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MID-SOUTH LITERACY JOURNAL

The University of Alabama at Birmingham, in partnership with The Mid-South Reading/Writing Institute, has established this peer-reviewed online journal, *The Mid-South Literacy Journal* (MLJ). This new online, peer-reviewed journal is dedicated to disseminating and extending scholarship through original research and practice articles in literacy education. MLJ highlights constructivist-based literacy theory and practice that places the child at the center of the learning process and furthers the legacy of Dr. Maryann Manning. Each journal features a focus on teachers' perspectives about issues in the field along with contemporary releases in children's literature. Utilizing a combination of real-world classroom applications and concrete theoretical framework, the journal provides bi-yearly publications each fall and spring.

MANUSCRIPT AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

For more information about submitting an original manuscript to MLJ, visit:
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MID-SOUTH LITERACY JOURNAL

Volume 1

Issue 1

Fall 2015

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Dr. Maryann Manning's achievements were significant, the products of her boundless energy, unfaltering determination and deep commitment to children. Dr. Manning's footprint can be seen in the many projects that the UAB School of Education is known for today. Dr. Manning authored numerous books, book chapters, monographs, and articles that have guided and inspired educators throughout Alabama and beyond. Organizations around the world esteemed her with awards and accolades. She was particularly honored and excited to serve as a future president of the International Reading Association. At the time of her death, she was working at a literacy conference in Indonesia, doing what she loved.

Overview of Issue

True to the values and beliefs that impassioned Dr. Manning's life, this online, open access, literacy journal reflects and continues her commitment to authentic literacy practices. The manuscripts chosen for this first issue promote effective and innovative research and practices in literacy education (P-16). The articles cover research and theory, pedagogical principles, and recent trends and issues within the field of literacy education.

Sherron Roberts from the University of Central Florida and Patricia Crawford from the University of Pittsburgh provide a meta-analysis of the research and works of Dr. Maryann Manning, internationally known for her expertise in reading research. Recurring themes associated with emergent literacy, family literacy, constructivist literacy practices, assessment issues, and policy issues are described in detail.

Kelly Hill from the University of Alabama at Birmingham describes a mixed methods study addressing the frequency and implementation practices of RtI Tier II reading interventions for Hispanic kindergarten English learners. Research results demonstrate the disproportionately high number of Hispanic kindergarten students identified for RtI Tier II reading intervention and the over emphasis on a skills-based instructional approach for all students. This article represents a powerful example of the continued need for quality professional development among early childhood and elementary educators in identifying, designing, and implementing individualized literacy instruction matching the learner's literacy strengths and areas of support.

Stephen Krashen, professor emeritus from the University of Southern California, comments on the International Reading Association's (2014) position statement on leisure reading. Krashen highlights a variety of studies establishing the significant results and confirmed success of implementing sustained silent reading. This article concludes with recommendations for supporting school and public libraries in order to offset poverty's negative influence on reading.

Jennifer Summerlin from the University of Alabama at Birmingham describes the importance of incorporating controversial children's literature in the middle school classroom for stimulating critical classroom discourse. The author provides insights into the benefits of incorporating books dealing with sensitive topics for increasing students' knowledge, decreasing students' vulnerability, and increasing empathy for victims of sexual abuse and trafficking.

Marilee Manning provides a personal epilogue and tribute to her mother, Dr. Maryann Manning in which she describes her mother's achievements and teachings which have resonated throughout both her personal and professional life.

The authors who contributed to this first issue examined the elements for cultivating the literary lives and services afforded to students and families of varying socioeconomic levels, life experiences, and interests. It is our hope that the featured manuscripts will stimulate discussion and encourage greater literary equity and access for all.

A Legacy of Literacy: Learning from the Life of Dr. Maryann Manning

Sherron Roberts
University of Central Florida

Patricia Crawford
University of Pittsburgh

As a tribute to the late Maryann Manning, this piece provides insights into the lifetime of scholarly contributions of our beloved friend and colleague. By reviewing the entirety of her publications, the authors arrived at four recurring themes: *Emergent and family literacy, Literacy strategies and skills in a constructivist framework, Assessment issues, and Policy issues*. These themes provide a powerful testament to the life of Dr. Maryann Manning.

Keywords: emergent literacy, family literacy, constructivism, assessment and policy issues

Introduction

How well I (Crawford) remember the first time I met Maryann Manning in an exhibit hall at a 1990s convention of the International Reading Association. After handing me a copy of Teaching Prek-8, for which she was a contributing editor, she asked me about my work. I described my current doctoral research and commented on how much I admired her writing. Not unexpectedly, she responded with a kind smile and a "thank you." However, what happened next was completely unexpected. After I walked on to see the next booth, I was surprised to see Maryann following me down the aisle. "Wait," she said. "I want to tell you something." She continued, "Thank you for letting me know you like my writing. Now I want you to know that I look forward to reading yours." I looked at her through my astonished, unpublished eyes. "You have good things to say. You just wait," she said. "Soon it will be your turn and we'll be reading your work. Don't worry, dear. You'll see. It will happen." Then, with a pat on the back, she was gone.

I left that exhibit hall with a new sense of hope and purpose related to my writing. At the time, I was overwhelmed by the kindness and encouragement that she, so well written and prominent in the field, had offered to me, a true newbie. What I didn't know at the time was that this was vintage Maryann Manning. She was a person who seized every opportunity to encourage others; to welcome others to the field and to help build their confidence that they could be a contributor, too. What I also didn't know at the time, was that I would be fortunate enough to have many more opportunities to work with Maryann, and that in each one, she would show herself to be that same welcoming, kind, encouraging person I met in the exhibit hall.

Together, we knew Dr. Maryann Manning as a strong, remarkably kind, and smart woman who consistently encouraged us in our journeys in academia. She was someone who could share strong, deep thoughts in clear, down-to-earth ways, and always with good humor. She was a person who supported many in their professional and personal lives. We have learned to no longer be amazed by the myriad of people we have encountered who share stories about the many diverse ways in which Maryann also supported them.

While she left this world much, much too soon, we still have a great deal to learn from her productive life of scholarship. Of course, we could not help approaching the writing of this manuscript with a strong bias of heartache and love for Manning's work. We thought we knew her work from reading her columns, articles, and books and from attending her presentation sessions. We knew her, liked her work, and followed her long before there were ways to "like" and "follow" one another on social media. Therefore, we greeted the research and writing of this piece with an exciting sense of pride and respect to re-discover the fuller scope of Manning's contributions.

Our Approach

Our first steps in approaching a way to honor, summarize, and synthesize her scholarly work was to obtain Manning's curriculum vitae which provided the start for our research with a list of recent publications. We next assembled an annotated bibliography of her published work. Then, following the guidance of Bogdan and Biklen (2006), we used a constant-comparative method to arrive at common themes, subsequently noting and coding thematic categories. Independent of each other, we color-coded each publication for possible themes. In this way, preliminary formulations were separately discovered by each of the authors, so that when we shared them, we realized that we had similar topics and common themes.

We then worked to craft a title that incorporated the breadth of topics that would fall under each theme. For example, one author had a notation related to Whole language and the other author had one of Strategies with constructivist framework, so the final theme of *Literacy strategies and skills in a constructivist framework* was determined. While we have not accounted for the intensity of each publication, order of authorship, or the overlapping topics, the following themes provided a framework by which we could learn from Manning's literacy legacy: *Emergent and family literacy issues*, *Literacy strategies and skills in a constructivist framework*, *Assessment issues*, and *Policy issues*.

As one might imagine, many publications could fit into several of the themes we identified. For example, an article about DIBELS was categorized primarily under the theme of *Assessment issues*, but its content absolutely overlaps with *Emergent literacy* and *Policy issues* as well. As a means of uncovering the work of Manning and honor her legacy of literacy, these themes will be examined.

Emergent and Family Literacy

So much of Manning's work has linkages with the academic worlds of early childhood education and care. This is not surprising, since her research and teaching were grounded in the tenets of Piagetian theory. She believed that even very young children could be active and capable constructors of knowledge (Kirkland & Manning, 2012; Manning & Kirkland, 2010; Manning, M., Manning, G., Long, & Wolfson, 1987). Furthermore, she strongly believed that literacy learning was a psycholinguistic activity; one that happened best within natural, authentic, and contextually-sensitive social contexts (Kirkland & Manning, 2010; Manning, Morrison, &

Camp, 2009). These foundational beliefs were well-aligned with the concepts of emergent literacy (Clay, 1991; Manning, 1994). Manning believed that children were on an extended continuum of literacy learning, which started in the earliest days of life and continued through the time they became competent and conventional readers and writers (Kirkland & Manning, 2012). Children who were still learning to navigate texts were viewed as emergent readers and their approximations of reading and writing texts were considered to be important steps in the journey to becoming literate in a conventional sense.

These important belief systems situated Manning in the field of early childhood and helped to inform the many contributions she made. Since she believed that literacy learning started long before the school years, she often engaged in research that explored the impact of families, culture, and social factors on children's early learning. This can be seen in her co-authored pieces that examine important topics like parents' perspectives on reading aloud (Manning, M., Manning, G., & Cody, 1988) and the role that socioeconomic status played in young children's understanding of print (Manning, M., Manning, G., & Long, 1992). Again and again, her work supported and conveyed her strong beliefs that children did not learn in a vacuum, but that their lives and learning were intertwined; thus highlighting the significance of diversity and both community and individual family circumstances on literacy and learning (Camp, Kirkland, & Manning, 2008; Manning, M., Long, & Manning, G., 1989; Manning et al., 1992).

Manning frequently explored support systems present within home and family literacy, and then offered practical suggestions for extending these supports in the curriculum during the early school years. An example of this can be seen in her study of children's awareness of connections between speech and written language, prior to the time in which they begin to use invented spelling in kindergarten writing (Manning & Kamii, 1999). Likewise, Manning made significant contributions related to the role of environmental print.

In her column, *A world of words* (2004a), Manning provided an overview of the impact of environmental print in the everyday life, media, and online worlds of toddlers and very young children; noting that "print is everywhere" (p. 78) and that it impacts children's conceptions of the connections between print and its meaning. She then applied this lesson to the classroom, indicating practical ways in which early childhood teachers might exploit the use of environmental print and use it as a basis for extended literacy learning. Later, Kirkland and Manning (2010) would revisit this important concept, noting that environmental print "provides a natural transition between home and school" (p. 268), and suggesting that early childhood educators should hold fast to such tried and true strategies that support literacy learning.

Manning was passionate and persuasive in her call to support children's earliest forays into language and literacy. She continuously urged parents, teachers, and other caring adults to insure that children had access to a diverse range of high quality books and many opportunities in which they could respond to them (Manning, 2002, 2006; Manning & Manning, 1996, arguing that "[c]hildren's literature should be the backbone of any reading program" (Manning et al., 1987, p. 12) . She believed that supporting children's literacy learning was a shared and ongoing responsibility for all. As she wrote with Kirkland:

If we are to realize the hope of having everyone become a reader, we must play vital roles in children's lives from the moment they are born. Just as we work to offer good nutrition for children, we should provide experiences that begin a lifelong love of literacy. (Kirkland & Manning, 2012, p. 216)

Given Dr. Manning's passion for supporting the work of families, schools, and communities in early literacy education, we think it seems especially fitting that The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Maryann Manning Family Literacy Center was opened in 2014 on the campus of UAB, where Maryann devoted so much of her professional life. Serving as a hub to support a broad range of literacy initiatives for families and community members, the establishment of this center insures that the broad-ranging and well-crafted work that Dr. Manning forged in the areas of early and family literacy will continue to impact many lives in the years to come (Chambers, 2014).

Literacy Strategies and Skills in a Constructivist Framework

Within the broader field of *Emergent or family literacy*, we identified many articles and publications that dealt with early literacy particularly as it pertained to families, parents, and parent-school relationships. Further, we coded many of the manuscripts published under her authorship as extending beyond early literacy concerns and the importance of family literacy. Together, we decided to include publications wherein literacy applications were made generally within schools under an agreed-upon title that would include Manning's whole language stance: *Literacy strategies and skills in a constructivist framework*.

The publications included in this theme provide an exploration of an innovative strategy or research related to specific areas of sustained silent reading or spelling skills. Within this second theme, several articles remain highly cited as well. In one article cited by 111 others to date and published in *Literacy Research and Instruction*, Manning, G., and Manning, M. (1984) worked to determine what model of recreational reading was most effective. Examining 24 teachers and their 415 students who were randomly assigned to a control group, a sustained silent reading group, a student-teacher conference group, or to a peer interaction group, the authors determined that the most effective methodology in terms of attitude toward reading proved to be those students involved in a peer-interaction recreational reading group.

As we read, re-read, and processed her many publications, we were continually struck by the level of scholarship, the smart research design, and the underlying motivation of Manning to make a difference in the everyday literacy lives of school children. Another observation comes in the high level of journals and research venues in which she was published, while at the same time, we know her level of involvement in local schools with local teachers and her widely distributed and highly read monthly practitioner columns published in *Teaching PreK-8*. In an era long before blogs and long before research-based decisions, Manning was ensuring a monthly 'blast' to teachers everywhere so that teachers could be made aware of timely and well-researched outcomes that could improve the daily literacy interactions of teachers with early childhood and elementary students.

One of Manning's books (Manning, Manning, & Long, 1994) that falls into this theme of *Literacy strategies and skills* is *Theme immersion: Inquiry-based curriculum in elementary and middle schools*. This highly cited book has earned a place in the literature by providing a solid rationale for inquiry based teaching, long before project-based learning (David, 2008; Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006), in terms of meeting children's developmental needs. Manning's book also

provides a number of real life examples, profiles, and interviews which exemplify Manning's theme immersion separate from a thematic unit or text set approach. Although written 20 years ago, this piece will surprise current audiences because it reads as fresh, timely, and innovative as it did then.

A more recent article (Giambo, Gonzales, Szecsi, Thirumurthy, & Manning, 2006/2007) offers practitioners successful teaching strategies for use with ELL. "Opening up to the issues: Preparing preservice teachers to work effectively with English Language Learners" provides teachers with culturally responsive strategies that fit the developmental needs of students involved in second language acquisition. Even more impressive is the work of Manning and Lewis (2010) as the authors provide a scholarly treatment of past and current research as they revisited the role of sustained silent reading.

Across the decades of active scholarly contributions, the intersections of Manning's personal and professional interests related to *Literacy strategies and skills* included (a) sustained silent reading (i.e., Manning & Lewis, 2010; Manning, M., & Manning, G., 1981; Manning, G., & Manning, M., 1984); (b) early writing strategies (i.e., Manning, M., Manning, G., & Morrison, 1995; Manning, M., Manning, G., Long, & Kamii, 1993; Manning, M., Manning, G., Long, & Kamii, 1995; Manning & Manning, 1991; Manning et al., 1987; Manning, M., Manning, G., & Hughes, 1987); and (c) the related topics of phonemic awareness, phonics, and invented spelling (i.e., Kamii & Manning, 1999; Kamii & Manning, 2002; Kamii, Long, & Manning, 2001; Kamii, Long, Manning, M., & Manning, G., 1990; Manning, 2004b; Manning, 2005; Manning & Kamii, 2000; Manning, M., Manning, G., & Kamii, 1988; Manning & Underbakke, 2005).

Kamii and Manning's (2002) article, published in the *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* and entitled "Phonemic awareness and beginning reading and writing," has been cited 47 times according to *Google Scholar*. This article shares two important findings: (a) kindergarteners' ability to successfully make sense of oral-segmentation tasks, such as "key" and "monkey" (Vernon & Ferreiro, 1999) seems to depend on their level of knowledge with our writing system, and (b) kindergarteners' ability to segment words into phonemes is not a prerequisite for learning to write.

Most importantly, Kamii and Manning (2002) noted a significant correlation between the writing task and the phonemic awareness of the 68 kindergarteners in this study. In making application of Manning's research, one of her last publications, entitled "Teaching strategies: Worksheets, worksheets, worksheets," co-authored with her daughter, highlights the need to move away from the everyday redundancy of worksheets and move toward contextualized, authentic reading and writing experiences (Ransom & Manning, 2013).

Cited 45 times to date per *Google Scholar*, the Kamii et al. (1990) article focuses on the invented spelling of English and Spanish-speaking students. This publication continues to influence the field and surely points out how ahead of the times Dr. Manning and her colleagues were in their genuine quest to help elementary students make sense of reading and writing tasks.

Whether the audience of the publication targeted top international literacy researchers or local Alabama literacy professionals, Manning always respected the need to bring literacy strategies or research about skills around to the educational implications for teachers because that is where positive change is affected. This is evident in Manning and Kamii's (2000) *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* article entitled: "Whole Language Versus Isolated Phonic Instruction: A Longitudinal Study in Kindergarten with Reading and Writing Tasks".

In this study, 38 kindergarteners were assigned reading and writing tasks and interviewed five times across one academic calendar, with half receiving isolated phonics instruction and half

in a whole language context of strategies. Findings revealed that the whole language group made significant progress in both reading and writing, did not regress and were not confused, and maintained more developmental coherence in light of Piagetian developmental stages.

Even though this was a formal research study, published in a research journal, Manning and Kamii provided related educational implications for teachers of young children that included whole language practices, such as facilitating phonics instruction in meaningful contexts, reading aloud to children for a total of an hour, writing demonstrations, journal writing, singing, chanting, and publishing the children's books. Descriptions of what whole language teachers practice is captured within the pages of this riveting research study. Surely, these salient implications lead to this article being cited to date 21 times.

Another book that fell into the theme of *Literacy strategies and skills* is an NEA publication, which in itself is a prestigious honor. The book, *Reading and writing in the primary grades: Analysis and action* (Manning, 1987) provides teachers with many classroom activities for reading, writing, and critical thinking, yet calls on teachers to reflect and critically analyze for themselves the way we teach or facilitate reading and writing processes in the elementary schools. Further evidence of her ongoing influence and positive intentions can be found in her practical, yet research-based columns in *Teaching K-8* from 2004 to 2006.

Assessment Issues

Manning found many avenues for examining literacy throughout her very productive career. She explored literacy through today's important lens of assessment and evaluation; many of these manuscripts have been highly cited as well. Her collaborative work on assessing the reading interests of boys and girls has been cited at least 26 times (Wolfson, Manning, G., & Manning, M., 1984) likely because of its innovative way of revisiting what children have to say about their reading interests. Another publication is a chapter on spelling assessment published by the founders of the whole language theoretical framework, Ken and Yetta Goodman (Manning, M., & Manning, G., 1993). This chapter provides theoretically sound and practical advice to teachers about how to frame and execute spelling assessment in their classrooms in a way that contributes to students' reading and writing progress.

Dr. Manning also published a book in 2006 by Heinemann that focused on assessment issues. The book, entitled *Scientific reading assessment: Targeted intervention and follow-up instruction* (Manning, Chumley, & Underbakke, 2006), provides literacy professionals, coaches, and teachers first with a chapter on what we believe about reading, then another that addresses what we believe about reading assessments that takes time to point out the specific types, applications, and pitfalls of current reading assessments. Then, in true form, Manning and her colleagues provide 35 specific reading strategy lessons. More importantly, in an age of high stakes testing, Manning et al. (2006) pushed against the grain ensuring that each reading strategy lesson specifically incorporated authentic children's literature. Then, taking this tactic even further and in a typical Manning vein, the authors provided extensions for family literacy activities to promote reading growth.

Most often, however, in analyzing the entire body of Manning's scholarly work, many articles from the current decade stood out as courageous, intellectually stimulating, and very relevant to district and state level literacy professionals, teachers, reading coaches, and administrators who are charged with using DIBELS, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (Kaminski & Good, 1996; 1998).

One article published in the *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* in 2005 (Kamii & Manning, 2005) asked the important question that many were simultaneously asking: Is DIBELS a tool for evaluating student learning? Approaching her response to DIBELS in a rational, methodical, and smart fashion, Kamii and Manning's research study of 208 kindergarteners and first graders found that two subtests of DIBELS, the Phonemic Segmentation Fluency and the Nonsense Word Fluency subtests, provided no evidence for use in evaluating literacy.

Then, as a follow-up to the assessment issues related to DIBELS, Manning, Kamii, and Kato (2006) wrote a chapter on this pervasive and powerful early childhood assessment entitled, "DIBELS: Not justifiable" in another book edited by Goodman. This controversial book contained an invigorating forward by research powerhouse, Pearson, and included pieces by well-known literacy researchers such as her close collaborator, Kamii, as well as Flurkey, Tierney, and Wilde.

This authorship really reinforces a pattern that we noticed over and over again as we analyzed the work of Dr. Manning. As a literacy educator and researcher, Manning was revered and respected by the top researchers and influential thinkers throughout her career as a literacy educator. From the beginning, she posed the tough questions and tackled answering them in an undeniably rational and logical manner so as to find possible solutions that added to the body of literature, but more significantly, gave teachers and literacy professionals clear answers for smart implementation.

Furthermore, as she gained stature and prominence, she remained true to her beliefs and to her research to make certain that the authentic literacy experiences of children everywhere were not discounted or usurped by the artificiality of tests such as DIBELS. We note, proudly, that she found many ways to remain relevant despite the changing landscape of literacy instruction, testing, and the intense financial gains made by testing corporations and publishing companies.

In 2005, the International Reading Association (now ILA: International Literacy Association) awarded their very prestigious Service Award to Dr. Manning, which one might note occurred during this same time of intense researching and writing these widely read and somewhat controversial articles, chapters, and an entire book focused on reading assessments, DIBELS, and corresponding curricular and policy influences. Even now, she ensures that good works in the name of literacy education continue by endowing the ILA Maryann Manning Outstanding Volunteer Service Award, which is an annual award given to those with lifelong dedication to local, state, or provincial ILA councils (See <http://www.reading.org/literacy-daily/ira/post/rty/2013/09/11/in-loving-memory-of-maryann-manning#sthash.5QaVVk4R.dpuf>).

Policy Issues

The term "policy" is not used extensively in the writings of Dr. Manning. Yet, the totality of her writing indicates that she engaged in her work with a constant awareness of the role that educational policy plays in impacting the nature and effectiveness of teachers' work and the processes and products of children's learning. Manning believed that the shaping of policy at both the macro and micro levels should be guided by research and a set of well-grounded beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning. Manning et al. (1987) posed the following question and response: Why do some teachers inspire children's learning and others stifle it? It depends, we believe, on the assumptions teachers have about knowledge and how it is constructed, the

understandings they have about teaching and learning, and how children grow and develop as literary learners.

As described previously, Manning believed passionately in the principles of constructivism and psycholinguistic theory, which strongly impacted every aspect of her scholarship, teaching, and service. These fundamental beliefs can be found in her perceptions of the ways in which best practices could be implemented in work with children. In summary, these core beliefs included the following:

- Children are active meaning makers, who learn best in environments that are meaning-centered, social, and purposeful.
- Early childhood programs should be shaped by the principles of developmentally appropriate practice.
- Literacy learning should occur in print-rich environments in which children have ready access to high quality literature.
- Children learn best when learning is presented in a holistic manner.
- Schools should insure that students have a content-rich curriculum, in which children have the opportunity to engage in all the content areas.
- The arts are central to children's learning and development, and should be given a prominent area in the curriculum.
- Assessments for learning should be developmentally appropriate, aligned with children's learning, and used in ways that are accurate, humane, and ethical.

These passionate beliefs often led her to critique certain policies and practices that were occurring in elementary schools. Early in her career, she criticized practices such as inappropriate classroom arrangements, standardized testing, and homogeneous grouping. With her coauthor, she declared these to be an "assault on childhood" (Manning, M., & Manning, G., 1981, p. 84). Many years later, she continued to raise a strong voice in opposition to those policies and practices she considered to be at best inappropriate and in some cases outright debilitating to children's welfare, noting "[t]he authors believe that the lack of improvement in reading comprehension scores is the result of prevailing behavioristic practices in many classrooms" (Kato & Manning, 2007, p. 238). In this same piece, the authors stated:

It is not a coincidence that students who do well on reading comprehension tests know a lot about the world. They are students who have had a rich curriculum that was more than just memorizing phonics rules and reading with a stopwatch. (pp. 238-239)

Words such as these, along with her outright critique of DIBELS and other standardized assessments for young literacy learners, were bold in light of the educational policy and political climate in the post-No Child Left Behind era in which they were expressed (Manning et al., 2006).

For Dr. Manning, policy issues were woven with a sense of praxis. Although she could offer strong critiques of policy, she did not find this to be enough. Instead, she worked tenaciously to create change and improve educational practice in schools and communities. She did this by working from the top down, by conducting cutting-edge research that could be used to shape policy, and by working tirelessly with practitioners in every arena. Through her writings, presentations, conference organization, and active involvement in professional associations, she sought to provide researchers, teacher educators, and practitioners with the knowledge base, strategies, and perspectives that could help them to also help create change and positively impact the lives of children in their own spheres of influence.

Concluding Remarks

Dr. Manning, no doubt, was an amazing and prolific scholar as evidenced by the literacy legacy that remains even in her physical absence. The themes we identified in reviewing the influential and broad scope of her work provided a means for us to examine her scholarship: *Emergent and family literacy issues, Literacy strategies and skills within a constructivist framework, Assessment issues, and Policy issues.*

Alongside her magnanimous contributions to charity, her work to establish scholarships, her dedication to create the MidSouth Reading and Writing Conference for area teachers that has grown beyond any imagined boundaries, her travels to represent IRA and promote global literacy initiatives, her day-in and day-out generosity with colleagues and doctoral students somehow Dr. Manning found the time to write. With all of her practical applications and her involvement in various elementary schools, one might imagine that she would be so busy living an exemplary life of a literacy educator that these important activities would usurp the time needed to do research. Manning was such a brilliant scholar and such a bundle of energy that she never neglected her role as a professor to contribute to the field.

Somehow she found the time to research important problems and solutions and to write engaging articles, chapters, columns, and books that continue to shape and reshape literacy practices and policies. How can we ever thank her for her scholarly contributions and for the literacy legacy that she leaves behind?

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Misguided Intervention—RTI for Emergent Bilingual Students in Kindergarten

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This sequential explanatory mixed methods study examined the assessment and identification practices for RTI Tier II reading intervention in kindergarten classrooms that contained Hispanic students learning English. The purpose of this research was to examine the frequency in providing RTI reading interventions and how they were implemented in kindergarten with Hispanic children who were learning English. The overarching mixed methods question was: What is the frequency of RTI Tier II reading interventions for Hispanic kindergarten English learners and how are they implemented? The first phase of the study included a quantitative survey for all kindergarten teachers in a school district in central Alabama. The second, qualitative phase included an in-depth multiple case study analysis of four kindergarten teachers. Additionally, assessment results of 12 Hispanic ELL focus students were analyzed. Finally, cross-case analysis was conducted on the teacher case studies and focus students. This study shed light on the instructional practices involving RTI Tier II reading interventions for Hispanic ELLs in kindergarten.

Keywords: emergent bilingual learners, RtI, reading intervention, early childhood education

Introduction

Since the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), many school districts have implemented Response to Intervention/Instruction (RTI) in an effort to meet federal mandates (IDEA, 2004). Assessment results are used as an indicator for student placement in RTI Tier II reading intervention groups (Bender & Shores, 2007).

According to the National Clearinghouse for English language learners (ELLs), there are over five million ELLs currently enrolled in schools in the United States, over 20,000 in Alabama K-12 schools (National Clearing House for English Language Acquisition, 2013). Students who are learning English as an additional language are now commonly identified as Emergent Bilingual (EB) learners (García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008). The academic achievement of EBs is often below their native English-speaking peers, and children of Hispanic descent are often farther behind than other EBs (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008). Children learning English have the challenge of learning academic content and language simultaneously, thus can take longer to become readers and writers (Allington & Cunningham, 2003). Poverty also plays a role. In 2011, 25.3% of Hispanics were living in poverty in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Emergent Bilingual Learners Who Struggle as Readers

For many years, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has documented that students of diverse backgrounds have lower achievement in reading (Au, 2002). Over 50% of children who enter school with primary language other than English score in the bottom third on reading competencies (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005). In Alabama, 50% of Hispanic 4th graders scored below basic on NAEP reading assessments; only 16% were proficient or advanced. Kindergarten EB learners who have been identified as struggling readers are often placed in intervention groups as a part of Response to Intervention.

Response to Intervention

RTI incorporates assessment and intervention within a tiered prevention system to maximize student achievement. Bender and Shores (2007) defined RTI as “a process of implementing high-quality, scientifically validated instructional practices based on learner needs, monitoring student progress, and adjusting instruction based on the student’s response” (p. 7). Schools identify students at risk for learning difficulties, monitor progress, provide evidence-based or scientifically-based interventions, and adjust the intensity and nature of the interventions depending on students’ responsiveness.

Tier I instruction is the core curriculum provided for all students (Bender & Shores, 2007). Tier II targets students who are struggling. This focused intervention is provided in groups of two to three students with weekly progress monitoring (Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L., 2005). Tier II should last between 20 days and 10 weeks (Bender & Shores, 2007). If progress is not made in Tier II, students receive one-on-one intervention in Tier III.

Current Study

This article focuses on the assessment and identification practices for RTI reading intervention involving Hispanic kindergarten EB learners and stems from the more comprehensive dissertation study exploring RTI for Hispanic EB kindergarten students (Hill, 2013). The purpose of this study was to examine the frequency of RTI and implementation and assessment practices.

Methods

For this study, an explanatory sequential (Quan→QUAL) mixed methods design was employed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The quantitative data informed the selection of participants in the qualitative phase.

Phase One: Quantitative Research

I designed a quantitative survey as a systematic method for data collection with a goal of predicting population attributes, perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors. I combined a quantitative survey with follow-up interviews (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Quantitative sampling. The quantitative sample included 117 kindergarten teachers in Shelter County. Five teachers were on leave and three team-taught and were not responsible for reading instruction; this left 109 total participants.

Quantitative data collection. The survey was distributed to 109 kindergarten teachers at 14 different elementary schools. Frequency data were collected, such as the number of Hispanic

students in each classroom, how many received RTI Tier II reading intervention, duration of Tier II, and the progress of Hispanic EBs' reading.

Quantitative data analysis. Survey data were entered into Excel; variables were assigned a numeric code to identify meaning. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze frequencies and measures of central tendency (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Themes from the open-ended response portion of the survey also emerged and were coded.

Phase Two: Qualitative Research

I sought to understand how teachers assessed and identified students, then planned and implemented RTI for Hispanic kindergarteners. Data included: interviews, observations, and document review (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 2007).

Qualitative tradition of inquiry. The specific tradition of inquiry was case study analysis (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). The case was defined as the teacher who provided reading intervention to Hispanic kindergarten EBs. I analyzed data within each case, across multiple settings and contexts to understand similarities and differences among cases (Yin, 2009).

Qualitative sampling. Purposeful sampling provided information-rich cases with the greatest potential for generating insight about the research of interest (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). A criterion sampling strategy included only kindergarten teachers in central Alabama who currently taught RTI Tier II reading intervention lessons to Hispanic EB children (Hatch, 2002). Teachers who identified a high number of Hispanic students receiving RTI Tier II reading intervention and indicated that their students had made adequate to exceptional reading progress were sought as possible participants. I employed a maximum variation sampling strategy by including teachers from different elementary schools with varying years of experience and levels of education. I then selected 12 focus students from the four classrooms.

Qualitative data collection. A survey, which included an open-ended response question related to reading for EBs, was sent to all kindergarten teachers in the district. Survey results provided a better overall understanding of interventions taking place throughout the district. During face-to-face interviews with each of four teacher participants data were collected. Two observations were conducted in each of the participants' classrooms during RTI intervention with the focus children. I observed the physical setting, participants, activities, and interactions during the lesson. Conversations and subtle factors, such as nonverbal communication which occurred during the intervention lessons, were also observed.

Archival records and document reviews were the final forms of data collection (Yin, 2012). For the 12 focus students, I collected pre-existing assessments from multiple points spanning the entire school year including: DIBELS (*Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills*) results, concepts about print, alphabet assessments, running records, phonological and phonemic awareness inventories, *ACCESS for ELLs*, and writing samples. These assessments aided in understanding student responses to interventions and the scope of their progress. Since it was not feasible to observe every intervention lesson, reviewing lesson plans allowed me to develop an understanding of the case and implementation practices of RTI Tier II throughout the year. Through document review, I gleaned information, details, and connections between Tier I and II reading lessons.

Qualitative data analysis. I transcribed audio recordings of the interviews, reviewed transcripts, and re-read transcripts multiple times to ensure a deep understanding. During the interviews, I took field notes of my impressions, reactions, and tentative interpretations and later interpreted my observational and reflective notes. I analyzed lesson plans from each teacher and made notes in the margins. I reviewed transcripts, observation data, and lesson plans and bracketed the words, phrases, and descriptions that commonly occurred. Themes and sub-themes emerged and were coded. I created data coding tables for each teacher participant as well as data tables for each focus student to record student performance on multiple assessments throughout the year.

Finally, I used cross-case analysis to allow findings to accumulate across the cases (Yin, 2009). I created cross-case data tables and graphs that displayed data collected from individual cases in a similar framework to represent the multiple case studies (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Analysis of the entire collection of tables allowed me to draw cross-case conclusions.

Quantitative Findings

Setting

The setting for this research was a county district in Alabama, with rural and suburban communities. At the time of this study, the population of this county was just under 200,000. In 2011, 6% of the total population was Hispanic.

The school district was comprised of 35 schools, with 14 elementary schools. In the 2012-2013 school year the district served 28,642 students, 2,247 of whom were in kindergarten. At the time of this study, the district had the highest population of EBs in the state of Alabama at 9.75%. Within the district, there were 48 different languages and 66 countries represented, and 3,265 students spoke a language other than English in the home. English as a Second Language (ESL) services were provided to 1,367 students. There were 298 kindergarteners in the district who received ESL services; 264 were of Hispanic descent.

During the 2012-2013 school year 32.84% of students received free and/or reduced lunch amounting to approximately 9,400 students. Of these students, 2,190 were EBs. These figures provided a glimpse into the socio-economic lives of the students in the district.

Participants

Seventy of the 109 teachers completed and returned the survey, for a response rate of 64%. Teachers from 13 of the 14 schools participated.

Students in Tier II

Number of Hispanic students in class. The majority of teachers, 59% (n=41), did not have Hispanic EBs in their kindergarten classrooms. The remaining 41% (n=29) reported having between one and 10 Hispanic EBs in their classrooms. These data indicated that in this district less than half of the kindergarten teachers had Hispanic EBs in their class and the number of EBs in each classroom varied greatly.

Hispanic EBs in Tier II. The 29 teachers reported a total of 129 Hispanic EBs in kindergarten. Of these 29 teachers, 90% (n=24) had Hispanic EBs in RTI Tier II reading intervention groups (see Figure 1). Of the Hispanic EBs, 67% (n=80) were placed in RTI Tier II reading intervention groups because they had been identified as at-risk for difficulties in learning

to read. Of this total, 5% (n=6) were moved out of RTI Tier II during the year because they had progressed in reading and no longer needed intervention. Thirty-three percent (n=43) were not placed in RTI Tier II reading intervention groups. Of the Hispanic EBs, 62% were placed in RTI Tier II reading intervention groups at the beginning of the school year and continued in these groups until the end of the school year. The vast majority, 93%, of Hispanic EBs identified for intervention in kindergarten did not move out of RTI Tier II reading groups once they had been placed in them.

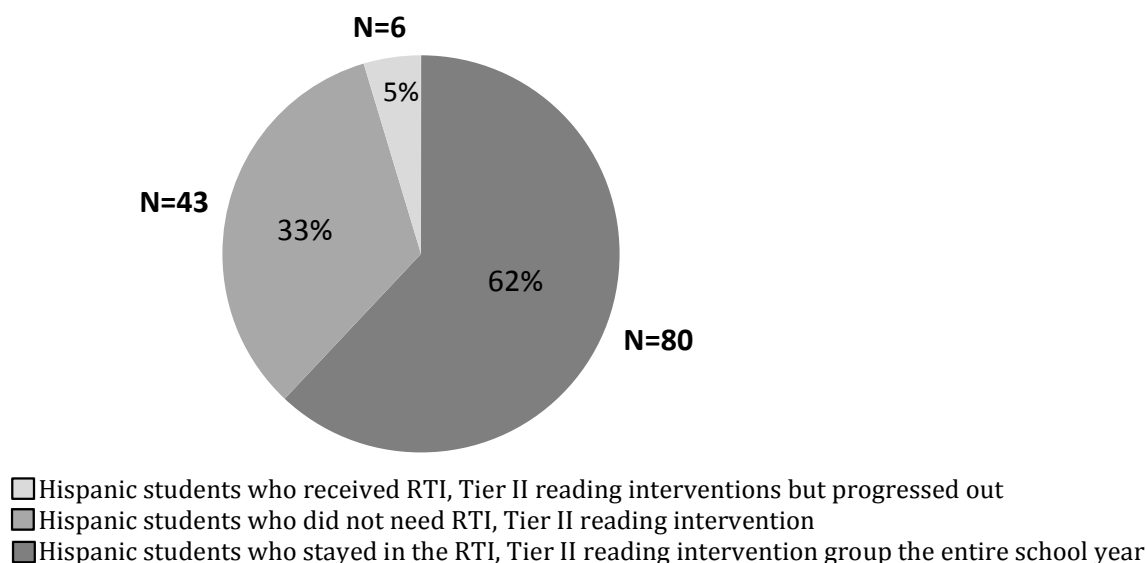


Figure 1. Frequency of placement of Hispanic EBs in RTI Tier II.

Trends in RTI Tier II. The following quantitative data are from the 24 teachers who indicated they provided RTI Tier II reading intervention to Hispanic EBs. These data provided more information on how students were placed in RTI Tier II and how their progress was determined.

Identifying students. Of the 24 teachers, 23 indicated they used a variety of assessments to determine the need for RTI Tier II. One teacher only used the school Problem Solving Team (PST) plan for placement in RTI Tier II reading intervention. The most common forms of assessments were DIBELS and classroom assessments. Teachers also identified the use of observations and anecdotal notes to determine placement. A number of teachers, 38% (n=9), indicated using student report cards for Tier II placement. Only one teacher noted using students' Limited English Proficiency (LEP) plans. None of the teachers in the sample indicated the use of the WIDA-MODEL for ELLs as a factor for determining placement.

Intervention materials. Teachers listed a variety of materials used for RTI Tier II reading interventions including scripted Harcourt Strategic Intervention lessons, self-created lesson plans, and a mixture of Harcourt and teacher created plans. Additional resources, such as skill-based games from online teaching websites, were also used. The majority of teachers, 54% (n=13), used a combination of the scripted Harcourt Strategic Intervention lessons and teacher

created lessons. Two of the teachers (8%) used only the scripted Harcourt Strategic Intervention lessons for RTI Tier II reading intervention. The remaining teachers used additional resources in combination with teacher created lessons and/or Harcourt Strategic Intervention lessons. Three teachers did not use the scripted Harcourt Strategic Intervention lessons with their Hispanic EBs during RTI Tier II.

Student Progress

Teachers demonstrated considerable variability in determining student progress. While all of the teachers used assessments to determine progress, there was no consistency among them. Of the teachers, 92% (n=22) used anecdotal notes to determine progress. The DIBELS assessment was used to determine progress by 75% of teachers (n=18). Teachers reported using a combination of many assessments to determine student progress. Only two teachers reported using observations of EBs in reading to determine progress. These data indicated a lack of consistency for determining progress of Hispanic EBs receiving RTI Tier II reading intervention.

Teachers reported perceived progress of the 80 Hispanic EBs who began RTI Tier II reading intervention at the beginning of the year and still received RTI Tier II at the end of the school year (see Figure 2). Of the 80 students, 1% (n=1) made no progress, 23% (n=18) made minimal progress, 51% (n=41) made adequate progress, and the remaining 25% (n=20) made exceptional progress. These data indicated that 76% of the Hispanic EB students who received RTI Tier II reading interventions made adequate to exceptional progress but remained in the intervention groups for the entire school year.

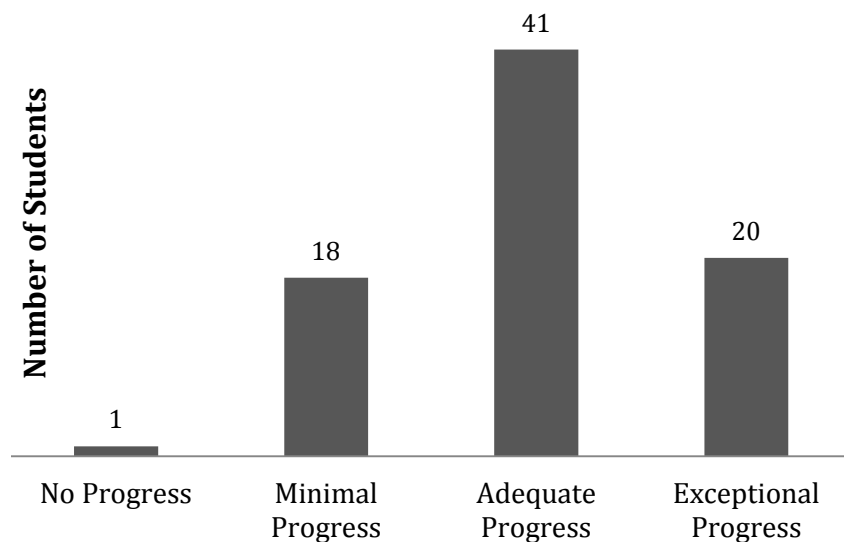


Figure 2. Progress reported for Hispanic EBs in RTI Tier II.

Summary

The quantitative survey provided important information about the frequency of and process for placement in RTI Tier II as well as factors for planning and delivering RTI Tier II. Finally, the rate of progress for students who received RTI Tier II was identified. Teachers reported that a large percentage of Hispanic EBs were at-risk for reading difficulty. Of the 129 students identified as Hispanic EBs, 86 (67%) were placed in RTI Tier II reading intervention groups. This high number demonstrated that this subgroup of the student population

was over-represented in RTI Tier II reading groups, which could be due to the lack of understanding between language difference and learning difficulty (Klingner et al., 2006). This discrepancy was further explored in the second phase of the study with case study participants.

Teachers identified varying processes for determining the need for RTI Tier II intervention. Teachers used DIBELS assessments and classroom assessments; however, there were inconsistencies related to the assessments used for placement and determination of progress. These irregularities may have resulted in students staying in RTI Tier II longer than necessary because there were no established methods for accurately and consistently measuring progress.

Most of the reading assessments tested isolated reading and pre-reading skills, such as phonics and phonemic awareness. Assessments lacked a focus on vocabulary and comprehension; running records were the only assessment that included a comprehension component. The lack of vocabulary and comprehension assessment was problematic as these areas are often the most difficult for children learning English (Antunez, 2002; Kauffman, 2007; Robertson, 2009). The survey also revealed that teachers did not use the *WIDA-MODEL* assessment in determining placement in RTI Tier II, and only one teacher reported using a student's LEP plan. These data indicated that very little attention was given to Hispanic EBs' English language proficiency when placed in RTI Tier II.

The materials used by teacher participants also varied. Teachers used a combination of scripted Harcourt Strategic Intervention lessons and teacher created lessons. Only three teachers (12%) did not use the scripted Harcourt Strategic Intervention lessons. Additionally, teachers indicated using resources such as skill based games in RTI Tier II. This further demonstrated that the focus of these lessons was on reading sub-skills rather than comprehension and vocabulary development. The instructional materials mirrored the problems seen with the assessments used to determine placement and progress of Hispanic EBs receiving RTI Tier II reading intervention.

The vast majority of teachers indicated the use of small group instruction for delivering RTI Tier II reading intervention. Teachers reported having three to six children in RTI Tier II intervention groups, double the recommended group size of one to three (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). Additionally, 25% of teachers indicated grouping strategies that were comprised of only EBs. As such, one-quarter of Hispanic EBs in RTI Tier II did not have native English speakers as models while in reading intervention groups.

Sixty-two percent of Hispanic EBs stayed in RTI Tier II reading intervention groups for the entire school year. This is far longer than the suggested timeline of up to 10 weeks (Bender & Shores, 2007). Of the 80 students, 76% were reported as having made adequate or exceptional progress. If students made adequate to exceptional amounts of progress, why did they remain in intervention? This question was further explored in the qualitative phase of the study.

Qualitative Findings

Setting

The setting for the qualitative investigation included three schools from different areas of the district representing a high, moderate, and small population of EB students. The socio-economic level of each school also varied. Each school was unique and offered diversity in the setting of the research study (Table 1).

Table 1
School Settings

<i>School</i>	<i>Setting</i>	<i>Title I school Status</i>	<i># of Students</i>	<i># of EBs</i>	<i># of Kindergarten Students</i>	<i># of Kindergarten EB Students</i>	<i># of Kindergarten Hispanic EBs</i>	<i>% of EBs Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch</i>
Ivey	K-3	No	682	76	170	22	18	70%
Heights	K-2	No	816	20	258	9	9	70%
Mountain View	K-3	Yes	962	189	212	51	48	93%

Participants

The teacher participants selected for qualitative case studies were unique and offered diversity to the group (Table 2). Two of the teachers had taught grades other than kindergarten. Participants had between one and 22 years of kindergarten teaching experience. Two had bachelor's degrees (one was working toward a master's) and two had master's degrees. One participant was a native Spanish-speaker.

Table 2
Case Study Participants

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Years of Experience</i>	<i>Years Teaching Kindergarten</i>	<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Area of Degree</i>	<i>Hispanic ELs in classroom</i>	<i>Hispanic ELs in Tier II</i>
Beatrice	Ivey	1	1	Bachelors	Elementary	7	6
Emily	Ivey	3	2	Bachelors	Elementary	6	2
Katie	Heights	22	22	Masters	Early Childhood	3	2
Lucy	Mountain View	28	20	Masters	Elementary and Early Childhood	8	8

Cross-Case Analysis

Through cross-case analysis, the following themes emerged: parent engagement, social emotional well-being, lesson planning and delivery, second language acquisition, and assessments. Two of the themes are presented here as they pertain to the article focus.

Cross-Case Teacher Findings

Lesson planning and delivery. There was great variability among participant lesson plans. Only two of the four teachers in the study provided all of their plans for the entire school year. Three of the four teachers indicated they created their own RTI Tier II reading intervention lessons. Katie was the only teacher who consistently used the scripted RTI Tier II reading intervention lessons provided by the district. Emily used the scripted lessons for the entire first semester but created her own lessons for the second semester. However, during the second semester, the lesson plans were identical for weeks at a time. Beatrice created her own lesson plans but did not consistently have them completed. This indicated a lack of consistent planning for RTI Tier II.

Three of the four teachers in the study identified the instructional focus of RTI Tier II as mastering basic skills. At the beginning of the year, teachers reported focusing on letter identification and sound recognition. Katie stated, “First, they’ve got to learn the alphabet. Just basics, basic letter ID; what a letter is and what it looks like.” Later in the year, the focus changed to blending simple words and identifying high frequency words automatically. Lucy explained, “Mostly it is just building and reading words. I want to make sure they can read and write CVC words.”

Routman (2003) cautioned against this approach because these basic skills begin to take precedence over comprehension. Zemelman et al. (2012) explained that phonics is included in reading instruction, but comprehension is the primary focus of reading. Beatrice was the only teacher who expressed that comprehension was the goal of her work with Hispanic EBs who received RTI Tier II. She explained, “I wanted to make sure that they better understood the story, not just reading the words, but to actually know what was going on.” This was evident in her questioning strategies as well as her focus on vocabulary.

The skills-based approach was apparent in lesson plans and lesson observation for the teachers in this study. Antunez (2002) warned that this approach often leads to isolated instruction and a lack of exposure to authentic texts. I observed this as teachers used alphabet dice, CVC word cards, skill-based games, and flashcards to teach isolated skills such as letter identification, blending words, and high frequency words.

Each teacher used the decodable text provided with the Harcourt reading series. These contrived texts often led to confusion and lack of comprehension. In fact, an instruction focused on comprehension was rarely documented or observed during RTI Tier II reading interventions. In Lucy’s case, the students read the decodable book chorally and then moved to the next activity; there were no text discussions. Allington and Cunningham (2003) suggested the use of patterned text for reading instruction with EBs. I did not see these text types in the RTI Tier II lessons provided.

There was great variability among the group settings for RTI Tier II reading interventions. Katie used mostly one-on-one instruction. Emily used flexible groups based on student needs. Beatrice’s and Lucy’s reading groups consisted of three to five students, all of

whom were EBs. In addition, all teachers indicated that the ESL teacher provided extra small group lessons for their Hispanic EB students.

The instructional sequence of RTI Tier II reading intervention lessons was very predictable within each case. Not all cases followed the same sequence, but they were all uniquely consistent and repetitive. Lucy stated, "It just has to be repetitive. They have to do it over and over before they can get it on their own. So we do a lot of the same thing over and over again." Several of the teachers indicated that repetition was important for their Hispanic students who received RTI Tier II reading intervention.

Assessments. There were commonalities among the assessments used by the case study teachers. They used DIBELS, phonics inventories (including letter and sound identification), concepts about print, running records, and observations with anecdotal notes. It was interesting that most children knew almost all of their letters by mid-year, but teachers still had children recite the letters and sounds from an alphabet chart almost daily. For running records, teachers often omitted the comprehension portion of the assessment. This directly correlates to the lack of focus on comprehension in their instruction as well. In addition, many children were not assessed on the next level texts for running records when their accuracy and comprehension scores warranted it. This could indicate that teachers held preconceived ideas about students' reading ability and did not move beyond that level in assessing their reading. None of the teachers consulted the students' ELP levels based on the *WIDA-MODEL* assessment. While all of the teachers indicated using observation as an assessment, Katie was the only teacher who documented these observations.

All of the teachers believed their students who received RTI Tier II had made progress. Lucy suggested that her EB students made more progress than native English speakers because they came in further behind and therefore had more to learn. Katie indicated that both of her students had made progress; one had caught up to native English speakers and the other student was still very far behind. However, she mentioned that her Hispanic EB students progressed more slowly than other students. Beatrice said that she believed her students had made rapid progress the first half of the year but slowed during the second semester due to their lack of vocabulary. Emily also indicated that language and vocabulary were important to the rate of progress for her Hispanic EB students. She stated, "With the ELLs, it is the concepts of print, and the language, and the confidence, and just their basic communication." There was no mention of weekly progress monitoring.

Even though all of the teachers indicated that their students made progress, they did not connect this progress to no longer needing RTI Tier II reading intervention. Consistent with the findings of Klinger et al. (2006) the teachers seemed to be unable to distinguish between language difference and reading difficulty. When asked how students progressed in reading, Beatrice responded:

It's hard to say because it is split 50/50. I have two who can have full-out conversations and I am sure that, for the most part, I understand everything they are saying. I still have two, who if you didn't know them, it would be hard to understand them. They still speak a lot of "Spanglish."

This revealed that language was considered when reporting reading progress.

Cross-Case Student Findings

There were several commonalities among the assessment results for each of the 12 focus students. Cross-case analysis of the focus students revealed similar progress among students.

DIBELS. The DIBELS assessment results indicated that Hispanic EBs who received RTI Tier II reading intervention did not meet benchmarks overall (Table 3). At the beginning of the year, five students did not take DIBELS. Of the seven who took the assessment, six were identified as at-risk, and one was considered some-risk. At mid-year, all of the students took the DIBELS assessment; 10 of the 12 were considered at risk and two were identified as some-risk. By the end of the year, one student had met the established benchmarks, three students were considered to be some-risk, and eight were at-risk. All of the students made progress during the year.

Several sub-test results were contradictory to classroom assessments involving the same skill. For example, 75% of the focus students were identified as at-risk for letter naming fluency at the end of the year. However, seven of the students knew all of the letters and five knew between 50-51 letters. This indicated they did not have a deficit in this area. In addition, 75% (n=9) of the focus students were identified as at-risk in nonsense word fluency (correct letter sounds). However, 75% (n=9) of the focus students knew all of the letter sounds and decoding ability was documented in running records. The remaining 25% (n=3) knew between 23-25 letter sounds. This indicated that the focus students had a strong foundation in applying the alphabetic principle.

The inconsistencies between classroom assessments and DIBELS may have been the result of DIBELS being a timed test. The timed test does not allow sufficient wait time that EBs often need. At the end of the year, 67% (n=8) of the focus students were still considered at-risk for reading difficulties, 25% (n=3) were identified as some-risk, and only one was determined to be low-risk. Overall, 11 of the 12 students were identified as having deficits in basic early literacy skills; however, they all made progress at each testing point.

Table 3
Focus Students' DIBELS Assessment Results

DIBELS instructional recommendation	Beginning of the Year	Mid- Year	End of the Year
Low-risk	0	0	1
Some-risk	1	2	3
At-risk	6	10	8
Not tested	5	0	0

*Number represents total of students.

Letter and sound identification. At the beginning of the year, focus students' knowledge of letters and sounds varied. By mid-year, all of the students knew more than half of the letters; two students knew all letters. By the end of the year, 54% (n=7) knew all of the letters and five knew all but one or two letter names. This indicated that students did not have difficulty identifying letters.

At the beginning of the year, 11 of the 12 students did not yet know any letter sounds; one student knew the sound for one letter. By mid-year, one student knew zero letter sounds, 10 students knew half or more letter sounds, and one student knew all sounds. This indicated tremendous progress from the beginning of the year. By the end of the year, 75% (n=9) of the

focus students knew all letters and sounds, and 25% (n=3) knew between 23-25 letter sounds. This indicated that students did not show difficulty in learning letter sounds but rather made tremendous progress on sound-symbol relationships during their kindergarten year.

Running records. All students made progress in their independent reading ability throughout the year, as evidenced by their increase in reading level (Table 4). The district set the end of the year benchmark for independent reading at level C. Only two students did not meet this benchmark. Three students met the benchmark level C by May. Seven of the focus students exceeded the benchmark set and read independently on level D or E by the end of the year. Overall, this indicated that 83% of the focus students met or exceeded the benchmark independent reading level set by the district. In addition, the accuracy rate and comprehension score indicated they could have been moved to a higher text level. These data revealed that 10 of the 12 students were reading grade-level text independently, which indicated they did not have difficulty in reading.

Table 4
Focus Students' Running Record Assessment Results

Reading Level	December	February	March	May
AA	6	3	-	-
A	4	4	-	1
B	1	4	5	1
C	-	-	4	3
D	-	1	1	6
E	-	-	-	1
Not Determined	1	-	2	-

*Number represents number of students at each level.

English language proficiency. At the beginning of the year, the majority of students, 92% (n=11) had an *entering* ELP level (Table 5) as indicated by the *WIDA-MODEL*. At the end of the year, the *ACCESS for ELLs* was given. Only four students remained at the entering level. Two of these four students were from the same classroom. The instruction in this classroom focused solely on skills to the exclusion of comprehension and discussion of text in RTI Tier II lesson plans; this was true in lesson observations as well. All students made some progress in English proficiency; 67% of students increased in proficiency level by the end of the year.

Table 5

Focus Students' English Language Proficiency Assessment Results

ELP level	Beginning of the Year (WIDA-MODEL)	End of the Year (ACCESS for ELLs)
1 – entering	11	4
2 – beginning	1	3
3 – developing	0	2
4 – expanding	0	3
5 – bridging	0	0
6 – reaching	0	0

*Number represents number of students at each level.

Overall, assessment data from focus students in this study indicated rapid growth in reading during their kindergarten year. Only one student had difficulty on both classroom and standardized assessments. The other students showed growth in all areas; however, authentic classroom assessments and writing samples revealed greater gains in students' literacy than did the DIBELS assessment. Student data indicated immense progress so it is unclear why the focus students remained in RTI Tier II reading intervention for the entire school year.

Discussion of Findings

Significance of the Study

Several significant findings were identified in this study. One of the most significant finding was the high percentage of Hispanic kindergarten EBs identified for RTI Tier II. A total of 67% (n=86) of kindergarten Hispanic EBs were placed in RTI Tier II reading interventions, but only six moved out of the group during the year. This indicated that 62% of the Hispanic EBs in kindergarten in this district stayed in RTI Tier II reading intervention groups for the entire school year. This is far longer than the suggested timeline of up to 10 weeks (Bender & Shores, 2007). Of the 80 students, 76% were reported as having adequate or exceptional progress. For the qualitative phase, 11 of the 12 students' assessments showed exceptional gains. In fact, 83% (10 out of 12) met or exceeded benchmark independent reading levels set by the district. This indicated teachers were unable to distinguish between language differences and reading difficulty, thus EBs making progress remained in RTI Tier II.

Assessment materials used to determine progress and guide instruction were also significant. Data from classroom assessments clearly indicated student progress. There was a mismatch between the focus of the intervention lesson and the classroom assessment results. Students received daily letter identification and sound instruction even though assessments evidenced student proficiency. The DIBELS assessment was the only assessment on which students did not fare well. This suggests one of two things: teachers used DIBELS assessment results as the main determinant for needing RTI Tier II intervention or the district over-emphasized this high-stakes assessment. It is clear that DIBELS is not the best measure of progress for kindergarten EBs.

The final significant finding was the overuse of skill-based instruction for RTI Tier II reading intervention. Three of the four case study teachers used a skill-based approach. Only one teacher indicated that meaning making was the focus of her work with Hispanic EBs in RTI Tier II. Comprehension and vocabulary instruction were rarely noted in RTI Tier II lesson plans.

Even with the skill-based approach, students did not perform well on the DIBELS assessment, which is a skill-based assessment. For Hispanic EBs, instruction and intervention focused on oral language development and the meaning making process of reading would be most beneficial. Overall, RTI Tier II reading intervention was a time for isolated pre-reading and reading, skills-based instruction. The focus was on memory and automatic recall of letters, sounds, and words. There was a lack of authentic texts for students to read during intervention which left little opportunity for deep comprehension and vocabulary development.

Implications

The following implications for implementing RTI Tier II reading intervention with Hispanic kindergarten EB students were revealed: authentic assessments, distinguishing language learning from reading difficulty, and instructional focus of intervention.

Authentic assessments revealed greater gains in the reading ability of the focus students. DIBELS results indicated that 92% of focus students were still at-risk for reading difficulty at the end of the year. In contrast, classroom running records indicated that 83% of students met or exceeded independent reading level benchmarks set for the end of kindergarten. In addition, analysis of student writing samples revealed emergent writing ability and invented spelling. This implies that authentic assessments, such as running records and analysis of writing, should be used to document the progress of Hispanic kindergarten EBs as opposed to large-scale, isolated skill-based assessments such as DIBELS.

A large percentage of Hispanic EBs received RTI Tier II, which indicates an over-representation of this sub-group. In addition, 62% of Hispanic EB sample population remained in the RTI Tier II reading intervention group for the entire school year, even though they had made progress on all of the assessments except DIBELS. This implies that teachers were not able to differentiate between language learning and reading difficulties. Teachers need more professional development in determining this difference as it impacts the instruction they will provide to students.

Although a skills-based approach was most often used, students still did not fare well on the skill-based DIBELS assessment. Overall, teachers indicated that students had made great progress in basic skills. However, vocabulary, comprehension, and communication were the main areas of difficulty for their Hispanic EBs, which are factors of language learning, not necessarily reading difficulties. In the state of Alabama, RTI Tier II can be used for intervention or enrichment (Alabama State Department of Education, 2009). This research implies that a language enrichment approach, rather than a reading intervention approach, should be implemented for RTI Tier II with Hispanic EBs in kindergarten. Instruction focused on the meaning making process of reading and oral language development would be beneficial for Hispanic EBs. The skills-based instructional focus did not yield positive results on skills based assessments. Teachers indicated vocabulary and comprehension as the most critical needs for EB learners, so it would make sense to provide language enrichment during this instructional time to improve the overall literacy development of young EB learners.

Limitations

This study was confined to one school district. Also, the observations were scheduled which calls the authenticity of the RTI Tier II reading interventions into question. Finally, this research was limited to the assessments used by the teachers, some of which were incomplete.

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**Should students be held accountable for their leisure reading?
A comment on the IRA's position statement on leisure reading**

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In this commentary, Krashen suggests the International Reading Association's position statement on leisure reading takes a step in the right direction by confirming the effectiveness of leisure reading for building reading competence. However, the position paper authors are reluctant to allow unsupervised student reading and discredit studies identifying sustained silent reading (SSR) as one of the best-established results in educational research.

Keywords: sustained silent reading; national reading panel, IRA position statement, leisure reading

Introduction

The IRA's position paper on leisure reading (International Reading Association, 2014) takes an important step in the right direction. It confirms that leisure reading is effective for building competence and suggests that we encourage it both in school and outside of school. The position paper authors, however, are reluctant to allow students to read without supervision and monitoring, stating that we should "hold students accountable for their reading."

This position appears to be stimulated by reports that many participants in sustained silent reading (SSR) programs do not read during SSR: "They fail to make good use of SSR time" (Reutzel, Jones, Fawson, & Smith, 2008, p. 194). However, studies of SSR show that this is not a major problem. Some studies that assert that students do not read during SSR provide no data. In one cited study which showed nonreading during SSR, non-engagement was rare (Reutzel et al., 2008). Robertson, Keating, Shenton, and Roberts (1996) reported "The children...enjoyed [SSR] generally, although one or two children found it difficult to conform and needed more support to keep on task" (p. 34). This is "one or two children" out of 19 classes, in nine different schools. One teacher, in fact, noted that one problem was "the difficulty of stopping" (p. 34).

When there is real evidence of non-engagement, there is a plausible reason. Namely, the basic principles of SSR had been violated. In some cases, the supply of books was limited, the books were too hard for the reading level of many of the students, or the books available were not interesting. In other cases, the conditions under which SSR was done were too rigid (e.g., desks must be clear of everything except your book, students must finish every book they start), and in others, student engagement was evaluated at the beginning of the school year, before students had found what they wanted to read (details of studies in Krashen, 2011).

The reluctance to allow more freedom in SSR is also influenced by the report of the National Reading Panel. The position paper mentions only mild criticism of the panel's conclusion that there is little evidence supporting SSR. Not mentioned is that the National

Reading Panel report has been thoroughly criticized: the panel missed many SSR studies and made errors in reporting. These criticisms have been published in major journals (e.g., Krashen, 2001, 2005), in widely circulated educational publications (e.g., Krashen, 2006), and in books (Krashen, 2004). Study after study since the NPR report appeared has confirmed that SSR works for children and young adults, for first language and second language acquirers, and in a variety of locations (See Cho & Kim, 2004; Lee, 2007; Mason, 2005; Smith, 2011; Tse, Xiao, Ko, Lam, Hui, & Ng, (in press) for reviews. See also Krashen, 2007; Nakanishi, 2014). The success of SSR is one of the best-established results in educational research.

The position paper mentions the importance of libraries. It is sad that at a time when evidence supporting the value of libraries and librarians is increasing (See the work of Lance, <http://keithcurrylance.com/school-library-impact-studies/>), support for school and public libraries is decreasing (Siu-Rungan, 2011). The results of a recent multivariate study (Krashen, Lee, & McQuillan, 2012) strongly suggests that the presence of a good school library is not only a strong predictor of reading achievement, but also can moderately offset the negative influence of poverty on reading. This makes sense. For young people living in poverty, the library is often the only source of reading material available (Neuman & Celano, 2001).

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Powerful Young Adult Literature to Foster Critical Classroom Conversations and Awareness of Modern-Day Slavery

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Contemporary children's literature provides a powerful spark for stimulating critical discourse in middle school classrooms. Although many educators resist introducing and featuring books reflecting sensitive topics, these texts reflect the real world experiences and challenges young people face on a daily basis. One particularly sensitive topic, sexual abuse and trafficking, is frequently an unwelcomed topic within the classroom despite the fact that the business of human trafficking continues to flourish both nationally and internationally. This hesitation among teachers is a result of multiple factors but contributes to a misrepresentation of the world in which we live. It impedes children's ability to gain knowledge and build empathy for victims, and also decreases a child's vulnerability to sexual predators. This article emphasizes the value of reading aloud and discussing controversial texts with middle school readers and provides two specific texts for stimulating critical classroom discourse dealing with the delicate topic of sexual abuse and trafficking.

Keywords: children's literature, classroom discourse, controversial classroom topics, critical thinking

Introduction

Bishop (1990), children's literature professor at Ohio State University, explained that literature should serve as a "mirror, a window, and a sliding glass door" for readers (p. ix). Literature should foster self-reflection and a deeper understanding of our own thoughts, desires, and motives, acting as a mirror. Literature should also provide a window to see outside of ourselves and into the lives of others. Finally, literature should empower us to advocate for change, urging readers to step through the sliding glass door, into the world, armed for action in support of those unable to defend themselves. Drawing on the work of Bishop, this article highlights two quality, yet controversial, texts appropriate for middle school students. Each book portrays an aspect of sexual abuse along with the damaging effects of these experiences in the lives of two young girls. Although the daily lives differ for each girl because they live on opposite sides of the world, they share a similarly shameful secret.

Young adult literature, such as the ones featured, potentially serves as a classroom catalyst for building knowledge, insight, and empathy for victims of sexual abuse and human trafficking. This article begins with the value of reading aloud and discussing controversial texts highlighting sexual abuse and exploitation. Following the valuable contributions controversial texts can make in the lives of middle school readers, the article highlights the first of two controversial books, *Speak* by Anderson (1999). Specific excerpts from the text are paired with questions for facilitating critical classroom discourse to build insight and awareness of sexual abuse. This section of the article ends with a discussion of how *Speak* offers a mirror for readers to increase their understanding of the shame, guilt, and power that accompanies date rape.

Afterwards, there is a brief section addressing the association between abusive dating situations and the sex trafficking network, serving as the connective link leading into *Sold* by McCormick (2006). Excerpts paired with questions to expand and extend classroom conversations follow; this section concludes with an explanation of how *Sold* serves as a window for readers into the lucrative business of sex trafficking.

Value of Controversial Texts in the Middle School Classroom

Wollman-Bonilla's (1998) research explored the reasons pre-service teachers rejected specific works of children's literature for use in the general education classroom. Wollman-Bonilla found reluctance to use books that introduce students to mature topics, represent alternative values, or identify social problems such as racism or sexism. Robinson, author of *Innocence, Knowledge, and the Construction of Childhood: The Contradictory Nature of Sexuality and Censorship in Children's Contemporary Lives* (2013) stated that parents and educators hide behind the veil of childhood innocence and developmentally appropriate practices to avoid building children's sexual knowledge despite the research on children's capability of comprehending such information (Robinson, 2012; Robinson, & Davies, 2008; Robinson & Davies, 2014). Robinson and Davies (2008) further posited the result of restricting children's sexual knowledge supports the construction of misinformation regarding sexuality, decreased sexual health, and increased vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

Allowing texts into the classroom that portray and deal with delicate topics such as sexual abuse and trafficking may not be comfortable, but accurately represents the world in which our students live. The recent statistics on the growing industry of sex trafficking are sobering. Equality Now, an activist group established in 1992, reported sex trafficking as one of the fastest growing criminal enterprises of the 21st century, a close second to drug trafficking (Equality Now, 2015). The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated a minimum of 20 million adults and children are currently sold worldwide to perform sex services or for forced labor purposes (ILO, 2012). Included in this 20 million are approximately two million children exploited for global sex trade and commercialism (UNICEF, 2006).

The disturbing practices involved in human trafficking may seem to be a global problem, but the reality is that this practice is in our own backyards. A recent 2015 study by the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (2015) noted that no community is safe from the evils of sex trafficking. Cases of sex trafficking have been reported in all 50 U.S. states, and victims come from all races, classes, education levels, age, and gender (UNICEF, 2015). However, the prevalence and extent of human trafficking in the United States is still unclear due to the nature and difficulty of gathering these data (Laczko & Gozdzia, 2005). Service providers suggest that inaccuracies and widespread discrepancies across studies are a result of unreported instances on the part of victims who distrust law enforcement and harbor fear, guilt, and shame (Caliber Associates, 2007; Clawson, et al., 2009). Also, the differing treatment of boys and girls, along with the varied circumstances under which victims are exploited, makes data collection and interpretation complicated (Clawson et al., 2009).

Still, less is known about domestic trafficking in the state of Alabama. What we do know is that the Birmingham, metropolitan area, has been identified as a major hub for the southeastern sex trade through the convergence of multiple highways making it a convenient route for human distribution (Lewellyn, 2013). An interview with McCarty, a former victim and current advocate for victims of sex trafficking, revealed a direct route across state lines with Interstate 20 being a primary route through the United States for shipping victims (Wellhouse,

2015). McCarty works closely with law enforcement in the Birmingham area to rescue, shelter, and educate victims of sex slavery, helping them escape the yoke of sexual slavery once and for all (Lewellyn, 2013).

Sex trafficking coalitions have also continued to grow in areas across the state of Alabama. Central Alabama, Montgomery county, and Huntsville-Madison county have all devoted monetary and human resources to combatting domestic trafficking in the state of Alabama. The Huntsville-Madison county coalition formed as a result of a number of documented court cases in which children as young as 11 years old were forced to provide sex to truck drivers along the I-65 corridor between three southeastern states: Nashville, Tennessee, and North Alabama (Stop Trafficking Now! 2015).

Based on the rising number of cases involving sex trafficking, there is tremendous value in knowing and sharing books with readers that explore the human wreckage and survival of victims involved in sexual abuse. Quality literature deals with sensitive topics and important issues in contemporary society skillfully, inviting the reader to connect and construct themes that are reflective of his or her life (Lukens, Smith, & Coffel, 2012). Lynch-Brown, Tomlinson, and Short (2011) described the appreciation and holistic understanding readers are able to develop as a result of reading and discussing books that address controversial, yet contemporary, issues such as the ones presented by Anderson (1999) and McCormick (2006). Lynch-Brown et al. (2011) further explained the valuable insight readers gain by examining social injustices endured by people nationally and internationally. In addition to building students' interest and knowledge, these stories encourage and promote determination for a fairer and more equitable tomorrow (Bomer, R., & Bomer, K., 2001; Barone, D., & Barone, R., 2012).

A literature-rich classroom where students listen to read alouds and simultaneously engage in classroom conversations, sharing a variety of perspectives around contemporary societal issues, establishes a foundation for building a literary community (Allen, 2000; Huck, 1977). Reading aloud provides an anchor text upon which the entire class shares the risk-free experience of envisioning the narrative while contemplating the moral and ethical dilemmas associated with the plot, characters, and themes woven throughout the story (Harvey & Goudvas, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Koeller, 1981). This deep level of understanding is vital for effective literature discussions (Allen, 2000; Kucan & Beck, 1997). Classroom discussions based on respect for others teaches students how to discuss topics with honesty and acceptance, a well desired skill set for the 21st century learner (Boardman, Klinger, Buckley, Annamma, & Lasser, 2015; Conley & Wise, 2011; Johnson, D., Johnson, R., & Roseth, 2010).

Quality contemporary young adult literature in the middle school classroom has both personal and academic value. Lynch-Brown et al. (2011) described how students translate knowledge and discernment into the human experience as they digest the text. In addition, students build empathy and a deeper understanding as they view situations from a variety of perspectives and grow in their appreciation of the complexity involved in every decision and moral dilemma they encounter (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2015). Academically, Fanetti (2012) described the value of controversial texts for supporting critical thinking and the respectful consideration of multiple viewpoints when students are able and willing to share their thoughts within the larger literary community. Fanetti (2012) stated:

We cannot encourage our students to become curious, engaged citizens of their local, national, and global communities unless we offer them safe and structured opportunities to learn about the widest possible range of people and experiences. We cannot encourage

our students to assert a voice to which others will listen respectfully unless we have encouraged them to understand why they believe what they do and to listen respectfully when others express differing beliefs. (p. 16)

Literature as a Mirror for Understanding

Bishop (1990) first identified the importance of literature as a mirror in the lives of young adults. A mirror provides a reflection of an object as it appears to others. Serving as a mirror, literature reflects the real-life experiences of the reader. These texts reflect the human experience and facilitate a deeper understanding of ourselves and others (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014).

Speak (1999) by Anderson has won multiple awards for its powerful representation of one young girl's experience and reaction to being raped at a party. This book poignantly reveals the outpouring of shame and guilt felt by the victim. Melinda, the main character, is raped and subsequently fades into the background of high school life. She quits talking and even sets up her own private sanctuary in a janitorial closet to hide from the reality of her traumatic experience. In the end, Melinda triumphs and finds her voice against her attacker whom she had named "The Beast."

Anderson's *Speak* is a mirror that reflects the lives of many young people who are coping with the long-term effects of sexual abuse. Victims of sexual abuse often feel invisible and blame themselves for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In addition to shame, victims often become depressed, have increased anxiety, feel isolated, and exhibit aggressive behavior (Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2014).

Comprehending a text requires the reader to consider how the text fits and relates with their own life experiences. Actively connecting personal experiences, actions, and/or emotions with the characters in the text supports the reader's comprehension at a deeper level. Anderson's text affords the opportunity for middle school students, who may have experienced an abusive relationship, to validate the shameful emotions, guilt, and self-torture associated with abuse victims. For other readers, *Speak* reflects the obstacles that abound in high school as students struggle for emotional, physical, academic, and cultural acceptance.

All readers benefit from open-ended questions that add multiple layers of meaning to a text. Asking questions and promoting classroom conversations like the following encourage connections with the text, as well as promoting empathy and consideration of the victim's perspective.

- "I can't do everything for you. You must walk alone to find your soul." This is a quote from Mr. Freeman on page 118. What do you believe is the relevance of this quote for Melinda? What do you believe is the relevance of this quote for another character introduced in the text? Mr. Freeman has many powerful quotes throughout this text. Choose one that you believe is symbolic of the text. Prepare to provide evidence to defend your thinking to others with specific examples from the text.
- What do you notice about Melinda's grades for each marking period? Do you think that life experiences can influence performance? Why or why not?
- What happens to Melinda is unfair. Whose fault is it? Should blame be placed on Melinda, "The Beast", Melinda's parents, Melinda's teachers, Melinda's peers? Be prepared to defend your thinking with specific evidence and examples from the text.

Just as connections in reading encourage active reading participation and lead to a deeper level of comprehension, building connective language during a classroom discussion promotes active engagement in the literary conversation and supports a deeper level of listening comprehension. Teaching students how to use connective language during a group book discussion increases student engagement and participation. Bomer and Bomer (2001) suggested three specific phrases for helping students bridge their thinking with the comments of others. First, having students begin with how they agree or disagree with someone's statement builds alternative perspectives. Next, identifying a previous statement that students would like to return to redirects the conversation and builds upon a previous idea. Finally, teaching students to ask for additional information when they lack clarity supports their listening comprehension explicitly; stating when they are unsure of what someone is trying to say also builds conversation clarity. Teaching students how to effectively use connective language helps them maintain active engagement and supports connections with peers through the literature discussion group.

In conclusion, *Speak* is a powerful text mirroring the experiences of young adults who are victims of sexual abuse. Anderson's use of silence throughout the novel realistically demonstrates how victims in abusive relationships build walls of silence, enclosing themselves off from the rest of the world (Moore, Sargenton, Ferranti, & Gonzalez-Guarda, 2015). Anderson's text fosters self-reflection and empathy for abuse victims while realistically representing the struggles faced by adolescents trying to survive within the walls of a high school. In addition to providing opportunities for connections to the text, teaching connective language for a critical classroom discussion offers a vehicle for connections among peers through analysis of the text.

Connecting Sexual Abusive and Sex Trafficking

Increasing our understanding and awareness of the link connecting sexually abusive relationships and sex trafficking is the key to developing sexual citizenship among young adults (Richardson, 2000; Robinson, 2012). Robinson (2012) referred to sexual citizenship as the ability to make healthy choices based on current knowledge, accurate information, and increased levels of self-efficacy. Sex education increases responsible decision-making and contributes to an individual's overall well-being (Halstead & Reiss, 2003). Covell and Howe (2001) reported increased levels of self-esteem and attitudes of respect for the rights of others when students received a children's rights curriculum between the ages of 13 and 15. One primary goal of middle school educators is not just the transmission of knowledge but also a willingness to support students' emotional literacy to construct their own worldview and for making decisions honoring self and others (Halstead & Waite, 2003).

Another primary goal of middle school educators is to recognize the characteristics of at-risk youth for sexual abuse and exploitation. Populations most at-risk for sex trafficking are often previous victims of sexual abuse or individuals who have witnessed domestic violence (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Raphael, 2004; Spangenberg, 2001). Harway and Liss (1999) identified a correlation between a learning disability diagnosed late and increased likelihood of becoming a victim of sexual abuse and/or sexual exploitation. According to these authors, the later the diagnosis the greater the likelihood of school failure which frequently leads to low self-esteem and increased vulnerability to sexual predators. Regardless of previous life experiences, there is one common characteristic all victims possess, a lack of self-confidence (Harway & Liss, 1999; Rothman, Bazzi, & Bair-Merritt, 2015). Bruggerman and Keyes (2009) explained the cycle of abuse as traffickers seek victims with already lowered self-esteem due to previous experiences in

abusive situations. Traffickers foster relationships in which victims truly believe they will be taken care of once and for all. This parental relationship quickly turns to threats, physical abuse, control, degradation, and a further loss of self (Rothman et al., 2015).

Education is critical to combating abuse and preventing violence. Educating youth about the factors that contribute to healthy and respectful relationships supports the development of healthy self-esteem. Education also helps pre-teens and teens understand the importance of seeking help if they experience physical or sexual abuse.

Literature as a Window for Building Empathy

Bishop (1990) identified the importance of literature as a window in the lives of young adults. A window supports the reader's ability to look beyond him or herself and out into the surrounding world. Literature that serves as a window reflects the real-life experiences of people in our world. These texts open opportunities to peer into and understand the experiences and decisions of others.

Sold by McCormick (2006) is a disturbing account of one young girl baited into the world of sex trafficking. The main character, Lakshmi, is a 13 year old female living in poverty in the village of Nepal. Lakshmi is sold to a brothel for 800 rupee notes by her stepfather. This is equivalent to \$12.46 in American currency. This story, written in prose, chronicles Lakshmi's life before, during, and after escaping the brothel. McCormick spent time researching and visiting the red-light district of Calcutta. The author also spent extensive hours interviewing adult and child survivors of the sex trade to deliver a detailed account of the experiences of those forced into a life of sex slavery.

Sold provides a window for viewing the world of women and children living in poverty. These victims are deceptively enticed into believing they are entering the workforce and will soon be able to support their families with a better way of life. What begins as a genuine heart to serve quickly transforms into a life of indentured sexual servitude. The growing debt incurred by the young girl leads to hopeless desperation with no vision of changing this way of life. Readers build empathy for these young victims of sexual exploitation and are challenged to face the misconceptions they may bring to the text about the reasons girls enter prostitution. This encounter, via text, enhances reader's understanding of multiple perspectives on the issue of sexual abuse.

Supporting readers with making connections between texts is a vital precursor to building conversations between peers. Keene and Zimmerman (1997) detected increased levels of reading comprehension when students were actively engaged in understanding the text during reading through connections to previously read texts. Connections between texts may be based on a character's experience, the historical setting, the genre, or the author's writing style. Asking students to reflect on and record a reading response regarding how the text reminds them of another text or something they have previously read establishes the foundation for effective peer conversations.

It is important for middle school readers to have a variety of opportunities to discuss and share their thinking in both large and small group settings. Utilizing conversation partners is one instructional technique that is extremely valuable and greatly underused. This technique provides an opportunity for two students to read, reflect, and discuss a common text throughout their reading. Rather than a small group of students discussing a text, two preassigned students actively work through the text together, have on-going conversations, and share their text connections. This partnership affords more opportunities for all voices and ideas to be valued.

When teachers couple conversation partners with a variety of reading response techniques, such as a reader's notebook, focused reading response questions, or stop-and-jot, the peer conversations are richer and highlight the relevance of the text to the reader's personal life (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Tovani, 2000). The following reading response questions encourage active reading participation and connections between texts.

- This book is written in prose. Why do you think the author chose this style to convey Lakshmi's story? Is this an effective writing style? Why or why not? Choose one poem that you believe relates to this text. Be prepared to share your poem and explain connections between the poem and the text.
- Choose one vignette from the story that reminds you of another text you have read. Explain why the vignette reminds you of the text. Explain how the texts are similar and how they are different. You may consider differences in characters, storyline, setting, genre, and/or the author's writing style when reflecting on the comparison between the two texts.
- Lakshmi's life dramatically changes from the Nepal Mountains to daily life in the city's brothel. Unfortunately, she learns many lessons about the evils of human nature while surviving Mumtaz's control and punishment. In addition, Lakshmi is forever changed by this experience. What do you believe needs to happen for Lakshmi to overcome such a terrible experience? Explain your thinking with specific examples from other texts you have read to support your ideals.

Sold is a potent text for providing a window into the real life experiences of victims of sex trafficking. McCormick masterfully chronicled Lakshmi's journey from naivety to survivor.

Literature as a Sliding Glass Door for Promoting Social Justice

Finally, Bishop (1990) highlighted the value of literature as a sliding glass door for promoting social justice. The author realistically explained that young adult literature has its limits and cannot magically wipe away hunger or homelessness. It can, however, provide a human bridge for understanding and greater acceptance for the differences in others by highlighting the universality of the human experience. Young adults are continuing to develop their understandings of themselves and their personal belief systems (Freire, 1993). These personal belief systems influence this new generation's response to the call for action in our world. A willingness to respond with meaningful action is vital to a global society and a better tomorrow (Banks, 2004; Short, Giorgis, & Lowery, 2013). Both books featured in this article, *Speak* by Anderson (1999) and *Sold* by McCormick (2006), support learning more about victims of sex crimes and promote action for social justice.

The first step through the sliding glass door begins with allowing texts into the classroom that address sensitive issues such as sexual abuse and sex trafficking. These narratives are accurate representations of the real world in which our students live. Second, establishing a classroom community based on respect for others and teaching students how to discuss topics with honesty and acceptance builds a platform for sharing insights into texts and helps student consider the perspectives of others. Providing opportunities to read authentic books and share their thinking with others is the beginning step towards advocacy. Without empathy and a holistic understanding, students lack the knowledge needed to advocate for change.

Expanding the Meaning of Teaching

In conclusion, controversial books, such as *Speak* and *Sold*, provide powerful opportunities for students to understand themselves and the world around them more deeply. Short et al. (2013) encouraged teachers to build on the lived experiences of their students rather than protecting them from difficult topics. Teaching requires an advocacy for students, for democracy, and for a better world. Development of empowered citizens to support children and teens who face an uphill struggle towards democratic participation is the call current educators are challenged to face. Contemporary realistic fiction resembling the real lives of our students potentially provides the catapult necessary for overcoming the mountains of Nepal.

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Mother, Teacher, Mentor, Friend: A Personal Reflection of Maryann Manning

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Introduction

My mother, Maryann Manning, began her teaching career in a one-room schoolhouse in rural Nebraska. She was a frightened teenager equipped with a dose of pedagogical training, a handful of books, a curious mind, and a devoted heart. In many ways, she remained that bright-eyed young teacher throughout her life. She never wavered from her calling as “schoolteacher,” and wore the title as a badge of honor. She believed teaching to be a vocation worthy of the earth’s best minds and most serious attention. Children and teachers were her life’s work and the force that propelled and sustained a remarkable life.

I was fortunate to know Maryann as mother, grandmother, and teacher in my own studies. She wanted the same things for her grandchildren as for all children. Mother understood that literacy is a prerequisite to both personal fulfillment and the realization of a democratic society. Literacy can transform the lives of children and families everywhere, offering a better world to us all. Every one of my mother’s myriad pursuits made sense because of her worldview and her belief that an individual can make a difference. She saw a future in which every person has an opportunity to live the life she or he wants. Reading and writing research were practical activities that could inform instruction; working with education professionals meant that children might have the best-prepared teachers; lecturing and professional writing allowed for the dissemination of ideas and methods; and professional and political activism offered an opportunity to influence policy on every level.

I can easily conjure a thousand adjectives to describe my mother. She’s my mom, so the list borders on the hyperbolic at times. However, most folks would agree that she spanned the adjectival deck—curious, brilliant, musical, hardworking, sometimes frenetic, and always compassionate. She loved children and teachers so deeply, so completely, that I have trouble finding words to contain it. In addition to those adjectives, I must add ‘humble’ and ‘pragmatic’. Thus, I know she would not wish words wasted on her achievements; instead, I hope she would tell me to communicate some of her teachings that resonate in my personal and professional life.

Protect and Encourage Autonomy

Maryann believed in encouraging autonomy, both as a philosophical and practical matter. She understood that children construct knowledge over time and along a developmental trajectory. Teachers cannot simply transmit literacy skills to their students; literacy must grow organically within each child. The process is not voodoo; it has been scientifically researched across languages, some of which was done by Maryann based on the original work of Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982). Because this process happens within the child, it only makes sense that teachers should focus energy on practices that encourage thinking and growth. Autonomy in the classroom does not resemble anarchy. Rather, it requires teachers to know how to scaffold individual learning. The most effective, enjoyable literacy programs involve a high level of student self-direction and choice. Students regard reading and writing as connected processes. Maryann crafted instruction for teachers in her many books and articles based on this principle (e.g., Manning, Morrison, & Camp, 2009).

Consider the Big Picture

Throughout my life, my mother constantly asked “why” and “what” questions. Her scholarly work often addressed the practical “how” of education, but her philosophies were rooted in difficult and sometimes elusive ideas. She rarely provided answers to pedagogical questions without also addressing the underlying goals, ideals, and philosophies of education. Maryann managed to simultaneously ponder the universal and the minute, and understood the inextricable link between the two. She encouraged me to question assumptions and scrutinize motives. Often, our discussions included the ideas of Postman (e.g., 1995, 1982), Kohn (e.g., 2011, 2004), and other thinkers who called assumptions into question. I remind teachers and parents of these ideas every time someone expresses anxiety over arbitrary expectations or forgets the overall goals of education while mired in student testing and milestones.

Slow Down

Mother was appalled that our culture has accelerated childhood so that it frequently resembles a frenetic jumble of activity. Students are shuffled from one discrete task to the next, leaving little time for self-direction, exploration, or play. The assessment race has fractured learning by creating unnatural divisions between subjects and disciplines. While accelerating the pace at which children absorb information might occasionally produce measurable results in terms of test scores, it absolutely does not accelerate their actual development. A toddler might be programmed to recognize letters or words through a system of flashcards or television. This does not, however, correlate in any way to the meaningful development of literacy. During the earliest phase of childhood, literacy is encouraged through time spent reading with adults, studying the pages of real books, and listening to the magic of language. We do not increase productivity, achievement, or efficiency by accelerating our pace; indeed, we often thwart creativity, passion, and depth without achieving meaningful or measurable gains.

Erase Labels

Early in my daughter’s kindergarten year, she was given a packaged reading assessment and assigned a skill number based on the results. Mother and I spent a great deal of time talking about the damaging effects of labeling throughout that year as I observed a group of amazing young people become categorized and sorted for the first time in their lives. Reading group books had numbers printed on the back; the children quickly figured out the numbering system and where they fit. Similarly, math groups were formed and students were shuffled about according to their ‘giftedness’ or ‘disability’. Each child quickly understood the classroom and grade level hierarchy, and the teachers’ innocent groupings transformed into something much more serious for the children. Certainly, there are times in which teachers need to group students together and some students will require special services because of unique intellectual or physical demands. However, adults should do everything possible to refrain from communicating any sense of permanency or preference through their language or behavior. Our words are impactful; they may degrade and discourage or they may inspire and give flight.

Practice What You Preach

Many of us work diligently to instill positive values in our children and students. We deliver lessons, hopeful that our young people will develop the morals, habits, and behaviors that will nourish their lives. These instructions may resonate and last, but children are far more likely to emulate our actions than listen to our words. Through actions, my mother demonstrated to me that literacy is essential to leading a fulfilling life. She never failed to have a stack of books next to her bed, one in her purse, and a few more in her car. As she read, she chuckled, marveled at beautiful words, and took notes. I observed how reading can enchant, inspire, and instruct, and I delight to see my mother's habits residing in my young daughter who has her own stack of precariously balanced bedside books. Of course, not all parents are as in love with words as my mother. Nevertheless, children can observe literacy in the lives of their families through newspapers, magazines, cookbooks, and other print materials. Teachers similarly should share their personal reading habits with their students. The love of words is infectious, and children readily feel when a teacher's group reading selections are genuine and intentional.

Understand Context

Children, families, and communities are inexorably connected. Each child brings to school a unique set of experiences, cultural paradigms, and values. Students demonstrate diversity of language, religion, race, and national origin. Mother was careful to avoid superimposing her own preconceived notions of correctness, manners, cultural norms, or success when working with children and their families. She insisted that classrooms should have books and other materials as diverse as the students reading them. Educator approval of family structure, values, or priorities is irrelevant; teachers must work hard to respect every student and family.

Be Practical

My mother understood the daunting realities of classroom teaching. Educators are often pulled in a mind-boggling number of directions, some of which may be contradictory. I can still hear her instructing teachers to do as much as they can, understanding the limitations and complications they face. A classroom teacher cannot unilaterally dictate a change in assessment or compel a school to utilize totally different materials. However, teachers can strive to reclaim space and time within their classrooms. They can also work with parents, politicians, and administrators to move their districts in a new direction. Each day presents parents and teachers an opportunity to accompany students on their developmental journey by supporting and guiding their learning and maturity. Maryann took that task seriously, devoting her beautiful life to the calling she loved.

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