AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EFFECTS OF USING

ORAL READING FOR ASSESSMENT AND PRACTICE

AT THE GRADE ONE LEVEL:

RESOURCE/CLASSROOM TEACHER COLLABORATION

by

PATRICIA ADAMSON

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

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Abstract

This study was an attempt to learn more about the effects of using oral reading

for assessment and practice in a Grade One classroom. Over a six month period from

January to June. 1996, the resource teacher developed a collaborative relationship with

the Grade One classroom teacher and, together, they worked to: examine the oral reading

activities used in the classroom; determine ways of incorporating authentic, ongoing

assessment procedures into these activities; and analyze how this assessment impacts on

subsequent instructional activities in the classroom. Data from this study provided

information on: (1) the use of running records for oral reading assessment and the

incorporation of this knowledge into planning appropriate subsequent instructional

activities, (2) the development of effective collaboration between the classroom teacher

and the resource teacher for purposes of supporting reading development and providing

early intervention. (3) the involvement of both children and parents in oral reading

practice and assessment of literacy development, and (4) the development of cross-age

tutoring partnerships between Grade One and older children.

In addition, this study augmented our theoretical understanding of early literacy

acquisition confirming that: (1) ongoing oral reading assessment and practice provides

the classroom teacher, the students and the parents with critical information for literacy

development; and (2) young readers need multiple opportunities to practice and extend

their reading understanding through social interaction. The results extend pedagogical

knowledge regarding how to: (1) use oral reading assessment to inform instruction;

(2) develop programs for oral reading practice using trained volunteers and cross-age

tutors; (3) select appropriately leveled texts for beginning readers; and (4) organize the

classroom effectively to provide a balanced literacy program.

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1

Background for the Study

One area of recent interest in reading development and instruction has focused on emergent literacy and early instructional intervention in reading. One component of reading instruction is reading aloud to children. Reading aloud to children from the time they are very young enhances both language and literacy development (Holdaway, 1980). Experts advocate that teachers continue the practice of reading storybooks aloud throughout the early school years (Sulzby, 1985; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Children not only learn to love stories and reading but they also learn about written language. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) confirm that listening to a wide variety of well-chosen texts allows children to "build up a repertoire of text structures and literacy language structures that will support them in their independent reading"(p.26).

In addition to listening to stories, Fountas and Pinnell also recommend shared "Big Book" reading instruction (Holdaway, 1981), independent reading and oral reading during guided instruction to assess strengths and weaknesses and inform instruction. Clay (1979; 1985), for example, suggests that having early readers, themselves, read orally during guided reading provides a means for carrying out appropriate and authentic assessment through the compilation of running records. Although oral reading plays an integral role in authenticizing and assessing early reading instruction, its use has not been researched extensively as a day to day activity

in classrooms. The purpose of this study is to inquire into oral reading as a way of both assessing reading and informing instruction. Oral reading as it was currently used in the classroom served as a starting point for discussions with the classroom teacher.

Conceptual Framework

Allington (1983) examined the role of fluency in skilled reading, finding that although oral reading is a common practice in most primary classrooms, most teachers do not rate the activity as fulfilling an important goal. He supports the view that oral fluency should be regarded as a characteristic of good reading, that training can be provided to improve the quality of oral reading, and further, that such training improves overall reading ability.

Allington (1984) identified the need for further research into the important features of oral reading. Of particular interest to this study was his idea that we need to investigate ways to make direct instruction of oral reading skills available in regular classrooms.

Providing for oral reading thus has two main purposes: (1) to assess early reading performance (Clay, 1979) and (2) to inform instruction. Classroom teachers and resource teachers alike are interested both in investigating ways of identifying "at risk" readers early in their schooling and providing appropriate instruction based on oral reading performance in regular classroom settings. At present, pull-out programs are commonly used to provide for "at risk" readers. Pull-out programs in which

2

resource teachers work with individual children in isolation and focus on skill

development, are not effective because there is no guarantee that skills taught in

isolation will transfer to enhanced reading performance in other contexts (Allington &

McGill-Franzen, 1989). Assessing children's miscues as they read orally is

recommended both for evaluating children's reading competence and informing

subsequent reading instruction. By working in collaboration with the classroom

teacher in the context of the whole language classroom, resource teachers can thus

develop oral reading as a means of: (1) assessing children's reading strengths and

needs and based on this assessment, (2) providing the children with training and

practice to meet these needs.

Traditional, formal methods of assessment no longer seem appropriate to

teachers working with beginning readers (Cambourne & Turbill, 1990). Valencia

(1990) advocates an approach to language arts assessment that encourages

teachers to use many different ways to evaluate learning and helps capitalize on

students' strengths. She suggests four guiding principles for assessment drawn from

both research and instructional practices:

> 1) Sound assessment is anchored in authenticity. Reading assessment should
>
> reflect our understanding of reading as a transactional process. Both purpose
>
> for reading and background knowledge impact strongly on how a reader is able
>
> to construct meaning. We must take these factors into consideration in our
>
> assessments. Using real classroom reading experiences enables teachers to

3

control for these factors while at the same time not detracting from valuable teacher and student time.

2) Assessment must be a continuous, on-going process. It is important to assess the process of learning as students develop. When teachers observe and collect information continuously, it reinforces the idea that learning is a continual, evolving process. Therefore, assessment practices must be a part of daily classroom activities.

3) Because reading is a complex and multi-faceted process, valid reading assessment must be multi-dimensional. Important dimensions of reading such as interest, motivation, strategy use, and metacognitive knowledge need to be considered in the evaluation process.

4) Assessment must provide for active, collaborative reflection on the part of both teacher and student. When students are involved in the process of evaluating their own learning, it helps them to understand their own strengths and needs and instills the notion that they have control over and can exercise responsibility for their own learning.

These four principles of assessment have been carefully considered in the development of this study. A basic assumption is that authentic assessment techniques, which can be used on an on-going basis in the classroom, can best help us understand the developmental needs of young children. By using the ongoing activities and the reading materials of the classroom in the assessment process, we are

more able to observe children at work on actual tasks and understand their strengths and their needs. Marie Clay (1985) developed keeping a daily running record of text reading as a reliable measure of how well children read their own books. Running records are one form of authentic assessment which provide valuable information for planning day to day instruction. Tracking oral reading provides information regarding which cues (semantics or meaning, syntax or language sense, and visual or symbol sound relationships) that the reader is using to facilitate the processing of text (see for e.g. Clay, p. 41).

While compiling running records of daily oral reading informs instruction, another important facet of beginning reading instruction is the need for practice in order to integrate the use of all cueing systems (semantic, syntactic and visual cues). Repeated readings of the same text increase oral reading fluency (Samuels, 1979). Blum and Kosinken(1991) summarize the value of repeated reading as follows:

> "Repeated reading appears to provide opportunities for learners
> to develop expertise by contributing to increases in knowledge
> of both content and strategy ... increased knowledge and awareness
> of improvement provides considerable motivation for continued
> practice." (p. 197)

The motivational and self-evaluation components of the repeated reading practice make it an appropriate choice of activity for valid reading assessment and for

increasing reading proficiency.

Repeated reading for practice requires an audience and paired reading is one way to facilitate repeated reading in the classroom that has proven to be effective (Kosinken & Blum, 1986). Working with a partner, whether it is an adult volunteer, an older student or a peer, provides an audience for the reader and fosters the collaboration while at the same time affording the opportunity for the beginning reader to integrate the use of the cueing systems. Most students find these partnerships enjoyable and motivating.

Connie Morrice and Maureen Simmons (1991) present a variety of ways of establishing reading partnerships between younger and older readers. Repeated reading can become a natural part of these literacy relationships. In this way, oral reading practice is rooted in actual experiences that require meaningful reading. This type of partnership requires training, however, in order to maximize the effectiveness of the shared reading and reinforce strategy implementation. Morrice and Simmons found that in using cross-age reading buddies: "The children practised being in charge of their learning, and in so doing learned to participate more fully as members of their community" (p. 577).

There is an important social aspect to these partnerships as well. Paul Kropp (1993) stresses the need to create a community of learners.

"If we think of reading as sharing, we can see how important the social aspect must be. Reading lets us access our collective experience, to harvest the skills and wisdom of all humanity. And reading brings joy - the sheer fun of stepping into other lives, other universes - of getting caught up in a world of imagination." (p. 5).

The use of the "Reader's Chair" in the classroom is an example of developing a sense of community and celebrating reading in the classroom. Children look forward to the opportunity to read to their classmates and share their enthusiasm for particular books.

The social aspects of reading must also be fostered within the home. The school can take an active role both in informing and involving parents in their children's literacy development.

"Evaluation should involve in a meaningful way those who are directly affected by the judgments made. When information, insights, and data are gathered from the key stakeholders, evaluation becomes more balanced, comprehensive and trustworthy. At the classroom level, in addition to teachers, critical participants are students, peers, and parents. All offer differing perspectives, and all need to be acknowledged as potential sources for information." (Anthony, Johnson, Mickelson, & Preece, 1991, p. 38).

7

In order to promote effective literacy development in the classroom, educators must recognize the need to include the selection of a wide variety of appropriately leveled texts, provide opportunities for oral reading practice and repeated reading to assist young readers to integrate the cueing systems, and develop a literacy community of learners including peers, older students and volunteers who have been trained as tutors and parents. As important components of literacy development, it is essential to consider developing goals for independent oral reading practice in collaboration with others and use oral reading as an authentic, ongoing assessment tool.

Scope of the Study

In an attempt to contribute to the knowledge base addressing the role of oral reading in literacy development, this study was designed to carry out an intensive investigation regarding the effects of oral reading in a Grade One classroom. In this classroom case study, the investigator collaborates with the teacher as a participant observer to provide appropriate opportunities for oral reading assessment and practice within the classroom setting. An effective and time-efficient means of assessing and practising oral reading performance to guide subsequent instruction was developed.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine what kinds of oral reading

activities lead to effective instructional intervention in reading and how to provide appropriate opportunities for oral reading practice to enhance reading development. Stemming from this overall goal, the study sought to discover how to:

1) Use oral reading for assessment and incorporate the knowledge gained from oral reading assessments into appropriate individualized instructional activities.

2) Develop effective collaboration between the classroom teacher and the resource teacher for the purposes of supporting reading development for all children and providing early intervention as needed.

3) Involve both children and parents in oral reading practice and the assessment of literacy development.

4) Develop cross-age tutoring partnerships between Grade One and older children to promote the integration of literacy skills beneficial to both the older and younger student.

Significance of the Study

This study documents a process where the classroom teacher and resource teacher, working in collaboration with one another, attempted to develop appropriate instructional strategies for early reading development based on authentic on-going assessment techniques. Findings from this study add to the existing body of knowledge on the importance of appropriate goals for oral reading assessment and development in primary classrooms. As well, this study reveals a rich

source of information on teacher decision-making in regard to both lesson planning and material selection to promote early reading development. This study explores the importance of diverse partnerships in learning and encourages teachers, students and parents to activate and reflect upon their own reading processes and ways to support early readers.

Definition of Terms

Resource Teacher - a teacher who works collaboratively with classroom teachers to provide support for all students' learning. Through classroom observations, discussions and meetings with teachers. working with individual students or small groups of students in the classroom or occasionally in pull-out situations. the resource teacher and the classroom teacher work together to pose questions, attempt new strategies, use different materials. observe and analyze student responses and evaluate program effectiveness in order to meet the needs of each individual learner.

Running Records - a method of recording the oral reading behaviour of an individual developed by Marie Clay (1979). The analysis and interpretation of running records is similar to Goodman and Burke's miscue analysis (1972). Unlike miscue analysis. running records are more easily adapted to the classroom setting as keeping a running record does not require the marking of a prepared script. The classroom teacher is able to record a student's oral reading behaviour using any available text by making ticks on a blank sheet of paper for each correct response and recording every error in

10

full. A sample reading of 100 to 200 words from each text is required. See Appendix A for further details about taking running records.

Appropriately Leveled Books - Students should be able to read text with fluency and phrasing and apply appropriate strategies. For instructional purposes a 90 - 95% accuracy level is required. Independent reading requires a 95 - 100% accuracy level. Barbara Peterson (1988) has outlined characteristics of appropriately leveled texts for beginning readers. Predictability is an important factor especially in the very beginning stages of reading development. See Appendix B for a chart which outlines the important text characteristics for each stage of beginning reading.

Emergent Literacy - "Emergent literacy represents the beginnings of reading and writing for the child" (Teale, 1986). Recent research of reading development has been largely observational and has provided detailed descriptions of children's development of literacy within social contexts of both home and school. Evidence from these observational studies indicates that children acquire critical concepts about reading and writing from their daily experience long before they enter formal schooling. They learn about stories, about the way print works, and about important relationships such as sound-letter correspondence through functional or authentic experience with written language. These concepts seem to "emerge" from experience, thus the term "emergent literacy" (Clay, 1979, 1991; Teale and Sulzby, 1986).

11

Oral reading for practice - The children in the Grade One classroom are given opportunities to read and re-read stories in different contexts and with a variety of reading partners to strengthen their understanding of the reading process and to develop reading fluency. Both Samuels' research on repeated readings (1979) and Stallings' (1980) research found oral reading to be more closely related to reading achievement gains than was silent reading.

Reader's Chair - The classroom teacher provides opportunities for four to five students daily to read to the class. These students select a story they have practised to read aloud and share with the class. They sit in the teacher's chair or "reader's chair" and read their story. The children are encouraged to "read like a storyteller" using expression and showing the pictures of the story. The other children are also encouraged to be a good audience, listen attentively, share their ideas about the story and ask questions. Cooper (1997) makes reference to the sharing and celebrating of literacy through group experiences such as this.

Cueing Systems - Reading is an transactive process in which the reader interacts with the ideas of the author in order to understand the meaning of the text. As children develop as readers, they draw information from the cueing systems (Clay, 1978):

Semantic - prior knowledge of the subject matter and concepts expressed in the text. e.g. Does it make sense?

12

Syntax - knowledge of the structure of the language. e.g. Does it sound right?

Visual or graphophonics - the link between the patterns of sounds and the patterns of letters. e.g. Does it look right?

Stages of Reading Development - Helen Depree's (1994) description of the stages of reading development include the following characteristics:

The Emergent Stage

Directionality - Children use fingers to indicate direction and return sweep.

One-to-one matching - Children begin to match one spoken word with one written word.

Monitoring - Children begin to notice discrepancies between the print and what they are trying to say.

Searching - Children may pause and search in the picture, the print or their memory for known information.

Self-correction - Children start to correct some of their errors.

The Early Stage

Directionality and one-to-one matching - Children begin to read the book matching text with their eyes, but reverting to finger pointing when the text presents some new challenge.

Monitoring - Children notice discrepancies in the meaning and the structure and at the word and letter level.

13

Searching - Children demonstrate an ability to search using letters and letter

clusters, as well as meaning and language structures.

Self-correction - Children correct many of their errors.

The Fluent Stage

Directionality and one-to-one matching - Children scan phrases with the eyes.

Monitoring, searching and self-correcting - Children are able to use both large

and small chunks of meaning, language structure, and visual information in an

integrated way to foster ongoing monitoring of reading comprehension.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

The following chapter is a review of the literature as it relates to this study. The theoretical background for this study is drawn from the empirical theories underpinning the emergent literacy perspective. Although the phrase "emergent literacy" (Teale & Sulzby, 1986) came into use in the mid 1980's, the construct the label represents has been present for several decades, with origins dating back to Dewey's notion of experiential learning (Dewey, 1938). The emergent literacy perspective received widespread recognition through the research within cognitive psychology and linguistics during the 1960's that raised questions about the reading readiness concept which focused primarily on isolated skills needed for reading. Research into early reading acquisition and instruction is also reviewed.

Theoretical Framework

The emergent reading perspective has evolved through three theoretical frameworks including: (a) learning to read as natural, (b) the Piagetian view of literacy acquisition, and (c) emergent literacy elaborated by Vygtosky's social constructivist perspective (Hiebert & Raphael, 1998). All share the essence conveyed by the term "emergent literacy". The "emergent" part of the label means that literacy is seen as developing over an extended period of time.

15

Learning to Read as Natural

The fundamental principle underlying this view of literacy acquisition is that children learn to read and write in the same way that they learn to talk and listen. Children acquire language successfully in a variety of contexts in both the home and the community. This learning has been described as natural because children learn without the necessity of specific lessons on how to speak. Chomsky's (1965) theory states that we have an innate disposition to learn language based on the shared systems of semantics, syntax and phonology across languages. Without a language acquisition device, Chomsky reasoned, the task of extracting the rules of these underlying systems would be nearly impossible for young children because of the chaotic nature of daily talk.

Goodman and Goodman (1979) applied this theory of innate disposition to develop rules about language to literacy learning as well. They believed that oral and written language were learned in the same: "In neither case is the user required to have a high level of conscious awareness of the units and system. In both cases control over language comes through the preoccupation with communicative use" (p. 139).

The importance of social interaction for meaning-making in this natural development of language use is a critical component that many researchers (Holdaway, 1980; Halliday,1994) believed was being ignored by theorists such as Chomsky. Halliday refers to children's use of oral language as "acts of meaning (which) are joint

16

constructions, dialogically constructed between himself and some "significant other" by reference to whom he is achieving a personal identity" (p. 71).

Holdaway (1980, pp. 14 - 15) concurs with this view of language learning and refers to the important characteristics in naturalistic, developmental learning and outlines them as follows:

1. Learning occurs naturally in an environment in which the mature skill is being used by everyone with obvious functional success.

2. Learning allows for gradual approximation towards final accomplishments. It begins in the learner role-playing him or herself as a user of the skill.

3. Learning is best supported by sympathetic, interactive adults who praise often and punish very seldom. It occurs in a secure social environment which assumes the learner's ultimate success.

Early literacy acquisition from the learning-to-read-as-natural perspective occurs when children are immersed in contexts where they can use written language to communicate. The major roles of teachers in primary grade classrooms were to make available many meaningful literacy experiences for students and to converse and conference with students in a safe and accepting environment. Holdaway (1980) stated that "the learning of a complex process is not dependent on expert instruction. It is when natural learning processes break down that expert instruction becomes necessary" (p. 14) and that "one important aspect of that expert intervention must be a movement towards

more natural developmental conditions" (p. 207).

Cambourne (1988) concurs that it is necessary to create a natural learning environment and states:

> "when teachers understand the principles they can and do arrange their
>
> classrooms so that they simulate for the written form of the language what the
>
> world appears to do naturally for the oral form. When they do this, the learning
>
> which occurs is powerful and durable" (p. 45).

This perspective came to describe the underlying view of literacy acquisition in the whole language movement, a philosophy that has been influential in literacy instruction over the past decade (Goodman, 1986).

The Piagetian View of Emergent Literacy

Piaget's influence is reflected in an emphasis on cognitive structures and processes as the source for literacy acquisition (see e.g. Clay, 1972, 1991; Sulzby & Teale, 1986). Researchers did not ignore the underlying linguistic foundation of literacy learning, but they were particularly intrigued by Piaget's concepts such as assimilation and accommodation, the two primary mechanisms of development, as well as his suggestion for developmental stages.

From this perspective, the writing system becomes an object of knowledge

18

for young children. They construct hypotheses to explain the nature and uses of writing. Although these hypotheses are not exactly the same in young children, they follow a general progression in their consistency and logic that can be characterized as stages (Teale, 1986).

Children use the processes of assimilation or accommodation as they attempt to make sense of writing. Assimilation referees to the transformation of new knowledge into the known or familiar. When the new knowledge is sufficiently discrepant or the tried and true strategies do not mesh with the new, children may modify their existing modes of thinking to accommodate the new knowledge (Yussen & Santrock, 1978). This accommodation may be slight initially as children attempt to restructure their understanding of literacy. When the information is discrepant enough and the familiar structures inadequate, children go through an "aha" experience as they realize new rules or ways of constructing new rules.

An illustration of assimilation and accommodation of literacy information comes from Sulzby (1985). Sulzby studied the behaviours that can be observed during storybook reading and tracked children's reading development over time prior to formal instruction. The study confirmed that children develop tremendously through interacting with storybooks. Very young children often begin with picture-governed attempts at storybook reading. They rely heavily on their oral language knowledge about storytelling. When children make the shift to print-governed attempts at storybook

19

reading, they often initially refuse to read the story at all. Sulzby contends that their increased awareness of the importance of print in the reading process can result in these "high-level" or "print-governed" refusals. In order to accommodate their new knowledge about the importance of print in reading, children need to modify their existing modes of thinking and assimilate their new "print awareness" into the reading process.

Sulzby's observational research documented at least ten types of reading behaviours which indicate that children develop tremendously through interacting with storybooks. The behaviours described in the studies showed stability across storybooks which indicates that children have made generalizations and that the behaviours are conceptual rather than just a stimulus-response pattern to a particular book. Also, the behaviours appear to be developmental in that the patterns differ predictably among age groups. Sulzby believes that transitions into conventional reading and writing are similar to stage shifts in Piagetian fashion, but prefers to refer to them as the development of a "linguistic repertoire" rather than stages. She states that Piaget's constructs of assimilation and accommodation are evident in general language acquisition and that, similarly, "children's literacy development represents adding new parts, refining old ones in the repertoire, and realigning relationships among the parts" (p. 279).

Emergent Literacy Elaborated by Social-Constructivist Theory

It was not until 1978 when Mind in Society was first published in English that

20

Vygotsky's presence began to be taken seriously. Stressing the social origins of

language and thinking, Vygotsky was the first modern psychologist to suggest the

mechanisms by which culture becomes part of each person's nature. Vygotsky's work

became an essential area of study beginning in the late 1970's due to an increasing

interest in the philosophy of language precipitated by Chomsky's scientific discoveries

about language and grammar, the emergence of cognitive science approaches and

attempts to develop alternative paradigms to capture and express the essential socialness

of language and communication.

Vygtosky's theory and its complex implications stress the inherent social nature

of all human activity. The theory of social constructivism is based on the assumptions

that knowledge is constructed through an individual's interaction with the sociocultural

environment; that higher mental functions are social and cultural in nature; and that

knowledgeable members of a culture help each other.

Vygotsky's theory directs attention to the role of adults in children's learning of

scientific concepts, such as literacy. Literacy is one of the higher-level tools of a culture,

according to Vygotsky, not a cognitive process that develops naturally in all humans. All

higher mental functions have a social origin. External activities that are mediated through

interactions and conversations with other individuals undergo transformations and

become internal activities. All human activities exist on two planes - external and

internal: "every function in the child's cultural development appears twice; first on the

social level, and later on the individual level; first between people - interpsychological, and then inside the child - extrapsychological" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). One example is speech that originally is a means of communication with other people and later becomes, in the form of inner speech, a means of thinking. Through social interaction, the child learns to use language for the four functions of reference, communication, semantics and self-control. Vygotsky (1978) summarizes this process from the external to the internal plane. First, other people act on the child, then the child enters into interaction with those around him. Third, the child begins to act on others, and finally, he/she begins to act on him or herself.

The key to the development of complex mental functions is mastering the signs and symbols of the culture and learning to use them to direct and regulate one's own behaviour. The development of these capabilities is determined by the sociohistorical heritage of the child's culture and the child's social experience. Therefore, the nature of the child's cognitive functioning is socially determined.

Unlike oral language, literacy has not been a part of all cultures. In cultures where literacy was developed, it served functions that allowed a culture to maintain records, to negotiate and interact across distances, and to document the history and commerce of the culture. Literacy systems are distinguished by their consistent, systematic relations which have been codified. In contrast, although oral language systems are complex, children become proficient with oral language before the cognitive structures that support the

acquisition of scientific systems have been acquired. Further, oral language is one of the tools that individuals use in acquiring literacy. The everyday concepts of oral language are needed to understand the manner in which written language systems represent ideas and objects.

Social Learning

There is a substantial amount of evidence regarding the importance of home environment and parental attitude in the development of young children's literacy acquisition. Heath (1983) and Moll (1992) have both studied various cultural and socio-economic communities and traced the influences of parental attitudes on literacy acquisition of their young children: "The manner in which parents talk with their young children, including encouragement to ask questions and the willingness of parents to respond to these questions, is the primary means whereby parents translate their goals and wishes for their children's literacy into reality." (Hiebert & Raphael, 1998). This social interaction, Vygotsky (1978) argued, is the means whereby adults draw children's attention to the critical elements of literacy. An important function of an adult or knowledgeable peer is to facilitate the learning tasks that are beyond the learner's level of competence. Assisted learning occurs in social contexts that enable the more knowledgeable person to model, question, and provide feedback until the learner can operate independently. Thus, oral language becomes critical to the acquisition of literacy because it is the means that adults and older children use to explain the workings of

23

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is an essential component of the social

constructivist theory. This term describes the potential learning range of an individual.

Vygotsky describes it as the "distance between a child's actual developmental level as

demonstrated through independent problem solving and the potential development as

determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with a more

capable peer" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

There is substantial confirmation for Vygotsky's construct of social interaction as

the means whereby children come to analyze print (Wells, 1986). Children learn a

substantial amount about literacy prior to school entry when book reading occurs in the

home and parent and child interactions are characterized by extended talk about the

meanings of books and of words as well as the features of print itself (Flood, 1977).

Therefore. some children learn a great deal about literacy prior to school entry and others

do not. The social-constructivist theory provides the reasons why this occurs. Although

all children are exposed to words on signs and labels. the difference for learning about

literacy lies in the interactions that adults have with children around literacy. Vygotsky's

theory focuses on the intent of adults to mediate and facilitate learning through modeling

and questioning. It is necessary to identify these strategies so that they can be applied in

school settings for children without extended prior literacy experiences.

The social-constructivist perspective is critical in describing how children have

come to know what they know and how contexts can be created for those children whose

literacy experiences occur primarily in schools. The social-constructivist perspective

enriches emergent literacy theory with its attention to the means whereby children's

literacy learning is supported through particular social interactions and events. By

elaborating on the special roles of teachers and peers, the social constructivist perspective

can be helpful for designing school contexts for children whose literature learning occurs

primarily in schools.

To become independent readers and writers, individuals must be adept at the

technical aspects of making associations between sounds and letters. It is in this area that

young children are challenged, not in the fundamental stances of comprehending. They

approach books as occasions for meaning as seen by Sulzby's study of storybook retelling

(1985). Keeping this fundamental disposition alive during the time when children are

learning technical aspects of literacy is a primary challenge for emergent literacy

teachers. The emergent learning perspective with its elaborations from social

constructivist thinking can guide teachers in juggling the basic stance of young children

that books and their own messages are intended to communicate, and the need for young

children to acquire fluency with the symbol system to become independent readers and

writers. The basic stance toward literacy should continually emphasize the central

processes of comprehending as well as provide opportunities for repeated practice to

develop automaticity in the use of all the cueing systems.

Development of literacy knowledge occurs on an number of different fronts

25

simultaneously. Consequently, the best advice that teachers can heed is that of Vygotsky who viewed learning as leading development, meaning that children are introduced to new contexts, materials, and concepts about literacy even before they have mastered all of the previous strategies or skills. Children's literacy processes are enhanced through the books that children read and that are read to them and the contexts in which literacy events, activities and lessons occur, and the way in which assessments are conducted.

Helen Depree (1994) describes the importance of providing a "balanced language program" in which reading and writing are problem-solving activities. She states that:

"beginning readers and writers need to know how to use their initiative,
building on what they know about the world and how language works to
make communication and generate new learning. They need freedom, time
and encouragement to test out ideas and solutions, inquire and research,
and to evaluate their current learning. They also need explicit instruction.
The provision of all these components is essential" (p. 5).

Instruction in the emergent literacy classroom focuses on modeling and interaction, rather than simply lecturing or telling. In small-group lessons, teachers guide children in acquiring facility with the strategies for independent reading. Using repeated readings over a period of time within the context of teacher-led, small groups of children at similar developmental literacy levels allows teachers to align instructional goals with

participants, the content and the materials used, to focus on goals during the lessons, to assess the students' progress and use this assessment to develop future instructional activities. Thus, instruction and assessment become interwoven and interdependent.

Understanding that parents share the goal of bringing children to high levels of literacy is important. Teachers need to understand the visions of success that parents hold for their children and parents need to be informed about teachers' goals for literacy development in the classroom. Several studies (Delpit, 1988; Fraatz, 1987; Shockley, 1994) indicate that although parents place high values on literacy education for their children, there remain many misconceptions about what should be done. Together, these studies make clear how important it is for teachers and parents to understand each other, and through this understanding come to share goals for children's literacy development. With such shared goals, events from students' homes are more fluidly brought into and integrated with classroom literacy events.

The theory of emergent literacy development and Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development address the multifaceted nature of all educational environments. Vygotsky's theoretical framework supports the repeated opportunities for oral reading practice with adult volunteers, older students and parents adopted in this study. As participants engage inter- and intrapsychologically in developing and assessing their own reading performance the ensuing interpersonal encounters impact the development of higher mental functions. The development of these higher mental functions is critical in

27

literacy development as young children move to independence in use of a wide variety of reading strategies. Language, which is a cultural tool, enables all participants to further their new conceptual growth and understanding. Thus, the use of oral reading activities for instruction and assessment, has the potential to facilitate meeting the needs of each learner within his or her zone of proximal development.

In summary, the principles that characterize how children become literate include:

(1) Literacy is acquired through using reading and writing for purposes that are meaningful to children.

(2) Literacy acquisition is dependent on its immersion in oral language. Oral language is the means for directing children's attention to the features and functions of written language. Through adult facilitation, young children's attention is drawn to the critical features of written language.

(3) Participation with both adults and peers is a critical component of literacy learning. The "scaffolding" of teachers enables children to perform at their potential levels of development. Peer relationships encourage ongoing dialogue and opportunities to make and reconstruct meaning.

In order to create the literacy acts where children interact meaningfully with one another and to scaffold appropriate learning experiences for students, teachers need to understand what children need to learn in order to become literate.

Research on Early Reading Instruction

In recent years our understanding of successful beginning reading has increased significantly (see Adams, 1990; Chall, 1989). Studies such as these which have focused on successful practices have been readily adopted in the educational field and have been used to update materials, guidelines and "scripts" teachers use (Pinnell, Lyons, DeFord, Bryk & Seltzer, 1994). Unfortunately, these imposed changes in practices and materials are not always applied with understanding. Chall's (1983) research revealed that teachers presented with new programs often tend to carry with them old practices. The underlying beliefs which supported the old practices still exist, inhibiting change. Chall's research is supported in the literature on change (Sarason, 1990). Often research evaluates the outcomes of new practice without attention to the role of underlying theories of learning. Shulman (1986) recognized that innovators who are successful have created a system that reviews itself through the construction and continual expansion of a theoretical base.

Clay (1979) emphasized the importance of systematic observation of learning as a means of deepening our understanding of the learning process. In The Early Detection of Reading Difficulties, Clay describes the use of running records to observe reading behaviours and determine the processes by which the child monitors and corrects his own performance. Running records of text reading can be used whenever oral reading is appropriate.

Clay's theory of learning to read is based on the Piagetian view that children

construct cognitive systems to understand the world and language. These strategies allow

them to use language and world knowledge and to integrate information from many

different sources. There are four different sources of learning which facilitate reading.

Clay says, all readers "need to use, and check against each other, four sources of

information: semantic (text meaning), syntactic (sentence structure), visual (graphemes ,

orthography, format, and layout), and phonological (the sounds of oral language)" (Clay

& Cazden, 1990, p. 207). In order for children to improve their use of the four cueing

systems and become "self-extending" readers, they must have opportunity to read

appropriately leveled material which is easy enough for them to practise the skills they

have and build up fluency.

Clay's theory of teaching reading also stressed the critical role of social

interaction in learning. Inherent in social interaction is the development of learning and

thinking. The conversation between teacher and child operates to stimulate, encourage,

challenge and support reading work. The learner is actively engaged, using all of his or

her resources to search, detect error and solve problems. The teacher looks for evidence

of constructive processing which is given priority over precisely accurate responses. By

working with the child in his or her "zone of proximal development," the teacher is able

to assist the child to sort cues and analyze his or her own learning. In supporting the

beginning reader, tasks shift from inter-individual functioning (between the teacher and

30

child) to increasingly complex intra-individual functioning by the child (Clay & Cazden, 1990; Vygotsky 1978).

Clay's detailed studies of how children learn to read and write led her to design a one-on-one tutorial intervention for children having difficulty learning to read. This program was subsequently named "Reading Recovery" for its potential to help young readers recover a trajectory of progress towards the development of independent reading strategies. Reading Recovery (RR) is designed specifically for children having difficulty in the first years of formal schooling. In New Zealand, children enter RR at age six, after the the child has experienced one year of literacy instruction. In the United States and Canada, RR students are first graders. RR provides children with daily, intensive one-half hour lessons with a teacher who has received specialized RR training. When a student shows evidence of an independent system for reading and can read material typical for his or her class, the student is discontinued, making room for a new student in the program.

There is a growing body of authoritative opinion and research evidence which suggests that reading failure is preventable for all but a very small percentage of children (e.g. Clay, 1985; Hiebert & Taylor, 1994; Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Dolan & Wasik, 1992). Reading Recovery focuses solely on individual tutoring, but several other early intervention programs have been designed using different organizational procedures.

31

Success for All (Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Dolan & Wasik, 1992) is a project

implemented mainly in schools in Baltimore, Maryland and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

for student from very low socioeconomic, inner-city communities. Success for All is a

total school program for kindergarten through to Grade Three that focuses both on

regular classroom instruction and individual tutoring sessions of twenty minutes daily.

Taylor, Strait and Medo (1992) developed Early Intervention in Reading (EIR). It

is a first-grade intervention program which has been implemented in several schools in

the state of Minnesota representing both middle and lower socioeconomic levels. It is

conducted almost completely by the regular classroom teacher. These teachers work

daily with the five to seven lowest achieving students in their classrooms for an

additional twenty minutes of reading instruction. The small group instruction focuses on

the repeated reading of picture books or summaries of these books and on developing

students' phonemic segmentation, blending abilities and other word recognition skills.

Students also work individually or in pairs with a teaching assistant. a parent volunteer,

or the teacher rereading materials from their small group instruction.

Although these three programs do not incorporate exactly the same procedures for

early intervention of literacy acquisition. it is important to focus on the multiple

dimensions they present. It seems probable that attention to these dimensions will

increase the probability of success in beginning reading programs. Pikulski (1994)

outlines the issues that should be addressed in order to increase the probability of program success as follows:

1. All students are receiving coordinated, systematic reading instruction both in their classrooms and in special intervention programs.

2. Children who are experiencing difficulty with reading should spend more time receiving reading instruction than children who are not experiencing reading difficulty.

3. For those children who are at risk to be successful readers, individual or small group instruction is essential.

4. Reading text must be at an appropriate level for all beginning readers. Children must be successful with the reading material in order to gain fluency and control of the reading process.

5. Reading the same text several times seems a very effective approach to helping at-risk children develop reading fluency. Instructional procedures must ensure that students see reading as an act of constructing meaning.

6. In early intervention programs, students need instruction that focuses their attention on words and letters in the context of meaningful reading.

7. Students should write daily. When children write words they attend to the details of those words, which supports the development of word identification skills.

8. Ongoing assessment that monitors student progress is necessary. The assessment of oral reading fluency is an informative, effective procedure.

33

9. Effective early intervention programs encourage communication between home and school. Children should be provided with appropriate material for reading at home.

10. Initial training and continuous professional support for teachers delivering beginning reading and early intervention programs is necessary.

It is evident that the development of effective beginning reading programs is a complex endeavour. The theoretical framework for emergent literacy, the critical aspects of both social learning and early reading instruction, and the components of early intervention have been examined in order provide a reference point. In this study, the questions considered and the interventions planned have been based on both the theoretical perspectives and the practical instructional procedures which have been outlined in this chapter. The focus is on: (1) assessment within the context of instruction in order to inform subsequent teaching; (2) development of effective collaboration between the classroom teacher and the resource teacher; (3) involvement of both children and parents in oral reading practice and the assessment of literacy development: and (4) the development of cross-age tutoring partnerships and volunteer programs.

CHAPTER III

Design and Procedure

The data for this study on the kinds of oral reading activities that lead to effective instruction was gathered over a period of six months from January to June. As part of this process the investigator, in her role as resource teacher, worked collaboratively with one classroom teacher during reading instruction activities over an extended period of time - two to three times each week during the winter and spring terms. Parent involvement and cross-age tutoring were additional facets of the early reading program that evolved. The investigation consisted of seven stages:

1) Collaborating with the classroom teacher and developing goals related to the use of oral reading in the classroom.

2) Ongoing data collection with the classroom teacher, developing or reinforcing programs for oral reading practice and assessment.

3) Involving and informing parents of their role in the oral reading process.

4) Training volunteers for the audiotaping of individual student's oral reading.

5) Working together to learn how to take running records effectively by using the audiotaped oral readings.

6) Using the running records to establish appropriate instructional activities for each student.

7) Involving Grade Six Reading Buddies for oral reading practice and training them

to help their Grade One partners use reading strategies effectively.

Method

In my role as Resource Teacher, I had the experience of working in the Grade

One classroom selected for the study since September of the school year. This

has enabled me to become familiar with the language arts activities used by the

classroom teacher. More importantly, this has given me the opportunity to get

know the classroom teacher and develop a trusting, collaborative relationship. We

have discussed our views of literacy development and early reading interventions

many times. A supplementary purpose of this study is to describe the process of

collaboration that the classroom teacher and I developed during the study which

enabled us to institute oral reading as a means of assessment and instruction in the

classroom. My role as an investigator was that of a participant-observer.

The study took place in a K - 6 school, located in a suburban area

of Winnipeg. The school enrollment is approximately 500 students with three or four

classrooms designated for each grade. The community is comprised primarily of

white middle-class families. In many situations, both parents work outside of the

home.

The study was conducted with students in one of the Grade One classrooms

where I was working as a resource teacher specifically with one special needs student

in order to adapt and/or modify learning activities according to her specific needs.

Twenty-two students attended this class for the 1995-1996 school year. Parental

permission for participation was received for all of the students. The students

represent a purposive sampling of most heterogeneous classrooms in terms of

scholastic achievement with abilities ranging from the very strong to quite weak. One

student had been identified for Reading Recovery starting in October of the school

year and worked daily with the Reading Recovery teacher until early June. For the

purpose of this study, the special needs student's results were not included. Although

this student did take part in all the classroom activities, she was not ready to be

assessed as a reader.

During a two week period in early January, the resource teacher/investigator

and the classroom teacher completed a questionnaire/journal entry regarding oral

reading in the classroom and completed a baseline assessment procedure that seemed

appropriate for the students in the classroom. Various instruments were considered in

the assessment including components of Marie Clay's Diagnostic Survey (1979), The

Stieglitz Informal Reading Inventory (1992) and the Yopp-Singer Test of Phonemic

Segmentation (1988). The resource teacher and the classroom teacher met at the end

of this two week period to share information, ask questions and establish classroom

oral reading goals for the winter and spring terms. The individual assessment data

was used to make decisions regarding appropriate instructional activities to be carried

out by both the classroom teacher and the resource teacher/investigator. Agreement

was reached over the following course of action: the classroom teacher prepared resources and organized the classroom for the implementation of the home reading and cross-age tutoring programs as well as selected the volunteers for audiotaping the students' oral reading and the resource teacher/investigator trained the volunteers and worked with the Grade Six reading buddies to prepare them for their role as tutors.

Oral Reading Activities

By the end of January, the classroom teacher and the resource teacher implemented programs for oral reading practice with parents, volunteers and Grade Six reading partners. In the home reading program, children were encouraged to take home two or three books weekly. An envelope or book bag was provided and parents were encouraged to complete a record sheet indicating book titles, number of minutes spent reading and comments or questions.

Cross-Age Tutoring Programs

For the reading partners component of the investigation, a cross-age tutoring program with Grade Six Reading Buddies (Morrice & Simmons, 1991) was established in collaboration with one of the Grade Six teachers. Student training sessions and opportunities for discussion with the resource teacher and classroom teachers were provided on an ongoing basis in order to ensure that students were aware of the goals and objectives of the program. Both the Grade One and Six

38

classroom teachers and the resource teacher supported the students in their

interactions and evaluated the effectiveness of the cross-age tutoring through direct

observations and student reflections in discussions and through response log writing.

Training Volunteers

The resource teacher/investigator worked with the four parent volunteers to

explain their roles in listening to the children read and audiotaping each session.

Initially, the group met for training at the end of January which included discussions

of the stages of early reading development, the importance of reading for meaning,

the value of practice in developing reading fluency, the use of strategies to enhance

word identification and comprehension and the basic procedure to follow in each

session with the students. Schedules were set up so that each volunteer worked the

same day each week.

The resource teacher trained the four parent volunteers to assume the

responsibility of audiotaping children's oral reading on a weekly basis at the end of

January. Children taped a story that they had practised in a variety of contexts during

the previous week. This program began in February with tapings occurring for each

child every week. Both the volunteers and the students became more familiar with

the procedure as time went on and, therefore, the pace of each morning session

quickened.

39

Parent Support

Parents were encouraged to take an active role in their children's literacy development. Letters (see Appendix C) and information packages were sent to the parents to increase their understanding of emergent literacy and the value of reading with their own children.

Before the reporting session in March and then again in June, the parents were given the opportunity to hear their child's audiotape and complete a questionnaire (see Appendix D) regarding their observations of their own child's reading at home. The tape and the questionnaire provided valuable information to be shared during parent-teacher conferences.

The Role of the Classroom Teacher

The classroom teacher assumed the responsibility for completing the running records from each child's volunteer-supervised audiotaped oral reading on a weekly basis. The assessment of oral reading on the audiotapes included compiling a running record, taking into account the observation notes made by the volunteer during the taping, and a student self-evaluation completed after he/she heard the audiotape playback (see Appendix E). Comparison of accuracy levels was made from week to week. The classroom teacher used these results to offer guidance regarding the selection of appropriate books for the children to use for home reading and partner

reading with Grade Six buddies. The classroom teacher and the resource teacher discussed these results, evaluated student needs and worked together to provide appropriate reading instruction to build on individual strengths and enhance reading development.

Data Gathering Activities

Field Notes

In my role as participant-observer I kept a journal and recorded events that occurred during the time spent with the class in this investigation. I reviewed the journal regularly and looked for emerging patterns and questions to consider when meeting with the classroom teacher.

Resource Teacher/ Classroom Teacher Meetings

Meetings occurred on a weekly basis throughout the study to discuss observations, pose questions, and to plan for future activities. Minutes of these meetings were kept in the journal.

Audiotapes and Record Sheets

The audiotapes and record sheets provided on-going documentation of each student's oral reading, the strategies they employed in reading, and the self-evaluations after playback of the tape. The following questions (Lipson & Wixson, 1991) were used to direct the self-evaluations:

How did you feel about your reading?

How well did you read?

Why do you feel that way?

What do you think will help?

Grade Six Reading Buddies Feedback

The resource teacher met with both the Grade One class and the Grade Six

Reading Buddies to discuss the reading partnerships and provide guidance and

evaluate the program. The following questions were used to guide the discussions:

Why do you think you have partner reading?

What do you do with your partner?

What do you like best about partner reading?

How could you make partner reading better?

Parent Questionnaires

Responses to the questionnaires were discussed with the classroom teacher

during parent-teacher conferences. The classroom teacher and the resource teacher

met before the conferences to review the questionnaire results and to discuss possible

questions or issues that should be addressed with specific parents. Following the

parent-teacher conferences, the classroom teacher and resource teacher met again to

debrief and analyze the parent responses, and determine ways to address parents'

reactions and concerns.

CHAPTER IV

Data Analysis and Discussion

Traditional research is based on the assumption that there is a single, objective reality that we can observe, know, and measure. In contrast, qualitative research such as the case study approach assumes that there are multiple realities which are a function of personal interaction and perception. Researchers must use several strategies to maximize opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information and be sensitive to the biases inherent in this type of research. Strategies included prolonged site engagement, conducting an audit trail, triangulation, progressive focusing and member checks.

Findings from this investigation include a description of the various oral reading activities and their usefulness and effectiveness. My description and interpretation were generated by integrating the shared meanings attached to events held by myself as the investigator and the classroom teacher, the students, and the parents. As a teacher/researcher I could not merely stand back and remove myself from the process. It was critical to become part of the process.

> "Seeing and describing story in the everyday actions of teachers,
> students, administrators and others requires a subtle twist of mind
> on behalf of the enquirer... When one engages in narrative inquiry
> the process becomes even more complex for, as researchers we

become part of the process. The two narratives of participant and researcher become, in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through inquiry." (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p. 7).

Establishing the Problem

When I met with the classroom teacher in early January to focus on this joint project, we looked at the various ways that oral reading was presently being used in the classroom. The teacher cited the following uses of oral reading:

1. Reading Instruction - Oral reading by the whole class in unison or by individuals was used during instruction. Reading selections came from a variety of genres including poems, songs and story selections.

2. Individual Work - Students were asked to read a question or read what they had written as the teacher circulated in the classroom. The writing that the students did was generally in response to the reading activities.

3. "Reader's Chair" - The classroom teacher invited four or five students on a daily basis to read a selection of their own choice to the whole class. This seemed to be a favourite activity of all the students. They were very proud to read aloud and pleased to keep a chart with stickers for each reading opportunity.

4. Grade Six Partner Reading - once a week the children were partnered with a student in Grade Six for thirty minutes of reading. The Grade One teacher had been encouraging her students to read to the older children since December when she felt

44

that the majority of the Grade One children could read something such as a basal reader selection or a Sunshine Book.

5. Home Reading - The children took home books each week. Parents were advised to read to the children when necessary to help their children enjoy the book selections.

The classroom teacher and I agreed that many opportunities for oral reading occurred as regular components of the language arts program. Most of the reading selections were based on their appropriateness and relevance to the monthly themes and were used with the entire class. The teacher presented theme-related vocabulary in the form of word wheels for individual sight vocabulary practice.

The teacher's main concern was related to the different needs of the students. Although a few students were already proficient readers, the majority of the children needed assistance to read much of the material being introduced to the whole class. The classroom teacher noted that many of the students were choosing to re-read very simple books when it was their turn for the "Reader's Chair" and many of these same students were now experiencing difficulty with learning all the sight words for each theme introduced. A smaller number of students continued to have difficulty remembering high frequency words such as like, saw, this, etc., even though these words appeared regularly in reading and writing activities.

I suggested that we both do some reading on developmental stages

of early reading to help us better understand the individual needs of the children in the classroom. We each looked at a variety of sources on early literacy development and discussed our findings at our next meeting. We agreed to use Helen Depree's (1994) stages of literacy development (emergent, early and fluent) as the basis for our future discussions and plans (See Appendix F).

Realizing that all of the children were at differing points along the reading continuum only reaffirmed the classroom teacher's concern regarding the importance of considering the type of reading material to be selected and the degree and quality of teacher support required by the students in the classroom. The classroom teacher generally used a whole group approach to instruction and then helped individuals as needed in follow-up activities. We realized that this would be an excellent opportunity to look at the use of small group instruction to meet the differing needs of the students in the classroom.

Preliminary collaborations thus established that: oral reading was an integral part of the classroom program; the teacher had concerns about meeting the individual student needs; Depree's guidelines outlining a developmental continuum provided a basis for future discussion and planning; and, small group instruction was an agreed upon organizational structure to provide for individual needs.

Further analysis of the data obtained in this study is divided into four sections. The first section describes the development of oral reading assessment in the

classroom in response to the concerns expressed by the classroom teacher. Section

One addresses these questions:

1. How is oral reading assessment presently being addressed in the classroom?

2. What is an effective and authentic assessment of oral reading?

3. How can this form of assessment be carried out effectively and efficiently

in the classroom on an on-going basis?

The second section presents the goals and expectations for Grade One readers

that the classroom teacher and the resource teacher came to understand and strive for

throughout the course of the study. Also included in this section is an analysis of

individual student progress (baseline data) at the onset of the study

The third section describes the types of activities used for oral reading practice

in the classroom and discusses the attitudes of both the students, parents and the

teacher throughout the course of the study. Data were collected through oral reading

self-evaluations, questionnaires, discussions and interviews held throughout the year.

The fourth section analyzes the effects of on-going oral reading assessment on

classroom instructional practices. This section also provides further data regarding

the on-going assessment of students' reading levels from the winter to the spring and

the resultant shift in instructional practice.

47

Section One

Oral Reading Assessment

In order to group the students effectively for reading instruction we needed to look at appropriate assessment techniques. I asked the classroom teacher how she used oral reading for assessment of individual student's reading strengths and weaknesses. Although she had planned and organized very carefully for oral reading to occur in her classroom, she had not planned on a systematic way of using oral reading for assessment. In our discussion, she mentioned how difficult it was to listen to individual children and record any observations during the course of the day without interruptions from others. She felt that the assessment of each child's oral reading was impressionistic rather than evaluative.

We decided to introduce a more systematic measure of oral reading. We considered Samuel's (1979) research on repeated oral reading and Clay's (1979) use of the running record when developing our plan. In order to eliminate the difficulty of "making time" during the day, we decided that volunteer parents would audiotape each child's oral reading on a weekly basis. The teacher could listen to the audiotapes at her convenience and make running records of each child's performance. The information gained from the running records would be used by the teacher to make further instructional plans regarding grouping for instruction and selecting appropriate material for oral reading practice.

The classroom teacher had an extensive selection of reading material in the classroom library. We agreed that we would need to organize and classify the reading material in some way to make book selection more appropriate for each student and more efficient in terms of classroom routine. For the purpose of this study, we agreed to pull out all the material which could be leveled according to Reading Recovery practices (Levels 1 - 20) and use these selections only for partner reading, home reading and the weekly audiotaped oral readings. The books were organized into five baskets: Levels 1 to 4, 5 to 8, 9 to 12, 13 to 16 and 17 to 20 in each. The teacher and I were pleased with the quantity and quality of books for individual selection.

This selection process also worked well with the use of repeated readings in the classroom. Each student would select one or two books at a designated level plus one other book from the classroom library for home reading on the weekend. The following week, these books would be used for reading with the Grade Six Reading Buddies and classroom peer partners. Also, one of the leveled books would be used for audiotaped oral reading with the volunteers. Most of the students had many opportunities to read and re-read their selections both before and after the audiotaping and self-evaluation.

The purpose of the audiotaped record of each student's oral reading was initially to assist the teacher in learning how to take running records. As Marie Clay

states "learning to take a running record can unsettle teachers" (1985, p. 19). She

goes on to advise the necessity of practice in order to increase the teacher's awareness

of children's reading behaviours. The classroom teacher and I both felt that the

audiotapes were a good place to start as they allowed the teacher to listen and practice

at her own convenience. The classroom teacher in the study and I would generally

listen to the tapes at lunch hour, during our weekly meetings, after school or in the

evenings. We would share our results and discuss similarities and differences. This

collaboration enabled us to improve our abilities and accuracy in the taking of

running records.

Initially, we conferred regularly and reviewed with one another various

aspects of the process. Eventually, the classroom teacher took over the entire

responsibility of taking the running records. She not only took running records from

the audiotapes on a weekly basis for each student, but by mid March the classroom

teacher felt capable enough to take running records during class time without

audiotaped support. She gained proficiency to take running records in the classroom

on a daily basis either during small group lessons or at moments when students in the

class were working independently. The classroom teacher's use of the "Reader's

Chair" proved to be a very opportune time for taking running records as four to five

students would oral read every day.

As students became more proficient in their reading, the teacher thought it

became less necessary to take running records. These students continued to have oral reading opportunities, but the necessity of assessing was lessened as they became more fluent and strategic in their reading behaviours.

Marie Clay (1985) advises against the use and reliance on audiotaped oral readings. However, in this study we found it to be an excellent way to begin using running records and gain proficiency in their use for assessment and instructional purposes. The classroom teacher's practice was not limited to audiotaped oral readings only. However, using the audio-taped enabled the teacher to gain understanding quickly through much practice and enabled her to assess each child. Throughout the study, she expressed a growing confidence and a clear understanding of why and how to use running records in her classroom for assessment and instructional purposes.

Section Two

Initial Expectations for Students

Throughout the study, the classroom teacher and I discussed the reading behaviours we observed in the students and formulated ideas regarding goals and expectations for reading in the Grade One classroom. We agreed that by the end of Grade One, most students should be able to read appropriately leveled text (instructionally - 90 to 95% accuracy and independently - 95 to 100%) with fluency

51

and phrasing, and applying appropriate strategies. Fluent and phrased reading behaviours include:

- scanning phrases with the eyes, and at times of difficulty finger pointing to assist,

- using both large and small chunks of meaning, language structure, and visual information in an integrated way to foster ongoing monitoring of reading comprehension, and

- reading smoothly with expression and little hesitation, and attending to punctuation.

Our expectations for end of Grade One reading included using text which exhibited the following characteristics:

- more complex sentence structures

- diversity of topics

- requiring inferential judgments

- use of illustrations that enhance meaning rather than provide or support it

The leveled materials that we used for the study with these characteristics were Level 12 and beyond. Ideally, students would be able to read texts at Level 16 or higher to indicate proficient Grade One reading.

Our baseline assessment was formulated from teacher observation and rating

as well as some specific assessment tools such as the Yopp-Singer Phonemic Segmentation Test (1988) and some subtests of Marie Clay's Diagnostic Survey (1979) including Letter Identification and Concepts About Print.

We used this assessment data to classify students as emergent, early or fluent readers. We then chose a specific book level for each student to use for oral reading audiotaping, repeated readings and running records. The class breakdown for baseline assessment in February is outlined on the following page.

Emergent Readers: Level One - 1 boy

Level Three - 1 boy and 1 girl

Level Four - 2 boys and 2 girls

7 students in total

Early Readers: Level Five - 3 girls

Level Six - 1 boy

Level Seven - 2 girls and 1 boy

Level Eight - 1 girl

Level Ten - 1 girl

9 students in total

Fluent Readers: Level 14 - 2 boys

Level 17 and over - 3 boys

5 students in total

53

Section Three

Classroom Activities

In order to help students develop proficient reading skills, the classroom

teacher and I looked at a variety of ways to provide oral reading practice and effective

reading instruction in the classroom program. We looked at the present practices in

the classroom and decided to modify some of the activities related to both the Grade

Six Reading Buddies and the home reading program. We added the audiotaped

reading with volunteers and subsequently, grouped the students for small group

reading instruction according to their individual needs.

Taped Oral Reading

We introduced the audiotapes to the students at the beginning of February.

The classroom teacher had each child select a book according to the level she

assigned from the five baskets and in a large group meeting told them about the

new activity. Students' responses were all very enthusiastic about having their own

tape and quickly found books that they wanted to read.

The resource teacher had previously met with the four volunteers to discuss

the procedure and provide a very informal training session. The training session

consisted of a brief overview of early literacy development and a step-by-step outline

of the procedure for audiotaping. The volunteers were enthusiastic and

knowledgeable. They worked well together to establish a weekly schedule so that taping would occur every day except Wednesday.

Originally, the classroom teacher and I had assumed that the volunteers would assist students during the taping procedure by giving the unknown word to the student after five seconds of hesitation as a means of maintaining continuity. I explained this during the training session and emphasized the importance that students make meaning when reading. We discussed the possibility of helping a student with a specific word by pointing to a part of it or pointing to the word if omitted in the reading. It was explained that this was not expected or wanted if it interfered with the process of establishing the meaning of the text or detracted from the goal of reading as a pleasurable experience. Upon examination of the tapes, the classroom teacher and I realized that these strategies were being used by the volunteers most often with the more confident and capable students who were making self-corrections. We agreed that the volunteers' instructional patterns caused minimal interference and were very appropriate for the children.

Throughout the study, I worked closely with the volunteers to answer any questions or clarify any aspects of the procedure. All the volunteers expressed amazement at the range of reading ability in the classroom. I felt that this experience gave these parents a new appreciation of both their own children's reading development and the classroom teacher's demanding role as a learning facilitator.

Other questions from the volunteers concerned the length of the story to be taped. We recommended that they should tape the whole story or chapter as it was important for each student to be able to share something of meaning. We reassured the volunteers that the quality of time spent with each child was much more important than "getting through the list" of students. During the three months of taping, the four volunteers were always able to complete the taping of everyone in the classroom (22 students) each week with each volunteer taping five or six children in approximately one and a half hours.

The volunteers expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to tape the same group of children each week. This enabled them to establish a positive relationship with each student and gain a more complete understanding of their individual needs. When I observed the volunteers working with the students during the taping sessions I was able to see firsthand the students' enthusiasm for the procedure. They all enjoyed hearing the playback and evaluated themselves positively. Some of their comments were:

> "I like the way I sound."
>
> "It sounds more like a story now that I've practised."
>
> "I knew all the words."
>
> "I'm better this time than last time."
>
> "I need to follow with my finger so I won't lose my place."
>
> "Practice helps me read better."

56

The classroom teacher and I included the self-evaluation for the children as we wanted them to become more aware of their own progress. The playback of the tape was very motivating for the children and it helped them develop the language and understanding to assess themselves. Listening to the tape seemed to help the children identify their own improvements and use of strategies as well as actually experience the benefits of repeated readings.

The classroom teacher and I discussed the use of volunteers for the taping and agreed that they were able to work efficiently and effectively and they exercised appropriate confidentiality. They were able to come to the classroom each morning, pick up the tapes and reading records and takes students individually without disrupting the classroom routines. This was very beneficial for the classroom teacher. It also proved to be an effective learning experience for them which, in turn, could prove to be beneficial for their own children.

Home Reading Program

At the beginning of February a letter was sent home to the parents to explain the study and request their support. Parents were given information on early literacy development, Topping's (1987) paired reading and book marks with questions for developing comprehension. The questions suggested were organized into three categories: using the title and pictures to establish prior knowledge before reading the text, making inferences and predictions during the text reading, and summarizing and

57

evaluating when the reading was finished. They were asked to read with their child each week to help develop a love for reading and to practise oral reading.

Grade Six Reading Buddies

We decided that we wanted to provide more direction for both the Grade One and Grade Six students during partner reading. In late January, the resource teacher met with both classes of students separately to discuss partner reading. Book marks (Appendix G) which included questions to consider before, during and after reading were given to all the students. The resource teacher explained the importance of reading for meaning and used the questions on the book marks as a basis for what to think about and talk about during the reading partnerships. The students responded favourably both to the discussion and the opportunity to continue with partner reading. Students in both the Grade One and Grade Six classrooms thought that reading together was enjoyable and beneficial. We agreed that we would meet again in six weeks time to discuss the partner reading program. Both classroom teachers monitored the weekly activity for the duration and expressed confidence in the students' participation and positive attitudes.

The resource teacher met with both the Grade One and Grade Six classes once again in mid-March and asked them the following questions:

Why do you think you have partner reading?

What do you do with your partner?

58

What do you like best about partner reading?

How could you make partner reading better?

Both the Grade One and the Grade Six students thought that partner reading continued to be a good idea. The Grade One students felt that the older children helped them with their reading by listening to them and helping them figure out words that they didn't know. The Grade One students liked it when the older students read to them also. Initially in the discussion, the Grade Six students felt that partner reading was only beneficial to the younger students. After much discussion they realized that they, too, were learning from the activity. They thought that partner reading taught them how to be better partners, better listeners and better readers.

Both classes gave excellent accounts of the various activities that occurred during the partner reading sessions. These included reading together, Grade Six reading to Grade One, Grade One reading to Grade Six, alternating the reader on each page, Grade Six reading and then Grade One re-reading, looking at the pictures and predicting what might happen next in the story. Their ideas indicated a good understanding of how to co-operate and help in learning to become better readers.

In the Grade Six discussion, a variety of questions came up concerning how to help a Grade 1 partner if he/she was stuck on a word or when the book seemed too difficult. I was pleased with the suggestions that the children shared with one another as they showed an understanding of a variety of useful strategies including the use of

59

contextual. visual and semantic cues. The Grade One students were also able to share a variety of strategies to use while reading. The ideas they presented during the discussion were shared with both classroom teachers. We organized the suggestions and prepared a handout (Appendix H) for all the students as a guideline for helping in future sessions.

Both grade levels indicated an interest in continuing with partner reading and suggested that this partnership could be used to work on projects, write stories, and act out plays as well as read.

Both Grade One and Grade Six classroom teachers were pleased with the enthusiasm shown by the students. They were interested in extending the partnership to other activities and planned other projects including crafts and story writing for the two classes to share. We agreed that the resource teacher could be involved in more class discussions with the students to help them better understand the reading process and to discuss appropriate strategies to use when reading. Writing strategies would also be an excellent topic for these discussions to assist students in the story writing project. Conducting workshops in Topping's paired reading (1987) for both the children and the parents was also considered as a possible opportunity.

Section Four

Effects of Oral Reading for Assessment on Classroom Instructional Program

The classroom teacher felt that she could use the baseline assessment data and the weekly running records to help her work with students in a variety of groupings for instructional purposes. Many activities were still presented to the whole class, but now the teacher felt that she could focus in on appropriate strategies for children both during the large group presentations and while working with individuals on follow-up activities.

We also looked at the possibility of working with three instructional groups in the classroom. The small group of students still reading at the emergent level required opportunities to use materials with a strong repetitive pattern both for reading and writing. They also were the students experiencing difficulty with sound/symbol matching. The group of students reading at the early level presented a broader group of needs and still required opportunities to use text with strong support both visually and semantically. The group of five boys reading fluently needed a challenge. They were interested in reading "chapter books" and showed a high level of motivation and independence. We decided that the classroom teacher, the teaching assistant and I could provide support for each of these small groups three times weekly for one to one and a half hours.

The classroom teacher selected materials and provided the plans for both the early and fluent groups. The teaching assistant supervised the five boys who were reading chapter books such as "Frog and Toad" (Loebel, 1979) and "Nate the Great" (Sharmat, 1972) series. The boys talked about the books they read, read aloud their favourite parts and completed books reports for each book. The classroom teacher worked with the larger group of students with diverse needs. She reinforced oral reading fluency, sight vocabulary, and writing skills through the presentation of appropriate texts related to the classroom themes.

As resource teacher, I worked with the group of five students at the emergent reading level. I selected text with strong repetitive patterns to be read and discussed as a group. We also looked at vocabulary from the texts and worked on developing phonemic awareness using letter tiles and sound boxes to build word families.

After five weeks into the program, the classroom teacher and I met to discuss issues specifically related to the use of repeated readings and running records. The classroom teacher indicated that the children almost always showed some improvement in reading accuracy from one week to the next. She referred to the group of students who were "making that leap into reading" - a phenomenon that occurred every year at this time for the majority of Grade One students. These were the children who were moving from the beginning reading stage (emergent) to that of consolidation. They were aware of a variety of reading strategies and could begin to

effectively use them. She felt that our evolving program was particularly motivating for this group of students and that their gains were the most substantial. We noted that many children were aware of the leveling of the reading material and seemed motivated to practice and read material at a higher level.

We discussed the possibility that the children who were already proficient readers (five boys in the class) seemed to enjoy the taping, but, perhaps needed a new goal. Their accuracy rate each week continued to be at the 95-100% level regardless of practice. Their errors tended to be those of omissions or substitutions which did not alter meaning. The teacher felt that she did not need to take running records of their reading as often. We discussed the value of giving them a new purpose for taping and considered the possibility of encouraging them to practice and perfect their reading of a particular story in order to make a tape of it for other children to hear at a listening centre.

Spring Term Oral Reading Assessment

The class breakdown for assessment data at the end of March was as follows:

Early Readers: Level Six - 1 girl

Level Seven - 1 boy

Level Nine - 2 girls

Level Ten - 3 boys

Level Eleven - 2 boys and 2 girls

11 students in total

Fluent Readers: Level Twelve - 3 girls

                              Level 17 and over - 6 boys and 1 girl

                              10 students in total

The classroom teacher and I decided that the end of March was also an opportune time to test out another potential use of the oral reading audiotapes. The children repeatedly made the request to take the tapes home and play them for their parents. We decided that this was an opportunity to inform the parents and involve them in the assessment process. The tapes were sent home for the weekend in their book bags along with a questionnaire about their observations of their own child's reading at home. Parent-teacher conferences were scheduled for the following week. The classroom teacher felt confident that the tapes and questionnaire could provide valuable information to use during the conference time.

The classroom teacher and I met prior to the parent-teacher conferences to discuss the parents' responses to the questions. These responses on the questionnaire indicated an appreciation of the school programs and increasing desire to become involved in their child's reading. Many parents stated that they could actually hear the improvement on the tapes. She felt encouraged by the positive response and did not anticipate any difficulties arising at parent-teacher conference time due to this sharing of reading development.

After the parent-teacher conferences, the classroom teacher and I met once again to review comments and questions pertaining to oral reading from the parents. The classroom teacher was very pleased with the parents interest in the tapes. She felt that it helped many of the parents focus on their own child's reading strengths and needs and better understand early literacy development and where their child fit along the continuum. Many of the parents commented that they would try to make more of an effort to read with their child at home. This, in itself, was a positive outcome!

There continued to be a small group of four children who experienced difficulty with reading in general. They were making gains in oral reading accuracy but they still required reading material which offered high levels of text support (Level 6 to Level 9). The classroom teacher consulted with the Reading Recovery teacher and recommended that two more students, a boy and a girl, be taken into the program. By April, the girl was selected to receive Reading Recovery. The classroom teacher and I continued working with small groups and providing individual instruction as required.

By the end of May, the assessment data indicated that all twenty-one students in the study were reading with 95 to 100% accuracy at Level 12 or higher which is in the category of Fluent Reader.

CHAPTER V

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of the use of ongoing oral reading assessment in the classroom and to determine what kinds of oral reading activities lead to effective instructional interaction in reading and how to provide appropriate opportunities for oral reading practice to enhance reading development.

The study sought to discover how to: (1) use oral reading for assessment and incorporate the knowledge gained from oral reading assessments into appropriate instructional activities; (2) develop effective collaboration between the classroom teacher and the resource teacher for the purposes of supporting reading development for all children and providing early intervention as needed; (3) involve both children and parents in oral reading and the assessment of literacy development; and, (4) develop cross-age tutoring partnerships between Grade One and older children to promote the integration of literacy skills beneficial to both the older and younger student.

The research results were reported in four sections in the preceding chapter. The first section dealt with the development of appropriate oral reading assessment techniques, specifically the use of running records (Clay, 1979). The second section clarified the shared expectations of the classroom teacher and the resource teacher/investigator for end of Grade One reading including fluency and phrased reading behaviours (Depree, 1994)

and text use characteristics (Peterson, 1988). The third section explained the various classroom activities initiated to promote oral reading assessment and practice, while the fourth section examined the effects of oral reading assessment on classroom instructional activities. In this chapter, general conclusions are formed and suggestions for future research are addressed.

Summary of Results

<u>Oral Reading Assessment</u>

The results of this study suggest that the implementation of running records as an assessment tool and collaboration with the resource teacher helped the classroom teacher to become more informed in her student evaluation, more aware of student needs for subsequent reading instruction and more able to articulate her understanding of the reading process.

Prior to the onset of the study, the classroom teacher relied mainly on data gathered from isolated testing such as letter naming, sound/symbol matching and graded word lists. While she listened to children read orally, her observations were impressionistic rather than evaluative. The classroom teacher would embark on these data gathering activities before reporting periods and basically suspend instruction in the classroom for about four or five days in order to gather the necessary information.

67

The data was used to assist in report card writing and parent-teacher conferences, but was not intentionally considered in terms of planning new instructional activities.

In order to effectively use running records, it was necessary to develop an implementation plan which took into account classroom organization of time, resources and activities. Using audiotaped oral readings, trained volunteers and texts leveled according to Reading Recovery standards (Levels 1 - 16) proved to be an effective and efficient way of organizing and implementing the plan. The audiotaped oral readings afforded both the classroom teacher and the resource teacher/investigator the time and means of learning how to take running records. The classroom teacher and the resource teacher/investigator worked together listening to the audiotaped oral readings and completing running records for each student on a weekly basis. The opportunity to practice regularly and collaborate with one another deepened the learning experience for both participants. The sharing of the task and the ensuing discussions resulted in meaningful dialogue about the strengths and needs of each student and appropriate resources and activities to be used to further develop each student's reading. Furthermore, both the classroom teacher and the resource teacher/investigator learned more about the cueing systems used in the reading process and developed strategies that could be introduced to enhance the use of these cueing systems.

These results indicate a significant shift in how the classroom teacher applied assessment information in the classroom. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) state that

68

assessment is an essential daily activity which informs instruction and helps teachers to continually build theory that is the foundation of their instructional decisions (p. 73 -74).

Goals and Expectations for End of Grade One Reading

Prior to the study, the classroom teacher's focus for observation and use of checklists was mainly that of evaluation for reporting purposes. With the onset of the study, there was a noticeable shift from summative evaluation to the ongoing process of assessment or formative evaluation and recording children's reading behaviours. Whatever the distinctions, there will always come a time when it is important to summarize the assessment findings and report them to others - parents, the school administration, the community, and the students. This summing up can be constructive for both teachers and their audiences. Therefore, we agreed that it was important to develop goals and expectations for reading in the Grade One classroom.

In section two of the preceding chapter, appropriate reading behaviours and levels of text for the end of Grade One were discussed in detail. We agreed that by the end of Grade One, most students should be able to read appropriately leveled text with fluency and phrasing, and applying appropriate strategies. Ideally, students would be able to read texts at Level 16 or higher to indicate proficient Grade One reading.

The baseline data presented in this study indicated that in February seven students were at the emergent stage, nine students were at the early stage, and five

students were at the fluent stage (Depree, 1988). By the end of March, all students had

made significant gains in reading fluency and had surpassed the beginning or emergent

level of reading with eleven students in total at the early stage and ten students at the

fluent stage. By the end of May, all students in the classroom were reading Level 12

material or higher independently (95 - 100% accuracy) which is considered to be the

fluent stage. The majority of students were reading with independence at Level 16 or

higher. However, there were four students (2 girls and 2 boys) who continued to work

best with reading material at Levels 13 - 14. It is significant to note that these four

students had made extensive gains throughout the period of the study and felt successful

with their own reading.

Classroom Activities Related to Oral Reading

In this study, the classroom teacher recognized the benefit of listening to children

read orally for assessment purposes. It was also recognized that children need

opportunities for repeated oral reading practice (Samuels. 1979) in order to gain fluency

and increased comprehension, integrated use of the cueing systems, and effective strategy

control. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) refer to these strategies as self-monitoring,

searching, using multiple information sources and self-correcting (p. 94 -95). The goal of

reading instruction is to develop a self-extending system where the reader integrates cues

and uses strategies independently. However, just as strategies cannot be directly

observed, neither can they be directly taught. Fountas and Pinnell explain that "we teach

70

for strategies" (p.149). There is not a specific teaching approach to each new strategy, rather a repertoire of interpretations and responses you can apply at any time to help the child learn from reading text. In this study, the students enjoyed the opportunities for repeated oral reading practice because they recognized the value of the practice in improving their oral reading fluency, comprehension and use of strategies. Information-rich texts at the right level of difficulty allow children to use what they know (words and parts of words, meaning, and language) in strategic ways as they problem-solve their way through many books. The weekly running record assessment enabled the classroom teacher in this study to select appropriate texts at the right level of difficulty for each student.

Providing appropriately leveled reading text and repeated opportunities for oral reading practice are two essential aspects of early literacy development. Vygotsky's construct (1978) of social interaction supports the use of adults and more capable peers to mediate and facilitate learning through modeling and questioning. In this study, trained volunteers and older students provided the necessary support during oral reading practice. The resource teacher/investigator and the classroom teacher worked closely with the older students and volunteers to ensure that they understood their role and supported the beginning readers effectively. Regular meeting and discussions with both the volunteers and Grade Six Reading Buddies afforded the opportunity to explain student behaviours and suggest ways of supporting the beginning readers through questions and explanations. The resulting handout (Appendix H) was given to all those involved in

71

reading with the students including the older students, volunteers and parents.

Barbara Wasik (1998) elaborates on eight components which should ensure a systematic and effective approach to developing volunteer tutoring programs. Ongoing training and feedback to the volunteers is critical, along with initial training to provide a basic understanding of the reading process and subsequent opportunities to share their own ideas with the reading specialist (p. 566). In the case of this study, all of these components were addressed with both the volunteers and the Grade Six Reading Buddies. Both the classroom teacher and the resource teacher/investigator believed that the ongoing observations, dialogue and group discussions helped to clarify and extend not only the volunteers understanding of the reading process and how to assist beginning readers, but was also very beneficial to both of the teachers as it offered them more opportunities for clarifying their own ideas and constructing knowledge through interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978).

Effects of Oral Reading for Assessment on the Classroom Instructional Program

In this study, the classroom teacher was able to use the audiotaped weekly running records to help her work with students in a variety of groupings for instructional purposes. She used this data to determine appropriate groupings for a variety of activities. She questioned why and when whole class, small group or individual instruction would be best and recognized the need for flexible groupings according to the purpose of the activities.

72

Prior to the study, the classroom teacher provided instruction mainly in whole class or individual settings. Using the running records assessment data enabled the classroom teacher to recognize similar needs for small groups of children and provide "mini-lessons" using multiple copies of an appropriate text. The classroom teacher also recognized several students who were strategic and independent in their reading. She began to plan for these students by providing opportunities for Literature Circle activities using chapter books, independent research on topics of interest and projects such as "Recycling With Worms" which they developed and shared with the whole class over an extended period of time.

In this study, each student had a record of oral reading development from the beginning of February to the end of May in the form of the weekly audiotaped oral reading. These audiotapes were not only important to the classroom teacher for assessment purposes, but they proved to be a source of pride for each individual student. Each week, the students listened to the playback of their oral reading and used this to help them self-evaluate. Generally, the students felt very positive about their reading and with prompting from the adult, could recognize what they did well such as finger pointing when the text was difficult, looking for cues in the pictures, self-correcting when it didn't make sense or look right, etc. The students also enjoyed listening to previously taped oral readings. Each oral reading was chronologically presented on the audiotape with the recording of the date prior to the student reading orally to make the audiotape an

authentic record of development. The audiotapes were a source of pride for the students and they were eager to share these with their parents.

As a result of the students' enthusiasm and pride in the audiotapes, the classroom teacher and resource teacher/investigator recognized the value of sharing these tapes with parents. Therefore, the audiotapes along with a questionnaire were sent home prior to the March scheduled parent-teacher interviews. The classroom teacher reported an increased awareness and understanding as well as more specific questions regarding their children's reading development being asked during the parent-teacher conferences in March. The questionnaire completed by the parents, the parents' inquiries and responses, and the classroom teacher's observations confirm the importance of extending parents' understanding of the reading process.

Raphael and Hiebert (1998) emphasize the importance of providing scaffolds for home reading programs such as providing books or book lists and, most importantly, providing information about the reading process and how to best help children extend their literacy experiences at home (pp. 244 - 248). The results of our study confirm the value of using a home reading program which provides suitable reading material, information about literacy development and opportunities for parents to increase their understanding of the reading process through dialogue with the classroom teacher.

74

Overall Results

The results from this study confirm both theory and practice. Findings showed that the use of oral reading for assessment in the form of running records allowed the classroom teacher and the resoure teacher/investigator to gain knowledge about students' needs and incorporate the knowledge gained into a variety of appropriate and effective instructional activities.

Effective collaboration between the classroorm teacher and the resource teacher occurred through ongoing dialogue. These shared conversations enabled the classroom teacher and the resource teacher to work as a team in developing a better understanding of students' needs through ongoing assessment, more appropriate reading activities for all students and early intervention in the context of these classroom activities for those students in need. The principles that evolved to facilitate this successful collaboration include the following: (1) starting with the teacher's own belief system and set of classroom practices; (2) expanding theoretical understanding through ongoing dialogue and practical applications; (3) recognizing the necessity for extended periods of time in order to produce gradual change in beliefs and practices; and, (4) recognizing and valuing the process of meaning-making through collaboration as an effective means of professional development.

Involving the students and parents in oral reading practice through the home reading program and the use of oral reading audiotapes as records of reading development

over the course of the winter and spring school terms proved to be a valuable means of deepening both parents' and children's understanding of the reading process. The students were highly motivated to engage in oral reading practice and both parents and children gained an understanding of the learning that was occurring.

The cross-age tutoring partnerships between the Grade One and Grade Six students proved to be an excellent means of integrating literacy skills beneficial to both the older and younger students. Both groups of students learned more about the reading process and could articulate important strategies to use during reading activities.

Implications for Classroom Practice

It is evident that early literacy acquisition is a complex process. There are a multitude of factors which affect a child's literacy acquisition, many of which occur in contexts not in the educators' control. It is critical that early literacy teachers are aware of these factors, but not dismayed by these limitations. Rather, it is the responsibility of all literacy educators to understand the students' strengths and needs and provide them with opportunities to develop literacy skills in meaningful, interactive environments. In order for classroom teachers to fulfill this mandate, they require ongoing support and training to continually develop their understanding and enhance their use of appropriate instructional activities. Developing a comprehensive literacy program takes time, collaboration and effort.

76

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) have worked extensively with Ohio State University's

Early Literacy Learning Initiative and have developed a literacy framework which is a

conceptual tool for planning and organizing teaching. It includes four kind of reading

and four kinds of writing, connected through extensions and themes and applied through

the teacher's observed evidence of children's progress. The following factors (P. 41) must

be considered by the teacher when using the framework:

1. The strengths, needs, and experiences of the children they are teaching.

2. The nature of the materials they have and can acquire.

3. The requirements of the curriculum.

4. Their own experience, background, and level of confidence.

Fountas and Pinnell stress the teacher's own learning as one of the most critical factors.

Each educator must find his or her own point of entry into the framework. They

recommend that teachers who are unfamiliar with particular aspects of the literacy

framework may incorporate only one element initially, as adding any one of the literacy

framework elements will increase instructional opportunities for children (p. 42).

Limitations of the Study

This study may be limited by the fact that only oral reading was examined as an

aspect of early literacy development. We know that reading and writing are interrelated

and what is learned in one area makes it easier to learn in the other. It is important to

note that writing occurred on a daily basis as part of the literacy process in the classroom

studied and was valued as a component of early literacy development. However, for purposes of focus and organization, it was not directly observed or discussed in the study.

This study focused specifically on oral reading activities and direct instruction related to the oral reading assessments. The study did not attempt to delineate all reading activities and instruction in the classroom.

Implications for Further Research

Conducting this study points to the need for further research in the following areas:

1. Practical methods of conducting ongoing assessment in all areas of literacy acquisition, including both reading and writing.

2. Developing collaborative opportunities for teacher professional growth in the context of the early literacy classroom.

3. Use of dynamic grouping for literacy instruction based on ongoing, authentic student assessment. Specifically, the use of guided reading with small groups of beginning readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). It is the heart of a balanced literacy program as it is a context in which a teacher supports each reader's development for processing text at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty.

4. Selection of appropriately leveled text to support readers in the development and extension of their use of the cueing systems and strategies.

78

5. Effective use of cross-age and volunteer tutoring programs to support beginning learners in literacy acquisition. Wasik (1998) states that "to have tutoring result in real gains in students' reading skills, more structure, training, supervision, and planning are needed" (p. 569).

6. Implementing programs for early reading intervention that are directed toward preventing initial reading failure.

"Teaching ... can be likened to a conversation in which you listen to the speaker carefully." Marie Clay

Both the classroom teacher and the resource teacher/investigator have continued "the dialogue" concerning early literacy acquisition and have found many opportunities to collaborate in the classroom to better understand the reading process through the voice of each child.

> "Transforming teaching into a learning experience is a journey without an end... (it) means recognizing that our understanding of what we'd like to have happen in our classroom and our ability to make sense of what students are trying to do will be in need of constant revision. No sooner will I think I have sorted out some aspect of my instructional agenda than something will happen to raise further questions. (Judith Newman, 1991)

79

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

How to Take a Running Record

Running records can be taken on any text. You may choose to record the child's responses on a blank sheet, on a copy of the text, or on an acetate sheet overlaying the text. As you listen to the child read, mark his or her responses in the following ways

Accurate reading: Each correct response is shown with a check.

√ √ √ √ √ √
The bird flew into the sky.

Substitution: If the child substitutes another word for the text, jot it above the word.

√ √ *fell* √ √ √
The bird flew into the sky.

Repetition: If the child repeats or rereads a word or a group of words, use R and/or arrows to show the repetition.

√ R √ √ √ √
The bird flew into the sky. (one word)

√ ←——R √ √ √
The bird flew into the sky. (a group of words)

√ ←——R» √ √ √
The bird flew into the sky. (repeated twice)

Omission: If the child leaves out a word, indicate the omission with a line

√ √ √ √ _ √
The bird flew into the sky.

Insertion: If the child inserts an extra word, write in the word.

√ √ √ √ √ *big*
The bird flew into the sky.

Self-correction: If the child self-corrects, record his or her first response, then jot S/C to show the correction.

√ √ *fellsk* √ √ √
The bird flew into the sky.

APPENDIX B

Important Text Characteristics for the Stages of Beginning Reading

Characteristics of Emergent Texts: These books are often one and two-line caption books that contain stories about subjects familiar to most children. Strong pictorial support is provided by illustrations that match the text exactly. The language patterns are predictable although the pattern can change on the last page. Sentences or phrases are contained in single lines. Short, high frequency and high interest words are used often. The print is larger than normal, positioned in the same place on each page, and provides obvious spacing between words.

Characteristics of Early Texts: These books contain longer sentences that may spread over more than one line or page. Many stories, though still brief, have a beginning, middle, and end. As children are now able to monitor their reading by using print cues, there is less picture support. The language patterns are not so regular and may contain rhyme and alliteration and some simple direct speech.

Characteristics of Fluency Texts: These books contain more pages and longer, more complex sentences about diverse subjects. Some of the concepts may be quite abstract, and the reader may be required to make inferences to comprehend the message. The illustrations tend to enhance rather than contribute to the meaning. The print may not be conventionally located on the page, and may even include direct speech in "talking bubbles" in the illustrations.

APPENDIX C

Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

Mrs. Pat Adamson and I are planning to do a classroom research project to find ways to measure and enhance the students' oral reading fluency. Our initial plan is to provide a variety of opportunities for oral reading practice including the home reading program and the Grade Six Reading Buddies. We will then have the students audiotape the books that they have practised. We will listen to the tapes and keep a running record of the student's strengths and areas in which we can provide extra help.

You can help by encouraging your child to read his/her books several times at home. Any volunteers that I have will also listen to the children read to provide them with additional practice before their final tapings. We are not asking you to drill your child but, rather, to read along with them and provide the words that cause difficulty. Reading at home should be fun and concentrate on obtaining meaning and enjoyment from reading.

As our project continues I will keep you informed of any successes. The goal of the project is to give the children more individualized reading help and to help them see how they are improving. Please share with us and your child ways that you see your child improving in his/her reading. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. J. Fisher

APPENDIX D

Parent Questionnaire

Dear Parents,

The children have been anxious to take their reading tapes home to share with you. This is an excellent opportunity for you to listen to your child's reading over the past few months. Please share you positive comments and feelings with your child about his/her reading strengths.

I would appreciate it if you could take the time to indicate your observations of your child's reading growth. Feel free to comment where appropriate.

My child:
1. Understands more of what he/she read	___ yes	___ no
2. Enjoys being read to by family members	___ yes	___ no
3 Finds time for quiet reading at home	___ yes	___ no
4 Sometimes guesses at words, but they usually make sense and sound like language	___ yes	___ no
5 Can provide a summary of a story read	___ yes	___ no
6. Has a good attitude about reading	___ yes	___ no
7 Enjoys reading to a family member	___ yes	___ no
8. Would like to get more books	___ yes	___ no
9. Chooses to write about stories read	___ yes	___ no

Strengths I see: _____

_____

Areas that need improvement: _____

_____

Concerns or questions I have: _____

_____

Please return this questionnaire and the audiotape on Monday with your child. I am interested in your comments and questions. I hope that we can discuss these together during parent-teacher conferences.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Fisher

89

APPENDIX E

Student Reading Evaluation

Reading Log

Student: _____   Date: _____

Title of Book: _____

First Reading ___ or Practised Reading ___

I have read this book to:

___ parents   ___ classmate   ___ Grade 6 partner   ___ other: _____

This book is:

___ easy to read   ___ just right   ___ difficult   ___ very difficult

After tape playback (student self-evaluation):

How well did you read? _____

Why do you think that? _____

How can you improve? _____

****

Observations During Oral Reading

Volunteer: _____

The student follows text: The student uses picture cues:

___ follows with eyes and fingers   ___ always   ___ often

___ point to text when asked   ___ seldom   ___ never

___ needs adult assistance

___ self-corrects when error is pointed out by adult

Comments: _____

_____

APPENDIX F

Stages of Reading Development

Helen Depree's (1994) description of the stages of reading development include the following characteristics:

Emergent

Directionality - Children use fingers to indicate direction and return sweep.

One-to-one matching - Children begin to match one spoken word with one written word.

Monitoring - Children begin to notice discrepancies between the print and what they are trying to say.

Searching - Children may pause and search in the picture, the print or their memory for know information

Self-correction - Children start to correct some of their errors.

Early

Directionality and one-to-one matching - Children begin to read the book matching text with their eyes, but reverting to finger pointing when the text presents some new challenge.

Monitoring - Children notice discrepancies in the meaning and the structure and at the word and letter level.

Searching - Children demonstrate an ability to search using letters and letter clusters, as well as meaning and language structures.

Self-correction - Children correct many of their errors.

Fluent

Directionality and one-to-one matching - Children scan phrases with the eyes.

Monitoring, searching and self-correcting - Children are able to use both large and small chunks of meaning, language structure, and visual information in an integrated way to foster ongoing monitoring of reading comprehension.

APPENDIX G

<u>Questions on Bookmarks to Guide Reading</u>

A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR READING PARTNERS

BEFORE THE BOOK:

1. Read the title. Talk about the cover.
2. What do you think the book will be about?

DURING THE BOOK:

1. How do you think the characters feel?
2. What do you think will happen next?
3. What would you do if this were you?

AFTER THE BOOK:

1. Who was in the story?
2. Where did it take place?
3. When did it take place?
4. What was you favourite part? Why?
5. Did you like the book? Why? why not?
6. Can you tell what happened
   - at the beginning?
   - in the middle?
   - at the end?

APPENDIX H

Suggestions for Helping Beginning Readers

READING STRATEGIES

It's important to think about ...

What it means:
- look at the title and the pictures
- think about what the story will be about
- as you read, think about what might happen next
- ask yourself, "Does this make sense?"

What it sounds like:
- leave the word out and read to the end of the sentence
- think about what word would fit into the sentence
- ask yourself, "Does that sound right?"

What it looks like:
- use the initial consonant sound and the picture to help figure out the word you don't know
- sound out the word
- look for little words in big words that you don't know
- ask yourself, "Does that look right?"

93

IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

150mm

6"
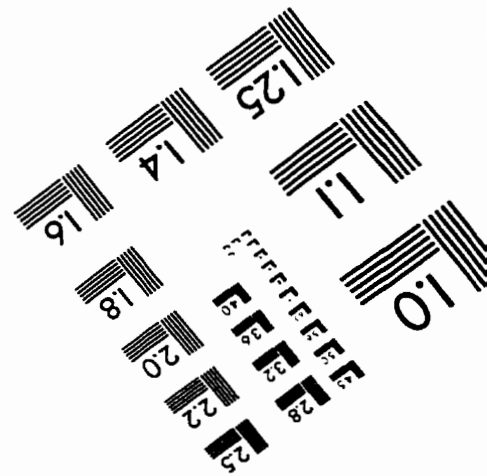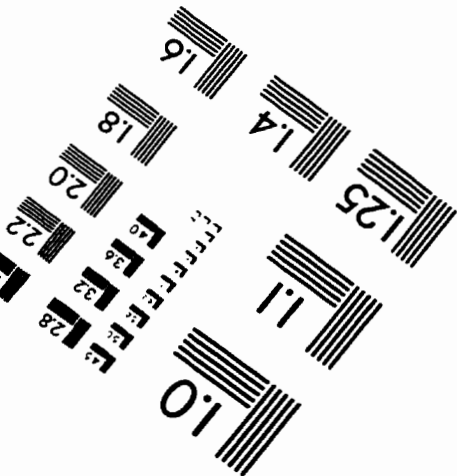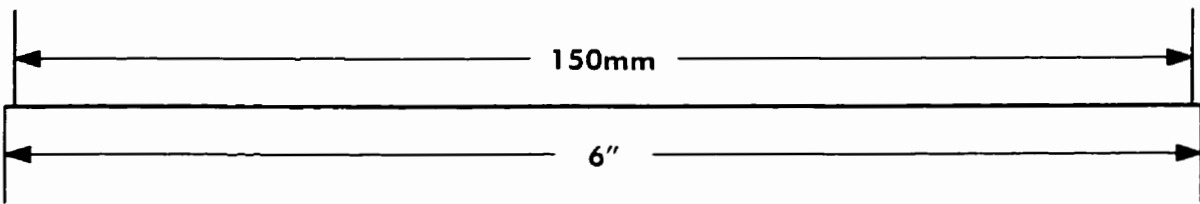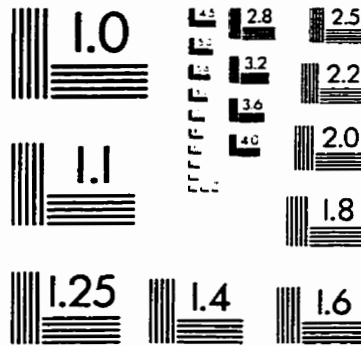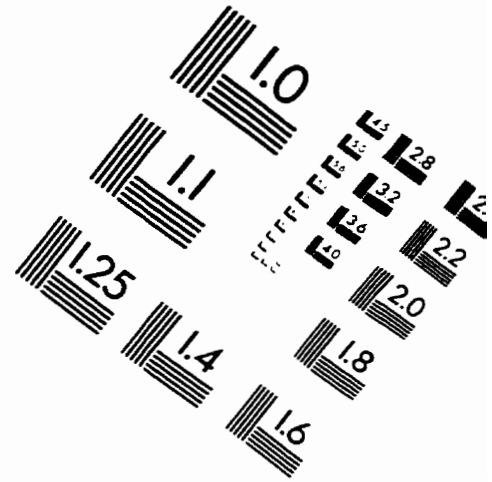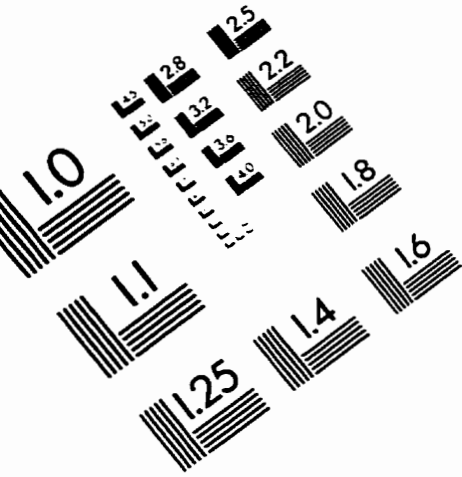
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