



Widening the Circle for Literacy in an Accountability Culture

Margaret Lally Queenan, School of Education
University of Bridgeport, Bridgeport, CT

The Problem: "...Thinking, reading, and writing critically are fundamental to developing globally competent citizens..." (Gutiérrez, 2009). The argument: focus on test preparation to meet requirements for accountability (Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass, & Massengill, 2005; Hollingworth, 2007).

I had a deadline several weeks into the school year for entering into the district data base the scores on two reading assessments—the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI). Each took about 20 minutes per child to administer, and I had 20 students in my class. That meant that the amount of time I spent at the beginning of our school year on formalized measurements, prescribed by someone from the state or district office, was almost 14 hours, or two weeks worth of Reading and Writing Workshop time. (Bomer, 2005)

Theoretical Rationale: "Balanced literacy" refers to helping children achieve literacy through a balance of teacher instruction and student support (Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass, & Massengill, 2005) in a climate where "...reading, writing, listening, viewing, and speaking receive appropriate rather than equal emphasis" (Hibbert and Iannucci, 2005).

Methodology: Participant observation **DATA:** transcribed discussions, interviews, artifacts. **ANALYSIS:** Generation of grounded theory, constant comparison of coded incidents with Nvivo 9, thick description, theme writing.

Question: *What happens when comprehension strategies are applied to science content in urban (77.8% poverty and 70.5 % minority) classrooms?*

Results: 3 kinds of literacy: 1) School (55 percent of students achieved proficiency and 25 percent goal in reading) **2) Balanced** (I have arrived at Africa. I saw a cheetah and then I saw another cheetah run after a deer. Wow! That cheetah is fast! It's like a race car. It goes 10,000 mph. It hunts with another male cheetah and looks for its prey, like deer or moose. It is faster than a tiger or bear. It goes 45 miles per hour. I can't tell you about its height. It is 37 inches long. It has sharp teeth.) **3) Science (Habitat:** In the wild cheetahs have two groups: 1) family and 2) male/female; **Survival:** Female cheetah lives by herself EXCEPT when she has a litter (babies). Captured cheetahs live 11.7 years; wild cheetahs live 6 years. **Comprehension strategies: Question:** How come a cheetah has long claws?

Inference: ...to help it catch its prey faster and scratch it first.