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
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LITERATURE STUDY GROUPS IN ACTION Guiding Pre-Service Teachers from Theory to Practice

Cover Page Footnote

The author would like to acknowledge Liz Storey and Deborah Wells who contributed ideas for this manuscript. In addition, she would like to extend thanks and appreciation to her preservice teachers, especially Paula Gerard, Andy Lintz, and Jessica Mackenzie.

LITERATURE STUDY GROUPS IN ACTION

Guiding Pre-Service Teachers from Theory to Practice 

ARTICLE BY **CARYN M. KING**

A paper presented at the College Reading Association Conference, St. Louis, Missouri, November 7, 1992.

Teacher educators of the 1990s are faced with the task of preparing future teachers who are capable of responding to literature both efferently and aesthetically (Rosenblatt, 1991) as well as understand how both reader characteristics and textual characteristics influence the meaning making process (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). In order to accomplish this task, I use literature study groups with my college seniors. My purpose is twofold: first, I want my students to learn to love quality literature for its own sake; and second, I want them to be able to use literature as a highly motivational way to teach reading and writing. This article will describe the literature study process used in my college level classroom, which may be helpful to other teacher educators. In addition, classroom teachers may find the components of this literature study project helpful as they prepare lessons involving children's literature.

The Importance and Function of Discussion

Within my university classroom, students gather in small groups of three or four and select a children's book they all want to study and eventually teach. Members of the group read the book, meet to discuss it, and form a literature study group (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Peterson & Eeds, 1991). I try to emphasize that initially the purpose of discus-

sion is to share with fellow readers the joys, difficulties, insights, and speculations that group members have experienced while reading (Peterson & Eeds, 1991). My intent is to encourage personally relevant responses to the selected literature since I believe that as readers, preservice teachers bring to the text their own unique set of life experiences, beliefs and values. Thus, as they meet in groups to discuss literature, their responses are shaped by their participation in life, the social context of the situation, as well as the literary conventions reflected in the author's style or text genre (Wells, 1990). Differences in experiences, understandings, and expectations of various group members can influence cognitive change within the individual (Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1989), and I view this as a necessary component in the intellectual growth of my students.

After students have met twice in groups and have engaged in dialogue about their books, I meet with each group and we talk about the book and our literary insights. (Please note: Our semester-long class meets once a week for three hours and approximately one hour each week is devoted to the literature study.) At first, discussions can be somewhat slow in starting since some of my students expect me to dominate and show them "what's important." However, I give this responsibility to my students by asking them to return to their books and identify passages that they felt were particularly significant, for whatever reason. This accomplishes two things. First, since I've asked them to

identify particular passages, we have something specific to talk about the next time we meet as a group. Secondly, because they have chosen passages that are personally significant, they are in a much better position for sharing insights within their literature study groups (Peterson & Eeds, 1991).

Other Components of the Literature Study

Following three or four weeks of group discussions, the entire class is introduced to the written aspect of the assignment. This component requires students to collaboratively develop literature-related activities they might use in their classrooms. Since my students are also in the field at the time they take this course and are teaching in a variety of classroom settings (some using basals, some using literature, some using individualized reading programs), I feel they can benefit from an experience that requires them to incorporate quality literature into their existing reading programs. This component of the literature study assignment is also designed with the International Reading Association's (1986) *Guidelines for Professional Preparation of Reading Teachers* as well as our state's *Standards in Reading* (MRA, 1987) in mind.

Each literature study group spends a portion of the next six or seven classes creating a folder containing resource information and original classroom activities to use with the selected book. Completed folders include:

- an originally written synopsis of the story
- information about the author and/or illustrator
- suggested grade levels and any special teaching instructions
- a story map (including setting, characters, conflict, plot development, and theme)

- a list of discussion questions representing several levels of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy (students are encouraged to focus their questions on those elements which they previously identified during earlier discussions of the story)
- an activity designed to teach a particular literary element (choices include characterization, mood, symbolism, metaphor, or point of view)
- a list of vocabulary words to be taught (these should be terms that are essential to comprehension and/or completion of the other activities included in the literature study)
- an activity designed to teach a reading comprehension strategy (these include, among others, KWL, DRTA, semantic mapping, text previews, anticipation guides, ReQuest, etc.)
- two thinking skills activities for each level of Bloom's taxonomy. Students design a "shape" that is relevant to their book and create an activity involving a particular level of thinking. For example, for Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, a school bus might be the appropriate shape. An appropriate activity for the "knowledge" level of thinking, which would be written directly on the school bus shape, might be: Complete a Wanted poster for T. J. Avery. Draw a picture on your paper using his physical description from the story. Underneath the picture, list the crimes that were committed against his friends in one column and in another column list the crimes he was accused of in Strawberry. An appropriate "evaluation" activity might read: Set up a court trial in your classroom. Appoint a judge and jury and

assign the character roles of the Logan family, Mr. Morrison, Mr. Jamison, Mr. Granger, the Simms, the Wallaces, the sheriff and the Averys. Conduct a trial and come to a conclusion whether T. J. Avery is guilty of robbery or murder or both.

- a grading sheet for evaluating pupils (this includes an explanation of what will be graded, why it will be graded, and how it will be graded)
- a list of final celebration ideas to enrich or extend pupil involvement with an appreciation of literature (students are required to include ideas that address multicultural or environmental issues as well as provide content area integration)
- Refer to the Appendix for an example of one group's completed project on Jerry Spinelli's *Maniac Magee*.

One master folder, good for duplication purposes, is developed, and each group member also submits his or her own copy of the master folder. Classroom displays promoting the book are also created. At first, students are usually overwhelmed by the number of activities required by this assignment; however, I emphasize that in an actual classroom setting, one would choose only the most appropriate activities since the activities should never overshadow the time devoted to daily reading.

My role during the time students are creating their projects is one of facilitator. I attempt to help my students answer their own questions by encouraging them to draw on several sources of information. For instance, I often refer them to the required course readings as well as supplemental materials from my own library. I remind them of class discussions we've had. I share with them examples of past students' work and encourage them to ask questions of

their classmates and their supervising teachers in the field. All of this is done in an attempt to instill the notion that teaching involves decision making, and in order to be a good decision-maker, one needs to be well-informed and open to suggestions.

A Celebration of Literature

Near the end of the 15 week semester, we have a "Celebrate Literature Day." During this time, class displays are set up and individual groups present their literature studies to the class. At this time, individual students may request copies of some or all of the literature studies presented, and this is the reason why each group is required to submit one master folder, good for duplication.

Often times, teachers from the local area and some of my former students join us for this celebration. I purposely invite these individuals because I feel their presence demonstrates to my current students that the literature study projects are not merely an academic exercise, but are something of value to actual teachers. There are no better testimonials than when former students, who are now practicing teachers, tell current students they actually use the literature studies they created for this course.

Evaluation of the Process and the Product

The responsibility of evaluating the group literature studies is shared. Since students are required to work in groups, they are responsible for evaluating their own participation as well as anonymously evaluating their peers' participation in group activities. Three criteria are used to evaluate the group process:

1. the extent to which each person was prepared for group discussions

2. the extent to which each person shared ideas and actively listened to others during group discussions
3. the quality of written work each person submitted to the final product.

Each criterion is given a point value, and scores are averaged across group members. This leaves me with the responsibility of evaluating the contents of the master folder. Since students each submit an individual folder, which contains a complete copy of the literature study, when their folders are returned, they receive my evaluation as well as anonymous peer evaluations from the other members of their literature study group.

Concluding Remarks

The use of literature study groups in the university classroom holds promise for future teachers of reading and writing. As preservice teachers discuss and interact with literature, they expand their own understanding of text, of the reading process, of themselves, and of the world around them. Put simply, these individuals develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be literate. Hopefully, this experience will influence their own teaching to the extent that they realize literate individuals, including even young readers, are capable of responding to literature in personally meaningful ways, even when the teacher is not present (Eeds & Wells, 1989).

APPENDIX

A Literature Study Project designed for use with *Maniac Magee*
Prepared by: Paula Gerard, Andy Lintz, & Jessica Mackenzie
Suggested grade level: 5

Synopsis and Author Information

Creative, energetic, and heroic! Author Jerry Spinelli writes an adventure that creates a legend. *Maniac Magee* is a story of a young boy who is always on the run. Jeffrey Magee's parents die in a car accident when he is young. He goes to live with his aunt and uncle who have a dysfunctional marriage. Jeffrey runs away, unable to bear the silence and ignorance.

He runs to Two Mills, a city near his original home. Jeffrey's flashbacks of his parents are distressing, but he still continues on with his adventure. Because he has no home, he takes up residence in a deer pen at a local zoo. Jeffrey is surviving when he meets Amanda Beale during one of his daily jogs. She lives on the East End of town, a place where Jeffrey is not supposed to be because of his white skin. He borrows a book from Amanda who is at first impressed by his forwardness, then his courage. When she invites him to her home to live, he fits in perfectly—doing chores for Amanda's mother and providing entertainment for Amanda's younger brothers who were once terrors. During his stay at the Beale's, Jeffrey becomes a legend by whacking a pitch from the fastest pitcher in town, untying impossible knots, running before dawn, and other happenings which gain him the name Maniac Magee.

Maniac cannot understand why he receives jeers from some people in the East End. After the Beale's home is vandalized, Maniac decides he must leave to protect the family, much to their dismay. He escapes back to the zoo and shares the buffalo home. Hunger hits hard and Maniac openly lies weak and nearly starved when Grayson, a zoo maintenance man, comes to his aid.

Grayson, an older, lonely man and Maniac become instant companions. He enjoys taking care of Maniac and provides the boy with all of the basic needs.

Maniac works side by side with Grayson at the zoo. Maniac makes himself a cozy home in the equipment room of a nearby baseball field. Grayson soon moves in with Maniac, leaving his YMCA room behind. They share many things besides a wonderful friendship. Maniac teaches Grayson how to read and tells him how the black people on the East End are the same as many white people. Grayson tells Maniac of his fameless minor league baseball years. The two of them have their best Thanksgiving and Christmas ever. Soon after, Grayson passes away, leaving Maniac with precious memories and solitude once again.

Maniac then meets two young runaways and convinces them to go back home, agreeing to go with them. Maniac soon realizes their homelife is unhealthy and narrow minded. During his short stay at their house, Maniac bribes them to attend school and forces them to face their fears of black people by bringing a black child from the East End to their home, causing more trouble than expected. Maniac realizes he must get away from this environment since the prejudice is too complex for him to comprehend.

Throughout the story, Maniac is faced with racism. He cannot understand why when he is in the East End he is looked at differently or why people in general even mention skin color. He is courageous and unwilling to let skin color stop him from being friends with anyone. The end of the novel reunites Maniac with the Beale family. He even gains a new friend, Mars Bar Thompson, who was once an enemy. Mars Bar gains respect for Maniac and sees past his white skin and into his soul.

Jerry Spinelli has written many other intriguing books. *Space Station Seventh Grade* is a book for the adolescent which again combines humor with honesty. The sequel, *Jason and Marceline*, is another book which explores a young

person's discovery of life. More books include *Who Put That Hair in my Toothbrush?* and *Dump Days*. Mr. Spinelli is currently working on new projects at home in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, where he lives with his wife, Eileen, who is also a writer, and their children.

Discussion Questions

These questions are categorized according to Bloom's taxonomy and are designed for use after the novel has been read.

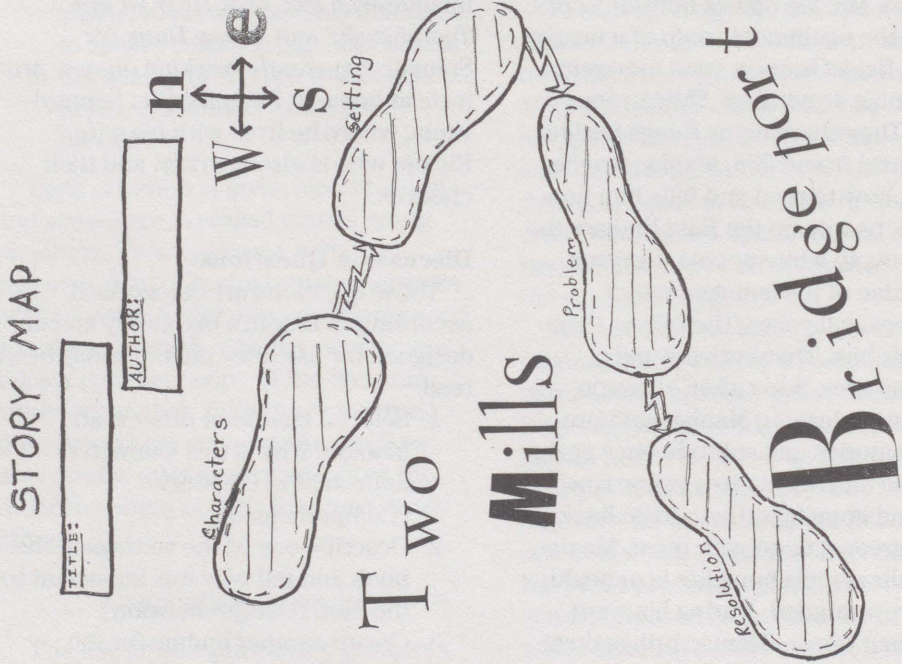
1. Select a character other than Maniac. Why is this character important in the story? (Comprehension)
2. Describe one of the settings in the book and tell why it is important to the plot. (Comprehension)
3. Create another ending for the story. (Synthesis)
4. Examine what you think was the best part of Maniac's life. Why was this the best part? (Analysis)
5. In your opinion, what do you think was the funniest part of the book? Tell why. (Evaluation)
6. Choose what you think was the saddest part of the book. Tell why you chose this part. (Evaluation)
7. Justify what you feel is the main message of the story. (Evaluation)
8. Do you like or dislike the main character? Why? (Evaluation)

Literary Element Activity

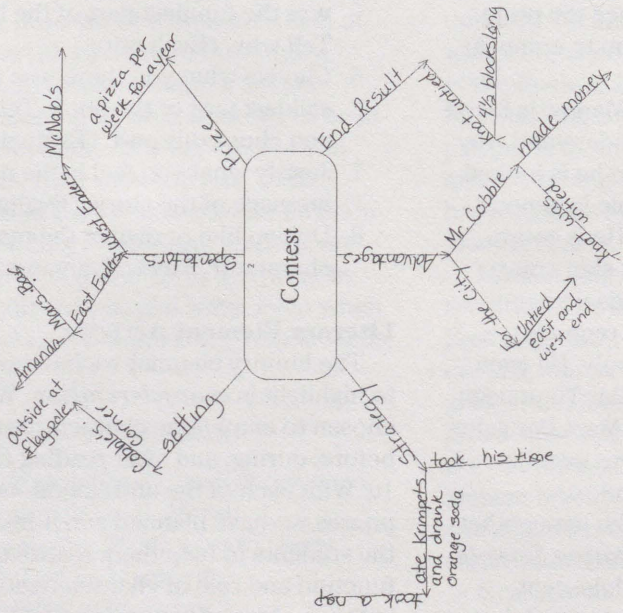
The literary element we have selected to highlight is *characterization*. We have chosen to emphasize characterization before, during, and after reading chapter 10. With each of the aforementioned phases we have planned activities for the students to help them realize the function and role of characterization within a piece of literature.

Prereading: This activity is intended to get the reader thinking about the qual-

Story Map



Semantic Mapping



ities of the new character, Mars Bar, who will be introduced in chapter 10. Students will be told they are going to meet a new character in this chapter. The teacher will read phrases from chapter 10 to describe Mars Bar's actions. Students must then write a list of Mars Bar's characteristics and compare them with Maniac's personality traits. Suggestions will be given to students to try different ways of recording the comparisons such as T-charts.

During reading: While the students are reading chapter 10, they are to add to their list of similarities and differences. Moreover, they should be forming opinions about the new character's personality and how his personality affects Maniac's actions.

Post reading: Once the students have finished reading chapter 10, they will be placed into small groups of three or four to discuss the new character, Mars Bar, and the qualities he possesses. In addition, they will be asked to make some generalizations about his relationship with Maniac. Also, as an independent activity, the students will be asked to make a Venn diagram comparing Maniac and Mars Bar.

Vocabulary Activity

This activity is designed for use with chapter 13. The vocabulary words for this chapter are:

plywood	solution
crowbar	allergy
expression	thankless
miracle	hemisphere
sycamore.	

After an initial introduction where the teacher pronounces each word and the class discusses its meaning, students will be placed into small groups. Each group will elect a group captain. The captains will be called to the front of the class and will draw an envelope out of a hat. Each envelope will contain a card with a number and one vocabulary writ-

ten on it. The task is for each group to figure out a way to role play the word. Groups will have several minutes to brainstorm. When the brainstorming is finished, the group with the number one on its card must come to the front of the class and role play the word. The groups not role playing must determine the vocabulary word. In addition to calling out the correct response, the group that correctly identifies the word must also define the term as it is used in the story and explain its importance to the plot of chapter 13.

Reading Comprehension Activity

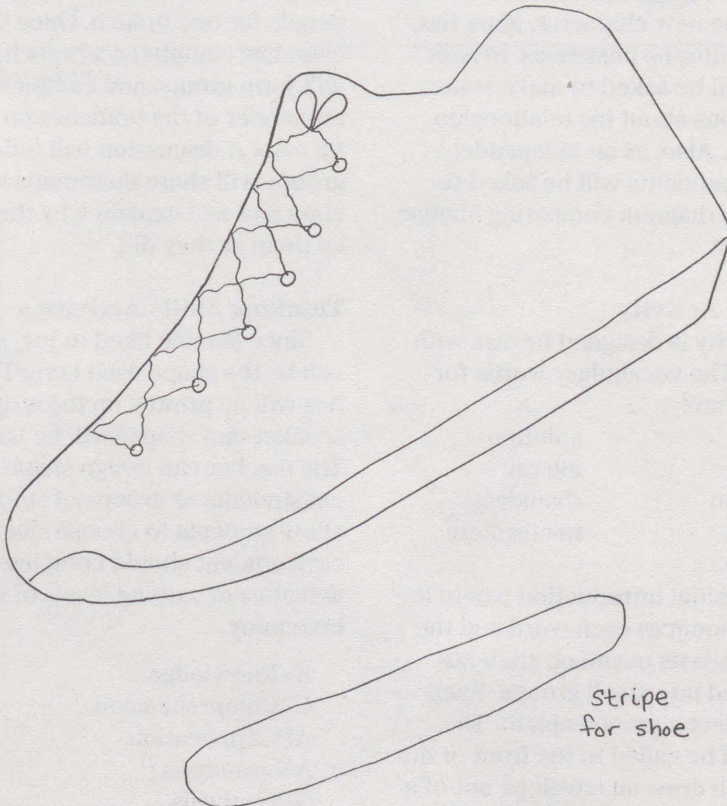
We have chosen a semantic mapping activity to reinforce students' reading comprehension of chapter 19. We will distribute the blank semantic map with the center circle and main branches completed. As a class, we will add the details for one branch. Once the entire class has completed a branch, students will form groups and complete the remainder of the branches on the semantic map. A discussion will follow where groups will share their maps with the class and will explain why they completed them as they did.

Thinking Skills Activities

Since Maniac liked to jog, a sneaker will be the shape used here. The activities will be printed on the stripe of the sneaker and shapes will be laminated. The teacher can assign shapes to individual students or groups of students, or allow students to choose shapes, but each student should complete three activities of varying levels of Bloom's taxonomy.

K=Knowledge
C=Comprehension
AP=Application
AN=Analysis
S=Synthesis
E=Evaluation

- K1. List as many characters as you can from the story and write a sentence to describe each one.
- K2. Identify the reason Maniac Magee doesn't live with his parents and name some of the homes he has had.
- C1. Describe the home environment of the McNab family.
- C2. Make a diorama of one of the places Maniac Magee lived and explain to a classmate why you included the things you did.
- AP1. Draw a picture of what you think Mars Bar looked like.
- AP2. As you read the story, pretend you are Maniac and keep a diary of the important happenings in your life.
- AN1. Compare and contrast what it would be like to live in the McNab and Beale families.
- AN2. Make a family tree of the significant people in Maniac's life.
- S1. Design a newspaper article that would appear in the local newspaper after Maniac untied "Cobble's Knot."
- S2. Write your own recipe for what you think is in a Butterscotch Krimpet.
- E1. Would you be happy if your life was like Maniac Magee's? Discuss this with a friend and tell why or why not you would be happy.
- E2. Regardless of what side of town you may choose to live in, write a letter to the editor recommending a way to eliminate racism and prejudice.



Assessment

Students will be given points for some activities and credit or no credit for other activities. However, not all activities will be formally assessed.

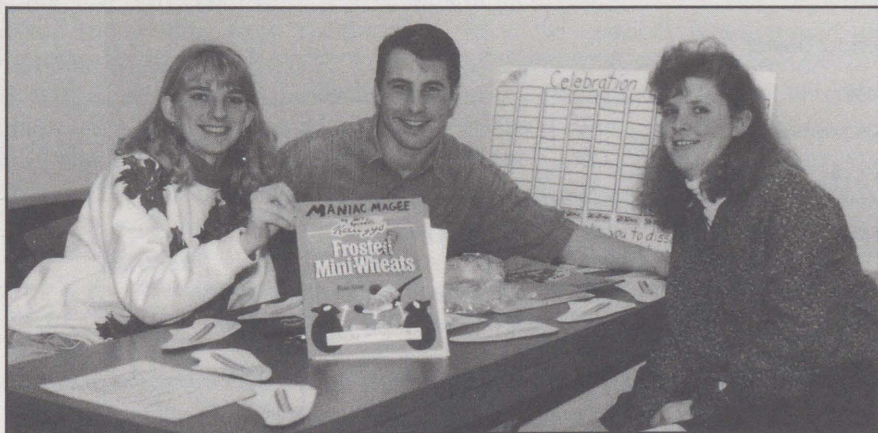
- Each child is to choose one thinking skills activity and share it with the teacher. Each activity is worth 5 points.
- The literary skill activity will be assessed by how well the children worked together to complete the activity. Groups will be given the opportunity to rate their peers' participation in the activity, and the grade given will be on a credit/no credit basis.
- The vocabulary activity for chapter 13 will be evaluated in the same manner as the literary skill activity.
- Each child must also complete a story map after reading the novel. This map will demonstrate a student's comprehension of the story and will be worth a total of 10 points.

Celebration Products

1. Chart the time it takes each student to dissolve a butterscotch candy (krimpet) in her mouth.

2. Make pizzas in honor of Maniac, the boy who was allergic to pizza.
3. Visit the local zoo to see what it would be like to live with the deer and buffalo.
4. Play a game of baseball in honor of Grayson.
5. Give students a graph-paper map with various locations where Maniac traveled identified. Find the locations with a given list of coordinates.
6. Using an encyclopedia, select an African American and trace his or her history. Write a short synopsis.
7. Have a guest speaker from a homeless shelter speak to the class.
8. Walk the length of Cobble's unraveled knot.
9. In groups, make paper mache models of various characters in Maniac Magee.

*** The author would like to acknowledge Liz Storey and Deborah Wells who contributed ideas for this manuscript. In addition, she would like to extend thanks and appreciation to her preservice teachers, especially Paula Gerard, Andy Lintz, and Jessica Mackenzie.*



Jessica Mackenzie (left), Andy Lintz and Paula Gerard are all currently teaching in the southwestern Michigan area: Paula in Muskegon, Andy in Fruitport, and Jessica in Lansing.

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