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Literacy Teaching, Literacy Learning: Lessons from the Book Club *Plus* Project*

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Late this summer, a front page, *New York Times* article on teacher education led with this statement:

> A growing number of states and school districts are short-circuiting the usual route to teacher certification with their own crash courses that put new teachers in the classroom after as little as three weeks. . . . (Zernike, 2000, p. A1)

The article went on to describe the predicted shortage of qualified teachers if we are held to current models of teacher preparation. The tone of the article was harsh, describing schools and colleges of education as having "done more harm than good," being "cumbersome," and offering "mind-numbing courses." Quoting policy-makers who "express near hostility to teacher education schools," the article called for new programs in teacher preparation to address the projected teacher shortage and concerns of quality.

I am uncertain why the article troubled me so much. Certainly I am used to criticisms of teacher preparation and, too often, I find that some are warranted. Perhaps it was the sheer hostility of the rhetoric and that the article appeared in a reputable public print medium. Articles such as this one signal how high the stakes have become. As a field, we must improve how we convey to the public, and each other, our knowledge about teaching literacy and preparing teachers who are competent and confident in their professional knowledge base. This is the focus of my presidential address.

I begin by sharing my understandings of this public debate about teacher education, and consider its consequences for literacy instruction and the education of literacy teachers. Second, I trace how my understandings influenced what I have chosen to study. I then turn to complexities that characterize literacy teaching and learning, ending with implications for professional development.

Public Debates About Teacher Education

Public discourse about education explores a range of topics, three of which are of direct concern to those of us in literacy education: (a) teacher preparation in

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general, (b) early literacy instruction, and (c) teaching diverse youngsters. In terms of general preparation of teachers, we may not agree with what appears in the media, but we can agree there is a common theme: the public's lack of value for current practices. Whether it is the argument for home schooling, the push for charter schools that have less stringent teacher certification requirements, the suggestion that "life experience" is a substitute for formal training, or the push for alternatives to schools of education and reading departments, the role of schools of education in teacher preparation and ongoing professional development has been devalued (e.g., Moats, 2000). Although teacher's knowledge about language and literacy is fundamental to their ability to teach students, especially those in early and middle elementary school, the average number of credits for reading, writing, and language practices, as well as children's literature and literacy assessment averages only 6.36 semester hours (2.23 courses) in typical 4-year undergraduate teacher preparation programs (Hoffman & Roller, 2001).

To counter this tendency to downplay the importance of teachers' preparation and professional development in literacy and closely related areas, our profession can begin by becoming clear and confident about what teachers need to know and by identifying ways they can build this knowledge, in both formal routes in existing schools and colleges of education and through new and innovative professional development programs. A likely outcome of putting inexperienced teachers with little formal preparation into classrooms is a profound need for inservice education—professional development on site as well as through graduate programs. Teacher educators must make the most of available credit hours during preservice education, while becoming ready to meet the increased needs of new teachers in the field.

A second focus of public discourse about teacher education relevant to literacy teacher preparation stems from our own debates about beginning reading instruction. Those in the media have given this topic so much attention that one might think the only knowledge a teacher needs is that relevant to the first few months of school. Yet, I believe our profession would acknowledge that literacy instruction continues throughout students' school careers. Teachers must be able to support the development of critical, independent thinkers who understand the power of literacy as it plays out in all aspects of our lives. Living in a democracy places heavy demands upon our citizens, which I was reminded of throughout the election and post-election processes. We need an educated, literate citizenry for our democracy to thrive. With a projected need for hundreds of thousands of new teachers, coupled with relatively few credit hours to study literacy teaching and learning, inservice teachers new to teaching likely will be inadequate in their understandings of the full range of literacy abilities and literacy content they are responsible for addressing.

A third topic has received less direct attention in public discourse, but arises indirectly in discussions about the increasing diversity of our student population and continued lack of diversity within the teaching force. Current preparation through multicultural education has been inadequate in preparing teachers to

work in diverse settings with diverse youngsters (Au & Raphael, 2000; Raphael, Florio-Ruane, Kehus, George, Hasty, & Highfield, 2001). Even more insidious, current preparation makes it easy for teachers who teach students much like themselves to dismiss multicultural study as being largely irrelevant to themselves and their students. This does little to prepare these youngsters to live and work in a diverse society.

This lack of preparation can be attributed, at least in part, to the kinds of texts and how they are used to teach future teachers and school-aged youngsters about diversity. First, social science texts (i.e., textbooks) dominate the curriculum. Treated as "science," they are rarely integrated with the study of genres which would lead to more critical examination of what is presented as science and to analysis into the "whys" and "wherefores" represented in the texts. At worst, such texts may end up promoting the very stereotypes they seek to diminish.

Moreover, textbooks are frequently the primary, if not the only, information source. They are not integrated with other literatures of cultural experience such as autobiographies written by members of different ethnic, racial, and social backgrounds, nor are they integrated with children's and families' experiences of literacy. Literature can provide a rich source of information about culture and humanity. From my experiences working in collaboration with Susan Florio-Ruane, I have seen how autobiography and autobiographical fiction can encourage the study of diversity and multiculturalism in ways that penetrate the reading and language arts curriculum in teacher education and for school-aged students (Florio-Ruane, 2001; Raphael et al., 2001).

Exploring Problems of Practice: A Personal Account

Over the past 5 years, Susan and I have used a model in which we frame our research in terms of "problems-of-practice." We began with today's challenges: a lack of value for teacher education when thousands of new teachers will be hired can lead to too many who will be unprepared to teach literacy, much less to a diverse student population. The problem-of-practice that concerned us is how one becomes a good teacher generally and specifically with respect to literacy. In our project, we have targeted three bases that are foundational for effective literacy instruction: (a) literacy teaching and learning as a complex cultural practice, (b) literature's role within the literacy curriculum, and (c) opportunities and alternatives for professional development. These areas provide the basis for Susan's and my efforts to help meet today's challenges for teacher education through the Teachers Learning Collaborative, a network of classroom- and university-based teacher researchers. Within this group—which networks three teacher study groups across southeast Michigan—we explored teachers' learning through conversation and collaborative inquiry, the influence of these experiences on teachers' design of literacy curriculum and assessment, and how the curriculum supported their students' learning about literacy and culture.

A Little Professional History

My evolving focus on literacy teacher education and its relationship to students' learning parallels that of our field. Like many of us who finished graduate school around 1980, I conducted instructional studies from the late 1970s into the mid-1980s. Studying with David Pearson and others at the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois, I attended graduate school when research on comprehension instruction was just beginning, and cognitive psychology provided the foundation. I used experimental methods to test particular strategies, such as QARs, and the means and effectiveness of using multiple strategies, such as Carol Sue Englert's and my work in Cognitive Strategy Instruction in Writing. The times were exciting. We were part of a group building a base for teaching and assessing comprehension and hundreds of studies demonstrated the power of strategy instruction on students' abilities to make sense of text. With this work, I began my extended focus on *what to teach* in the name of literacy instruction.

In the mid-1980s, at Michigan State University and the Institute for Research on Teaching, Carol Sue and I began engaging with teachers for more extended periods of time than I had in past research. We met with the teachers working with us at least once a month for most of the academic year. We did weekly observations as they implemented Cognitive Strategy Instruction in Writing. Teachers taught the program and helped with some data collection. However, a pivotal event occurred in the year following the writing work.

A Pivotal Event

In 1989, a year after Carol Sue and I had completed data collection, I bumped into one of the project teachers (whom I will call Marcia) who had been actively involved throughout the project. As we pushed our carts up the grocery store aisle, I asked Marcia how things were going with her current fourth graders. Initially, she was enthusiastic, but then seemed to become embarrassed. She apologetically said something along the lines of "I really liked your writing program, and wish I had time to keep using it." She mentioned her students' gains in writing while in the program, but she said she just could not find time for it in the curriculum.

As we parted company, I was struck by Marcia's comments. First, she called it "your" writing program, meaning Carol Sue's and mine, rather than "ours," including her and the other teachers. Second, she said she had believed her students had benefited from the program, but that she did not have time to use it now that the project had ended. Yet, she taught in a district and school that at the time gave teachers quite a bit of autonomy. This encounter began my process of rethinking how I approached literacy research with teachers, specifically in terms of ownership, engagement, and inquiry as viewed through the lens of sociocultural theory.

Kathy Au (1998) has talked extensively of the importance of *ownership* for students to fully participate in literacy events, and I began to think about how relevant this is to teachers working within literacy education. John Guthrie and his colleagues (e.g., Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997) have written of the importance of student *engagement* with literacy, which also seems crucial for teachers who want to be effective in adapting, rather than simply reproducing, literacy instructional approaches. Gordon Wells (1993) argues strongly for an *inquiry approach* with students and the related changes we must make in teacher education. Yet, such approaches to teaching are challenging when teachers themselves have never experienced inquiry-based approaches in their own learning. Sociocultural theory argues not only that literacy is cultural practice, grounded in language-mediated activities, but also that it is only through an ongoing and iterative process of appropriation and transformation, publication and conventionalization that learning—both teachers' and students'—occurs (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996).

Marcia's comments stood in stark contrast—I believe our grocery store conversation showed she had little ownership. Moreover, though engaged during the project, she was not for the long term. Our inquiry had involved questions of interest to the university researchers, but apparently not at the same level of concern for participating teachers. For Marcia, the writing instruction was frozen in time, lacking connection to her ongoing curriculum. In Vygotskian terms, she may have appropriated what was presented during inservice activities to use as *we*—the researchers—had intended within her classroom, but there was little evidence that she felt the program would address a meaningful problem she had identified within her own practice. And, these problems may have been exacerbated by a lack of collegial support after the project ended.

Despite my own references to constructivist theories, I had not interacted with teachers in the ways that I encouraged them to engage with their students, a striking disconnect between my theory and practice. In retrospect, despite believing strongly in a particular approach for student learning, I had ignored what I believed about learning in my own work with teachers, essentially taking teacher learning for granted. It was from this experience that I began my continuing interest in *how to teach.*

A Different Approach: Collaborative Inquiry and Teacher Research

The Book Club line of research, which I began in 1990 with Sue McMahon, Ginny Goatley, and Laura Pardo, took a substantially different form, becoming increasingly collaborative with colleagues from public and private school settings as well as from the university (McMahon & Raphael, 1997). Based in principles of collaborative inquiry through teacher study groups, we explored how to solve numerous problems of practice. For example, we studied ways to create instructional contexts in which students engaged in discourse around age-appropriate texts, promoting critical thinking, comprehension, and text interpretation (Raphael, Florio-Ruane, & George, in press). We examined the effects of such instructional contexts on diverse learners within the regular education classroom

(Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995; McMahon & Raphael, 1997). We studied the impact of this collaborative inquiry on our own professional development and learning about literacy instruction (Florio-Ruane, Berne, & Raphael, 2001; Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001; Raphael, Damphousse, Highfield, & Florio-Ruane, in press). Many members of the original Book Club project team have stayed with the project as it has evolved, serving as more knowledgeable others to support learning within the group. New members brought different perspectives and new problems-of-practice, representing an ever increasing range of districts within southeast Michigan.

Unlike Marcia, the members of the Collaborative have been involved in sustaining, as well as transforming, the Book Club program. For example, in 1991, Kathy Highfield, Laura Pardo, and Julie Folkert developed the content-area links that now characterize the program. At the time, each taught fifth grade in different districts across southeast Michigan; Julie and Kathy were beginning the masters degree program at Michigan State University that Laura had just finished. Kathy and Julie developed a sample unit as part of a project for a course they were taking with me. They also began meeting with the original Book Club Teacher Research Group, where Laura was active. Impressed with Kathy and Julie's curriculum work, Laura modified it to use with her social studies units. The three continued to refine the content-area connections over a 2-year period until it became part of the conventional approach to Book Club (Highfield & Folkert, 1997; Highfield, 1999; Raphael & Hiebert, 1996).

A few years later, MariAnne George, a third-grade teacher, developed the Literacy Block component of Book Club *Plus*. At the time, MariAnne was a member of the Book Club *Plus* node of the Teachers Learning Collaborative where we focused on expanding Book Club to serve the needs of struggling readers. Adding Literacy Block provided a context for guided reading and independent practice on strategies, skills, writing, and other work thematically related to the unit. Nina Hasty, a member of the Literacy Circle Study Group, another node of the Collaborative, heard MariAnne and others talk about Literacy Block at the meetings of the full Collaborative.

Nina teaches in an elementary school in a high-poverty urban setting. The school district has fewer resources and more restrictions on implementing the literacy curriculum than MariAnne experiences, and the teachers' professional development activities there are dominated by district-mandated workshops for which their attendance is required and paid (Florio-Ruane et al., 2001). Working with the support of members of the voluntary Literacy Circle Study Group, Nina adapted MariAnne's work to meet the needs of her first and second graders. Her enthusiasm from her students' successes both within the program and on school assessment measures have led the Literacy Circle Study Group to select Book Club *Plus* as this year's primary focus.

Members of the Collaborative also worked together to solve broader problems-of-practice. As teacher educators and teachers, we are well aware of the importance of accountability for our students' literacy learning. While we were convinced of our students' success based on observational and descriptive data from our pilot studies, we knew that a systematic study evaluating students' progress in reading, writing, discussion, and content learning—using experimental methods—would be potentially more convincing to others. Conducting such a study with minimal resources became a problem-of-practice for the Collaborative to solve.

In the summer of 1999, a subset of seven of us held a retreat in northern Michigan to develop a thorough but manageable assessment system. We represented first through eighth grades, five different districts including high-poverty urban, working-class rural, and middle-class to affluent suburban communities. Drawing on district, state, and national standards, we developed a common set of standards for reading, writing, discussion, evaluation, and related content areas, such as the study of culture, connected to the Book Club curriculum. We then created an assessment system that included a standardized test and informal group and individual assessments such as the QRI, writing samples, and observations. All could be handled by teachers within the context of their own teaching. We brought the system back to the Collaborative for refinement, and it became the basis for the assessments we conducted during an evaluation study of Book Club *Plus* this past school year.

These teachers' experiences differed markedly from Marcia's. In *this* research project, the teachers felt both ownership and engagement. Together, we identified problems of practices to be addressed, and group members were crucial to our success in addressing them. The inquiry stance we assumed enhanced our own teaching as well as the curriculum work in which we engaged with Book Club *Plus* (Raphael, Florio-Ruane, & George, in press). My experiences since 1990 have convinced me that we do not have to sacrifice teacher's ownership and commitment to their own learning in the name of scientific study, nor do we have to sacrifice accountability in the name of collaborative inquiry.

Complexities in Literacy Teaching and Learning

Teacher ownership and engagement are crucial when working in the very complex domain of literacy instruction. To feel and to be professionally competent for creating skillful readers, teachers must have a broad knowledge base. I return now to the three areas that Susan and I targeted as foundational to the professional development of literacy educators: understanding complexities in a complete literacy curriculum, knowledge about literature as humanity's recorded history and values, and opportunity to engage in meaningful professional development.

Complexity in a Complete Literacy Curriculum

Literacy exemplifies what Rand Spiro has termed a "complex domain," with complexity attributed to its highly contextualized, ill-structured, and non-algorithmic nature (Spiro, Feltovich, Jacobson, & Coulson, 1995). In a recent *Educational*

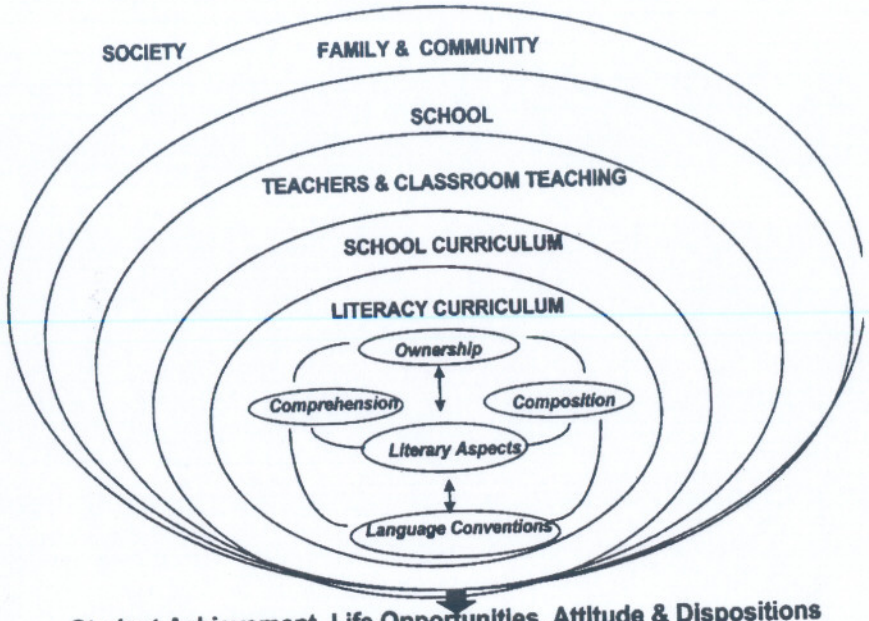

Figure 1. Teaching and learning as cultural practice. Modified from Taylor, Anderson, Au, & Raphael (2000).

Researcher article, Taylor, Anderson, Au, and Raphael (2000) attempted to capture this (see Figure 1).

Grounded in a sociocultural perspective, the figure reflects the many layers that influence and shape a students' literacy development, from family and community values and practices to those of the school; from the specific school curricula and related areas of emphases to those of the literacy curriculum. Effective literacy teaching and learning depend on teachers having a clear understand-

Language Conventions	Comprehension	Composition	Literary Aspects
Sound/Symbol	Background Knowledge prediction	Process: planning drafting revising	Literary Elements theme plot character setting
Grammar	Text Processing: summarizing sequencing identifying importance	Writing as a tool	Response to Literature
Syntax		Writing from sources	personal creative critical
Interaction	Monitoring clarifying planning	On-demand writing	

Figure 2. Articulating the literacy curriculum.

ing of how these different levels contribute to children's literacy acquisition, practice, values, use, and engagement.

Turning to the school curriculum, literacy teaching and learning involve knowing how the language system works; being facile at creating, comprehending and interpreting text; and most important, insuring each student ownership so literacy can serve his or her goals (see Figure 2).

Debates of the past several decades stem, in part, from limitations in the amount of curricular time devoted to literacy instruction. As literacy researchers uncover areas important to literacy acquisition and practice, educators (and researchers) have taken the bait that pits the new or the timely against current curricular content. In my teacher training program in the late 1960s and in the curriculum materials I used in the 1970s, most of the emphasis in the reading program was about teaching the code and that generally was unquestioned.

With research from the Center for the Study of Reading and others during the 1980s, the importance of comprehension and strategy instruction was unquestioned, but it ended up being pitted against skills related to our language system. Similarly, as the importance of literature emerged, researchers and educators found ourselves pitting related aspects—such as response, interpretation, and appreciation—against comprehension and skill instruction (Stahl, 1999). None of this makes sense. Instead of recognizing that with each passing decade, our field has learned more about how to teach literacy, about the complexity of the literacy processes, and about the ways in which literacy is instantiated and valued across time and cultures; we essentially fell into the trap of assuming that new knowledge somehow replaced or overshadowed previous practice. This is *not* simply my attempt toward reconciliation—that, in some trivial sense, everything matters. Rather, in very important ways, all that we as a field have researched and demonstrated to have an effect on reading progress *does* matter.

To engage in literacy is to engage with the signs and symbols of our culture. A sociocultural perspective highlights the way in which language mediates these interactions, whether the language focuses on text comprehension and interpretation or the literacy curriculum itself. Jerome Bruner (1996) has suggested that curriculum is actually an ongoing conversation. Florio-Ruane makes the point that if curriculum is conversation, the teacher is the interlocutor (Florio-Ruane, 2001). Yet, the boxes illustrating the literacy curriculum, in and of themselves, often end up lending themselves to a hierarchy when, in fact, the whole chart is the cultural practice. Over time, this grows in complexity, feeds back upon itself and leads us to work with all aspects all the time.

Certainly, the curriculum changes over time through dialogic activity in different conversational spaces. Jim Gavelek and I adapted Rom Harré's (1984) work to detail the conversational spaces in which the curriculum is appropriated and transformed, made public; and sometimes changes to that curriculum become new conventional practices (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996, see Figure 3). Notice that this figure conveys conversational spaces that can be public and social, where conventional knowledge can be introduced and explained, as well as private and individual (such as occurs when students read independently or record their

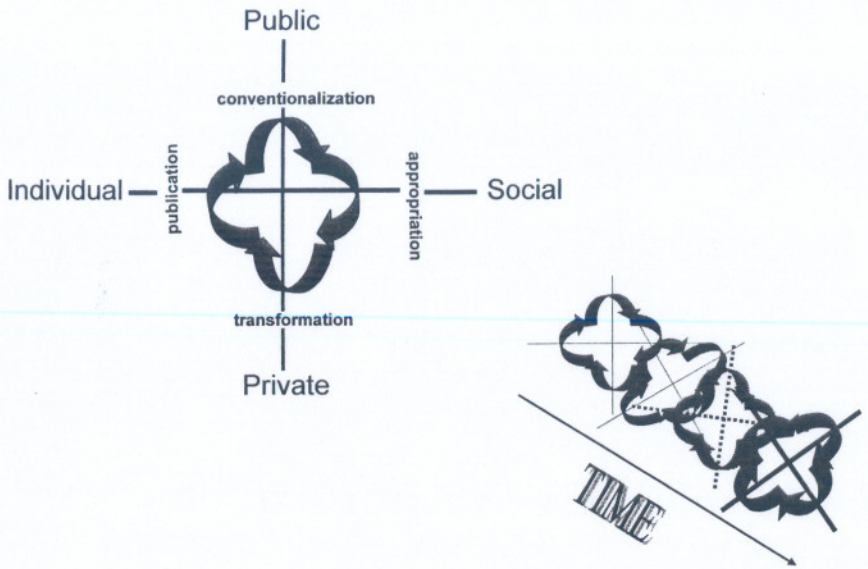

Figure 3. The Vygotsky Space.

thoughts in reading logs, appropriating and transforming what they have learned). Moreover, these conversational spaces are iterative. Over time, they feed back upon themselves in the way that Bruner has described. The work done within these conversational spaces suggests a curriculum that is not static, but a dynamic structure that helps teachers and researchers organize language and literacy processes that we have declared as comprising the curriculum. These conversational spaces and the work done within them are the activities of the language arts; they represent our cultural practices. We—teacher educators, teachers, and researchers—should stop taking the bait that asks us to privilege some aspects of the curriculum over others—it is not in the best interest of students or teachers.

Literacy is the foundation for all other learning, the means by which youngsters develop critical thinking skills. It is the vehicle through which humans can make sense of our world and ourselves. It is a complex set of skills, as well as cultural practice, that both determines the skills that comprise it and the values placed on how the skills are employed. This requires a literacy curriculum for *all* readers—those who struggle as well as the avid and proficient—a curriculum that engages students in meaningful literacy events in which they see the value of the skills, strategies and dispositions directly and indirectly taught. It also underscores teachers' need to understand the depth of literacy practices and ability to

adapt instructional programs to insure students can and do participate in literacy practices.

Complexity from our Dual Obligations

This brings us to the complexities related to what I call "dual obligations" of literacy teaching. Keith Stanovich has raised the specter of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer with respect to literacy learning in today's schools (Stanovich, 1986, 1998). Students who struggle need to develop a repertoire of decoding skills to read age-appropriate materials. Thus, they require instruction and practice in applying these skills to texts at their reading level. Historically, our field has taken up that challenge. Many programs, as well as resource staff, exist to guarantee that students are taught the basic skills they need to improve reading fluency with reading-level appropriate materials. In addition, the practice of ability grouping for guided reading within the regular education classroom further supports this aspect of instruction.

However, literacy educators have done little to guarantee that when students have caught up on basic skills, they will have had—and be able to draw on—rich experiences with age-appropriate materials. These materials push their text analysis, interpretation, response, and critical thinking about issues in ways that their more successful grade-level peers experience daily. These are the dual, and often competing, obligations of literacy educators: providing sufficient practice with reading-level appropriate materials, as well as access to and engagement with age-appropriate text. Moreover, in both cases, we must identify meaningful ways to ensure that these texts become part of students' interactions with each other through literate conversation. As John Shotter has articulated (Shotter, 1993; cited in Florio-Ruane, 2001), students learn not only the content of the texts, but the social system into which the text is embedded. This social system and associated sorting of students has implications as profound for their life-long literacy learning as being able to read the print.

As literacy researchers and educators, we cannot choose between these two obligations, nor should we view them as being in opposition. Unfortunately, with many approaches, low-achieving readers may conceivably go through school never engaging with texts appropriate for their age level, texts that require higher order thinking and interpretation skills such as those laid out in our national agenda and reflected in both national and state standards documents. Further, these struggling readers rarely have opportunities to talk with peers about such materials and the ideas they contain. When this happens, the classroom becomes stratified (i.e., the social system in which the curriculum is embedded is instantiated). In that setting, it is difficult—if not impossible—for low-achieving readers to join, or for the teacher to create, a functioning community of learners. And it is belonging to such a community that helps motivate thinking and learning (Wells, 1999). Yes, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, and not only in the area of fluency (Raphael et al., 2001).

Literature's Role Within the Literacy Curriculum

I hope I have now conveyed what I include in knowledge of literacy processes, reasons why it is important for our profession to make this knowledge clear, and challenges that stem from our dual obligations as literacy educators and literacy teacher educators. Teaching the processes that constitute literacy inevitably leads to the texts that we use during instruction. Thus, I now turn to the second area foundational to teachers' successful literacy instruction: literature and its role as literacy's substantive content.

Literature as Cultural Practice

Literature is the "meat" of the reading program, for it includes the texts with which students learn to read, practice learned skills, and develop fluency. Although scholars today in fields from critical literacy to cultural studies debate both what "counts" as literature and whether literature refers to the object itself or the activity in which it is involved, there is little debate about the value of children's reading literature in and out of school. Many suggest good literature is motivational—inspiring students to become avid readers who exhibit the kind of ownership and engagement that scholars such as Au and her colleagues (Au et al., 1997), and Guthrie and his colleagues (e.g., Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997) have described. But literature is more than a tool for bringing students into literacy. Birkerts (1994) describes literature as follows:

> Our entire collective subjective history—the soul of our societal body—is encoded in print. Is encoded, and has for countless generations been passed along by way of the word, mainly through books. I'm not talking about facts and information here, but about the somewhat more elusive soft data, the expressions that tell us who we are and who we have been, that are the record of individuals living in different epochs—that are, in effect, the cumulative speculations of the species. (p. 20)

Literature as Textual Practice

In addition to capturing society's "soul" and history, literature represents a set of textual practices (Golden, 2000). Current work in textual practices is often framed within genre study. In our work, we have found it useful to classify these genres broadly in terms of their goals: scholarship, fiction, and a sort of hybrid, autobiography, recognizing that each has imitations as well as strengths. Bruner's discussion of paradigmatic and narrative modes of thought was helpful as we distinguished between these genres, allowing each to be judged in light of its own criteria for effectively describing or explaining human experience. Although both can result from disciplined inquiry, they create very different texts.

The scholarly record of the society is often recorded using the genres of social science exposition, where criteria such as falsifiability and generalizability are important. These genres, by their very nature, are static and tend to "freeze frame" the knowledge being reported. This writing—biased toward a search for

universal truth conditions and characterized in terms of the outsiders' perspective—appeals to procedures for establishing formal and empirical proof and uses arguments to convince readers of their truth.

In contrast, the genres of fiction as well as autobiography are told through narrative where criteria for justification include verisimilitude—that is, the likelihood or probability of an event—and believability. Rather than seeking universal truths, these genres search for likely connections among events, using stories to convince readers of their likeliness. Fiction genres tend to be personal and told in dialogue between insiders and outsiders. These forms invite contact with, and changing knowledge through, comparisons of lived experiences. As such, they stand in contrast to the freeze-frame nature of the literature of social science and invite alternative ways of reading and making sense of the content.

Literature as Cultural and Textual Practice

Thus, through both content and form, literature provides a reflection of and a window into the history and practices of a culture (Galda, 1998). In our work in Book Club *Plus,* we find that framing questions about what is revealed through the literature helps students see and explore the stories of their own lives, their families, and different cultures. To construct meanings from this literature, within the Book Cub *Plus* curriculum, students learn and apply traditional comprehension strategies, as well as analytic and interpretive skills less typical of literacy instruction, especially for early and struggling readers.

For example, in our Book Club *Plus* work in third grades, this played out in an author study of Patricia Polacco, a prolific Michigan author who through her autobiographical fiction shares family stories of her Russian immigrant and her Michigan farmer ancestors. Her stories became the basis of activities for both book club discussions and for teacher-led guided reading. As students read books like *My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother* (Polacco, 1994), they practiced their basic skills as well as explored issues of power and authority within their families and by extension within their classroom and their community.

Teachers must establish the community; select the texts; create the contexts in which the texts are read, written about, and discussed; and provide instruction supporting comprehension, literary response and analysis, composition, and language conventions. Yet, few teachers are immersed in the personal interactions with text that provide background on which to draw or in the scholarly study of literature in preparation for supporting children's response and interpretation of the texts they read. Without teachers having knowledge of and direct experiences with literature's content and form, they are reduced to being the tool of the adopted commercial materials, rather than positioned to use these materials as tools for developing skillful readers.

Like the dual obligations of both reading-level- and age-appropriate texts, balance must be created between readers' aesthetic experiences with the texts and exploring the content related to literature, and between the substantive focus on literature and the instruction in literacy skills that provides readers with access to

that literature. As Desai (1997) wrote, "Literature has the power to open eyes and change lives, it is also apparent that this does not happen merely by reading a piece of culturally diverse literature in a classroom" (p. 175). Literature deserves serious attention in defining the knowledge base of an effective literacy teacher.

Opportunities and Alternatives for Professional Development

The third base for successfully developing skillful readers lies in teachers' initial preparation and ongoing professional development. With an increasingly less experienced and underprepared teaching force, we must consider professional development opportunities for new and practicing teachers. So, what are options in light of current policies and practices for teacher education?

Literacy researchers and teacher educators can begin by recognizing that different inservice models have different goals. We can take a minimalist approach—raising test scores on a specific test such as a state assessment or commercial achievement test. We have seen the growth in popularity of these approaches today, and it is not surprising. It can be tempting in the face of great need to look for solutions that give us the greatest sense of control, what Anders and her colleagues (Anders, Hoffman, & Duffy, 2000, p. 732) call a "packaging mentality." Cloaked in the mantle of science, like the social science texts I talked of earlier, they tend to freeze-frame both the content of what is taught and the ways in which instruction occurs, usually through specific delivery systems. Because of their nature, such models are not generative and thus unresponsive as new issues emerge.

More powerful experiences arise using a problem-of-practice approach. As Gordon Wells (1993) has written:

> Knowledge construction and theory development most frequently occur in the context of a problem of some significance and take the form of a dialogue in which solutions are proposed and responded to with additions and extensions or objections and counter-proposals from others. (p. 51)

Dialogic models are, by their very nature, responsive to the problems identified, and because of this, generative in terms of both problem identification and solution. Where can such dialogue occur? I have come to value three opportunities: (a) within-school (e.g., through grade-level or school-wide reform efforts), (b) through magnets such as graduate programs in literacy education, and (c) through creating and sustaining teacher networks dedicated to exploring and solving problems of practice.

School-wide Models of Professional Development

Recently, scholars have researched successful school-wide efforts. For example, Barbara Taylor, David Pearson, and their colleagues studied schools that beat the odds in terms of students' achievement scores relative to what would be predicted given locations in high poverty settings (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000). Jim Mosenthal, Marge Lipson, and their colleagues conducted case analyses of schools whose students performed well on the state-wide Vermont literacy assessments (Mosenthal, Lipson, Mekkelsen, Russ, & Sortino, 2000). These success stories reveal a consistent pattern in the schools. There is a public and shared vision among the teachers and administrators. Schools have extensive professional development opportunities within the school with stable leaders to support these efforts. There are means of communication that are open and ongoing for all the staff members and respect for the teachers. Teachers are characterized by their high levels of expertise and their ability to be articulate about their work and a variety of approaches to instruction, rather than a "packaging mentality" or single program emphasis.

Yet, not all teachers have access to school reform efforts, and in school-wide efforts, the status quo can be hard to overcome. If buy-in is required from all teachers, passive inaction by a few can be sufficient to derail professional development efforts. How can those of us in university and other professional development settings support teachers interested in becoming part of innovative practices, but who teach with colleagues who may not be interested in reform? And, how can we support those same teachers so they can assume positions of leadership within their professional settings?

Professional Development Through University Graduate Programs

The response to these questions invites us to turn to the context for which we probably have the most influence: our own literacy masters degree programs. In light of the trends predicted over the next decades, it seems timely for us to engage in serious review to create programs with two goals. One is helping teachers develop the expertise needed for effective literacy instruction across grade and ability levels, as well as across cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The second is helping teachers develop the expertise necessary to become instructional leaders within their professional settings.

Rather than trying to fight for undergraduate credit hours, I think we should focus on the practicing teacher, a market likely to grow as new teachers realize how much they need to learn to help youngsters become literate. Moreover, even in the best circumstances, teacher educators' influence on teachers' practices increases greatly with just a year or two of classroom experience. Readers with experience teaching at the preservice and graduate levels are likely to have shared experiences similar to my own. I have taught a course to those preparing to teach and a few years later, some of those former students appeared in a master-level class I was teaching on similar topics. During the latter half of my 15 years at Michigan State University, these students whom I had taught as undergraduates would, in the graduate course, ask something like, "This (whatever the "this" happened to be) was really helpful. Why didn't you tell us about this in the undergraduate course?" Yet, if anyone compared the two syllabi, it would be obvious that the course content was quite similar. Developmental differences between a preservice teacher and even a relatively new teacher are dramatically

different. They have more upon which they can build and they know what they do not know.

As much or more than ever before, teachers need more than simply a knowledge base for literacy instruction. They need more than advanced methods in various aspects of oral and written language. They need to be more than reading teachers, clinicians, or language arts specialists. They need to have principled understandings of practice and be skilled at conveying them to all the stakeholders who directly and indirectly affect their decisions and practices. Thus, in a strong masters program, teachers would learn about methods of literacy instruction and literacy as a set of cultural as well as political practices. They would develop a clear vision of literacy instruction and understand its theoretical roots and implications for their own classroom practices. And, they would become articulate at conveying their position with respect to how literacy is defined and taught.

Professional Development Through Teacher Networks

A third professional development opportunity I have come to value is the teacher network helping members solve problems they have identified in their practice (Clark, 2001). Such networks "work against the traditional isolation of teacher from teacher, university from classroom, novice from experienced educator . . . to craft a new professional community with a new discourse for the understanding and improvement of practice" (Raphael et al., 2001, p. 606).

For members of the Teachers Learning Collaborative, experiences within the network mirrored our work as teachers and teacher educators on multiple levels: the curriculum through which we learned about literacy and culture; the texts we read, responded to and discussed; the social organization and power of learning through conversation that we experienced; the border crossing that helped make the familiar strange and provided authentic opportunities for articulating commonalities and differences. Through our research, we have documented changes in teachers' beliefs and learning, changes to curricular practices, and growth in children's literacy learning and understandings of culture (Raphael et al., 2001, in press, a, b).

The power of Networks for enhancing teachers' learning, curriculum development and planning, and ultimately, students' literacy progress suggests an important next problem of practice. The challenge for any successful intensive, dialogic professional development effort is to "scale up," providing the means for other teachers to create their own professional groups, their own networks, and their own efforts to enhance literacy curriculum and instruction for their students. How can we build from the experience of successful networks such as ours to provide tools others might draw upon as they begin new professional networks?

In an ill-structured domain such as literacy teaching, Rand Spiro has argued for the importance of cognitive flexibility and for the power of case-based learning, specifically using mini-cases that, through computer technology, can be juxtaposed to illustrate complexities of teaching. This year, Susan and I have begun

collaborating with Rand, applying cognitive flexibility theory to our work with teachers, and with Kathy Au, who has developed professional networks through her work in Hawaii. Our initial efforts and future plans are to develop a series of mini-cases created from artifacts generated by members of the Teachers Learning Collaborative and, in Hawaii, the Kalama Teacher Education Program. Rand describes these mini-cases as "bite-size chunks of real-world complexity" (Spiro & Jehng, 1990) because—to paraphrase William Blake—sometimes the only way to see a world is in a grain of sand.

Concluding Comment

I conclude reflecting on a cross-cultural professional experience that gave me a lot to think about regarding professional development. In October, I led a reading delegation in Cuba to learn about the Cuban approach to literacy education, one of two national initiatives Castro instituted when he rose to power. In Cuba, the illiteracy rate is now under 5% which, according to world standards, means that they have no illiteracy. The Cubans have both national standards and a national curriculum, but allow local control for how the standards are met. Each school has two leaders, one responsible for the curriculum, the other for school management.

While I do not want to overly romanticize what we were able to observe in our limited time there, it appeared that literacy instruction is determined by those involved in teaching—teachers and the curriculum leader. We were struck by the "taken-for-granted" notions of teacher professionalism. All teachers are expected to study their practice. In each of the schools we visited, the notion of the teacher as researcher was so unremarkable as to be mentioned only in passing. This sense of the teacher as respected professional extended to the family and community relationships as well. On the word of the teacher, family and community members could be expected to take action to help a student in need of support beyond school hours.

The Cuban example suggests that treating teachers as professionals can, at the very least, co-exist with—and, perhaps, contribute in important ways to a successful literacy program. I find this encouraging as I think about how well-situated literacy educators are here in the United States for addressing students' literacy problems. We know *what to teach* in our literacy programs. We know *how professionals learn* in complex domains such as literacy education. We know *how to create opportunities* for education professionals from a variety of settings to engage with each other to solve problems in our practices. What I hope is that we can learn from our field's and our own histories, in our search for effective, creative, and generative solutions.

I have used this presidential address as an opportunity to make sense of my own path as a literacy educator and use that understanding to make sense of what is happening within our field. Steven Birkerts (1994) captured the essence of this reflective experience in an essay on autobiography. He wrote:

> There is a path, then, from A to B . . . though of course it neither begins right at A nor ends obligingly at B. As paths go, it is a meandering thing, with many twists . . . each describing some choice made at a crucial moment. Back then, when the whole idea of a path was hazy, I did not think of myself as following or making any sort of track. I wandered to and fro in the realm of the immediate, moving toward what I liked and striking out against whatever displeased me. Retrospect alters everything. Looking through the aperture of time is like watching movement from a great altitude. What felt like blundering starts to look like fate. (p. 34).

May it be the fate of all of us not only to live in interesting times, but to be part of the times when we solve the problems of practice that have plagued us as a profession.

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