

**Literacy as Inquiry:
Bridging Beliefs and Practice**

By

Sherri McFarlane

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of**

Master of Education

**Faculty of Education
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
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MASTER OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

This thesis has two purposes. The first is to examine my beliefs about literacy and learning. The second purpose is to analyze my literacy teaching in the classroom. Both of the above purposes will help me to better understand the dynamic relationship between theory and practice.

This research study is a retrospective analysis using the methodology of narrative inquiry. I observed students by taking notes and recording conversations as they were involved in daily reading and writing experiences. I also systematically gathered student-learning artifacts capturing the literacy learning that took place in the classroom during a period of one school year.

The research activity of story writing has allowed me to slow down and reflect more deliberately on my teaching beliefs and practices. It is through these stories that I have been able to make connections between my theoretical beliefs and the lived literacy learning within my classroom. It has also given me firsthand experience to see the powerful potential of approaching the teaching of reading and writing as a collaborative, social inquiry. This study connects to the works of Short, Harste and Burke (1996) and Luke and Freebody (1990, 1997 & 1999). Literacy instruction grew out of students' investigations of rich fictional texts, non-fiction resources and supportive conversations about the reading process and the craft of writing. Whole group demonstrations provided students with the necessary support to investigate multiple texts in small group settings and individually. Our thinking was made public to all learners through regular whole group discussions and purposeful bulletin board displays.

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Acknowledgements

It has taken me seven years to finish my coursework and write a thesis in order to obtain a Master of Education degree. As I take in one hefty deep breath, I gaze out at the piles of books and endless papers that have overtaken my home and smile because I can finally shout, "I AM DONE!"

To my husband Cam, for supporting me throughout this journey, for always being there to take me on multiple "coffee runs", to listen to my ideas about my writing during the wee hours of the night and for encouraging me to keep going even if I thought I was stuck. Your kindness, love and enthusiasm kept me going. You are my best friend!

To my parents, Brian and Laurel McFarlane, for their constant support and caring ways, those gourmet dinners (including dad's signature lunches) gave me extra time to focus on my writing and provided me the strength to keep going. Thank you for always being there to listen to my questions or my ideas regarding my writing. Hearing the words, "Just get it done, Sherri!" helped me forge ahead. I am blessed to have such wonderful parents who value education and who supported my decision to go back to school and obtain my Master of Education degree. I love you both!

I would also like to thank Pat Steuart and Shannon Steuart for their constant kindness, understanding and patience. I am very lucky to be a part of your family.

To a supportive friend, Marni Stephens, thank you for encouraging me to keep writing, giving me the necessary computer equipment in order to scan materials and inviting me out to the odd hockey game or baseball game in hopes of lifting my spirits and giving me a break. I treasure our friendship.

To my advisor, Dr. Wayne Serebrin, your exceptional knowledge of teaching and learning is what inspired me to continue on my academic journey as a graduate student. Regardless of how busy you may have been, you always found the time to support me – finding resources, responding to my questions or concerns and challenging me to write every day. You are a master teacher and I am very fortunate to also consider you my friend.

I am also very grateful for the other members of my thesis committee, Dr. Sheldon Rosenstock and Professor JuliAnn Kniskern. Your enthusiasm, helpful suggestions and support were very much appreciated.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank the students and families of Strathmillan School. Talking with you, listening to you and watching you have helped me to become a stronger teacher. Your voices and learning artifacts brought my thesis to life.

Foreword

When you hear the words *literacy* and *inquiry* what comes to mind? Everyone has an opinion about how reading and writing should be taught, especially in an early years classroom. *Literacy* and *inquiry* have become educational buzzwords often attached to pre-packaged programs that promise results. There is no denying that we live in a “time of standards”. Various assessments and evaluative measures are devised to ensure that students and teachers are meeting these standards. In response to these pressures, teachers and administrators alike are intrigued by these programs and implement them in hope of ending all reading and writing woes. Yet, there is no such thing as “one size fits all” instruction. These programs reduce the teaching of reading and writing to a linear set of step-by-step lesson plans.

Where is the voice of the teacher amidst the growing search for effective literacy instruction? Why has she let those outside forces silence her professional knowledge, overtake classroom experiences and dim her beliefs about learning?

Teaching is a complex, dynamic process. There is no one program or method that fits all learners. Rose (1995) describes effective teaching as:

Knowing one’s students well and being able to read them quickly and, in turn, making decisions to slow down or speed up, to stay with a point or return to it later, to underscore certain connections, to use or forgo a particular illustration. This decision-making operates as much by feel as by reason; it involves hunch, intuition, at best, quick guess (p. 419).

This study is an attempt to explore the complexities of teaching. Examining my beliefs about *literacy* and *inquiry* and looking more closely at my actions in my classroom reveal the creative art of teaching. I am not searching for a perfect fit or match between my beliefs and actions. However, I feel that both spheres of my professional life are connected in multiple ways; each informing and complementing the other. Taking the time to clearly articulate a belief system and enact those beliefs in the classroom is an empowering act and frees me to “march to the beat of my own drum”.

This study is a collection of interpretive stories, featuring moments of engagement, from my Grade 4/5 multi-age classroom over the 2003-2004 school year. During this time, my sole responsibility was teaching my multi-age class and I was not assigned to teach any other classes. I had the good fortune that year of having more time to make observations and more systematically gather information about my students' literacy learning and my literacy teaching during regular reading and writing experiences. My stories represent one voice. I agree with Spandel (2005) who states that teaching is “an individual path-finding” act (p. xi). It is my hope that as you read my stories you too will become empowered to look beyond all of the outside forces and to find your path so others can hear your voice.

Introduction

A Morsel of Magic

“What counts as teacher research? Words, songs, poems, pictures, dances, stories, children’s questions, teacher’s questions, close attention, shifting perspective, altered practice and new ways of thinking about learning” (Karen Gallas, 1999, p. 47).

It is the middle of September and my twenty-eight students are gathered on the carpet enjoying our first shared novel of the year. It is a book written by Andrea Spalding (1995) and it is called *Finders Keepers*. While reading aloud I look up from the pages of the story to survey the room, noting that all students are still, engaged and almost in a trance-like state. “Perfect!” I think to myself. I continue to read the story:

"When he reached the far pasture he looked back. Joshua and his grandfather were silhouetted against the sky, carefully folding up the blankets. Danny scanned the blue above them with a heavy heart. There was not an eagle to be seen. Then he saw Joshua pause before disappearing over the ridge, and look in Danny's direction. Danny looked hopefully back. Joshua raised his hand in reply" (Spalding, 1995, pp. 12 –13).

Out of the corner of my eye, I observe a morsel of magic that only a teacher can truly appreciate. One little boy, Robert, begins to raise his hand in the air as if he were Danny, the main character, standing on the vast prairie waving to his friend, Joshua. Robert is not looking at me; rather, he is looking through me as he enters the world of the story. I pause for a moment, fascinated by Robert's involvement with this text. I continue reading with an inner smile, knowing that he has ultimately sampled the power of literacy. (Personal Journal, 09/18/03)

Experiences like this one make me realize the importance of systematically recording and reflecting upon daily classroom events - in this case a “morsel of magic” - because such ongoing research action makes clear to me the connection between my literacy learning and teaching beliefs and practices. The above sample is just one of the many magical moments I have collected over the course of my teaching career. It is from this data that I

will create my stories to reveal the relationship between a teacher's beliefs and classroom practice. Short and Burke (2001) urge me, as a teacher, to examine my beliefs and classroom actions in order to deepen my understanding of my teaching - creating a deliberate link binding my theoretical understandings and my teaching practice. Cochran-Smith (1991) states "the teacher is centrally responsible for raising questions, interrogating her own knowledge and experiences," in order to notice, value and appreciate teaching and learning experiences that enrich and deepen our daily lives (p. 290). Judith Newman (1998) encourages teacher researchers to collect and recall "critical incidents" - moments of engagement, anomalies, uncertainties, and so forth - as a way of continuously re-searching the threads connecting beliefs and practice. "A crucial facet of research," Newman writes, "consists of connecting our personal experiences to the wider world of scholarship, of situating reflective moments within the broader research discourse" (p. 10).

The purpose of this study, then, is to contribute to the ongoing professional conversation regarding the relationship between a teacher's theoretical beliefs about literacy and literacy teaching and learning and this teacher's classroom practice. Reflecting on data from my experiences over the last several years has allowed me to capture valuable moments of practice in action. It is the writing of narratives, however, that have more fully enabled me to draw connections between my theoretical understandings and the literacy life lived within our classroom. Both the articulation of a theoretical belief system and the enactment of those beliefs in the classroom are complex processes. Bringing theoretical beliefs and practices together, however, is an empowering act for a teacher – one that reveals the dynamic, creative nature of teaching and learning.

Such research will enable me to continue to learn and grow as a teacher, and vicariously to support the reflective inquiry of other teacher researchers.

The methodology for this study is narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is the vehicle that enables me to write my teaching stories (my data). The data for my stories has been drawn from my journal entries, observations of classroom events (captured in photographs, and on audio recordings) and conversations with the children about their literacy learning. Narrative inquiry demands that I also ground my classroom research in the work of other teachers and researchers exploring similar theory/practice connections. The research activity of story writing has slowed me down and helped me to reflect more deliberately on my practice as I calibrate my teaching practice in relation to my theoretical goals. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), teachers' reflections and constructions of their experiences, in a storied manner, is a natural function of their trying to understand and learn from their experience. They suggest that:

Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Therefore, narrative inquiry is the study of the ways humans experience the world. Teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories (p. 2).

The process of narrative inquiry will allow me to explore and make explicit connections between daily classroom life and my theoretical understandings of literacy and learning (Olson, 2000, p. 111). In sifting through my previously collected data, I will construct my stories, with the intention of more fully appreciating what I believe as a teacher and who I wish to become. My intention is not to use narrative inquiry as a means of finding quick answers or instant solutions to fix aspects of my teaching. Rather, it is my hope that by

organizing, articulating and communicating my classroom stories, while interweaving existing theory on inquiry and literacy, I will become even “more thoughtful and mindful” of the complexities found within my profession (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 7).

Margaret Olson (2000) suggests that Western storytelling tends to have a “linear quality” (p. 111) containing a beginning, middle and end. However, it is important to note that in the process of collecting and learning from these stories I will be engaged in a dialogic inquiry. Different stories will provide different insights - my theoretical beliefs will inform my classroom actions and my classroom actions will help shape beliefs. Thus, the reciprocal nature of these two dimensions of teaching makes this anything but a linear process:

Time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimensions of space...I think of time as having a shape, something you can see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don't look back along time but down through it, like water. (Atwood, 1988, p.3)

I realize, therefore, that this journey of creating and sifting through my interpretive stories of reflections, events and artifacts will engage me in a complex process as I struggle to better understand, inform, shape, re-shape and reform my teaching (Cochran-Smith, 1991).

Learning is Inquiry

“Teaching is a process of becoming that continues throughout life, never completely achieved, never completely denied. This is the challenge and the fun of being a teacher – there is no ultimate end to the process” (Frances Mayforth, 1999, p. 46).

Reflecting back to past experiences allows me to recall an initial “critical incident” (Newman, 1998). I attended a section meeting for the Early Years After-Degree Program at the University of Manitoba in August of 1996. Students accepted into the Early Years After-Degree Program were asked to this meeting to discuss schedules and course load, to meet professors and to introduce ourselves to one another before the first day of regular classes. I remember feeling excited to have been accepted into the After-Degree Program. I also remember feeling anxious and curious about the years ahead. During the course of the meeting, I remember recording a wonderful poem written by Diane Stephens into my notebook. It was read aloud to the entire group and I could not help but be intrigued and inspired:

*I used to think teaching was action – move, negotiate, entertain.
I used to think learning was doing – centers, projects, murals.
Now I think teaching is reaction and response – invite, sustain,
support. Now I think learning is reflection – watching, thinking,
caring. I used to think I was a good teacher – nice, caring,
pleasant. Now I think I can't be good. I can only get better.
(Personal Journal, 08/26/1996)*

Contemplating this poem on teaching and learning set the stage for what would become a personal mission for me as a beginning educator. This poem represents an understanding of learning as an ongoing endeavour. As we learn, we raise questions, seek understandings and investigate issues critical to our lives. During this learning cycle, new questions and concerns arise, assumptions are examined and the journey begins all over

again. Diane Stephens captures the continuous nature of learning with her “I used to think” and “now I think” statements, encouraging me to sort out and make sense of my own beliefs about teaching and learning. I, too, want to “invite”, “sustain” and “support” my students as we learn collaboratively, side by side.

I am currently entering my eighth year of teaching in an intermediate multi-age Grade Four/Five classroom. A multi-age classroom grouping consists of students who are intentionally placed together from two or three grade levels. Children with different ages, abilities and needs learn together forming one unique community of learners.

My own understanding of learning is consistent with the underlying philosophy of multi-age. Students are encouraged to take risks, be inquisitive, collaborate and cooperate with one another. Students are able to get to know one another and understand each other's strengths and weaknesses. Everyone is a learner. Everyone is a leader.

At the same time, I am able to build a rapport with my students over a two-year period. We function like one big family. Students know who to go to if they are having trouble with a math problem, they know who to talk to if they are interested in insects, and they know who to ask when they are searching for a specific book. Interests and expertise are valued and students become rich resources for one another.

But, beyond multi-age grouping, what is at the core of my beliefs about literacy learning and teaching? The single word that best names my belief system is "inquiry". Like Harste (2001), central to my philosophy of education is inquiry. Personally and professionally I learn through a process of inquiry and I teach in a way that invites the students in my multi-age classroom to inquire. What does this really mean? What does teacher and student inquiry look like? Where is inquiry situated in my attempts to bring together theory and practice? These are questions that this research study will explore.

During the course of this exploration, I will retrospectively be analyzing photographs, student work samples, taped conversations and my personal journal entries collected over the 2003-2004 school year.

Before embarking on such a research quest, I am, however, mindful of Harste and Leland's (1998) caution that:

In certain education circles, inquiry has become the sound-byte lecture, the sure-to-get-accepted convention presentation title, the generic pedagogical advice offered to preservice and inservice teachers alike. Inquiry-based education, they are told, is “where it’s at.” It sounds like the easiest thing in the world. But sometimes, if you step up close, you can get a better look at that world. You can see its real potential. You can also see just how easy it isn’t (p. 204).

This is the research process I will be engaged in - “stepping up close, taking a better look” and trying to be explicit about how I put my beliefs into action so that my students and I “find powerful ways to get things done in the world” (Comber, 2001).

I was first introduced to *Creating Classrooms for Authors and Inquirers*, written by Short, Harste and Burke (1996), during my undergraduate work in education. These authors created a curricular model of inquiry learning that has informed my teaching. Their curricular model encompasses the **personal and social knowing** of learners, **knowledge systems** and **sign systems**.

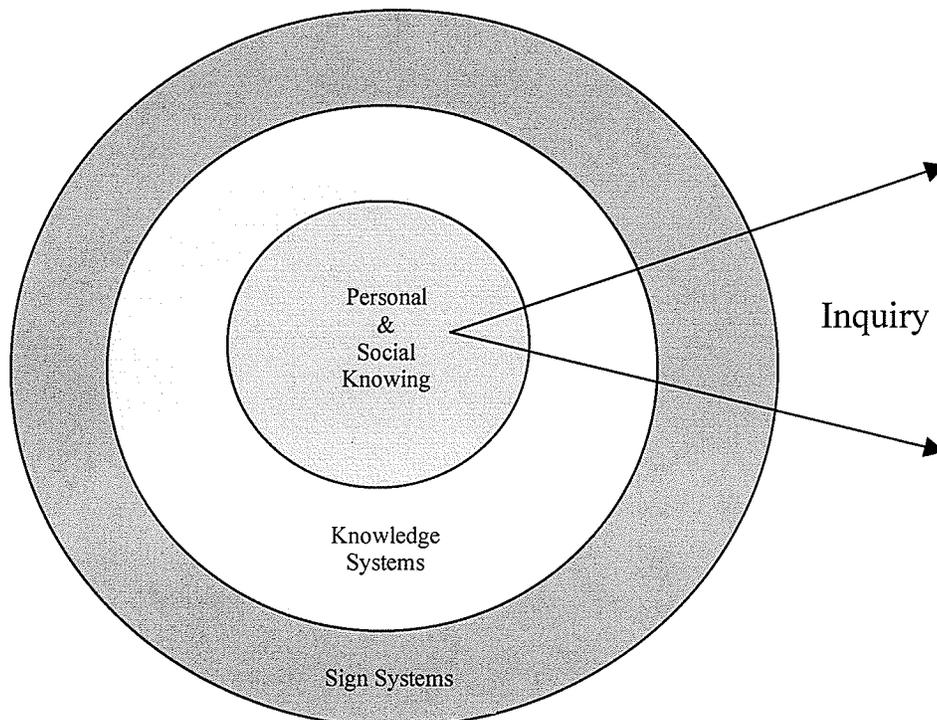


Figure 1. Curriculum as inquiry

Personal and Social Knowing

Inquiry is driven by a learner's personal wonderings and questions. All learners bring knowledge gained from life experiences. Learners further build upon their prior knowledge by gaining the perspectives of others through social interaction: "Knowledge is personally and socially constructed and reconstructed in situations as people share their ideas and stories with others" (Olson, 1995, p. 123). Thus, personal and social thoughts, the interests and questions of individual learners and a community of learners are central

to learning and become the heart of curriculum (Harste, 2001). It is important to note that in an inquiry model the teacher is also a “learner”, for she too is part of the classroom learning community. It is she who creates specific learning experiences, models strategies to support all learners, and collects resources and materials for students to build upon and extend their knowledge base. The teacher is a demonstrator, a co-learner, a facilitator and a guide as her own and the children's questions arise.

Knowledge Systems

Unlike subject areas that tend to focus on skills and facts in an isolated manner, knowledge systems or disciplines are used as perspectives for learners to tap into when exploring a topic. Each knowledge system has its own set of tools or strategies for observing the world; each offers the learner a unique learning perspective. Every knowledge system “looks at the world through a different lens, asks specific questions and uses special tools” for pursuing questions and sharing meaning with others (Short, Harste & Burke, 1996, p. 258). In other words, providing the opportunity to explore a topic as an historian – using charts, timelines, maps and artifacts, noting connections between past and future – offers a completely different experience than studying the same topic using a scientist’s perspective – making observations, collecting data, working through fair tests, drawing conclusions, etc. Harste (2000) calls for a dramatic shift in our thinking as educators, imploring us to realize that “knowledge systems are research perspectives used by inquirers, rather than inert bodies of knowledge to be memorized and forgotten (p. 10).

Sign Systems

Sign systems are ways of expressing and sharing meaning. Each sign system is composed of unique forms of representation and conventions (Bergoff, Egawa, Harste & Hoonan, 2000). Simply put, these multiple ways of representing meaning/symbol systems - such as art, drama, dance and music - help children to evoke richer and diverse understandings. Each representational form/symbol system contributes a different dimension to what a learner can know. Students can express their thinking using one form of representation and then recast it in another. This process is called transmediation. Transmediation is the process of translating or connecting meanings from one sign system to another. Transmediation enables a “multiple-ways-of-knowing” perspective (Bergoff, Egawa, Harste & Hoonan, 2000). Elliot Eisner (1991) feels that human understanding must be all encompassing:

The poet, the painter, the composer, the playwright, as well as, the physicist, the chemist, the botanist, the astronomer have something to teach us. Paying adequate attention to such forms of understanding in schools is the best way to make them a meaningful part of our students' intellectual lives (p. 15).

Short, Harste and Burke's model of inquiry has also helped me to understand the collaborative nature of learning among the students and the teacher. It is the teacher who plans around big ideas; maps out potentials or possibilities for learners to pursue. Teachers are planners – noting the vast opportunities or potentials of a study before they even take place. But teachers are also flexible - allowing students to lead them down surprising paths of unexpected investigation. Teachers are risk-takers – pursuing broad topics of study for unknown lengths of time. The personal and social knowing of all

learners, and their use of knowledge systems and sign systems, function to enable them to individually and collectively explore, share, make and express meaning.

Short, Harste and Burke (1996) have created a second model representing the underlying processes found in learning.

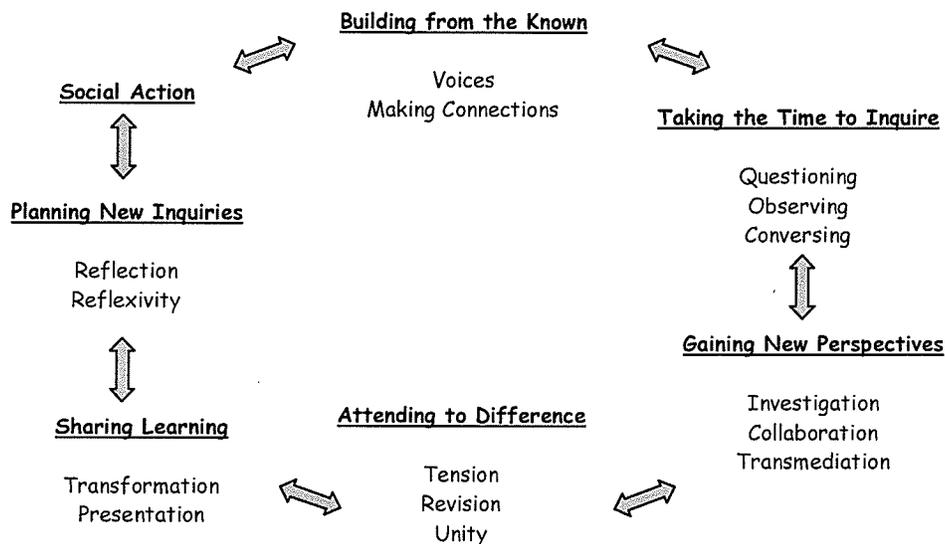


Figure 2. Underlying processes of inquiry

In this model, we see that students come to school with their own set of experiences and ideas. These experiences and ideas are valued but expanded as students are presented with new experiences and invited to ask questions and converse freely about their understandings with others. While students are encouraged to build understandings based on what they know, they are also challenged to go beyond their current perspectives by collaborating with others, drawing upon the perspectives of various disciplines, and expressing their new knowing through multiple sign systems – art, dance, music, etc. Through such an inquiry cycle learners develop new theories or revise existing theories about the world. By sharing and presenting their findings learners then contribute these new or revised theories to the larger class conversations, and thereby the “thought collective” continually builds new knowledge and understanding (Harste & Leland,

1998). Reflecting and re-examining experiences are paramount in this inquiry cycle in order that learners are always identifying and planning “for the lives they want to live and the people they want to be” (Harste & Leland, 1998, p. 192).

My knowledge of inquiry continues to evolve. I realize that inquiry is not a special teaching technique or method, but, rather, a “basic philosophical stance” (Harste & Leland, 1998, p. 192). It represents a way of being in the world – it involves taking the time to undergo a journey, tolerating ambiguity, being a risk-taker, gaining new perspectives, revising thoughts, and so forth. There are elements of choice, collaboration, negotiation and reflection. Inquiry is an ongoing, holistic, complex process where the teacher and the learner learn with and from one another.

Structuring the Classroom for Inquiry

Short, Harste and Burke's (1996) theoretical models have provided me with a way to sort through and unpack my thinking about inquiry. What does inquiry look like in my classroom? How do I set up my room and what routines or structures would be in place to support all of the learners in my class?

In response to my professional reading, I have been inspired to build my own curricular model, representing the underlying structures and processes necessary for me to live out my inquiry beliefs within the classroom.

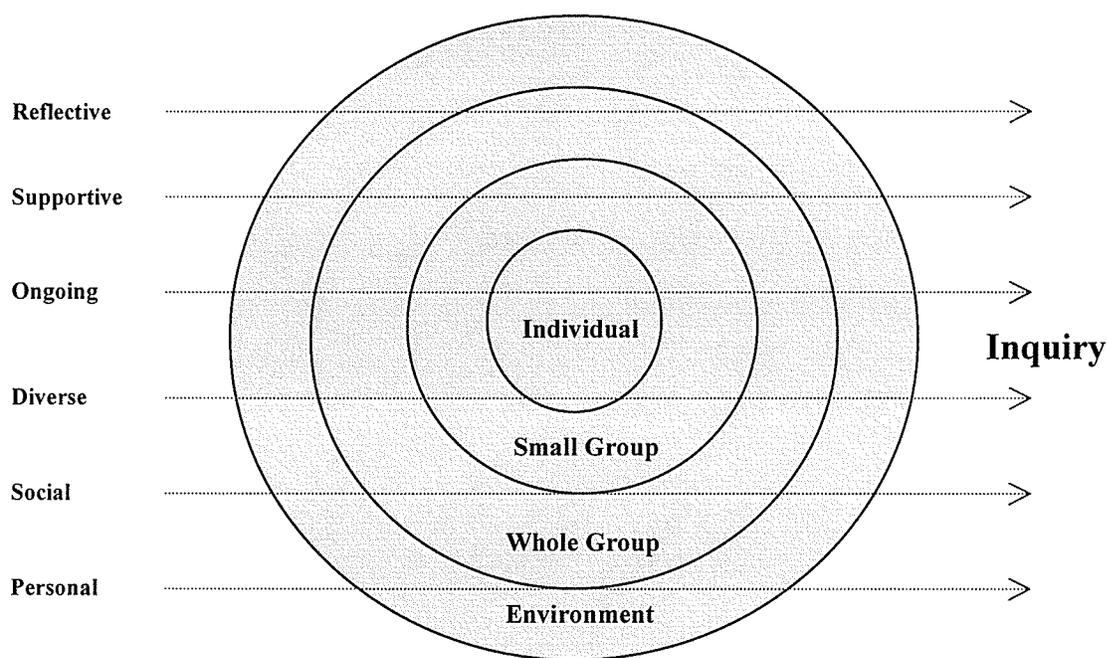


Figure 3. My curricular model

My model consists of four overlapping circles or components with my beliefs about learning running through them. Highlighting each component separately will provide a clearer understanding of my model:

Individual

The individual learner is at the center of my model. This not only represents the learner's prior knowledge, questions and interests, but it also involves all types of individual learning experiences that occur in the classroom throughout the day. Some examples of individual learning experiences include playing with language and developing written pieces within a writer's notebook, tracking thinking about reading in literature logs, or publishing multiple texts (fiction, non-fiction, artistic pieces, etc.).

Small Group

The second component features small group learning. This is when students collaborate with one another to share knowledge, express opinions, support each other, and so forth. This could take the form of a literature circle, for example, where students discuss a specific text or it may be an investigation where students work through a text finding significant passages to discuss later as a class.

Whole Group

Whole group learning is the third component to my model. All students sit together, often on the carpeted area of the room, as a community of learners, eager to share insights, concerns or questions, discuss strategies, observe demonstrations, hear other viewpoints, and so forth. This may simply be a time for a read-aloud, a time to tackle a text together through shared reading, a time to re-group and reflect after a small group experience or a time for an individual to share his or her work or new knowledge.

Environment

The different groupings above (individual, small group and whole group) take place within the larger classroom environment. This environment is comprised of the following: physical structures of the classroom, the routines or daily rituals, and the carefully constructed social tone.

- **Physical Structures**

My classroom provides students with the space in which to have discussions in small groups at their tables. A large carpeted area acts as a meeting place where we can engage in conversations as a large classroom community. There are also areas at specific times that are designated as “quiet zones for thinking”. Our book nook houses a variety of literature that is sorted into labelled bins. Comfortable chairs and a cushioned bench surround our book nook, making it a perfect spot for students to explore, relax and enter the world of a story.

- **Routines and Rituals**

There are routines and rituals that help make all learning experiences flow smoothly. They also promote choice and independence. Routines and rituals are introduced during the first week of school and they eventually become part of the day-to-day rhythm of the room. For example, when students are working through the writing process they record their names on sticky notes and place them onto a poster titled, “*Keep on the Write Track*” - representing different phases of the authoring cycle. Not only does this act as an organizational device for the students, it is also a visual aid for me - a quick glance allows me to see where each child is during our workshop time.

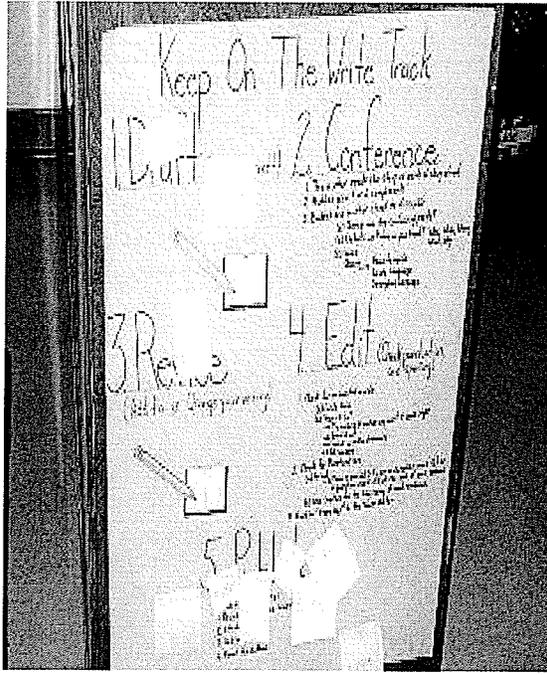


Figure 4. Keep on the write track chart

- **Social Tone**

A caring, warm and supportive social tone is the thread that ties everything together. There are always opportunities for students to bring a piece of themselves into the classroom, knowing that they are appreciated and valued members of the classroom community. For example, one community building experience involved students putting their hand prints around the perimeter of our classroom door. They also had to complete the phrase "Learning is..." which was written carefully in the middle portion of the door. This invitation provided an opportunity for every student to articulate his or her own personal theory of learning and to assume responsibility for his or her actions in the classroom.



Figure 5. Classroom door

Creating this theoretical model (Figure 3.) has helped me pinpoint the curricular structures and instructional settings necessary to enact my understandings of inquiry in the classroom. It is important to notice the generative nature of this model. The three instructional settings - (individual learning, small group learning and whole group learning) - work together in a flexible fashion, moving back and forth, within the classroom environment.

Writing is an excellent means of depicting the dynamic relationship between all three instructional settings in the classroom. One engagement I used to inspire students to add more detail and description to their written pieces shows this dynamic relationship.

I decide to read the book, *A Quiet Place*, by Douglas Wood (2002) to the whole group. This story is full of rich language – similes, metaphors, onomatopoeia and personification. First I read the story aloud for the class to simply enjoy. Next we read it

again. However, this time, students have a print copy of the text, a highlighter, a pencil and a clipboard. It was my plan to give students an opportunity to “read like writers”. Making connections, predictions and thinking about the actions of a character are all important aspects of reading for understanding. However, I also want students to read stories using the eyes of a writer – focusing on the language and structural patterns of a story. Katie Wood Ray (1999) helps to distinguish between these two types of craft that can be found within a text:

One of these is *structure*. A structural crafting technique is a way of using words that holds together either a whole text or a part of the text...This is the crafted structure of the text, the “how it’s done” of its structure...The other kind of thing we learn from the study of craft in texts are the particular *ways with words*. These are crafting techniques that stand by themselves and do not do any work in conjunction with other parts of the text (p. 44-45).

It is my hope that the book, *A Quiet Place*, will spark conversation about this author’s *ways with words*. Two students, Joanna and Robert, help make connections to past class events and they also help clarify the expectations of this task before we begin:

T: Lately, we’ve spent a great deal of time ‘reading like readers’. We’ve been sharing our reactions to many different stories.

J: That’s like when we make connections, we read something and it kinda reminds us of something in our own life.

T: That’s right, Joanna! Good for you! All of you have also been making predictions by thinking ahead and guessing what might happen next based on what you already know. You’ve also been trying to figure out why a character might have done something or acted a certain way.

R: Like stepping into the character’s shoes?

T: Exactly! Today I want us to re-read this story, but we are going to 'read like writers.' We will search for 'craft'. Craft is a special way or technique that an author uses to make his or her stories sound breathtaking. That's why you have a copy of the story right in front of you. As I read the story aloud, stop me and share the parts that you feel sound beautiful – parts that make you feel as though you are actually in that quiet place. (Personal Journal, 10/15/03)

We begin to read the passages and think aloud **together as a class**. Students highlight and verbally share parts they feel sound beautiful, jotting down notes in the margins of their paper, using the code "L.L." which stands for lovely language. Holly and Joanna initiate our discussion:

H: I like the part 'You might find a...mossy log for a couch in a green mansion of shadows and sunbeams.' It makes me feel like I'm in a forest and I can see everything clearly. I think it is strong description.

T: It makes me feel like I'm in the forest too. If you notice here the author compares the forest to a green mansion of shadows and sunbeams. When a writer compares two things without using the words, like or as, we call this a metaphor.

H: I also like the part where the author uses the sounds of words. He says 'drip, drip of water'. I can hear the water like I'm there.

T: When authors use the sounds of words in their writing it is called onomatopoeia. It is quite the word, isn't it? Here, I will print it out for all of you on the chart.

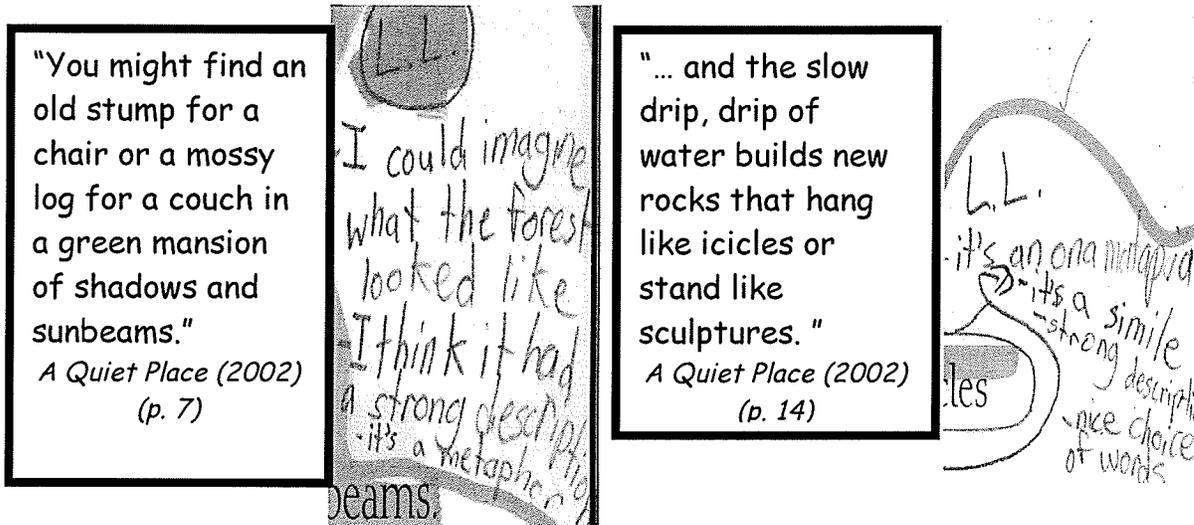
J: The part about the icicles standing like statues...is that called something?

T: You've got it! When an author compares two things using the words, like or as, it is called a simile.

H: Ummm...I am thinking about another part. I think the author uses sabre-tooth tiger for a special reason because you really wouldn't meet a sabre-tooth tiger in a cave. It's extinct. It's a neat way to imagine something. What's that called?

T: Well, I do not know. Sometimes authors do special things and there really isn't a specific name for what they do.

H: We should make up a name for it! We can call it the past/present technique! (Personal Journal, 10/15/03)



L.L. - I could imagine what the forest looked like. I think it had strong description. It's a metaphor.

L.L. - It's an onomatopoeia. It's a simile, strong description. Nice choice of words.

"And you can be a cave dweller in the lair of the saber-toothed tiger."
A Quiet Place (2002)
 (p. 14)

L.L.
 -I thought it was neat saying something like you're in a cave of a sabre-toothed tiger even though it's extinct

L.L. I thought it was neat saying something like you're in a cave of a sabre-toothed tiger even though it's extinct.

Figure 6. Holly's typed text copy

I am very pleased to see students noticing rich language and they are beginning to take risks by creating special names for the written techniques they discover. My hope is that this collaborative large group experience will help lift the quality of writing in the classroom.

Later on in the week I wanted students to have another experience searching for rich writing craft. This time students worked in small groups and they were given chart paper to record their collaborative efforts:

“You will notice that each group has received a simple sentence that doesn’t really give the reader a clear, vivid picture in his or her mind. Your job is to use the crafts we have been talking about – similes, onomatopoeia, and the past/present technique (I wink at Holly) – to transform this sentence and stretch it into lovely language. You will be responsible for sharing your creations when we meet back at the carpet as a large group.”
(Personal Journal, 10/17/03)

Students bring their pieces of chart paper back to the carpet eager to share their improved creations. Each group stands up, reads their simple sentence, and then recites their new improved descriptive piece of writing.

The forest was beautiful.
 The sunbeams shone through the shelter of the trees.
 Morning breezes whispered in my ears.
 Little drops of sparkling water fell from the trees after last night's rain.
 Shining drops of dew glistened on jungle green leaves.
 The sky was a brilliant electric blue and the clouds were pearly white.
 Small butterflies and moths danced among the branches.
 Birds of all sizes sang a song of welcome.
 Everything was so enchanting and silent that I felt as though I was the only one in the world.
 It amazed me to think that my surroundings were only part of the my planet of wonders.
 I picked a bouquet of pastel coloured wildflowers. They smell as good as good as my mother's fruit pies.
 I soon realized that the moment I entered the forest, all my troubles had slipped through my fingertips. It was like trying to hold water with open hands. My soul was finally free.

The forest was beautiful. (Telling)

The sunbeams shone through the shelter of trees. Morning breezes whispered in my ears. Little drops of sparkling water fell from the trees after last night's rain. Shining drops of dew glistened on jungle green leaves. The sky was a brilliant electric blue and the clouds were pearly white. Small butterflies and moths danced among the branches. Birds of all sizes sang a song of welcome. Everything was so enchanting and silent that I felt as though I was the only one in the world. It amazed me to think that my surroundings were only part of my planet of wonders. I picked a bouquet of pastel coloured wildflowers. They smelled as good as my mother's fruit pies. I soon realized that the moment I had entered the forest, all my troubles had slipped through my fingertips. It was like trying to hold water with open hands. My soul was finally free. (Showing)

Figure 7. Small group writing experience

I am delighted with how students' use of craft has made their writing more descriptive. It is my hope that using rich texts as demonstrations and then allowing small groups of students to experiment with language will help lay the foundation for others to try this type of writing in their own written pieces.

These two critical incidents and the one that follows have shown me how different instructional settings can harmoniously intertwine to enrich the lives of individual learners and that, in turn, these learners can “contribute to the functioning of various thought collectives” that make up our classroom (Harste, Short & Burke, 1996, p.58).

A Published Author?

I am sifting through to-do jobs and searching for post-its within my classroom. My usual parent volunteer will be in this morning working with students by helping them practice their math facts. Afterwards, there is usually something to chop, bind or laminate. I need to get that something ready. Allison, a little girl in Grade Four, bursts through the classroom door, rosy-cheeked, smile upon her face, ready to start the day. Eagerly, she rushes over to me to explain her most exciting news. “Good morning, Allison! How are you today?”

“Very good! Guess what! I am published in my Grandma’s writing club book!” she boasts with her bright eyes.

“You are what?”

“See...look here. I am on page 68! It is my fall piece where I practiced showing instead of telling.”

She hands me the book and right there, on page 68, is Allison’s beautiful piece – all about fall – full of craft and sophistication. She also hands me a copy that she typed on the computer. As I begin to read her piece I am overwhelmed by the joy and accomplishment that begins to radiate from her. She is excited and I am very proud of her. (Personal Journal, 02/26/04)

Fall

I look around me. Birds chatter noisily amongst themselves in the trees. I see wisps of smoke curl above the trees and fade into the never-ending sky. Tall black pines tower over me and the rest of the world. The faint sweet scent of smoke soothes me. The piles of leaves call to me invitingly. The voices whisper, shhh, shhh. The urge is too strong. As I sink into the piles, all thoughts clear from my head. I look up at the sky where the geese are flying south. It comforts me to think that I am not alone. The familiar scent of fall leaves washes around me in a wonderland of autumn. I take out a thermos of hot chocolate. I pour it down my throat and it warms me from head to toe.

As I walk toward the swing set, a cat brushes against my legs. "Meeoow," it purrs. I sink onto the swing. I start to push myself high up into the air. I feel a light wind on my face. Suddenly, I hear a call. I go into the house. Mother is standing in the kitchen, a smile on her lips. She holds out a piece of pumpkin pie. I take it from her and try to eat it all at once. My efforts fail but it tastes just as good. She hands me some apple cider to wash it down. The mug is hot and feels unnatural after the chilly wind.

I go outside once more. The leaves still call but I turn them down. The whisper of the wind welcomes me back. Tree branches wave at me and I am glad to be appreciated. As I walk through the forest, I see a small doe and rabbits dozing. I hear the crunch of their feet on the leaves. Soft winds gently blow against my cheeks. I feel at home in the forest, away from the usual noise. I watch as a small chipmunk nibbles on an acorn. I toss it a peanut and it chews it gratefully. The fragrance of wildflowers fills the air. I pick a bouquet, but instead of the sweet smell of wildflowers, the stink of bog weed floats around! Instead, I pick a single red rose and a wondrous sweet fragrance hangs in the air. As I continue my walk, I once again hear a call. I slowly walk into the house. Mother points to the stairs. I trudge up the stairs, as slowly as a turtle. As I comb my hair, I think about the day. I can't wait until tomorrow!

Figure 8. Allison's piece on fall (Simply Write: Heartspace Writer's Anthology 2004)

Now I realize that Allison is a gifted writer. She is a voracious reader of many genres and she often feels compelled to record things within her writer's notebook at a

moment's notice, with no direction from me. However, combined with her gift and passion for writing are the powerful collaborative learning opportunities she has internalized; this generates confidence that she can share with the larger classroom community.

How do these critical incidents relate to my theoretical understandings of learning? Combining my data of student artifacts and classroom conversations, I am able to clearly view my beliefs about inquiry. Asking questions, gaining new perspectives, sharing ideas and developing or extending our understandings of good writing became a collaborative inquiry. An initial knowledge base on writing gradually developed during our whole group search for interesting writing techniques. Taking the time for students to make their own observations, share their connections, reveal their wonderings and hear each other's opinions are all fundamental components of inquiry (Short et al. 1996). Conversations continue and understandings grow when students pursue their investigation of descriptive language within a small group. Allison was able to build upon her understandings of excellent writing. However, she also challenged herself to go beyond her current perspectives by collaborating with others – her peers and published authors. By sharing and presenting, Allison was able to add to our ongoing conversation about writing and inspired others to publish their own pieces. However, Short et al. (1996) warn, “presentations do not assume finality – that the research must be complete and finished; they simply provide an opportunity for students to determine what they have learned” and they transform the thinking of others (p. 171). Our inquiry into the craft of writing was just the beginning. Allison became the catalyst for further explorations or inquiries into reading and writing. Learning is a never-ending process and

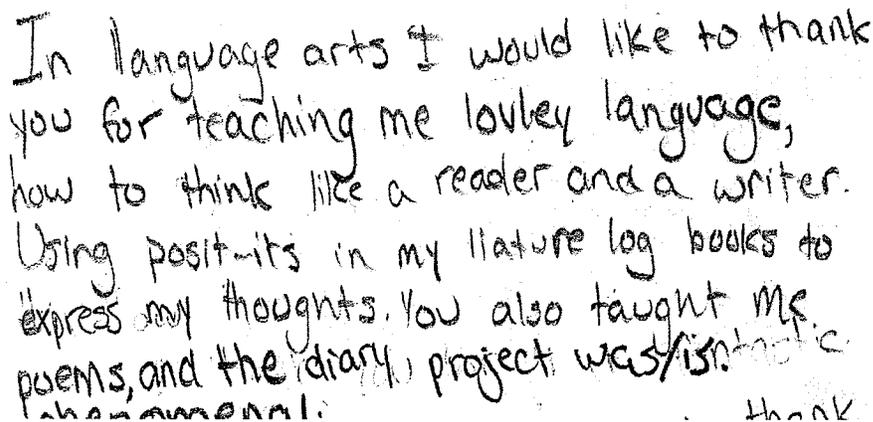
therefore, we will move through a variety of instructional settings - each informing the other - in order for students to benefit from, build upon and broaden their learning.

The Luke and Freebody Connection

“To teach English and language arts, reading and writing, literacies and multiliteracies - to engage with linguistic features, behaviours, and cognitive processes – requires that we have a ‘reading of the world’ in our toolkits” (Allan Luke, 2002, p. 668).

So much of what we do in my classroom involves literacy – reading and writing.

A little note that one of my students, Michelle, gave me at the end of the year invited me to look more deeply into the literacy practices that occur in our classroom:



In language arts I would like to thank you for teaching me lovely language, how to think like a reader and a writer. Using post-its in my literature log books to express my thoughts. You also taught me poems, and the diary project was/is phenomenal. Thank

In language arts I would like to thank you for teaching me lovely language, how to think like a reader and a writer, using post-its in my literature log books to express my thoughts. You also taught me poems, and the diary project was phenomenal.

Figure 9. A portion of Michelle’s thank-you note

When I began reading the work of two Australian researchers, Luke and Freebody (1990, 1997, 1999), my thinking resonated with their definition of literacy education. Their definition is ultimately about the shaping and constructing of literate beings. It is about understanding the power of using and accessing multiple texts (print, media, art, etc.) and knowing how these texts position us emotionally, socially and culturally throughout our lifetime. With this in mind, Luke and Freebody (1999) developed a model, *The Four Resources Model*, where they describe four necessary reader practices needed for students to live literate lives:

<u>CODING PRACTICES</u> (The Code Breaker)	<u>TEXT MEANING PRACTICES</u> (The Text Participant)	<u>PRAGMATIC PRACTICES</u> (The Text User)	<u>CRITICAL PRACTICES</u> (The Text Analyst)
How do I crack this text?	How do the ideas represented in the text string together?	How do the uses of this text shape its composition?	What kind of person, with what interests and values, could both write and read this naively and unproblematically?
How does this text work?	What cultural resources can be brought to bear on this text?	What do I do with this text, here and now? What will others do with it?	What is this text trying to do to me? In whose interest is it written?
What are the patterns and conventions?	What are the cultural meanings and possible readings that can be constructed from this text?	What are my options and alternatives?	Which positions, voices, and interests are at play?
How do the sounds and the marks relate, singly and in combination?			Which are silent and absent?

Figure 10. The four resources model

Luke and Freebody (1999) state that these four social practices function like a dynamic family – “being redeveloped, recombined and articulated in relation to each other on an ongoing basis” (p. 6). The code breaker is concerned with the structure and features of written texts such as the alphabet, patterns of sentences, conventions, etc. The text participant works to understand the text and “may shed tears at a sad part, smile at a humorous incident or may even recall a related life experience” (Wilson, 2002, p. 10). The text user has a purpose and wants the text to provide a function. All texts have different structures and can be used in multiple ways. For example, a recipe, a novel, an instruction manual and a script have different structures and are therefore, used in different ways. Finally, the text analyst tries to “step back, and view the text from a social, critical perspective” (Wilson, 2002, p. 10). Analysts interrogate the text by stepping into the characters’ shoes, figuring out the author’s motives for writing a particular text and examining multiple perspectives that may or may not match the reader’s views of the world. I believe that effective classroom literacy events (reading and writing engagements) allow learners to tap into these practices and to use them in a

non-hierarchical, varied fashion to make sense of the world around them. Studying the work of Luke and Freebody has helped me realize this family of social practices act as heuristic lenses with which to view my own classroom practice.

Short, Harste and Burke's (1996) model can be integrated with Luke and Freebody's (1999) model and my own theoretical model of the structures of inquiry. This combined model gives me a multilayered, theoretical device from which to analyze my own language stories and literacy lessons.

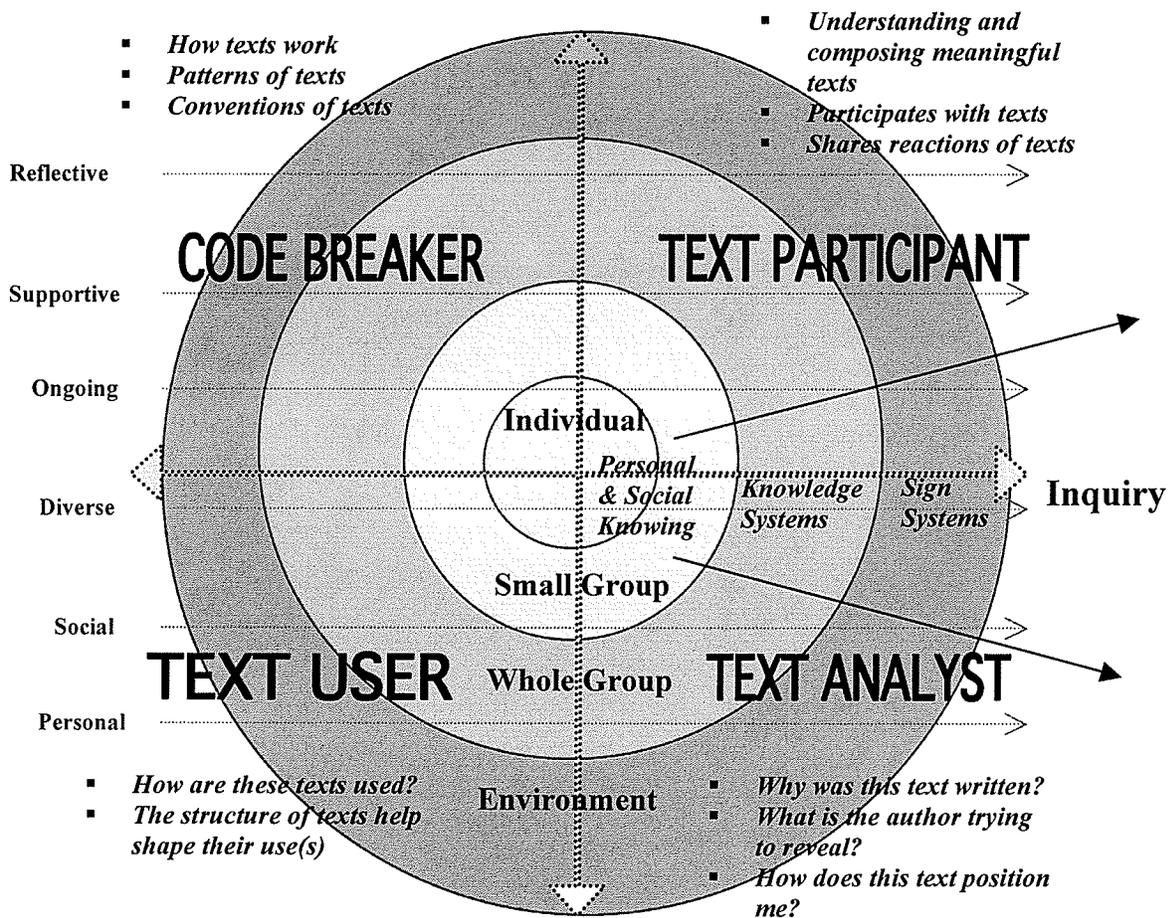


Figure 11. Research framework

Chapter Two:
A Study of Language

Creating a Community of Readers

“We need to offer readers learning experiences where we model for them the reading behaviours we want them to develop, provide opportunity for practice, and fill our classrooms with conversations that make a difference”
(Szymusiak & Sibberson, 2001, p. 12).

“Sherri, I had the cutest conversation with my daughter last night. She was sitting at the kitchen table and was madly writing in a little notebook. I asked her what she was doing and wondered if she was actually working on homework. I mean, I didn't think you'd assign homework on the first day of school...anyways she proceeded to tell me that as soon as you enter Mrs. Steuart's classroom...you automatically become a reader and a writer because you do a lot of it in room 14!” (Personal Journal, 09/05/03)

Creating a literature-rich environment occurs immediately on the first day of school. Of course I want students to share their interests and hobbies in order to get to know one another. However, I also want them to value and understand each other as readers and writers. I begin to do this is by writing to my students before our first day of school. This gives me an opportunity to introduce myself, talk about my summer and ask them to bring in a special text from home to share with the rest of the class:

A Special Picture Book



*Please bring in a picture book to use during the first week of school. It must be a book that reminds you of something in your life. You must feel that you **connect** with this book. Maybe the contents of the book remind you of the lake, a trip you took with your family, a special time with a family member, etc. It is important that you choose a book that you can explain the part or parts of the story that remind you of your life. I have a special book that I plan to share with you. It is called Prairie Summer by Nancy Hundal. If you do not have access to a picture book, a chapter book will do just fine. A picture book would be best, however, because it can be read in one sitting. We will be sharing our special books with each other during the first week of school. Please put your name in it!*

Figure 12. A portion of my summer letter to students

Excitement permeates the room as students begin to take out their special books from their backpacks. This community building experience allows literacy bonds to form between returning students and newcomers. Being seen as a reader and a writer “is an important factor in becoming an integral member of the classroom” (Pierce, 1999, p.361). Comments such as, “Hey, our books are by the same person!” and “What’s your book about?” begin to fill the air. We assemble on the carpet where I begin to share my special book, *Prairie Summer*, by Nancy Hundal (1999). All eyes are glued on me as students learn my intentions for sharing this special picture book:

“I have chosen to share one of my favourite picture books with you today. I love this book because it reminds me so much of the times that I spent with my Nanny at her house during school vacations. I’m going to read the story first, just so you can get a sense of what the story is about and so you can enjoy the flow of Nancy Hundal’s writing. Then I will highlight portions or snippets of the story that really make me think of my own life. Maybe some of you will also find something – a picture, a similar experience or a special passage within this story that reminds you of your life. We can share those afterwards.” (Personal Journal, 09/08/03)

After reading aloud I begin to flip to certain pages of the book to explicitly explain my connections to the story. I do this by using a post-it note strategy where I code the post-it note with “T-S” to show that I am making a “text-to-self connection” and I jot down notes beneath it revealing “a time line of my thinking and a record of my evolution of thought” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, p. 33).

"Collecting rocks down a country road..."

Prairie Summer (1999) p. 12

T → S

This reminds me of collecting rocks at my Nanny's. I spent hours collecting pebbles along my Nanny's back lane. There were so many colours and shapes. I would use an ice-cream bucket.

Connecting to a Passage of Text

T-S: This reminds me of collecting rocks at my Nanny's. I spent hours collecting pebbles along my Nanny's back lane. There were so many colours and shapes. I would use an empty ice-cream bucket.

Figure 13. My think-aloud with *Prairie Summer (1999)*

After sharing some of my own personal connections with the whole class, a couple of students, Sanita and Jaryd, begin to share their connections as we discuss the story aloud:

T: Making connections can happen with the print and the illustrations within a story. Good readers make connections between texts they read and their own lives. Did any of you have any connections with this story?

S: The part about the mosquitoes...and there's a good picture of it.

T: Here (I turn to the page), you mean this part, "Like the mosquitoes, whose tickle left hard and red and hot imprints to scratch. Scratch. Scratch."

S: Yeah. That's pretty much what I did all summer. My family spent a lot of time at our lake and my brother would notice a new mosquito bite on my arm and he would touch it to try and make it itch (giggles emerge from the group)!

T: That's a really funny connection, Sanita. Thanks for sharing. Sometimes our siblings like to play silly tricks on us. I bet you were a little angry (I grin at her and she grins back).

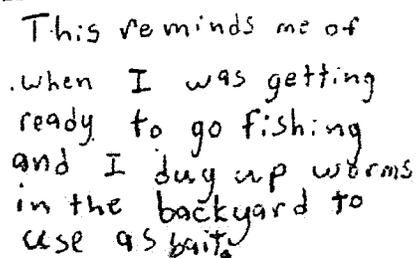
J: The illustration on the cover reminds me of something. I noticed that they repeat the same picture that's on the cover inside the book.

T: Good for you to notice that, Jaryd! What does the cover remind you of?

J: Well...one boy is bouncing a ball and the other boy is blowing bubbles. My little cousin came over when my family was having a barbeque and I was blowing bubbles towards her and she was trying to clap them out of the air. She's really little.

T: Excellent connection! It is funny how one picture can make your mind travel to a fun memory. (Personal Journal, 09/08/03)

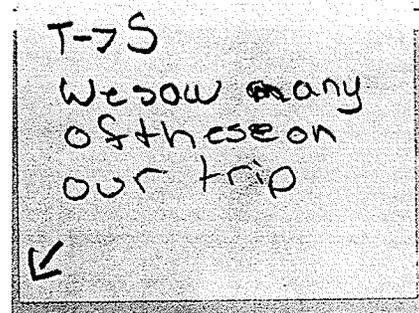
I am pleased to see students constructing meaning from this text by recalling experiences from their own lives and connecting them to a new situation. This collaborative whole group experience provided support and acted as an anchor experience (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000) for students to draw upon as they move off to code text and connect to their own books independently. Talking about texts together also creates a “common language” for students to use when they are sharing opinions, making connections and asking questions about texts (Szymusiak & Sibberson, 2001). Below, Sanita and Jaryd, share their special texts and reveal their text-to-self connections eliciting rich discussion with other students (Mark and Holly) as we assemble back at the carpet:



This reminds me of
when I was getting
ready to go fishing
and I dug up worms
in the backyard to
use as bait.

Jaryd's Text-to-Self Connection

This reminds me of when I was getting ready to go fishing and I dug up worms in the backyard to use as bait.



T->S
We saw many
of these on
our trip
↙

Sanita's Text-to-Self Connection

We saw many of these on our trip.

Figure 14. Text-to-self connections – Sanita & Jaryd

T: After listening to Prairie Summer and watching me share my personal connections out loud, I want you to try the same by yourself with your book. Let's spread out into a large circle and one at a time we can talk about our books. Try to mention the title, the author, what the book is about and share one of your post-its. Let's start with you, Sanita.

S: My special picture book is called Prairie Alphabet (by Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet, 1992). I got this book when I was a bit younger and I really like the pictures because they show what it's like in the country or on the prairie.

T: That is a beautiful picture book. It is funny how people seem to think that ABC books are only for really young children, but your book is a great example of how an author takes a familiar structure (the alphabet) and makes it revolve around a special topic (the prairie). Tell us how you connect to this book.

S: This picture shows a grain elevator and when we travelled through Saskatchewan, we saw a lot of them.

H: Your book, Sanita, is similar to Mrs. Steuart's because it talks about the prairie and your book is also about the prairie.

T: Good point, Holly! Isn't there a special name when we connect one book to another? My Grade Fives should know this (I am smiling)...

J: It's a book-to-book connection or you can call it a text-to-text connection.

T: You've got it, Jaryd! Good memory! Many of you may have had experience with making connections (text-to-self and text-to-text) in previous grades. Good readers make connections with books all the time.

J: Can I share my special book?

T: Of course!

J: My book is called Not a Nibble and the author is Elizabeth Honey (1996). My mom got me this book because I love to fish. I guess that's the connection, but on one of my post-its I wrote, 'This reminds me of when I was getting ready to go fishing and I dug up worms in my backyard to use as bait.'

T: Excellent connection. Let's just continue sharing around the circle (I look at Mark).

M: O.k. You will all be surprised with my book. (Mark holds up his picture book for all to see and instant excitement fills the air.)

S: Hey, that's exactly like my book. We can make a text-to-text connection!

M: But my book is not about the prairie. It's all about the mountains and that's why it is called A Mountain Alphabet (Ruurs, 1996). This book reminds me of my trip to Banff, Alberta.

H: The way the book is done...how it's an ABC book, but the topic is different. (Personal Journal, 09/08/03)

Providing students with a specific lesson (my think-aloud with *Prairie Summer*), having them go off to practise this strategy on their own (using their personal book) and regrouping or coming back together to share special connections makes the process of getting to know one another a rich literacy experience. Students are beginning to take risks by sharing their thoughts aloud with the rest of the class. I am thrilled that our conversation not only includes “reader behaviours” such as connection making (text-to-self and text-to-text), but it also touches upon “writing behaviours” when Holly notices and comments on the structure of both alphabet books.

As our knowledge base of reading and writing continues to grow, I feel it is important for students to have a variety of shared literacy experiences to continue making reading and writing strategies visible and public to all. As I think with Short, Harste and Burke (1996), I agree “that it is through collaboration that students gain new perspectives and outgrow their current selves” and we can do this by encouraging “students to form groups where they are pushed to consider new ideas and to explain their thinking to others” (p. 271).

Later on that week, I decide to build upon our prior experiences by grouping pairs of students together to support one another in their discussion of two different texts. Both *Camping* by Nancy Hundal (1999) and *My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother* by Patricia Polacco (1994) are good choices as students can easily converse about familiar family relationships and child-like experiences. I decide to give students a typed version of these stories in order to give them the freedom of coding, highlighting certain passages and making jots in the margins. I feel that typed texts provide a means of helping students track and later revisit their thinking.

We assemble at the carpet for a brief meeting so I can reflect on recent literacy experiences and set a focus for today's learning:

"I am very impressed that you are all reacting to what you read. Recently we have shared our personal books and we have made many connections with them such as text-to-self and text-to-text connections. We have also talked about parts that we really enjoy (our favourite parts), parts that allow us to make pictures in our minds (visual images), happy parts, sad parts, etc. Today, when you are reading I'd like you to code and highlight portions of the text that really make you think and jot down your ideas either on your post-its or in the margins. You will be able to share your thoughts with your partner as you read these pieces together..." (Personal Journal, 09/11/03)

Students head off to various parts of the room to read together, jot wonderings and orally share their reactions to these stories. It is during these intimate groupings where I observe student interactions with the literature and with each other. There is a purposeful hum in the room. Two students, Kiley and Anna, reveal their involvement with the stories:

**"... he was always nice whenever she was around us; but as soon as she'd leave, he would do something terrible to me and laugh."
My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother (1994) p. 4**

That reminds of my sis, She will only hurt me when it is just me and her, she will pick me up on her shoulders and throw me on the bathroom floor and lock me in ~~my~~ bathroom. Then when my mom comes home my sister gets in so much trouble that I bet she feels like a volcano about to erupt.
Running Time!!

Kiley's Reaction to My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother

T-S (Text-to-Self) - That reminds me of my sis. She will only hurt me when it is just me and her. She will pick me up on her shoulders and throw me on the bathroom floor and lock me in [sic] bathroom. Then when my mom comes home my sister gets in so much trouble that I bet she feels like a volcano about to erupt. Running time!!

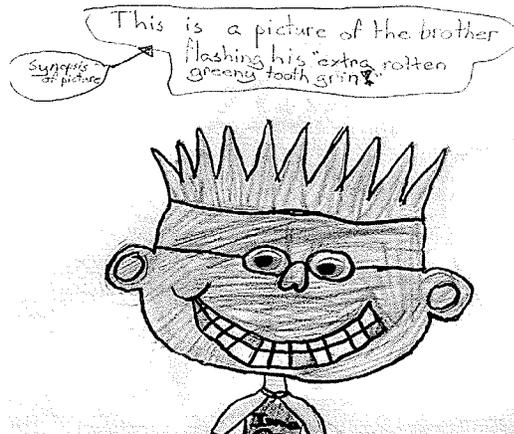
Figure 15. Kiley's reaction to *My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother* (1994)

"Richard gave me one of his extra-rotten, weasel-eyed, greeny-toothed grins."

My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother
(1994) p. 16

"Mom wishes for museums and art galleries. Dad talks about fancy hotels. My sister Laurie wants malls. Duncan dreams of arcades."

Camping (1999) p. 1



Anna's Reaction to My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother

VI (Visual Image) - This is a picture of the brother flashing his "extra-rotten, greeny-tooth grin!" [Synopsis of picture]

alleries.

→ On the holidays this summer everyone in my family wanted to do something different.

Anna's Reactions to Camping

On the holidays this summer everyone in my family wanted to do something different.

Figure 16. Anna's reactions to both texts

Both Kiley and Anna reveal their ability to "entertain a text" (Smith, 1988) – connections are made to their own lives, visual images are created and general feelings are jotted within the margins. These students draw from prior strategy sessions and use these reading strategies simultaneously as they encounter new texts. More importantly, however, is the conversation they engage in as they begin to make more significant connections between what they read and the world around them.

A: The part about the boy dreaming of arcades reminds me of my mom getting mad at my brother and cousin because they were fighting over a Nintendo game and it was a beautiful day outside!

K: My mom and dad think that my sister and I should be playing outside most of the time and not watching t.v. and stuff during the

summer. But it's hard to play with your sister when she is bugging you!

A: (Anna giggles) You mean like this rotten redheaded brother? (she points to her picture) Isn't this the perfect picture of a brother who is bugging you?

K: I think it is perfect, but I would add pigtails to your picture to make it look more like my sis.

A: I think I'll leave it so it looks like my brother! (both girls laugh) Anyways...we are not allowed to watch t.v. all the time either. Sometimes we will go to the library to pick out books. My mom and dad think that we can have just as much fun reading.

K: So what books do you pick out when you go? What's your favourite book?

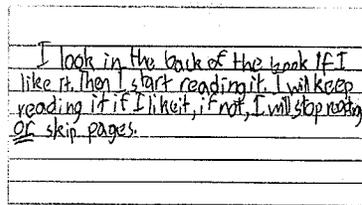
A: Hmmmm. I like lots of books. I just love the way books make you relax or you feel like you are a part of the book when you read it... (Personal Journal, 09/11/03)

I invite Kiley and Anna to share their conversation as we assemble back together as a whole group. Coming together after a small group experience provides opportunities to share insights, ask questions and consider multiple perspectives. In doing so, our evolving "thought collective" (Harste & Leland, 1998) continues to deepen and new inquiries begin to emerge. Kiley and Anna's conversation uncovers an overwhelming class interest in wanting to know more about one another as readers. We brainstorm and decide on the following questions to help guide this study:

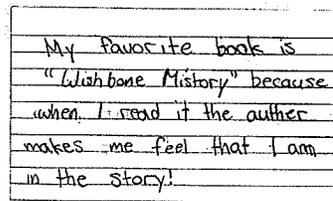
1. Do you have an all time favourite book? Why do you like it so much?
2. What reading strategies do you currently use?
3. Do you enjoy reading alone, with a partner or with a small group? Why?
4. What genres or types of books do you like the best? Explain.
5. Why do you like to read?

Students are given small index cards to jot down their thoughts about our five major questions. These index cards have two purposes. First, they act as tools to help

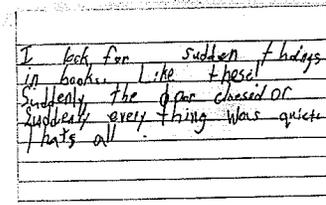
guide discussions. Secondly, they are sorted in a grid-like manner on a bulletin board for easy reference and our thoughts about reading become public to all.



I look in the back of the book if I like it. Then I start reading it. I will keep reading it if I like it, if not, I will stop reading or skip pages.



My favourite book is "Wishbone Mysteries" because when I read it the author makes me feel that I am in the story!



I look for sudden things in books. Like these: suddenly the door closed or suddenly everything was quiet. That's all.

Figure 17. Examples of index cards

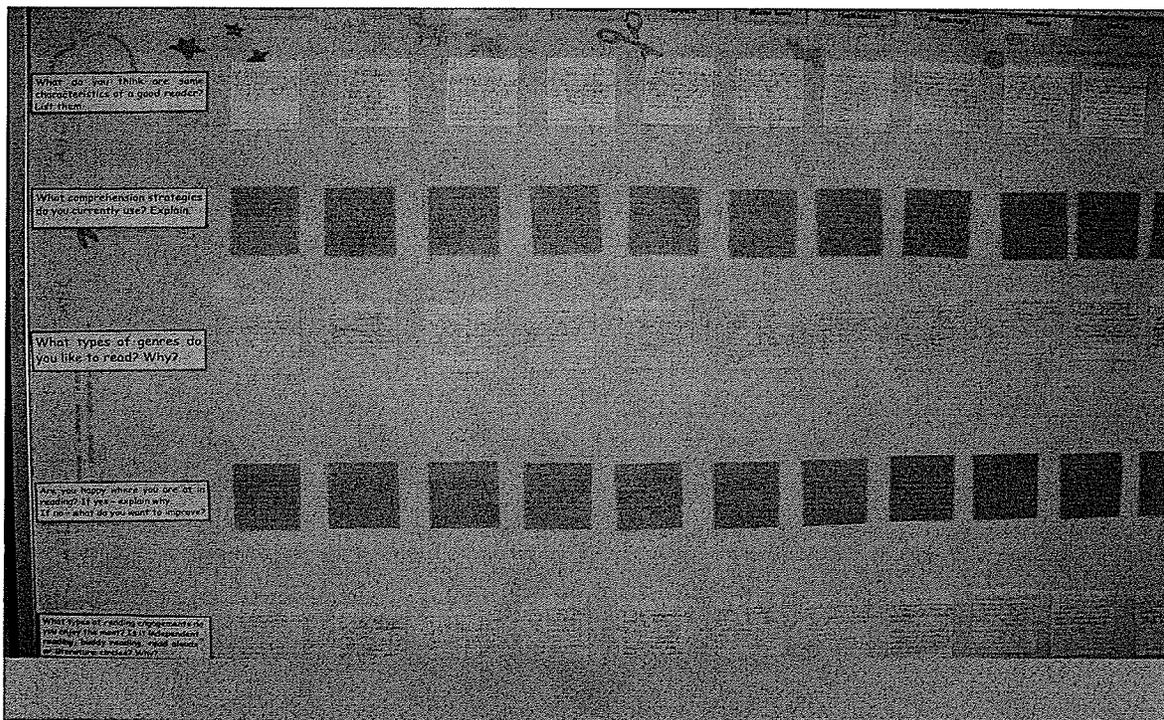


Figure 18. Classroom bulletin board of index cards

Afterwards I ask students to write a reflection to help “hold on” to this experience. I tell them they can use our five questions to organize their thoughts or they

can create their own structure. The following excerpts highlight personal interests and thoughts about reading and these written reflections become valuable entries for student portfolios.

I enjoy buddy reading and independent reading. I enjoy buddy reading because you can talk to your buddy about what is happening in the book. You can talk about what you would do if you were in the character's shoes. I also like independent reading because it is peaceful and quiet. You can also read in your zone and you won't be distracted. Sometimes when I read I say to myself, "Why did the character do that? I would have done this." These are my thoughts about reading.

Mark's Reading Reflection

I enjoy buddy reading and independent reading. I enjoy buddy reading because you can talk to your buddy about what is happening in the book. You can talk about what you would do if (you) were in the character's shoes. I also like independent reading because it is peaceful and quiet. You can also read in your zone and you won't be distracted. Sometimes when I read, I say to myself, "Why did the character do that? I would have done this." These are my thoughts about reading.

The comprehension strategies I like (to) use are I try to put myself into the character's shoes or I would write down my thoughts on a post-it. My favourite book is Face-Off because I think the author is good at writing sports stories and there is suspense all throughout the book. I like literature circles because instead of expressing your feelings on a post-it you can tell a whole group of people what you want to say.

Sam's Reading Reflection

The comprehension strategies I like (to) use are I (try) to put myself into the character's shoes or I would write down my thoughts on a post-it. My favourite book is Face-Off because I think the author is good at writing sport stories and there is suspense all throughout the book. I like literature circles because instead of expressing your feelings on a post-it you can tell a whole group of people what you want to say.

Figure 19. Reading reflections – Mark & Sam

Both Mark and Sam have firm beliefs about themselves as readers. Mark feels that reading is a relationship between his thoughts and the text printed on the page. He remarks freely that his inner voice – “*Why did the character do that? I would have done this.*” – draws him into the text to make connections and meaning with what he is reading. Both boys agree that sharing the enjoyment of a text with others (buddy reading for Mark and literature circles for Sam) makes the process of reading social and active.

Our literacy knowledge base begins to grow as students reveal who they are as readers. It expands and rebuilds itself from constant exposure to demonstrations, peer conversations and social interactions. Classroom knowledge about reading is socially constructed - we (the students and myself) share our thoughts, hear other viewpoints and gain new insights collectively. Thus, a community of learners who value the process of reading begins to emerge.

Thinking through these initial “getting to know you” experiences heightens my understandings of inquiry. Our sharing of picture books during the first few days of school becomes the catalyst for a more in-depth study of each other as readers. Bringing in a personal item from home gives students the opportunity to express current understandings about themselves and about reading. After viewing my whole group demonstration using post-its, students try out this strategy individually by tracking their own thoughts or reactions. Coming back together as a whole group gives students opportunities to share their discoveries. Students also work in small groups to practise coding two different texts and to engage in conversations about the stories they are reading. All of these transitions – working as individuals, in small groups, and discussing ideas as a whole class – help students construct understandings about language and literacy. In turn, these individual insights naturally “propel us forward” adding to the social knowing of the class (Short and Burke, 1991, p. 26).

My sharing of *Prairie Summer* allows me to model the dynamic nature of Luke and Freebody’s family of reading practices – code breaker, text user, text participant and text analyst. Before reading the story, I explain that this particular text reminds me of the times that I spent with my Nanny and I want students to get to know me better (text user). While reading the story I demonstrate a method of tracking reactions and students see

how I encounter and decode the print (code breaker). During this time I also express my thoughts out loud and students provide their personal connections to the story (text participant).

It is Anna's piece, however, that pushes our thinking about reading in a deeper and more critical manner.

Reading

Reading is an escape to another world. Reading is like floating on a cloud of happiness drifting over the fighting earth below us. Reading grabs you and slowly sucks you in until you completely vanish from the real world. Reading loves the way you keep your eyes fixed on the fictional fantasy in your hands. But then, suddenly reading begins to fade and you shut the joyful tale. You go off and sit in front of a blinding screen and simply just stare. You click on mechanical machines. Reading gets pushed out of the way for all the mind-mixing things you do. You start playing exercising sports, crafts, science and lessons. Reading gets pushed, washed completely away. Then when you are simply doing nothing, you bump into a shelf. A shelf that is the most incredible shelf, because it holds reading. A simple, crumpled book falls onto the floor beneath your very feet. You slowly bend to pick it up. It is one of your favorite stories. It's very old but you know old looking books hold the best stories. Reading slowly begins to crawl back. You open the cover and SNAP! Reading instantly races back. You read the first line. You start reading and reading pushes all the activities away just as they had to her. Reading is important again. And you read, your mind trapped in the imaginative place she takes you. You rejoice! Reading is taking your real self away and pulling into her magical world. Reading rejoices! You have finally found the quiet place that once held you like a mother holds a child. You love her again and she loves you.

Figure 20. Anna's reading reflection

Anna's reflection makes my heart race. I am overwhelmed with her ability to write such a smooth, sophisticated and critical piece on the complexities of reading. It is obvious that Anna is aware of worldly issues going on around her. First she touches on the declining interest in reading by stating, "*reading begins to fade*" due to "*mechanical*

machines" and "*all the mind-mixing things you do*". She also hints not to "judge a book by its cover" because it is the "*older looking books that hold the best stories*". Reference is even made to present times for she compares the peaceful activity of reading to the "*fighting earth below us*". There is no doubt that Anna loves to read. She mentions earlier, during her conversation with Kiley, that reading is relaxing. Her magical words say, "*reading is like floating on a cloud of happiness*" and a comparison is made between the love of a book and how "*a mother holds a child*". I agree with Short and Burke (1991) when they state:

We construct stories about our experiences as we dialogue with others and make connections between aspects of our current experience and stories we already have constructed from earlier experiences. Our view of the world becomes a web of interconnected stories which continues to grow and change in complexity (p. 30).

These first weeks of school are more than the swapping of summer vacation stories. Instead, a united spirit embraces the classroom and paves the way for future action. Anna glances up at her peers as she finishes reading her piece aloud. Everyone sits motionless on our carpeted area of the room. Wide-eyed students begin to look at each other and at me...

*A: Any comments or questions? (Anna nods to Heather)
Yes?*

H: You sure sound like a real author! I like how you used lovely language...like when you said reading is like floating on a cloud.

A: Thank-you. (She looks around the room trying to decide whom to pick next) I'll pick a boy this time. Mark?

M: I think it is neat the way you begin with reading, then you don't, but then you do read at the end. Where did you get that idea?

A: Ummm. Well...nowadays there's so many different video games and stuff like that and my parents always try to make sure we don't forget about reading. So I guess I got the idea from that. Holly? (She nods to Holly)

H: I'm piggybacking on Heather's comment. You do sound like a real author! I think we should post it up in the classroom somewhere!

It is unanimous. Anna's piece is framed and posted in our book nook area for all to enjoy. It is through demonstration, conversation and reflection that students learn to express themselves, share their expertise and in doing so become powerful role models for one another. Reading is not simply a skill. It has become a way of living within our room.

Students are all valued members of the classroom. A great sense of camaraderie among students arises when individuals are asked to demonstrate their current understandings with peers. Students rise to the occasion and internalized individual strengths become powerful demonstrations for others. A "common language" begins to form making whole group sharing sessions smooth and productive. Comments like "*I'd like to piggyback on Heather's idea...*" and "*any comments or questions?*" naturally occur after modelling and guided practice.

Taking risks by following the lead of students, observing their conversations, and using them as "curricular informants" (Short, Harste and Burke, 1996) is empowering for all. Students are language researchers by formulating a common group of questions to help them tap into the reading lives of their peers. New perspectives about the reading process are considered as students converse with one another. Personal index cards sorted into a large, public chart and individual written reflections are the tools students use to express meaning. It is Anna's reflective piece that pushes us forward to a deeper appreciation of story and her words become a collective stance on reading.

Students are code breakers – jotting down thoughts on post-its with texts they brought in from home and the typed texts read with a partner. Students are text participants - engaging in dialogue with peers by sharing connections, visual images, etc. They are text users - reading their own picture books and two different typed texts to get to know one another and share experiences. Students are text analysts - sharing a piece of themselves found in a special book brought to school, by asking each other questions and writing reflections about the reading process and discussing Anna's reflective piece on reading.

Detectives of Text

“Fill them up. Read aloud, read silently, recite, do choral readings, tell stories, dramatize, sing. Fill them up some more. Then step back and watch what happens” (Harwayne, 1992, p. 1)

As previously discussed, students enjoy acting like language detectives searching for interesting writing structures and flowing language in picture books and other texts found in the classroom. I agree with Katie Wood Ray (1999) who comments that the possibilities for writing are limitless “to students who live in communities in which they read like writers and study together the craftsmanship of writers” (p. 16). She continues to say:

The conversations that happen during an inquiry into craft make many techniques available to inexperienced writers that, without such inquiry, might have seemed out of reach. Slowing down to do more than simply reread something you’ve noticed an experienced writer doing in a text, slowing down to name it and figure out how it was done, helps you better imagine doing this kind of crafting in your own writing (p. 16).

Students have their writer’s notebooks in hand and the room is fairly quiet. There is a bit of a “buzz” occurring on the carpet. I notice that Anna and Erica are searching through our “treasure chest bin”. This bin holds mentor picture books or stories containing specific structures or breathtaking language. The majority of these texts have already been introduced to students and now, they return to them, using the texts as tools during writing time. Erica takes the book, *A Quiet Place*, by Douglas Wood (2002) and hands it to Anna. As a class we have discussed the lovely language – similes, metaphors

and onomatopoeia found within this book. These girls are interested in something and they begin to share their wonderings with me.

T: I see you girls are looking at A Quiet Place again.

E: Anna and I are trying to figure something out for her idea on writing about winter.

T: You are writing a piece about winter, Anna?

A: Well, after looking at A Prairie Boy's Winter, I think I'll make a booklet about things you do in winter.

T: That sounds like a great idea. What are you noticing about this book (I point to A Quiet Place)?

A: When we read this book as a class, we talked about the similes and stuff – like they way he says, “the wind sings in the leaves”, but I think we have found something else. I think Holly might have had something.

T: I remember Holly was interested how the author used an extinct animal in the book. I think she called it the past/present technique.

E: Here, I'll go get my duotang so I can mark the parts we're talking about.

A: Grab a highlighter too!

E: O.k. On every page there's a place and he imagines something.

T: I see. Tell me more.

A: Here... (Anna takes Erica's duotang, which already holds a typed text version of this story. She proceeds to highlight 'woods' and 'timber wolf') we start out in the woods and the author pretends to be something in the forest.

E: And if you turn the page... (Erica turns the page and highlights 'pond' and 'fisherman') now he is thinking he is in the pond and he's a fisherman. I can't believe we missed this!

You could look in the woods. *place*
 You might find an old stump for a chair
 or a mossy log for a couch
 in a green mansion of shadows and sunbeams.
 It's not really quiet, of course.
 Blue jays scream warnings, and wind sings in the leaves.
 But it feels quiet. And you can be a timber wolf,
 the gray ghost of the forest. *imagine*
 The woods could be your quiet place.

You could sit by a pond,
 A heron by the shore
 stands still as a tree branch,
 and the water is so calm it looks like a mirror.
 Then a frog plops from a lily pad,
 and your face begins to wiggle.
 And you can be the world's greatest fisherman
 Reeling in a monster catch.

Figure 21. Notes on *A Quiet Place* (2002)- Erica & Anna

T: I see you girls have discovered how the story is structured around a type of a pattern. What would you call it?

E: That's what we're thinking about...we thought maybe "Pick a Place and Imagine!"

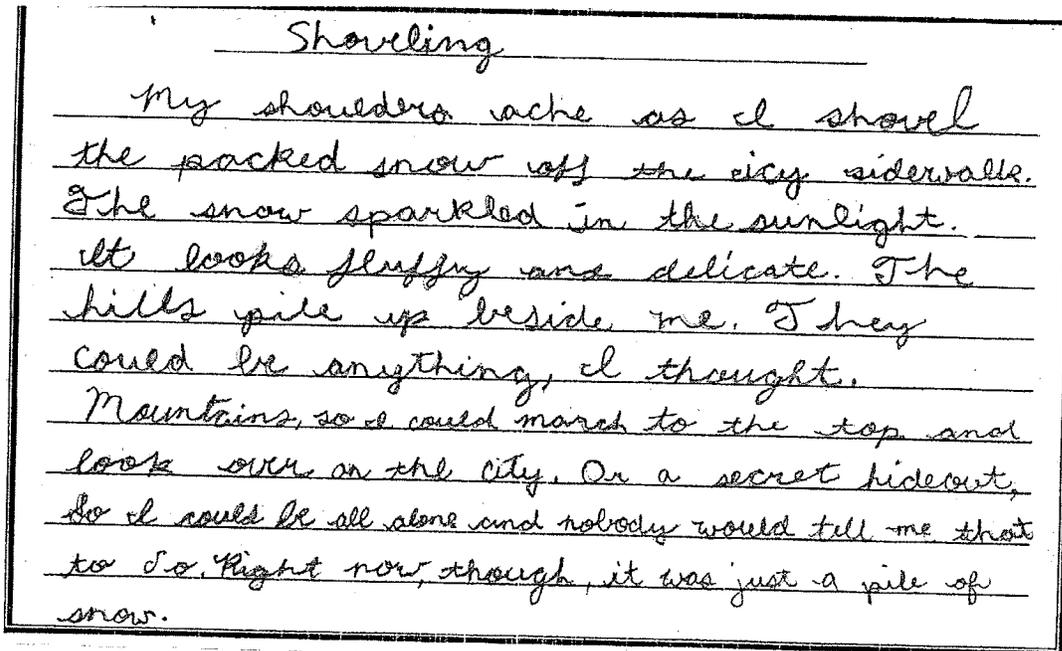
Anna and Erica are very pleased with their new discovery. It is wonderful to see students supporting each other as they search for unique structures and experiment with their own writing. Anna and Erica take this initiative by searching through classroom resources. Choosing a familiar text, analyzing it a second time and finding something new is empowering. Anna maps out memorable winter experiences in her writer's notebook before writing more specifically about certain winter-like moments.



Figure 22. Anna's winter memories map

The rest of the class is intrigued with our newly created crafting technique, "Pick a Place and Imagine". Giving students opportunities to share their wonderings and ideas with peers deepens relationships among students and empowers them to make informed decisions about their writing. Below, Anna shows how she interprets a newly generated writing structure and applies it in her piece on winter. Students become motivated by

Anna's determination and therefore begin to pursue ideas with greater purpose for publication.



My shoulders ache as I shovel the packed snow off the icy sidewalk. The snow sparkled in the sunlight. It looks fluffy and delicate. The hills pile up beside me. They could be anything, I thought. Mountains, so I could march to the top and look over the city. Or a secret hideout, so I could be all alone and nobody would tell me that [what] to do. Right now, though, it was just a pile of snow.

Figure 23. Anna's piece on shoveling

This artifact provides further insight into the cyclical nature of learning with literacy. Texts are not simply used once and then abandoned. There are no expiration dates with books. Reading and writing engagements have purpose, building upon one another in order to deepen and extend our understandings. Inviting students to discuss a variety of books as a whole class and within small groups establishes connections and paves the way for students to voice individual opinions. Anna and Erica are compelled to

dig deeper and study *A Quiet Place* by Douglas Wood (2002) a second time. Curiosity drives them forward as they begin to see the structure that Douglas Wood uses throughout to hold his story together. Noticing these types of student collaborations and knowing when and how to capitalize on these moments is something I continue to learn. Watching Anna and Erica act as text users (selecting the appropriate book), code breakers (searching for craft) and text analysts (observing what an author did, naming it and deciding how to use it in their own writing) during writing time makes me appreciate the dynamic qualities of literacy. In fact, Anna's mini-lesson on "*Pick a Place and Imagine*" invites the rest of the class to think with her, acting like texts participants.

Tracking our Thinking: Charts or Codes?

I can see students are beginning “to see themselves as knowledge makers who find and frame problems worth pursuing” (Siegel, 1995, p.3). In response to Erica’s “I can’t believe we missed this!” as a class we decide to revisit other texts to take a closer look. I decide to build upon our knowledge of the author Nancy Hundal. Students are already familiar with two of her texts, *Prairie Summer* (1999) and *Camping* (2002). Students pair up with a buddy and I provide a plan of action before they head off to continue “reading like writers”:

“We can certainly see why it’s important to revisit books that we really enjoy because you never know what you’ll find! (Jaryd looks at me and adds, “Like when you watch a movie over and over again. You always notice something new!) You’re right! Today you will be re-reading Camping by Nancy Hundal. I’d like to you keep track of what you notice. You can use your highlighters and make notes in the margins or you can use post-its. You might even make a chart listing your thoughts, the author’s sentences and technique name. Afterwards, I’d like you to write a reflection about what you noticed or discovered.” (Personal Journal, 10/21/03)

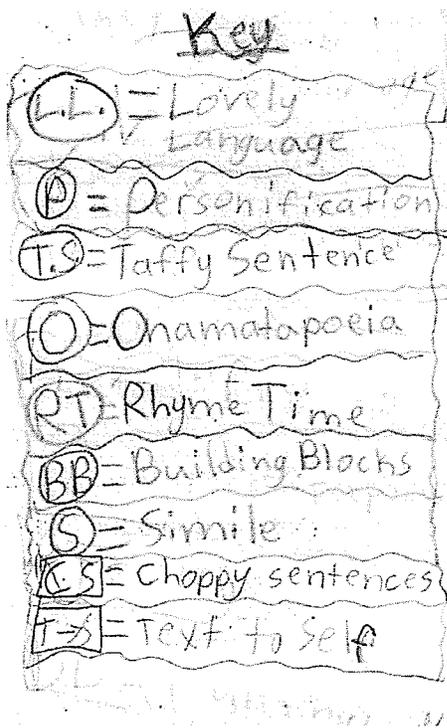
Students get out their typed texts and I take this opportunity to do a “walkabout” so I can make sure everyone understands the task and is using their time wisely. I can hear the conversations taking place. I notice Jana and Holly rummaging around with a ruler. “No, no, Jana. Not like that. Here let me show you,” directs Holly sounding a bit flustered. Jana, on the other hand, pushes her sheet reluctantly towards Holly, puffing her cheeks up with a big sigh. Instead of interrupting them, I continue to watch them to try to understand what is actually taking place. Holly continues to move her ruler vertically along her page making a chart. It is a three-column chart (see Figure 24) with the headings “Name It!”, “What the Text Says” and “Explain It!” I am very curious, but I

continue to watch hoping to see a conversation that will flow into a positive and productive discussion.

NAME IT	What the text says	EXPLAIN IT!
Choppy sentences	Camping. Mosquito bites, burnt food.	I like it how she can explain camping in choppy sentences
Text Self →	Camping. And I long for Disneyland.	This reminds me of when I was there.

Figure 24. Holly's three-column chart

Holly hands the chart to Jana and comments, "This should help you when you write about the things we noticed. See, as we find stuff, think of a name for it, write the real sentence down and then explain our ideas. You can have your own chart and I'll have mine." I can see Holly, who's in Grade Five, taking a softer tone in her leadership role with Jana, who's in Grade Four. Jana, feeling a bit relieved responds, "O.k. But I have an idea for making a key for the things I find like in math when you make a picture graph." Holly nods her head in agreement. I am impressed with their ability to listen to one another, incorporate each other's ideas and proceed with enthusiasm. I approach them to see their budding observations and to ask them to explain their thinking, which they have documented on Jana's typed text (see Figure 25).



When Dad pushes, the creaking metal finally says yes,
brings up its chilling water. Such hard won water tastes good.

And dishes. Hot water suds in a bucket, sometimes love
late at night by touch, not sight.

Figure 25. Typed text with coding key – Jana

T: I see you girls have quite the plan underway.

J: Holly came up with this chart to kind of sort our thoughts out before we do a write-up.

T: Good for you, Holly. I like the headings you've used for your chart.

H: Jana was a little unsure of how to write our discussion up afterwards. (Jana begins to turn a little red.)

T: Don't worry about that Jana. Holly's chart is only one way to organize thoughts. Don't forget, Holly has already experienced reading and writing in our class last year when she was in Grade Four like you are now (Jana begins to smile.)

H: You should see Jana's key idea! (Holly points to Jana's typed text and urges her to explain it to me.)

J: Well, instead of writing down the craft, I thought a key could make things easier. O stands for onomatopoeia, RT – that one Holly made up 'cause we see that there's rhyming going on and Holly called it 'Rhyme Time'.

H: We also noticed that she writes a lot of short words and I called that CS- which stands for 'Chopsticks' or you can call it 'Choppy Sentences' like Jana does.

T: Wow! I am very happy that you girls are sharing ideas on how to organize your thinking. Good work!

it. As I continued to read I noticed a personification. The author wrote, "Camped out in a deer's living room, swimming in a racoon's kitchen." The author uses personifications in her story, to help describe certain things in an interesting way. As I continued to read I found another T-S connection as the author wrote "Tooooot of a train." When I read that I thought of the tooot of a train that I always hear from my house. Sometimes when I go outside I can see the train going by, off in the distance. Another thing I came across was a list. The author wrote "Mom wishes for museums and art galleries, dad talks about fancy hotels, my sister Laurie wants malls." Nancy Hundal uses lists throughout her story to also describe things. As I continued to read I found yet another T-S connection when the author wrote, "Camp food." It reminded me of when me + my family have a sunflower seed spitting. We take a sunflower seed + whoever spits it the farthest wins. I never win, but it's really fun. When I read I found chopsticks, when the author wrote "Freeway entrance - speed up exit right to highway - slower merge left - gravelled laneway - crawling." I named that chopsticks because it's choppy, like it's this and that and that and this. The author also uses chopsticks a few times. As I continued to read I found

...As I continued to read I noticed personification. The author wrote, "Camped out in a deer's living room, swimming in a racoon's kitchen." The author uses personification in her story to help her describe certain things in an interesting way. As I continued to read I found another T-S connection as the author wrote, "Tooooot of a train." When I read that I thought of the tooot of a train that I always hear from my house. Sometimes when I go outside I can see the train going off in the distance. Another thing I came across was a list. The author wrote, "Mom wishes for museums and art galleries, dad talks about fancy hotels, my sister Laurie wants malls." Nancy Hundal uses lists throughout her story to also describe things. As I continued to read I found yet another T-S connection when the author wrote, "Camp food." It reminded me of when me and my family have a sunflower seed spitting (contest). We take a sunflower seed and whoever spits it the farthest wins. I never win, but it's really fun. When I read I found chopsticks when the author wrote, "Freeway entrance, speed up, exit right to highway, slower merge left, gravelled laneway, crawling." I named that chopsticks because it's choppy, like it's this and that and this. The author uses chopsticks a few times. As I continued to read I found...

Figure 26. Holly's written reflection on *Camping* (2002)

Getting students to reflect on their discoveries after a shared experience is a great way to record what they were thinking “as readers” and “as writers” (see Figure 26). Holly’s charting strategy proves to be a successful way to help Jana and herself organize their thinking. Holly’s written reflection shows the structure of her newly constructed model - “name it, author’s words and explain it”. These girls are acting as text users – rereading the book *Camping* in search of the interesting ways Nancy Hundal uses language: as code breakers – reading the text and finding ways to record and organize ideas, as text participants – enjoying the story and drawing connections with events and characters, and as text analysts – figuring out how Nancy Hundal structured her writing around a common theme and how her use of craft added interest to her story. I want to reiterate that giving students the time to share ideas and hear other viewpoints can in turn become powerful demonstrations for others in the class. This time, however, these students added to my personal understandings. Students need to be made aware of the many different ways we organize our thinking. Post-its, highlighters and making notes in the margins are several ways that students can track their thinking as they read. Both ideas, Holly’s model for organizing reactions and Jana’s key for coding reactions, are well received by the class. It is even noted that the phrase, “Name it! Author’s Words! Explain it!” has a bit of a rhythm to it when said aloud. After continual chanting, I decide to post Holly’s words on our bulletin board for others to refer to when writing about their reactions to texts.

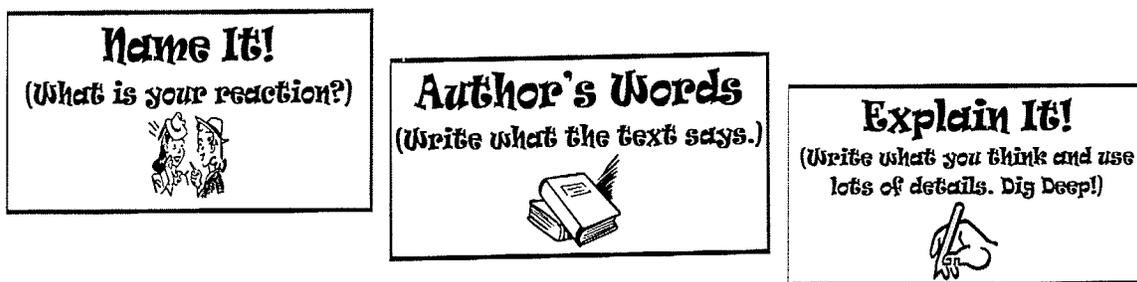


Figure 27. Chart displaying a method for writing reactions to texts

Meetings where we join together as a class on a continual basis help create and maintain a supportive and accepting community of learners. Holly and Jana feel secure and begin to value their own and each other's ideas. Thus, "they become capable of supporting the meaning making of others" (Short & Burke, 1991 p. 26). Pearson and Stephens (1994) say, "we want students to learn from and with each other, and to understand that knowledge is socially constructed, and so we provide time for students to work with, and learn from, each other" (p.37). In doing so, students become exposed to multiple interpretations, gain knowledge from differing perspectives and in the end, a diversity of thought is celebrated.

**Chapter Three:
Looking Closer**

Crafting Connections Among Texts

Building upon our fascination with writing, I decide to share a collection of texts written by the author Jane Yolen. As a class we have been studying the animals found in each layer of the rainforest and after a shared reading of her book, *Welcome to the Greenhouse* (1993), students are enthused about the way she plays with language. Students work in small groups analyzing *Welcome to the Greenhouse* (1993), *Welcome to the Icehouse* (1998), *Owl Moon* (1987) and *Nocturne* (1997). Afterwards, we share our findings, decide names for these discovered techniques and develop the following chart depicting her craft:

What the Text Says	Crafting Technique
Welcome to the green house. Welcome to the hot house. Welcome to the tent of the warm wet days. (Jane Yolen, <i>Welcome to the Green House</i>)	Taffy Sentences
When you go crawling you have to be quiet/brave.. (Jane Yolen, <i>Owl Moon</i>)	Repetition
The shadow hooted again. (Jane Yolen, <i>Owl Moon</i>)	Personification
A train whistle blew long and low like a sad, sad song. (Jane Yolen, <i>Owl Moon</i>)	Simile
Whoa...Whoa...Whoa...Whoa...Whoa.. (Jane Yolen, <i>Owl Moon</i>)	Onomatopoeia
This is a house. A bright house. A wet house. A warm house. A single and a swarm house. A fish and bird and bee house. (Jane Yolen, <i>Welcome to the Green House</i>)	Rhythm wording with the use of "and"
A flash of blue.. A splash of golden.. (Jane Yolen, <i>Welcome to the Green House</i>)	Painting technique

Figure 28. Crafting chart on Jane Yolen

I feel it is also very important for students to draw connections between books that are written by different authors. Students need to notice that writers share similar

crafting techniques (*ways with words and structural*), yet find uses for them in different ways for different purposes. I agree with Katie Wood Ray (1999) when she states:

If I can show a student more than one example of a certain type of technique using different texts, then it helps the student understand the craft as separate from topic so much more easily, and it makes it easier for that student to envision the craft in his or her writing (p.194).

Next, to help students make these text-to-text crafting connections, they are handed a typed-text copy of the story *Time of Wonder* (1989), written by Robert McCloskey. Before we begin to read and discuss this story together, students go off to grab clipboards, highlighters and pencils. I begin to share my plans while students are settling down at the carpet:

“As we read this book together, I’d like each of you to think about all of the other authors that we have studied so far this year. While I read passages of this story aloud, I’d like you to stop me and share if you notice any familiar crafting techniques that are similar to other books we have read in the past.” (Personal Journal, 11/15/03)

After reading the first couple of pages, I look up to the many raised hands of students eager to share. Allison points out that a passage from McCloskey’s text, “*the gulls... start giggling and laughing because they too were suddenly surprised by the wake,*” is personification. We had just discovered earlier that Jane Yolen also uses personification in some of her books to make her stories descriptive. Picking up the book *Owl Moon* (1987) Allison points out personification from this text to back up her thinking. She flips through the pages and she reads, “*the shadow hooted again.*” I

acknowledge her comments and can readily see how capable students are of recognizing craft, specifically personification, across multiple texts.

Next, Anna comments on two different passages from McCloskey's text (see Figure. 29). The first passage is "*They dive off the rock and swim, then stretch out, dripping, in the sun, making salty young silhouettes on the old scars made by the glacier*" and the second passage is "*In the evening, when the tide is high again, and all your guests have gone, you row around to the point, feeling lonely, until an owl asks a question*". Anna has a bit of a puzzled look on her face as she begins to share.

A: Well, I notice a couple of things about the first sentence. It reminds me of another book that we read about fireflies.

I ask another student, who happens to be sitting close to our classroom library, to hand me the text, *Fireflies!* by Julie Brinckloe (1985). Anna turns to the page and reads a sentence from Brinckloe's book, "*Blinking on, blinking off, dipping low, soaring high above my head making white patters in the dark.*"

A: I guess I think these two sentences are sort of like each other. I think the parts – 'making salty young silhouettes' (from McCloskey's text) and 'making white patterns in the dark' (from Brinckloe's text) sound kind of the same.
T: Interesting discovery, Anna. You've noticed that each author really inspires us to visualize what is happening in his or her stories. I guess you could say both sentences focus on movement.

... humor, start giggling and laughing because they too were suddenly surprised by the wake.

Repetition
Personification

n, and loud with happy noise of children to have come to spend the day.

They dive off the rock and swim, then stretch out, dripping, in the sun, making salty young silhouettes on the old cars made by the glacier.

In the afternoon, when the tide is t, they build a castle out of rocks and driftwood below the spot where they had hilly-whoppered and dog-paddled during the morning.

Taffy technique
can picture shadows of children



Blender

Figure 29. Copy of Anna's typed text

A: Yeah. I can picture the shadows of people jumping into the water and I can also picture those bugs dancing all over the place. My second comment is from this sentence that I highlighted (she points to McCloskey's text and reads the passage – "In the evening, when the tide is high again, and all your guests have gone, you row around to the point, feeling lonely, until an owl asks a question.") I think it is like one of Jane Yolen's 'taffy sentences' because it is stretched out using commas and keeps on getting longer and longer.

As a class, we refer back to our chart showing Jane Yolen's work. Other students in the class challenge Anna's idea of the 'taffy technique'. Some feel that the 'taffy technique' is accomplished by using a string of sentences, with each sentence getting longer than the previous one. However, another student, Justin, who also studied the text *Welcome to the Greenhouse* (1993), supports Anna's idea. To help strengthen Anna's comment, he immediately looks at our chart and then chooses a passage from Yolen's text to read aloud.

J: Just wait a minute...I was also in Anna's group when we looked at that book together. We also thought the 'taffy technique' was more like a group of sentences and each sentence gradually gets longer like the one on our chart. But this sentence (he reads from the book) – 'This is not a quiet house, not even in the night: with the chirr-chirrup of chorusing frogs from limbs and logs, from trunks and leaves, from the water's edge, from the rocky ledge, welcoming the dark'. This is only one sentence, but it gets bigger and bigger with commas.

I am in awe of the risk-taking students show sharing ideas and the tiny details being noticed as we delve further into our study of writing. Anna, being a strong role model for all, shares what she feels is an insightful discovery, connecting a sentence from the text, *My Time of Wonder* (1989) to another text, *Fireflies!* (1985). She proceeds further with her discoveries when she finds a version of Yolen's 'taffy technique' within McCloskey's text. She makes her thinking public, fully knowing that others may not agree with her. "Learners gain new perspectives on their experiences by taking the risk to state what they believe. This process makes thinking public so others can help by providing critical challenges through dialogue" (Short, Harste & Burke, 1996). Justin, on the other hand, realizes that Anna's connection is not an exact match to what the majority of the class understands; yet, he takes on a supportive role. He finds a sentence in the book, *Welcome to the Greenhouse* (1993) that matches closely to what Anna refers to as, "getting longer and longer with commas".

This whole group discussion of craft, especially the risk-taking conversations of Anna and Justin, inspires others to value their own personal thoughts and acts as the impetus to make their thinking public. In this way, our community is enriched, conversations continue and there is a sense of constant renewal. Shelley Harwayne (1999) states:

Students who become investigators of good writing become colleagues of their teachers, sharing the responsibility of discovering quality literature. They also become an invaluable resource as their classmates study new genres (p. 95).

Short (1990) makes me realize that my students are actively involved, all are committed, “not just working side by side, but thinking together to build new ideas that go beyond what could be accomplished individually” (p. 34). Short continues: “a learning community that encourages collaborative relationships and conversations among all learners creates new potentials for learning and breaks down obstacles that keep them from learning more fully with and from others” (p. 51).

Inviting my students to inquire into the written texts of others, has not only given them powerful opportunities to participate in in-depth writing conversations with fellow classmates and grow as independent, confident writers, but it has enabled me to “step-up close and take a better look” (Comber, 2001) at my own practice using the four literacy practices of Luke and Freebody (1999). Again, students study the writing techniques of various authors making our reading a purposeful act (text users). Students participate with the different stories (text participants) by revealing how an author’s choice of words creates mental images or pictures. Students are also code breakers and text analysts by searching for text patterns, language structure, and by drawing crafting connections across different texts and different authors. Analyzing my own language stories and literacy lessons using Luke and Freebody’s four literacy practices reinforces the notion that these practices work together in a recursive nature. Students are simultaneously working as code breakers, text participants, text users and text analysts. The functioning

of these practices is integral to how I view our reading or writing engagements within the classroom. One experience builds upon the next – we read and write texts, share our findings, ask questions, and rethink ideas. All of these processes occur in an integrated fashion. We are a community of inquirers who use reading and writing to learn about each other and the world around us.

I Wish I Said That!

Working together as a community of inquirers, students suggest they return to books they have read independently to see if they can recognize interesting writing techniques they may have previously overlooked. Everyone is enthusiastic and eager to find passages within their books. Using the knowledge gained from our whole group experiences, small group collaborations, and listening to the recent epiphanies of peers, all provide a foundation for students to build upon as they begin their own independent searches. Mark chimes in, “Going back to some of my chapter books will be fun because I can look for things like I’m a writing expert!” Building upon Mark’s comment, I encourage students to search for passages they think are so lovely that they wish they had written them. However, I advise them to not be overly focused on finding a taffy sentence, a simile or a personification. Instead, I want our celebration of searching for the interesting ways authors use language to continue in hope that students will be able to tap into these experiences when they begin publishing their own texts. I also inform students they will be responsible for sharing their passage and explaining what they like about it to the entire group.

Students go off, acting as “writing experts”, in search of unique passages they feel are too good to miss. During this time I have the opportunity to talk to individual students about the passages of text they find personally interesting. Of course I want all of us to share our thinking as one collaborative community. As Shelley Harwayne (2000) states, “pulling up alongside a student to talk about the work in hand,” gives me a chance to personally connect with each student, offer support if needed and give them individual attention (p. 65).

I begin conferencing with Nathan. He is holding the book, *I Was a Sixth Grade Alien* (1999), and is smiling from ear to ear. I ask him if he has found anything interesting and he proceeds to tell me, “You are going to absolutely love this! I mean, it would be so much fun to write like this guy all day long!” He continues to feverishly copy down the following passage of text:

Please, Mom, oh please please please please please. You don't know how much this means to me. It's the most important thing in my entire life I have been waiting forever to meet an alien I want this more than anything else in the entire world and if you don't I'll probably die and even if I don't it'll ruin my life and I'll never be the same again and probably grow up to be some warped psychotic or even a criminal mastermind or something and it will be all your fault because you thwarted my deepest desire and I want this more than anything else I've ever wanted ever ever ever so PLEASE don't tell me I can't be friends with him! (p. 68 -69)

Nathan quietly giggles and he remarks that these “never-ending” sentences really grabbed his attention. He fills me in on some of the important details and events of the story and enthusiastically shares his insights:

N: When I first read this I was laughing so hard. I just thought it was funny the way the boy says “Oh please, please, please” like five times. It reminds me of how my sister and I beg for things from my mom and dad. But looking at it again makes me think (he flips to the cover to check the author) Bruce Coville wrote it like that for a reason.

T: What exactly do you think it is?

N: To show how desperate the character is...like I can picture the character all out of breath and red in the face (Nathan begins to act out the motions of the character by placing his hands under his chin as if praying) chanting, “Please mom, please, please, please!”

T: Wow! Looks like the author's attempt to make readers hear this fear sure worked on you! Great discovery, Nathan!

N: (Nathan looks up at me and gives me one of his precocious smiles) I guess not using punctuation is o.k. after all!

I have to chuckle to myself. Nathan is so clever! After analyzing this passage he understands the author wrote purposefully, without using proper punctuation, in order to get the fast paced, frantic feeling of the main character in the heads of all readers. At the same time Nathan wittingly pokes fun at my desire for students to check their punctuation when they are editing a piece of writing. I wink at Nathan and smile, showing that I appreciate his sense of humour. “You are quite the kid, Nathan! I like the way you think,” I say. “Do you know what else?” he questions, once again, grinning up a storm. “Hmmm. I bet you’ve noticed something else,” I reply. “You bet! This never-ending sentence is like that Shel Silverstein poem where the kid doesn’t want to go to school and he’s naming every excuse in the book, until he realizes it’s Saturday!” My eyes widen and we knowingly look at one another. “I know the poem you are talking about! Great connection and great memory Nathan!”

Next, I walk over to one of our tables and sit down beside Cari. She has been reading *To Kill a Mocking Bird* by Harper Lee (1960). She explains that the book belongs to her mom and her mom gave it to her to read. I ask her what she finds interesting about her book. “Well, I like the way the author uses three things to describe what is happening and then the entire paragraph ends,” she comments. Cari shares the passage of text that has caught her eye:

Atticus’s arrival was the second reason why I wanted to quit the game. The first reason happened the day I rolled into the Radley front yard. Through all the head shaking, quelling of nausea and Jem yelling, I had heard another sound, so low I could not have heard it form the sidewalk. Someone inside the house was laughing (p. 41).

She then clarifies what she means by “three actions”. “Well instead of the author just saying, ‘Even though it was noisy, I heard another sound’, it says, ‘head shaking, quelling of nausea and Jem yelling’ all grouped together. I ask her, “What do you like about

clustering three things together?" She replies, "I like the way it describes what's going on and I can picture what is happening in my head."

I am very impressed with the unique thinking of this group. Students are able to pick a certain passage and explain why they feel they wish they had written it. To add to our ongoing celebration of writing, each child types his or her passage of text on the computer noting the book it came from and author of the passage. A bulletin board titled, "I Wish I Said That!" is placed within our room to act as another device, resource or source of inspiration for students to refer to when they are doing their own writing. It is also another way to celebrate an appreciation for rich writing as one community.

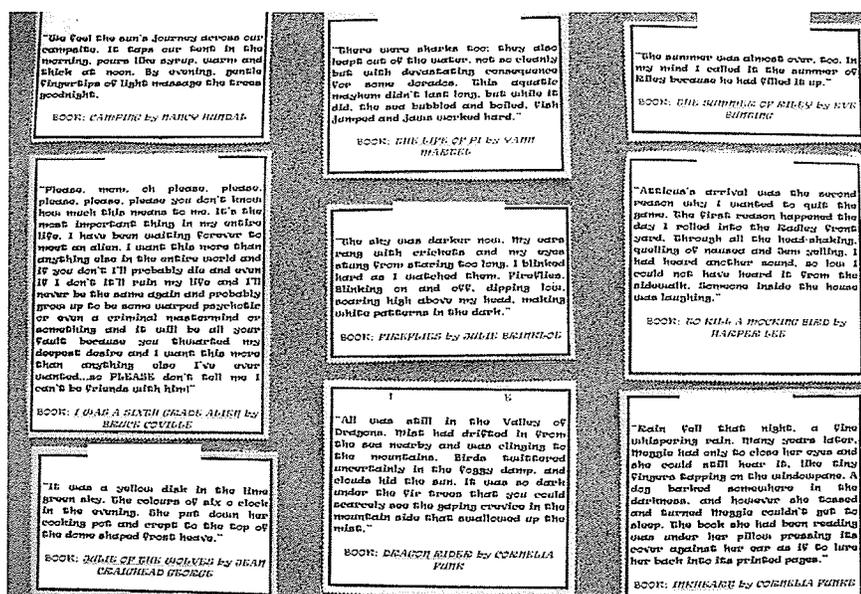


Figure 30. "I wish I said that!" bulletin board

An Author's Visit

So much of our time is spent on learning about writing from reading the texts of various authors. Picture books, poetry and short articles all help us appreciate wonderful ways with words or structural crafting techniques. To have an open conversation with an author about writing would be such an authentic experience for all. I decide to invite a children's author to share her knowledge about being a writer with the rest of the class. Eagerly awaiting her visit, students brainstorm a couple of questions they feel they must ask her about writing and the writing process itself. Students crowd around our guest, notebooks in hand, and begin jotting down as much information as possible. Loads of questions are asked such as, "*Do you use a writer's notebook?*", "*Where do you get your ideas for stories?*" and "*Do you have any interesting ways to start your stories?*". It is my hope that students will take this experience and use the knowledge gained to help them in their own writing. To help my students think deeper about this experience, I ask them to write a reflection (Figure. 31) about our author visit.

Today we had a special guest in the classroom. She is an author and she talked about how to make stories exciting, how to get ideas, how you should keep a notebook, journal or diary with you to take notes about what you see, hear and feel everyday, so you never run out of ideas.

From this experience I learned that when you make a story, first get an idea for it. Then think of the characters that are going to be in it. Then a beginning, middle and end. Also she told us about making a good beginning to lure readers in with very descriptive words, with a mysterious problem or it depends what kind of story it is. M**** told us how to get ideas. Whenever you're stuck on a story or you need ideas for a story you should look around everywhere you could take a day for the park, go for a walk, or look in your notebook if you already have ideas. She also says a true writer never loses his/her ideas even if you think they're bad because they could help you in the future.

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Figure 31. A written reflection on our author visit

It is not very often that a teacher is lucky enough to have a real author at hand.

This author added depth to our ongoing understandings about writing. Sharing a number of her journals and showing how she works through a series of drafts before she is finally satisfied emphasizes the process or journey one goes through when writing. Students are encouraged to look back through their writing notebooks, revisit ideas or add on to an already existing story. There is a new perspective given to the writer's notebook. It not only serves as an experimental tool for trying out ideas; but, it is also seen as a memory bank for students to hold on to questions, observations and thoughts.

Authentic Advice

Using the advice gathered from a real author and incorporating the numerous experiences of noticing and analyzing craft, we decide to revisit our writer's notebooks to choose an entry, develop it and gradually bring it to publication.

One of our regular routines during a block of writing time is for students to gather at our meeting area and form one large circle. This has come to be called our "meeting in a round" time. It is an opportunity for students to share ideas, ask about a problem they may be having with a specific piece or to simply seek feedback about a portion of their work. During this time, I act as a facilitator because I want students to look to each other for help rather than solely relying on me. I enjoy these meetings because everyone is facing each other and I can observe the eye contact and the dialogue that occurs between students. I will provide more one on one support with individuals when students head off to work independently after this large group meeting. Besides the obvious rules of taking turns when talking and always using kind words, we have two "non-negotiables" for our meetings. First of all, the student requesting advice has the final decision on whether they make any revisions to their writing. Secondly, all students must be diplomatic when giving advice. Over time, students begin the habit of starting off their conversation with something positive and then their advice follows.

We are all eager to hear what others are working on in their notebooks. We convene at the carpet and it is Erica who initiates a discussion on a piece she has written about the rainforest. Amanda, Robert and Nathan provide suggestions and offer ideas.

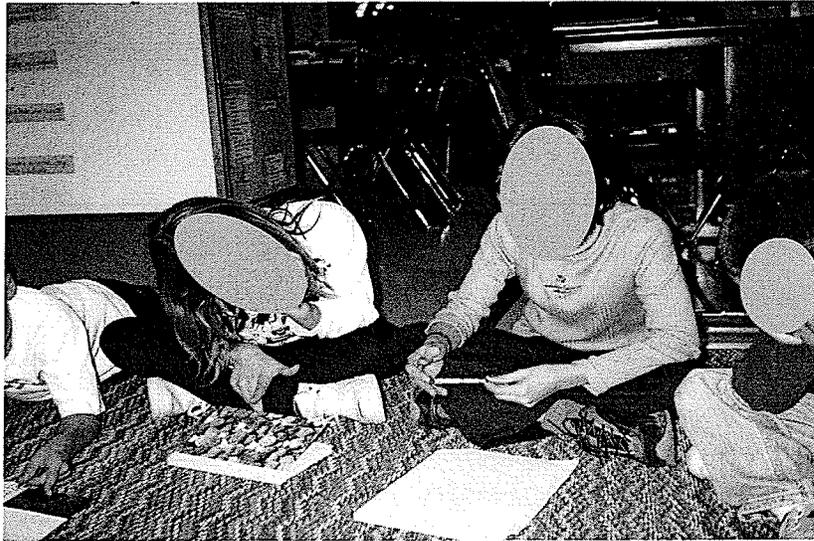


Figure 32. A meeting in a round

E: My story is about walking through the rainforest. I like it, but I think it is missing something. I'd like some advice on how to jazz it up...like adding more craft. (She reads her piece out loud)

A: I like how you use the real names of animals and plants in your writing.

N: I like the way you say what you see and hear to describe the forest. What made you do that?

E: Ummm. I wanted to do something on the rainforest as soon as I started reading about the toucan. I became interested from that. The rainforest looks so pretty and I wish I could go there.

R: You could add something that repeats throughout your writing?

E: Good idea.

A: You could use Jane Yolen's book on the rainforest to get some more ideas. You should try using one of those techniques (she points to our crafting chart). (Personal Journal 01/10/04)

Below, is Erica's initial rainforest draft that she had with her during our whole group meeting. Beside it is her published copy, displaying the revisions she made to her piece.

* chart

I saw the damp colours in a splatter of deep green and a splash of color so close to lime. Turtles were making their way through the Amazon river. Fish splashed through the waters and my eyes caught sight of a bright toucan for a moment. He returned my glance but then flew off in a blur of color.

An enchanted fragrance of wet grass and blooming flowers filled the air. It made me feel like I was in a place warm enough for animals to live and grow in harmony. I wished I could shed my skin and join them. I could smell the previous mornings' dewdrops.

I heard the birds singing a sweet song but the roar of the Great King destroyed my daydream and he left in silence.

I could feel the ropery epiphytes in my hands and the tall buttresses by my feet. I felt like the Great King with his dark spots and eyes was watching me. I could feel the damp humid atmosphere pulling at my back. This Amazon memory I shall not soon forget.

* book → Yolen

A Place I Will Not Soon Forget

I saw a place so unfamiliar to me, so quiet and calm compared to the busy streets and tall skyscrapers of my land. The damp foliage twisted in a splatter of deep green and a splash of color so close to lime, but too magnificent for words. Slow pacing turtles were making their way through the splashing Amazon River, yet they were not interfering with the swimming fish. My eyes caught sight of a bright toucan for a moment. He returned my glance, but then flew off in a blur of colour.

I smelled a place so unfamiliar to me, so quiet and calm compared to the busy streets and tall skyscrapers of my land. There was an enchanted fragrance of wet grass and blooming flowers. It made me feel like I was in a warm, snuggly place where beautiful animals live and grow in harmony. I wished I could shed my skin and join them. I could smell the previous mornings' dewdrops and I wanted to taste the fresh fruit so badly.

I listened to a place so unfamiliar to me, so quiet and calm compared to the busy streets and tall skyscrapers of my land. I heard the birds singing a song so sweet. I felt I could dance on air, but the roar of the Great King disturbed my daydream and he left the rainforest in an uncomfortable silence.

I touched part of a world so unfamiliar to me, so quiet and calm compared to the busy streets and tall skyscrapers of my land. I could feel the ropery epiphytes tight in my hands and the tall buttresses by my feet. I felt like the Great King with his black spots and dark eyes were watching me. I could feel the damp atmosphere pulling my body into ...

A hot place,
A peaceful place,
A secret and a forget-me-not place.

And now I'm back with my tall skyscrapers and busy streets. I can still taste, see, hear, touch and smell the warm Amazon like a memory I shall not soon forget!

Figure 33. Erica's draft and published piece

Learning is indeed a collaborative, social process. The knowledge gained from an in-depth study of multiple picture books, a visit from a real author and supportive suggestions from peers helps Erica develop her piece on the rainforest. Erica pursues her

writing, just as a real author would, with a purpose that is personally relevant and meaningful. Our whole group inquiry into the craft of writing motivates individual students to slow down and pursue writing using the perspective of a language expert.

It amazes me to see how all of our literacy experiences build upon each other and simultaneously represent portions of the *Four Resources Model* developed by Luke and Freebody (1999). There is a commitment to analyzing various texts – noticing structural or a ways with words craft techniques and trying hard to figure out the author’s motives for using such craft. This is shown in students’ enthusiasm to revisit books they have already read independently to see if they overlooked anything. Students celebrate together creating a bulletin board displaying their discoveries of great writing. Not only does this bulletin board serve as a rich resource for students, it also reveals the diversity of thinking found within our room. Nathan participates with his passage of text by using hand gestures and facial expressions to show he understands what the author is trying to convey. As a code breaker Nathan decides the author’s absence of punctuation within that passage of text purposefully added to the desperate emotions of the main character. Students become even more empowered to try out their own writing ideas within their writer’s notebooks after having the opportunity to talk with a real author. Erica takes initiative and is open to ideas from her classmates as they analyze her piece on the rainforest. She makes changes to her writing based on suggestions obtained from her peers. Erica adds a repeating line to the beginning of each paragraph (“*I saw/smelled/listened/touched a place so unfamiliar to me, so quiet and calm compared to the busy streets and tall skyscrapers of my land*”) to suit the four senses described within her work. She even uses a technique borrowed from the author Jane Yolen, by grouping three things together when describing something (“*a hot place, a peaceful place, a secret*

and a forget-me-not place. ”). Erica’s intended **use** for her written piece was to capture her love of the rainforest by taking the reader on a peaceful walk through the jungle.

Erica’s balance of fact and fiction within her rainforest piece makes me realize there are multiple ways of weaving content into writing that is still sophisticated, rich and meaningful. It is time to push our thinking further. Investigating non-fiction texts will help us continue on our journey.

**Chapter Four:
What About the Facts?**

Individual Interests Inform the Inquiry

“Failing to trust learners and the learning process results in the wrong kind of structures – structures that restrict, not support learners. When children are not permitted to consult with peers or choose what aspects of content to engage in, they can’t ‘wiggle’ the structure so as to have it make personal sense to them”

(Short, Harste & Burke, 1996, p. 15)

I am sitting at the carpet watching one student, Justin, share his non-fiction book about dinosaurs with the rest of the class. My students engage in sharing every day. Each student thinks about a topic, event or memory that is meaningful to him or her and presents his or her findings on a specific day. This daily ritual is another structure created for children to participate in and support one another’s inquiries. Today it is Justin’s turn to present an interest to his peers. He is sitting in our author’s chair, holding up a chart, explaining the specific geologic time periods such as the Triassic period. He begins to tell his peers how he loves reading fact books because they have “cool diagrams and real photographs”. Justin leans his book over the edge of his knee so everyone can take a closer look at the colourful chart. He comments, “I know there are a couple of people who are interested in doing a project on dinosaurs and some of you might want to check this book out. I will leave it on our shelf and anyone can borrow it. Trust me. You’ll want to check this book out.”
(Personal Journal, 01/25/04)

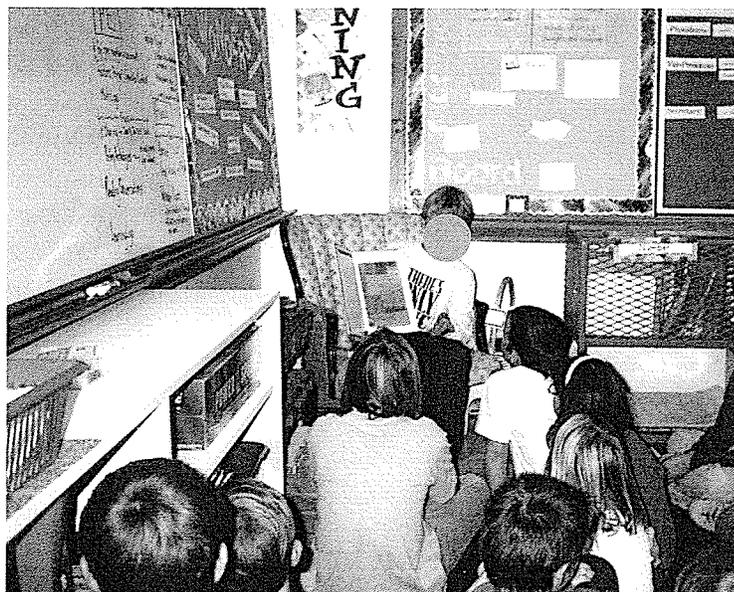


Figure 34. Justin sharing his dinosaur book

One cannot help but notice the sincerity in Justin's words as he shares his book with the rest of the class. We are a supportive community of learners who take the time and have the interest to get to know one another and value the individual thoughts of others. This collaborative enterprise makes the process of inquiry rich and motivating for all. Not only is Justin sharing his passion for dinosaurs, he is also willing to lend his special book for others to look at because he knows that there are students in the classroom who plan to research these prehistoric creatures. Students are beginning to view each other as excellent resources during our study of non-fiction. Katie Wood Ray (1999) elaborates on this need for a supportive community of learners:

Our classroom is a place where we all pool all that we know to help each other write well. While everyone will have his or her ongoing projects to pursue, no one will be left to "face the writing" alone. We have writers on the bookshelves and writers at the desks next to us, and we are all learning how to learn from each other (p. 268).

I decide to follow Justin's lead by sharing non-fiction texts with the whole class. I purposely choose three different types of non-fiction texts - *Cactus Hotel* by Brenda Guiberson (1993), *The Snake Scientist* by Sy Montgomery (1999) and an Eyewitness book called *Seashore* by Steve Parker (1989). Each book provides the reader with factual information on a particular topic using a creative structure or format. I decide to highlight certain passages from each book in order for students to notice the varying structure of the non-fiction genre. I sit at our author's chair, placing the books out on a table and I begin:

T: The other day I noticed how fascinated all of you were when Justin shared his non-fiction book on dinosaurs. I decided that we would spend some time really looking at non-fiction. When you look at factual books what do you notice? (Mark raises his hand)

M: Some non-fiction books have real photographs in them or charts and diagrams...like in Justin's book.

T: That's right. Do any of you read a non-fiction book differently than a fiction book, like your chapter books? (Nathan now joins in on the conversation)

N: Well, after lunch, I usually read my chapter book and I just pick it up and start reading from where my bookmark was...but looking at fact books is different. I am all over the place (his eyes widen and he begins to smile).

T: Tell me more.

N: Like my eyes go to a diagram, then to a sentence and then I might flip pages to look for something else.

T: Wow! You describe non-fiction reading perfectly! There's so much to look at in a non-fiction text! Today I am going to share three examples of non-fiction books and we are going to see how each author structures facts in a different way to get a reader's attention. (Personal Journal, 02/07/04)

After reading portions of each book aloud, students willingly share their insights.

The Eyewitness series of non-fiction books are popular with a lot of students. These books present loads of factual information on various topics using mini snippets of text, real photographs, illustrations, labels and captions. Mark and Greg begin to share their thoughts.

M: I always try to get an Eyewitness book from the library. I like the way there is so much stuff to look at...you can look at everything in any order.

G: About the Eyewitness books...piggybacking on Mark's idea...the facts are spread out over two pages so there's more room to cram lots of stuff in.

The conversation continues with students recalling other Eyewitness books that they have previously seen. I am happy that Mark and Greg share what they noticed about the structure of these Eyewitness books. Next, Joanna, Robert and Kyle, start to share their

thoughts on the two other non-fiction texts – *Cactus Hotel* (1993) and *The Snake Scientist* (1999).

J: Before you even read a part from that book, I knew that it was going to be about different animals that live in a cactus.

T: Did you make that prediction because of the title?

J: Kind of...but also because of the cover illustration. There's a border of lots of animals and then if you look at the cactus there are holes – spots for each animal. That's how I knew what the book was probably going to be about.

T: Good for you! (I notice that Kyle has his hand up) Yes, Kyle. What's your reaction to these books?

K: Well, I like the way Cactus Hotel is like a little story, but there are tons of real facts in it. It looks like a regular picture book, but it is actually true.

J: It's like the Magic School Bus books. They all have facts in them.

T: Great connection, Joanna. This is precisely why I chose Cactus Hotel. Non-fiction books can be presented using different formats. What did you think of The Snake Scientist?

R: I like the way the book is about snakes, but you get to see how a real scientist looks after the snakes and stuff.

T: You're right. It is interesting getting facts on snakes directly from the perspective of a real zoologist!

(Personal Journal, 02/15/04)

Our pursuit of non-fiction continues. My hope is to not only have students noticing the various features or qualities of this genre, but also to experience further demonstrations and collaborations as readers and writers of factual text. Building upon our previous whole group discussion of different non-fiction formats, I decide to give small groups of students various samples of non-fiction and instruct them to record everything they notice. Studying the structural craft of this genre and paying close attention to others' works pushes our learning further. Below, are two samples of what some small groups discovered:

1. They give little bits of information and then write a paragraph related to it.
2. They organize information into different groups and sections.
3. They give the sources of the information.
4. They have Table of Contents, Glossary and Indexes.

Table of Contents	to help you find the page that you want to find
Titles	To help you know what your reading about
Photos	to show what it really looks like
Captions	to know what the picture is of.

1. They give little bits of information and then write a paragraph related to it.
2. The organize information into different groups and sections.
3. They give the sources of the information.
4. They have [a] Table of Contents, Glossary and Indexes.

- Table of Contents - to help you find the page that you want to find.
- Titles - to help you know what you're reading about.
- Photos - to show what it really looks like.
- Captions - to know what the picture is of.

Figure 35. Two samples of non-fiction discoveries

Students are very enthusiastically searching through different types of non-fiction texts. I begin to visit each group noticing the different ways they are recording their findings. This is also a great time to converse with individual students. Once again, however, Justin draws me back into his interest with the dinosaur book:

T: What are some of the special structures that your group found?

J: Real photographs and charts are really important and neat to look at. Like in my dinosaur book [he has included it in the selection of books his group investigates].

T: What else did you notice?

J: Well, some of these books are kind of boring and almost hard to read. There's good stuff and bad.

T: What do you mean? Some topics don't interest you?

J: No...it's just that charts and diagrams are more interesting to look at. Some books are just writing without the cool diagrams and stuff. I think that's boring. (Personal Journal 2/17/04)

My conversation with Justin provides me with a deeper understanding of how reading and writing are intricately connected. Justin is looking at these non-fiction texts both as a reader and as a writer. When reading non-fiction, he is very clear that these books are boring to look at if there are no charts or diagrams to support the text. While reading non-fiction texts, Justin specifies what he needs in order to stay interested. He notices that charts and diagrams provide a clearer understanding of a particular topic. As a writer, Justin is also quick to notice these structural features – charts, diagrams and photographs – make non-fiction texts more appealing and interesting for other readers.

During my conversation with Justin, I couldn't help but notice how non-fiction features offer a wealth of learning opportunities for students. When Justin placed his colourful dinosaur chart directly beside another non-fiction book that was mainly written text, I felt that it was important for us to look more closely at the construction and various uses of non-fiction charts.

"It's funny how things strike you at certain times. When I look around my classroom, there are many types of charts that help us – we have charts that promote routines ('keep on the write track chart'), charts that reveal preferences (like our reading chart), charts that summarize information (ways with words chart) and even charts that help us organize our thinking (name it/author's words/explain it chart). Justin has a very good point about non-fiction text being boring. If we were to look at a non-fiction book that is mainly made up of writing...we could try and make it more interesting by turning the information into a chart!"
(Personal Journal, 2/17/04)

I decided to give written descriptions of various types of butterflies to pairs of students. I chose butterflies because I happened to come across a binder of science materials that contained reproducible write-ups that were strictly text based; however a picture of each butterfly was embedded within the text. My goal was to have pairs of students sift specific information from the text in order to make a large class chart. First

of all we would be transforming the content of a written piece into a chart. Secondly, this chart would allow students to summarize the scientific information they were reading, acting as a strategy lesson for note taking. In the end our chart would also be a visual representation of a non-fiction convention. When students attempt their own non-fiction writing, they may choose to include a chart like the one displayed in our room. They may also choose to use this charting method as a way to collect factual information.

Major headings for the top portion of our chart included the name and colour of the butterfly, wingspan, food, habitat, etc. Students worked in pairs, highlighting these specific bits of information and recording the sifted facts onto index cards. They were also responsible for sketching a picture of their butterfly and for placing all of their research cards under the major headings. The end result was a large factual chart representing different types of butterflies.

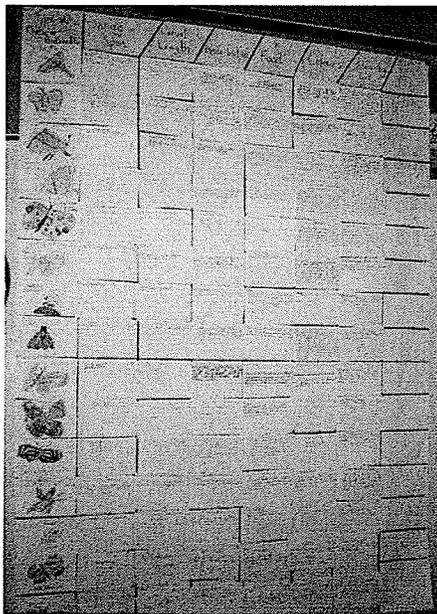


Figure 36. Data chart on butterflies

Students are very pleased with the butterfly chart. After looking at a variety of non-fiction texts within small groups, and noting that non-fiction is made up of diagrams,

photographs, illustrations and charts, students are excited to have a non-fiction feature displayed in our room. Several non-fiction features are also placed on a bulletin board in our room acting as another rich resource. Below each non-fiction feature is a description explaining its intended use for a reader.

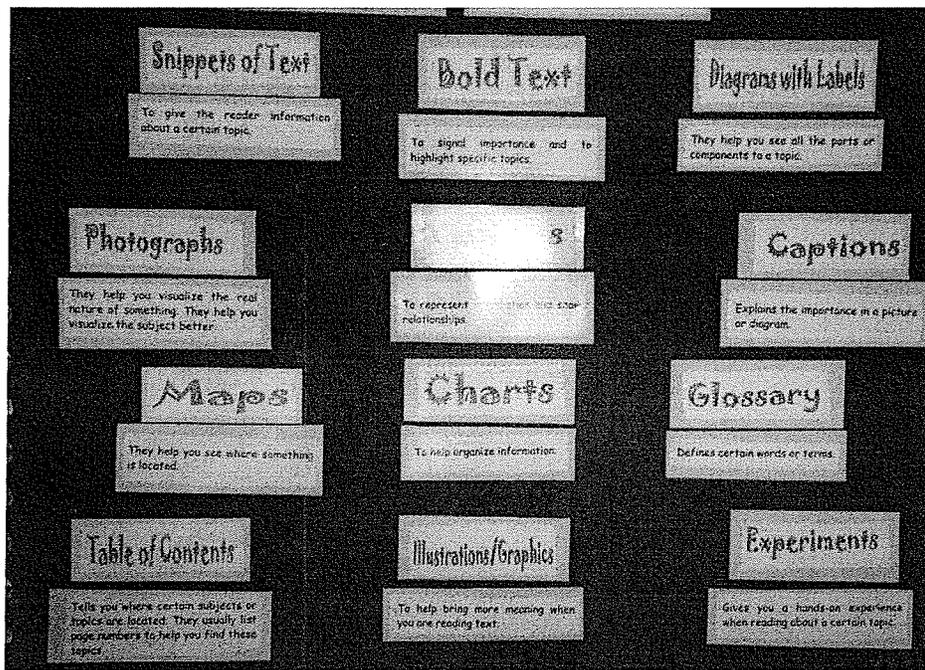


Figure 37. Bulletin board of non-fiction features

Focused Lessons: Reading Non-Fiction & Collecting Information

I notice Robert looking closely at our new butterfly chart. To him it is not just an example of a non-fiction feature. He feels this chart could help others when they begin to search for information about personal topics of interest. He refers to our butterfly cards as being “just like little jot notes” and he comments that he collected bits of information like that in a logbook when he participated in the science fair last year. He explains that he took out some books from the library when he decided to enter a project on Great White Sharks. Robert continues, “I decided what I was going to study beforehand – like the shark’s body and stuff. I picked out those facts from different books and wrote them down.” I am thrilled that Robert shares this insight with the rest of the class. Allowing time for students to talk, share strategies and experiences with one another strengthens our classroom community.

Capitalizing on Robert’s discussion of note taking, I decide to immerse all students in a variety of methods for gathering information. Knowing how to select and organize information from multiple texts will help all students as they begin to research their own non-fiction writing. It is important for students to realize that there are many ways of collecting or gathering information, just as there are many ways of representing or publishing information. As I reflect back on various conversations with students regarding non-fiction reading, I must admit I am a little concerned with Justin’s decision to so easily abandon a non-fiction text because it does not contain charts, diagrams or photographs. On one hand, I am pleased that Justin understands what he needs as a reader in order to stay interested, focused or to be supported. However, I also feel it is important to give students a variety of strategies so that they are well equipped and are confident readers of any type of text.

I come across a binder filled with reproducible sheets about Canadian Aboriginals of the Plains for teachers to use with students. Its structure consists of groups of informational paragraphs and would lend itself beautifully to a demonstration of determining the essence (Harvey, 1998) of a non-fiction text. I refer back to previous conversations that we've had regarding non-fiction, particularly the conversations with Justin, and we all settle down on the carpet with copies of the article and a pencil:

T: Remember when all of you worked in small groups and you recorded everything that you noticed about non-fiction?

J: Yes, we all like the charts, diagrams and photos.

T: Right. But what happens when you are presented with a piece of non-fiction and there aren't any charts or diagrams to help you out?

J: Easy. Pick out another book (he begins to giggle and others join in).

T: Well that is definitely one choice. But, today I want to show you a way that you can still feel confident and obtain information from a book that is strictly text based.

As a class we begin by reading one paragraph at a time. We "chunk the text" by putting brackets around the paragraph and then jot a brief note in the margin stating the main idea of the paragraph. Students go off to work in pairs, supporting one another, as they practice this strategy together. Below, is Cari's copy revealing our collaborative efforts.

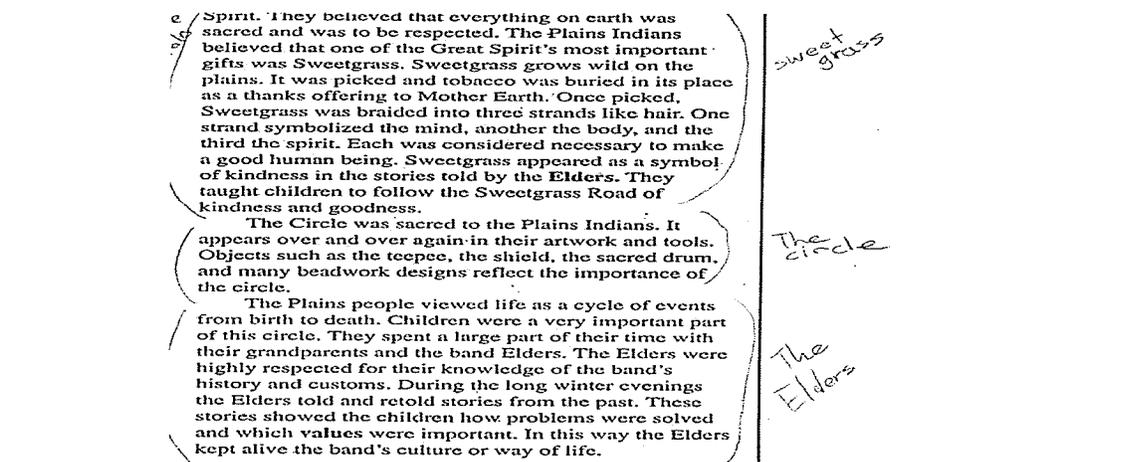


Figure 38. Reproducible text showing "chunk it" strategy - Cari

Next, we reassemble back at the carpet to discuss our recent strategy practice and note-taking method. Students remark that they like the “chunking strategy” because they are able to look at the summarizing notes placed in the margins and they can quickly see the topic of each paragraph. Robert shares with the group, “with one quick look I can see what each paragraph is all about”. He goes on to say, “collecting facts for a project would be a quicker and an easier search”. I build upon Robert’s comments by asking him to further clarify his ideas with the rest of the class.

T: Robert, you said that our chunking technique makes things easier for you. How?

R: When you’re looking for facts?

T: Yes.

R: You’ve already read the information and you’ve also made your notes.

T: So how is that easier for a researcher?

R: Your eyes go straight to your notes, instead of a whole page of words.

T: O.k. I see what you mean. Since you’ve already scanned the text and made notes you can see the topics of information quicker.

R: Yes. When I think back to my research that I did for my science project, I think this strategy would’ve made it easier for me to get my facts from certain books.

Students are excited to learn about another type of note-taking method. They are already familiar with webbing and constructing charts for different purposes. I introduce two types of t-charts for collecting information. The first one has topics or categories of information placed on one side of the chart and “sifted” details or facts about each topic or category are placed on the opposite side (Harvey, 1998).

Topic	Details
. How to make tipis	tipi was started by lashing three poles together; then the poles were raised to make a tripod. the thongs with tied each poles together were long enough to reach the ground were they were staked out side the tipi to provide support
inside the tipi	fire place inside the tipi hole at top for chimney. Atop two opposite poles leaning against each other flaps were attached when poles were moved, flaps covered hole to control heat or smoke and let it out.

Figure 39. Topic/details note-taking chart - Cari

I decide to use another reproducible from the *Aboriginals of the Plains* and suggest that before we make our chart, we read the article together, by “chunking the text” and recording our topics in the margins. Students begin to see that our notes in the margins of the article become the topics that are recorded on the right side of the t-chart (Figure 39.). One student, Cari, comments, “You have to be picky about what you place in the details part of the chart.” Cari goes on to suggest that this chart could help someone if they had questions or topics already chosen because all they’d have to do is search texts for the details.

A second type of t-chart builds upon the previous example. This time, however, the left side of the t-chart is for recording details on a topic and the right side is for adding a personal comment on the information (Harvey, 1998). I give pairs of students a

copy of an article on bats. I explain to them that they can still use the “chunking” strategy as they take turns reading portions of the article. I continue to say, “You can read a passage aloud, decide if it is interesting factual information, and then talk about it. The chart created by Justin and Joanna gives insight into what they were thinking about when reading this factual information.

<u>Note Taking</u>	<u>Note Making</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bats make up $\frac{1}{4}$ of all mammals on earth - Bats can live on all continents (not Antarctica) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This makes up a great deal of the animal population. Wow! • I guess they have learned to adapt
<p>Bats make up $\frac{1}{4}$ of all mammals on earth.</p> <p>Bats can live on all continents (not Antarctica).</p>	<p>This makes up a great deal of the animal population. Wow!</p> <p>I guess they have learned to adapt.</p>

Figure 40. Notetaking/notemaking chart - Justin and Joanna

Appreciating Each Other As Authors

“By presenting we bring our learning to a new level of knowing. What was intuitive and taken for granted has to be made public and understandable. But it is worth it. Presenting invites others to share in our celebration of learning”

(Short, Harste & Burke, 1996, p. 355).

After exploring a variety of strategies for reading non-fiction and collecting information, students are eager to pick a topic and create their own non-fiction book. Taking the time to practice different strategies for reading non-fiction and sampling different ways for collecting information gives students the confidence and experience necessary for completing an independent project. Students have the freedom to select a non-fiction topic. However, I feel it is important for the whole class to discuss a necessary focus to be shared by all. I initiate a discussion with the entire class. Justin, Holly and Robert raise some interesting points.

T: I know all of you are very excited about making your own non-fiction book. We have spent a great deal of time looking at non-fiction writing. We have also spent time on how to be productive readers of non-fiction. What do you think our non-fiction books should look like?

J: You should definitely have some type of chart!

T: Sounds good. (I refer to our bulletin board of non-fiction features.) Do most of you think that you should have at least some of these features in your books?

H: Well, it depends on how you want to write your book.

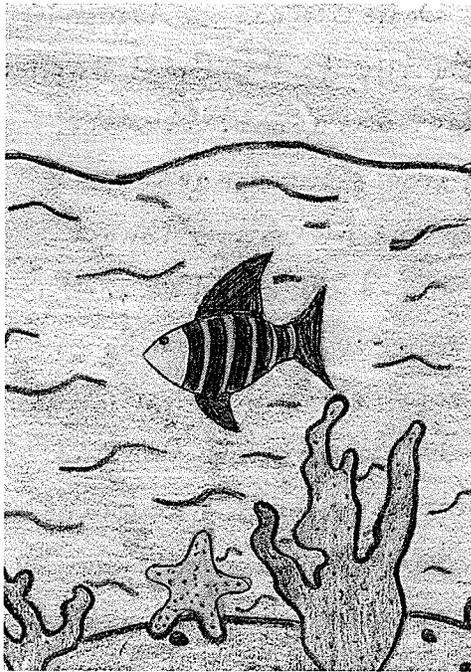
T: What do you mean?

H: Like if I want to pretend I am watching animals... my book would have notebook entries. I might not have a chart.

R: It's like the books you read to us. Like that scientist book.

T: O.k. depending on the format that you choose...you should select non-fiction features that will complement your book. Any ideas? (Personal Journal, 02/23/04)

Several weeks pass and students settle at the carpet to look at and listen to each other's non-fiction creations. It is Holly's turn to share her book on Australia. She sits up straight in our author's chair carefully showing her illustrations to ensure nothing is missed. Many gasps fill the air, as students are impressed with her artwork. I decide to ask Holly some questions in order for her to explain the process she went through when deciding on the format of her book.



Dear Journal August 10
 My trip to the Great Barrier Reef was great! It's the largest and longest reef in the world. It's longer than 2000 km. The reef is made up of thousands of coral reefs and tiny islands. It attracts many fish and other creatures like crabs, turtles and stingrays. I got to go scuba diving. I think the coral was pretty. I had fun.

Figure 41. Excerpt from Holly's book on Australia

T: Your book looks great, Holly. Could you tell the class how you decided to represent your Australia information?

H: In Grade 3 we made travel pamphlets on the Arctic. That idea got me thinking and I decided to make a book on Australia, but I wanted to pretend that I was there.

T: So you made your book into a journal about Australia and incorporated non-fiction information based on things you saw and did?

H: Yes. (Holly notices Anna's hand in the air.)
A: I like the way you added dates and your entries are in printing. It looks like a real journal.
H: Thank you.

It is now Justin's turn to sit in the author's chair and share his non-fiction book.

His book is all about Vikings and he is very excited to share one of his diagrams with peers.

"This is my favourite page in my book. It's got flaps and the words match my Viking picture. I got the idea from a pop-up book at home."

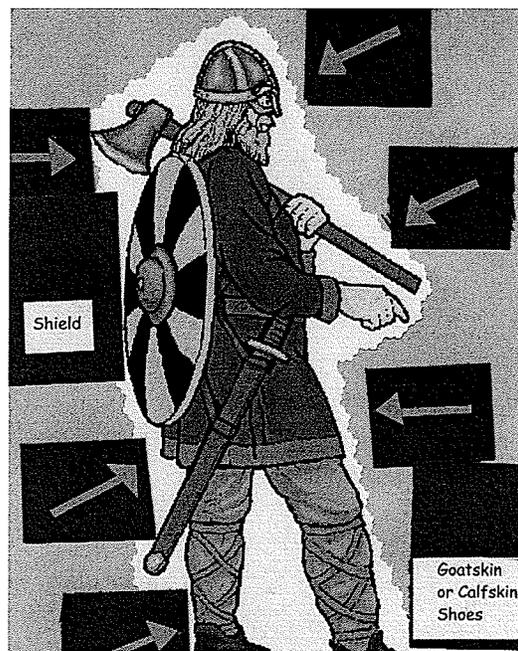


Figure 42. Justin's favourite page

Our day of celebration is finally here. Watching each student share his or her book is very fulfilling. A feeling of accomplishment spills over from the students into our room. Coming together, embracing one another's ideas as one supportive community, is the ultimate assessment. This sincerity is highly valued by me. It is more rewarding than any numerical evaluation. My beliefs about assessment coincide with Spandel (2005)

who states, “assessment is not just about numbers, but also includes room for a smile, a laugh, a sigh, applause, and the honest and passionate response all writers hunger to hear” (p. 111).

So much time has been invested in our study of non-fiction. This makes me pause and reflect on the generative nature of inquiry. Slowing down to purposefully analyze great writing and share thoughts and discoveries is part and parcel of the inquiry process. This can be a struggling area for teachers due to the worry of meeting report card or term deadlines and feeling the pressure of having to “cover the curriculum”. Of course it saves time to simply assign a topic for a student to complete. However, when that assignment is done another one must be ready. Rather than moving from activity to activity, an inquiry curriculum invites learners to “make their discoveries and hypotheses known to their peers” (Short, Haste & Burke, 1996, p. 65). Carefully listening to and watching my students evolve as readers and writers provides me with a wealth of information about what to teach. Successful “kidwatching” (Goodman, 1978) involves getting to know each member of the classroom, tapping into the strengths and interests of each student and using this information to guide teaching. At the same time I meaningfully weave in provincial curriculum and make informed decisions based on the needs and interests of students.

An inquiry curriculum generates momentum with one experience building upon the next. Justin’s sharing of his dinosaur chart pushed our thinking further. Our investigation of fiction writing evolved into a study of non-fiction. Conversations flourish and meaningful connections develop as students are exposed to different formats of non-fiction writing and are given opportunities to practice a variety of note-taking strategies. Students are code breakers - searching for non-fiction features and practicing how to best

obtain factual information from a variety of non-fiction texts. Students are text users and text analysts - viewing different formats of non-fiction and studying the impact text structure has for various readers. Students are also text participants – sharing thoughts, ideas and perspectives about a variety of non-fiction texts. Adding all of these experiences to our ever-growing knowledge base, students make well-informed decisions or choices such as what topic to study, how to collect and record information, and how to best represent their learning. Each student sits proudly in our author's chair celebrating his or her published piece. There is a strong sense of ownership and satisfaction, yet our learning never stops. Short, Harste and Burke (1996) state, “the celebration of authorship brings both an end and a new beginning” (p. 137). Conversations will emerge, new ideas will be shared, and questions will arise taking us on another learning journey.

Conclusion:
And the Beat Goes On...

And the Beat Goes On...

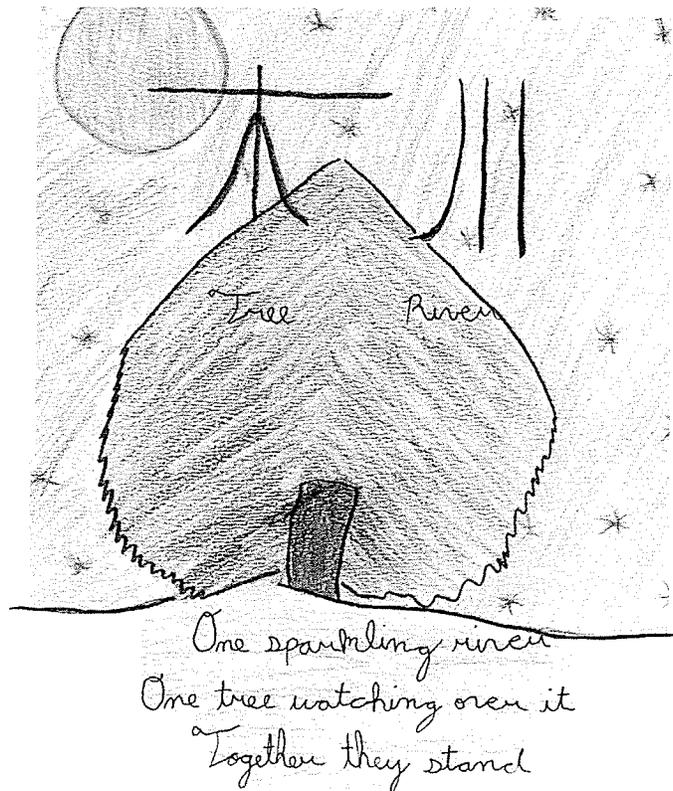


Figure 42. Michelle's haiku poem

Our school year is nearly complete. It is the end of May and students are looking through portfolios recalling memories and sorting through special pieces they plan to take home and keep. I decide to take down a student display of Japanese haiku poetry. I reach for Michelle's poem and gaze at her work ever so carefully. Reading her poem quietly to myself makes me realize that it is the perfect metaphor for how I view the theory/practice relationship. Over the course of this year, I have experienced the dynamic nature of these two spheres. Both are always present, harmoniously intertwined, watching over one another.

Writing these classroom stories and analyzing them using my research framework (see Figure 11.) has "enabled me to reconstruct the mental journey" of the life lived in the

classroom (Short, Harste & Burke, 1996, p. 361). Our in-depth study of reading and writing provided multiple opportunities for students to tap into the four social practices of Luke and Freebody (1999) – students acted as code breakers, text users, text participants and text analysts. For me, inquiry is a stance one takes about learning and children; rather than a teaching method or technique. Inquiry is central to my philosophy of education and it is through my writing that I feel I have gained further insight into its complex nature. The following points highlight further understandings:

The teacher and her students are at the heart of inquiry. I was living these stories directly from the inside, along with my students as an integral member of our classroom community. I made specific decisions based on the ever-growing needs of my students – pulling specific texts to elicit conversation, listening to student discussions, knowing when to intervene or to stand back and admire peer interactions, capitalizing on student epiphanies and showcasing strengths to support and extend our study of language. At the same time, behind the scenes, I was also drawing deliberate links with the provincial curriculum. O’Keefe (1996) states that inquiry involves “the art of weaving my agenda – what I want the class to have achieved by the end of the year – with the continuously emerging agenda of the children (p. 78). Duffy and Hoffman (2002) contend that teachers living an inquiry philosophy “weave a variety of teaching activities together in an infinitely complex and dynamic response to the flow of classroom life.” Rather than following a set group of activities to be taught in a linear sequence, inquiry “is more like an orchestration rather than a straightforward implementation” (p. 376).

Inquiry is an authentic, generative process. My stories represent how one experience builds upon the next deepening and strengthening our understandings of what it means to be a reader and a writer. No textbook or syllabus of lesson plans could

produce the depth and breadth of literacy learning that the students and I experienced. For example, Allison was able to use the knowledge gained from our whole group and small group discussions of wonderful writing and applied it to her own written piece on fall. By sharing her published piece, Allison added to our ongoing understandings of rich writing and she challenged others to think more critically about their own written pieces. This led Erica and Anna to the book *A Quiet Place* (2002), for a second look. During their examination of this text, both girls became intrigued with the author's structural craft. After careful observation and discussion, Erica and Anna developed their own theory or name for this technique and brought it to the attention of the entire class. Anna was also able to experiment with this technique in an entry she developed in her writer's notebook. The class became inspired to revisit and study other familiar texts to see if they too overlooked any interesting techniques. This genuine momentum in a cycle of inquiry is created by the members who dwell within and fuels the learning process for all involved.

Inquiry is a social process. Inviting students to bring in a special book from home to share with the whole group elicited rich discussion about personal experiences and reading preferences. Discussing texts with familiar child-like themes allowed students to build upon ideas, hear multiple perspectives and establish relationships with peers. The dialogue continued and students became invested in understanding each other as readers. Written reflections about reading were created and through sharing, Anna's piece inspired the class to view reading in a more critical manner. Her piece is framed and hangs on a wall in our book nook. The social nature of inquiry has helped create a supportive, united spirit where each child is valued and respected. Students were not afraid to share their thoughts or take risks when ideas differed from the majority of the group. Students supported each other's questions and respected each other's ideas. Justin

came to the aid of Anna who held a different viewpoint regarding the meaning of the “taffy technique”. Holly supported Jana’s decision to construct a key, rather than using the suggested chart for tracking reactions to texts. I have learned that the diverse thinking of individuals can be used as powerful demonstrations for the entire class. In doing so, “we borrow others’ experiences and understandings to extend our available collection of ways to know the world” (Short and Burke, 1991, p. 14).

A variety of instructional settings help shape inquiry. Throughout our study of language, students worked individually and collectively – in pairs, small groups and with the class as a whole. Moving between the different groupings provided students the time to formulate opinions, hear different viewpoints and extend or reformulate thinking. For example, students worked in small groups analyzing the writing of a variety of books written by the same author, Jane Yolen. Afterwards, students came back together as a whole group to share discoveries. A classroom chart was created to document student thinking and to also serve as another resource when writing. Students moved off independently, developing or rethinking entries in their writer’s notebooks. Erica creates a piece on the rainforest, but requests a whole group meeting where she can hear the opinions and suggestions from peers. After hearing a variety of suggestions, Erica approaches her writing with greater confidence and uses the tools around her – mentor texts, classroom charts and advice from peers.

I am mindful of the wise words of Fitch (2000) who states that “we all have juice in our mind and songs in our heart and stories we might like to tell” (p. 11). My thesis represents a collection of stories that captures the songs of my heart and the juice of young minds as we collectively engaged in a study of literacy. This journey has come to

an end. However, these thoughts are enough to keep me eternally enthused and renewed until another journey begins and the beat goes on...

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