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In the Classroom: Poetry in Motion (May '91)


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IN THE CLASSROOM

Michael P. French, Bowling Green State University
Kathy Everts Danielson, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Poetry in motion

Janet Millar Grant

Children learn how to walk by walking, talk by talking, and write by writing. Consider allowing your class to feel the motion of poetry through body movement. Movement is a sensory experience. The use of movement to respond to poetry can help students understand poetry and provide them an opportunity for expressing ideas.

By taking a movement approach to poetry, students experience the poem through body sense, the kinesthetic sense, making the poem their own. A movement approach extends the child's perceptual experience. Responding with movement helps the child make meaning of the words, linking the written words with the child's world.

As a class, we introduced movement during a fall unit. After going on a neighborhood walk to observe the leaves, we experimented in the school yard with leaf movements, the wind and the sunny sky helping us as we twirled and swirled.

When we returned to the classroom, the children were eager to make a list of descriptive leaf words. The list started with *twirling*, *spinning*, *diving* and grew to include *dancing*, *swooping*, *gliding*, and many others. In several cases, the children drew pictures to accompany the descriptive words in order to capture the feeling created by the movements of the leaves.

Then we pushed back the desks and got ready to move. With one child as conductor pointing to a descriptive word, and myself providing the accompaniment, the children dipped and dived throughout the room.

The children were eager to create and explore word pictures stimulated

by the leaves. By combining two of the descriptive words, the children sought movements to capture word pictures such as *swirling*, *dancing*, *dragging down*, and others. They were challenged to create a movement phrase for each word, tying the two phrases together to make a movement sentence.

Having experienced the word pictures through movement, the children were eager to sit down and record their impressions:

Leaves go up, leaves go down.
They twirl all around.
They also drag around.
They blow zip zag around.

Joshua

Zip zag
Fly leaf
Dance, twirl, dance
Leaves.

Zachary

Falling Leaves
Leaves fall and twirl to the ground
Up again, then fall down
When the wind blows it seems its running
When the wind stops, the leaves look like a statue
Goes the wind
Goodbye, little leaves, goodbye.

Matthew

Following the writing activity, the children expressed their sensory experience in art. Using leaf-shaped stencils and a variety of colors of tempera paint, they created leaf prints to accompany their writing. They used different color combinations to record their observations of leaves. They enjoyed using a different medium to express their impressions.

This movement experience of descriptive words extended beyond the senses. The movement provided an ex-

cellent opportunity for each child to clarify his or her thoughts through exploration, selection, refinement and to communicate those ideas through movement. By moving, children developed a body understanding of the descriptive words and expressed that understanding through movement. Anyone who has watched children run knows that they experience and express exhilaration! The class enjoyed expressing "twisting, twirling, and flying"! Movement is certainly an excellent medium for experiencing and expressing ideas.

This was just one example of students' personal responses to their environment. It has been so successful in our classroom that we repeated it on several occasions throughout the year. I found that by including movement exploration in the classroom, the children experienced a more intense emotion and were more focused in resultant activities. Indeed, there were many children who were far more expressive in the medium of movement than in any other expressive medium.

Grant is a primary teacher at Charles Howett public school in Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada.

Book-a-mania

Maria Ramirez Zirkelback

In mid-October, two fourth-grade teachers and I started making plans for National Children's Book Week which takes place in the U.S. in November.

For that week, we decided to shelve our basals and do something enjoyable with our reading classes while integrating required skills. We called our project "Book-A-Mania." After obtaining the principal's approval, we advertised the event throughout the school.

The week consisted of instructional, entertaining events. We began by having famous authors, portrayed by my colleagues and me, visit our classrooms. Next, guest readers from the community were invited to read and share their thoughts with the students. The last day was highlighted by a visit to the county library.

To prepare for impersonations of famous authors, we read as much as possible by them and about them. We borrowed every available book they wrote and dressed up in the typical costume of their day. We coordinated our reading classes so that all our students saw and interviewed each author. The students played along with our impersonations and even asked for our autographs.

Our guest readers not only read to the classes but also shared the impact reading had in their professional lives. A question and answer period followed in which the students were eager to ask pertinent questions.

The visit to the county library was beneficial for those who had never had an opportunity to use it. Many students concluded the visit by signing up for library cards.

After Children's Book Week was over, my colleagues and I each borrowed a related set of library books. For example, I gathered at least 100 biography books about famous people and read some of them to my class. My students read many of the remaining books. Before beginning with this project, I did a book talk on many of the books. I then read one about Abraham Lincoln as a child. After reading the book aloud, we discussed and compared Abe Lincoln to ourselves in terms of characteristics, personalities, and hobbies.

Similarly, another teacher took many Caldecott Medal winning books, gave book talks, and then created activities to go with them. The other teacher took the Newbery Medal winning books and created activities to go

with them. Each teacher kept the books for about 6 weeks and then rotated them.

Book-A-Mania resulted in the librarian of our school being overwhelmed with students wanting to read and reread the books discussed during the week. The event was work for both teachers and students, but the "Book-A-Mania" it created was worth the effort.

Zirkelback is a fourth-grade language arts teacher at Madison Elementary School in Port Lavaca, Texas.

Signs of life

Karl A. Matz

A child's awareness of environmental print is an invaluable foundation upon which to build further reading concepts. Most primary children have experiences of this kind and can identify commercial logos for fast food restaurants, breakfast cereals, and popular toys.

In the rural region in which I live, however, many children have not had the kinds of experiences urban teachers may expect. Many live in homes which are miles from any town; many come from families where English is rarely spoken. In such cases, experience with common street signs and commercial logos is limited.

As part of a university independent practicum, I worked with a group of first-grade children who seemed to have no print awareness and demonstrated little familiarity with environmental print. My objective was to open their eyes to the meaningful print around them. I began by displaying enlarged facsimiles of commercial logos and street signs, and I was stunned to discover that they were unable to recognize any of the signs I had prepared.

I began anew by sharing Tom Funk's *I Read Signs* (Holiday House, 1962). In the story, a boy named Peter Malone observes and reads the signs around him while running an errand for his mother. Upon returning home, he creates signs of his own for the garden,

the lamp post, a sign which reads "Don't Beware of My Dog," and others.

Next, I used Tana Hoban's wonderful picture books *I Read Signs* (Greenwillow, 1983) and *I Walk and Read* (1984). These books feature large color photographs of environmental print and are easily read and enjoyed by beginning readers.

When I shared these books with the first graders, the U.S. Mail logo elicited the first sign of recognition. "Mailman!" one boy shouted, connecting the logo to the patch on his letter carrier's shoulder. Another boy recognized the triangular yellow *Dead End* sign and observed, "There's one on my street." A young girl recognized *PUSH*, having noticed it on the door of the apartment building where her family lived.

"Are there any other signs in your apartment building?" I asked.

"Stairs," she said, after a lengthy pause, "Then an arrow."

"How did you figure out that it said *Stairs*?"

She looked confused at the obvious question. "Well, because that's where the arrow points!"

A flurry of anecdotes and experiences followed, and it was difficult to give everyone an opportunity to share. They obviously had observed a great deal more in their environment than either they or I had imagined. Many of the experiences were quite different than I expected, but they were equally valid. One child had lived in a small community near a local night spot. He was familiar with several beer logos from the neon signs in the window. Another child recalled corporate logos of several farm implement manufacturers.

I decided we needed a more appropriate big book. Based on the experiences the children had shared, I created a big book on a standard 17" by 22" watercolor tablet. Although they had been unable to recognize the earlier examples such as *McDonald's*, *Don't Walk*, and *One Way*, they immediately identified the signs from their own environment such as *John Deere*, *No Trespassing*, and *County Road*. I also included the many signs the children had suggested such as *Fire Exit*, *Hamm's*, and *Cargill*.

I then suggested that perhaps we could make signs of our own as Peter Malone had done. I asked the children to look around to find places where signs might be "needed." I provided the materials and left our big book and Tana Hoban's books where they were easily accessible for perusal. The only direction was that the letters must be large enough to read from a distance.

In a very short time, we had adorned the classroom walls with signs such as *WATR* (water) for the drinking fountain, *TIM* (time) for the wall clock, *LIBARE* (library) for the bookshelves, and one little girl's creative *FRH R* (fresh air) for the window. Naturally, the children used the letter-sound relationships that seemed most reasonable to them, and this also provided rich soil in which their literacy skills could grow. Subsequent experiences with reading and writing led them to progressively more conventional spellings.

These children who had paid little attention to the print in the foreign environment of the public school began to point out signs whenever the class left the room: *BUS*, *GIRLS*, *PRINCIPAL*, *Mrs. Flanders*, *5B*. I was astonished at how quickly they generalized their new learning to other situations.

But the children taught me a valuable lesson as well. Many children do not share the kinds of environmental print experiences we have come to expect. The child from a town or city lives in an environment that is rich in print, but rural children have equally valid experiences of their own. Our task is to identify and extend them. Children bring their worlds into the classroom, and we should do no less than honor what they have to offer.

Matz is a doctoral student at the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, North Dakota.

Football and reading do mix!

Cindy Visser

As a reading specialist, I know that there are more boys than girls in remedial reading programs with an ever increasing disparity in higher grades. From experience I know that mothers are more likely to read to their children than fathers. In fact, many boys never see their father *or any male* reading! As a result, boys grow up associating reading with female teachers, mothers, and librarians, and many get turned off to reading without the opportunity to develop a love for it. Faced with an ever increasing male population in our district's remedial reading programs and an increasing number of single-parent homes, it is imperative to provide male reading models for our K-4 population.

We began our search in the business and professional arena and had exciting results from visiting firemen, policemen, and even the city's mayor. But our goal was to have a male reader visit each classroom, and we soon depleted our supply of volunteers. Knowing the importance our town places on sports, we turned to the high school football coach and formed a partnership that has been mutually enriching. Eager to dispel the dumb athlete image, the coach invited his players to wear their football jerseys and read a book to an elementary class. The players were so well received that the High School Readers program has become a monthly event.

Here's how it works: On Monday of High School Readers week, each teacher chooses a read-aloud book for his or her class and puts it in a box in the elementary school office. The books are primarily picture books and are short enough to be read in a 20-minute period. The box is delivered to the high school where the athletes

choose a book and take it home to practice reading it aloud. The guidance given to the readers consists of (a) an explanation of their importance as role models; (b) directions to read slowly, read with enough volume, and to share the pictures; and (c) instructions to field questions after the story with an emphasis on how important reading is in school and sports. On Friday morning, the players wearing their jerseys are bused to the elementary school and spend approximately 20 minutes in a schoolwide read-in. They read, talk to the kids about reading, and even answer questions about sports.

The first time this idea was presented to the high school students, it was met with comments like "I can't read in front of a class full of kids!" and "They'll probably laugh at me if I read a word wrong." But once the rationale behind the program was explained, they were willing to participate. That first busload of athletes in jerseys with books in hand was incredibly nervous as I welcomed them to Fisher Elementary. When they returned to the bus a half hour later, they were elated: "Those kids really thought I was something special! You should have seen the way they listened to the story!" "That was fun!" "The kids wanted to know all about me and what position I play." I knew the program was a success by the looks in the student-athletes' eyes!

We knew the program would benefit our elementary school children; what we hadn't counted on was the enthusiasm of the high school readers! The responsibility of their task and the worship in the eyes of the K-4 students has boosted their self-esteem immeasurably. The coach reports that he has a waiting list of football players wanting to participate. We even had the school mascot, in full lion costume, visit the classes one High School Readers day!

We still have plenty of boys in our remedial reading classes, but they all have an image that we hope will remain with them: an image of a young man in a football jersey, sharing the joy and excitement of a book. And they look forward eagerly to the principal's announcement: "The High

In the Classroom is a peer reviewed column that publishes practical ideas for classroom use within the field of literacy education. Submit manuscripts to **In the Classroom, The Reading Teacher, School of Education, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907, USA**. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to this same address to receive a brochure describing manuscript preparation and submission procedures.

Practical teaching ideas

School Readers are here; will each class send one person to escort your reader back to your room." As the kids say, "Oh boy! They're here!"

Visser is a reading specialist at Fisher Elementary School in Lynden, Washington.

Poetry-of-the-month club

Steven Schneider

An exciting way to celebrate each new month is to have students create a poem symbolizing and reflecting the spirit of the season, holiday, or special event involved with that month. Children are given a calendar frame (see example). The frame provides a space above the calendar for the children to decorate in much the same way as a commercial calendar might have a picture of an autumn scene accompanying the month of October.

Children may be asked to create a poem based on a seasonal or monthly theme such as a historical event or a more personal event such as a classmate's birthday. Some suggested themes for a U.S. classroom are:

- January: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day; winter
- February: Ground Hog Day, Valentine's Day, Lincoln-Washington birthdays, Chinese New Year
- March: Easter, St. Patrick's Day, spring, weather, seasons
- April: passover, spring, flowers, April Fools Day
- May: Mother's Day, flowers, spring themes, Memorial Day
- June: End of school, Father's Day, Flag Day, summer themes
- July: Independence Day, summer vacation, summertime activities
- August: summer vacation, camp, outdoor recreation, games, sports
- September: back-to-school, Labor Day, end of summer
- October: Columbus Day, fall, Halloween

A child's calendar page

Fourth of July
by Erica Leigh...

*On the Fourth of July,
The fireworks explode with light.
They fill up the sky,
With colors in flight.
Shades of red, white, and blue,
With memories of freedom
And a nation brand-new!*

<i>July</i>							<i>1989</i>
<i>Sun.</i>	<i>Mon.</i>	<i>Tues.</i>	<i>Wed.</i>	<i>Thurs.</i>	<i>Fri.</i>	<i>Sat.</i>	
						1	
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
23 30	24 31	25	26	27	28	29	

November: Election Day, Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving, fall, Children's Book Week

December: Christmas, Chanukah, winter, end of year, Santa Claus, snow, toys, presents

The first step to writing calendar poetry is to read aloud various selections from poems based on the monthly theme. These poems can be discussed, analyzed, and shared among your pupils. You may wish to have groups of children concentrate on gathering and sharing specific kinds of poetry related to the monthly topics and have them present their favorite selections in a

poetry "round-table." In addition, children may be able to obtain further ideas and thoughts for their self-made poems from literature, research, classroom discussions, personal journals or logs, newspapers or magazines, television programs, and peer consultations.

When you feel that students have sufficient background information, you may wish to model the procedure first and then allow them to create their own poems, individually or in collaboration with other students.

After children write their poems in the blank spaces on the calendars, they can decorate the remaining area with

pictures, either hand drawn or from magazine cut-outs. In addition, you can split the top blank part of the calendar into two separate sections. One section can contain verse written by a famous poet. The other section adjacent to it can be left blank to allow the students to create their own poetry. In this case, you have a poetry appreciation lesson on one side and a poetry writing lesson on the other.

The calendar itself can be either a desk or wall display type depending on the cover style you choose and the method by which it is folded and sta-

pled. The calendar should be developed as a culminating activity each month which would enable your students to reflect back on their classroom and life experiences during that month. The calendar might be a full 12-month calendar; it might also reflect school-related themes and can be based on a 10-month cycle depicting poems created from the activities and programs that the school sponsors each month. Moreover, it may be a good idea to purposely leave out the numbers of each month when duplicating blank calendar sheets so you can

have a storehouse of calendar pages for future use. The children merely fill in the appropriate numbers accordingly.

In any event, when the calendar is completed, children will be able to take home and display a relevant educational project that is not only aesthetically appealing but functional as well.

Schneider is a teacher at Public School 85 in Bronx, New York.

Call for new "In the Classroom" feature

To promote dialogue among ITC readers, letters from practitioners who may have used suggestions published in ITC are encouraged. As space permits, these responses will be published at the end of each ITC column in a new feature entitled "Encore." Comments should address practical application or modifications of a specific strategy found in the ITC column. Address letters to "In the Classroom," Carolyn Colvin and Pam Ross, College of Education, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA, 92182-0139, USA.

Literacy vignette: The sea otter's diet

Jack A. Graves

While making a presentation about the California sea otter to a group of 92 kindergarten children, I indicated the otter's favorite foods: sea urchin, clam, crab, and abalone. About a week after my visit, I received some fine drawings done by the youngsters, as well as a written summary by the teacher of the salient aspects of each illustration as described by the children. One little guy recalled the sea otter's favorite foods: sea urchin, clam, crab, and baloney!

Graves is a professor in the Department of Teacher Education at California State University, Stanislaus in Turlock, California.

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