



Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

Volume 37

Issue 1 *September/October* 1996

Article 7

10-1-1996

Professional Materials

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Recommended Citation

Cress, S. (1996). Professional Materials. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 37 (1). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol37/iss1/7

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Professional Materials

Through Writing to Reading, Classroom Strategies for Supporting Literacy. Written by Brigid Smith. Routledge, New York, NY 10001. 1994. US\$55.00 Hardback, \$17.95 Paperback.

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Brigid Smith describes the Language Experience Approach which most teachers have learned about and used in their classrooms for years. As children dictate a story to adults and subsequently read their narrative they view themselves as readers, which is a big step towards achieving literacy. However, the author quickly moves beyond the traditional ways of using language experience by describing many practical methods of extending this approach.

Smith suggests a variety of strategies for individuals, small groups, large groups, and students with special needs. One of the strengths of the dictating process Smith describes is its versatility. For a student experiencing many academic difficulties including severe perceptual motor problems, Smith suggests having the child dictate a story. The adult then types it on the computer using a book style font. The student is given a printed copy accompanied by a tape of the story for shared reading. When the student is comfortable with reading the story, he reads it independently. For another child with emotional problems which include passivity and a lack of observed motivation to read, the first step is to encourage

talking about events which are meaningful. The student draws pictures about the events, and is encouraged to make statements about the pictures. The dictation is written by the adult to accompany the illustrations. The student then reads the dictation back to the adult. Both of the strategies involve dictation to an adult at some point, but the process is individualized to meet the student's needs. Throughout the book, numerous case studies and example illustrate how to use dictated writing in the classroom.

Smith outlines a program to train the use of volunteer helpers as scribes and listeners, and this is perhaps the most helpful part of the book. Two sessions are outlined for teachers who wish to train adult volunteers. Smith describes an initial meeting to give background and provide interest, and a training session which includes details about the role of the adult in the dictating/scribe process.

At a time when educators are rightly concerned about providing the best possible practices to meet the needs of a diverse population of students, the author describes the implementation of an approach which fulfills this need. The practical strategies and the examples provide new and experienced teachers with the tools necessary to implement language experience in the classroom.

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