



Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

Volume 34

Issue 5 *May/June* 1994

Article 2

6-1-1994

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Recommended Citation

Crowell, R. A., & Jacobson, J. M. (1994). Literacy Through University-School Collaboration: A Prologue. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 34 (5). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol34/iss5/2

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Literacy Through University-School Collaboration: A Prologue

Ronald A. Crowell
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In schools, colleges, and departments of education throughout the country, collaboration with public schools is high on the agenda of current programmatic efforts to reform and revitalize teacher education. Teacher preparation programs designed or suggested by the Renaissance Group (1993), by John Goodlad and his group (1994), and the Holmes Group (1990) — to name but a few major efforts — hinge on establishing long term, field based programs in collaboration with the public schools. Collaboration between the university and the schools is not a new phenomenon, however. Some limited form of partnerships between schools and universities has always existed. What is new is the recognition that teacher preparation programs can no longer exist isolated from the field, and that university faculty must form alliances with teachers to pursue the rich research of the classroom.

This themed issue of *Reading Horizons*, "Literacy Through University School Collaboration," presents issues of research and practice characteristic of many current collaborative efforts. The development of new roles for university faculty and classroom teachers is illustrated, in the opening article, by Taffy Raphael and her colleagues Virginia Goatley,

Deborah Woodman, and Susan McMahon, through a description of a year-long Book Club project during which classroom teachers and university collaborators accepted multiple and changing roles. They describe collaborative research which tracks the book club program through two examples — an instructional unit and a study of students' questioning abilities. The process enhanced the classroom literacy environment and clarified for participating educators the benefits collaboration holds for both classroom teachers and university faculty.

The second article, presented as a dialogue between a university faculty member, Janet Dynak, and an elementary teacher, Nancy Gagliano, further explores the rich relationship that a collaborative effort encourages, and demonstrates how the connections of methods courses to classroom settings can influence and strengthen preservice preparation. Next, Sherry Macaul, Thomas Blount and Kimberly Hill Phelps explore three different types of collaboration and show how collaborative work can expand over the years as school/university contacts increase and become more elaborated. They offer a useful discussion of how the traditional boundaries between universities and school are being stretched and bridged, advocating collaborative relationships which engage participants in "co-planning, co-teaching, co-investigating and co-evaluating alternative teaching and learning models and practices."

In "School-University Collaboration: Everyone's a Winner," Carole Schulte Johnson, Mary Hughes and Rena Mincks again present a dialogue between those engaged in school-university collaboration. Their enthusiasm for such partnerships is heartening and motivating. Collaborative action research, a theme of earlier articles also, is described by Karen Cirincione and Denise Michael in "Literacy Portfolios in Third Grade: A School-College Collaboration." Their work contributes to current inquiry on the use of portfolios, and

highlights another important advantage of collaboration among educators.

Curt Dudley-Marling's article, "Struggling Readers in the Regular Classroom: A Personal Reflection," offers a different perspective on collaboration — that of a university professor teaching a third grade class while on a year's leave. His field notes, interspersed with his analysis and comments, offer valuable insights to all those who work with struggling readers. In the course of describing his experience during the year he makes a strong argument for diversity in the classroom and inclusive education.

This commentary serves as a prologue to our themed issue. More significantly, that theme itself describes a process which is still in its prologue phase. The articles all describe attempts to create environments which support literacy through collaborative action — teachers and university faculty working in concert to achieve group and individual goals. We hope that as our profession enters the twenty-first century such collaborations will no longer be prologue, but will be recognized as the central core of the professional continuum, and shared inquiry will bond school and the university firmly together.

References

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