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Spring 5-2009

Investigation of Shared Reading and predictable books.

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Shared reading in the classroom: How and why?

By Jonathan Smith

Whether it is reading a book in the silent corners of a library, the menu in a bustling restaurant, or the words that slowly scroll by on the TV Guide channel when nothing else is on, reading is a very important and necessary aspect of everyone's life. Therefore, should something of such importance not be shared with the others in our lives? Nevertheless, if you asked someone, "When was the last time someone read to you?" they would probably either have a difficult time answering or say that it was during their childhood. However, do people not share reading with us all the time? Whether it is a sports announcer reading a line-up of the players during a game, a waitress reading off the special of the day or pointing to the menu while reading off something you missed, a teacher presenting a Power Point presentation to their class, or even a newscaster reading news off of a teleprompter, people are constantly reading to us. If this is the case, then why do we often teach children to read by drilling letters and sounds? This idea of sharing reading is just as important to helping students learn to read as it is to our everyday lives.

What is Shared Reading?

Anne McGill-Franzen (2006) defines shared reading as a whole-group read-along where the teacher does most of the reading, and students contribute with what they know. She also mentions that texts for shared reading include far more than just big books. A few examples she provides are classroom charts, maps, songs, rhymes, and much more. With so many types of texts available for shared reading, the teacher can also connect reading to other subjects across the school curriculum.

The Literacy Environment

In order to successfully teach students through shared reading it is important to create a strong literacy environment. Donald Holdaway (1979) presents three necessary aspects of such an environment. The first is an element of discovery. This involves introducing students to an

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"enjoyably story experience" that they will want to return to later on, encouraging students to join in on repetitive text, reading commonly used words, predicting what will happen, becoming engaged in the story, and presenting students with a model of appropriate book language and word decoding strategies. Next, Holdaway (1979) discusses the element of exploration. This element includes re-readings of the often predictable books used during shared reading and thus presents opportunities for teaching of new concepts. These re-readings allow the teacher to point out special structures of the stories, provide all students with more chances to practice reading aloud and using word-decoding strategies, and of course, provide more fun listening experiences for all students. The third and final element presented by Holdaway (1979) is independent experience and expression. This means allowing students to further explore and experience the stories on their own or in small groups. Furthermore, students can participate in expressive activities that help them identify with the stories and internalize the language used. This element also provides children with a chance to practice individual reading, gives them a sense of achievement and self-confidence, "encourages the development of self-monitoring and self-correction", and allows students to help teach each other when reading in groups (Holdaway, 72). Once these elements are in place, shared reading can become a very effective teaching tool.

Lessons

Aside from only giving young students experience with oral reading, shared reading can be used to teach several important emergent and early reading concepts. Sharon Taberski (1998) lists several of these concepts and more in her article on shared reading. First of all, shared reading is great for developing print concepts. The following are a few of these concepts:

-print is read from left to right

-printed words and what is read orally have a one-to-one correspondence

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-sentences begin with capital letters and end with some form of punctuation

-text in quotation marks usually means that a character within the story is speaking

Pointing at and masking the words, sounds, and parts of speech being taught helps to ensure that students' attention is focused on the correct area in the text. Secondly, shared reading presents a great chance to introduce children to different genres of writing and discuss what makes each one special. A third lesson that can be gained from shared reading is methods for decoding words in stories. These strategies include determining what makes sense in the context of the story and pictures, sounding out, matching letters, and any other strategies that students may find useful. The most important thing about all of these lessons is that they present information to students in a fun and interactive way. However, as Taberski (1998) points out, teachers should not leave student learning to chance. If problems or confusions are seen when students are working individually or in groups, then those should be explored further during whole-class shared reading.

Choosing Appropriate Materials

Before implementing shared reading in the classroom, a teacher must know how to choose useful materials that are appropriate for his or her students. Lori Jamison Rog and Wilfred Burton (2001) describe appropriate books as those that "provide a balance between support and challenge" for the students. The books chosen should help build confidence while still providing opportunities for new learning. There are several leveling systems designed to help teachers pick the best books for their students. Rog and Burton (2001) helped to develop a 10-point leveling system for this purpose using five criteria: vocabulary, size and layout of print, predictability, illustration support, and complexity of concepts. Two of these criteria which are very important to shared reading are predictability and illustration support. Predictable texts

allow students to quickly catch on to word patterns so they can join in even if they cannot

otherwise decode the words. Good illustration support is useful for helping children decode

words they do not know and make predictions of what will happen later on in the story.

Anne McGill-Franzen (1993) and Don Holdaway (2001) also provide worthwhile tips for

selecting good shared reading books. McGill-Franzen (1993) recommends books involving

counting and colors, as well as those with themes familiar to children, for emergent and

beginning readers. With more difficult books, she suggests that reading them to children first

can give them background knowledge that will help them when reading the books on their own.

Even when students are beginning to read chapter books, she suggests that the predictability and

familiar flow of series books can make this transition easier. Holdaway (2001) stresses the

importance of using books that have proven to be loved by children. He also mentions the need

to transfer these loved books, as well as fun songs and chants, to big books with illustrations and

text that can be easily seen by all students during whole-class shared reading. Furthermore, he

believes that the students should have a say in choosing the books for re-reading, and most

importantly, teachers should use books and materials that are enjoyable and are presented as

such.

Introducing Shared Reading to Students

After obtaining or creating a library of stories and other shared reading materials, it is

time to implement shared reading in the classroom. Unless this is the students' first year of

school, shared reading may be a different way of learning than what they are expecting, but they

will likely find it fun and effective. The first and most important aspect of introducing shared

reading is to provide an enjoyable and supportive environment in which all students can

participate. Marie Clay (1991) presents some other ideas to keep in mind when introducing a

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new or unfamiliar book. First of all, the teacher should present the topic, title, and characters to the students. In some cases, titles can be confusing, and it might be worthwhile to return and discuss them later. Secondly, one should encourage children to respond to the book and share any personal experiences that might relate to it. Thirdly, Clay (1991) mentions providing an overview of the plot to help students anticipate what will occur and possibly relating the story to other books with similar topics. Lastly, it is helpful to introduce and let students practice saying unusual words, names, and sentence patterns that are found in the new or unfamiliar book.

Clay (1991) also provides important steps for getting students involved with the story. One of these is urging students to think of how the story connects with experiences in their lives. Another strategy is to pause when reading to allow the students to finish a familiar part or to anticipate what will happen next. This both helps focus their attention and "contributes to the feel of where the story is going and how the climax is building up" (Clay, 269). Asking questions to make students reflect on their thoughts and predictions is also a good way to get students involved. This can give the teacher insights on the information to which the students are paying the most attention. Finally, when asking about words or the story, the teacher should accept partially correct answers, so as not to discourage students, and then kindly point out things they may have missed. By using these strategies for introducing shared readings and new books and for getting students involved, teachers can make shared reading a successful activity with a plethora of teaching opportunities.

Making and Using Predictable Books and other Shared Reading Materials

In a shared reading classroom, the teacher should know how to create and obtain useful materials, such as big books and charts, and what kinds of activities can be implemented when using these materials. Predictable books are almost essential to shared reading in early

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classrooms and can be useful in all classrooms. One great aspect of predictable books is that a

teacher could make his or her own without too much difficulty, or better yet, students could

cooperate to make their own predictable books to use during shared reading time. Even without

creating one's own books, there are several great predictable books to be found. Some such

books can also be found in big books versions, but if a big book version cannot be found, it is

important to either make one of your own or use a projector for shared reading purposes. Several

other great shared reading materials can be made or purchased and placed throughout the

classroom. These include several types of charts, labeled diagrams, maps, murals, songs,

rhymes, chants, and even students' very own writings.

It is also very advantageous to have activities that supplement students' learning when

doing shared reading. Marianne Saccardi (1996 a,b) presents several activity ideas that can be

used with predictable books. A few of these include:

-Readers Theater, where students act out the story along with the text

-connecting to activities in other subjects, such as science or math

-rhyming play

-puppet theater

-rhythm games

-word sorts

Many of these ideas follow directly from the topics, style, and wordplay used within the

predictable books being read. These are only a small number of the possible activities that can

make reading and learning fun for students.

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Conclusion

As can be seen, shared reading is a much more inviting method of teaching reading that the traditional use of phonics, worksheets, and stories that children, or even adults, do not find interesting. With the proper literacy environment and materials, shared reading can be used to teach all sorts of literacy concepts in a fun, useful, and memorable way for students. Furthermore, by letting students have a say in the books being read and even create their own books, they may even look forward to coming to school and learning. Also, by using predictable materials that students can learn to read without too much stress, they will gain higher self-esteem and be more willing to attempt more difficult books. Although shared reading is beginning to be used more in schools, it is still often used more as listening time for the students instead of reading and learning time. Hopefully as more research surfaces and teachers are trained, more schools will begin using true shared reading and more students can learning to love learning and reading.

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