Georgia Journal of
# READING

Volume 33 Number 2 Fall 2010

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**GEORGIA READING ASSOCIATION**

*The Georgia Journal of Reading*, published semi-annually by the Georgia Reading Association. Membership in the Georgia Reading Association is open to all persons interested in the improvement of reading in Georgia. Dues for one calendar year of membership are $15 and include subscriptions to the *Georgia Journal of Reading* and to *Focus*, the newsletter of the Georgia Council. Membership inquiries should be directed to Loretta Vail, 1334 Swallows Walk, Grayson, Georgia 30017 or lvail24@comcast.net. Visit the GRA web site at www.georgiareading.org to obtain more information.

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# Message From the Editors

BY SHERYL DASINGER AND BETH PENDERGRAFT

As we look to a new decade, the *Georgia Journal of Reading* is pleased to bring you a collection of articles that address issues of relevance to Georgia Educators today. The articles provided address a broad range of topics that are appropriate for all instructional levels.

Dr. Vickie Luther provides a discussion on what it means to be a highly effective literacy education teacher. With the increase in the interest in ESL across the state, *The Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* has graciously allowed us to reprint the very timely commentary by Lee Gunderson on the State of Art of Secondary ESL Teaching and Learning. Christie Pace provides an insightful perspective on writing instruction and Loleta Sartin and Rosalyn Magee discuss approaches for teaching vocabulary. Patricia Guerra's article on non-traditional literacy provide implications for working with parents.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the many reviewers who helped to make this edition possible. We appreciate your hard work to provide thoughtful, careful consideration to the articles that are included in the *Georgia Journal of Reading*.

As we close 2010, it is with deep sadness the *Georgia Journal of Reading* acknowledges the passing of Georgia Reading Association Parliamentarian, Ron Bryant. Ron was a vital part of GRA for many years and will be missed. We express our condolences to Sheree and his family.

Beth Pendergraft

# President's Page

BY SALLIE MILLS

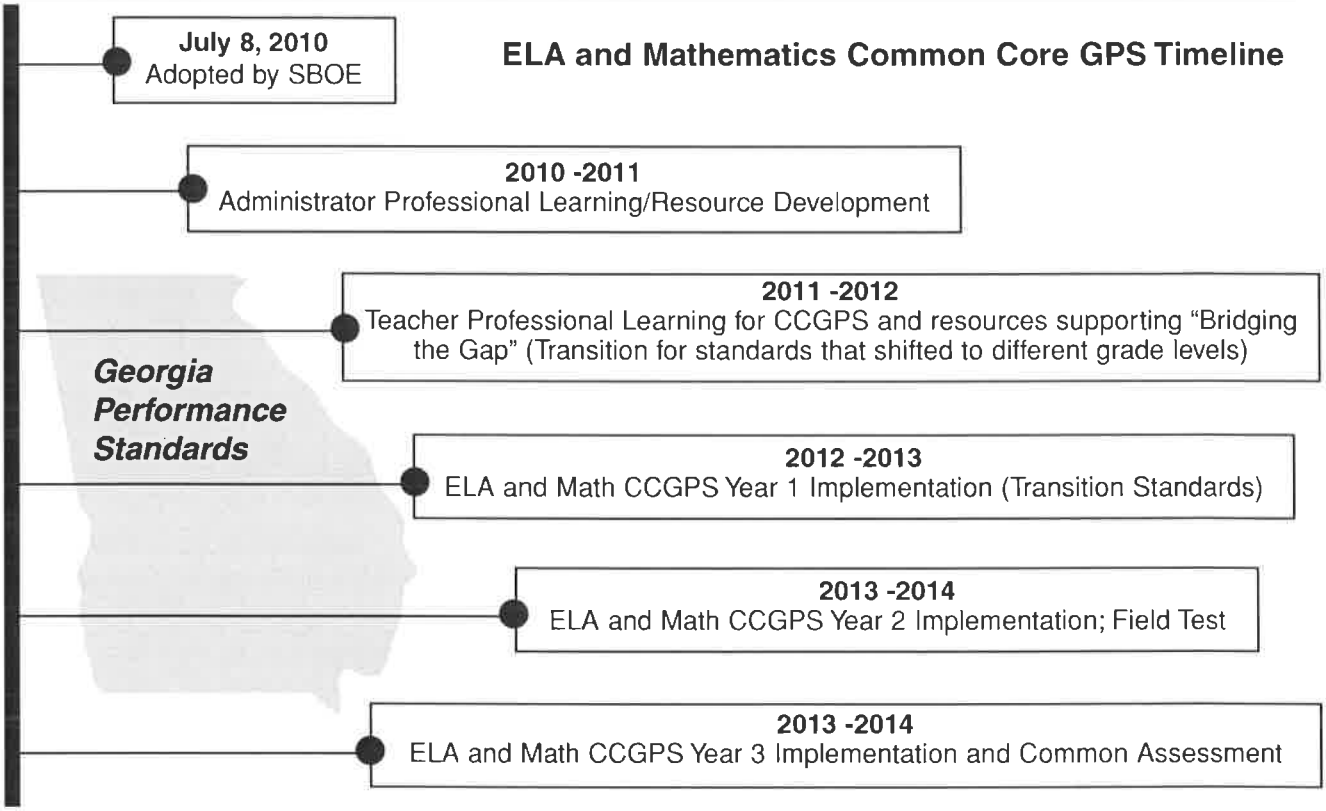
*"No skill is more crucial to the future of a child, or to a democratic and prosperous society, than literacy." —Los Angeles Times*

In June 2010, Georgia made a giant step towards ensuring that our students will be prepared for a successful future by adopting the Common Core Sate Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. To date 39 states have adopted the standards. This set of standards known in Georgia as the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) provide a consistent framework to prepare students for success as we continue to travel into the 21st century. Building on the strength of our current state standards, the CCGPS are designed to be focused, coherent, clear and rigorous; internationally benchmarked; anchored in college and career readiness. They are evidence and research based.

Our previous work with the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) has prepared Georgia for a smooth transition from GPS to CCGPS. Although some content may be in different grade levels, nearly all of the English Language Arts Georgia Performance Standards are addressed. The Georgia Department of Education has a plan of building capacity and sustainability as we move forward with the implementation of the CCGPS.

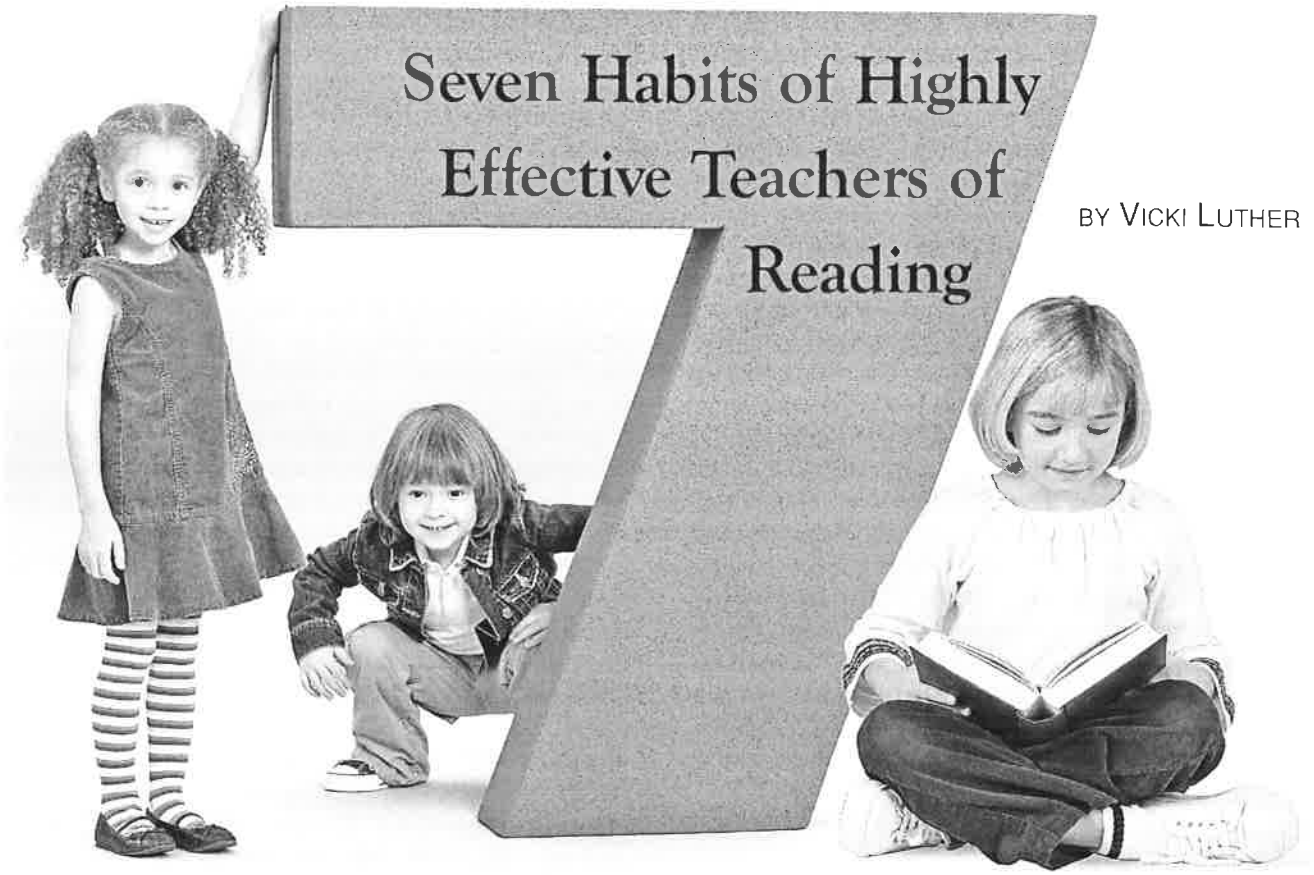
Despite our present economic challenges, we must continue to work together in preparing our students in Georgia for their journey on the literacy road to success. My challenge to the Georgia Reading Association state and local council leaders is to get involved in this effort by working with the Georgia Department of Education in regard to the implementation of the CCGPS.

The timeline below is Georgia's plan for implementation of the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards for ELA and Math. Please visit the Georgia Department of Education's website www.gadoe.org for detailed information on the CCGPS.



# Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teachers of Reading

BY VICKI LUTHER



In 1989, Stephen R. Covey introduced us to a book entitled *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.* This book has sold millions of copies and is still widely used today. Its popularity is evidenced by the fact that Covey's principles have become a mainstay in many of the country's top companies. In the book, Covey challenges readers to change their lives, and subsequently better their lives, by embodying seven primary habits into every day events. Although the book's lessons can be beneficial to most anyone, the book is used most frequently by leaders of business.

I have been familiar with this book for years; it was first introduced to me by a professor in a graduate course. However, I never really thought much about it or its implications until recently when I came across a copy of it at a book store, flipped it open, and started to read. It was easy for me to recognize the power of Covey's work and why so many individuals use this book as an aide to enhance their success. As I thumbed through the pages and perused through Covey's advice, I began to see a correlation between his "habits" and the attributes that we as teachers of reading must possess. As a former elementary school teacher and now as an educator of pre-service teachers, I can say with certainty that there is no more important job than that of a teacher of reading. As I read through the habits, I began thinking about the fact that teachers must exhibit strong positive habits and traits in order that their students, year after year, become fluent, independent, and lifelong readers. Without positive habits, reading instruction will suffer and student potential could be wasted. At that moment, questions began to fill my head: What are seven habits of highly effective teachers of reading? How can Covey's insight be used to enhance the teaching of reading? Using the same framework of Covey's seven habits, I started to think about what each habit may look like for those who teach reading skills to children on a daily basis.

**Habit 1: Be Proactive**

To be great teachers of reading requires that we are proactive. We need to be aware of students' needs before they become great concerns. It is important that we use observational tools to notice any changes in the behaviors, attitudes, or academic abilities of our students. Teachers who constantly monitor students have a greater chance of noticing potential problems early on. Being proactive allows teachers of reading the ability to offer various strategies and learning tools, such as one-on-one tutoring.

Assessing what students know and can do is the first step in becoming proactive. Without first assessing the students, we will not be able to adequately teach the students to the best of our abilities. As Reutzel and Cooter (2009) surmise, "The goal of literacy assessment should be to provide sufficient information for teachers to make decisions about "next steps" for students in their literacy learning, and for the selection of effective, evidence-based teaching strategies" (p. 11). Assessment must be conducted frequently in order to understand the growth and progress of students. For the effective teacher of reading, the journey is just as important as the destination. We must look at the processes children go through to become proficient in their literacy skills. "Classroom assessment should be broadly interpreted to allow examination of students' literacy processes as well as the products they create" (Reutzel & Cooter, 2009, p. 11). We should look for improvements, albeit small improvements, in order to recognize growth, and we must constantly look at those areas of literacy in which students are struggling. The effective teacher monitors all students closely and carefully and is proactive in knowing the students and their needs.

**Habit 2: Begin with an End in Mind**

In his book, Covey (1989) says that this habit is "based on the principle that all things are created twice" (p. 99). Covey goes on to explain that there is always a mental creation, then a physical creation, for everything. Long before a new school year (or semester, or unit) begins, many teachers create a mental picture of what they expect. Because we may enjoy reading as a leisure activity, we expect that all children will, too, and we bask in the idea that all of our students will meet-and even exceed- all the required standards before the school year is out. We plan and prepare, and are often extremely positive in our thinking. It is important that teachers go into the classroom with high expectations for each and every child and with the confidence that great strides will be seen in all students. This is why the teacher of reading should develop a habit of beginning with the end in mind. In recent years, the terms "Understanding by Design" or "Backward Design" have begun to emerge. As educators, we should know what we want the end result to be before any plans have been made (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The effective teacher knows where he or she wants the students to be at the end of the journey. When we begin with the end in mind, we have set goals to work toward and this will help us to accomplish great things in the classroom.

Yet while having an optimistic view of our students is critical, we must also be realistic in the understanding that children are all different. Our plans will not always go according to how we would like them to go; students will not always learn at the same pace, our lessons may fall flat, and daily demands of teaching may cause us to stress. The teacher of reading should always have the motto that all children can learn, but not all children will learn in the same way or in the same interval of time. We must never forgo the education of our students in order to meet our goals and expectations. The effective teacher identifies what the students must be taught but understands that the learning process cannot be rushed. Therefore, the effective teacher of reading must begin with the end in mind to set goals to work toward, but must be realistic of those goals.

**Habit 3: Put First Things First**

Covey (1989) describes "effective management" as putting first things first (p. 148). Effective teachers of reading must have skills to create classroom communities and must also have the ability to organize and supervise the happenings of the classroom so that all students have the ability to learn in a safe environment (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Teachers must be thorough in the thinking of the classroom layout in order to achieve the goals of a successful reading program (Reutzel & Cooter, 2009).

As teachers of reading, it is important that we create collaborative communities so that our students can learn not only from us but also from one another. Children must feel secure as they develop reading skills. In order to create a positive classroom environment, we must have faith in ourselves and in those students in our care. We have to realize that we are, each moment of the day, molding and shaping our students' lives. We must respect our students enough to handle ourselves, and our classrooms, in the most productive ways. It is as equally important to be a "self-manager" as it is to be a "classroom manager."

**Habit 4: Think Win/Win**

Every teacher has heard about and is familiar with federal and state guidelines, the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, and Adequate Yearly Progress. These words have become so commonplace in our educational system that we almost treat them as "background noise." But what does it truly mean when we educate all children in the skills of reading? When we teach students how to be proficient readers, we are giving them hope for a better future. Effective

teachers of reading must make it a habit of remembering that doing the job well will serve as a win/win situation for our students, their families, our school systems, and society as a whole.

When we teach children the necessary processes needed to read for meaning, we are not just giving them the skills to pass a standardized test at the end of the year; instead, we are providing them with the ability to become more developed in their thinking skills, more advanced in their knowledge of other content areas, and more focused on their interests. Those who can read have opportunities afforded them that their illiterate contemporaries do not have. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2009), 23% of the fourth graders in the United States are reading below the basic standards, while 37% of fourth graders in the state of Georgia are reading below a basic rate. In his book *Illiterate America,* Kozol (1985) details how difficult it is for adults who do not know how to read to function in the general public. He goes on to discuss how a lack of reading skills can cost persons in yearly wages, self-esteem, basic understandings of our democratic system, and in advancements in the community in which they live (Kozol, 1985).

We are helping children to realize the gift of a brighter future when we teach them to read. Our main focus must be to create lifelong readers so that they will become productive members of society. This gives our communities, and our state, a better future. Children who can read become adults who can read, and that is a win/win for us all. No matter how difficult the challenges that are before us, we are impacting our society for the greater good when we patiently and lovingly teach our students to read. Our diligence can help students stay in schools and make positive advancements in their futures. Therefore, we must make it a habit to embrace our jobs and understand the important work that we do. We can make such a positive impact on our communities and on the future.

**Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood**

The old saying is true: Children will not care how much we know until they know how much we care. If we do not attempt to understand the students, we are minimizing our role and their potential. Effective teachers of reading must be willing to understand how each child is different from the others, and must be willing to adapt the instruction to meet the needs of every child (Stronge, 2002). Most often, children do not come to us with an innate ability to value the guidance of adult-figures in their lives. They do not comprehend why they cannot eat candy and ice cream in lieu of a meal, and they rarely have the ability to fully appreciate the gift that reading truly is. Often, students are excited about learning to read in the early grades, but, as time moves on, begin to look the reading process as a bore and a chore. This is why we must work to understand the students and their backgrounds. Children will never be able to understand our role in their learning process unless we are first able to identify with them.

In the past, teachers have been told that in order to show equality in the classroom, we must treat all students the same. This sentiment certainly does not yield success for those who are the teachers of reading!There is a large amount of literature (Fletcher, 2006; Sax, 2007; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Tyre, 2008) that reveals that girls are out-achieving boys when it comes to reading and literacy skills. Perhaps even sadder, boys tend to lose focus and interest in reading altogether. When boys, who are already behind in their word recognition or fluency skills, lose even the slightest interest in picking up the printed word, the results can be devastating.

Educators who value gender differences tend to have more students who want to read and write (Fletcher, 2006). Teachers of reading must remember that boys and girls do learn differently (Sax, 2007) and that boys tend to enjoy reading about much different topics than girls. Award-winning author Jon Scieszka was inspired to create a website known as "Guys Read" to encourage boys to become lifelong readers. This website lists the titles of books that boys, in particular, would find interesting (www.guysread.com). Cunningham (2005) encourages teachers to revisit their classroom libraries and printed materials to ensure that there is something for everyone. The books we offer children and the way we approach the teaching of reading can make a tremendous difference. Understanding that many students are reluctant to read and seeking to find initiative ways to make reading exciting and captivating can help change the hesitant reader to the more experienced one.

Teachers must also remember that not all children will come to school with the same background knowledge or prior experiences. The home situation can make a tremendous impact on learning. More and more children are living in poverty (Fass & Cauthen, 2007), and due to recent economic downturns and rising unemployment, this is a trend which may last for years. Children who live in poverty may bring a unique set of challenges to the

classroom (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). Teachers of reading must understand that fear and worry greatly affects the comprehension, ability, and desire of the student to learn. Teachers must also be aware of each individual student's cultural and linguistic background. Culture plays a huge role in how students learn and what students expect to get from their reading development (Moll & Gonzales, 2004). Only when educators make all attempts to truly know the children in their care can they begin to teach students where they are and see the potential for how much they can accomplish.

**Habit 6: Synergize**

Covey (1989) characterizes synergy as the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. He goes on to explain that communicating synergistically allows one to open their "mind and heart and expressions to new possibilities, new alternatives, new options" (p. 264). The effective teacher of reading understands that the literacy learning processes can be somewhat messy and that demonstrating knowledge of said processes does not have to be done in the same exact way. Simply stated, we must be willing to allow our students to try new alternatives. Reading is "the whole," but how we assess students' reading development does not always have to be the same. We must think outside the box and must allow ourselves the ability to discover new and exciting ways to get students interested in the reading process.

Reutzel and Cooter (2009) worry that the tendency in our schools is to engage in a mentality of "one-size-fits all" reading instruction (p. 12). It is important to remember that this approach is detrimental, and teachers who realize that the same way does not always work for everyone will be more efficient in reaching all students. Because most schools are now equipped for technological resources, reading practices can take on various forms. We have to remember that although new approaches may be a bit daunting to us, for students these new alternatives can lead to an increased passion for literacy.

**Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw**

Maria Montessori (1966) once said, "We must be taught and we must be willing to accept guidance if we wish to become effective teachers" (p.149). The teacher of reading must never become stagnant in his or her presentation of the information and must ensure that students are actively engaged in the reading process. Research shows that there is a strong correlation between what teachers know about reading instruction and the achievement of the students (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Simply put, the teacher is the most important factor in the classroom; no curriculum, technological advancement, or even increased funding can take the place of a highly qualified teacher. Competent teachers are the key to effective reading instruction (Reutzel & Cooter, 2009).

As educators, we must make it a habit to be self-reflective and honest of our teaching practices. We must ask ourselves the tough questions: Is my instruction working for all of my students? Am I stuck in a "rut" in my teaching practices? Are my students excited about the process of reading? Am I excited about my teaching so that the students can be excited about what they are learning? Only when we are honest with ourselves can we truly improve. It is also important that we keep current with trends and evidenced-based instructional practices (Reutzel & Cooter, 2009). If we do not continue to "sharpen our saws," we will unfortunately allow our teaching, and our students' learning, to suffer. Effective teachers of reading keep active in professional literacy organizations, keep abreast of new developments in reading strategies and reading assessment tools, and are open to changing teaching techniques in order to meet the needs of the students.

Educators who are highly effective must never stop learning, never stop taking chances, and never stop enjoying the opportunity to teach reading skills to children. Reading is a very complex skill; therefore, the task of teaching students to be proficient readers can be extremely daunting. It is often easy for teachers to feel burned out, but it is critical that we remain positive and supportive of our students. We must keep our enthusiasm of the printed word, for when we lose our joy of reading, our students surely will, too.

**Conclusion**

Each day, teachers enter the classroom ready to educate the students entrusted into their care. The highly effective teacher of reading is one who knows the students, understands the role of the teacher, and is extremely familiar with the components of reading. Those who teach reading skills to children are to be commended and applauded for their gifts and talents. Teachers who demonstrate positive practices and habits tend to be extremely satisfied in their teaching accomplishments. Using Covey's principles can lead to successful teaching, and this will lead to greater gains for our students.

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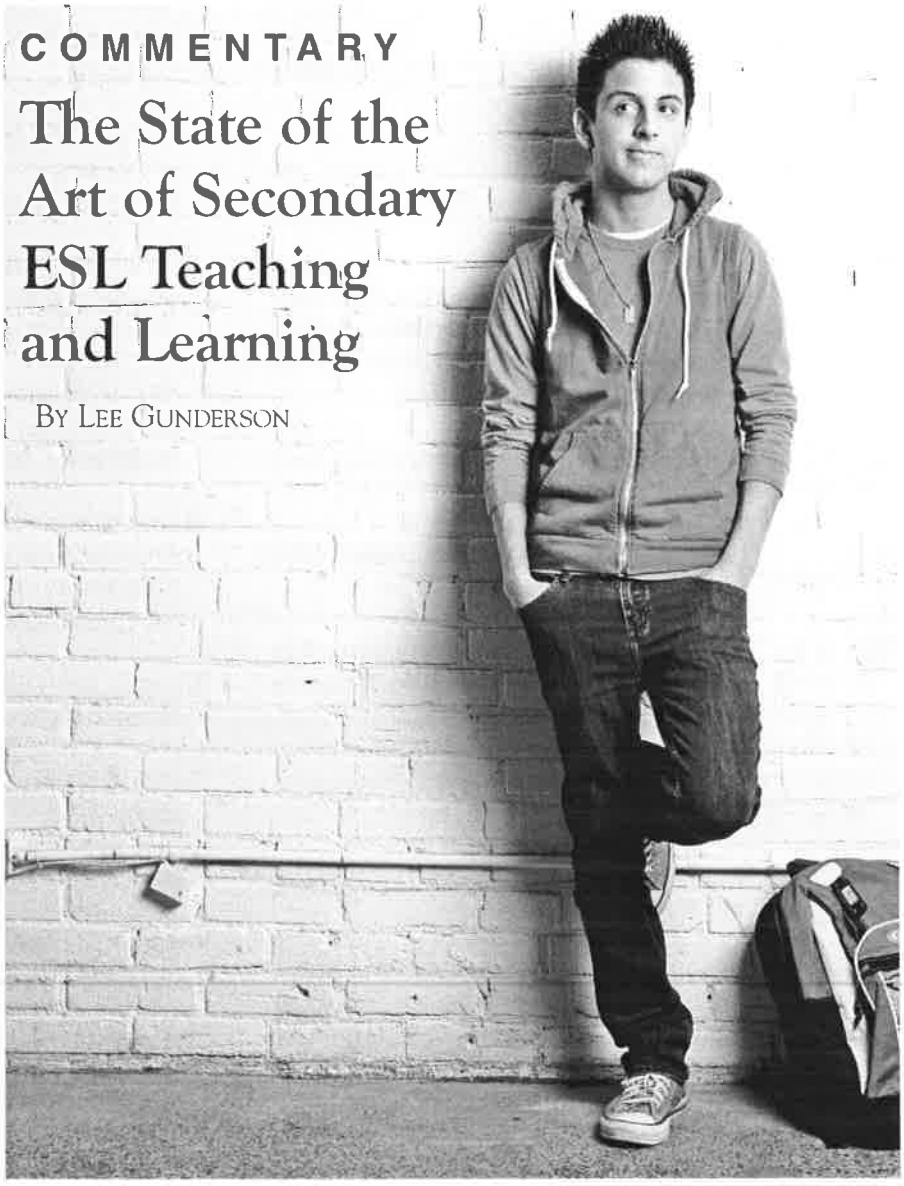
Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy 52(3)
November 2008
doi:10.1598/JAAL.52.3.1

(pp. 184–188)

COMMENTARY

# The State of the Art of Secondary ESL Teaching and Learning

By Lee Gunderson



I first began to teach in the 1960s in San Francisco, California. I taught in both Spanish–English and Cantonese–English bilingual schools. Ronald Reagan, then governor, signed into law a bill that allowed the use of other instructional languages in California. The 1968 Bilingual Education Act specified that students who "come from environments where a language other than English has had a significant impact on their level of English language proficiency; and who, by reason thereof, have sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language" should be provided with bilingual programs (Bilingual Education Act, 1968).

These years saw the beginning of the growth and influence of bilingual education, which appeared to garner more attention after the U.S. Supreme Court's Lau vs. Nichols (1974) decision. Since the mid-1970s, a pervasive and negative view of bilingual education has spread like a virus across the United States. A deep-seated English-only attitude has grown in strength and aggressiveness (Crawford, 1998; Kloss, 1998) and at least three states have passed antibilingual laws. These developments are disturbing because early American history reveals an acceptance rather than an intolerance of bilingualism (Jiménez & Rose, 2008; Kloss, 1998).

From my nearly 45 years of teaching and researching in English as a second language (ESL), I am convinced that in these times secondary ESL students are in trouble, North American school systems are in trouble, and the related research base is also in trouble. Teachers have claimed that ESL students bring down the overall learning level (Gunderson, 1985). A large majority in this dated study felt that English should be a requirement for immigration and a prerequisite for admission to their classes. It is shocking to find that these sentiments are still held by secondary teachers in the new millennium (Gunderson, 2007b).

In 1981, Jim Cummins, a well-known ESL/bilingual researcher, noted, "Minority-language students, especially Hispanic and Native groups, have been characterized by high drop-out rates and poor academic achievement" (p. 19). Twenty-seven years later, the problem is worse. In 2008, Statistics Canada reported on world cities that had high percentages of nonnative-born individuals: Los Angeles—34.70%; Miami—35.50%; Vancouver—

39.60%; Toronto—45.70%. The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (2007) reported that the percentage of ESL students in America's schools has risen by 57.17% since 1995–1996. ESL students are 10.50% of the total U.S. school population (Hoffman & Sable, 2006), and the highest growth rate is in grades 7–12 (Kindler, 2002). At the same time, ESL students score the lowest in reading achievement and have one of the highest drop-out rates (Gunderson, 2007a; Hoffman & Sable, 2006; Kindler, 2002). ESL students are less likely to succeed in school (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2004). Spanish-speaking students are less likely to complete high school than English speakers and are less likely to go to university (NCES, 2004; Zehr, 2003). There is a serious and pervasive problem in the United States and Canada. ESL students are failing to learn to read and write English, and they drop out of school in significant numbers. It is scandalous that conditions have not improved.

Many blame the victims rather than the school systems that fail them. It has been concluded, for instance,that California's dismal achievement scores were due in part to the fact that "vast numbers of students speak little English, and one in four lives in poverty" (Asimov, 1997). Jiménez and Rose (2008) concluded,

> Current efforts to legislate rather than create instructional and programmatic solutions to the achievement gap reflect mainstream assumptions of ELs, their families, and their communities. These assumptions include the belief that ELs must be forced to learn English, that they don't value education, and, also, the unsubstantiated view that they aren't willing to work hard to profit from their schooling. (p. 234)

It has been argued that "the achievement gap between English learners and their English-only counterparts can be attributed in part to a number of inequitable conditions that affect their opportunities to learn" (Gándara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003, p. 9). Gándara and colleagues (2003) concluded that "these students appear to receive a significantly inferior educational experience, even when compared to other low-income students in the public schools" (p. 9).

There were a number of additional disturbing revelations. I found that secondary ESL students' biggest complaint was that there was little or no access to native English speakers. I also found that the percentage of ESL students who remained in high school academic courses until they graduated was 40%. There were, however, disaggregated results that revealed significant differences among ethno-linguistic groups. Students who were Spanish, Vietnamese, Tagalog, or Punjabi speakers had higher disappearance rates and lower grades in academic classes than Chinese speakers because there were differences in socioeconomic status and families' abilities to scaffold their children's education when school programs failed to do so. Schools with higher percentages of ESL students had higher ESL disappearance rates and lower grades in academic classes (Gunderson, 2000, 2004, 2007a).

To be meaningful, statistics must be disaggregated to reveal underlying instances of disturbing inequities. So, while an overall average of 40% of immigrant students in my study graduated, only about 2% of Spanish speakers graduated. This striking inequity is masked by the overall mean percentage. This is similar to drop-out rates reported in the United States. Overall, 30% of students drop out across all the states. However, this percentage masks significant differences between states—for example, a 51% graduation rate in South Carolina versus 86% in New Jersey (Haney, Madaus, & Abrams, 2003).

What does U.S. research say about secondary ESL students? The National Literacy Panel (NLP) was established to produce "a comprehensive report that provides clear, evidence-based conclusions and recommendations for audiences concerned with the education of language minority children and youth" (August & Shanahan, 2006). The important premise of the review was that the research base should be scientific. The authors noted that "controlled experiments and quasi-experimental designs are essential if we are to evaluate the relative effectiveness of particular actions (such as the adoption of particular instructional methods, materials, and interventions) and to test the generalizeability of alternative theoretical claims" (p. 9).

They wished to explore "how can we best improve literacy achievement for language-minority students" (p. 9) and stated that "the panel relied exclusively on experimental and quasi-experimental studies designed to evaluate causal claims" (p. 9). Only experimental research qualified. However, the Department of Education declined to publish the report. Toppo (2005) noted, "The government will not publish a report it commissioned on bilingual education— and critics say that's because the Bush

administration disagrees with the findings, which cast doubt on the efficacy of teaching immigrant children through English-only lessons" (¶1). Slavin and Cheung (2005) noted, "The first author was initially a member of the panel but resigned in June 2002 to avoid a two-year delay in publication of the present article" (p. 253). These authors reported that there was support, although limited, in favor of bilingual instruction over English-only instruction. They found there were only two qualifying studies of secondary ESL versus bilingual programs (i.e., Covey, 1973; Kaufman, 1968). August and Shanahan (2006) published a full report. A review of their database finds 14 studies of secondary students. There is a serious lack of studies, at least in terms of those that qualify as scientific. This suggests a profound misunderstanding of secondary school environments and the kind of research that is appropriate within them, especially with ESL students.

The definition of secondary differs across jurisdictions, but broadly, the salient feature of this category is that it contains human beings who generally range from about 14 to 19 years of age. Within the ESL category, there are those who were born in a different country and those who were born in the United States or Canada. There are those who speak no English, those who speak interpersonal English, and those who have developed academic language ability in English. (See Cummins, 1979a, 1979b, 1981, 1983, 2000, and Cummins & Swain, 1986, for a discussion of "basic interpersonal communicative skill" [BICS] and "cognitive academic language proficiency" [CALP], the language of instruction and academic texts.) BICS appears to take about two to three years to develop and CALP about five to seven. Sometimes parents believe that their children's BICS is a feature suggesting they can cope with academic texts, which can be a serious problem for those who have not developed CALP (Gunderson, 2006).

The label ESL—or English-language learner (ELL) or whatever acronym is used—is problematic because it masks significant underlying differences that have serious consequences. There are also many negative features associated with the label. There are ESL students who have never learned to read in their first language and those who have never attended school prior to immigrating. On the other hand, there are those who have attended school and who have learned to read some English. There are those who have learned to read and who have studied advanced academic subjects in their L1s. There are those who have entered as poor refugees and those who have entered as rich refugees. There are those who have entered when they were 6 years old and those who have entered at 14 to 19.

Jiménez and Rose (2008) argued that ESL students who succeed in school are no longer counted as ESL and their scores are not ref lected in ESL reports. This tends to make it seem like there is never any measurable ESL achievement. Another basic problem is that secondary schools are not ideal places to conduct scientific research. As I explained in an earlier publication,

> As social institutions containing micro-societies comprised of students, teachers, administrators, counselors, paraprofessionals, librarians, custodians, secretaries, parent volunteers, occasionally police officers, and others, schools are not the best places to conduct scientific research. The normal state of affairs in a school is one of great flux and change. It is likely impossible to conduct scientific research in a typical school because there are too many confounding variables to control. (Gunderson, 2007a, p. 248)

Conducting experimental research in such environments is extremely difficult. Planning instructional programs is also a complex and difficult undertaking (Gunderson, 2009). I have argued that secondary teachers need to know about their students' cultures or students will continue to fail (Gunderson, 2000). I have come to believe that it may be extremely difficult to teach courses and consider students' first cultures when teachers have as many as 220 students a day. This argument has little practical applicability in such cases. We need research that addresses the complexities of instruction in high schools rather than research that reduces the issues to fit into controlled and quasiexperimental designs. Secondary ESL students are in jeopardy. They are missing from "approved" research, and teachers are not trained to teach them.

We have put unrealistic faith in science as a way to reveal truths about teaching approaches for millions of students who share little more than their membership in a convenient category. It is sobering to see how few "approved" studies there are. We miss out on the results of qualitative studies. For instance, I found that students appeared to feel "ghettoized" by their inclusion in ESL classes (Gunderson, 2007a). ESL classes made students feel inferior, "like those who are crippled or blind." One noted, "People make fun of me because I was in ESL" (Gunderson, 2007a, p. 191). Talmy (in press) found that in one Hawaiian

school students were negatively viewed as "FOBs" or Fresh Off the Boats. Although neither of the studies is experimental, their results begin to suggest that the issue should be explored more broadly. Students may have negative views of ESL classes. We should hear more from the students themselves. The results of qualitative studies should not be rejected out of hand.

On October 4, 1957, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) launched Sputnik I, followed by Sputnik II on November 3. Critics claimed schools were not producing the scientists required to keep the United States first in technology and science. In 1963, Admiral Hyman Rickover wrote American Education: A National Failure. In part as a result of his efforts, educational programs were refocused and redesigned, especially at the secondary school level. It seems like we need a new Rickover, otherwise we will wake one day to find that a substantial portion of the population cannot read and write English and has given up. We have known for about the last 40 years that ESL students are at risk. It seems to me that the lack of success in the teaching and learning of ESL students is a national disgrace and a colossal failure. Why has no progress been made?

President Kennedy established the goal that the United States would visit the moon by the end of the 1960s, and it happened. It seems that the same awesome determination and purpose could be focused on discovering how science, math, social studies, and English teachers can teach successfully in classrooms that include increasing numbers of ESL students. And, after all, isn't this the explicit promise of inclusive education? Surely, this cannot be more complex and difficult than putting a man on the moon! Can it be more difficult than rocket science?

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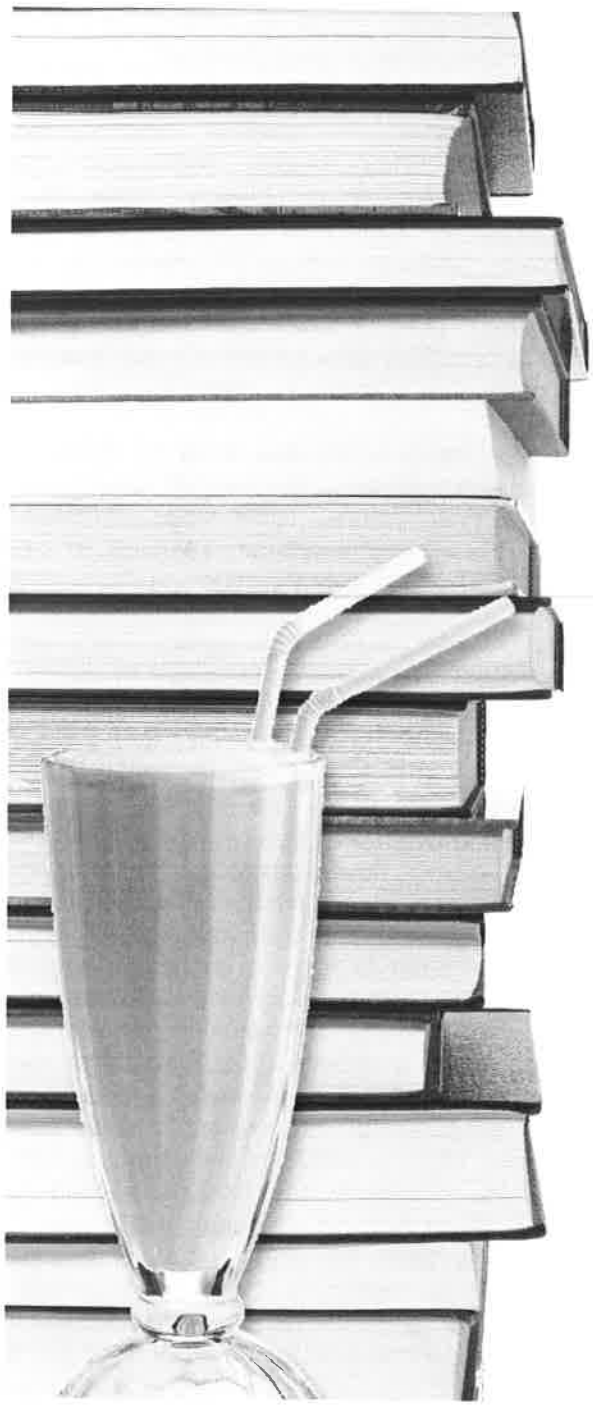
# Nontraditional Literacy

## Nontraditional Forms of Parental Involvement in Literacy Development: The Book Mobile and Other Stories

By Patricia Guerra and Clarena Larrotta



**Abstract**

This qualitative research examines family literacy practices used by working-class Latina/o parents. Through personal narratives two Latina researchers illustrate how their parents and family members engage in nontraditional parental involvement activities that promote literacy development and learning. Analysis of narratives reveals incidental learning occurs through nontraditional parent involvement. In literacy development this learning occurs when parents and children interact in daily life activities. Three themes are explored--nontraditional reading resources, value assigned to literacy, and family interactions. Each theme is explained and accompanied by example narratives. Relevant implications for family literacy instructors are provided.

### Introduction

It was one of those rare days when my mom left work two hours early to take us on an errand. It was the first day of summer vacation and there was no school. After picking us at home we drove four blocks to a strip center that housed several stores, including a drug store. At the end of the strip center parked on the street was a very large and long vehicle that looked like a portable building on wheels. Actually called a book mobile, it was a smaller library containing a variety of children and adult books and a librarian at the front desk to check books in and out. These mobile libraries were used to serve residents in the suburbs because the city only had one main library.

Once we parked, my mother led us into the book mobile, introduced us to the librarian, and asked how to sign up for a library card. Because I was only eight years old and my brother five, my mother helped us complete the necessary paperwork, and then co-signed as the responsible party for any lost or damaged books. After explaining the library rules and procedures, the librarian led us to the children's section and pointed out the different genre of books. I remember standing in front of the shelves of books in awe. Although we did not have children's books at home, I loved books. I loved their smell and feel, but especially the places and times to which they transported me. I checked out about five books that day and my brother three. I wanted to check out more books but my mother explained I could only check out as many as my brother and I could carry. She promised that every two weeks when the book mobile returned she was going to let us walk the short trip back; return the books and check out more.

Upon leaving the book mobile, we walked across the street to the drugstore where my mother bought each one of us a milk shake, which was a real treat, and one we were not allowed to have very often. As we left the drugstore my mother told us she would give us just enough money every two weeks to have this treat before walking back home. Driving home my mother took the route we would walk to and from the book mobile, instructing us to avoid the major thoroughfares. It is funny in looking back on that day, I do not remember my mother getting a library card or ever checking out books for herself.

The bookmobile story above narrated by Pat is just one of many examples illustrating how our parents like many other parents of color engage in nontraditional parental involvement activities (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Del Valle, 2002; Heath, 1983; Mercado 2005; Zentella, 2005), that promote literacy development and school achievement. For working-class parents of color, involvement in their children's literacy development is often perceived as non-existent because of their "failure" to use "traditional" practices such as reading bedtime stories, buying educational toys, and implementing shared reading techniques (Daniel-White, 2002; Lopéz, 2001; Zarate, 2007). Even though they do not engage in "traditional" parental involvement activities, many of their children go on to develop literacy and are successful in school and in higher education.

This article examines family literacy practices used by working-class Latina/o parents, that is, how multiple generations learn together and how they use and value literacy (Weinstein, 1998). Through sharing our literacy autobiographies, we (the authors) examine the literacy practices used in our families while growing up. We will (1) identify nontraditional forms of parental involvement resulting in the development of literacy habits children cultivate for life; (2) explore strategies for integrating these nontraditional forms in parenting and home-based education; and (3) use our personal narratives to provide relevant examples and implications for family literacy instructors. According to Worth (2008), narratives speak to "the representation of an event or sequence of events. It is closely tied to description, but it goes beyond description" (p. 43). This article presents stories of our literacy development during childhood and explores the question: What involvement behaviors did the parents of these two Latina Ph.D. university professors use to facilitate their literacy development?

**Redefining Literacy**

In the past, literacy has been defined in simplistic terms as the ability to read and write. Powell-Newman and Beverstock (1990) explain: "In the past a person who could barely read and write was judged to be literate...As a nation, we are now coming to realize that literacy involves the many dimensions of our many cultures, and we are redefining literacy accordingly..." (p.7). The definition of literacy needs to accommodate to modern times and to the many cultures represented in the population of our Nation. It is important to view reading through a socio-cultural lens (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2000; Gee, 1990) that goes beyond technical skills of decoding sound-symbol relationships and highlights the importance of cultural, historical, and political contexts for comprehension. Chu (1999) challenges the traditional conceptualization of literacy and suggests (1) Expanding the definition of literacy that takes into account the language and cultural knowledge of linguistic minorities, (2) examining the socially contextualized nature of literacy and literacy practices of linguistic minorities, and (3) understanding how the literacy of linguistic minorities is measured (p.5).

Furthermore, many factors determine the extent to which a person is literate in the heritage language or other languages (culture, social role, education, economic status, and length of residence in the person's native or adoptive country).

With the notion of *emancipatory literacy*, Freire and Macedo (1994) suggest two dimensions of literacy, the individual and the social. In the individual dimension, students have to become literate about their immediate environment histories, experiences, and culture. In the social dimension, they must appropriate the codes and cultures of the dominant spheres. By learning how to navigate in the dominant culture, students transcend the individual dimension. They need to interact and understand both dimensions in order to become successful literacy users. Teaching and learning in this framework, therefore, must draw on funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) based in the background knowledge, life experiences, and linguistic practices of the students and their communities. Literacy practices and purposes vary from culture to culture and from household to household (Pérez & Torres- Guzmán, 1996; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Literacy is part of our daily life and routines; no matter what the socioeconomic status of the person or the family, literacy is present to a higher or lower level of frequency and fashion in every household.

**Nontraditional Literacy Involvement**

Research indicates that a number of nontraditional involvement behaviors are used to facilitate literacy development by parents of color (Delgado-Gaitán, 1994; Farr, 2003; Heath, 1983; Lopéz, 2001; Mercado, 2005; Valencia & Black, 2002; Zentella, 2005). For many children of Latino background, oral tradition, consejos, funds of knowledge, and the value of hard work are manifestations of non-traditional parent involvement behaviors.

**Oral Tradition**

In the oral tradition stories are told rather than written and are conveyed through folktales as well as songs, chants, music, poetry, dance and rhythms (Heath, 1983). In many Latin American countries like Mexico corridos (folks songs), dichos (proverbs), riddles and jokes are also considered part of the oral tradition (Farr, 2003). Passed on from generation to generation some stories teach history and tradition while others entertain and provide moral guidance. These stories are performed in public settings or shared in homes between family members. Regardless of setting, a high value is placed on the storyteller's creativity and verbal dexterity.

*Consejos*

Through *consejos* (advice or life lessons) Latina/o parents shape children's behavior and instruct them in school matters to encourage the development of self-sufficient individuals (Delgado-Gaitán, 1994; Valencia & Black, 2002). *Consejos* like "My job is to feed and clothe you; your job is to go to school and learn" or "You need to finish school so you won't have to work in the fields or clean houses like me" are delivered as brief messages or embedded in stories shared through the oral tradition. Usually, conveyed spontaneously, these lessons center on important experiences that create bonds of care between parents and children.

**Funds of Knowledge**

Strategies, skills, abilities, practices, and bodies of knowledge essential to a household's functioning and wellbeing comprise a family's funds of knowledge. Examples of these funds include family history, migratory practices, household composition, income producing and recreational activities, child-rearing practices and beliefs, and oral and written literacy practices in Spanish and English (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992). Drawing upon their funds of knowledge families use literacies to make sense of daily life experiences involving medical and health care, child-rearing, spiritual guidance, leisure and other relevant activities (Mercado, 2005).

**Value of Hard Work**

Research on migrant parents (Lopez, 2001) suggests that they instill the value of hard work in their children as a means to communicate the importance of having an education. By helping children experience the harsh conditions of manual labor, parents motivate children to obtain an education, which in turn will get them a better job and end the family's cycle of poverty. Parents believe that if children learn to work hard, they will to do so at work and in school.

It is important to continue gaining knowledge into the ways in which non-mainstream parents assist their children with reading and writing development using life events and community interactions that are part of the daily life of families (Ortiz & Ordóñez-Jasis, 2005) rather than judging them for what they "fail" to do like reading nightly to their children. As a case in point, we like many other Latinas/os were not read to as children because our parents did not see it as their role. Teachers were responsible for teaching academics and parents socialized children's behavior (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). Additionally, our parents worked full-time to make a "better life" for us than what they experienced as children. Even if they had wanted to help with academics, between work and household chores little time was left in the evening to work with children. Our parents did not read to us nightly or use other traditional forms of parent involvement; however they developed literacy in other ways as the remaining sections of this article highlights.

**Literacy Autobiography**

According to Steinman (2007) the literacy autobiography is "a reflective, first-person account of one's development as a writing being" (p. 1). Building on her definition, our literacy autobiographies include the many aspects (i.e., reading, writing and culture) of literacy development, not just writing. Literacy autobiography is the method of reflection we used to generate our narratives. According to Sparks-Langer and Colton (1991), reflection requires three elements--cognitive, critical, and narrative. Cognitive refers to how people use their knowledge to make decisions. The forces that drive thinking--"experiences, goals, values, and social implications" constitute the critical element (p. 37). Narrative may include both elements but the focus is on understanding how people make sense of their lives and their experiences (Merriam, 2009; Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). For Clark and Rossiter (2008) "Narrative learning falls under the larger category of constructivist learning theory, which understands learning as construction of meaning from experience" (p. 63).

**Data Generation and Analysis**

Through a series of informal conversations, we (the authors) told stories about how we learned to value reading and writing and the roles different family members played in developing literacy habits within us. We took individual notes and started writing our stories to have a data bank. Once we were done recalling and telling these stories we typed them and looked for patterns. Using open coding techniques (Creswell, 1994) and narrative analysis (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009) we drew upon our narratives to understand the meaning of our literacy experiences growing up. Our focus was on how our parents and family members engaged in nontraditional forms of parental involvement that promoted our literacy development and school achievement. We juxtaposed the findings from our narratives (Strong-Wilson, 2006) against the dominant discourse on parental involvement in children's literacy development to identify non-traditional forms.

**Two Latina Researchers**

Currently we are working as assistant professors in the college of education at a public university in central Texas. The following paragraphs present the background of our upbringing and families.

**Patricia Guerra**

Born and raised in San Antonio, Texas I am at least a third generation Mexican American. Beyond that I am unsure because my parents knew little of their family history and rarely discussed it although my brother and I often inquired about it. Growing up during the depression, I think their families spent their time struggling to survive from day-to-day. My mother was the youngest of eight children and my dad had three older brothers. Both lived in extreme poverty during childhood, especially my dad. After being orphaned early in life, he lived with his godmother in a shed behind his Uncle's house with no food, running water or electricity. Forced to drop out after sixth grade in order to survive, he did odd jobs and manual labor until he joined the military at 16. Four years later he was honorably discharged with his GED. My mother graduated from high school and then worked as a bookkeeper. While my mother spoke English and Spanish, my dad was bilingual and bi-literate. He learned to read and write Spanish from his godfather who required him to read the Spanish newspaper nightly.

From the age of five I grew up in middle-class neighborhoods and attended schools that were predominantly White. I was bilingual until the age of five when I was caught speaking Spanish to the only other Mexican American student in my first-grade class. I was immediately sent to the principal's office where my parents and I were told if I ever spoke Spanish again at school, I would be expelled for the year. From that day on my parents never spoke Spanish to my brother and me again. Consequently, I lost my Spanish and my brother never learned to speak the language until much later in life. Out of my immediate family I was the first to go to college and graduate with a bachelor's degree and the first out of my large extended family to earn a master's degree. I attended the University of Texas at Austin where I graduated with a Ph.D. in education.

**Clarena Larrotta**

I was born in Armenia, in the coffee region, in Colombia, South America but I was raised between the interior of the country, the mountains, and the pacific coast. Growing up my family was poor. My dad worked different jobs, as a door-to-door salesman, in the ships checking the quality of the merchandise that arrived in the port, and as a watchman. My mother worked at department stores in a variety of service positions. I am the second child in a family of five children, three girls and two boys.

My mother's schooling reached only the fifth grade and none of the women in her family finished secondary school or attended college. My father quit school when he was finishing first year of middle school because he wanted to start making money. However, his father wanted him to pursue a degree, which most of the men in his family did. Women in my father's family were a different story; they were only allowed to continue their education through the fifth grade. My grandfather used to say: "Las mujeres sólo tienen cabellos largos e ideas cortas" [Women have perfect hair and imperfect ideas]. Following their parents' model, my parents did not encourage my sisters and me to study. Also, my mother got pregnant two times in a row when I was about to finish high school. The little money my parents made covered basic needs for five children (food, clothing, shelter). However, I managed to attend college working part time jobs; dealing with many economic difficulties I obtained a bachelor's degree in education. During my third year in college I started teaching English to children at a bi-national center. Seven years later I traveled to Puerto Rico and obtained a Master's in English Education. Next, I attended the University at Texas at Austin where I graduated with a Ph.D. in education.

### Broadening Understanding of Parental Involvement in Literacy Development

From our literacy autobiographies three themes emerged—nontraditional reading sources, value assigned to literacy, and family interactions. In the sections that follow each theme is explained and accompanied by excerpts from these autobiographies.

### Nontraditional Reading Sources

The examples presented in this section highlight reading materials not commonly considered resources in an environment that fosters literacy development. On the surface these two homes do not appear to provide a print rich environment however when examined closely these homes had reference books, manuals, gossip magazines and other nontraditional reading materials. Books present in the home were not necessarily purchased to develop children's literacy skills.

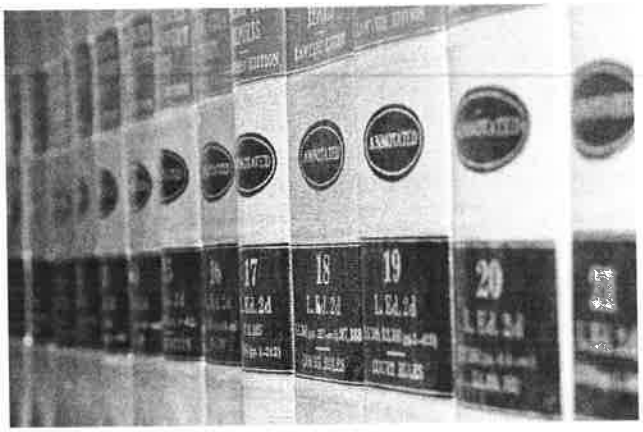
### Books at Home

> Since the living room in our house was like a museum and was reserved only for entertaining company, it was off-limits except when I was to dust the furniture on Saturdays. The "good" furniture was kept in this room along with porcelain vases and other objects sitting on tables and shelves that my mom loved and did not want broken. On one wall of our living room was a fireplace with built-in four-feet bookshelves on each side. These shelves were lined with expensive books my dad had purchased when I was a baby. They were beautiful. Each one was bound in a tan hardback cover with a red leather label on the spine. The pages were like parchment and smelled wonderfully. The title was embossed in gold on the front cover and each page was gilded. Since I never saw my parents read these books, I guess they were used as décor like the other "expensive" objects in the living room. Drawn by their beauty, I spent hours reading in the big easy chair next to the bookshelves once my parents left the house on Saturdays (Pat).

Although Pat's parents did not intentionally buy books for her to read, they displayed them in an accessible location and in plain sight along with other "art" objects in the living room, which gave them value and significance and sparked her initial interest in books. By placing a comfortable chair next to the bookshelves her mom also created an inviting environment where reading was encouraged.

> The only books I remember seeing in my house growing up were books with adult content such as sex manuals, murder mysteries and western stories, and a cartoon series for adults called "The White Samurai". However, as a child I did not have access to those books. My dad used to hide them from us, sometimes locking them up in a drawer, but I "borrowed" them whenever no one was looking. I hide in the bathroom or my bedroom to read. I remember reading the samurai story when I was 9 and the other books when I was 12 (Clarena).

It becomes evident that parents know certain reading content is not appropriate due to a child's age. However, by their existence and hiding place, children know parents read these books. Parents also communicate the message people read for purposes other than academic. As these two stories illustrate Latina/o parents may not utilize traditional parent involvement behaviors like reading to children or buying children's books but they do other actions that spark children's reading. By having books and other reading materials accessible in the house and signifying their value by placing in important locations, they unintentionally encourage children to read.




### Encyclopedias

> When I was in middle school, my parents purchased an expensive set of encyclopedias for me to use. I don't recall ever seeing my mom or dad open one of these books, not even to instruct us in how to use them. They did tell me I should use them to do schoolwork. Unable to take me to the library after school, these books became the substitute library. I used them to write research papers and do other homework. After a few months, I remember seeing my younger brother sitting in the living room spending hours reading each encyclopedia from cover-to-cover. He loved

reading the stories and sharing his knowledge with me. I'm convinced this routine was in part responsible for his acceptance into medical school with a full scholarship (Pat).

Buying costly encyclopedias was a huge sacrifice on the part of Pat's parents. This involvement behavior supported literacy development as well communicated the importance of learning and the value of education. Furthermore, observing Pat's use of these books served as a reading model for her bother. Reading these non-traditional resources increased his knowledge and developed vocabulary and reading skills.

> One afternoon I was alone in my grandmother's fancy living room. I was curious about the encyclopedias in display next to the expensive liquor bottles and antiques. I grabbed volume "M" and looked inside. I remember reading the word "medicine" and learning about the origins of medicine. The volume discussed how in past centuries prisoners were used as guinea pigs to study the human body, especially the brain. I was 10 and I still remember the picture of a prisoner tied up on a cement counter screaming with his head open. Three doctors were looking inside the man's head using weird tools. It was so interesting that I kept reading until I heard steps and put the volume back on the shelf. I knew I was not supposed to use the encyclopedia without adult supervision (Clarena).

In this home encyclopedias were also for reference but were not to be handled unless an adult was present. Like Pat's brother, Clarena was fascinated by the stories found in the encyclopedias. History presented as stories held her interest and encouraged more reading.

**Gossip Magazines**

> While visiting my grandmother on the weekends I borrowed gossip magazines from my youngest aunt who lived with her. I took the magazines home and read the love stories in the romance section. This was exciting reading for me because it was a different type of reading from the one we did for school. I found these stories very similar to fairy tales (Clarena).

In this example, gossip magazines provided by an extended family member are another source of non-traditional reading material used to develop literacy skills. This type of reading was helpful in exposing Clarena to character development and the structure of stories with a plot, problem resolution, beginning, middle, and end.

**Almanac**

> When I was in fourth grade we learned about dinosaurs. Fascinated by these creatures, I went home each day and shared my newly acquired knowledge with my mom. One day, I remember going with my mom to trade in her S&H green stamps at the local redemption store for a large, colorful paperback book that looked like an almanac. (Green stamps were given to customers at the checkout counters of supermarkets when they purchased food.) Since we didn't have a lot of money, my mom usually redeemed these stamps for small appliances so this was an unusual exchange. The almanac contained pages of short paragraphs about dinosaurs--their habitat, food needs, and other pertinent facts. Next to each paragraph was a space where a picture of a dinosaur was to be glued like a postage stamp. My parents did not read the paragraphs to me or ask specific questions about the information but each month I received a new set of animal pictures. I glued each picture in the appropriate space and spent hours studying the pictures and descriptions. (Pat).

Although not a traditional reading resource, the almanac and the monthly set of animal pictures Pat's mom redeemed for the green stamps built on her interest of dinosaurs. The pictures along with the descriptions encouraged her reading and expanded vocabulary and sentence structure among other literacy skills. Additionally, the redemption of stamps for the book rather than home appliances signified strong support of Pat's reading and learning.

**Value Assigned to Literacy**

Our parents instilled the value of literacy through daily-life reading and writing interactions that were not necessarily school-like (Ortiz & Ordonez-Jasis, 2005) but still conveyed the importance of literacy development. These involved using literacy such as individually reading the newspaper, reading a manual to make repairs or reading notes with instructions.

**Reading Models**

> My parents loved to listen to the stories my brother and I wrote. While mine were five-page romance stories, my brother wrote 30-page "books" of James Bond adventures. Although our parents did not read our stories themselves, my brother and I read each other's. His were just as exciting as watching the James Bonds movies. My parents did, however, read the daily newspaper from front to back and on Sunday mornings it was a two-hour ritual because the paper was so thick (Pat).

Even though Pat's parents did not read and interact with stories in traditional ways such as conducting shared reading or asking questions about the content, they listened intently while she and her brother read them aloud and gave lots of praise. Receiving admiration from the most important people in their lives placed great value on their work and encouraged more reading and writing. Additionally, both siblings served as reading models for each other.

> My dad didn't read to us when we were children but he used to buy the Sunday newspaper and read it in his special chair the entire morning. I peeked over his shoulder or asked questions until he was annoyed. He answered one or two questions and then gave up and took the comics section of the newspaper and told me: "Take...and go away... leave me alone. I want to read!" I obeyed him and went to and room and deciphered the stories told in the cartoons. I am not sure I knew how to read yet (Clarena).

> Since my dad was handy, he had a garage full of tools. Each one came with a manual that he filed in a box along with the manuals for the appliances in our house. If the lawnmower or stove needed repair, he sat in the den studying the appropriate manual until he felt prepared to fix the device (Pat).

Parents and children reading together was not the norm in these families. Moreover, newspapers and manuals are not considered traditional reading material like books but in reading them daily Pat and Clarena's parents served as powerful reading models, demonstrating reading was critical for accessing information like city and world events. And, when Pat's dad read manuals and then repaired equipment Pat observed a concrete link between reading's functional use and relevancy.

**Teaching Siblings**

> After school each day I played school with my brother. Since he was younger, I was the teacher and he was the student. I taught him lessons learned in school—the alphabet, spelling, vocabulary, and I read to him. As a result by the age of four he could read. (Pat).

> When I became an elementary school teacher and earned a salary, my first present for my brothers who were 7 and 8 at the time was a big book with a collection of classic children's stories. This book had two CDs and I was excited that my brothers enjoyed listening to the stories, looking at the colorful pictures, and turning the pages (Clarena).

As illustrated in these excerpts, literacy development does not belong solely to the role of parents but is shared by other family members. Socialized by parents who value interdependence and have different role expectations for older and younger children (Trumbull, et al., 2001), older Latina/o siblings like Pat and Clarena, assume roles similar to parents such as providing childcare or sharing their funds of knowledge with younger siblings. Socialized by school, Pat and Clarena learned more traditional involvement methods, which they in turn used with their younger siblings.

**The Importance of School**

> My first year in middle school my parents bought me a desk. Located in my bedroom, this desk provided an official place to write my stories, read, and study. Each day after school, my mom asked if I had homework, which was her way of telling me I should go work at the desk in my room and get it done (Pat).

By providing a physical space and asking about homework, Pat's parents signified the importance of literacy. Moreover, they sent a strong message that learning and school are important.

> Since my two brothers were born when I was 17, I grew up with two sisters. Because we were women there were very strict rules at home about

when and where we were allowed to go. School was the only place I was allowed to go at any time of the day or week. I remember signing up for after school tutoring even though I didn't need it just for the fun of being able to leave the house (Clarena).

Clarena's parents did not attend school meetings or pick up her report cards. However, they communicated the importance of school by allowing her to attend school and school-related functions at any time.

**Family Interactions**

Family members come together and recount stories focusing on real-life events and family affairs. These stories entertain, teach, inform and/or pass on history and culture to the next generation.

**Storytelling**

Each night at dinner, our parents told us stories about what happened during their workday. Since my dad was a salesman he had lots of stories about the dealings with customers each day. After he finished, my mom shared her story of the day's events. Working as a clerk at the county courthouse she told fascinating stories about co-workers and the cases heard in court. It was like listening to daytime soap operas. Once she finished, they turned to my brother and me and asked about our school day. Our parents were not the only adults who told stories in our family. Every weekend and holiday we visited relatives who also shared stories while children listened (Pat).

Many times early in the morning my mother fixed breakfast for my dad and after, we waived him goodbye at the door. My two sisters and I then sat on the floor around my mom who used to sit on a chair by the kitchen table and tell us stories. She wore a long nightgown, sat like a frog, and pulled the nightgown down to cover her legs and feet while sitting on the chair. I don't know why I thought that was fun to watch and still today I remember that image. Two of the stories she told frequently were how she met our dad and their wedding day. Since my grandparents did not approve they got married in secret but my granddad arrived at the church with a rifle to stop the wedding. During these times, my mom also told us what we were going to do during the day and week, and about her concerns over her and my dad's jobs. I wasn't in school yet but I still treasure those moments in the mornings when my "ma" would tell these stories (Clarena).

In the traditional method of shared reading parents read books to children and children are expected to interact with parents by asking questions, discussing details or pointing out items in pictures. As these excerpts illustrate, parents tell stories of real-life events and expect children to listen quietly while the story is told. Real-life events transformed into oral stories entertain, teach/inform, and provide moral guidance to family members. Through the oral tradition family history and other significant events are passed down from generation to generation. Rich with details and emotion stories are told within the context of relationships between people.

Parents modeling and encouraging the telling of stories facilitates the development of literacy in several ways. First it provides a space and time for dialogue and interaction to occur among family members where adults practice their skills and children listen and learn. Second, like reading texts, interlocutors have to make sense of the story's meaning, understand new vocabulary and follow story structure. In addition to drawing upon cognitive abilities, storytelling engages affective skills like imagination, spirit and heart (Clark & Rossiter, 2008).

**Recipes and Grocery Shopping**

Since my mom was not the best cook—believe me her homemade tortillas were so bad we purchased them from a "tortilla factory"—she relied on recipes a lot. Cut from newspapers and magazines leafed through at the beauty shop, she and I would carefully read the recipes together to make weekend meals. Since my mom worked full-time, by ten, I was preparing weekday suppers by myself using these same recipes. I must have reread them hundreds of times (Pat).

When I was 7 my mom used to send my two sisters and me to the market on the beach while she stayed home cleaning and got ready for work. She gave us a list of groceries and seafood for us to buy. We had to decipher the words on the list and make decisions about what to buy depending on the price and what was fresh (Clarena).

In Pat's case, in addition to providing opportunities for oral interaction between mother and child, use of the recipes communicated the functional value of literacy--reading accomplishes a task in the daily routine of life. Repeatedly mulling over these recipes

encouraged reading and learning new vocabulary related to cooking and math literacy (i.e., measurement and temperature). Similarly, when Clarena deciphered the grocery list and made calculations and decisions about the purchase of food based on the amount of money she was given, she also strengthened reading and math literacy through real-life application.

**Implications for Adult & Family Literacy Instructors**

Instructors working in family literacy programs should first, broaden their definition of parent involvement in literacy development beyond traditional behaviors of shared reading, buying children's books and other behaviors to recognize and value the involvement behaviors working-class families of color use. Rather than seeing families for what they do not do or have, view their funds of knowledge (i.e., reading materials, family interactions, sibling relationships) as assets upon which to draw for literacy instruction.

Second, during home visits instructors should identify nontraditional types of reading material such as comic books, magazines, the Bible, reference books, brochures, recipes, medical/drug information and other functional material present in the homes with which they work and use in literacy instruction. Additionally, instructors should inquire about literacy interactions between parents, children, and siblings to identify potential sources for incidental learning that instructors can incorporate during literacy sessions.

Third, instructors should encourage adults to use storytelling as a means for promoting literacy development. "Narrative is also how we craft our sense of self, our identity" (Clark & Rossiter, 2008, p. 62). Similar to what happened in our families; story telling is a powerful means working-class families utilize in order to educate their children and convey a positive message about self, culture, and education. Clark and Rossiter (2008) explain learning through stories requires listening, telling, and recognizing stories, which involves receiving and making sense of a message. "Stories are powerful precisely because they engage learners at a deeply human level. Stories draw us into an experience at more than a cognitive level; they engage our spirit, our imagination, our heart, and this engagement is complex and holistic" (p. 65). In telling stories we establish connections and recall other related experiences and as a result new learning happens.

Finally, consider having older siblings and extended family members, not just parents, practice literacy with children. Have children write stories about their families and encourage families to continue to cultivate oral traditions such as giving advice (consejos) and using proverbs (dichos) in their conversations as another means of developing literacy. Instructors can devise other assignments around these practices as a way to validate families' literacy skills and enhance the traditional curriculum established by the family literacy programs they serve.

**Final Thoughts**

The three themes presented in this article are consistent with existent literature explaining there are multiple ways for family literacy to develop other than reading books and reading with your child (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Farr, 2005; Heath, 1983; Zentella, 2005). Although our stories reflect parental involvement practices from 30 years ago, current research on working-class Latina/o families reveals that many of these practices are still evident in today's homes (Farr, 2005; Mercado, 2005; Reese & Goldenberg, 2008; Zentella, 2005). Literacy is developed through families' funds of knowledge and it is embedded in daily life experiences. This development occurs through the use of printed material as well as through language-learning opportunities found in Latina/o homes (Reese & Goldenberg, 2008) such as storytelling, telling proverbs and jokes, giving advice or life lessons, practicing religion, and singing and listening to music. These practices contrast with the perceived lack of involvement of these families by some family literacy educators (Farr, 2005).

Additionally, the concept of print rich environment manifests in different ways depending on the home (Ortiz, & Ordóñez-Jasis, 2005; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). In some homes a rich print environment is comprised of books and a computer while in others it encompasses magazines, flyers, the Bible, newspapers, manuals, catalogs, health and medical documents, greeting cards, and other non-traditional reading materials. It is not social status, race, or economics that make a home rich in literacy, but the value placed on literacy and education. In a study of Mexican immigrants, Delgado-Gaitán (1992) found a range of texts and literacy tools used in homes despite the fact that parents had little prior schooling. This and other studies (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Mercado, 2005; Moll, Neff, & González 1992;) suggest that the extent to which families use literacy as an integral part of family life is the key to shaping literacy acquisition. Therefore, it is important to disrupt the dominant discourse that the only or the

best way to develop literacy is through the use of books and reading bedtime stories to children. It is evident that the use of nontraditional reading material can help families, their children, schools and institutions, build a bridge to academic literacy development.

In examining our literacy autobiographies we, the authors, illustrated that through non-traditional parent involvement incidental learning occurs. In other words, unintentional and unplanned learning happens in a natural way (Kerka, 2000; Rogers, 1997). In literacy development this learning takes place when parents and children interact in daily life activities that do not necessarily have an academic purpose. Consequently family literacy educators will benefit from gaining knowledge and acknowledging the value of all types of family literacy practices. This will call for an assets-based approach in which educators identify what sparks children and parents' interests as a way to motivate and further their development ofliteracy skills.

**Author's note.**

The authorship of this manuscript is credited equally to both authors. Each contributed equivalent efforts toward its conceptualization, analysis, and writing.

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## Georgia Reading Association Goals

- Empower members of the GRA and local councils to become effective leaders in the field of literacy.
- Provide quality reading education services to all Georgia educators.
- Recognize exemplary individuals, local, and state literacy efforts.
- Achieve maximum involvement of members at the local, state, and international levels to receive maximum benefits.
- Promote the goals and objectives of the International Reading Association of Georgia.

## GEORGIA JOURNAL OF READING EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS

# What's in a Word?

*Increasing Acquisition of Word Knowledge through Effective Vocabulary Instruction*

Loleta D. Sartin and Rosalyn L. Magee

Johnny (a pseudonym) was able to decode the words in the poem, *"Democracy."* When asked to summarize the poem, Johnny responded, "I don't know what it was about." This is a common scenario in classrooms. Students are able to identify words automatically, but are unable to discuss the meaning of the words. Decoding is a component of the reading process, but in order to become a reader, one must be able to both decode and understand the words on the page as defined by the National Reading Panel, are the words we must know to communicate effectively (LINCS, 2010). are four types of vocabulary: listening (words we can hear and understand), speaking (words we use when we speak), reading (words we can identify and understand when we read) and writing (the words we use in writing) (Reutzel & Cooter, 2009). As a student's vocabulary increases, the better reader he will become. There is a positive correlation between a person's vocabulary attainment and fluency, comprehension, and oral and written communication skills.

**Effective Instruction**

To teach reading well, teachers must use a combination of strategies incorporated in a coherent plan with specific goals. Teachers must know how children learn to read, why some children have difficulty reading, and how to identify and implement instructional strategies for all children (National Reading Panel, 2000). effective instruction, modeling matters, teachers must model for students how to take ownership of new words. Having students actively engage with vocabulary words will advance their knowledge of the new words. This can be accomplished by helping students visualize the words, playing games with the words, and using newly acquired words in speaking, reading, and writing. Direct instruction of vocabulary helps students learn difficult words and is a valuable part of reading instruction (Johnson, 2001). should have numerous encounters with the vocabulary, experiment with the vocabulary, and engage in meaningful use of the vocabulary (National Institute for Literacy, 2001). In order to fully learn a word and its connotations, a student needs multiple exposures to the word in different reading contexts (Sedita, 2005). Acquiring vocabulary should be an active process relating to students' background knowledge. Educators should remember when teaching students new words, comprehension is the ultimate goal.

**Vocabulary Instruction in Action**

Providing rich and meaningful vocabulary instruction is vital to fostering students' success and continuous achievement in reading and writing. It is the teacher's duty to provide students with a stimulating learning environment while inspiring them to achieve and prosper.

**Step Inside My Classroom**

Through the years, I have established and modified several instructional strategies beneficial to enhancing my students' vocabulary acquisition. The students perceive they are playing a game, while all along they are sharpening their reading and writing skills. The strategies I utilize are applicable across all grade levels.

**I. Gallery Show** – This strategy is often used to introduce a new set of vocabulary words. Prior to seeing the words, students utilize pictures to brainstorm descriptors and activate their background knowledge. Their listening and speaking vocabularies

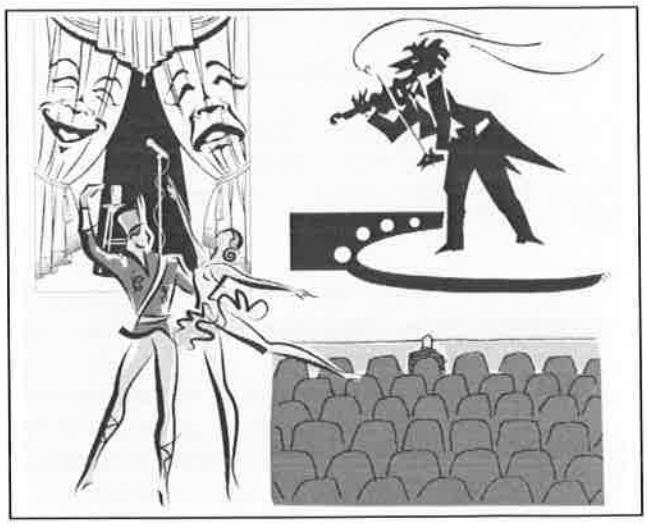

FIGURE 1: Cluster of pictures represents the word *audience*

are extended by engaging in "big dialogue." This strategy requires the teacher to create a cluster of four or five pictures to represent each word. The visuals may be created using an interactive white board or PowerPoint. (see Figure 1).

a. Working in small groups, students are given approximately two minutes to view groups of related pictures and record words or phrases that come to mind (see Figure 2). This allows students to draw from past experiences and make connections to their existing schema. The collaborative dialogue actively engages each student. It provides students the opportunity to explore with each other and removes any anxiety felt by those experiencing difficulty with oral expression. Following is an example of how a group of students may respond to the images depicted in Figure 1:
*Student #1 – dancing*
*Student #2- performances*
*Student #3 – on a stage*
*Student #4– people in a theater watching*

Name _____ **GALLERY SHOW**

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

**Reminders**
Use "Big Dialogue"
Everyone participates in the group

**Things to think about...**
How do you connect with the pictures?
What do the pictures make you think of?
What words come to mind?

**FIGURE 2:** Gallery Show Form

b. After the Gallery Show, students are asked to place the Gallery Show form aside. I present one of the vocabulary words and allow students to discuss their knowledge of the word. I clarify any misconceptions and help students generate a kid friendly definition. The students discuss the definition and correctly utilize the word in sentences.

c. The students revisit their Gallery Show form and analyze their recordings. They determine which set of words or phrases appear to match the vocabulary word presented. I show the pictures that correspond to the vocabulary word. Students determine if the pictures are an accurate representation of the word. Lastly, students are required to justify their responses.

d. Steps B and C are repeated until all words have been presented.

**II. Get the Picture #1** – This strategy may be used as a whole or small group activity. It is closely related to the Gallery Show given that visual representations are provided in both. The Gallery Show requires students to brainstorm and activate background knowledge prior to viewing the words, while Get the Picture requires students to connect their knowledge of the word to a given picture. Both strategies may be used to introduce a set of vocabulary words; however, Get the Picture may also be utilized as a follow-up activity.

a. If this is an introduction of the vocabulary words, I present each word and allow students to discuss their knowledge of the words. I clarify any misconceptions and help students generate kid friendly terms.
b. If this is a follow-up activity, students review vocabulary words and discuss word meanings.
c. I display a picture and allow students to determine which vocabulary word matches the picture (see Figure 3). Students must justify their selection. (Note: Each student may have a different word selection for a given picture.) Students justify their selections by using the vocabulary words in sentences that describe something happening in the picture. Following is an example of vocabulary words and examples of how students justified their matches.

**FIGURE 3:** Dwayne and Kayla Magee

*Vocabulary Words:* expression, noticed, exploded, definitely, positive, grumbled

Student #1 - The girl has an excited **expression** on her face.

Student #2 - The father is **positive** that his daughter is happy.
Student #3 - The girl is **definitely** happy!
Student #4 - The girl **exploded** with excitement.
Student #5 - The father **noticed** that his daughter was happy on her birthday.

This process continues using a variety of pictures, realizing that some pictures will have more choice possibilities than others.

**III. Get the Picture #2** – This strategy should not be used to introduce new vocabulary. I ensure the students understand the meaning of each word prior to attempting this activity.

It is a small group exercise and requires higher order thinking and imagination.

a. Students work in small groups, justifying as many vocabulary words to a picture as possible. Students write sentences in order to share with their classmates. Using the picture and vocabulary words mentioned above in "Get the Picture," the vocabulary word grumbleddoes not directly correlate with the picture. A student using his imagination could say, "The father and his daughter are happy, but the mother **grumbled** when she saw the mess they made."

b. I also employ this strategy allowing small groups to find their own pictures in magazines or newspapers.

c. To conclude this lesson I allow the groups to share their pictures and sentences. Their peers determine if they agree with the justifications. I clarify any misunderstandings.

**IV. Vocabulary Word Chart -** I use a vocabulary word chart after students have gained knowledge of the new words (see Figure 4). This allows them to record their own definition and visual representation for each vocabulary word.

**Linking Reading and Writing**
The vocabulary strategies discussed are often integrated into reading lessons; however, this is simply not enough. In order to gain true mastery and "ownership" of their new vocabulary, students must assimilate these words into their writing activities. Students are encouraged to use new and past vocabulary terms in their narratives when feasible. As a class we celebrate the dynamic vocabulary we hear in our classmates' writing pieces.

| Word | Picture | Meaning |
|---|---|---|
| *expression* | | |
| *noticed* | | |
| *exploded* | | |
| *definitely* | | |
| *positive* | | |
| *grumbled* | | |
| *accident* | | |

FIGURE 4: Vocabulary Word Chart

**We Must Get it Right**
Matthew's Gospel 25:29 states, "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. Reflecting on this verse, Dr. Stanovich coined a phrase The "Matthew Effect," which has been summarized as "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." effect is evident when analyzing students' vocabulary development. Students with larger vocabularies are better readers and engage in the reading process more often. As a result, the more students read, the better readers they become. Students who have inadequate reading vocabularies, will struggle with reading; therefore, they will have less desire to read. Consequently, their reading ability will continue to decline.

Teachers must be equipped with content knowledge and research based vocabulary instruction to enhance students' vocabulary acquisition; this will directly impact students' overall reading ability. Understanding that vocabulary development involves active engagement and continuous reinforcement is paramount. Until we address the needs of each child, we will continue to play the blame game. College professors will wonder what occurred in the K-12 system, teachers will find fault in the home situation, and Johnny will continue to respond, "I don't know what it was about."

Whose Fault Is It?
Certainly Not Mine...

The college professor said,
"Such wrong in the student is a shame,
lack of preparation in high school is to blame."

Said the high school teacher, "Good heavens, that boy is a fool. The fault, of course, is with the middle school."

The middle school teacher said,
"From much stupidity may I be spared, they send him to me so unprepared."

The elementary teacher said, "The kindergartners are block-heads all. They call it preparation; why, it's worse than none at all."

The kindergarten teacher said, Such lack of training never did I see, what kind of mother must that woman be."

The mother said, "Poor helpless child, he's not to blame. You see, his father's folks are all the same."

Said the father, at the end of the line, "I doubt the rascal's even mine!"

Anonymous
Printed in the English Journal, 1996

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# CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

The *Georgia Journal of Reading* is published twice yearly in Spring and Fall. The Journal is a refereed journal with national representation on the editorial board and is published by the Georgia Reading Association. We are seeking manuscripts concerning the improvement of reading and language arts instruction at all levels of education.

Manuscripts should be double-spaced and the format should conform to the guidelines presented in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th Ed.). The author's name, full address, email address, affiliation, and a brief statement about professional experience should be submitted on a cover sheet. Three copies of the manuscript should be included. All submitted articles undergo blind review by multiple reviewers.

Authors are to process manuscripts in Microsoft Word. If a manuscript is accepted for publication, authors will be expected to send an electronic copy to the editor after revisions are made. Three types of manuscripts are being solicited.

**Full-length Articles**

These articles should deal with research, current issues, and recent trends in reading or literacy programs. Appropriate topics for the Journal include project descriptions, research reports, theoretical papers and issues in reading education at the local, state, or national level. Preference is given to articles focusing on topics that impact Georgia's students.

**Articles for the Exchange Column**

Articles for this column should describe creative teaching ideas and strategies that can be implemented in the classroom. These articles are shorter than full-length articles and may or may not require references. If references are needed, they should conform to APA format mentioned above.

**Book and Resource Reviews**

Reviews should describe and critique children's books, professional books, or reading resources (such as software, assessment tools, etc.) that are appropriate for use by teachers and reading professionals. Complete bibliographic information, the address of the publisher, and the cost of the materials (resources) should be included.

**Photographs**

Do you have photos that illustrate the use of innovative literacy practices in your classroom? How about important literacy events–a child reading a book for the first time, a family member sharing a favorite book from childhood at storytime, an adolescent reader lounging in a special spot engrossed in a book? Please share them with others by submitting them for possible publication. High-quality resolution and pleasing composition are expected in submissions. If selected, you will be asked to submit the photos electronically and to provide a signed release form for anyone appearing in the photos.

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# Walking and Writing

*"…. [L]earning to write is not that unique to learning to walk. Both, developmental in nature, involve readiness, modeling, learning from trial and error, and repetition."*

By Christi Pace

"I can't write. I'm no good at it. I'm just not a writer!" Whether you teach younger students, middle graders, or high school students, as teachers I'm sure we can recount the numerous times we've all heard these words. Most certainly there were times during my greenhorn days of teaching that I would sigh, furl my brows, and for a brief moment, wear a befuddled look on my face. After all, I taught my students the writing process and how to write a thesis statement. We used t-charts, lists, and other sophisticated looking charts to brainstorm and organize students' ideas before they wrote. Yet, none of this seemed to help my reluctant writers. Perhaps like many teachers, I thought my students avoided writing because they despised it, and that they were using these catch phrases to get out of having to do their assignments. That is, until I thought about it from the students' point of view.

When I thought about the tone they used, the inflection in their voices, and their body language, I made a stark realization. They were right. My assumptions of what I thought they were telling me were wrong. They were not telling me they didn't want to write. No, their reaction was a resounding frustration of not having the skill set to do so. From their vantage point, writing was something to dread because they didn't know how to do it. This, in turn, did nothing to bolster their self-confidence as writers. They were not the problem; my teaching style simply wasn't meeting their needs. They required more time to write, exemplars, breaking the writing into smaller steps, and strategic, directed instruction.

Determined to introduce a new paradigm for these struggling writers, I developed an analogy that learning to write is not that unique to learning to walk. Both developmental in nature involve readiness, support, learning from trial and error, and repetition. After all, we're not born knowing how to walk and we're not born knowing how to write, but by applying researched based strategies effectively, we can learn to do both.

**Background**

Over the past few decades researchers have attempted to identify "best practice" strategies for teaching students how to write. However, the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress ([NAEP] 2008) report on student writing achievement indicates that eighth and twelfth graders have shown little improvement since the 1998 writing assessment. Santangelo and Olinghouse (2009) state, "assessment data indicate that we are not yet highly effective at helping students gain the critical knowledge and skills required for competent narrative, expository, and persuasive prose" (p. 1). In fact, over a nine year period (1998- 2007), eighth grade writing scores increased by only six points, while seniors' scores showed a mere five point improvement (NAEP, 2008). So, why are students not achieving at a faster rate given that research has identified which strategies work best to improve writing?

To answer the question we first must acknowledge that the teaching of writing is an intricate, complicated task (Hillocks, 1987; Marchisan & Alber, 2001), and writing well demands that writers learn many skills (Steineger, 1996, p.1 in Smith, 2003). However, given today's emphasis on high stakes assessments, little class time is available to teach these skills and teach them well. Stapler (2005) suggests that the time spent on writing instruction not only be doubled but used more effectively (as cited in Simmons, 2009, p. 40). To that end, students frequently may experiment with a type of writing only once in a given school year. Furthermore, the body of literature concerning research in writing instruction recommends providing students ample time learning,

rehearsing, and applying writing skills and strategies to their own work (Soiferman, Boyd, & Straw, 2010).

One way for teachers to achieve this is by spending time teaching clear, precise writing skills and strategies, allowing ample time for writing practice, and differentiating instruction for struggling writers (Santangelo & Olinghouse, 2009). The National Institute for Literacy (2007) suggests "direct, explicit, and systematic instruction" as a means for delivering the kind of instruction student writers need in order to write well (p. 32). So, how do teachers effectively incorporate research-based strategies to teach students how to become effective writers? The institute recommends the following four strategies as methods for delivering this kind of instruction.

1. Explain the writing skill or strategy and model how to apply it in writing in a manner that is similar to what students will be asked to do,
2. Guide students in using the skills and strategies in their writing assignments and provide corrective feedback,
3. Provide time and opportunities for independent practice with the writing skills and strategies, and
4. Repeat these instructional steps until students are able to use them independently in their writing. (p. 32)

Though comprehensive, research on writing infrequently provides a step-by-step plan for classroom application of "best practice" strategies, or how they work in tandem with the writing process. The following steps outline a detailed approach to writing instruction for teachers to implement in their own classrooms and are intended for use with the writing process. They are based upon the research of many, including this practitioner's more than 20 years of personal experience teaching writing.

## READINESS

### Setting Purpose, Determining Audience, and Defining Genre

Before your students begin, help them gain a strong understanding of what they will be writing. Do this first by taking time to introduce them to the type of writing they will be doing. Will it be narrative, expository, persuasive? Or, maybe it will be a poem, letter, short story. Since writing is developmental, it's not too early to begin teaching young students about the different writing genres. Tapping into their prior experiences will help (Read, 2010). Even the youngest of writers needs to begin learning that there are different types of writing and that each of these uses a different organizational structure. According to Graham and Perin (2007), "Excellent instruction in writing... instills in writers the command of a wide variety of forms, genres, styles, and tones, and the ability to adapt to different contexts and purposes" (p. 22). And, though your grade level standards will dictate the type of writing to some degree, don't be afraid to allow your students to experiment with various writing genres. Give assignments appeal by making them real-world applicable. For instance, a second grader might write a letter to the principal convincing him/ her to give extra recess. High school students might write a letter to their town's mayor persuading him/her to lift an imposed curfew. In doing so, you are establishing a purpose and audience for your students to write. Marchisan and Alber (2001) call this "helping students find personal meaning" (p. 2) and suggest connecting students with their interests. Many students passively approach writing because they do not see the value of it. Purposeful writing connects students with their subject, assigns ownership, and motivates them. Moreover, giving them a reason to write and identifying their audience writing readiness and gears students toward a starting point.

### Preparing to Write: Visualizing and Pre-Writing

Writing can be such an abstract task that those who struggle often find it helpful if they can first grasp the layout of a piece, as this helps them establish a concrete picture of how the piece will look, both in form and style. According to Marzano (2010) creating a picture in the mind's eye or a graphic representation is a type of nonlinguistic representation that helps learners conceptualize new information.

The same concept applies to the use of graphic organizers, lists, thinking maps, charts, and such strategies that help students organize their ideas

during pre-writing. If writing a paragraph, explain or remind students about topic and concluding sentences, transitions, and detail sentences. When writing longer pieces, teach an essay's organizational arrangement of paragraphs depending upon the writing genre. Explicitly teaching students these skills has been linked to improved writing performance (Santangelo & Olinghouse, 2009).

## SUPPORT

### Modeling, Mini-Lessons, and Gradual Release

Once students have conceptualized the format and organization of a mode of writing, it's time to move into what the National Institute for Literacy calls "direct, explicit, and systematic instruction," providing support until students are capable of performing the task on their own. Begin by introducing an exemplar, or model, of the same genre that you expect students to write. It need not be the same topic, but if it is, it will give students a better idea of what they are to do in their own writing. For example, if you want your students to write a compare/contrast piece, the example paper should be in that mode. This is also a good time to build upon what you taught during the readiness phase about format and organization.

Engage students in a careful examination of the model piece, identifying what works or doesn't to make the writing effective. Discuss the strategies the author used to achieve a certain effect, teaching students how to identify strong/ weak points in the writing. A helpful tip is to save strong and weak papers from students of the year before by creating a file of sample papers, or place them wherever you put the other activities for the lesson. This way, you will have easy access to them.

The use of models, first reported by Hillocks (1987) and more recently by Education Northwest as part of its 6 + 1 Traits of Effective Writing, has been shown to have a positive result on student writing. The premise is that students analyze the writing for its positive and negative qualities, for what the author did that is or is not working in the piece, thus allowing them to model a similar approach (Graham & Perin, 2007).

However, students applying the skills to their own writing involves separating the writing into doable "steps or parts" and giving students practice using the skills at each juncture, thereby bridging the acquisition gap between declarative and procedural knowledge (Hillocks, 1987, p. 76). To this end, after students have had practice identifying the effective/ ineffective qualities, it's time to directly teach students how to use the strategies to achieve the same or similar effect as the author of the modeled piece. This is easily done through mini-lessons geared toward specific strategies.

Mini-lessons separate the writing into manageable parts. For example, if the above mentioned exemplar uses an effective thesis statement, guide students in identifying it in the exemplar, following it up with direct instruction on ways to achieve the same effect. Practice the strategy by developing several examples together. Then allow students to practice the strategy on their own, thus gradually releasing responsibility of the task until students have learned to apply it to their own work.

Teaching students how to use strategies can first be done in isolation, but for strategy instruction to be most effective, students must apply the newly learned strategies to their own writing. Throughout the year, continue building on this process by introducing new strategies and having students apply them to their own writing during the drafting phase.

Writing Workshop and trait-based approaches have successfully used mini-lessons as a method for teaching writing. Furthermore, research has yielded positive effects for all writers when they are taught to use these strategies, but it is shown to be a highly effective approach for struggling writers (Graham & Perin, 2007). By the end of the school year, you will have taught numerous strategies that students simultaneously apply to their writing. So, not only are you scaffolding each writing lesson, you are scaffolding an entire year's worth of writing.

### Drafting

The drafting phase can be the most difficult step in the writing process for students, especially reluctant writers. This is because they often do not know how to begin or cannot think of what to write. A strategy to try is to engage students in a quick talk. The student verbalizes to the teacher what he/she is thinking in terms of what should be written. An activator of sorts, it gets them articulating their thoughts. Once they have verbalized what they want to say, have them write these thoughts on paper, reinforcing that as a rough draft, they can always change what they've written during revision. Many times, once students begin writing, they are able to continue with little assistance of this type. However, for those who do not, you could repeat the above process or try a peer assisted strategy, pairing a stronger writer with the reluctant writer. The stronger writer offers support and suggestive feedback to the other.

Breaking the draft into manageable sections makes drafting less daunting. A useful strategy for students who might be writing longer pieces, such as essays or research reports, is to divide the paper into sections, guiding students through each, again using modeling and scaffolded strategy instruction. A key factor during drafting is realizing that it is a recursive process and that students must be given ample time to compose and rewrite.

## TRIAL AND ERROR

### Guided Revision and Editing

One of the most powerful stages in the writing process, revising, tends to also be one of the most unattended by teachers. Students need to distinguishing revision from editing, as they are two very different tasks. Try showing students that even published authors create many drafts, revising and editing, before they get that "just right" copy.

It is during the revision stage that students make changes to their rough drafts in purpose, content, style, wording, and even form. These changes may be through adding, changing, or deleting from the writing (Hillocks, 1987). But, without teacher guided instruction, students are apt to simply recopy or reprint from their word processers an exact replica of their rough draft, passing it off as the final copy.

During guided revision, engage students in a sort of reciprocal teaching activity where they become the teacher, offering critique of their peers' writing. Begin modeling this process by allowing volunteers to read aloud their piece to the class. You can determine how many students get to read their piece depending on the amount of time allocated. Then, provide constructive feedback, beginning with at least two positive qualities about the piece. Next, move into providing helpful suggestions for improving the piece. Once students realize the feedback helps to improve their piece, they volunteer more readily! This activity also allows other students to hear what students their own age do to create effective writing. After going through this process a few times with students, release to them the task of offering corrective feedback solutions during student read alouds.

Once they can successfully offer effective peer feedback as a class, it's time to continue releasing the task so students can learn to use this strategy independently. Allow partners or groups of three to work together to critique each others' paper. Each author reads aloud his/ her piece to the others in the group. The other two students listen carefully, taking note of what the writer did that is or is not working. This is similar to what students did when looking at the models, except now they are applying this same strategy of identifying strengths and weaknesses to their own and others' writing. Younger students may simply express their comments verbally, while older students are encouraged to take written notes whenever they hear the author using effective/ ineffective strategies. Once the author is finished reading the piece, the other two group members take turns offering their critique and their suggestions for improvement. Continue this process until each student has read and received feedback. Using this approach to revision gives students an opportunity to recognize effective writing strategies in their peers' work while at the same time identify ways to improve their own writing. During this time, the teacher acts as facilitator, stopping to listen in on each group and offer feedback.

Realizing the nature of students, ground rules for this type of activity must be well- established beforehand. From this point, students may move back into the drafting phase or proceed to editing. Important to note is the powerful potential for teaching and learning at this stage because students developing schemata that allow them to move from a descriptive to a procedural knowledge base.

As stated earlier, from here students may move back into drafting or on to editing. Teach students that editing involves looking at and correcting the author's grammar, usage, and punctuation. Many strategies exist to help students edit their work, but this can also be a powerful time to teach students how to use grammar and punctuation for stylistic effect, encouraging them to take risks in their writing. However, research has shown that teaching grammar in isolation does not improve writing effectiveness; in fact it may have adverse effects (Hillocks, 1987). Instead, encourage students to simultaneously use in

their writing the grammatical skills they are learning.

During editing, remember that students must learn to correct their own grammatical mistakes. A word of caution is warranted here. As teachers, we often want to correct students' grammatical errors, but if students are to improve, they have to learn what they did wrong and then a strategy to remedy it. Use the same partners/groups for editing that you used during revision. This time, allow students to exchange papers with each other. Give students a set list of items to look for in their peers' writing. Checklists work well for this. Each student in the group (or partnership) takes a turn reading the paper, identifying, and marking errors. Afterward, the students may collaborate to get help correcting their errors. Once again, the teacher is facilitating, answering questions from individual groups.

From here, students create a final, polished draft. Their work culminates in a time set aside for students to "publish" their work by sharing it aloud, posting it on the wall, or if writing a more authentic piece such as a letter, sharing it with the one to whom it is addressed.

**Conclusion**

According to Hillocks (1987), "young writers must learn that effective writing involves a complex process that includes prewriting, drafting, feedback from audiences, and revising" (p. 80). Teaching students to write effectively takes time, but given the strict adherence to prescribed protocols of teaching and preparing students to pass standardized tests, the teaching of writing often takes a back seat in the classroom. If we are to move students along the writing achievement continuum, we must invest adequate time using highly effective teaching strategies and policymakers must make sure that time is available. I am reminded of a truism offered by Amy, an art teacher and friend with whom I worked for many years. She explained that we are not all born artists, but we all have the potential to acquire and grow the skills we need to make us artists. As a middle grades language arts teacher, I applied this truth to the teaching of writing. I figured that if I could help students master the techniques of writing, like their artist counterparts, they could grow as writers. After all, we're not born scientists, mathematicians, historians, or a host of other things, and though some students may be more linguistically predisposed than their counterparts, it doesn't mean they cannot learn to write. And learning to write well takes time-probably even more time than learning to walk.

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