It is the policy of CCIRA to provide a forum for the open discussion of ideas concerning the content and teaching of reading and language arts. Publicity accorded to any particular speaker's point of view does not imply endorsement by CCIRA, its Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, or the membership at large, except in announcements of policy, where such endorsement is clearly specified.

Reproduction of pages in this publication is hereby authorized provided the use of the material is for educational, noncommercial purposes and the number of copies does not exceed 100. Consent to photocopy does not extend to poems, cartoons, photographs, or items identified as reprinted by permission of other publishers, nor to copying for general distribution, advertising, or promotion, for creating new works, or for resale, unless explicit permission to copy for these purposes is granted by CCIRA. Before reproduction, full citation should be placed in a prominent place.

Note From the Editors

It is bittersweet as we write our last "Note From the Editors" of the *Colorado Reading Journal*. It has been a wonderful experience working with members of CCIRA and all the authors that have contributed to the *Journal* over the past few years. We leave our tenure with some tips on how to make the most of your *Journal*. This letter provides a road map for easy, accessible, professional development. As editors of your state reading journal, it has always been our mission to use the *Journal* as a vehicle to share ideas, offer support, and celebrate the amazing teachers that teach everyday in classrooms in Colorado and across the country. To help you get the most of each issue, we've outlined some ideas for using the *Journal* as an instant and accessible professional development tool:

- **Conduct an article study with colleagues**. Article studies are great discussion tools to challenge our beliefs, build empathy, and learn new teaching strategies. This edition features an interview with Ellin Oliver Keene, "Conversations on Policy, Methods, and Accountability," which will truly get you thinking about how to stay focused with current educational demands. Similar to a book study, read the interview and start talking. An alternative is to read an article of interest with a practical application, such as "Keeping Literacy Alive in Your Classroom," "Ideas for Teaching English Language Learners," and "Ha Ha I'm Comprehending With Imojis," and apply it in your own class, and revisit with colleagues to discuss how it went. For teaching strategies, we recommend articles such as "Teaching Vocabulary and Writing in Kindergarten Through Dramatic Play Centers." Review the reference section of any article in this issue and read widely within an area of interest. We highly recommend opening these study sessions with a song from Michael Ford. Each issue has a parody that addresses issues in education. These songs will certainly put you in the right mood for taking on the big ideas.

- **Hold an "appy hour."**
  Use the *Journal*'s "What's New?" technology articles to find great new apps and implementation ideas. The "What's New?" department features Augmented Reality Apps (Summer 2015) and Digital Storytelling and Photo Manipulation Apps (Summer 2014). This Summer 2016 edition features apps for creating infographics. The articles provide short introductions to integrating these tools into your classroom along with specific and recommended apps. We suggest looking at the apps with colleagues on a Friday afternoon off campus!

- **Participate in classroom author studies.**
  We've featured several authors in our tenure as editors and encourage you to share the work that happens behind the scenes with your students. This issue features insights from David Harrison's process of writing poetry in "For the Fun of It (And the Learning Just Happens!)." Or return to the Summer 2015 issue and share Tom Lichtenheld's process of an illustrator's intention in every aspect of a picturebook ("Studio Shoes and Moo Puns: An Inside Look at the Life and Work of Author and Illustrator Tom Lichtenheld."

- **Be the teacher as a writer.**
  In our Winter 2014–15 note, we encouraged our readers to be readers and writers first, to live the life of a reader who can talk about and recommend texts, and to be a writer who

understands how difficult the writing process can be. In this issue, Trish Wojurfin a fifth grade classroom teacher, gives advice to future student teachers in her article "Letter to a Would-Be Teacher." So, grab a pencil or your laptop and collaborate with a colleague to share insights from your classroom. Use the *Journal* as a mentor text and submit your own article for the next issue.

- **Read, sketch, review, and rate books in your classrooms.**
  In each edition, we've put out a call for Colorado students to tell us what they're reading, sketch an image, give it a quick review, and rate the text. This edition features students from Lara Saunders' fifth grade class at Mary Blair Elementary in Loveland, Colorado. Lara used our previously published editions as mentor texts for her students. The class analyzed the published works and designed their own pieces to submit to the *Journal*. Enjoy this issue's submittals and then and read, sketch, review, and rate some books in your own classrooms.

All issues of the *Colorado Reading Journal* under our editorship are available online at ccira.org. We encourage you to download and share PDFs of individual articles to best meet your needs. We'd love to hear how you're using your state journal to further literacy education. In this last issue from the three of us, we say to you: happy reading and happy trails!

—Suzette, Christine, and Kimberli

Call for Manuscripts

The *Colorado Reading Journal* is a peer-reviewed journal of the Colorado Council International Reading Association. The *Journal* is published in the winter and summer of each year. The *Journal* publishes articles that address topics, issues, and events of interest and value to teachers, specialists, and administrators involved in literacy education at all levels. The *Journal* seeks submissions for the categories below.

- **Departments (1,000–2,500 words in length, not including references)**: These shorter articles should offer specific classroom practices that are grounded in research and can easily be implemented by readers. Submit to any of the following departments:
  - Songs & Poetry
  - Instructional Ideas to Support Diverse Learners
  - Children's and Young Adult Literature in the Classroom
  - Digital Literacies and Innovative Classroom Practices
  - Effective Writing Instruction

- **Feature Articles (3,000–4,000 words in length, not including references)**: These articles may include descriptions of instructional practices based on theory, research, and/or practical experience; research based on original investigations, commentaries on, or analyses of issues related to literacy practice; and profiles or interviews of literacy professionals, authors, and illustrators of children's books.

We are especially interested in hearing from Colorado teachers who are willing to share classroom practices and ideas on how they are dealing with and/or incorporating 191/Teacher Effectiveness, READ Act, and Common Core.

For detailed information about submitting to the *Journal*, visit CCIRA.org, click on the "Publications" tab, and then select *Colorado Reading Journal*.

The Main Idea:
Life Is Comprehension

Michael P. Ford

When selecting a song for this last issue of the *Colorado Reading Journal* under the editorial leadership of Suzette Youngs and Christine Kyser, I had to consider a final song that might sum it all up. I needed a "main idea" song. For me, reading and writing are all about making meaning. No matter on which small feature of reading and writing we might focus, we need to always remember that it is done as a means to an end—comprehension. In more than a decade of policies that often had us narrowly focused on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary, comprehension was often delayed, marginalized, or forgotten—and outcomes from those policies often reflected that. We should never lose focus that the end should always be about making meaning so we can find the joy from being entertained or informed from our reading, or entertaining and informing others from our writing. With that in mind, I offer this song "Life Is Comprehension" to remember the main idea: we need to always celebrate the meaning that brings about the joys of reading and writing.

♫♪ Life Is Comprehension ♫♪

(Sung to the tune of *Life Is a Cabaret* because what is better than reading alone in a room?)

What good is barking at print on the page
If it don't mean a thing?
We need to understand this stuff.
Let's make these pages sing!

Enough of phonics...
Let's balance it out.
How about some strategies?
If we're going to understand this stuff,
Comprehension is what we need.

Let's think aloud!
Let's visualize!
Let's get our whole brain activating,
Why keep all your schema waiting?

Now when we're reading
Words fly off the page
The meaning is getting clear
Comprehension is what it's all about
When we're doing our reading here!

To sing along with Mike, go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6_Ze7iXBT8&feature=youtu.be&hd=1

Michael P. Ford is professor emeritus from the Department of Literacy and Language at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. Ford has been working with preservice and inservice teachers for the past 29 years. He is a former Title I Reading and First Grade teacher. He is the author or editor of eleven books, including his latest Guided Reading: What's New, and What's Next? *from Capstone Publishing.*

Ideas for Teaching
English Language Learners

Brian C. Rose

*This article offers instructional ideas for teachers to implement while
working with English language learners. Putting these ideas into practice
will provide more effective learning opportunities for all students.*

There is a population explosion occurring in the United States. While the English language learner (ELL) population is certainly growing, similar diversity within U.S. schools does not exist. Indeed, white students integrate more fully with their minority peers, but minority students have actually experienced greater isolation in schools (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007b). Close to one third of Hispanic students attend nearly all-minority schools, with more than half of these students attending majority Hispanic schools. In fact, since the 1993–1994 school year, the number of these schools has almost doubled. Such isolation has its consequences. For instance, ELLs are among the farthest from meeting most metrics of school achievement (Pew, 2007a). "When ELL students are not isolated in these low-achieving schools, their gap in test score results is considerably narrower" (Pew, 2008, p. i). In addition to poor performance on standardized tests, the dropout rate of Hispanic high school students is greater than all of their classmates combined (Laird, DeBell, Kienzl, & Chapman, 2007). ELLs also attend low-performing schools with high student–teacher ratios, high student enrollment, and high poverty levels with greater regularity than their peers (Pew, 2008).

Teachers who find themselves in these schools are not always prepared to work effectively with ELLs. Indeed, very few states require all incoming teachers be competent in aspects of ELL instruction, and there are several states that do not require teachers of ELLs to have any specialized training or certification at all (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008); further, incentives and assistance for teachers who wish to earn an English as a Second Language

license of endorsement are not widespread. In the face of this lack of urgency and with states struggling to make sure that teachers are prepared to teach the ELLs in their classrooms (Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passal, & Herwantoro, 2005), it is not surprising that many teachers do not believe they are able to teach these students effectively (Harper & de Jong, 2009; Parsad, Lewis, & Farris, 2001). Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to offer teachers who work with ELLs some feasible instructional ideas that can aid in providing ELLs greater access to the academic content and the instructional practices of the classroom.

Instructional Decisions

During any single lesson, teachers make innumerable instructional decisions. These decisions can center on a variety of classroom circumstances, including how much time a particular aspect of a lesson might take, which behaviors to reward or correct, how many and which students should share their work with the rest of the class, and what to do with student work that fails to meet or exceeds the expectations of the lesson. There are some decisions, however, that are made ahead of time, during planning, that allow for specific instructional differentiation among the students in the classroom. These modifications are often made to allow students greater access to the content of instruction as well as greater support for completing classroom activities.

The data presented in the discussion that follows are culled from a study investigating the specific modifications preservice teachers chose to include in planning documents aimed at addressing the needs of ELLs. Detailed

below are specific, recommended modifications that can be categorized as offering peer assistance, allowing native-language use, and encouraging family and community involvement during lessons to be enacted in elementary-grade classrooms. The preservice teachers' lessons, from which this discussion finds it origin, were part of a unit of study assigned as part of a course offered within a teacher preparation program. The teacher candidates' work is not the main focus of this article; rather, how the modifications they suggest be put into place in classrooms to provide the prism through which we can analyze the assumptions inherent in certain instructional decisions and offer some ideas that teachers can implement in their classrooms to more effectively work with ELLs.

Peer Assistance

Preservice teachers often over-rely on modifications that offer ELLs opportunities to work with their peers and receive assistance from other students (Rose, 2015). For instance, one such modification outlines why within a lesson ELLs can work with their native-English-speaking

Students can indeed learn through interactions with their peers.

classmates—"For my ELLs, I will have each ELL at a different table with English-speaking students so they can get ideas." Another possibility, of course, is grouping ELLs together to access further instructional support—"I can also pair my ELL students with another student who speaks their language and could translate to them if it is possible in my classroom." These modifications are not unusual in any way. In fact, research suggests that students can indeed learn through interactions with their peers (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; August, 1987; Chen & Goswami, 2011; De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1998).

There are many theories that guide the research of and instruction in second language acquisition (see VanPatten & Williams, 2007). However, one of the more present theories guiding the use of interaction toward language learning is sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), and more specifically, the Vygotskian construct of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). The ZPD is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as

determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Within instruction, the ZPD can be exemplified through scaffolding (see Wood, Bruner, & Ross [1976] for a theoretical exploration of scaffolding principles), or the provision of specific guidance, instruction, and/or assistance with the aim of developing new skills, strategies, or knowledge. These empirical and theoretical findings are typically the basis for grouping strategies represented in modifications such as these.

Assumptions. One assumption that undergirds the instructional practice of pairing ELLs with either their native-language-speaking counterparts or their English-speaking classmates is that assistance occurs naturally—as if simply grouping students together will result in learning. Further, in employing various grouping strategies, teachers relegate themselves to a secondary position within instruction. In other words, it is possible for teachers to group students and then expect that the students will provide all subsequent instructional support. This stance also assumes that the students know everything they need to know regarding the activities in which they engage and the academic content they need to learn. In fact, these practices presuppose that some students are already somewhat of an expert in the content the teachers will present in any given lesson or that they can expertly navigate the specific instructional activity they are tasked with completing.

Some ideas. To more effectively leverage peer assistance for ELLs, teachers can provide instruction regarding routine classroom interactions, explicitly modeling the language ELLs can use to seek information they need, confirm and clarify information they receive, and offer assistance of their own to their peers. In what Manyak (2007) calls language-rich instruction, teachers can support all of their students to more effectively construct questions that help ELLs elicit from any of their peers the type of assistance they may need. Of course, this strategy seems simple on its face, but there may be some concern as to where within a lesson this type of support might reside. Logistically, offering support of this nature is not much different from classroom directives that offer alternatives for students who don't know what to do when they finish early, do not know the meaning of a word, or are learning how to pick appropriate texts for themselves. More important, though, is the focus on providing ELLs greater ability to advocate for their own academic needs, removing the onus from their peers to divine what kind of assistance may be needed.

Should teachers choose to group students to engage in classroom activities, teachers must organize the work,

support the students in their work, and hold appropriate expectations as to what learning the students will demonstrate. However, to reiterate, simply grouping students together does not necessarily accomplish what teachers may have identified as the objective of a lesson. Cohen and Lotan (2014) present a framework through which teachers can develop and support group activities. These authors present four phases: *get-along, developing relationships, production*, and *autonomy*. During each of these phases, the expectations for students shift. For instance, during the get-along phase, students engage with their peers socially, present ideas, and address any conflicts that may arise. This differs greatly from the autonomy phase, in which students are expected to complete assigned tasks, switch between multiple activities, and engage with their peers with little to no assistance from the teacher.

For ELLs to be successful in groupwork in general, teachers need to be cognizant of how these students are able to participate in groups. Further, teachers need to provide specific language to help address the linguistic demands of the activity. For instance, in the developing relationships phase, students need to know how to negotiate roles with their peers. This negotiation requires students to identify what their peers are able and willing to do and what they, themselves, are capable of adding to the group. In this vein, questions such as "What would you like to do?" and statements such as "I can do…because…" become useful and, indeed, necessary to successfully participate in the activity. By attending to the specific linguistic demands of an activity, as well as the academic content of a lesson, teachers provide greater access to both the curriculum and practices of the classroom.

Native-Language Use

School-aged students arrive in their classrooms with a wealth of knowledge and personal experiences. Regardless of the student's background, his or her language experiences are brought to bear upon the learning required in the classroom. In their review of all relevant research literature, Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, and Christian (2006) state, "Maintenance and development of ELLs' L1 is influential in all domains we examined: oral language, literacy, and academic achievement" (p. 223). More specifically, ELLs have access to and do employ various cultural and linguistic strategies toward their social and academic lives (e.g., Jiménez, 2001; Jiménez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1996; Puzio, Keyes, Cole, & Jiménez, 2013). Teachers who tap into these resources can provide their students greater access to instructional content and routine classroom practices (Jiménez & Rose, 2010). Instructional modifications such as "I will give the ELL students

a copy in their native language" or "I will also be allowing the students, in some lessons, to write in their own language and translate it back to English" provide some evidence that preservice teachers understand the value of their students' experience and linguistic strengths.

Assumptions. Providing ELLs opportunities to use their native language in the classroom is not an inherently valuable option. First, this kind of instructional decision assumes that the student(s) can speak, read, write, listen, view, and/or represent proficiently in his or her native language. In allowing students to use non-English languages in classrooms, teachers accept, possibly without confirmation, that students have the necessary academic proficiencies in their native languages required to both participate in the specific activity and negotiate the specific academic content of the lesson. Although many students may be able to work successfully with academic content in their native language, it is possible that neither of these two assumptions may be met satisfactorily by the students at all times.

Modifications such as those mentioned above also view native language use, in and of itself, as meaningful and demonstrative of academic achievement. Assessment, in this case, becomes incredibly problematic. Some teachers may also be proficient in the languages spoken by their students. In these cases, the teachers may be able to assess their students appropriately. However, many teachers may not be able to conduct assessments in language other than English, making it very difficult for them to evaluate whether ELLs using their native languages have met the lesson objectives.

Some ideas. Teachers can effectively incorporate the native language proficiencies in the classroom by offering ELLs the opportunity to leverage these skills toward learning language and academic content. There is a difference between this leveraging of linguistic strength and teaching a student in their native language. To do this effectively, teachers need to allow students to use their native languages, to whatever extent possible, to engage in learning processes, leading to the ultimate demonstration of learning. In other words, while the final product, performance, or assessment can be completed in English, it may be incredibly useful, for students who are able, to engage in various learning process in their native languages. One example of this is a think, pair, share activity where students participate in all thinking and pairing in their native

languages. The sharing activity, then, is in English. For some students, this may still be a bit of a challenge, but for others, using their native languages to confirm their understanding of content, interact with other capable peers, and possibly rehearse various elements of the activity before demonstrating their content knowledge in English can be extremely useful. Leveraging native languages in this way allows teachers to provide students opportunities to bring all of their cultural and linguistic resources to bear on the content of instruction. After all, if students are struggling with the content of instruction, why not allow them full access to all of the knowledge, skills, and strategies?

Of course, before teachers can effectively leverage their students' linguistic strengths, they must try to confirm or deny the assumptions mentioned above. Simply asking students about their language use can provide the teacher with a better understanding of the breadth of his or her students' language proficiencies. However, student responses to basic questions such as "What language do you speak at home?" do not necessarily provide teachers much data with which they can plan instruction. More helpful might be the implementation of a survey of language use and literacy practices. Gottlieb and Hamayan (2007) offer some guidance to teachers by outlining various contexts, activities, and languages in which students may participate. Information such as which languages students speak around their homes, around their neighborhoods, and around their school as well as in which languages students read and write for various purposes is much more beneficial for teachers to know. With these data about their students (even those who speak English natively), teachers will be better equipped to provide appropriate opportunities for all students to build upon their linguistic and literate strengths.

Leveraging native languages allows teachers to provide students opportunities to bring all of their cultural and linguistic resources to bear on the content of instruction.

Family and Community Involvement

Much importance has been placed on the connections of home and school practices. There is a deep tradition of empirical work suggesting that how students behave "literately" can differ in the home as opposed to in schools (e.g., Gay, 2002; Heath, 1983: Lee, 2001; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Through knowledge of these differences and engagement in more culturally informed instruction (see Gay [2010]; Ladson-Billings [1995] for more on culturally responsive and relevant

teaching), teachers can bridge these differences and provide for a more accepting, inviting, and familiar classroom to students from diverse backgrounds. However, a word of caution—Pranksy and Bailey (2002/2003) posit, "Even with attempts to make the classroom a more comfortable, accepting place, the academic progress of at-risk students can be compromised unless they are 'initiated' into the cultural rules and language use of the school community" (p. 373). I would argue that even this "initiation" is limited in its effect, as it implies a one-way street of cultural practices wherein the classroom can become a place where the specific cultural strengths and knowledge of some students is denied. By expanding the cultural repertoires honored in the classroom, teachers can more fully involve students in the instruction they present. Educators, then, need to "look more deeply and carefully into what is already in front of us, connecting it to ideas, experience, and theory beyond our culturally, personally, and even professionally informed beliefs, values, and assumptions" (p. 382). In this way, teachers can provide for an inviting and safe classroom environment by bridging the differences between home and school practices, all the while increasing student engagement (Jiménez, Smith, & Teague, 2009) and maintaining academic rigor (DaSilva Iddings & Rose, 2010). Instructional modifications and decisions such as "Parents are welcome to visit and volunteer in the classroom at any time" and "Students will have the chance to be able to bring in their knowledge and ways of learning these stories from their home life" suggest that preservice teachers understand the value of students'—and indeed the larger community's—experiences and practices as they pertain to the classroom.

By expanding the cultural repertoires honored in the classroom, teachers can more fully involve students in the instruction they present.

Assumptions. Involving family and community members in classrooms and schools is not always a straightforward experience. Arriving on school premises, for instance, may not always be possible for many parents, or any parent for that matter. Teachers and school officials misunderstand parents' failure to visit schools and suspect a "lack of interest, apathy, and even antagonism and were baffled and troubled by the failure of these parents to 'care' about their children" (Valdés, 2001, p. 35). Of course, inviting family and community members to visit classrooms does have the potential to benefit all students, but the assumption present in modifications that advocate for family and community member involvement in the classroom is that their mere presence is enough.

Some ideas. Teachers can invite family and community member to speak to the students in their classroom. Invited guests allow teachers to develop their students' specific literacy practices as well as provide greater access to instructional content. To accomplish this, the teacher should know what the speaker will present and prepare the students to interact with the visitor. Numerous academic standards of practice can be addressed through work of this kind. For instance, Colorado Academic Standards Standard 1: Oral Expression and Listening contains two grade level expectations, both of which can be addressed through providing opportunities for students to interact with any classroom speaker. For instance, students can demonstrate that they can "ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue" (CDE, 2009a, p. 14). Of course, the students in the classroom need to be able to participate meaningfully with the guests, and by preparing questions before the speaker arrives to the classroom, teachers can ensure that all students are able to engage directly with whoever comes to visit.

Additionally, guest speakers from different communities can help students meet social studies standards that require them to be able to "compare how communities and neighborhoods are alike and different" (CDE, 2009b, p. 13). In addition to the above recommendation, teachers can provide students opportunities to identify specific features of their own communities and neighborhoods that they can juxtapose to what the guest presents. Engaging in this activity before the speaker arrives organizes the content of the presentation and allows all students, not just those for whom English is a non-native language, to more effectively process what they hear and see. Ultimately, when teachers invite guests to the classroom, regardless of which community or family they represent, they need to integrate the guests into the classroom curriculum and provide students greater and specific access to the academic content being addressed.

Moving Forward

One of the main challenges teachers may face when working with ELLs is knowing, in the first place, that their instruction needs to shift. "It's just good teaching" does not invoke the true professionalism required to do the job. After all, teaching is a deliberate act, with teachers basing instructional decisions on the specific needs of their students, both

as a whole and individually. To boil down this pursuit to a universal set of actions, enacted in a classroom where the students respond and learn to the exact same degree, is to fundamentally misunderstand how teaching and learning occurs. Too often, however, the work teachers do is reduced to maxims such as the one mentioned above as well as to those that might espouse the inherent value of groupwork, language immersion (or submersion), or parental involvement. The reduction of these complex theoretical and empirical constructs, however, can unnecessarily unburden teachers from seriously considering what their students know, are, and do. Further, without considering, or even knowing, the cultural and linguistic strengths of their students, teachers will find it difficult to effectively leverage what their students know/are/do toward the learning of academic content.

The ideas forwarded in this article represent only a few of the instructional possibilities teachers can implement in their classrooms. While the recommendations themselves seem fairly simple at first glance, they each embody the professionalism teachers need to maintain

One of the main challenges teachers may face when working with ELLs is knowing, in the first place, that their instruction needs to shift.

when developing instruction for their specific students. We cannot hand off our instruction to our students, hoping that they will serve as reliable teachers for their peers; rather, we need to put students in a position to advocate for themselves within instructional activities to make clear to others, including us, what needs they have. We cannot assume that simply having knowledge of another language equates to academic prowess in that language; rather, we need to put students in a position to mobilize the various linguistic resources they may have, all the while maintaining a strict eye on what students need to learn. We cannot expect that the simple presence of family or community members in our classroom will result in learning; rather, we need to leverage experiences familiar to students toward specific academic goals. Ultimately, the ideas presented here highlight the need for teachers to understand the specific assumptions that exist in their classroom decisions and reconcile these assumptions through more nuanced instruction. If teachers can do this, then they are well on their way to providing more effective instruction to not just their ELLs, but to all of their students.

Brian C. Rose, PhD, is a former kindergarten and fourth grade teacher. He is currently an assistant professor of teacher education at the University of Northern Colorado. His professional work focuses on supporting teachers to teach diverse populations of students. In other words, he helps teachers work effectively with every student in their classroom.

References

Antón, M., & DiCamilla, F.J. (1998). Socio-cognitive functions of L1 collaborative interaction in the L2 classroom. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, *54*(3), 314–342.

August, D.L. (1987). Effects of peer tutoring on the second language acquisition of Mexican American children in elementary school. *TESOL Quarterly, 21*(4), 717–736.

Ballantyne, K.G., Sanderman, A.R., & Levy, J. (2008). *Educating English language learners: Building teacher capacity*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. Retrieved from www.ncela.gwu.edu/practice/mainstream_teachers.htm

Capps, R., Fix, M., Murray, J., Ost., J., Passel, J.S., & Herwantoro, S. (2005). *The new demography of America's schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

CDE (Colorado Department of Education). (2009a). *Colorado academic standards: 2nd grade reading, writing, and communicating*. Denver, CO: Author.

CDE (Colorado Department of Education). (2009b). *Colorado academic standards: 2nd grade social studies*. Denver, CO: Author.

Chen, J.H., & Goswami, J. (2011). Structuring cooperative learning in teaching English pronunciation. *English Language Teaching, 4*(3), 26–32.

Cohen, E.G., & Lotan, R. (2014). *Designing groupwork: Strategies for the heterogeneous classroom* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

DaSilva Iddings, A.C., & Rose, B.C. (2010). Promoting educational equity for a recent-immigrant Mexican student in an English-dominant classroom: What does it take? In H.R. Milner (Ed.), *Culture, Curriculum, and Identity in Education* (pp. 77–92). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

De Guerrero, M.C.M., & Villamil, O. (2000). Activating the ZPD: Mutual scaffolding in L2 peer revision. *Modern Language Journal*, *84(*1), 51–68.

Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *53*(2), 106–116.

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Genesee, F., Lindholm-Leary, K., Saunders, W.M., & Christian, D. (Eds.). (2006). *Educating English language learners: A synthesis of research evidence*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Gottlieb, M., & Hamayan, E. (2007). Assessing oral and written language proficiency: A guide for psychologists and teachers. In E.C. Lopez, G.B. Esquivel, S.G. Nahari, & S.L. Proctor (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural school psychology: An interdisciplinary perspective* (pp. 245–263). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Harper, C.A., & de Jong, E.J. (2009). English language teacher expertise: The elephant in the room. *Language and Education, 23*(2), 137–151.

Heath, S.B. (1983). *Ways With Words*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Jiménez, R.T. (2001). "It's a difference that changes us": An alternative view of the language and literacy learning needs of Latina/o students. *The Reading Teacher, 54*(8), 736–742.

Jiménez, R.T., Garcia, G.E., & Pearson, P.D. (1996). The reading strategies of bilingual Latina/o students who are successful English readers: Opportunities and obstacles. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *31*(1), 90–112.

Jiménez, R.T., & Rose, B.C. (2010). Knowing how to know: Building meaningful relationships through instruction that meets the needs of students learning English. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *61*(5), 403–412.

Jiménez, R.T., Smith, P.H., & Teague, B.L. (2009). Transnational and community literacies for teachers. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 53*(1), 16–26.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory Into Practice, 34*, 159–165

Laird, J., DeBell, M., Kienzl, G., & Chapman, C. (2007). *Dropout rates in the United States: 2005* (NCES 2007-059). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Lantolf, J.P. (2000). Introducing sociocultural theory. In J.P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 1–26). New York: Oxford University Press.

Lantolf, J.P., & Thorne, S.L. (2006). *Sociocultural theory and the genesis of second language development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lee, C.D. (2001). Is October Brown Chinese? A cultural modeling activity system for underachieving students. *American Educational Research Journal, 38,* 97–141.

Manyak, P.C. (2007). A framework for robust literacy instruction for English learners. *The Reading Teacher, 61*(2), 197–199.

Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice, 31*(2), 132–140.

Parsad, B., Lewis, L., & Farris, E. (2001). *Teacher preparation and professional development: 2000* (NCES 2001-088). Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics.

Pew Hispanic Center. (2007a). *How far behind in math and reading are English language learners?* Washington DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

Pew Hispanic Center. (2007b). *The changing racial and ethnic composition of the U.S. public schools*. Washington DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

Pew Hispanic Center. (2008). *The role of schools in the English language learner achievement gap*. Washington DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

Pranksy, K., & Bailey, F. (2002/2003). To meet your students where they are, first you have to find them: Working with culturally and linguistically diverse at-risk students. *The Reading Teacher, 56*(4), 370–383.

Puzio, K., Keyes, C.S., Cole, M.W., & Jiménez, R.T. (2013). Language differentiation: Collaborative translation to support bilingual reading. *Bilingual Research Journal, 36*(3), 329–349.

Rose, B.C. (2015). How can we help? 1st-year teacher candidate experience in classrooms. *The Field Experience Journal, 16,* 69–85.

Swain, M., & Lapkin, S. (1998). Interaction and second language learning: Two adolescent French immersion students working together. *Modern Language Journal, 82*(3), 320–337.

Valdés, G. (2001). *Learning and not learning English*. New York: Teachers College Press.

VanPatten, B., & Williams, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Theories in second language acquisition: An introduction*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wood, D., Bruner, J.S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 17*, 89–100.

Keeping Literacy Alive in Your Classroom

Hollyanna Bates

Access to books does make a difference in students' lives, and the thorough checklist provided in this article can help teachers improve the quality of their classroom libraries.

The heart of the classroom is the library and how children interact with the rich materials you've worked so hard to select and maintain. Children's access to literacy and achievement in literacy is directly connected to their access to high-quality reading materials (Neuman, 1999).

The following checklist is designed to help novice and experienced teachers evaluate their classroom library practices and set goals for improving aspects of the system. A wonderful classroom library has no effect on the children if the system is not well developed. The system includes how children select books; identify authors, topics, or genres they like; return books after reading; recommend books to others; put their names on a wait list; and learn about new books to expand their reading palettes. Formalized processes for all of these aspects create a strong system, one that supports all learners on the path to become lifelong readers.

While the checklist can seem daunting, reviewing the components can help guide teachers to see the progress they have made while also identifying one or two practices to improve for the future.

Hollyanna Bates is past president of CCIRA and co-president of Ten Mile Reading in Summit County, Colorado. She is a Reading Recovery teacher leader in Summit School District where she facilitates district staff development, coaches teachers, and teaches Reading Recovery.

Reference

Neuman, S.B. (1999). Books make a difference: A study of access to literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *34,* 286–301.

Classroom Library Self-Evaluation Checklist

Quality of the Collection

☐ There are at least 1,000 books that represent a range of reading levels.

☐ Most of the books are targeted for the reading levels typically represented in my grade, with ample selections for below- and above-grade-level readers.

☐ Every year I purge damaged and low-interest books and purchase/acquire hundreds of new books.

☐ There is a formal wish list system as students discover new books and authors.

☐ I can name at least 40 books that I've used to hook hard-to-please readers.

☐ I know the books in the library and read many of them each year so I can recommend books effectively.

☐ There is a formal student recommendation process that students participate in daily.

☐ Book trailers and book talks are a daily practice.

☐ I go through the monthly Scholastic catalog to highlight books; book orders provide a constant influx of high-interest books for students at home and in the classroom.

☐ The quality of read-alouds is so high that it's often the most memorable experience of the child's year—read-alouds are located in a special bin.

Organization of the Collection

☐ Students give input about how the books are organized and make suggestions as the year goes on.

☐ A sticker or marking system makes the continued organization easy for students to manage with easy-to-identify labels.

☐ I worry less about losing books and checking them out properly than I do about kids having access to books for nightly reading.

☐ At any time, any student can go right to a tub of books on his or her level.

☐ Books are easy to sort through and are at the children's height with covers facing the student.

☐ There are comfortable cushions and the space welcomes readers.

☐ There is a formal wait list so that books can go directly from one child to another; students have a list of books they would like to read that year.

Access to Books

☐ Students are invited and encouraged to choose new books every day, even on field-trip days.

☐ Before students leave for the day, I ensure that every child has at least one book they are interested in reading.

☐ Students have a reading log that stays in class and tracks progress made in finishing books but also notes which books were abandoned; this reading log is an important tool for reading conferences.

Goal for this school year:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Ha-Ha,
I'm Comprehending With Imojis

Evan Vargas

This article blends insight from case studies concerning punch lines in humor and nonverbal imagery to provide strategies that assist comprehension in English and language arts using innovative meme imagery, called imojis.

When trying to teach middle schoolers, some people say, "Kill them with kindness," but I like to think that you have to dig deeper than that. These students possess the rambunctiousness of bulls and the need to be spoon-fed instruction like toddlers. Being a middle school teacher, my motto is "Kill them with laughter." I make classroom use of their satiric vocabulary, which is founded on memes.

Memes are funny images, typically spoof-like and derisive in nature, containing a phrase or two for comedic effect. Memes say a lot, and can have multiple meanings depending on what text is sandwiched in. By taking out the added phrase from the meme, you get something called an emoji, which allows us to add content. Not to be confused with an *emoticon*—a typographic display of a facial representation; for example, **:)** for a smiley face or **;)** for a winking smiley face—*emojis* are picture characters that are used by most operating systems today. Similar to an emoji, an *imoji* is a picture, a photo, or text turned into a sticker that has been created with a mobile software application called ImojiApp (available through Google Play or the Apple Store). See Figure 1.

Who could not laugh when an imogi of Macaulay Culkin's famous scream is shown on the projector with the headline, "Don't forget your consent forms for this week's field trip!"?

Does Humor Help With Comprehension?

According to Shibata, Terasawa, and Umeda (2014), humor is like a "cognitive problem-solving task" (p. 137), because learners must first make a prediction before the
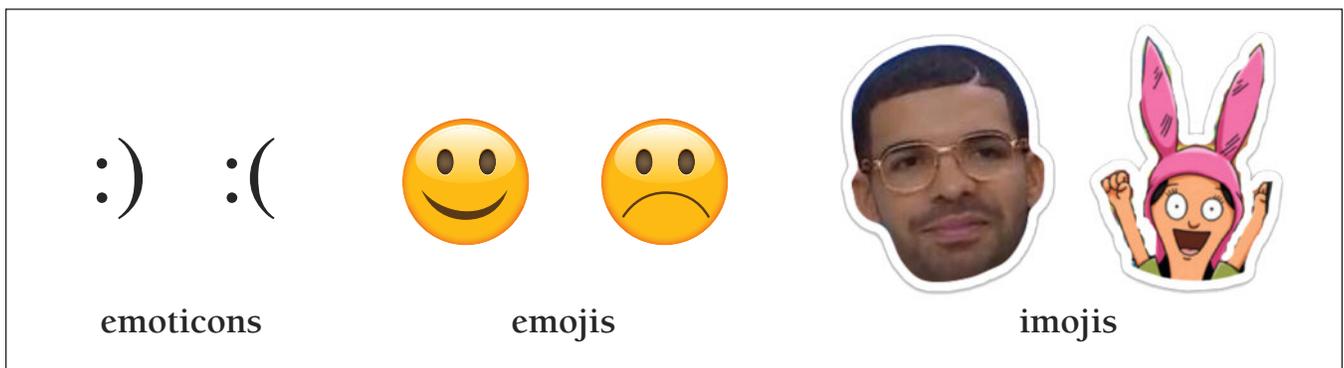
Figure 1. Emoticons, emojis, and imojis

emoticons   emojis   imojis

punch line to a joke is delivered; then identify reasoning that will aid understanding of the punch line; and last, appreciate the joke through laughter.

Similarly, Shibata et al. (2014) discovered that learners who understood the punch line measured greater activation in a functional magnetic resonance imaging reading in language and semantic neural networks when compared to those who did not understand one. These neural networks, according to Shibata et al. 2014, "play a central role in incongruity detection and resolution, as well as in positive emotional response" (p. 137).

Imoji Basics

You can download ImojiApp from either Google Play or the Apple Store into your smart device. Smartphones that are not Apple based typically use an Android operating system, which will already have Google Play installed. For Apple users, I recommend using the Apple Store, which is pre-installed on Apple devices. Simply type "Imoji Google Play" or "Imoji Apple Store" in your preferred Internet browser's search field, and a link will populate for the recommended program. When you have opened the application, simply click on the desired imoji. The imoji search engine will allow you to narrow down your ideas. I also recommend e-mailing each imoji you plan to use to your e-mail address. This enables you to plug them into your slides, word processing program, or e-mail message. Simply, click on the imoji you wish to use, select the mail icon, and enter your address to send the imoji to your e-mail account via Apple. For Android users, you may have to download the imoji sticker by first clicking the imoji, then the download button. Send your imoji as an attachment through your e-mail, which should be located in your download folder. This provides you with access to your imojis using any platform that allows Internet access.

How to Use an Imoji to Activate Schema

I have found that a plot diagram is a great place to input imoji imagery, to activate prior knowledge and lure our learners into the plot. For instance, in Walter Dean Myer's short story, "The Treasure of Lemon Brown" (2010), Greg gets into a lengthy, didactic conversation with his
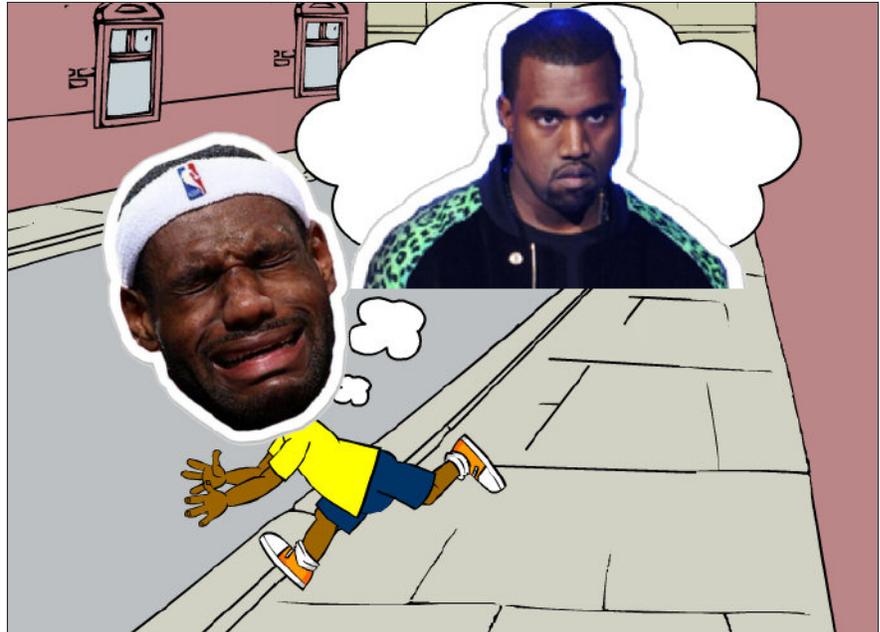
Figure 2. Composition example with imojis

father about his fascination with basketball over school. Greg is anxious and upset almost to the point of tears over their discussion, and he decides to run out into the evening streets of Harlem.

In order to have memes or imojis retain the punch line rather than give false predictions, Fein, Beni-Noked, and Giora (2015) recommend that we do not associate nonverbal cartoons used prior to the punch line. This means that if you show the same imoji before and after prediction, learners are more likely to remember false ideas from their prediction. Before showing your imoji, or a composition (Figure 2), pose a question to your learners in order for them to predict, for example, "What do you think will happen next?"

At this point, let's assess our prediction using a composition highlighting the use of prior knowledge and an imoji to keep the students engaged in the story. Many students know about LeBron James' success playing basketball, so seeing this National Basketball Association's (NBA's) dominating small forward show facial tears in an imoji would register with many of them as humorous. Similarly, showing the outspoken provocateur Kanye West whimpering when portrayed as LeBron's (Greg's) father would also connect with the students, using imoji humor to suggest that the two had an argument, which caused LeBron to run away. Learners enjoy seeing their idols connected to an assigned story. Shibata et al. (2014) found that "the funny condition induced a perception of funniness and caused a greater activation in language and semantic regions, as well as in mesolimbic reward regions" (p. 144).

To extend the imoji instructional mileage, you can now go back to the introduction of "The Treasure of Lemon Brown," and have your students locate the keywords that support the imoji sketch. Similarly, you can have your learners address other symbols, such as the NBA logo and its relevance to Greg's character. Have them ponder the question: "Why did I use LeBron James to represent Greg?"

You can also ask the learners to make a sketch, using their iPads, mobile devices, or school computers, to highlight other elements in the story, such as the climax and resolution.

Sometimes it is hard to explain what adjectives and idioms look like. Yes! These words do look like something.

How to Use Imojis for Comprehending Adjectives and Idioms

Sometimes it is hard to explain what adjectives and idioms look like. Yes! These words do look like something.

When one student remarked, "Mr. Vargas, I don't get what *taken aback* means," I used an imoji to help me explain it. Imojis can also be used to overexaggerate the meaning of words, gluing their meanings to each learner's mind.

With each imoji, you can use a variety of words for the expression. With the image here on the left, we associate the following words: *taken aback, confused, not supportive, dazed, perplexed....*

A good strategy is to have a word bank of adjectives, and have learners connect as many adjectives they can to an imoji. This can be used as a warm-up before the lesson is taught. It can also create friendly competition among peers or participating class periods to see who is able to connect the most correct responses per imoji. It would be best to then list the best examples in a slide or anchor chart, and link a new imoji that has similar adjectival features, so learners can associate the correct synonyms with the imoji. Fein et al. (2015) found that pairing nonverbal cartoons (which for us is the imoji) before and after the punch line caused learners to retain false predictions despite receiving the answer.

How to Employ Imojis to Send Messages

Learners are often confused about our instruction and content, but they do not always let us know. Sometimes we are not able to decipher their anxiety or confusion in time to clarify the lesson. One way to assess our learners' comprehension is by providing a set of imojis, each showing an emotional state that is broad enough to carry a range of similar feelings but precise enough to be universally understood (Figure 3). These can be posted on the wall.

Similarly, you can let your learners know that they can raise their hands and display a number (e.g., the number 1, denoting confusion) at any time during class, to signal they're having a problem with comprehension. In a

Figure 3. Imojis showing emotion can be displayed in the classroom

different context, number 1 could connote not feeling well and possibly needing a restroom break or a visit to the school nurse. It is great to provide flexibility and options for your learners to communicate how they are feeling. By changing the process from the traditional model of raising a hand and speaking aloud their concerns, you can give learners options that mitigate the occasional awkwardness. Kids like to send a coded message, like a number, without making themselves stick out.

For Imojis and Other Apps, the More the Merrier

Anyone familiar with photo editing has probably heard of Photoshop by Adobe. However, not everyone who knows of these types of products can afford such software. Within the open-source boom, mobile app developers have been creating similar applications that do pretty much the same things as the costly professional software programs. However, open-source apps and software are free and do not need to run only on your computer; they can be used online through an app or on a website as well.

Pixlr is a Photoshop-like mobile app that allows you to arrange a variety of images and revise them however you like, shrinking a little here and there, and clipping media to compose your backgrounds and characters. Pixlr provides free tutorials via articles on https://support.pixlr.com/hc/en-us/categories/201021817-Tutorials-Tips-Templates.

Similarly, ToonDoo is a comic-strip-making, web-based app that allows you to choose among a variety of backgrounds and character bodies to render a scene that can vary from a seated boy postulating with a thought bubble atop his head to someone running in fright as shown in my first imoji composition, Figure 2. ToonDoo provides free tutorials via their forum on https://toondoo.wiki.zoho.com/.

Conclusion

Engaging our learners' interest is essential. Fortunately, humor promotes engagement, and research has shown that humor aids learner comprehension (Shibata et al. 2014). Humor is a mood enhancer that encourages positive emotional response (Shibata et al. 2014). It is being

Humor promotes engagement.

❧

capitalized on within social media, and it can become a welcome addition to our classrooms via imojis.

Oddly enough, my fascination with meme imagery came from everyday tasks, such as sending messages via social media, or being amazed at how company logos are continuing to minimize their brand into an icon, getting rid of text to convey a message, for example, the Starbucks logo. We can easily brand our class rules and expectations as an imoji logo for learners to become better invested in the class. Similarly, learners can create their own imojis to rate experiences they had with books they have read or journal reflections they have written.

Mobile apps are continuing to expand and innovate how digital literacy and communication affect understanding and comprehension. As educators, understanding how visual media aids comprehension is necessary, but doing so in the lingua franca of the now seeks to go that step forward into tomorrow.

Evan Vargas is an English and language arts educator, certified in the state of Texas for grades 4–8. Evan is currently teaching sixth graders at Pasadena Independent School District. He holds a master of education and a bachelor's degree in architecture, both conferred by the University of Houston. Evan enjoys all types of media and technology, and researches visual media's effect on cognition and comprehension to provide simple, yet rigorous higher-order instruction in a student-centered and technology-friendly format. Having had experience in multimodal approaches to learning from undergrad and graduate school, he seeks to mine a pedagogy that blends the tactile and technological to craft strategies that are meaningful, relevant, and useful for learning in the now.

References

Fein, O., Beni-Noked, S., & Giora, R. (2015). Under/standing cartoons: The suppression hypothesis revisited. *Journal of Pragmatics, 86,* 86–93, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2015.05.016.

Myers, W.D. (2010). The treasure of Lemon Brown. In K. Beers et al. (Eds.), *Elements of Literature* (pp. 14–26). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Shibata, M., Terasawa, Y., & Umeda, S. (2014). Integration of cognitive and affective networks in humor comprehension. *Neuropsychologia, 65,* 137–145, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2014.10.025
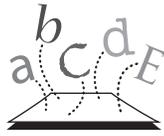
For the Fun of It
(And the Learning Just Happens!)*

DAVID L. HARRISON

Entice your students to "come alive" with the many tips for reading and writing poetry from this renown author who makes learning fun!

When I made up my first poem, I was hungry and tired of waiting. My mother was frying fish in the kitchen and I was sent to the living room to wait for dinner. The words I thought of expressed my need. I liked the way they sounded. *"Sometimes I wish/I had a fish/Upon a little dish."* No one told me I had to make up a poem. I was six-years-old. It was just a fun thing to do. My mother taped the poem into my scrapbook. High praise!

Seven decades later I'm still making up poems. Kids ask why I climb out of bed at 6:00 to settle into my daily writing routine. The reason hasn't changed: It's a fun thing to do. Writing poems makes me feel good. Writing well is neither simple nor easy, but it provides me with a sense of gratification that drives my desire to do it again.

I tend to have paper and pen close by. I stash them in my bedroom, my car, and my pockets. If there's anything I'm better at than recognizing million dollar ideas at unexpected times and places, it's forgetting them if I don't quickly scratch out a note. I would never admit to an officer of the law that I've made notes in my car. I'm just saying that I have a good many notes that I can't read the next day.

One of my favorite ways to dive into a poem is by association. I pick a word or phrase and follow where it leads me. "Build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door." I don't remember who said that. By association I realized that the proper addendum for that advice would be, "But mice will hate you." Mice led to cheese. Cheese led to the moon. If you're not old enough to know that the moon is made of green cheese, indulge me. The moon led to the Man in the Moon, which led to a poem.

THE MAN IN THE MOON
From *Using the Power of Poetry*

The man in the moon
Eats nothing but cheese.
There's nothing but cheese to eat.
Often he cries
To the cheddar skies,
"I'm dying for some little treat!"
He dreams of chicken salad, he says,
On slices of fresh whole wheat.
"I yearn for yams,
Sugar-cured hams,
Or anything gooey or sweet!"
The man in the moon
Eats nothing but cheese—
There's nothing but cheese to eat—
But oh how he wishes
For tastier dishes,
Like salads!
And veggies!
And meat!

We may feel certain emotions so deeply that we find them difficult to talk about....Sometimes a poem can express what the tongue cannot..

become involved. They hear the beat, feel the rhythm, and see the pictures.

Poetry teaches while it entertains. A letter from a little boy who was a struggling reader expresses what it feels like when words work their magic. *"The words* [in your poem] *have a rhythm to them,"* he wrote. *"I can hear the beat in my head. Then when I get it down I read it out loud to myself."*

A six-year-old girl was given one of my books called *Farmer's Garden* in which a dog interviews various inhabitants of his master's garden. The girl sat on her mother's lap and listened to the poetic interviews over and over. She read them silently to herself. She read them aloud. She asked an adult friend to sit down and listen to her read her new poems. She asked the adult to take turns reading with her. The little girl loved the words so much that she began acting out some of the parts, leaping and waving her arms and dancing in exuberant interpretations of what she heard and felt and saw in her imagination.

The following morning she took the book to school. There she organized her classmates into teams. As the book was read aloud, the children performed the girl's choreographed movements. Was this youngster a struggling reader? I doubt it, but I'm willing to bet that some of her dancing classmates were, and her rambunctious joy in turning words into dance must surely have been good for every reader in the class, wherever they

Learning takes place when we add something new to our base of knowledge and prior experiences. When we ask students to choose writing from the long list of possibilities that vie for their attention, we're expecting too much if, for them, writing does not bring pleasure. Readers who stumble at making sense of words strung together into sentences and paragraphs often find the shorter, more inviting lines of a poem easier to "get." Other senses

were along the reading scale.

Poems can convey moods, messages, and voices as broad and deep as the experience of being human. Sometimes the most serious among us feel like being silly. The most rambunctious have quiet moments; the classroom comic, his reflective times. We may feel certain emotions so deeply that we find them difficult to talk about. Being embarrassed, abused, poor, homeless, hungry, frightened,

degraded, and alone are hard to discuss. Sometimes a poem can express what the tongue cannot.

I remember being mortified as a middle school student when I fell off the back of the bandstand at a school party, still clutching my trombone. I could barely stand the thought of climbing back up and facing the crowd.

FROM THE BACK ROW
From *Connecting Dots*

Tonight our band performed at school,
on risers in the cafeteria,
music folders on black stands,
our first gig, professional.

My solo came, I stood tall,
pushed back my chair,
played flawlessly,
acknowledged applause,
nonchalantly took my seat,

Fell off backward, chair and all,
off the back of the top riser,
somersaulted through the air,
crash-landed behind the band.

Huge applause when I reappeared,
climbed the risers carrying my chair.

I wish I'd broken both legs.
A little sympathy is my only chance
for tomorrow.

Young people in school have almost unlimited opportunities to be embarrassed. Maybe that's why they can be so sensitive to the plight of others. This student knew exactly what I was talking about.

"Dear Mr. Harrison, My favorite poem was the one with you falling off the risers. When you fell off the risers I bet you were embarrassed. I have embarrassing moments too."

Another common experience is being the new kid. Whether in church, neighborhood, class, school, or community, nearly every child knows what it's like to be on the outside feeling alone and excluded. If you're a new kid and you're shy, you can spend a lot of time staring at your desk or looking out the window—anywhere to avoid making direct eye contact.
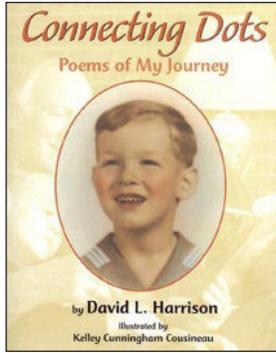
NEW SCHOOL
From *Connecting Dots*

What did you do
in school today?

I saw a boy
looking at me.
I waved,
but he looked away.

His friends ran up,
yelling and laughing.
I laughed, too,
but they looked away.

I answered wrong
in class today.
The boy laughed,
I looked away.

I know I'm reaching my audience when I receive notes like this one: *"Mr. Harrison, I'm new so I relate. That's exactly what happened to me."*

A poet's job is to write so that readers want to read what he has to say. I like nature. One day on a walk I stooped to examine a single hoof print pressed into a soft spot in the path. Alone in the forest silence, I felt somehow connected to the wild creature that had walked where I now stood, perhaps moments earlier. I didn't think, "Aha! A poem!" But I carried the memory away with me, and the act itself became part of the poem that I eventually wrote.

CROSSING PATHS
From *Wild Country*


A single hoof mark
in the moist trail,

small
probably a deer.

We'll never meet
yet our paths cross
here.

In these woods
our separate ways
are clear

but standing briefly
where this deer stood

is a memory
worth taking
beyond the wood
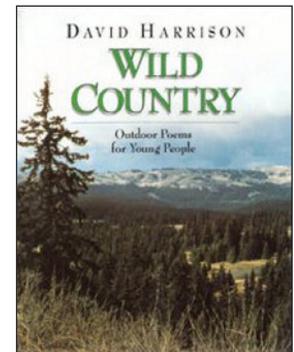
The deer poem seemed as inevitable as the fish poem of my youth. They both sprang from sudden urges to record a moment that felt important. I've developed a lot of tricks over the years to help me find my way into poems, but most of my favorites take their voices from something as simple and personal and compelling as wanting to eat or crossing paths with a deer. I am my first and most important audience. If I don't like it, I take for granted that my readers won't either.

Serious times in our lives often generate serious writing to describe them, but not always. As I look around at the size of a lot of us these days, I want to write about the enormity of the problem. But to write a poem about being overweight that might be read aloud in a class would risk embarrassing some of the students. Poets have a responsibility to consider such possibilities before choosing how to present a subject. My solution in this case was to keep it light and silly.

If we expect to draw in readers and entice writers, we need to learn what kids like.

〜

THE PERFECT DIET

From *The Boy Who Counted Stars*

Mrs. LaPlump weighed 300
    pounds,
Her husband weighed 202.
"I've got to lose some
    weight," she said,
I'll give up potatoes and
    pizza and bread."
Mr. LaPlump said, "I will,
    too.
My darling, I'll do it for you."

When each of them lost 100 pounds,
He only weighed 102.
"I've got to lose more weight," she said.
"This next 100," said he, "I dread,
For when we are finished I'll only weigh 2,
But darling, I'll do it for you."

When they lost another 100 pounds,
Her figure was perfect and trim,
But there is a lesson here I think,
Mr. LaPlump continued to shrink
Till one day he disappeared down the sink,
And you may find this grim, my dears,
But it was the end for him.
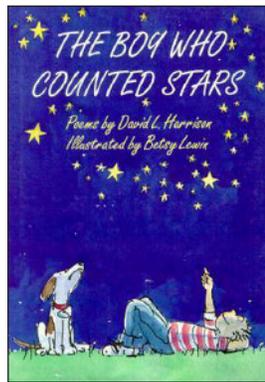
If we expect to draw in readers and entice writers, we need to learn what kids like. School visits help authors remember the differences from one grade to another. Sometimes this can be a challenge! If I spot some boys in the back, slouching at their seats, ankles crossed, determined to be unreachable, I play my trump card: one of my nonfiction books called *Cave Detectives*. One passage describes the discovery of ancient claw marks high on a cavern wall.

"Those deep gouges in the clay were put there by a bear," I tell them.

The boys, still motionless, peer out through their eyelashes.

"Fourteen feet up the wall."

Feet uncross.

"Four feet higher than a basketball goal."

They lean forward.

"That bad boy could weigh 2,000 pounds, run 45 miles per hour, and was always hungry for meat."

They're mine. Sometimes so much so that I have a hard time moving on to the next topic. Think those boys would read a poem about a bear? Would they try their hand at making up their own bear poems? I'd bet on both.

When I was developing *Connecting Dots*, 54 memory-based poems that covered the arc of my life from 3 through my age at the time (early 60s), I visited P.S. 86 in the Bronx. With the wonderful support of the principal, reading coach, and teachers from third through sixth grades, every poem was read aloud in classes and rated on a grid by every student in those grades.

At the time, more than 1,700 students attended P.S. 86. Weeks later I received 12,000 ratings that ranged from *yuck* to *amazing*. I learned a lot about what those kids liked and didn't like. I removed some poems, expanded others at their request, and added others that they suggested.

But stimulating kids to read poetry is only half the battle. They also need to write their own poems. On my blog I post a new word each month and challenge poets of all ages to write poems inspired by that word. A teacher in Florida began submitting student poems. The poems were often weak, but the students soon became fully engaged in the effort. The teacher told me that her students came from a low socioeconomic area and were in a Level 1 ninth-grade class. No one ever asked them to write poetry although Level 1 students were given Intensive
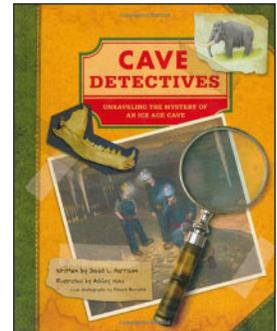
Reading courses to help them with the FCAT (Florida's Standardized Test).

She said, "I truly believe that by shoving reading lessons down their throats without the benefit of creative writing lessons served only to bore them to tears and caused them to shut down." Who wants to read boring, nonfiction passages about a spider or a country they never heard of before? Now, when I introduced poetry, they were interested. At first, they tried to act cool and aloof, but I knew them.... When I showed them poetry, they were a little interested. When I taught them to read poetry, they were more interested. When I told them to write poetry, they thought I was crazy.

When they wrote poetry, they came alive.

Were the poems good? No, not technically. But they poured their hearts into them and they loved seeing their names on your blog.

And that is when their reading scores went up.

And that seems like a good place for me to end.

HAVE IT YOUR OWN WAY

(Two Voices)

From *The Mouse Was Out at Recess*

(Isabelle)   (Teacher)

Me and Sally are pals!

        Sally and I are pals.

I didn't know you knew her!

        I don't.

Then why did you say,
"Me and Sally are pals?"

        Sally and I are pals.

You said it again!
You said,
"Me and Sally are pals!"

        Sally and I are pals!

Have it your own way.
You and her are pals.
But I don't believe it,
And Sally won't neither!

You know what? This is just a fun thing to do.
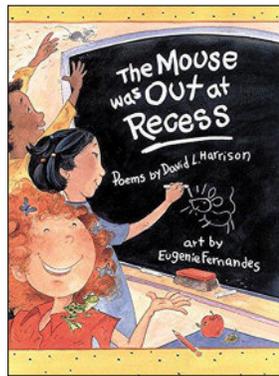
David L. Harrison is a poet, author, and nationally known speaker. He holds degrees from Drury and Emory universities and an honorary doctorate of letters from Southwest Missouri State and Drury universities. His 2016 publication, Now You See Them, Now You Don't, *is his seventeenth collection of poems and his 90th book for young people and teachers. His books have won numerous honors including the Christopher Medal. In 2013,* Pirates *was chosen to represent Missouri at the National Book Fair in Washington, D.C. His work has been reprinted in classroom texts and statewide reading tests, anthologized in 185 books, translated into more than 10 languages, and has appeared in more than 100 journals, magazines, newspapers, and videos. His poem, "My Book," is sandblasted into the Children's Garden sidewalk at Phoenix's Burton Barr Central Library and painted on a bookmobile in Pueblo, Colorado. David Harrison Elementary School was named for him. In 2014, Missouri DESE and the State Board of Education presented Harrison with its Pioneer in Education award "for distinguished and devoted service to public education." David is Poet Laureate of Drury University.*

Books by David L. Harrison

The Boy Who Counted Stars. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, 1994.

Cave Detectives: Unraveling the Mysteries of an Ice Age Cave. San Francisco: Chronicle, 2007.

Connecting Dots: Poems of My Journey. Honesdale, PA: WordSong/Boyds Mills Press, 2004.

Farmer's Garden. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, 2000.

The Mouse Was Out at Recess. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, 2003.

Now You See Them, Now You Don't: Poems About Creatures That Hide. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge, 2016.

Pirates. Honesdale, PA: WordSong, 2014.

Using the Power of Poetry to Teach Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, and More (with K. Holderith). New York: Scholastic, 2003.

Wild Country. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mill Press, 1999.
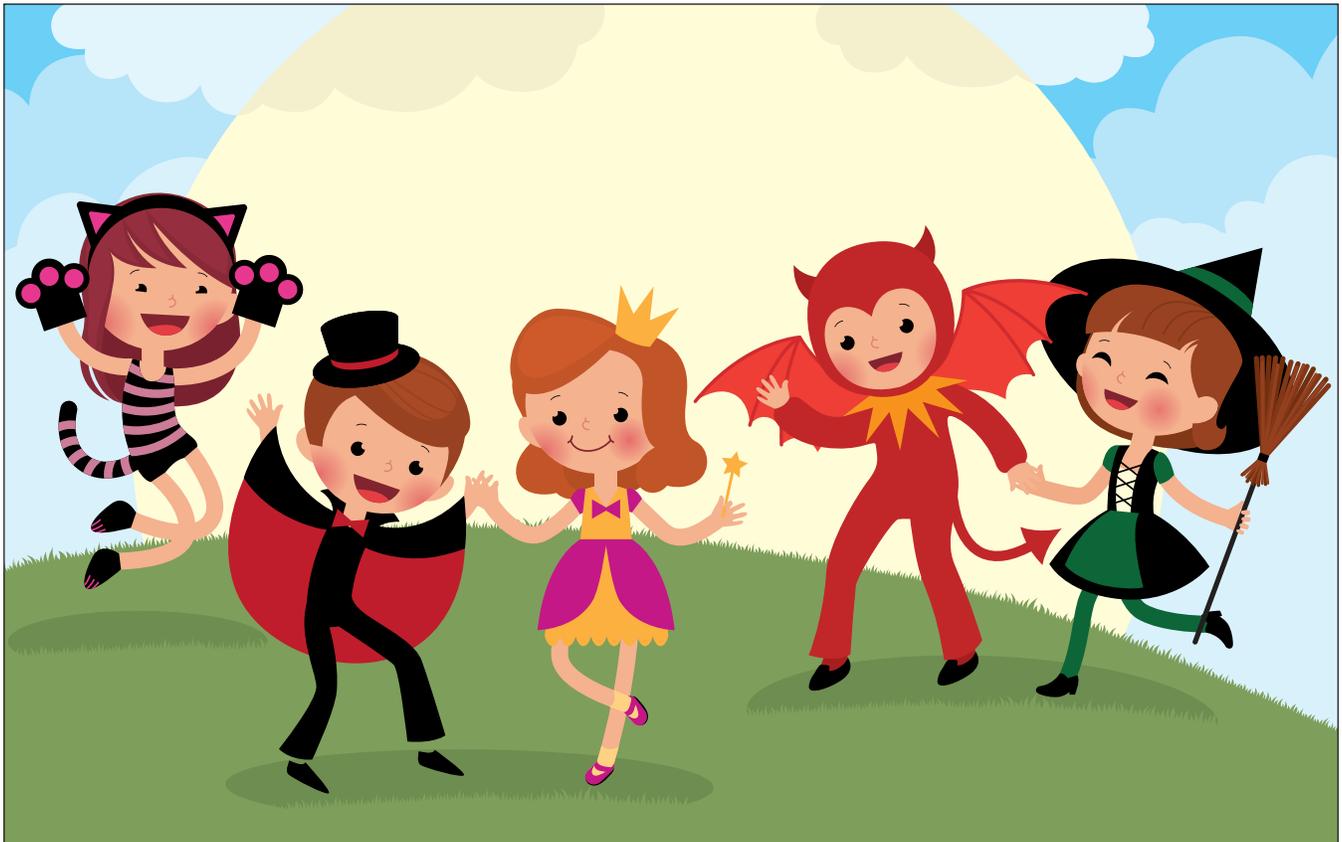
Teaching Vocabulary and Writing in Kindergarten Through Dramatic Play Centers

Shelley Stagg Peterson and Christine Portier

Explore tactics for connecting vocabulary development and play centers to enrich kindergartners' conceptual and print understanding of words.

In many communities, parents, administrators, and policy makers see the development of literacy skills as the key to children's school achievement and later success as adults. As a result, teachers at all levels, including kindergarten, are increasingly under pressure to devote considerable classroom time to measureable literacy skills, rather than creative activities such as dramatic play. This is true in the United States, where Dombkowski (2001) found that parents wanted kindergarten and primary grade schooling to give their children a "competitive edge...[Parents] want to see results from educational expenditures, and while they do not mind seeing children paint and play as they might in a non-academic kindergarten, they would somehow rather see a rise in test scores" (p. 545). It is also true in developing countries, such as Bangladesh, where Chowdhury and Rivalland (2012) found that low socio-economic parents of young children viewed their children's school success as a way out of their socioeconomic conditions. They believed that play did not have a place in school because it would distract children from their study.

In this article, we argue that dramatic play is a highly motivational forum for literacy learning. While we agree that there is a place for formal literacy instruction in kindergarten, it should not be confined solely to teaching

children *about* print and language (e.g., learning how to form letters and arrange them into words with spaces between them, learning new vocabulary through being introduced to words, and learning letter–sound relationships). There is a far greater chance that children will learn about print if they have opportunities to learn *what they can do with print* by writing self-initiated texts in meaningful contexts. Similarly, children are far more likely to learn new vocabulary if they have a chance to use the vocabulary in dramatic play settings.

We draw on research and theory and our observations of children in the dramatic play centers in Cassie's kindergarten class in Eagle Hills (all names are pseudonyms), a rural community in northern Canada. Cassie is involved in an action research study with us (a university professor and postdoctoral fellow) where we explore ways to support young children's writing and oral language through play.

Dramatic Play and Literacy Centers Supporting Vocabulary and Writing

Eagle Hills, a town of about 6,700 people in the far north of a Canadian province, is an industrial center based on the abundant natural resources in the area. A large percentage of the town's occupants are working age (15–64) and working class. Most of the town's residents speak English as their mother tongue, and of those whose first language is not English (typically German, Pilipino, and Cree), a large percentage most often speak English at home. Cassie typically has 24 students attending each of her two half-day (morning and afternoon) kindergarten programs every day. The students in her class reflect the demographics of the town.

Cassie reads narrative and nonfiction books to the children in her class. Students and teacher talk about the books, and Cassie invites children to be physically interactive (e.g., with gestures) and to chime in or make appropriate sound effects as she reads. In this way, Cassie helps the young writers in her class to "build understandings about texts, process, and what it means to be a writer" (Ray & Glover, 2008, p. 127). She devotes 30 minutes

Children are far more likely to learn new vocabulary if they have a chance to use the vocabulary in dramatic play settings.

each day to centers, where groups of four or five children spend 10 minutes at three of five centers on any given day. At the literacy center, Cassie, or an educational assistant, model and provide support for children in forming letters and learning letter–sound relationships. At the dramatic play center, the children organize their own play scenarios around the furniture, costumes, and props that Cassie has set up. The theme for the dramatic play center changes each month. This year, the center had shelves of clothes and shoes for children to dress up in October, and hats, coats, and other items for a fire station center in November.

Dress-Up Center: A Context for Children's Writing

Near the beginning of October, the wardrobe at the dramatic play center included adult dresses, suits, and shoes, as well as other items, such as wallets and purses. Children donned the clothes and took up roles as family members in their interactions at the center. For about two weeks, the children explored the dress-up clothes and items and created their own play scenarios. Cassie then added Halloween costumes and the children explored dressing up with these outfits. A week later Cassie asked the children to put on a costume and look at themselves in the large mirror beside the center, and talk about how they looked all dressed up. Cassie taught a shared writing lesson where children generated adjectives and nouns to describe how they looked. She gave them sentence starters, such as "I look …" and wrote some of their descriptive words (e.g., *pretty, cool)* on a white board that was hung up beside the mirror.

Throughout that week at the dramatic play center, the children were invited to write on four-by-three-inch pieces of cardstock and describe what they looked like when they dressed up. Children could have copied some words, if they wanted, but Cassie encouraged them to write words on their own. The children were highly motivated to write. In Cassie's words, the "students took to this like wildfire," and soon "the writing took over." In some cases the children dressed up as a perfunctory activity before starting to write, and in other cases, the children were so engaged in their writing that they forgot to dress up. The children were proud of their writing and showed each other what they had written. Cassie gave the students bulletin board space to post their writing, and by the end of the week, the board was covered. Some children took their writing home to show their families.

Figure 1. Boys playing at the fire truck center in Cassie's classroom

Fire Station Center: A Context for Supporting Children's Vocabulary Development

Toward the middle of November, Cassie replaced the costumes in the dramatic play center with clothing and props to create a "fire station." She set up a wooden "fire truck" with steering wheel, windshield, and walkie-talkies and a seat that fit two or three children. The fire truck hood opened and stored firefighter coats, hats, wooden axes, plastic fire extinguishers, and small fire trucks (Figure 1). For this first week, Cassie deliberately kept her center introductions and descriptions brief, simply letting the students know what items they would find at the fire station and how to open and close the truck lid safely. The students' first rotation to this center gave them a chance to explore the items and what they knew about firefighters. As Cassie put it, "each group had a very different take on the fire station play." The children sat in the fire truck, tried on the coats and hats, spoke into the walkie-talkies, and tried to figure out the uses for the axes and fire extinguishers.

The following week, Cassie invited the local firefighters to visit their classroom. The firefighters talked about the different aspects of their jobs and how they used the equipment. The children had a chance to go outside to see the fire truck and to talk about its parts and how they function. Cassie told us that in the past, she had taken the students on a field trip to visit the fire station, but decided this year to ask the firefighters to come to the school. She found that this unexpectedly shifted the focus from the fire *station* to the *roles* that the firefighters take in their jobs. This led her to follow up the visit with discussions about the roles of the firefighters in relation to the items that they use. She created a fire truck center list of "roles" and posted it beside the fire truck. For each item (e.g., axe, truck, walkie-talkie, fire extinguisher), Cassie listed the actions and purpose associated with it. For the next few weeks of dramatic play, the students referred to this list to select their roles and organize their play.

Children's Writing at the Dramatic Play Centers

Children use mark making and drawing to represent things and ideas that are significant to them. Whenever children make marks or draw pictures to communicate with others, perhaps to tell a story about what happened to them or to represent someone or something important to them, they are engaged in early writing activity (Anning, 2003; Yang & Noel, 2006).

As children encounter print in their lives, they discover that some types of marks (letters) are used in environmental print and continuous texts such as books, magazines, and websites. The adults in their lives read the words formed by these letters for various purposes (e.g., to get the information they need or for entertainment). These types of marks start to show up more and more frequently when children represent their own meanings in their writing. The marks and drawings that children create show adults what they know about letters, sounds, and spaces. However, what adults know about print can also help children achieve social purposes, such as communicating ideas to others, regulating others' behavior, and providing information (Rowe, 2009). Children's learning about print, created while they engage in formal classroom lessons and everyday encounters with print, is reflected in their writing.

The writing samples in Figure 2, written by 10 children at the dress-up center, show varying principles about print that the children have hypothesized. First and very importantly, all the children told Cassie and the educational assistants in the classroom what their writing, or "signs," meant. They had generated an understanding that Clay (1975) identified as the sign concept. In other words, they understood that "print is symbolic; it is used to 'stand for' other things" (Pahl, 1999, p. 58). As one boy wrote his family members' names (the writing in the lower right-hand corner of Figure 2), he told the children in his group about his family. He recognized that he could use print to introduce peers to people from outside the classroom who are important to him. Although the children's writing at the dress-up center may not have contained the letters of words that they wanted to communicate, their writing is, however, a symbolic representation of an idea in the same way that written words are symbolic representations of ideas.

Some of the children from the Figure 2 sample represented their ideas with what Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) found were typical of young children's initial writing: continuous wavy lines and a series of small circles. These beginning hypotheses will provide a foundation for later understandings about letter correspondences with voiced sounds (often each letter stands for one syllable—the syllabic hypothesis) and further understandings about written characters corresponding to sounds rather than to syllables.

Figure 2. Writing from the children in Cassie's kindergarten class

Although Cassie had written some words on the interactive board that had been generated in the whole-class shared writing activity, she encouraged the children to create their own texts, rather than copying these words. Her practice is consistent with research findings that literacy development is limited in situations where children copy letters, words, and sentences. Copying takes away the important cognitive demands that are placed on children when they create their own symbols using their ever-growing knowledge about print (Clay, 1975; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982). The phonics and letter formation work at the literacy center are important to children's literacy learning. Yet there must also be opportunities for the intellectual work that goes into the creation of independently written products to support children's literacy learning.

The marks and drawings that children create show adults what they know about letters, sounds, and spaces.

Children's Learning of New Vocabulary at the Dramatic Play Center

To learn new words, children need repeated and meaningful exposure to words, including word meanings (Biemiller & Boote, 2006), words presented within a theme or in context (Neuman & Dwyer, 2009), and opportunities to talk and use new words in meaningful contexts. Hearing, using, and exploring new words in meaningful contexts is important for vocabulary expansion and overall language development, and for coming to know the possibilities for using words in various social interactions (Blachowicz & Fisher, 1996; Dickinson, Golinkoff, & Hirsch-Pasek, 2010). Cassie's support for children's vocabulary development at the fire station center aligned closely to the following principles for teaching vocabulary.

Immerse students in words. By simply setting up a dramatic play center, Cassie gave her students an environment where they could practice talking with one another, develop their general or usable vocabulary, and figure out the meaning of the new fire station–related vocabulary.

The students negotiated how they would use the props and how they would equitably take turns doing so. By setting up this center for several weeks, the students were able to expand their use of new vocabulary and begin to develop play fire-station scenarios that made use of the words they were learning.

Encourage students to be active in making connections between words and experiences. The dramatic play center provided a way for students to take an active role constructing the meanings for the new words they were learning. For example, hearing their teacher introduce them to the word *fire extinguisher* served as only the first step in their real understanding of those words. In the first week of their play, many of the students called the fire extinguisher prop by its name and even knew that it put out fires. Much of their play with this prop involved standing still and making "ssssshhhhhh" sounds as they sprayed pretend fires with it, then trading so someone else could try it out. Over the weeks, students began constructing fire-fighting narratives that incorporated the fire extinguisher into the roles they took in their stories. By creating fire-fighting experiences, the students explored the relationships between the items, their use, and the people who use them.

Principles for Teaching Vocabulary

1. Immerse students in words.
2. Encourage students to be active in making connections between words and experiences.
3. Encourage students to personalize word learning.
4. Build on multiple sources of information.
5. Help students to control their learning.
6. Assist students in using words in meaningful ways.

Encourage students to personalize word learning. By visiting the fire station center several times over four to five weeks, the students were able to personalize their word learning and expand on their understandings of the concepts. For example, during the first week, one group of children spent half their playtime negotiating for a turn to use the axes. Suddenly one boy connected the axe to the popular online game *Minecraft*. He suggested that they use these props to play a *Minecraft* scenario where they were fighting off zombie attacks. The meaning of the axe was personalized through the children's experiences with virtual axes in the online environment. Over the course of a few weeks, after talking with firefighters and reading texts, the students created new fire-fighting play experiences. Although the function of the axe remained the same, the students acted out expanded meanings of this word in scenarios that showed how axes are used by different people (firefighters in addition to zombie fighters) for different purposes (free people who are trapped in addition to stopping a zombie's attack).

Build on multiple sources of information. By pairing this center's theme with visits from the local firefighters as well as fiction and nonfiction texts that she and the students read together, Cassie introduced the children to new vocabulary from several sources and related vocabulary about the roles of firefighters in relation to the tools and vehicles that they use.

Help students to control their learning. Cassie set up a chart beside the fire station center that listed (words and pictures) the different fire-fighting tools and the roles associated with each one. In the third and fourth rotations to the center, she asked students to look at this list and decide which tool and role they would take in their play. They were essentially considering the new vocabulary words and how they might interact with them prior to entering the center. The students could then develop narratives based on what they knew about the words in context and in relation to the roles their peers had chosen.

Assist students in using words in meaningful ways. Overall, the fire station center gave the students a way to contextualize the new vocabulary that they were introduced to at the beginning of the center and throughout the next few weeks. The play center offered a context for literacy and vocabulary development in the classroom, where the props could help children draw relations to the "real" objects they discussed with firefighters and read about in texts.

Supporting Children's Writing

Writing is a natural part of many contexts that teachers can set up for dramatic play in their classrooms. Table 1 provides a few suggestions for ways to integrate writing and vocabulary development into children's dramatic play.

Table 1. Writing Opportunities in Dramatic Play Centers	
Dramatic Play Center	Writing Opportunities
Repair shop	Create work orders. Create checklists for repairs. Take inventory of vehicle parts. Draw diagrams with labels.
Flower shop	Create cards with messages for flower deliveries and create flower orders. Create signs advertising flowers and other items for sale.
Grocery store	Create labels for boxes and cans of food. Prepare shopping lists. Make signs with prices of food items.

Table 2. Vocabulary Development in Dramatic Play Centers		
Type of Vocabulary	Flower Shop Vocabulary	Repair Shop Vocabulary
Characters	Florist, assistant, customer	Carpenter, joiner, apprentice
Actions	Arrange, deliver, plant, feed, water, cut, design, wrap	Fix, break, damage, twist, measure, weigh, snip, glue, fasten, oil, clean
Items	Bouquet, flower, rose, leaves, centerpiece, vase, wreath, pot, soil, roots, stem, petals	Bolt, screwdrivers, measuring tape, pliers, ruler, safety glasses, tool belt, wire cutter, sander, workbench
Description	Dozen, beautiful, aroma, scented, rancid, crimson, pink, gold, damp, wet	Broken, damaged, shiny, rough, dull, scratched, polished, smooth, oily, patched

If there is not sufficient space for a permanent dramatic play center in the classroom, teachers might create portable centers by filling a blanket, tablecloth, or box with materials for dramatic play that can be brought out when needed.

Teachers might introduce writing possibilities by modeling during their shared or interactive writing lessons (McCarrier, Pinnell, & Fountas, 1999), and show how print texts might enhance the roles that children take at a dramatic play center. They might also demonstrate the types of thinking that are involved in creating the various texts. With the inclusion of writing materials at the dramatic play centers, children would be free to create texts before they initiate their dramatic play, or as needed throughout their play. Our observations in Cassie's classroom show that children might post their texts in places they believe are appropriate in the center, incorporate the texts into their dramatic play, or simply engage in the writing and then leave the texts to the side for use another day.

Supporting Vocabulary Learning

Dramatic play also provides a meaningful context for children's vocabulary development. Children can repeatedly use the new words they learn in their interactions with peers. As they incorporate the words into their play, they see how others respond to their use of the terminology to get a sense of what they can do with the words in various social contexts. For example, in a flower shop or repair shop dramatic play setting, the vocabulary shown in Table 2 could be introduced and experienced by children as they create narratives about what happens in these settings.

This new vocabulary can be introduced to the children as the teacher reads aloud to them. Stories can be chosen that take place in the focus settings or include the setting as one aspect. Informational texts can also introduce the students to new words in context. As teachers read, they can provide the children with new word meanings in relation to the context of the text and other words. These texts can be placed in the classroom reading area for children to read during the day.

Teachers also might want to consider ways to connect a writing center to the dramatic play center. For example, some of the writing examples listed in Table 1 could form a separate writing center where the children can focus on exploring the new vocabulary and context through writing. Center rotations could be organized so that the children visit the literacy/writing center either immediately before or after their dramatic play center rotation. If the writing center is visited before dramatic play, the writing might serve as a way for children to plan their play, and the vocabulary practiced in writing may find its way verbally into the play.

Alternatively, the students may bring their writing with them to the dramatic play center as part of the context of their play. For example, the writing center may be a place where children can create maps of outer space, which they may decide to take to the space dramatic play center. If the children visit the writing center after the dramatic play center, then the writing becomes more of a reflection on their play scenarios or a way to extend the ideas they developed during play. Keeping with the space center example, children may develop a "Captain's logbook" where they write of their explorations at the space dramatic play center. In this logbook, students might write about their "discoveries" during the play scenarios or they may imagine new events that extend the space travel ideas from their dramatic play.

Summary

Societal, parental, and administrative pressures to devote sizeable amounts of time in kindergarten to supporting children's literacy do not have to lead to the elimination of play in daily classroom activity. Indeed, by removing dramatic play from the kindergarten classroom, teachers are doing away with a valuable context for reinforcing the conceptual and print understandings that children construct in formal instruction. Dramatic play offers a motivating and authentic context for children to write, as they apply their understandings about print to create texts that mean something to them. Dramatic play centers also support children's vocabulary development, providing opportunities for children to practice and construct deeper understandings of words by using them in context as they interact with peers.

* * * * *

*A former elementary teacher in Alberta, Canada, **Shelley Stagg Peterson** is a literacy professor in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Ontario, Canada. Her current research involves action research with northern Canadian primary teachers, examining ways to support young children's oral language and writing in various play contexts.*

*A former K–6 teacher in Ontario, Canada, **Christine Portier** is a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. She works with Shelley on the Northern Oral Language and Writing Through Play project.*

References

Anning, A. (2003). Pathways to the graphicacy club: The crossroad of home and pre-school. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, *3*(1), 5–35.

Biemiller, A., & Boote, C. (2006). An effective method for building meaning vocabulary in primary grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *89*(1), 44–62.

Blachowicz, C., & Fisher, P. (1996). *Teaching vocabulary in all classrooms*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Chowdhury, N.N., & Rivalland, C. (2012). Value of play as an early learning instrument in Bangladesh context: A socio-cultural study. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 37*(4), 115–122.

Clay, M.M. (1975). *What did I write? Beginning writing behaviour*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Dickinson, D., Golinkoff, R.M., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2010). Speaking out for language: Why language is central for reading development. *Educational Researcher*, *39*(4), 305–310.

Dombkowski, K. (2001). Will the real kindergarten please stand up? Defining and redefining the twentieth-century US kindergarten. *History of Education, 30*(6), 527–545.

Ferreiro, E., & Teberosky, A. (1982). *Literacy before schooling*. Exeter, NH: Heinemann.

McCarrier, A., Pinnell, G., & Fountas, I. (1999). *Interactive writing: How language and literacy come together*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Neuman, S.B., & Dwyer, J. (2009). Missing in action: Vocabulary instruction in pre-k. *The Reading Teacher*, *62*, 384–392.

Pahl, K. (1999). *Transformations: Meaning making in nursery education*. Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books.

Ray, K.W., & Glover, M. (2008). *Already ready: Nurturing writers in preschool and kindergarten*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Rowe, D.W. (2009). Early written communication. In R. Beard, D. Myhill, J. Riley, & M. Nystrand (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of writing development* (pp. 213–231). London: Sage.

Yang, H., & Noel, A.M. (2006). The developmental characteristics of four and five-year-old pre-schoolers' drawing: An analysis of scribbles, placement patterns, emergent writing, and name writing in archived spontaneous drawing samples. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, *6*(2), 145–162.

Conversations on Policy, Methods, and Accountability:
An Interview With Ellin Oliver Keene

Roland Schendel and James Erekson

Inspiring deeper thought and engagement in students, preserving and growing best practices despite seemingly rigid policies, trusting one's instincts and beliefs, finding the artistry in teaching—all this and more is revealed in this insightful interview by a true pioneer in reading education.

Ellin Oliver Keene is an educator who works constantly to make sense of the educational landscape and stay focused on supporting teachers to meet the individual needs of their students. She proved this through an inspirational and grounding speech at the 2016 annual CCIRA conference. She has also supported teachers and their students through published works, including *Mosaic of Thought* (2007) and *To Understand* (2008).

Ellin shared her time for an interview shortly after the conference to help us think about current educational demands and how to stay focused on meaningful philosophies and practices for teaching and learning.

As part of the CCIRA Legislative Committee ("LC" in the interview that follows), we hope to back Ellin's efforts and support you during and after you read this interview. As you read, feel free to take a moment to reflect on your own experiences and beliefs or to capture important questions, ideas, or solutions that come to mind. We have included space for you to hold your thinking by note-taking. After reading, it is our hope that you will continue critical conversations with others (i.e., team meetings, book clubs, curriculum discussions, parent meetings, etc.) in an effort to capitalize on this learning experience.

* * * * *

LC: What makes *To Understand* your favorite piece of work?

Ellin: *To Understand* is the most challenging book I have written. It involves the most complex thinking. It was like a 20,000-piece puzzle that had to be put together very meticulously, and that challenge was difficult. It is very content rich in that it delves into a lot of different pieces we hadn't explored that focus on comprehension strategies. This was a challenging and therefore extremely gratifying piece of work for me because it was intended to help teachers peer insightfully at the complexities of reading comprehension.

LC: In Daniel Pennac's work, he talks about the value of our profession as teachers when we didn't focus so much on our methods. What are your reactions to this message?

Ellin: The speech I gave at the CCIRA conference addressed this message. Perhaps what he is asking us to think about is the lack of spontaneity in responding to children as learners. The practices driven by policies and program scripts for instruction are causing us to be too precise and rigid in our responses to children. We are thinking about articulating exact responses to kids according to some program or pacing guide, and maybe we could respond more authentically or warmly to kids. I love thinking about teaching methods, but I want them to always be eclipsed by authentic, genuine, and warm responses that inspire children's inquiries and ideas.

LC: We are particularly moved by your use of the words *spontaneity* and *authenticity*. Have we forgotten that we are teaching people?

Ellin: Yes, exactly. That is what that reads to me. It is in the context of what [Pennac 2006] values and what he writes. I think we are forgetting in some cases that the focus on assessments and particular instruction does not feel spontaneous.

Hold your thinking:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

LC: How might policy efforts in Colorado be deciphered and used to inspire teachers?

Our knee-jerk reactions to new policies are usually one thing that will keep us from doing our best work with children.

❧

Ellin: I love this question. The way you phrased it gave me a lot to think about. I wonder about how many schools we have where faculty are engaged in a conversation about what policies are and how we can build on our knowledge and beliefs about best practices in teaching given those policies. I think it is fascinating to think about faculty conversations about policy realities and how to approach these realities with our own ideas about best practices based on what we know from research, while keeping our belief systems and philosophies firmly intact. Our knee-jerk reactions to new policies are usually one thing that will keep us from doing our best work with children. Often, the policies are not as well thought out as they would be if teachers were an integral part of their creation. But I think we can make the best of this dilemma by really asking how can we address the READ [Reading to Ensure Academic Development] Act, for example. Revisions to that act are necessary for preserving, enhancing, even growing what we think of best practices in our schools.

LC: Ellin, you have inspired a line of thinking on our part with respect to Karen Durica's (2008) work *How We Do School* and the use of those poems to inspire professional development conversations. What might be the value in gathering teachers together, presenting them the READ Act in its simplest form, and asking them to reflect about what they see and what can be done about it?

Ellin: Sure it's up to our interpretation. You know there are some non-negotiables in any statute. I think we have a tremendous amount of latitude and we ought to take it. Instead of feeling passive, overwhelmed, or intimidated by policy, let's get it out there, define it, and make sure that we are clear on what it is so we can really talk about how to preserve and grow best practices in light of a policy.

LC: Will you elaborate a little on what shift is necessary to allow teachers to really envision and embrace multiple pathways for teaching children?

Ellin: I think the heart of it lies in those faculty-level discussions, where the climate of the conversation is essentially about what is in the best interest of the children. How do we adopt a positive outlook toward policies and varieties in practices? It is about understanding our experiences with children and what the research says about best practices in literacy. It is about forging a very individual path based on both of those sources of information to

reflect on our decisions with children. Where those two overlap is really where people can find the artistry in teaching. That is what I think we are about in education. We are trying to find the artistry in teaching. As I mentioned in the keynote at the CCIRA conference in February, it is about finding our own fingerprint, our own unique way of approaching teaching. It is also aligned with what the research says and what we know about the particular group of kids in front of us at any given time.

Hold your thinking:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

LC: What have you seen in those phenomenal schools where teachers are supported positively and encouraged professionally to follow that individual pathway to their teaching identity?

Ellin: Oh, my goodness, I have been so lucky to see wonderful schools all over the country! I mean really extraordinary schools. I am thinking about a school that I visited very recently in downtown Los Angeles where they were serving a 100-percent-free and reduced-lunch-eligible population and 100-percent bilingual or students learning a new language. The practices and conversations in that school are so smart that the leadership in that particular school is setting up regular, intellectually rigorous conversations about how much kids are able to do. I think the thing that really makes it remarkable is that there is just a no-limits thinking about the children in that school. They focus on the advantages of being a second-language learner. This view is reflected from the leadership on down. There are so many meaningful conversations occurring, so many schools that I can describe. The commonality between the really terrific places that I get to observe these days is a set of expectations that transcends socioeconomic and language realities. That is what I am excited to see! They are places where teachers simply know their children. They know them extremely well and are responding to them in very different ways. Happily, there are many examples of that around the states and they don't all look the same. There are many ways of having high expectations, lots of ways of having an access orientation to children rather than a deficit orientation.

I think the deficit model is pervasive in policies and I'm sorry to say that the READ Act is one of those policies. It is based on the identification of language and reading difficulty for diagnosis and remediation rather than describing a kid's assets. We need to look at kids based on what is going well and build on those strengths. If a child speaks two languages, that is an asset, not a liability.

LC: If you could do anything to make a difference for teachers, what would it be?

Ellin: It would be to give them the gift of conversation, of high-level conversation among themselves. The real experts are the people who know their children and need the time and structure to talk about those kids in an open-ended way. If I could give teachers any gift, it would be to teach them that they truly are the people that have the expertise. I'm not saying that they don't need ongoing learning in new areas and an understanding of what the research says about what other people are doing in respect to the best practices, but ultimately they need each other.

LC: That speaks back to your focus on the artistry of teaching and the personal aspects of teaching. It reiterates how our pathways as classroom teachers are different than yours because we are responding to different learners and we are different learners as well.

Ellin: Exactly!

Hold your thinking:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

LC: How might a teacher respond to a student to inspire deeper thought and engagement?

Ellin: This is the area that I love, am deeply invested in, and am exploring constantly. I think there is a huge benefit to taking a deep breath and slowing our interactions down—not calming them down, but slowing them down. It buys us the time to say, when a student responds to a learning experience, "What else are you thinking?" or, "What else would you like to tell me?" I have this little thing that my mother taught me, "I know you don't know, but if you did know, honey, what would it be?" I use that with kids all the time. The bottom line is the interaction between the teacher and the child or group of children. It is a matter of pausing, of slowing down for children to develop thought. You cannot think well quickly. If I asked

> *I think there is a huge benefit to taking a deep breath and slowing our interactions down.*
>
> ❧

you to say something really smart, really fast, you would say, "Sorry, I need a little time to think about that."

LC: From our perspective, that might be the really smart thing to say: "Sorry, I need some time to think." That is proof that the student is thinking.

Ellin: Exactly. We need to empower kids to say precisely that. The urgency that we teachers feel because of policies and assessments are causing us to race through curriculum and to hurry through conversations and not give the gift of time and the gift of silence that let thoughts develop in our classrooms. We adults are very uncomfortable with silence. Kids are not. Kids are fine with silence. I think we need to get comfortable with the time that it takes to develop a thought. If you are talking about engagement and saying to children something as simple as "What else?", you are going to get to greater depths of thought. This requires us to adopt a different state of thinking, a different view of pace. This transformation of thought addresses the tension that runs through our instruction because we are so worried about what we are missing, what we are not getting to, and where the kids need to be next.

My favorite moment as a teacher is watching the surprise on a child's face when he or she discovers that their thinking is much more sophisticated than they thought it was.

LC: We hear a conversation theme running through this. The thinking process evolves and is nurtured throughout conversations between teachers with respect to their unique teaching and learning experiences, and an abundance of conversations between students in the classroom allow them to nurture, share, and reveal their understanding.

Ellin: Yes, it is very important. We need to be very present for children and focused on the immediate responses that they have. We need to be asking them open questions to get them to probe their thinking more deeply. For me, my favorite moment as a teacher is watching the surprise on a child's face when he or she discovers that their thinking is much more sophisticated than they thought it was.

Hold your thinking:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

LC: What role does grouping play in the classroom to allow a teacher to make these kinds of conversations happen and to promote meaningful learning experiences?

Ellin: I have very strong feelings about this that may run against the tide in some educational circles. I am a very strong proponent of heterogeneous grouping, and by that I don't mean large group or whole class instruction all the time. I mean getting kids together for particular learning objectives based on observed need rather than level. I think our leveling has really had a pernicious effect on children. I can understand the need to understand, generally speaking, where a child's instructional and frustration levels are in reading, but grouping children based on a letter level does not mean the children in that group have the same needs. So, for me, grouping is a very dynamic process. The groups change all the time and are populated by children with the same interest, level of curiosity, and specific learning need. The children in any given group are unusual suspects, if you will. I believe in the power of heterogeneous, needs-based, dynamic groups, and I am working with teachers on this all the time to create those groups and respond to them in meaningful ways. I call these groups invitational groups in which children are invited to come to a group to discuss something, a particular common interest—for example, inviting a group of kids that are not using ending punctuation. I have them come to an invitational group to explore ending punctuation and all that they might want to know about it as a writer as opposed to grouping driven by the mindset "you don't know how to do this," or "let's slug through level J in order to get to level K." It is a very different conception of grouping.

LC: Grouping is grounded on a specific learning need whereas leveling a child is usually so broad.

Ellin: [Leveling] is a coarse way to think about children's needs as readers and we need a much more refined way to understand their needs. Refining is made possible through conferencing with individual students. The teacher is going to know the child well enough as a reader and a writer and is going to understand his or her particular needs. So a lot depends on the time we carve out to be with a student individually.

LC: These conferences allow a teacher to naturally, flexibly group students based on needs students tell us, needs they share with others. With respect to this thinking, what moments would you encourage teachers to focus on?

Ellin: Focus on those moments of surprise—not where children surprise us, but where children surprise each other and themselves. Focus on those moments of insight where the other children in a group are sitting around someone and showing understanding. Moments of insight that come from each other and not from the teacher are important signs of thinking, of understanding. These are precious moments, and I think the teacher's responsibility, in the moment, is to define it and to describe it to increase the likelihood that it will happen again. To be clear, it is not just saying, "What a great idea." It is defining and describing why it was great and exactly what the child did to get to a particular insight. For example, I might say, "Oh honey, you showed great empathy for that character and that allowed you to understand him on a deeper level." Our job is to name and describe what children do naturally. But students need to gain insights themselves, and that means that we have got to give them lots of time for oral language interaction.

Hold your thinking:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

LC: How do teachers prove and reveal their accountability?

Ellin: I think this is very difficult. I think there is a lot of tension about this right now. The best way to show our accountability is to show children's accountability through authentic work that they do in the classroom. It is extremely difficult to describe the work of the mind, which is what reading, writing, speaking, and listening are. It is extremely difficult to describe the work of the mind in quantitative terms. We as a nation need to get our heads around the fact that we are not going to be able to describe the best our children can do through purely, or even mostly, quantitative description. We need children's work to speak for itself and then we have a more robust description of the children's strengths and needs. It is about the

Moments of insight that come from each other and not from the teacher are important signs of thinking, of understanding.

❧

daily work that children choose to do to reveal their thinking that really matters. As professionals, we need to become more articulate about explaining what pieces of work tell us about a child. We need to stand up and let policy makers, parents, principals, and others know that we can see many layers of brilliance, and need as well, in children's writing, oral language use, and responses to text. That is really the most descriptive and helpful way that we can go about it. Unfortunately, I think we are far from being able to do this.

Hold your thinking:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

LC: Ellin, what else would you would like to share with Colorado teachers?

Ellin: I think Colorado educators are certainly among the most thoughtful, reflective, and intelligent people with whom I have an opportunity to work with every year. A message to teachers is to trust your instincts and your beliefs as well as the knowledge that you accumulate over the years. Trust what you know is best for kids and make it an intellectual challenge to figure out how to preserve those practices in a time when things seem to be working against you. I'm not sure things are working against us as much as we may think.

LC: We feel the same way. Ellin, do you have any advice for a professional group like CCIRA for overcoming these challenges in support of teachers?

Ellin: CCIRA, which is widely regarded as one of the best, if not the best, in the country, can continue to support teachers through online forums and actual conversations about policy. Read and discuss policies, regulation, and district mandates. Face them head on and really ask yourselves the question, "How can we work with these policies by *Holding on to Good Ideas in a Time of Bad Ones?"* as Thomas Newkirk (2009) called it with the title of this book. I think CCIRA can provide the venue for those conversations, and that is enormously helpful.

Roland Schendel is currently an assistant professor of literacy at Metropolitan State University of Denver. Roland's research and teaching efforts focus on understanding and nurturing partnerships with local area schools to create meaningful learning experiences for teacher candidates and professional development for elementary teachers.

James Erekson is associate professor of reading at University of Northern Colorado. Jim's current work focuses on helping teachers become advocates for their literacy work, creating structures for communicating about meaningful classroom-based assessments with administrators, parents, and the public. He has been working with Colorado teachers since 1999.

References

Durica, K.M. (2008). *How we do school*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Keene, E.O. (2008). *To understand*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Keene, E.O. & Zimmerman, S. (2007). *Mosaic of thought: The power of comprehension instruction* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Newkirk, T. (2009). *Holding on to good ideas in a time of bad ones*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Pennac, D. (2006). *The rights of the reader*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

Letter to the Would-Be Teacher

Trish Wojurfin

Are you new at teaching? A student teacher maybe? Or are you thinking about becoming a teacher? Then the tips in this must-read article are for you, from a teacher who loves being one.

Alright, so I don't really think that I am THAT hard to get along with. I am pretty easy to figure out. I say what I mean; I mean what I say. Sometimes, I can be very direct (which can be off-putting for some folks). That being said, I have a message for student teachers, new teachers, and those people out there who think they want to become teachers.

I love teaching. But, teaching isn't a job. It is my life. Sure, I have other things in my life. Don't even get me started. But without teaching, those other things would lose their flavor, a bit. :-) So these are my tenets, my instructions, my je ne sais quoi, so to speak (student teacher beware—this is how to succeed in my classroom!).

Teaching Is a Craft and YOU Are Not a Craftsman

Yet, YOU are an apprentice—and better yet, you are MY apprentice. Therefore, don't try to impress me. Don't try to know "everything" (because you don't—but don't worry, neither do I). Don't try to knock my socks off with amazing lessons that you read from Pinterest or "Teachers Pay Teachers." Just don't. Instead, watch and learn. Ask questions. Wonder. Explore. Fail. Try again. Make a mess. Try Again. Fail Again. Then…try again. You are an apprentice. Sometimes there are moments that aren't fun. For those times, it is fun to conjugate new cuss words (be sure to do that part in your head).

Remember that teaching isn't something you DO, it is something you ARE. Because of that, you will be doing A LOT of "doing" until it becomes something you "are."

Look at your lesson from the view of the student, NOT from the view of other adults you are trying to impress.

This process takes time, effort, sweat, tears, and lots and lots of chocolate, or wine (whichever you prefer). In the meantime, learn how the brain works, learn how students acquire skills (hint: it doesn't come from flashy lesson plans with cute fonts and neat-looking clip art), learn by becoming the student yourself. Do everything you are asking your students to do. And then do it again while pretending you are a reluctant, pain-in-the-neck, ten-year-old. And then do it again and pretend you haven't eaten breakfast and there may or may not be anyone at home to help you. Because THAT is what it looks like sometimes. Look at your lesson from the view of the student, NOT from the view of other adults you are trying to impress. (Again, don't try to impress us; it WON'T work)

Self-Reflection Is a Must

You must be able to look at your own teaching in a completely objective way. Get rid of the ideas of positives and negatives, and seek and speak the truth. You didn't do a good job with your lesson; you did A job. You must provide evidence for your reflections. You must use this evidence and reflections to make goals. These goals will drive your learning. Take a look at your teaching and describe what went well and what…did not. What worked and what NEEDS work. And for the love of all things holy, stop using the word *good*. You should shoot for something better than "good." Be excellent. Be superb. Be remarkable. Don't be good. Make a difference in the lives that you are leading in your classroom. Those words are just labels and

anyone can say that about themselves; show HOW you are being excellent. This comes from hours of painstaking self-reflection. Look at how your lesson affected the room of learners. How effective was your delivery? Did anyone learn something from you today? How did you measure what they learned?

Real learning doesn't come from finding the right answers but from finding the right questions. Ask yourself questions about your teaching. Struggle in the answering, for he who works the most, learns the most.

You Need to Be a Student of Instruction, Classroom Management, AND Content

You cannot be a teacher just because you know a lot about a lot. Content knowledge is simply not enough to carry you through. Yet, it is a key aspect, so you had better have it. Knowledge of instructional practices is also a must. Different classes call for different approaches, so you had better have more than one instructional approach in your wheelhouse. There is new research written every day. If you are not reading, then you are not learning (and you should always be learning). Find some aspect that you want to learn more about and STUDY it. Have initiative, have drive, find people to learn from. Be curious, have an urgency for more knowledge. And here is a little secret to success: True classroom management begins and ends with instructional pedagogy. The better the classroom instruction, the less effort needs to be put into classroom management. That is because an engaged kid is less apt to cause problems. (Notice here I use the word *engage. Engagement* is not the same as *excitement*. So, please stop confusing the two. Building excitement by throwing the kids into in an exciting activity of fun ways to do worksheets or doing crafts from the Internet is not the same as kids putting their heads together to dig deep into a unit of inquiry. Shoot for the latter, please). (Also, stop doing crafts as the sole entry to learning; kids CAN learn things without gluing M&M's to papers).

Kids Are Awesome, and Terrible

And amazing. And horrible. It is okay to like them, but it is better to love them. You must learn to build a relationship with all of them. The best way to do this is during conferences—hint, hint (workshop model). Also, a rela-

Make a difference in the lives that you are leading in your classroom.

❧

tionship is a two-way street. You need to follow through with what you say to kids. Give them feedback that will be useful and true. Telling a student "good job" may make YOU feel better, but it doesn't tell the student anything specific about their skill set. It doesn't tell them how to grow; it doesn't tell them what they should shoot for next time. It just tells them that you are happy with what they did. Don't you think it is more important about how THEY feel about their work? You have to own up to them as a person.

You cannot just be friends with kids. You should get your own friends. You shouldn't be the funniest person in the room (but it is OK to be funny). But it isn't about you. It is about them. They should be stronger after you leave them. They should be more independent, more responsible, more everything. This is hard to do. You shouldn't be the center of the room. They should be. You already passed elementary school—now it is their turn. So, make it about them. Talk to them, learn from them, listen to them, watch what they DO…and DON'T do. Look back at your lessons and your approach. Build something that is worth lasting.

Teaching Is an Impossible Job

You are never done. Your best year should be your last year. You will never be "good" at this job and you shouldn't strive for that (see above). There are thousands of aspects that you need to learn to even attempt to be a teacher. But if you are stalwart, if you are worthy, you can achieve many things as a teacher. But forget all of that because teaching needs to be student centered. It needs to be about growing students through intrinsic motivation, brain-based education, authentic learning, and so much more. You may feel like this job is overwhelming. Good, because it is. And only those hungry enough for it are going to make the profession a better place.

Alright, so maybe I AM hard to get along with. Maybe.

Trish Wojurfin has been teaching fifth graders for 12 years at University Schools in Greeley, Colorado. While some people may say she doesn't have a life, she would like to remind people that reading books, being a working parent, and pondering the inner workings of a fifth grader's mind IS a life. Just not an exciting one.

Read, Sketch, Review, and Rate:
Fifth-Grade Book Reviews

Lara Saunders

Students at Mary Blair Elementary in Loveland, Colorado, wrote book reviews this year as part of their work with persuasive writing. To begin the exercise, students read multiple book reviews as mentor texts to ascertain how to write a review. From this process, they determined that each review needed to include an engaging introduction, a short synopsis, and, of course, an opinion. Interestingly, students also noticed that many reviews included the mention of an author's message or theme; given that determining the theme of a story is part of the fifth-grade standards, they were encouraged to include this in their own reviews.

Later in the year, students turned their written book reviews into oral book "ads" and shared them with the class while including all of the same components. Not only did this expose students to other books, but it also gave them the ability to practice speaking and listening skills as well. In addition, the book ads inspired students to share their favorite books and, in turn, students read more books, which ultimately is my goal in the classroom. The following reviews are a few of our early efforts.

El Deafo
Written by Cece Bell
Reviewed by Bailey Arellano

El Deafo is an amazing book that I loved so much that I am saving my money for it. Cece is just a regular little girl when one day she gets really sick. After she feels better, she finds out she can't hear. She has to get hearing aids and go to a special school full of kids like her. Then suddenly her family is moving. Cece will have to go to a new school and make new friends. She starts out making new friends but then realizes they aren't real friends. Find out how Cece's life is full of ups and downs and how her hearing aids become a super power.

I think the theme of this book is perseverance. I think this because Cece has to persevere to make it through all the ups and downs in life. This is a marvelous book! I truly loved all the funny things in it. ENJOY!!!!

Bailey gave this book 5 out of 5 Superman signs.

Honey
Written by Sarah Weeks
Reviewed by Brooklyn Ewert

It has just been Melody and her father for as long as she can remember. Lately, her Dad has been totally out of it, and when she hears him calling someone Honey, she knows something's up. She starts to tune in to the world around her, and while she tries to find out what is going on, she gets it all wrong. Then Melody finds herself missing her Mother she never knew. What is Melody to do?

The message of this story is, it is not good to keep a secret from someone because they might get the wrong idea. This book was so good that I could not put it down until I read the very last page.

? ? ? ?

Brooklyn gave this book 4 out of 5 question marks.

Wonder
Written by R.J. Palacio
Reviewed by Caleb Sutter

Wonder is about a kid named Auggie who has a facial deformity. I think that this book was an amazing book that everybody should have a chance to read; in some parts of the book it almost got me crying.

In the beginning of the book, Auggie was not going to school because his parents were protecting him from being made fun of because of his face. The problem is that Auggie is a normal and ordinary kid but other people don't think that. This year is his first year of public middle school (5th grade). On his first day of school he was excited and nervous. His mom, dad, and his sister all kissed him goodbye as he jumped out of the car for his first day of school.

Once he got in school, he could feel people staring at him or getting a second look. He didn't know what to do, so he just went straight to homeroom. Then this guy named Jack sat next to him who Auggie had already sort of met from a meeting before school started. Then the principal, Mr. Tushman, plus three other kids, Jack, Julian, and Charlotte, organized a meeting. All of them are in Auggie's homeroom. Then the first day of lunch came, and he found an empty table and sat there. Later a girl came over who Auggie has never seen before in any of his classes. Auggie was surprised because he thought nobody would sit next to him. Later during the year it was Halloween and Auggie came in the room with his face covered by a mask. He heard his best friend Jack saying mean stuff about Auggie's face.

I think that this book taught me to be kind to everybody, even if they are different from me, because everyone is different.
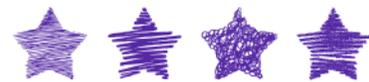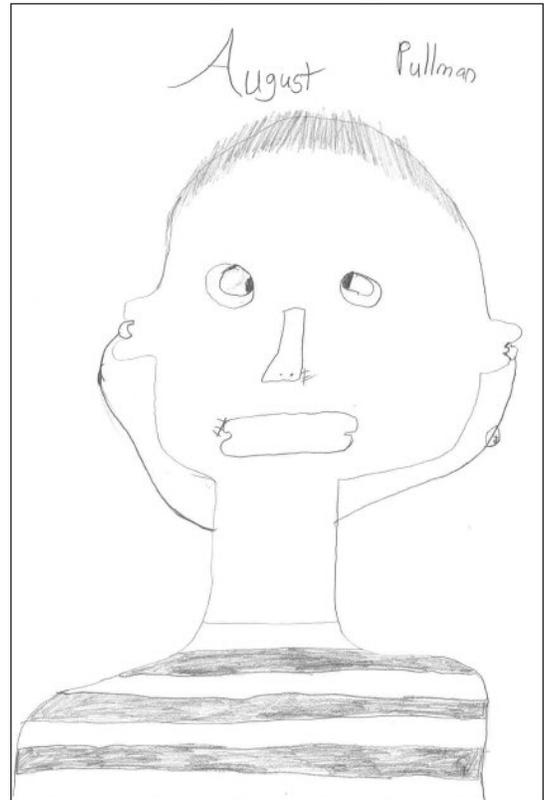
Caleb gave this book 4 out of 5 stars.

The Throne of Fire
Written by Rick Riordan
Reviewed by Gavin H.

The Throne of Fire is a beckoning, adventurous book that is totally amazing. This book is about two siblings that have learned they are magicians. They have also found out that a giant snake, Apophis, is trying to break free and swallow the sun. He wants the earth to become total darkness and chaos. Sadie and Carter discover one god that can defeat Apophis: Ra the Sun God. Apophis has taken over people like Menshikov to help him escape his prison. Sadie reawakens Ra but he acts like a child. He is old and strange, talking about zebras. His real soul is trapped inside him, reducing his power. Then they go to Apophis' prison and confront Menshikov. All of a sudden, the chief lector of the first Nome, a known enemy of Carter and Sadie, appears and does something very hard but great. In the end, does he turn out to be a friend or enemy? Read to find out.

I think Carter and Sadie learn that they should not judge a person on how they are now and always bear in mind that they might change.

Gavin gave this book 4 out of 5 fireballs.
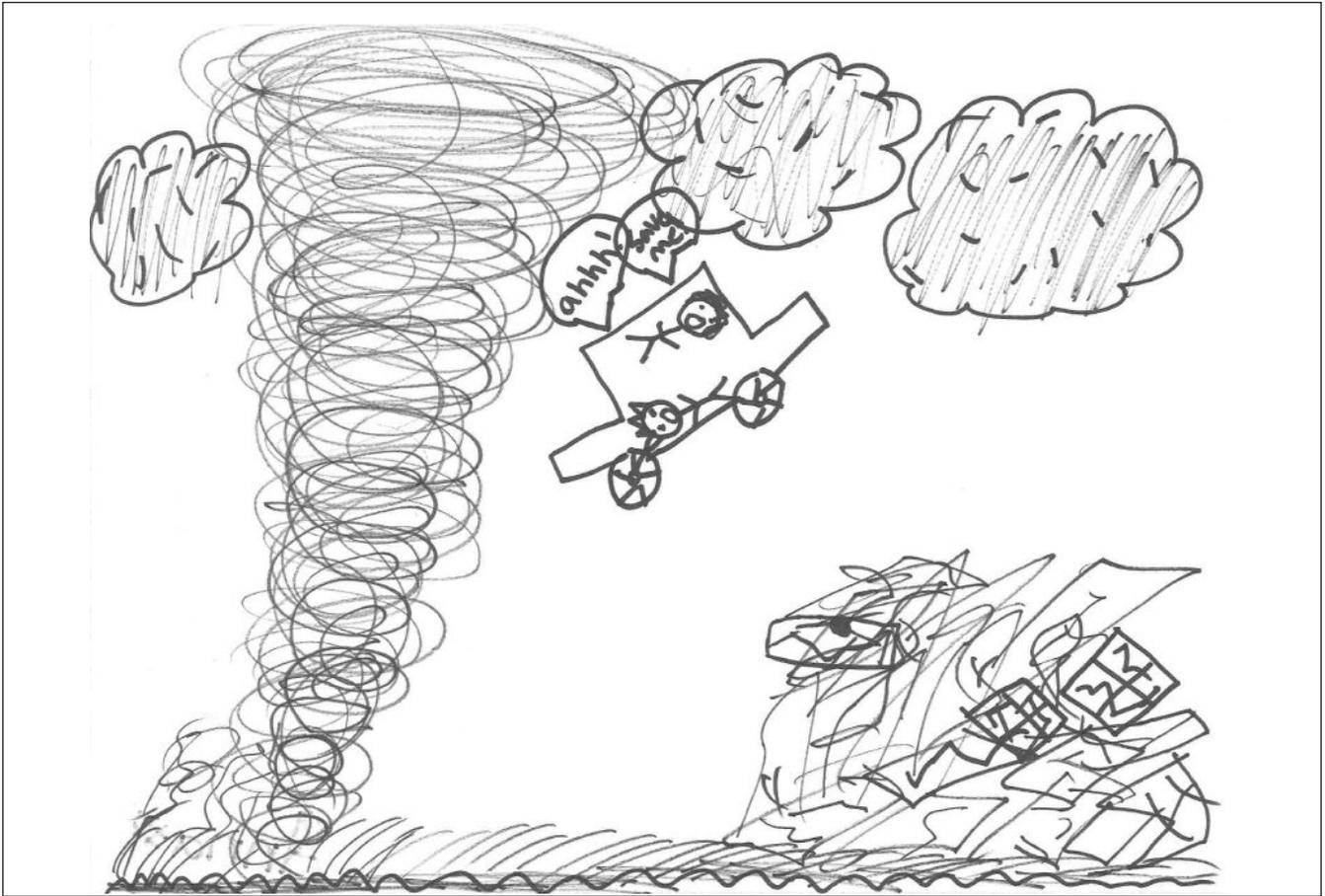
I Survived the Joplin Tornado, 2011
Written by Lauren Tarshis
Reviewed by Anna Kash

I Survived the Joplin Tornado, 2011, is a breathtaking and scary book that I really enjoyed reading. Dex is 11 years old and [gets to chase a tornado] with a storm chaser named Dr. Gage. Dex is driving with Dr. Gage when a terrifying tornado hits Joplin! They both get shaken up in the car that they were driving, and when it finally moves on, Dex sees Dr. Gage on the ground and thinks he might be dead. Will Dex get help in time before Dr. Gage is gone? Find out in *I Survived the Joplin Tornado, 2011.*

I think the message from this book is that even when times are tough or you lose everything, you can find hope in yourself and other people. What I enjoyed about this book is that it definitely shows you what it would be like if the most terrifying tornado hit you, with all of the amazing details included.

Anna gave this book 3 out of 5 tornados.

Lara Saunders is a fifth grade teacher at Mary Blair Elementary in Loveland, Colorado. Lara graduated from the University of Northern Colorado and has been teaching for 18 years.

The *Colorado Reading Journal* editors extend the invitation to other Colorado classrooms to submit their own Read, Sketch, Review, and Rate commentaries. Please feel free to enhance/extend the response and/or focus on other themes that highlight the latest and greatest in children's and young adult literature.

This Contains All That

Kelly McKenna

Explore the fascinating world of infographics with these free online tools.

Information graphics, also known as infographics, are visual representations of information. Infographics allow information to be quickly and clearly presented in a visually appealing manner. These graphical representations of information have long been a method for presentation, but historically infographics were difficult and time-consuming to create. Advances in technology have generated a variety of free and easy-to-use tools, allowing everyone the opportunity to effortlessly create infographic masterpieces.

Infographics are a unique and creative way to engage students in visual literacy. Students have the opportunity to communicate knowledge through the creation of a digitally created graphic representation. And, with the integration of technology in teaching and learning, students are no longer limited by their artistic ability, graph paper and other available supplies, or a static image.

The following 10 infographic tools are free or offer free versions and can easily be used by students in the classroom to assist in visually communicating their messages successfully.

1. Easel.ly (www.easel.ly)

Easel.ly has a variety of customizable templates for creating infographics that are appropriate for all ages. It employs a simple drag and drop method. Documents and pictures can be uploaded, and colors and text can be tailored to construct a unique end product. A brief and basic video to get started is available on the website. Once you create an account (e-mail address and password), you'll be e-mailed additional video tutorials and how-to articles.

This option has some great templates for younger audiences.

2. Piktochart (piktochart.com)

This tool offers templates in four formats: infographic, presentation, poster, and report. The templates are set up in a grid for simple modification. Piktochart allows you to search through its icons and pictures or the option of uploading your own images for personalization within the graphic. The tool also makes it easy to create your own charts and graphs for inclusion. The finalized infographic can be saved as a JPEG, PNG, or PDF, or shared on social media.

One unique feature is the ability to import data directly from SurveyMonkey.

3. Infogr.am (infogr.am)

The free version of Infogr.am allows you to create 10 infographics. The tool uses dummy spreadsheets for incorporating charts, graphs, and maps. These spreadsheets are edited by adding your own data. Chart properties such as size and color can be modified. Finished products can be published on a website with the provided embed code.

Infogr.am allows you to upload videos into your infographic.

4. Venngage (venngage.com)

This tool offers templates for infographics, reports, posters, promotions, and social media. The free version limits the accessible templates and only allows you to create five free infographics, but there are a

multitude of templates. The simple drag-and-drop creation includes a plethora of widgets that can be incorporated in the image. The ability to upload personal images is also an option.

Interactive polls are an added feature in this tool.

5. Visme (www.visme.co)

The biggest drawback to Visme is its limit of three projects with the free version. However, although templates are limited, there is an abundance of distinct pictures and infographic backgrounds for use. This tool specializes in infographics, presentations, and banners (a unique format). It uses a simple drag-and-drop system and has an introductory video.

The biggest draw to using Visme is the option to include audio within the infographic.

6. Canva (www.canva.com)

Canva starts you out with a beginner's challenge, a simple tutorial that can be engaging for all ages. The challenge allows students to be introduced to all the options available to them while suc-

Students are no longer limited by their artistic ability, graph paper and other available supplies, or a static image.

cessfully creating a basic, but imaginative infographic. Once completed, you're ready to get started or go to Design School. The options available for photo effects, speech bubbles, text, and pictures are impressive. The infographics can be as simple or complex as fits your objective, but charts within the image can't be edited on Canva.

The best features of Canva are the lesson plans and workshops available for teacher use in the classroom.

7. Timeline JS (timeline.knightlab.com)

With this tool the use of a spreadsheet assists in creating multiple slide timelines. All cells within the templates must be completed. A variety of media can be incorporated into the visuals. The tool is used in conjunction with Google Drive. Once completed, the timeline is published; then the embed code can be used to incorporate the images on a website for presentation.

Timeline JS works well for narratives that are presented in chronological order.

8. Creately (creately.com)

Creately allows for simple drag and drop of shapes and images or click and drag to incorporate lines. There are numerous preset color themes and templates that are customizable. Completed infographics can be exported as a PDF or shared via e-mail. The free version is slightly difficult to find and includes five infographic diagrams.

The most attractive element of Creately is the real-time collaboration.

9. Statsilk (www.statsilk.com)

The web version of StatTrends and the desktop version of StatTrends Plus are both free. These infographics include interactive maps and graphs. Excel or other spreadsheet software is used to insert or import the data. A data editor is available for customization of the information.

Charts and graphs in the infographic can be animated when using this tool.

10. Dipity (www.dipity.com)

Dipity specializes specifically in timelines. Video, audio, links, and social media can all be added to the visual and will be recorded with location and time stamps. This tool is likely more appropriate for older students and students with more experience. The interactive capabilities are a unique aspect.

Dipity timelines allow you to have followers.

* * * * *

Images are powerful and contain copious amounts of information in a single visual. Check out one of these 10 tools in your classroom and allow students to realize the abundance of information they can communicate through one infographic.

Kelly McKenna is an assistant professor in the School of Education at Colorado State University, teaching online, face-to-face, and hybrid courses. Kelly has a PhD in educational technology and formerly taught preservice teachers how to integrate technology into the classroom. Her research interests focus on creating optimal learning environments and facilitating successful student experiences through technology-enhanced teaching and learning and educational learning communities.

# Letter From the Conference Chair

Anne Cook

As I sit on my deck on an absolutely gorgeous Colorado day to think about what lies ahead as we plan another fabulous conference, I stop to ponder what makes each of us value our surroundings and what we put into our profession every day. We are so lucky to live in this beautiful state with all its resources and breathtaking scenery. The things we value about living here are just some of the ingredients to why we live here. Our motivation to work in a vocation that changes the world through exploring, synthesizing, and stimulating new ideas is the perfect recipe for success for our students and ourselves.

My vision for the upcoming 2017 conference, "Golden Ingredients for 50 Years of Literacy," is for all of us to gather together in February and share our wealth of knowledge and understanding about how so many elements go into teaching and learning effectively. It takes many "ingredients" for our students, and us, to be successful…not just information given, but shared experiences, exploring, listening, speaking, and the thoughtful development of the specifics offered. The speakers and authors who are coming will share their expertise and provide solid examples of valuable "recipes" that are practical, logical, and applied in their own teaching of students. Some of the "master chefs" who will attend include Doug Fisher, Nell Duke, Ruth Culham, Kelly Gallagher, Penny Kittle, Stephanie Harvey, Kate Messner, Janet Stevens, Lester Laminack, Tim Rasinski, Jan Richardson, Kristin Ziemke, Danny Brassell, and so many more. Our conference has an amazing reputation outside of Colorado too. So many speakers and authors did not hesitate to say "Yes!" when asked to join us in 2017.

Of course, we must also celebrate 50 years of the Colorado Council of the International Reading Association. Our organization has been providing support, grants, resources, a place to collaborate with other educators, and an amazing conference each year for 50 wonderful years. The membership of CCIRA is strong, and the educators that are involved cannot be compared. Involvement is key, and the strong support and collaboration with others has been why I personally have been involved for many years. I know that when I go to a meeting or mini-conference, or just talk with others over coffee in the Atrium at the Marriot during the February conference, I am among a mighty group of educators who are dedicated, loyal, and on a quest to do whatever is best for students. Come join that fabulous group of educators at the annual conference on literacy February 1–4 at the Denver Marriott Tech Center. It will be delicious!
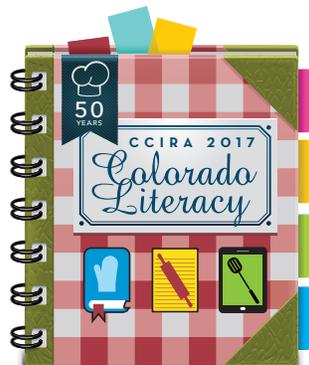
| Danny Brassell | Ruth Culham | Kelly Gallagher | Penny Kittle | Lester Laminack | Kate Messner |

Here's what we're Cooking Up for 2017!

2017 is a 50th Anniversary landmark for CCIRA — 50 years of promoting and celebrating literacy in the state of Colorado. We are marking the occasion with a tasty theme guaranteed to get mouths watering in anticipation!

Look for conference information materials in October; registration opens November 1. We will look forward to you celebrating with us the first week of February 2017!

Pam Allyn
Jeff Anderson
Danny Brassell
Danny M. Cohen
Ruth Culham
Nell Duke
Doug Fisher
Kelly Gallagher
Dr. Vickie Gibson
Nikki Grimes
Stephanie Harvey
Linda Hoyt
Penny Kittle
Lester Laminack
Barry Lane
Kirby Larson
Christopher Lehman
Kate Messner
Donalyn Miller
Julie Ramsey
Tim Rasinski
Jan Richardson
Laura Robb
Janet Stevens and
Susan Stevens Crummel
Diane Sweeney
Kristen Ziemke
...and many, many more!

50 YEARS

CCIRA 2017 Colorado Literacy
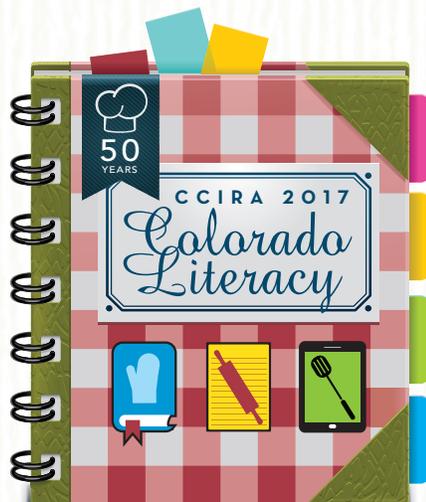
Golden Ingredients for 50 Years of Literacy

2017 CCIRA Conference on Literacy

FEBRUARY 1-4, 2017

COLORADO
READING JOURNAL

CCIRA
10148 Mockingbird Lane
Highlands Ranch, CO 80129