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ABSTRACT

A descriptive/observational study examined one teacher's approach to teaching literature in a heterogeneous, self-contained fifth-grade classroom in a growing suburban community in southeastern Michigan during one school year. The teacher (with 21 years experience) was selected by the Murray Hill School administrators and was observed once a week for 1.5 hours each time. Data included a teacher interview, conferences before and after classroom observations, field notes, audio tapes of each observed literature lesson, and interviews with and written and graphic response of six students. Results indicated that the teacher: (1) understood and valued the importance of exposing students to a variety of literary genre; (2) wanted students to understand that there were specific criteria and techniques to analyze literature; (3) emphasized in various ways that she thought literature should be valued for the aesthetic experience it offers; (4) often asked the students to engage in creative writing activities; (5) helped students develop collaborative learning skills; and (6) chose reading materials of keen interest to students. However, results also indicated that the teacher did not appear to help students recognize the criteria and techniques for determining the merits of a literary selection, and that the teacher appeared to need assistance in learning about the role that questioning plays in eliciting higher order thinking, especially critical aesthetic response to literature. (A group advertisement for one of the books read and several semantic webs are included; seven professional references and 16 children's literature selections are attached.) (RS)

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THE STUDY OF LITERATURE IN A FIFTH-GRADE CLASSROOM: ONE TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

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Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects

The Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects was awarded to Michigan State University in 1987 after a nationwide competition. Funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, the Elementary Subjects Center is a major project housed in the Institute for Research on Teaching (IRT). The program focuses on conceptual understanding, higher order thinking, and problem solving in elementary school teaching of mathematics, science, social studies, literature, and the arts. Center researchers are identifying exemplary curriculum, instruction, and evaluation practices in the teaching of these school subjects; studying these practices to build new hypotheses about how the effectiveness of elementary schools can be improved; testing these hypotheses through school-based research; and making specific recommendations for the improvement of school policies, instructional materials, assessment procedures, and teaching practices. Research questions include, What content should be taught when teaching these subjects for understanding and use of knowledge? How do teachers concentrate their teaching to use their limited resources best? and In what ways is good teaching subject matter-specific?

The work is designed to unfold in three phases, beginning with literature review and interview studies designed to elicit and synthesize the points of view of various stakeholders (representatives of the underlying academic disciplines, intellectual leaders and organizations concerned with curriculum and instruction in school subjects, classroom teachers, state- and district-level policymakers) concerning ideal curriculum, instruction, and evaluation practices in these five content areas at the elementary level. Phase II involves interview and observation methods designed to describe current practice, and in particular, best practice as observed in the classrooms of teachers believed to be outstanding. Phase II also involves analysis of curricula (both widely used curriculum series and distinctive curricula developed with special emphasis on conceptual understanding and higher order applications), as another approach to gathering information about current practices. In Phase III, models of ideal practice will be developed, based on what has been learned and synthesized from the first two phases, and will be tested through classroom intervention studies.

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Abstract

This is a descriptive/observational study of one grade-five teacher's approach to teaching literature. Data reported pertain to how she taught elements of story, characteristics of genre, and criteria and techniques used to analyze and evaluate literature. Data reported also describe the strategies she used to teach literature and to encourage its appreciation and enjoyment.

THE STUDY OF LITERATURE IN A FIFTH-GRADE CLASSROOM: ONE TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE[1]

Barbara A. Quirk and Patricia J. Cianciolo

This descriptive/observational study relates one teacher's approach to teaching literature in a heterogeneous, self-contained fifth-grade classroom during one school year.[2] It is one of a set of case studies that have been developed as part of the research agenda of the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects. In addition to this case study, our research pertaining to teaching literature in the elementary grades has included a synthesis and critique of the scholarly literature on teaching literature in the elementary school (Cianciolo, 1988); a report which summarizes the views of six experts who were interviewed to elicit their views on the teaching of literature in the elementary school (Cianciolo & Prawat, 1990); a detailed critique of one of the most commonly used and representative of the K-6 literature series which is currently used in the elementary school (Cianciolo & VanCamp, 1991); a critique of a distinctive K-12 literature program (Cianciolo & Quirk, 1992a); and two improvement-oriented studies, the first of which was the teaching and learning of critical aesthetic response to picture books as literature (Cianciolo, 1991), and the second was the teaching and learning of critical aesthetic response to varied kinds of literature (Cianciolo & Quirk, 1992b). Similar reports have been developed from Center work in mathematics, science, literature, writing, and the arts.

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[1]Patricia J. Cianciolo, professor of teacher education at Michigan State University, is a senior researcher with the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects. Barbara A. Quirk, a doctoral candidate in teacher education, is a research assistant with the Center.

[2]Names of the school, school district and teachers described in this report are pseudonyms.

Three concepts inherent in an ideal elementary literature program which focuses on critical aesthetic response to literature as an art are to develop (1) a familiarity with literature to the point that students can identify the characteristics of each genre as well as elements of story (poetry, drama, literary biography), (2) the ability to use specific criteria and techniques for analyzing and evaluating the various literary genre and elements of story, and (3) an enjoyment and appreciation of literature for its own sake, that is, for the aesthetic experience it offers (Cianciolo & Prawat, 1990). An understanding of these three concepts provides a foundation which would enable students to respond critically and aesthetically to literature. This approach to literature focuses on readers' awareness and appreciation of cognitive and affective responses evoked by various factors. These include the elements of a story (poem, drama, literary biography), the ability to evaluate literary works of art according to criteria and characteristics defined over time and by the traditions of a specific culture, as well as the ability to recognize and prefer the beautiful in literary selections in terms of individual taste. One of the challenges of this case study was to determine if and how the teacher, Ms. Williams, differentiated between teaching literature as literature and using literature as a tool for teaching various reading skills.

Of interest is Ms. Williams's understanding and beliefs about how literature should be taught and learned and how her understanding and beliefs are translated into practice in the classroom. In other words, we have engaged in this descriptive/observational study to determine why, if, and how she enables students to develop the three concepts listed above.

Procedures and Methodology

During the Spring of 1989 Cianciolo chose to conduct this study in Wedgewood School District because she knew from personal contacts made when

she conducted inservice workshops in the district that many of the elementary school teachers were knowledgeable about children's literature and used it extensively and in various ways across the curriculum. She asked the district's library/media coordinator to consult with the elementary school principals and the assistant superintendent to select one teacher. Ms. Williams, a teacher at Murray Hill Elementary School, was identified by these instructional administrators and subsequently agreed to participate in our study. Consent to conduct the study was obtained from the school board, the principal, the teacher, and the parents of all the students in this fifth-grade classroom.

We observed Ms. Williams over a period of seven months, from October through April, at least once a week for approximately one and one half hours each time. There were a few occasions when we observed two consecutive days to see follow-up lessons and to observe students present the projects they started during the first of the two days. The data were obtained from a number of different sources. Several conferences were held with the teacher both before and after classroom observations; one formal interview with the teacher was also conducted. In addition, data were obtained from transcription of tape recordings and field notes which documented each observed literature lesson. Six students who were identified by the teacher on the basis of high, moderate, and low interest in reading literature were interviewed; their written and graphic responses were collected and analyzed.

Description of school

Murray Hill School is one of five elementary schools in a growing suburban community in southeastern Michigan with approximately 50,000 residents. Murray Hill serves approximately 500 students who represent a wide range of socioeconomic levels. A small percentage of the students qualify for free

lunches; in contrast a small percentage come from homes that exceed $400,000 real estate valuation. The majority of the students are Caucasians born in the United States, but 14% represent racial and ethnic minorities. The school is experiencing an influx of Asian and Chaldean immigrants, who receive instruction in English as a second language if they need it. Murray Hill was one of the eight schools in the district to achieve National Exemplary School[3] status. Also, the district's media program was the recipient of the National School Library Media Program of the Year Award, which means that in each building there is a close working relationship between school librarians and teachers in the selection and use of library holdings (such as literary selections) to accomplish instructional goals. In the year this study was conducted, the principal of Murray Hill was named the Principal of the Year in the state of Michigan.

After attending state- and regional-level reading conferences and workshops, the teachers and librarian of Murray Hill School expressed the desire to study a literature-based reading program. As a result, they identified teaching a literature-based reading program as a school improvement goal. The introduction of their literature-based reading program was carefully thought through: the reading consultant, the principal (who had been a reading teacher), and the librarian conducted a weeklong meeting during which the staff made important decisions about how they would begin using more literature to teach reading and other areas of the curriculum. The teachers were provided a packet of professional materials about teaching reading through literature. They were also provided kits and packets prepared by publishers of children's literature trade books and basal reading series.

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[3]The National Exemplary School status is awarded by the U.S. Department of Education based on curriculum, school climate, and working relationship with parents.

One of the decisions the teachers had to make during the course of these meetings was whether to use the commercial materials or to prepare their own. Some of the teachers chose to use just the commercially prepared kits and packets, some chose to prepare their own teaching guides, and some chose to combine their own guides with the commercially prepared kits and packets. The Grade 5 teachers chose to combine their own materials with the prepared kits and packets.

During the school year the principal continued to provide planning time and professional materials which enabled the teachers to study this approach to literature. Additionally, the assistant superintendent in charge of curriculum worked with the staff to demonstrate her support for their exploration of implementing a literature-based reading program. The Murray Hill faculty hired an outside reading consultant from western Michigan to meet with them two months after they initiated this pilot study. She answered some of their questions about this approach, especially those about assessment and working with children of different abilities and achievement levels.

In addition the superintendent gave the school $2000 to purchase the books needed to conduct a pilot of this literature-based reading program. Therefore, there were a substantial number of selections and the teachers could exercise some choice about which books they would teach in their own classrooms. Ms. Johnson, the school librarian, commented about these circumstances in an interview.

> So we planned out a curriculum for our building and identified certain books that [the teachers] wanted to use per grade level. Then we bought the books in various ways: we bought classroom sets of six to eight different titles for each grade level and group sets of six to eight copies of single titles. Then we gathered together all of the materials to supplement individual titles. We purchased audiovisual materials. There was a lot of interest in readers' theatre, so we bought scripts [of children's stories]. Some of our teachers belonged to a consortium that trades scripts and so forth. So all of the materials are available to teachers. Basically there are materials for most anything for teachers to use.

The teachers decided that at the end of each year they would evaluate the books they used that year and would identify which books they would retain or eliminate. Furthermore, they decided to identify additional titles they would like to purchase in multiple copies. Ms. Williams stated that it is important to keep reevaluating the books and to decide whether or not particular books worked well with the students. She also emphasized that there are always new books which should be considered for use in their program.

The faculty of Murray Hill School began a literature-based reading program one year prior to the initiation of this study. During our numerous contacts with the teachers throughout the course of this study, they appeared to be conscious of their goal to use literature to teach reading. According to Ms. Williams, she teaches in a "unique" building with teachers who "really do have an appreciation for literature and a knowledge of literature and a willingness to explore different strategies using literature." The teachers have continued their learning about teaching literature through attendance at workshops, building inservice meetings provided by the district's five reading consultants, and district inservice meetings.

Personal History and Beliefs About Teaching

Ms. Williams has taught for 21 years in the Wedgewood School District, 10 of those at Murray Hill School. When asked about her recollections of her elementary school experiences with literature, Ms. Williams said that "it depended ..., as it does probably from here to eternity, on the teacher at the time. Some had a real love for literature, and therefore you studied it." She commented that if a teacher's interest was in another subject, then literature was not a priority. She went on to say that the school librarians read to the students during their visits to the library. Her most vivid

childhood memory about literature was going "to the library and sitting down and listening, being able to totally relax and immerse yourself in the story that was read at that time." In both the classroom and the library the students did not study or analyze the story in any way. She felt she was first introduced to the study of literature in her high school classes.

Ms. Williams has a bachelor of science degree from Wayne State University with minors in social studies, science, and English; her major was education. She has a master of arts degree in education from Oakland University. When asked to identify what experience might have had the most influence on her approach to teaching literature, she referred to the 1987 Michigan Reading Association Conference. At that conference she had the opportunity to listen to several speakers talk about literature replacing the basal reading series in the elementary classroom. Ms. Williams stated she believes that the speakers "opened up for a less guilt-ridden [reading] teacher because very often [teachers] feel if [they] don't cover such and such [they're] not really covering the whole [reading] program."

Another factor which influenced Ms. Williams decision to teach literature was the new Michigan Education Assessment Program Reading Test. She and the other teachers at Murray Hill reported having attended inservice meetings which focused on strategies developed to help teachers implement the new Michigan Reading Model, upon which the MEAP Reading Test is purportedly based. These strategies emphasize that reading is an integrated process, not separate individual skills, and they generally stress reading comprehension.

Ms. Williams described the major change in her approach to teaching literature as being the elimination of a focus on reading skills, such as syllabication. Instead, she said, she now focuses on the literary aspects of

the selections. Her attitude about this change in approach is evident in the following statement.

> It was just like you were tearing your hair out sometimes. For what? When [the focus should be on] the problem [in the story], do [the students] really understand what's going on? Do [the students] really understand the character? Do [the students] understand the elements of story making of literature?

Ms. Williams expressed a desire to have students involved in the study of literature everyday but stated that it was not always possible because of the numerous building activities which tended to interrupt her preferred teaching schedule. She said she also believes that the schedule has to be flexible so when

> the kids get so tuned in to their creative writing that you can't stop and say, 'Okay, it's ten-thirty. It's time to ___." I don't think that's a service to the children because one doesn't stop being creative at ten-thirty to go on to something else.

The Wedgewood School District does not have a specified amount of time that each grade level should spend on the study of literature, but does specify the amount of time that should be spent on teaching reading. Ms. Williams said she believes that the district does not separate the teaching of reading skills and the teaching of literature; however, she separates these two areas in her classroom.

> We still do the skills, the necessary skills for reading. I just call those reading skills. But then I separate and call it literature. So the children do have an understanding of reading skills, I would hope, and literature. Even though the reading skills are part of literature, I still want them to differentiate between literature and reading [skill lessons].

This practice seems to reflect her belief that children will learn to enjoy reading by reading trade books, especially if the literary experience is acknowledged and if aspects of literature are focused on.

Her conviction that literature should be taught as she teaches it is implied in the response she made to the question of whether or not her substitute would teach literature when she was gone.

> "No! I do not assume or want the sub to assume a responsibility that I feel is very near and dear to me because I know what I expect, what I hope to get back myself, what I want the students to get.

Data

Three concepts inherent in an ideal elementary literature program which focuses on the development of critical aesthetic response to literature are (1) familiarity with literature to the point that students can identify the characteristics of each genre as well as elements of story, (2) che ability to use specific criteria and techniques for analyzing and evaluating the various literary genre as well as elements of story (poetry, drama, literary biography), and (3) enjoyment and appreciation of literature for its own sake, that is, for the aesthetic experience it offers (Cianciolo & Prawat, 1990).

Identify Characteristics of Each Genre and Literary Elements

During the seven months of this study we observed Ms. Williams and her students studying three literary selections: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe written / C. S. Lewis and illustrated by Pauline Baynes, Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman written by Dorothy Sterling, and The Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler written and illustrated by Elaine Konigsburg. Each of these selections represents a different literary genre: fanciful fiction, historical fiction, and contemporary realistic fiction respectively, which enabled her students to become more widely acquainted with different types of literature. Suzanne commented that she thought Ms. Williams chose the books they read for various reasons including using literature which fits into a classroom theme, and

> sometimes she picks a book because she's heard about it and she enjoys it herself, and when we read The Lion, The Witch, and The

Wardrobe I think that she wanted us to read a different kind of story, like an adventurous fantasy kind of thing. She wanted us to see what different books are like.

While the students and teacher were reading The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, Ms. Williams began a lesson by asking questions which eventually enabled them to identify and discuss the characteristics of fanciful fiction. (The transcript of this lesson does not identify the individual students' responses.)

Teacher: What is similar about this book and the book we just finished [The Trumpet of the Swan, White, 1970]? What kind of writing?

Student: Fiction.

Teacher: What type of fiction?

Student: Fantasy.

Teacher: What are the characteristics of fantasy?

Student: It starts real.

Student: The humans and nonhumans interact. They talk to each other.

Student: Some characters have magical powers.

Student: The Trumpet of the Swan had a happy ending.

Student: Both of the books have unreal characters.

Ms. Williams also said she wanted her students to learn about the elements of story: setting, theme, characterization, style, and plot.

I think it'd be a disservice not to present the students with these concepts [about story] because [the students] can grasp ever so much more when they're exposed to so much more.

We observed lessons in which Ms. Williams taught some of these literary elements. Some of these lessons are described below.

When discussing Dorothy Sterling's style of writing in Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman, Ms. Williams directed her students' attention to specific passages in the story.

Teacher: What comes to mind when you hear the word image?

Student: A picture.

Teacher: An author uses colorful words [to paint a picture]. Look at page 14 to get a sense of feeling, smell and taste. [This portion of the story describes the cabin where Harriet lives with her mother, father and three siblings.] What are phrases the author uses on this page to help you see a picture?

Student: "A few slanting rays of sunshine found their way in through the cracks in the log walls, making a crazy pattern on the bare earth floor."

Student: "From the door, hanging crookedly on its hinges, a patch of light shone on the fireplace" helps me picture a very rundown cabin that doesn't have much light.

Teacher: The author wants you to feel not just read. What happens to us when we feel what we are reading?

Student: It is more interesting and I feel a part of the book.

Teacher: Let's read together the fourth paragraph on page 23. [This paragraph describes how Harriet feels after being whipped by her master.] As we read pay attention to the imagery.

Teacher: How does this make you feel?

Student: Uncomfortable. She's hurting so it makes me kinda hurt, too.

During an individual interview Suzanne made a comment about the way authors help readers visualize the characters and the setting.

> In a comic book there are drawings and you just see what the writer thinks it's about. But when you're reading a book like The Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, you can see it the way you want to see it. You get those pictures because of the way the writer uses imagery. They describe it well enough so that you can tell what the picture is going to be like.

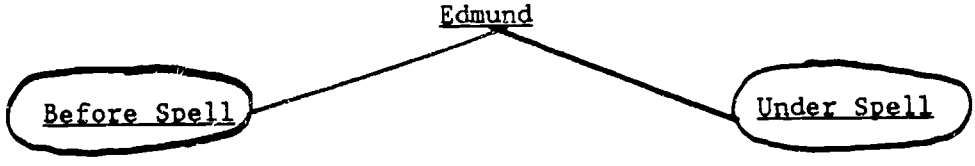
When they were reading of The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, Ms. Williams put the students in small groups to read a chapter. She asked them to write down some of the interesting words they found as they were reading. One group continually interrupted their reading aloud to record these words.

In contrast, another group identified words more selectively and less obtrusively with two students working as scribes. One student in this group made a comment about the "long" sentences used by the author. Ms. Williams asked him why he thought the author did that. The student responded, "He wanted us to see that there was so much in the room [being described in the story]."

Ms. Williams considered semantic webbing[4] a way to help students focus on an idea, such as the strengths and weaknesses of a character. She said she thought that the semantic webbing could then be used as an outline when the students would write about the ideas they focused on in their web. Ms. Williams stated that

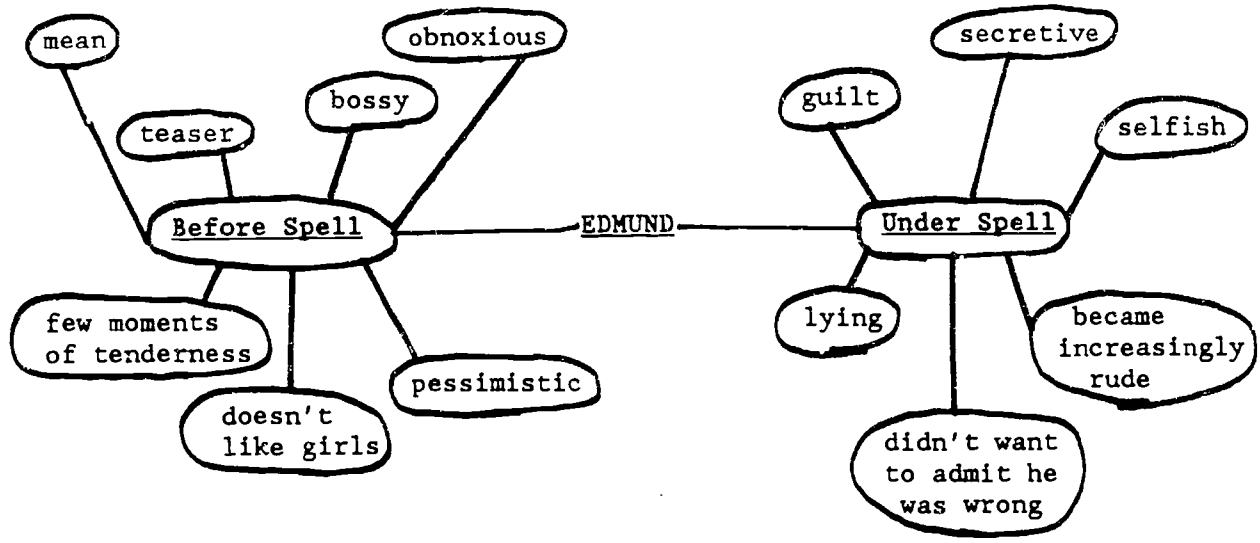
> all of these strategies [questioning, discussions, and semantic webbing] have helped [me] do a better job teaching literature, rather than just saying here is the book now read it, and we'll discuss it. That isn't enough. We have to discuss character. We have to discuss what the ramifications of setting [are]. [We have to discuss] how the setting applies to the character or vice versa.

Examples of how Ms. Williams used semantic webbing as a vehicle for discussing aspect of story, namely character change and literary themes, in two of the lessons we observed are described below. During a lesson which occurred about half way through The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe, she put three major areas of the web on the board as seen in the format seen below.



[4]A semantic web is a way of organizing graphically ideas and books according to a central idea such as genre, theme, or personality traits of a character.

Ms. Williams then asked the children to answer three questions about Edmund. What do you know about this character before the spell and under the spell? What about his attitude toward his sister? What about his attitude toward life? As the students volunteered the character traits the teacher served as the scribe and recorded them on the chalkboard to form a web.



During another lesson Ms. Williams and the students collaborated to make a semantic web of books the students read previously in group situations and independently, in or outside of their classroom according to four basic themes: sacrifice, responsibility, greed and selfishness, and sibling relationships. The group discussed the fact that some books seemed to fit into more than one theme. Ms. Williams asked the students to choose the main theme for each book; however, the students could not make this decision for Charlotte's Web and The Trumpet of the Swan both by E. B. White. Thus each of these two books is listed in two places. The following web is a reproduction of their final product.

SACRIFICE

Charlotte's Web
Dicey's Song (Voigt)
Sounder (Armstrong)
Trumpet of the Swan

RESPONSIBILITY

Charlotte's Web
Dicey's Song
Sarah Plain and Tall (MacLachlan)
The Courage of Sarah Noble (Dagleish)
Trumpet of the Swan
Bible
Joan of Arc

THEME

GREED & SELFISHNESS

The War with Grandpa (Smith)
The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe
Bible
A Christmas Carol (Dickens)

SIBLING RELATIONSHIP

My Brother Sam Is Dead (Collier & Collier)
"Sweet Valley Twins" series (Pascal)
Little Women (Alcott)
Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing (Blume)
Superfudge (Blume)
Bible

During a discussion about The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, Ms. Williams asked her students to consider the importance of the setting in this book and in fanciful fiction in general. An abbreviated version of the transcript of the lesson follows:

Teacher: How important is the setting to this story?

Susie: Very, very.

Teacher: Why?

Susie: Because if the setting was in a different place, they wouldn't have got [sic] the wardrobe. And then they wouldn't have gone to Narnia.

Teacher: Okay. Jessica.

Jessica: I think they could have changed the setting a little. They had to make it into a different world, but they didn't have to make it all snow. They could have made it spring and the children always wanted it to be winter.

Teacher: Okay. So they could have changed the seasons very easily. But you said something about it had to be Narnia.

Jessica: It didn't have to be Narnia, but it had to be a different world.

Teacher: A different world. Why? That's a very good point, Jessica. Why would it have to be a different world? Darrin?

Darrin: Because it makes you like, interested because you could go through a wardrobe and walk and walk, and then you enter into a new world.

Teacher: Okay, and what do you think Steve?

Steven: I think it [the setting] is very important, because if you put them [the characters] in a setting like [our town] it wouldn't be exciting. I mean, like in Narnia you have all these monsters and the witch.

Teacher: What does it do to our imagination when we have, as Jessica suggested, another world, or another time, or another place? Barbara?

Barbara: If it's exciting we want to read more. You can make it the world you want it to be.

Teacher: Absolutely, very good. Jason?

Jason: When it's another world it makes your mind wander and makes you want to get out of everything. But it also makes you think that you're actually in that world. It's kinda boring if it was just in the professor's house or something. But it's more exciting when it's in another world.

Teacher: Why is it okay to have this other world situation in Narnia, but in The Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing it is a familiar situation. Judy Blume books are set in familiar places we can identify like [our town], or whatever. Why is it okay for those books, but I'm hearing some of you say Narnia has to be way out some place. Barbara?

Barbara: Because Judy Blume's telling what could really happen, but here in C. S. Lewis' books it's imagination and imagination has to lead you the way or else you aren't gonna get anywhere.

Teacher: Okay. One last comment. Martha?

Martha: I think that it can be different because of the titles. There wouldn't be a lion, a witch, and a wardrobe in [our town]. It has to be somewhere, where anything can happen.

Use Specific Criteria and Techniques to Analyze and Evaluate Literature

Ms. Williams attempted to encourage the children to analyze and evaluate the overall literary quality of The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. She divided the class into small groups for the concluding activities. One group was assigned the task of writing two letters: The first letter was to be addressed to C. S. Lewis and the second letter was to write his response. In the letter to the author the students were supposed to detail what they liked about his book and why, and ask him any questions about himself and his writing.

The directions for this activity sought to elicit what Parsons (1989) called a Level Four response. Each stage is a loosely knit structure in which ideas are shaped by a dominant insight about literature as art. The reader's response to literature, therefore, is shaped by the dominant insight characteristic of the particular developmental stage at which the reader happens to be. At Stage Four, the emphasis is on the way the author uses words or creates the story within the characteristics of the genre or how the illustrator uses medium, color, form, and space. These elements or characteristics are how a selection relates to the norms or criteria established by tradition.

The following is an abridged version of the transcript of the small group's conversation while writing the two letters. (The transcript of this lesson does not identify the individual students' responses.)

> Teacher: Be sure to tell Mr. Lewis about the parts of the book that you could relate to and why you liked the book. So as Mr. Lewis, I want to know why you think my book was good. By just telling me and making a statement, "I think your book is good." I'm still going to wonder what you really liked about it. So what I'd like for you to do right now is make a list, a brainstorming list like we do when we're doing creative writing. Come up with various ideas about why you liked this book, just words, or phrases. They don't have

to be complete sentences. From that I think you can get a real comprehensive paragraph.

Student: Well, how about his use of imagination?

Student: The make-believe animals.

Student: Wait, not-make believe animals, but mythology because it had all the centaurs.

Student: Just the idea of Narnia.

Student: Well that's imagination.

Student: You're right. Put all the imagination things that they had together. Make a list like Narnia and the deer and stuff.

Student: Wait. The adventure.

Student: Cool. I would love this kind of house, wouldn't you?

Student: What was the most important part that you liked?

Student: How the children changed through the book.

Student: I liked how Narnia was different than everything, than the real world.

Student: But imaginary worlds are different than real worlds.

Student: Not always. They don't always have to be.

Student: Okay. So we think it is very good because of the imagination and then [what]?

Student: Because of the imagination he uses in the book.

Student: Yes, and we have a couple questions for you. Go on like that.

Teacher: What do you think is good about the imagination? Why is that good?

Student: Because of the imagination of Narnia.

Student: Because you use your imagination you can make anything that you want. And that's why I think it's pretty important because when you're making a fantasy book I think it's pretty important to use your imagination.

Teacher: So when you say you liked the imagination, do you like C. S. Lewis' imagination?

Student: Yeah

Teacher: Or do you like that you can use your imagination?

Student: Both. We like both.

The two letters written by this group of students follow.[5]

Dearest C. S. Lewis.
We have read book one of The Chronicles of Narnia. We think it is very good because of the imagination you used in the book. We have a few questions to ask you. The first one is What inspired you to be a writer? The second one is How did you get the names of the children? The last one is Where did you get the name Narnia? We hope you'll answer these questions, thanks.
Sincerely
Ann, Lisa, and Tom

Dear Ann, Lisa, and Tom,
I got your letter and I'll answer your questions. Question number one, I always wanted to be a writer. It was my dream. I always loved to write so I decided I wanted to be a writer. Question number two, I got the names from my relatives. Question number three, well I always thought there was a magical world in my wardrobe when I was a little boy and I called it Narnia
Sincerely,
C. S. Lewis

Another group of students was assigned the task of writing an advertisement for this book. The directions stated that a magazine advertisement should include a headline, the text, and a picture. Below is a reproduction of this group's advertisement. Though the picture is reproduced in black and white, it was drawn using colored pencils. (See Figure 1.)

C. S. MAKES KIDS GO CRAZY

C. S. Lewis came out with this new Book that Makes all the kids who read it go CRAZY with there amaganation. The loin the wicth and the warobloe [wardrobe]. A Fifth grade class in Murray Hill School red it they LOVED it eveyone loves it all the kids are hoping he makes more than he has allready so if you dont have it or havent Red it. Buy it or hes chorncles to Narnia, its an exing [exciting] Book your never Forget.

---

[5]Student writing is reproduced in this report without editing spelling, punctuation, or grammar.

Figure 1. Group advertisement for book.

Enjoy and Appreciate Literature for Its Own Sake

In addition to having the students study several pieces of literature, Ms. Williams occasionally read other books to students. When reading these other books, her focus appeared to be on the enjoyment of the selection; she did not ask the students to "do" anything with these selections. The selections we observed the students studying always involved some activity, based on their reading selection, whether it was class discussion or individual or group projects.

When Suzanne was asked why she thought literature is studied in school, what one can learn from reading literature, and why it is important to read a book, she responded,

> So that when we're older we get a good idea of all the books in the world, and so that we're interested in reading. You can also learn about the different people in the world, and different cultures, and how different people think. It's important to read a book because we learn how to read, and like I said before about different cultures and everything, and just for enjoyment.

She also added the following comment.

> I like literature a lot because when you read a book it's like you're in with the characters. You're like a part of them.

Michael added,

> You can learn a lot really, because when we're reading books ... every book teaches a different lesson. So you learn a lesson from your books.
>
> Most people think studying literature is really boring, but when we first read The Trumpet of the Swan, I had already read the book, but I didn't read it the way Ms. Williams reads it. I just read it, and it's different with Ms. Williams because she goes over it and stuff.

Ms. Williams had a conversation with Polly while the class was reading The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. Polly commented that she has the Chronicles of Narnia books 1, 2, and 3 at home:

> I never read them because I looked at the cover and it looked like it was for people much older than me. And it looked like it would be boring and I wouldn't understand it. When Ms. Williams said we were

going to read it, I thought, Oh, no. I'm not going to like this! And now I love the story and I want to read the other ones.

Other Approaches to Literature

Variety of ways to involve students. Ms. Williams frequently encouraged students to respond to a selection they read through interpretive and/or creative writing. For example, after completing The Trumpet of the Swan she invited students to write poems which expressed Louis's love for Serena if they wanted to. Two of the students' poems are presented below.

A Love Poem for Serena from Louis, the Swan
by Brenda

Serena Oh Serena how I love you Serena
I will never forget Red Rock Lakes when I
met you and how I followed you around
and rote I love you.
I will never forget you.
Now we are married and have cygnets of our own.
Serena Oh Serena I am happy we have a home

Signed
Louis

Serena
by Maria

Serena Serena
You are such a dear. Serena Serena
You always care.
Serena Serena your so lovable
Serena Serena I wrote this poem because you are a dear
and you always care.
Serena my dear!
Louis your husband

Another example of Ms. Williams integrating writing and literature were the diary entries the students wrote after reading Freedom Train: The Harriet Tubman Story. The assignment was for each student to write three separate diary entries each of which recorded Harriet Tubman's thoughts and feelings about her experiences as described in this historical fiction novel. Ms.

Williams told the students they were "to go back and to think as Harriet, feel as Harriet, back in the time of Harriet." The two sets of diary entries which follow are representative of those written by the students. During the lesson observed, the students read aloud their diary entries while their classmates listened attentively. They seemed to be intrigued and awed by how different each student's entries were. They were also favorably impressed by the creative covers some of the students made for their diaries.

Sandy read her three entries to her classmates:

Dear Diary,

Today I set off to find the promised land. I started out my journey by packing everything that I would need into my ticking bag. Then I took my patchwork quilt that meant so much to me and put it on the Quaker lady's doorstep. This was a thank you gift because she started me on the road to freedom. I had to tell someone about my departure that wouldn't squeal about it. I decided to tell my sister Mary Ann, but when I had gotten her attention and started to tell her Mrs. Sarah's brother rode up on his horse. He gave us a look that scared Mary Ann into the kitchen. I could only tell her by singing. I could tell that she caught the first words.

Now my journey had really begun. I walked swiftly for many hours. I slowed down when I came to land that was not familiar. I traveled a great deal of the 30 miles before I reached Choptank. The sun was going down and I decided to lay my body down on the soft quill moss on the forest floor.

Dear Diary,

This morning I awoke with a fright. I had to get a move on or they might catch me. After I calmed down and I was walking at a good tempo, I could see where the forest ended. I would soon be at Choptank. When I arrived in Choptank, I waded upstream all afternoon. I shivered when I came out of the water. Then I stood in an old dead oak tree and ate some soggy pork and some water logged bread. I walked until dark when the silence was broken by the sound of horses' hooves. It was patrollers searching for missing slaves. I stayed hidden in the ditch for a very long time. At last, I found Eziekial Hunn's house but I didn't want to wake up his family so I paced all night in their barn.

Dear Diary,

When daylight came, I saw a woman come out of the house and sweep the steps. I went up to her and handed her a note. She handed me the broom and told me to sweep. Then she went into the house. I waited for a few minutes and then a man dressed as a Quaker came out. Then another man with nicer clothing came out, hitched up his horse and rode off. When he was out of sight, the Quaker invited me in. He then introduced himself, fed me and gave me a bed to sleep in.

Ms. Williams asked Sandy to describe how she made her diary to her classmates.

Teacher: Could you show us your diary and could you tell us why you decided to put it together in that manner.

Sandy: Well. I put cloth on it because that was probably what she used. I made the paper sticking out because she might not have had enough cloth to cover her paper.

Laura's three diary entries follow.

Dear Diary,
Just past the border of Philadelphia. Home free I yelled. There was no one there to greet me like I dreamed many times. It was all very different than I thought it would be, but just the same I yelled home free. Time to hit the sack and may God rest in peace.
Faithfully yours,
Harriet

Dear Diary,
This morning I woke up with many scattered thoughts. One that seemed to stick out most was that every man, black or white, should be free. I have made my final decision. That is what I have come up with, I will travel back down South to lead innocent slaves to freedom. The slave catchers, nor Mrs. Sarah can stand in my way. Let my people go. I say, let my people go.
Faithfully yours,
Harriet

Dear Diary,
On my way down South to fetch my brothers, all I had was my ticking bag and a small food supply. Hope to be back North within a week. Praise the Lord and let Him guide me back South and then to the land of freedom.
Faithfully yours,
Harriet

Ms. Williams encouraged the students to consider the language Laura had used when writing her diary.

Teacher: You had a couple of phrases in your entry like "Praise the Lord."

Laura: That's what Harriet said.

Teacher: So you were using her terminology. I liked when you said fetch because today we don't usually say fetch. I noticed you were using very good terminology just as Harriet would. There was another phrase in there that helped me realize that Laura was writing as Harriet but a little bit of Laura was coming through. Did anyone catch what it was?

Sam: I don't remember what it was, but it was something at the beginning that was very Americanized and very 90s.

Jason: She said, "Time to hit the sack."

Teacher: Exactly. It is very hard to put ourselves in someone else's shoes as we're writing. Tell us how you made your diary.

Laura: I glued the edges and the writing is sort of smudged. I put it together with a cinnamon stick.

Teacher: That could be something Harriet would have had. That was very clever and creative. What were your feelings while you were writing this?

Laura: When I was doing this, I felt like I was Harriet because I was going back in the book and I was looking at some of the things that happened to her. While I was reading back in the book, I felt like they were happening to me because I knew that I was going to write about somethings that I thought were interesting. Things that I thought she'd write in a diary. While I was reading the parts I thought were good, I felt that I was that person. That it was happening to me.

Teacher: Kimberly, will you describe how you made your diary?

Kimberly: I didn't put anything on the cover and I just had it plain brown. I tied it with little dirty pieces of string that she could find on the ground somewhere. Also on the inside, I wrote it very messy. I didn't want it to look like I was writing with a pencil. I wanted it to look like I was rubbing something on there so I used the edge of my pencil and rubbed it on like that.

Teacher: I am impressed because I think you have done some really fine writing. Secondly, your comments show that you really do care about people and their struggles. Thirdly, it shows that you have set some goals for yourselves.

Stephen: Ms. Williams, when my Mom was in college she lived in a house that was part of the Underground Railroad. On the floor they have secret passageways and a big tunnel.

Teacher: Not too far from here at Murray Hill we have an old Indian trail that goes around the lake. On one corner there was also a home or a station of the Underground Railroad.

When describing how she would develop her lessons when teaching literature, Ms. Williams stated emphatically, "First of all you have to read the book. You have to know the book." The next step, according to Ms.

Williams, is to decide what the students should learn from the particular book, both as a whole and by chapters. The activities in which the students participate need to vary from chapter to chapter

> because otherwise it becomes more of the same thing and it's too predictable for the children. Plus you want them to get more creative in what they're doing and if you keep doing the same thing chapter after chapter it's not a motivating source.

She also advised that one should vary the approach with each book.

Suzanne verified that Ms. Williams practices this belief.

> I think Ms. Williams tries to pick different things to make it interesting for us, and it is interesting. She thinks of different creative things. She can tell [what we've learned from reading a book] because she's read the book, and by the questions that she asks us, she can tell if you're really into it or not. Also if somebody doesn't like a book that she's picked for us, and I've always liked it, but she understands and she says you don't have to like every book. But you should try to read some of it to give it a chance.

Michael added that Ms. Williams "stretches your imagination" by varying the types of activities she asks the students to do.

In addition Ms. Williams appears to acknowledge the differences of learning styles in her students through the variety of ways she and her students read the literary selections and the activities the students engage in. Two students commented on their own responses to the different size groups Ms Williams provides for. When asked whether she liked to read and/or study literature independently, in a small group or in a large group Suzanne replied,

> I like doing it as a large group because I like hearing what everybody has to think and I like everybody hearing what I have to think and I feel more comfortable [with the large group] rather than with just one or two people.

Michael stated

> When we're doing something like the journal, I like to do it with two people because it's easier than having five or six people because you can just direct your thoughts, and you don't have to wait for everyone to be quiet and stuff like that. But I also like having groups of four or five because you share your thought and if it's a project then you get to share your ideas again but then put them into

one total thing that you want. I like smaller groups better than large group. Sometimes with the whole groups, like Ms. Williams will read and then she'll stop a little bit and like it's getting to the best part, and then she'll stop and then she'll start discussing it. So I like it both ways, but I'm sort of iffy on the whole class.

These beliefs were evident in several of the lessons we observed. When reading Chapter 5 in The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, Ms. Williams used a variety of ways to get the students involved in reading the story, to provide for active participation, and to encourage prediction. Each of the students and the teacher had a copy of the book. Ms. Williams' total approach during this lesson was a unique combination of reading aloud to students, asking individual students to read aloud, choral reading, and silent reading. Ms. Williams began by reading the first paragraph of the chapter aloud while the children followed along in their books. This was followed by the teacher asking individual students or the whole class to read passages aloud, or to read a short passage silently. Ms. Williams was the primary reader while individual or groups of students intermittently read aloud upon her request. She knew the story thoroughly: She had obviously thought about which sections or passages would be read by her or by an individual student or groups of students. They seemed to be flexible and handled the change of readers comfortably. The students appeared to be attentive throughout this lesson for, in each case, when she called on individuals or groups of students to read aloud or to respond to a specific question, they were always able to do so.

During this lesson, Ms. Williams frequently asked the students to engage in prediction. For example, before beginning this lesson, she asked the students to recap what they read the previous day and to predict what they thought would happen next. Throughout the lesson she frequently interrupted both her own and the students' reading to pose a predicting question; generally the students responded aloud but sometimes it was only a rhetorical

question to motivate them to read (or to listen to her read the story).

At one point in the lesson, Ms. Williams stopped reading at an exciting point toward the end of the chapter. She then asked the students to close their books, take out a piece of paper and fold it in half. On one side the students were told to write a prediction about what would happen next and draw a picture of their predictions. When they finished this task they joined their reading partner to finish reading the chapter. The pair of students then drew a picture of what really happened on the other half of their papers. When the students finished this activity Ms. Williams brought them back for a whole-group discussion; she then asked several children to explain why they made the predictions they did. At this point she reminded them that prediction "is not just a guess. We make predictions by recognizing and using clues from the story."

Ms. Williams stated that she would always introduce a new book to the students before asking them to begin reading and that at the beginning of a lesson, whether it is the beginning or the middle of the literary selection, she starts by asking the students to make predictions about what might happen next. When she distributed From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, she asked the students to look at the cover of the book and tell her what they were thinking about. An abridged version of the transcript of the discussion follows.

Teacher: What do you think of when you look at the cover of this book?

Stacy: Two kids are in a museum at night.

Teacher: Why a museum?

Steven: The statues.

Teacher: Does it look like anything else?

Britany: A castle.

Teacher: What do you think about the kids?

Anne: They're young.

Brian: They're in their pajamas.

Teacher: Does this seem strange if we think it's a museum?

Scott: Yes, maybe they ran away.

Jim: Looks like they went back in time.

Teacher: Why is it good to predict?

Jennifer: Because, you can think many things ... can be held in suspense.

As a result of the change in Ms. Williams' approach to teaching literature, she stated that she felt free to allow students to express their responses to a literary selection through art projects, creative drama, and creative writing instead of simply answering questions dealing solely with the content. "It's amazing how creative kids are if you let them be." Her belief in the students' need for opportunities to express their responses to literature in this way were evident when she allowed them to come up with their own ideas for their final project after they finished From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler. The students were free to chose a project of their own which several groups chose to do, but Ms. Williams did offer some suggestions for those who were unable to think of any on their own. One group made a time machine from a chair and a garbage bag because they wanted to go back in time to question Michelangelo to solve an unsolved mystery in the novel. Another group did a parody of the poem of "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere." When Ms. Williams discussed the students' presentations with the researcher, she said, "There was a lot of good learning going on, but there was a lot of good fun going on."

Another example was evident when viewing the culminating projects for The Trumpet of the Swan. Several of the students made stencils about some aspect of the book and used these stencils to decorate T-shirts. Ms. Williams hung a clothesline diagonally across the room to display these shirts. Some of the students chose to design a picture which represented an aspect of the story, while others designed a picture and wrote a caption to accompany it.

Relevancy of literature in students' world. Ms. Williams believes that she has learned the most about teaching and learning literature from the children she has taught rather than any classes or workshops she has attended. She appears to have been professionally involved on an ongoing basis throughout her career and expressed the need to choose from the workshops or presentations the ideas she thinks will be successful for herself and her students. When asked what the children have taught her, she discussed their need to be able to "apply part of what they are reading to their own lives, and to live vicariously through the character, or the setting ... then it [the story] becomes more meaningful. Through her questions and choice of activities she offered the students, Ms. Williams asked the children to connect aspects of their own lives and others in today's world with those of the book characters in each of the books we observed her teach.

When the students were reading From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, part of the class discussion focused on why the main characters had run away, and why children today might feel the need to run away. When asked why she chose this particular book, Ms. Williams stated that it was on Murray Hill School's list of books for the fifth grade, but that she would have chosen it anyway because

> it's a fun book to read, and I think the kids can identify with it very readily at this particular age level. They can see themselves. The girls can see themselves as being Claudia. The guys can see

themselves as being Jamie. And I think that is very healthy. That's stimulating and motivating in itself for reading literature, if they can project themselves into the character.

This is an excellent book at this age level for [the students] to get lost into. I think it's great for them to see that they aren't the only ones that have difficulty at home. They aren't the only ones that have parents that don't pay attention to them, but there are better ways of getting attention [than running away as the characters in the story did]. Certainly the kids in the story needed to communicate more with their parents, and the parents needed to do the same thing. I think the students are getting the message that if you have a problem you have to talk about it.

One of the concluding activities for Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman had the students comparing the jobs Harriet had in the story with the jobs they had at home. Each of the three students in the group chose to make a list of her jobs to compare with one list of Harriet's jobs which they wrote cooperatively (see chart on next page).

Cooperative learning. On several occasions Ms. Williams also referred to her desire to have a comfortable classroom in which the students share the ownership of what happens. She views her students as a "family" or "team" in which "it's okay to be yourself" but "it's also very important that we care for one another." She frequently changed the make-up of small groups so that eventually every student would work with every other student in the classroom. She occasionally reminded her students of the type of behavior she expected when they were working in teams; treat others fairly, encourage one another, always use time wisely, and make the best of your talent.

One example of Ms. Williams' use of cooperative groups during a literature lesson occurred with the reading of From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler. Her description of her method of presenting this book follows.

I divided the students into teams of two's or three's, and I tried to pair them so we had an excellent reader, an excellent comprehensive type of person with someone who had a little more difficulty. This way there was a good balance between what they were going to come up with. Then they read and filled in their journals [Literature Journal commercially prepared by Houghton Mifflin to accompany this book.].

Our Jobs

Susan

1. dishes
2. laundry
3. making the beds
4. cleaning my room
5. babysitting
6. vacume
7. set the dinner table
8. clear off the dinner table
9. wash the close
10. wash the floors
11. take our the trash
12. dust my furniture

Kris

1. feed fish
2. wash hands
3. Clear dinner table and dishes
4. make bed
5. clean bedroom
6. set the dinner table

Tracy

1. put away laundry
2. make my bed
3. wash dishes
4. empty dishes
5. sort laundry
6. clean my room
7. babysit
8. sweep tile floor
9. feed and clean the birdcage

Harriet's Jobs

1. Put the baby to bed
2. Up before [daylight] to light the fire
3. Sweeping
4. dusting
5. rocking the baby while Miss Shara got breakfast ready.
6. peel potatoes
7. pluck chickens
8. washing
9. cleaning
10. soothing the fretful baby
11. sit beside the baby in the dark
12. brought water to the men in the field
13. Carry messages to the overseers
14. pick fat green horn worms from the underside of the tobacco plants
15. shuck corn
16. weeve
17. scrub floors
18. watch the muckrat traps
19. pourd out the wash [water]
20. fetching salt and butter and run in the kitchen when someone else is needed.

Everything is prescribed right here in the journal, what should be done, what could be done, what pages to read, different criteria to look for. Since it's only a couple weeks before we go on spring break, I thought the students needed something that was very, very structured. I also think this will get them ready for our literature project when we return from spring break. My intention is to take another look at the list that I have of some of the books that are suggested reading. I'm going to divide the students into five or six groups and each group will have a different book rather than everyone reading the same book as we've been doing up to this point.

We did a little preliminary kind of predicting about the book before I even gave them the journal. The things I would do with any other book and then I really cut them loose. I said this is it. Now read X and X amount of pages, and then get together with your team mate and by the end of the week this much should be done. Then at the end of the week we pulled together all of the groups. We shared the information, for example here are the silhouettes of Claudia and Jamie and maybe one team would say that Claudia was this way and another team would say something else. With all 26 kids would interact things that they could add to the silhouette. So by the time we were finished with that segment of the journal, they had input from not just the 2 people but all 26, and it was a nonthreatening kind of thing. There wasn't a grade that was given per se because we had worked on it all together. We went through the entire journal the same way.

When we finished everyone felt very comfortable with the book. They knew it backward and forward. They knew the characters. They understood the setting. They understood the feeling of what these kids had gone through. We even talked about do you have feelings like this. Do you ever feel like running away? We talked about that and are there other options that are given to you if you have difficulty in your family? What could [the characters] have done?

One of the cooperative group activities which the students did while reading Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman shows that Ms. Williams knows the book she teaches and decides what she wants the children to learn from each chapter or groups of chapters. It also demonstrates one of the numerous cooperative activities observed during a literature lesson. The class began reading the selection, but had numerous interruptions over several days. Thus, Ms. Williams wanted to refresh their memories about what had happened in the first four chapters of the book before continuing to read. After a brief discussion with the entire class, Ms. Williams divided the students into groups of two or three and gave each group a different task.

She described each task on a 5 x 8 index card. The following directions written on an index card were given to one group.

Character Development
Compare/Contrast

List character traits that Harriet and Cudjoe have in common. The list should show why both would be good leaders.

The students' initial written response was

Both want freedom

Both Religious

Both spred news

Kind to own people

As the students were working in groups Ms. Williams circulated among them. When she stopped to discuss what this group was doing, they had already identified the phrases identified above. The following conversation then took place.

Teacher: What was the evidence [to prove your points]?

Student: She [Harriet] was nice to them.

Teacher: What do you mean nice?

Student: I can't remember.

Teacher: You need to go back to the story. Things you think you know, you need to go back to find it in the story. If you want to make a list and then divide it to find the evidence you can.

The students then went back to their books and wrote a more complete list of character traits which is presented below.

Both want freedom
They both belived they could become free. They both had much faith they could do it, make a dream come true.

Both Religious
They both had faith in god they could make it. They prayed for freedom, and there hope came true.

Both spred news
Cudjoe can read while Harriet listens and spreads news.
Together they make a team

Kind to own people
Harriet respects her people She also perserveres and tells people her dream

They both would be good leaders because they. They incurage their people they're resonsibul they cooparte with their people. There willing to fight untill they get free.

Another group was given the following task:

> Write down the names of songs important to Harriet. Why/What was important about them? List names of songs your team thinks are important to you. Why? How are they similar to Harriet?

This group of three students wrote out the lyrics to two songs: "Steal Away Home" and "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel." They did not explain why they thought these songs were important. Two of the students listed the titles of the songs important to them: "That's What Friends Are For" and "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." Neither of the students wrote why they liked the songs. The third student wrote the following.

My Song

When you wish Apon A Star

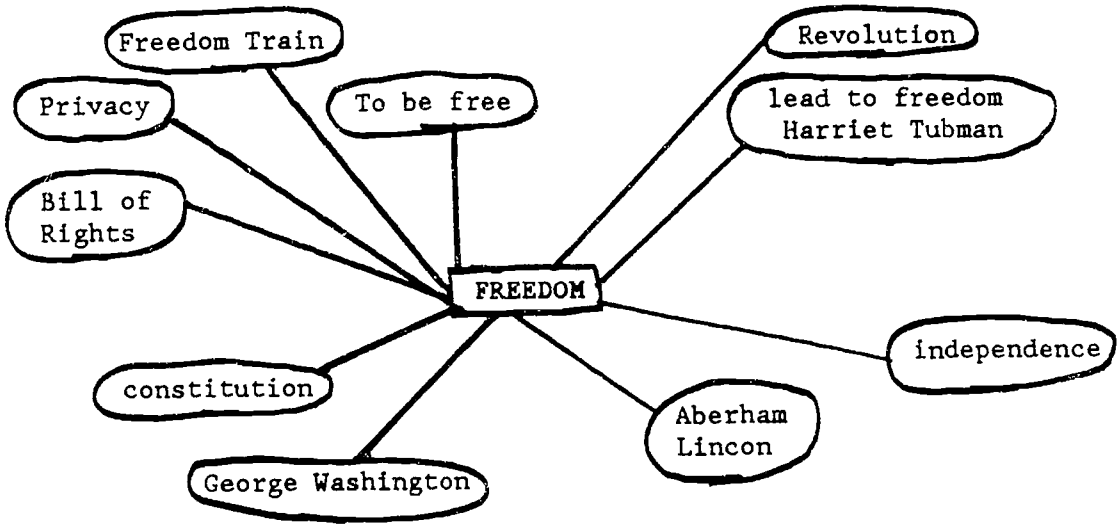
> When you wish Apon A Star is my favorit song When I was yonger because I Love Disney Land and Mikey mouse!

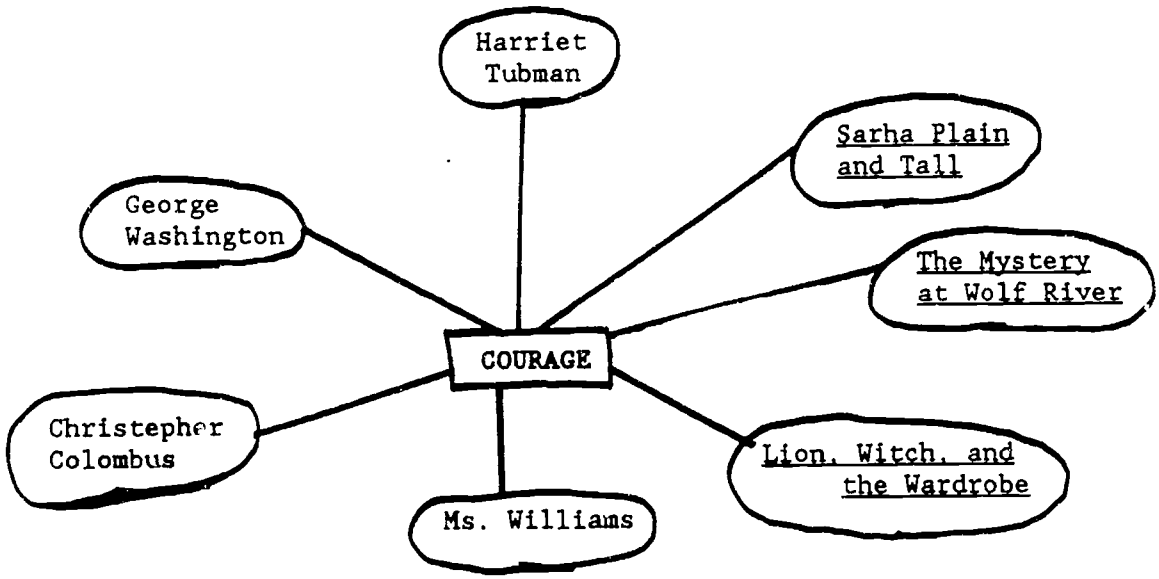
A third group of students were given an index card which told them to map the ideas courage and freedom on two sheets of paper.

The students drew the two semantic webs shown on the next page.

Conclusions

It appears that Ms. Williams understood and valued the importance of exposing students to a variety of genre. We observed her guiding the reading of three different kinds of fiction, namely fanciful fiction, historical fiction, and modern realistic fiction. Experiencing a variety of genre broadens


Freedom Train
Privacy
To be free
Revolution
lead to freedom
Harriet Tubman
Bill of
Rights
FREEDOM
independence
constitution
Aberham
Lincon
George Washington


Harriet
Tubman
Sarha Plain
and Tall
George
Washington
The Mystery
at Wolf River
COURAGE
Christepher
Colombus
Lion, Witch, and
the Wardrobe
Ms. Williams

readers' horizons and provides opportunities for readers to acquire individ literary preferences, and thereby promotes the development of individuality which is an educational goal we treasure. More specifically, each literary genre enables authors to interpret, make a personal comment about, and respond imaginatively to human experiences in different ways. Likewise each literary genre enables the reader to interpret, make a personal comment about, and respond imaginatively to human experiences in different ways.

Ms. Williams attempted to alert the students to two structural aspects of literature by questioning them about the characteristics of a specific genre and the elements of story. We observed three literature lessons during which Ms. Williams focused on the characteristics of fanciful fiction. We do not know if she taught the characteristics of historical fiction and modern realistic fiction because we were unable to observe her on a daily basis. However, when we were in the classroom and during our conversations with her no mention was made of any attempt to teach this aspect of literature. We also observed Ms. Williams's attempts to have the students consider elements of fiction: writing style, characterization, theme, plot, and setting (time and place). Although the discussions and activities focused on some aspects of these literary elements, the level of thinking achieved, in the main, was literal or interpretive. In some instances Ms. Williams encouraged creative thinking by asking the students to describe the specific images evoked by the author's use of descriptive detail. This is one way to help students understand the meaning and significance of writing style. We did not observe lessons in which students were asked to evaluate how effectively the authors developed any of the literary elements.

The elements of story (writing style, characterization, theme, plot, and setting) are constant. What changes are the ways these elements are used by

the author--from century to century, from author to author. By learning something about these constants, which constitute the most basic vocabulary of literary art, one comes to all literature with a greater depth of understanding. The way an author defines each of these basic elements of story, combines them, uses them, or minimizes or highlights them is what makes a literary work of art unique.

The very nature of the questions Ms. Williams posed and the directions she gave for the various literature-based activities suggested to us that she wanted the students to understand that there are specific criteria and techniques which one might use to analyze literature and to understand how to use these criteria and techniques to evaluate the literary merit of the selections. However, she did not identify for the students what the specific criteria and techniques are which they might use to determine the literary merit of the selections they read. Furthermore, during the course of our discussions and structured interviews she did not verbalize that these understandings and practices were instructional objectives or purposes.

Ms. Williams emphasized in various ways that she thought literature should be valued for the aesthetic experiences it offers. When asked to identify the main ideas or understandings about literature that she would want her students to have, she responded, "First of all I would want them to love literature. I would want them to have a real love of literature, an appreciation for literature." She emphasized, during the discussions we had with her preceding and following our observations of her literature lessons and during structured interviews, that she wanted her students to learn to enjoy and appreciate literature for its own sake rather than merely view it as a tool for learning other subjects such as reading and social studies. Her behavior when teaching literature gave credence to her oft-repeated statements about

these attitudes and goals for reading and studying literature. During each of the many times we observed her teach, her attitude about literature in general and more particularly about studying it was upbeat and was characterized by an exuberant pace and reading aloud dramatically. Her attitude about reading literature and responding to it so enthusiastically served as a positive model for her students. Because she showed so uninhibitedly the pleasure and enjoyment she got from reading literature, her students' attitudes about literature seemed to be influenced positively. They appeared to enjoy literature, too. The students' positive attitudes were evident in their attentiveness during the lessons whether it was the teacher reading aloud, their reading aloud or silently, or the discussions about their responses to the selections. They were also enthusiastic and thorough when engaging in interpretive and follow-up activities pertaining to the various selections they read.

It is important for children to enjoy what they read if they are going to acquire the habit of reading. Enjoyment of literature is the fundamental and crucial factor in critical aesthetic response to literature as art. It must occur before any other affective aspect of the process of responding to literature critically aesthetically. Enjoyment allows one to become involved in and to identify with the story. Involvement and identification allow one to engage in imaging and association. The process of engaging in affective responses such as enjoying, imaging, and association makes it easier and more pleasant for the reader to take an objective stance and engage in higher order cognitive thinking about literary forms, techniques, and styles of literature selections. When these affective responses are ignored and the cognitive aspects of critical response to literature are emphasized, teachers are less likely to build a firm foundation for a lifelong habit of reading.

Ms. Williams often asked the students to engage in creative writing activities in connection with the content of the stories they read. She also assigned other creative writing activities which depicted their feelings about the characters' problems and actions, as well as the feelings they thought the characters themselves felt. In addition, she varied considerably the approaches and activities she used within a specific lesson, from one lesson to the next, and for each literary selection. There was no way to predict what approach or activity she would use, but the students seemed to adapt and accept without question or confusion this variety of approaches. In fact, the very unpredictability of her approaches to the study of literature added to the vitality that typified her lessons.

She frequently offered the students options for the culminating activities. The chance to choose their activities provided the opportunity for students to make use of their individual talents and interests. It also fostered the development of self-confidence in making choices and encouraged them to think in terms of options.

Ms. Williams frequently asked the students to apply what they were reading to aspects of their own lives and the lives of others in today's world. By doing this she thought she helped the students to understand better what was happening in their lives and broadened their perspectives about what was happening to themselves and to others in today's world. The activities such as the diary entries and some of the dramatizations we observed encouraged identification of the readers with the book characters. Thus, she thought they were able to perceive vicariously the experiences of the characters. Ms. Williams thought that identification and vicarious experiences made reading literature more interesting, meaningful, and even more memorable for her students.

It is not uncommon for educators to suggest that literature be used to help students better understand, respect, and appreciate themselves and others and to cope with their problems. As was demonstrated in an earlier study (Cianciolo & Prawat. 1990), many educators believe that fiction allows the students to make the links between causes and effects in a character's life and that this linkage leads them to understand the character's behavior and make some sense of it. This insight supposedly allows a student to process the experience vicariously. Thus one may properly view literature as a replication of reality: If one wants to and/or needs to better understand why one feels or thinks as one does under certain circumstances, it is proper to compare aspects of one's life to those of the book character's life.

Identification by the reader with a character as he/she responds to a particular conflict or problem is an important component of the literary experience, but the readers must always be able to pull back when they finish the story and say that this is only an illusion of life, this is only part of the way life is. Because literature is an art, what is depicted in it is not a mirror reflection of that reality. Encouraging students to make direct application of aspects of their real life circumstances to what the literary artist has changed into an illusion of real life through selective interpretation is a misuse of literature and transmits misinformation about the nature of literature.

One of the strong points of Ms. Williams approach to teaching in general, as well as teaching literature, in particular, was her ability to help students develop collaborative learning skills. On numerous occasions, she divided her class into collaborative groups. Each time the basis for forming these groups varied, as did the sizes of the groups. Sometimes the group was based on common interests, other times it was based on diverse abilities, and

occasionally each group was determined by seat assignments. During an interview Ms. Williams stated that before the end of the year each student would have been in a collaborative group with every other student in that classroom.

The literary selections chosen by Ms. Williams for in-depth study and for pleasure reading seemed to be of keen interest to the students. They talked enthusiastically about the stories and participated wholeheartedly in discussions and activities pertaining to the selections they read. We did not observe nor did the students indicate in any way that Ms. Williams encouraged them to select and study individual titles. We observed students select individual books of interest to them from the school library, but we did not see Ms. Williams make any reference to these individual selections nor did we see her ask students to make any connections among their selections with anything going on in the classroom. Therefore, it does not appear that Ms. Williams encouraged development of individual reading interests and tastes by capitalizing on individual selections in ongoing curricular activities. We do know, however, that some students had reached Stage 4 (as defined by Parsons, 1989) of critical aesthetic response to literature because of statements some students made during their individual interviews. For instance, Stacy said,

> I read books a lot. I really like books, and I get all different kinds of books. I don't like particularly one kind. I just read the summary of it, and if it tantalizes me, I read it. If I wonder what might happen, or sometimes like with modern books about people's lives who are my age I like to read those because I can.... What's the word? Well anyway, I understand it.

Having achieved this stage of critical aesthetic response to literature could be due to a number of factures, such as approaches to literature used by previous teachers, the school librarian's skill in motivating children to read, and the quality of the school library collection. It is also possible,

and quite likely considering Ms. Williams knowledge and enthusiasm for children's literature, that she does encourage the development of individual reading interests and tastes, but we did not observe her doing this.

Ms. Williams seemed knowledgeable about certain aspects of literature as a subject, particularly the elements of story and the characteristics of fictional genre. Because of her repeated emphasis on the literal and implied comprehension of the content or themes of literary selections and the use of literature as a tool for learning other subjects, Ms. Williams did not seem to view literature as an art.

Ms. Williams' questions and activities elicited primarily literal and interpretive level thinking. She seemed to lack knowledge about and/or understanding of how to pose questions which would elicit higher order thinking. Aside from the teacher's knowledge about literature, the very heart of teaching children to be critical readers of literature seems to be the ability to design questions which elicit critical aesthetic response and also encourage the children to continue to advance developmentally in this kind of response to literature.

The syntactical structure of questions one asks and statements one makes about literature via the content of the questions can model critical aesthetic response to literature. The questions one poses can also motivate students to acquire new and/or more information or new attitudes about literature, to compare and contrast this new information and attitudes about literature and their responses to it with what they already know or value. Questions can also help students to draw meaningful relationships and to apply or transfer those relationships when evaluating (judging) the quality of literary selections they are rereading or are reflecting on.

Implications

This was a descriptive/observational study of how one teacher teaches literature, so we did not engage in any intervention techniques. On several occasions Ms. Williams stated that she would like us to return when this study was completed so that she could explore with us ways in which she might improve and change her approach to literature. Thus it appeared that she would be willing to study how to help students develop critical aesthetic response to literature.

It did not appear that Ms. Williams helped students recognize that there are criteria and techniques which should be considered to determine the merits of the literary selections they read. It is also apparent that Ms. Williams needs assistance in learning about the role that questioning plays in eliciting higher order thinking, especially critical aesthetic response to literature. Our experience in conducting a two-year intervention study of teaching and learning critical aesthetic response to literature (Cianciolo & Quirk, 1992b) has demonstrated that these were common problems of the elementary school teachers we have worked with, not problems unique to Ms. Williams. Therefore, we believe that the study of critical reading of literature and of questioning should be components of preservice and inservice education.

If the study of literature is to be taught correctly, teachers and students must be alerted to the fact that literature is an art. It means, as Michael J. Parsons emphasized in his seminal book How We Understand Art: A Cognitive Developmental Account of Aesthetic Experience, that teachers and students must learn about aesthetic response to literature (Parsons, 1989, p. xi). They must learn how children and adults, too, come to understand (literature as) art. They need to recognize that there is something serious in (literary) art to be understood, especially as it pertains to aspects such

as (a) the subject (topic) depicted in the story, poem, drama, or literary biography; (b) the feelings or emotions expressed in the literary selection; (c) the language, form, and style used in the literary piece; and (d) the judgment one makes in evaluating its quality. (Parsons, 1989).

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