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MIDSOUTH LITERACY JOURNAL

The University of Alabama at Birmingham, in partnership with The MidSouth Reading/Writing Institute, has established this peer-reviewed online journal, *The MidSouth 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.

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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

We gladly present to you this fifth issue of *The MidSouth Literacy Journal*. The articles featured in this issue describe the effectiveness of an evidence-based intervention practice, technology to support integrated literacy instruction, exploratory writing strategies for reflective practices, and a thorough review of newly published children's literature paired with suggestions for specific classroom uses.

The first article, *Examining the Effects of PALS on the Oral Reading Fluency of Students with and At-risk for EBD in a Rural Elementary School*, examines the effects of Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) for students with and at-risk for reading difficulties. The study specifically looked at the effects of PALS for struggling readers with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD). The authors present a review of the current literature, the purpose of the study, specific research methodology used, and the related findings.

The second article, *Using Exploratory Writing Strategies to Promote Reflective Practices*, details the inclusion of exploratory, informal writing strategies to support preservice teacher candidates reflect more deeply on the classroom practices introduced within a content-area literacy course. The author provides an overview of the related research on writing-to-learn strategies, along with the context and processes used to incorporate a variety of free writes and reading responses within one teacher education, methods course. Participant quotes evidence the value of writing for deepening and extending teacher candidates' reflective practices. The article is a powerful reminder for teacher educators to support teacher candidates with meaningful and purposeful opportunities for reflective writing.

The final article, *New Books, New Opportunities: The Best Picture Books of 2017*, is a regular feature within the Fall issue of *MLJ*. The journal editors provide a comprehensive list of the newest picture books published in 2017. The titles included are considered high-quality children's literature and are organized in categories based on topic, subject, or genre. For each book, the authors provide a brief summary and practical ideas for classroom use with the goal of helping readers fall in love with a new book!

Examining the Effects of PALS on the Oral Reading Fluency of Students with or At-risk for EBD in a Rural Elementary School

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Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) is an evidence-based practice for students with and at-risk for reading difficulties. It has also been investigated with students with and at-risk for emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), as they have academic and behavioral deficits that impact their school success. For example, reading achievement of students with and at-risk for EBD is lower than their typically developing peers and fails to improve over time without intervention. This study sought to address this limitation by using PALS with five 5th grade students with EBD. The intervention, implemented with fidelity by the classroom teacher, resulted in gains in oral reading fluency for only one student, and limited gains for the remaining four. Limitations and implications for research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: emotional and behavioral disorders, PALS, peer-assisted learning strategies, reading.

Introduction

Students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) have academic, behavioral, and social deficits that impact their success in school and other postsecondary environments (Kauffman & Landrum, 2013). Historically, the field has seen and addressed the behavioral and social needs of students with EBD, including social skills deficits and internalizing and externalizing behavior patterns (Crews, Bender, Cook, Gresham, Kern, & Vanderwood, 2007). More recently, however, attention has also been paid to the academic deficits of students with EBD and the compounding effects that academic deficits may have on existing behavioral needs. Specifically, Lane, Barton-Arwood, Nelson, and Wehby (2008) found that students in self-contained classrooms for behavioral disorders were below the 25th percentile in reading, writing, and math achievement and that behavioral variables were predictive of reading performance. Likewise, Nelson, Benner, Neil, and Stage (2006) found that academic fluency of students with

EBD in this particular study was mediated by language skills, a further area of deficit for many students with EBD. However, few studies have demonstrated what practices are evidence-based for addressing academic deficits of students with EBD.

Peer Assisted Learning Strategies

One evidence-based approach to supporting the academic needs of students with EBD is the use of peer-mediated interventions, which have been successful for students with EBD across academic areas, including reading (Ryan, Reid, & Epstein, 2004). One peer-mediated intervention that has been used with much success with students with and without disabilities is peer assisted learning strategies (PALS; Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L., Simmons, & Mathes, 2008). The PALS lesson plans include prescribed roles for partnering students who take turns being the tutor and tutee as they complete a series of structured tasks involving partner reading that are designed to improve accuracy, fluency, and reading comprehension.

To date, the majority of interventions investigating the use of PALS has been conducted by the research teams responsible for developing it. As discussed by Horner et al. (2005) it is important that interventions, particularly single-case designs, be tested across a range of different research teams and geographic locations. Currently, three studies have investigated the use of PALS with students with EBD. Locke and Fuchs (1995) implemented peer-mediated instruction (before it was formally identified as PALS) on appropriate peer interactions during tutoring with three 5th and 6th grade boys with EBD. The authors saw gains in both on-task behavior and peer comments; however, reading performance was not assessed. More recently, in 2005, Barton-Arwood, Wehby, and Falk investigated the effects of PALS and the Horizons Fast Track reading program with six 3rd grade students with EBD. The intervention package resulted in improved academic engagement, moderate improvements in reading skills, and questionable transfer to reading fluency. Finally, Sutherland and Snyder (2007) investigated the effects of PALS with four 5th-7th grade students. The intervention resulted in decreased disruptive behavior, increased academic responding, and attainment of typical reading growth goals. While this body of research suggests PALS may be a promising practice for use with students with EBD, only one study reported clear gains in reading fluency, an important variable for reading achievement.

Purpose

The purpose of this research brief was to evaluate the effects of PALS with five 5th grade students with, or at-risk for, EBD. The decision to include students identified as at-risk for EBD by the school was based on research indicating that while 6% to 10% of the student population has an emotional or behavioral disorder, less than 1% of students are served for their disability (Forness, Freeman, Paparella, Kauffman, & Walker, 2012). In this pilot study, we addressed the following research question: (1) To what extent does PALS increase the oral reading fluency of five students with or at-risk for EBD in the latter elementary grades?

Methods

Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in a rural elementary school in the Midwest serving 444 mostly male (53%) and White (70%; Black 6%, Hispanic 6%, and 18% other) students. Within the school 13.5% of students were receiving special education services and 26% of students were receiving free/reduced lunch. This study took place in a self-contained, special education

classroom for students with EBD. The classroom typically served seven to eight students with EBD in grades five and six. The classroom had dividing partition walls that separate the space into three different learning areas, each with a table and supplies for student use (i.e., pencils, white boards, erasers). In the middle of the classroom was a central work table where students would meet prior to the start of class activities. The classroom also contained a seclusion room in the back corner as well as two staff desks. While participants receiving services for emotional disturbance had individualized behavior plans, there was no formal behavior management plan in place in the class.

Student participants. Student participants were selected for the study if they displayed at-risk status for both reading and a behavior disorder as defined by: (a) receiving services for an emotional disturbance or recent referral to the school intervention team (SIT) for problem behavior in the current academic year, and (b) possessing reading deficits, as defined by a score below the 20th percentile on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAPS; Northwest Evaluation Association, 2009). All 5th grade students receiving services for EBD were given consent forms. To determine other 5th grade students who may meet these criteria, all 5th grade teachers were asked to identify students in their classrooms that had been referred to the SIT for behavioral concerns.

The parents of students who met the behavioral component of the selection criteria were asked to provide consent for their child to participate in the study. Six students were given consent forms (three EBD, three from SIT referrals), with all six consent forms being returned to the researchers. After two weeks, scores on the MAPS were analyzed for each of the students who had returned consent forms.

A total of five students met the inclusion criteria for the study (one consented student participated in the intervention as a peer partner but had a MAPS reading score above the 25th percentile). The five participants, identified by pseudonyms, were all male, three of whom were Black and two White. Three of the students (Daniel, Devin, and Keenan) were receiving special education and related services for an emotional disturbance. Gabe received special education and related services for an Other Health Impairment for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and Roger received accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act for ADHD. Because PALS is predicated on the use of peer dyads for instruction, we selected a sixth student from the pool of students who did not meet inclusion criteria for reading risk but was at-risk behaviorally. Students were paired based on ability level based on MAPS and DIBELS scores. See Table 1 for individual participant descriptions.

Intervention agent. The third author (a doctoral student) served as the intervention agent in the study. She was the self-contained teacher at the elementary school, where she was in her 6th year of teaching in a classroom for 5th and 6th grade students identified with emotional disturbance. She held a teaching license in both elementary and special education with a Master's degree in special education. As part of her training, the teacher completed the IRIS Center's PALS modules for grades 2-6 (The IRIS Center, 2016). The IRIS Center is a national, online center that provides training modules over the use of evidence-based practices and interventions such as PALS. The PALS modules included five components that required approximately two hours to complete. These modules include videos, teaching scenarios, and an assessment piece to help reflect on the training and implementation procedures of PALS. She

also carefully reviewed the teacher's manual of the PALS reading curriculum (Fuchs et al., 2008) prior to implementation.

Research Design

This study used a multiple-baseline across participants design. In multiple-baseline designs, the independent variable is introduced to participants with similar behaviors and in comparable contexts in a successive manner (Kazdin, 2011). Given that change in academic performance is a cumulative process happening over an extended period of time (Fuchs et al., 1993), we did not expect a dramatic increase in student achievement when the independent variable was introduced. Therefore, the researchers made a decision to begin the intervention for each of the dyads at predetermined intervals.

Dependent Variables

Student's oral reading fluency (ORF) was monitored weekly by the teacher using passage reading fluency probes from easyCBM (Alonzo & Tindal, 2010). ORF was used as the dependent variable in this investigation because of its prior use in similar studies with this population (Sutherland & Snyder, 2007) and, more importantly, its strength in predicting overall reading achievement including comprehension (Baker et al., 2015; Tinghe & Schatschneider, 2014). To determine their current reading level, each student was administered the easyCBM reading grade-level benchmark probe. If the student fell below the 10th percentile on the fall benchmark probe, then the probe for the grade level directly below that was administered. This process was continued for each student until he scored higher than the 10th percentile, in which case the corresponding reading level was used. Daniel and Devin used the fourth grade easyCBM probes while the other four students used the 5th grade probes.

On the weekly probes, students were asked to read aloud for one minute, each time from an easyCBM passage on their level, while the teacher marked incorrectly read words (i.e., substitutions, omissions, insertions, hesitations for longer than four seconds). A student's performance was then recorded for the number of correctly read words in one minute.

Inter-observer Agreement. Inter-observer agreement (IOA) of passage reading fluency performance data were collected on 25% of passage reading sessions (at least one session in each phase for each participant). IOA was calculated by dividing the number of agreements by the total number of agreements + disagreement and multiplying by 100 (Kazdin, 2011). IOA for this study was 100% across participants and phases.

Procedures

Baseline. Baseline instruction involved the Storytown Language Arts Curriculum (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008) during regularly scheduled 30 minute reading enrichment classes. After three weeks of baseline data collection, the researchers introduced the PALS intervention to the first dyad. The remaining two groups continued to participate in the baseline reading instruction. After three additional weeks, the second dyad began receiving the PALS intervention, followed three weeks later by the third dyad.

PALS Student Training. Due to time constraints, the researchers made the decision to start the PALS student training sessions over the course of the first three weeks of the study for all students. These sessions focus on procedures to be followed in the PALS curriculum (e.g., learning about PALS, how to identify mistakes, how to give help to their partner) and little direct reading instruction. Therefore, it was determined these training sessions were not likely to confound the findings. Both the special education teacher and two or three para educators helped facilitate the reading and practice lessons.

PALS. Student dyads were formed by grouping students based on reading ability using their easyCBM data from the first two baseline data points. Consistent with the PALS curriculum, each student received his own folder with PALS materials, prompt cards, and a team point sheet. The point sheets were utilized to motivate and encourage dyads to work together. Points were awarded for following correct procedures and performance during partner activities. At the end of each week, points were totaled and students received rewards for participation and progress through the program.

PALS sessions were conducted for 30 minutes, three times per week (Monday, Wednesday, Friday) in the special education resource room. In PALS, students take on the role of both reader and coach as they learn to identify and correct word recognition errors with their partner. Prompt cards are utilized to remind student-coaches of the appropriate ways to assist their partner when reading. As thorough descriptions of these procedures are readily available elsewhere (e.g., The IRIS Center, 2016), we will provide abbreviated descriptions of the four reading activities used in the PALS curriculum.

Partner reading. Within the dyad, the higher functioning reader reads for five minutes while the lower functioning reader acts as the coach and uses specified correction procedures in the event the higher reader makes a mistake. After five minutes, the students switch roles as coach and reader.

Retell. Next, the second reader retells the events of the reading in the partner reading while the first reader prompts/corrects the second reader with prewritten comments/suggestions from the PALS workbooks.

Paragraph shrinking. In five minute intervals, the readers switch between the following tasks: A reader reads a paragraph, and is then prompted by the other reader (using included prompt/correction cards) to create a main idea statement for the paragraph. After the statement is correctly described, the reader continues this process until five minutes have passed. At the end of the five-minute interval, the students switch roles for another five minutes.

Prediction relay. The prediction relay involves the first reader making a prediction about text they are about to read. After making the prediction, they read half of the page and check to see if their prediction was accurate, while the second reader checks for accuracy and makes corrections. After five minutes, the students switch roles.

Rewards. After each activity, students tally points using formulas described in the PALS workbooks. At the end of each week, students calculate weekly points and designate winners for the week.

Implementation Fidelity

During each PALS session, the intervention agent followed and checked off each item of the PALS Implementation Checklist (Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L., 2006) to confirm fidelity to the procedures. In addition, the checklist was utilized by a second observer during a random sampling of 30% ($n = 10$) of intervention sessions to ensure the intervention was being implemented as intended. If the observer saw the component happen during the session, she checked a box on the sheet. There were a total of 500 PALS checklist items within the sessions and only five items were not completed ($495/500 = 99.80\%$ fidelity).

Social Validity

Social validity was assessed by evaluating the social significance of the goals and the social importance of the effects (Wolf, 1978) through two methods: social/normative comparison and clinical significance (Kazdin, 2011). Social comparison was conducted through analysis of graphed data displaying participant scores on weekly oral reading fluency probes analyzed next to anticipated gain scores derived by methods proposed by Fuchs and Fuchs (1993). Specifically, Fuchs and Fuchs suggested that ambitious goals for students in the 5th grade would be a gain of 0.8 words per week. Thus, goals were created and displayed for each student by using the median score from the last three baseline data points and adding 0.8 times the number of weeks remaining (goal = MEDIAN baseline + $[0.8 \times \text{\#weeks remaining}]$). This was then displayed on the graph as a goal line starting at the intercept of the beginning week of intervention (X) and median of the last three data points of baseline (Y) and ending with the goal.

Clinical significance was determined by comparing scores from pre- and post-test MAPS (2009) benchmarks to determine if a student's percentile ranking on these measures changed as a result of intervention. We determined that results would be clinically significant (Kazdin, 2011) if, at the second measurement (post-test), students were no longer considered at-risk with respect to reading performance (below the 25th percentile; Kazdin, 2011).

Results

Results of this single-case design pilot study showed insignificant gains in the oral reading fluency of students with, or at-risk for EBD as a result of the PALS curriculum. Visual analysis of graphed data (see Figure 1) suggests a positive relationship between the introduction of the PALS curriculum and gains in reading fluency occurred for only one of the six participants (Devin). The percentage of non-overlapping data (PND; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & Casto, 1987) for the included study participants was 20% ($SD = 0.16$) which is considered an insignificant effect. Hedges' g for single-case design was calculated for the current study following the statistical methods drawn by Shadish, Hedges, and Pustejovsky (2014) using the DHPS Macro (Version 1.0) for IBM SPSS (version 22). Unlike other effect sizes for single-case designs, g summarizes change in level, or mean, while controlling for trend in the phases. In the current study, a faintly negative effect was found ($g = -0.04$, $var = 0.02$) suggesting an insignificant effect (Cohen, 1988). With respect to social comparison, the percentage of student data points meeting or exceeding the respective goal line ranged between 0% and 50%, suggesting that the students were not making gains consistent with what would be realistically expected by peers. Further, participant scores on the easyCBM spring benchmark did not find any of the students moving out of at-risk status in reading (see Table 2).

Discussion

The results of the current pilot study suggest that while the PALS curriculum was implemented with fidelity in a rural elementary school by the classroom teacher, it may not provide meaningful remediation of reading deficits in students with, or at-risk for EBD. Specifically, a functional relationship was not demonstrated due to the lack of improvement in the oral reading fluency data of four of the five participants. To meet criteria of demonstrating a functional relationship in single-case research, a visible change in data must be present at three distinct points in time (Horner et al., 2005). Within this multiple-baseline design, we only found a visible change in trend with one student (Devin), thus negating possibility of a functional relationship. In addition, evidence of the social validity of PALS with this population was suspect within the constructs we used to measure it. For example, the method used to measure social comparison (reading goals calculated using procedures defined by Fuchs and Fuchs, 1993), found four of five of the participants failing to meet these goals indicating the participants did not meet normative growth rates. As for clinical significance, neither measure of effect size showed a meaningful improvement in oral reading fluency.

With respect to the presence of insignificant results, Shadish, Zelinsky, Vevea, and Kratochwill (2016) noted that many researchers contend that null results in SCDs are uninterpretable and that the lack of results may not be due to the intervention failing, but rather problems with elements of the experiment (e.g., measurement error). However, Shadish and colleagues also noted that SCDs with null results are rarely accepted for publication, and that many researchers would not submit a SCD study without large functional relations. These later findings suggest that the SCD literature may be heavily skewed towards positive findings, a problem which seriously undermines the validity of the research base and determination of evidence-based practices (Cook, 2014; Maag & Losinski, 2015; Shadish et al., 2016). As asserted by Shadish et al., “Knowledge of what does not work should have just as great a place in evidence-based practice reviews as knowledge of what does work” (p.12).

With this in mind, the current study informs the research-base on the use of PALS to improve the oral reading fluency of students with behavioral issues by describing under which circumstances PALS may not work as shown with other populations. For instance, compared with other studies that used PALS with students with learning disabilities (e.g., Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L., Mathes, & Simmons, 1997) and the more recent investigation of PALS with students with EBD (Sutherland & Snyder, 2007) that resulted in improvements, the current findings’ null results represent an important factor in the replication process. It is possible that in a rural midwestern school with students with or at-risk for EBD in the 5th, PALS may not be an effective intervention to remediate reading. Further, these findings are consistent with the limited improvements in oral reading fluency found by Barton-Arwood and colleagues (2005). Most importantly, the results of the current study further solidify the need to replicate the efficacy of peer-assisted reading interventions for students with or at-risk for EBD, as this population of students possesses unique needs and may necessitate instructional approaches different from those that have demonstrated success with other populations of students.

Limitations

The current study has a number of limitations that may challenge its findings. First, due to time constraints, the researchers made a choice to begin the intervention after three baseline data points for each dyad. However, baseline data had been stable for the participants, and it is not likely increasing baseline for the first dyad would have made a significant difference.

Second, it may be that the brevity of the study was partially responsible for the lack of response, and that extended intervention may have yielded better results. However, the length of the study was consistent with previous research that yielded significant results in oral reading fluency (e.g., Sutherland & Snyder, 2007). Third, it is not known if prior reading ability or disability status affected student response to the PALS curriculum. It is interesting that the one student who made noticeable gains was also the lowest performing student at the beginning of the study (Devin), a finding consistent with previous research that suggests that the students most in need benefit more from the intervention (e.g., Fuchs, L., Fuchs, D., & Karns, 2001).

Fourth, as Fuchs and Fuchs (1993) noted, oral reading fluency data may not be the most appropriate dependent variable. However, research has consistently suggested that oral reading fluency is a strong predictor of overall reading achievement, even into secondary school, and correlates strongly with measures of reading comprehension (Baker et al., 2015; Tinghe & Schatschneider, 2014). Further, previous research with older students with or at-risk for EBD has utilized ORF as a sole academic dependent variable, thus it was selected for this pilot study due to its robustness, ease of implementation, and ability to compare results to similar research (e.g., Sutherland & Snyder, 2007).

Future Research

Future researchers may want to evaluate the effectiveness of PALS as measured by other variables of reading achievement (e.g., comprehension). Future researchers should consider assessing measures of behavioral performance, as is recommended for investigations of reading with students with EBD (Baker et al., 2015). In addition, future researchers should explore what, if any, additional behavioral supports are needed to increase the effectiveness of PALS for students with EBD just as Locke and Fuchs (1995) explored in their earlier investigation and other researchers have demonstrated may be necessary to support students with EBD when academic interventions are in place (e.g., Ennis & Jolivette, 2014). Because it is unclear if prior reading ability was a determining factor of growth in the current study, future researchers should investigate the extent to which prior ability mediates growth in students with or at-risk for EBD. Finally, the lack of improvement for four of the five included participants necessitates further replication of the PALS curriculum with this population of students to determine variables that may have led to the null findings.

Conclusion

Students with EBD possess academic, behavioral, and social deficits that impact their success in school and postsecondary settings. However, there are few evidence-based practices to support their academics performance. While peer mediated instruction has demonstrated success with students with EBD, PALS has limited evidence to support its use with this population. Future research should consider replicating these findings, with the aforementioned considerations such as accurately measuring reading performance and providing appropriate behavioral supports to see if PALS can be used with greater success for students with EBD.

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Table 1
Description of Participants

Student (Percentile)	Grade	Age	Race	Disability	MAPS (percentile)	DIBELS
Devin	5	10.33 yrs.	White	ED	183 (3)	198
Gabe	5	10.50 yrs.	Black	OHI	198 (16)	428
Keenan	5	11.25 yrs.	Black	ED, LD	199 (10)	294
Roger	5	11.12 yrs.	Black	--	195 (21)	303
Aaron*	5	11.25 yrs.	Black	--	202 (40)	422
Daniel	5	10.92 yrs.	White	ED	190 (9)	269

Note: *= Did not meet inclusion criteria for the study, ED = emotional disturbance, LD = learning disability, OHI = other health impairment, SS = Standard Score.

Table 2
Pre and Post-Test Scores for easyCBM Benchmark Reading Passage Probes

Student	easyCBM Weekly Passage Reading Fluency Probes (Correct Words per Minute)			easyCBM Passage Reading Benchmark Assessments (Correct Words per Minute)		MAPS	
	Mean Baseline (SD)	Mean Intervention (SD)	Standard Mean Difference*	Fall Pre-test (Percentile)	Spring Post-test (Percentile)	Fall Pre-test (Percentile)	Spring Post-test (Percentile)
Devin	59.00 (9.12)	65.8 (16.68)	0.75	55 (3 rd)	88 (4 th)	183 (3)	160 (1 st)
Gabe	125.33 (14.28)	117.33 (6.35)	-0.56	135 (41 st)	113 (10 th)	198 (16)	193 (10 th)
Keenan	88.00 (6.48)	88.83 (9.37)	0.13	91 (10 th)	89 (5 th)	199 (10)	165 (1 st)
Roger	128.33 (5.51)	121.6 (11.12)	-1.22	128 (34 th)	146 (31 st)	195 (21)	199 (19 th)
Aaron*	189.11 (14.05)	187.75 (12.42)	-0.10	204 (92 nd)	188 (71 st)	202 (40)	215 (59 th)
Daniel	80.33 (9.02)	81.30 (14.30)	0.11	61 (3 rd)	83 (3 rd)	190 (9)	201 (23 rd)

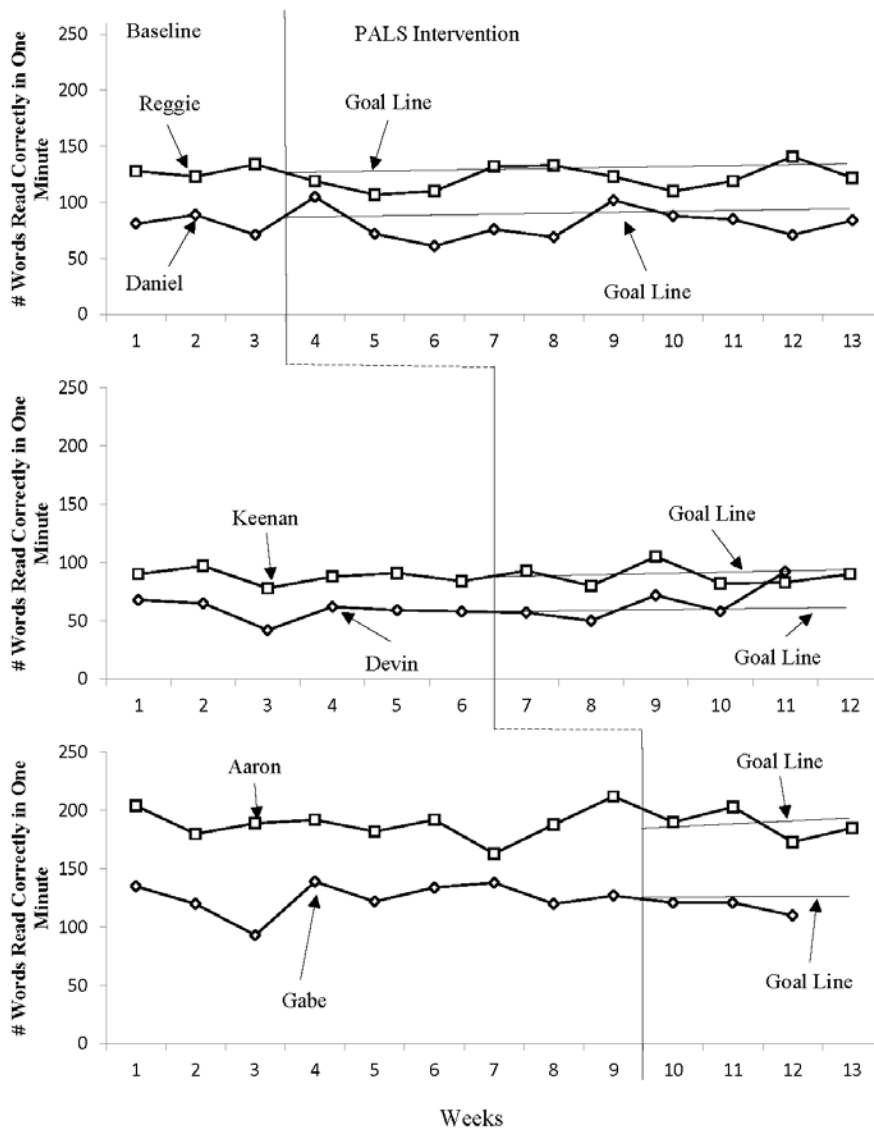


Figure 1. Oral reading fluency across students.

Using Exploratory Writing Strategies to Promote Reflective Practice

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In previous semesters of my content-area literacy class, there had been a lack of emphasis on reflective writing however, after attending an on-campus, month long, professional development at my institution, I decided to make reflective writing a key component of my classroom instruction. This manuscript details how I used exploratory, informal writing strategies to help my teacher candidates be more reflective in their practice. Findings include that informal, exploratory writing strategies such as free writes and reading responses can help teacher candidates think deeper about classroom practice and such strategies can help serve as “first drafts” of a longer end-of-semester reflective essay.

Keywords: reflection, writing, exploratory, content-area literacy

As content-area literacy and disciplinary literacy teacher educator, I strive to model best practice in my writing instruction in my undergraduate elementary education content-area literacy and disciplinary literacy class. I believe part of my job is to model to my teacher candidates that learning does not end once you graduate from college. As such, I try to attend as many professional developments as I can to enhance my own practice, and I share with my teacher candidates what I learn from pertinent professional developments. A few years ago, I attended one such professional development at my institution called the Maroon Institute for Writing Excellence (MIWE), which is focused on implementing informal, exploratory writing strategies. This institute is tied to the institution’s Quality Enhancement Program (QEP) and is faculty-driven.

The purpose of the MIWE is twofold: (1) to introduce faculty members from across the institution to informal, exploratory writing strategies, otherwise known as writing-to-learn strategies, particularly those pertaining to reflection; (2) for participating faculty to revise an undergraduate course to include a focus on writing-to-learn strategies. MIWE is an intensive summer institute and lasts for 33 instructional hours. Each class is comprised of faculty members from disciplines across campus such as physics, geology, art, sociology, music, animal and dairy sciences, landscape architecture, agricultural economics, and education. During the workshop, we read literature on learning theory, composition theory, cognitive theory, and writing-to-learn pedagogical theory as well as engaged in journaling, free-writing, peer-evaluation, and crafting reflective essays.

In previous semesters, I incorporated many exploratory writing strategies into my teaching, however, it was not something I did on a weekly basis and I did not include a specific focus on reflective writing throughout the semester. My teacher candidates were required to write a reflective essay at the end of the semester, yet, I did not provide any instruction on the importance of reflection nor did I provide my teacher candidates with strategies to help them practice deep reflection. I knew from reading student reflections each semester that my students

produced superficial reflections; however, I was unsure of how to remedy the situation. It was if they were going through the motions in order to meet a class assignment and they were not deeply thinking about what worked in their lessons, what did not work, and what they could do differently next time. In addition, I heard from many students that while we required them to reflect *all the time* (emphasis added), the students did not know the purpose of the reflection. I needed guidance on what I could do to help my teacher candidates reflect more deeply on their practice. MIWE provided me with the support I needed; I read literature on the importance of reflection and what it meant to be a reflective practitioner as well as practiced strategies that had me engaging deeply with the institute's content.

Writing to Learn and Reflective Practice

Informal, exploratory writing, otherwise known as writing-to-learn strategies, are primarily used as an instructional tool to promote learning and to deepen understanding of subjects studied, engage students in thinking, apply or extend knowledge, and develop skills (Bean, 2011). According to the WAC Clearinghouse (2014), "Writing to learn activities are short, impromptu, or otherwise informal writing tasks that help students think through key concepts" (n.p.). Teacher candidates may use different ways to communicate and demonstrate understanding such as diagrams, charts, lists, graphic organizers, as well as short written responses. Murray (2011) noted that writing is a process, a dialogue between the writer and the text, and teacher candidates should be able to formulate their own thoughts and use their own language when writing in class.

Larrivee (2000) posited that teaching requires more than just implementing practice and not thinking about one's own personal beliefs. Instead, teachers and teacher candidates need to consider their own beliefs and self-reflect on decisions made throughout the instructional day. Reflection can occur after a lesson has taken place or before one occurs (Van Manen, 1995). Walkington (2005) noted that teacher candidates need opportunities to reflect on what they understand teaching to be as "they are encouraged to compare and contrast what they know from past experiences with that in which they are currently immersed" (p. 61).

Context

My institution is a large, public, rural university in the southeastern United States. At my university, the teacher candidates in the elementary education program can either be an early childhood concentration or a middle school concentration. The majority of teacher candidates choose the middle school concentration; they graduate with a K-6 elementary education degree and two endorsements in mathematics (7-8), English (7-12), science (7-12), and social studies (7-12). My content-area literacy course is their final literacy course in a three-semester sequence and focuses on content-area literacy and disciplinary literacy in grades K-8. In the class, teacher candidates create an informational text set (either science or social studies focused) and plan four lessons (three content-area literacy lessons: comprehension, vocabulary, and writing and one disciplinary literacy lesson). The teacher candidates teach two lessons plans—one content-area literacy comprehension lesson plan and one disciplinary literacy lesson plan based on the text set in the field. They teach their lesson plans in partner pairs in the English/Language Arts classroom. Their placements range in grade levels from second to sixth grade. The other two content-area literacy plans are not taught in the field but are fully developed lesson plans.

A Revised Focus

For the required course revision, I focused on three main assignments for the class: (1) reading responses, (2) free writes, and (3) lesson plan reflective essay. Each assignment as well as feedback from teacher candidates is described below.

Reading Responses and Free Writes

My students' weekly reading response journals and class free writes embody Bean's (2011) idea of informal writing. In the reading response journals, students read an assigned reading (either a chapter(s) from their main text Fisher and Frey's *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Content Area Literacy Strategies at Work* (3rd ed.) or articles assigned on Blackboard) and created or wrote a response to the text. Because I wanted to have a larger focus on reflective practice, five of the readings (two classes' worth) were articles or book chapters on the art of reflection (e.g., Larrivee, 2000; Leshem & Trafford, 2006; Schon, 1983; Van Manen, 1995; Walkington, 2005). The reading response journals contained three steps: Step (1) prompt options, Step (2) a reflection on the readings assigned, and Step (3) a reflection on their choice for step one and how it would or would not work with their students. Please see Appendix A for the reading response journal directions and prompt options. Reading responses were collected each week, and teacher candidates used them to help formulate their thoughts for the midterm essay exam, final essay exam, and their lesson plans reflective essay.

Free writes were based on the videos we watched in class. While our teacher candidates are in the field for 120 hours during their senior methods block, they do not always see best practice occurring in the classroom. Because of this, many of the professors in the senior block program have introduced videos in their curriculum. The videos the teacher candidates watched each week ranged from segments from whole class lessons to short five minute or less strategy demonstrations or teaching tips. In many of the videos, teacher candidates observed how to incorporate literacy best practices into science and social studies. After watching the videos, teacher candidates composed their free writes. The free writes allowed teacher candidates to explore their own thoughts about content-area literacy and disciplinary literacy instruction in the classroom. Like the journals, the free writes served as a "first draft" of some of their thoughts for the midterm and final essay exam questions in class. Teacher candidates watched the videos and reflected on what they saw in the video and the implications for best practice and made connections to their language arts field experience.

Overall, teacher candidates enjoyed reflecting on the readings through reading responses as well as composing free writes. Jodi noted, "I loved the articles on reflective practice because I spend so much time reflecting, but haven't really been taught why I am reflecting or that there are different types of reflection." Two other teacher candidates, Keri and Susan, discussed in class that they never realized one could reflect before and during a lesson. They always thought reflection occurred after a lesson was finished. Keri explained, "I love that reflection includes being proactive about your teaching. As we design lesson plans for senior block, we need to remember to be proactive in figuring out what will work or will not work with our students." Susan said, "I noticed my mentor teacher engaging in in-action reflection in the field last week. She quickly realized that part of her lesson plan was not going to work so she made adjustments on the spot." Another teacher candidate, Tracy said, "I am surprised that I could reflect at different intervals and in different ways. I had not thought about posing questions and discussing them in small groups or with a colleague." Further, Jessica posited, "Completing the reading

responses and the free writes required me to deeply reflect on the content we learned.”

Lesson Plans Reflective Essay

In addition to adding the two informal, exploratory writing assignments (Bean, 2011), I revised my syllabus to add a greater focus to the lesson plans reflective essay that is due at the end of the semester. In their field experience, teacher candidates teach two lessons in the language arts classroom and plan two additional, fully developed lessons that are not taught in the language arts classroom. Lessons are based on an informational text set meeting the content standards for the subjects they are integrating (e.g., ELA CCSS and state frameworks in either science or social studies). At the end of the semester, they answered a series of prompts about (1) how they engaged in the writing process as they lesson planned, (2) the two lessons taught in the classroom, (3) the two lessons that were not taught, and (4) how they can use what they learned in their teaching experience in their internship/student teaching the next semester.

While I originally wanted to have multiple workshop days in class, where teacher candidates could peer edit their colleagues' reflections, it was simply not feasible because of time constraints. However, I was able to give my teacher candidates a short amount of time during a few class periods to start on the writing process for the lesson plans reflective essay assignment. During this time, I encouraged them to brainstorm and work on their rough draft of the assignment as well as discuss their writing with their colleagues. I also set aside one class period towards the end of the semester to serve as a workshop day, where teacher candidates partnered with someone else in class (not their original partner pair) and offered feedback on the lesson plan reflective essay. Lindemann (2001) posited that learning depends on relationships with others; the workshop allowed teacher candidates time to receive substantial feedback from a colleague, to whom they felt close. At the workshop, teacher candidates remarked that the readings I provided on reflection as well as the process of actively reflecting on a weekly basis in the reading response journals and free writes helped them compose their lesson plans reflective essay and offer meaningful feedback to their colleagues.

Many of the teacher candidates expressed a belief that the reflective practice workshop was beneficial in class because they were able to share their on-going reflections with others who had similar, but not exactly the same, experiences in the classroom. Kathy noted:

The workshop allowed me to share my rough draft with another student in the class that was not observing me when I taught my lessons. Because of this, she was able to point out areas where I needed to give more details.

Mary explained, “The workshop helped me think more deeply about my teaching. I was able to share my experiences and talk through what I had written down in my rough draft. I then was able to incorporate good feedback into my final draft.”

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this article was to describe how I incorporated informal, exploratory writing into my elementary education content-area literacy course as a means to help my teacher candidates reflect on their course readings and teaching experiences. Throughout this process, I found that my teacher candidates were able to become more purposeful in their reflections. Specifically, teacher candidates were more deliberate in their writing. They provided thoughtful responses to the prompts for the writing assignments throughout the semester. As a result of the changes made in the class, teacher candidates also seemed more comfortable with composition.

In particular, because teacher candidates were allowed to use their thinking from their reading response journals and free writes as a starting point for their midterm and final exams and final reflective essay, they did not feel intimidated as they wrote these longer writing assignments for class. Further, having them engage in the writing process in class provided them with an opportunity to receive feedback from their peers as they composed their final essay in class. This practice not only reinforced best writing instruction but also provided them an opportunity to share their work with a colleague who could provide detailed feedback to them before submitting the final reflective essay.

In addition, I learned more about my teaching candidates because of these modifications to the course. I believe these new writing assignments allowed some students, who did not always want to share their thoughts with everyone in class discussions, to be more open in their thoughts regarding literacy instruction. For example, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of many of my teacher candidates' own experiences in the K-12 system, as they reflected on the best practices shown in their free writes. I was also able to gain more insight into how they planned to use information they learned in the course and field experience in their internship/student teaching experience the following semester. Because of this experience, I continued to introduce additional informal writing strategies (e.g., generic summaries, focused summaries, discussion starters, annotations, 3-2-1's) into my instruction each week so my students experienced a variety of informal, exploratory writing strategies in class before using them in their own teaching. I also set aside more class time for students to share their drafts of the more formalized writing assignments in class with their peers. This has been a beneficial classroom activity and it reinforces the importance of engaging in the writing process in class.

Conclusions

As noted by Larrivee (2000), reflection requires deep thinking about one's own beliefs and examining those beliefs in practice using student data. It was my hope that my foray into informal, exploratory writing strategies in my classroom practice was a step in the right direction; one where my teacher candidates might become more comfortable with the act of reflection and engage in deep reflection more often in their own practice. Based on feedback from the students in that class as well as future sections of students, the revisions made to the course helped them understand the importance of reflection and how to do it deeply and purposefully. After sharing my experience of MIWE with colleagues in my program area, another elementary education colleague decided to apply to the institute this past summer. She has now made modifications (e.g., incorporating writing to learn strategies and reflective writing) to the middle block reading pedagogy course in our elementary education program. Therefore, this approach to writing instruction has now potentially impacted two of the three blocks of coursework in our teacher education program. However, the impact of such writing experiences is not only one that should occur in the education departments. Rather, this focus has the ability to impact writing pedagogy research across the university as other faculty members can implement similar writing strategies with their students in their specific disciplines.

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Appendix A

Reading Response Journal

IMPORTANT NOTE - These reading response journals have three parts: (1) your written response to the assigned readings (see options below), (2) your analysis of how the readings are all connected, and (3) your reflection on the activity. Be sure to include all three parts in each Reading Response Journal assignment.

Step 1: You will complete a Reading Response Journal after reading each textbook chapter or assigned articles. **If you have more than one article assigned to read, please synthesize across the readings for your Step 1 response.** You have the freedom to choose any of the activities from this list. If you have different ideas about responding to text reading or see a reading response activity in a classroom that you would like to try, please talk to your instructor before completing the assignment in your own form. Use a different response activity each time you complete the assignment so you will have optimal experience with these reading response activities.

Step 2: Once you complete the assigned reading for class, you will then write a brief (**2 paragraphs**) response making connections across all of the readings.

Step 3: After your written response to the prompt and your analysis of how are all connected, you will write a brief reflection paragraph on your experience with the activity through the eyes of a teacher. You might discuss how the activity could be adjusted for younger or older students, if you enjoyed it and what you enjoyed, if you thought it was useless and why you would not use the activity as a teacher in your own classroom, or any other thoughts or reactions you had while completing the response activity.

Step 1 Options:

1. A cinquain is a five-line poem. The first line is a one-word topic. The second line is two words describing the topic. The third line consists of three verbs related to the topic. The fourth line is a four-word phrase about the topic. The fifth line is a synonym for word in the first line. Write a cinquain about the readings.
2. Make a connection between ideas in the readings and something you have read, observed, or experienced in the past. Explain why the readings make you think of the other situation.
3. An acrostic poem is written using each letter of the topic words as the beginning letter for each line of the poem. Write an acrostic poem for the readings, using the module title as your topic and words that relate to the readings beginning with each letter of the topic words.
4. Write about three things you wish the author would clarify.
5. Write three quotes from the readings that you feel are important. Explain why you felt a connection with these statements.
6. What will you remember most about the readings? Why?

7. Pretend you are selecting the textbook for this course. Based on the readings you read, explain your thoughts about them and whether or not you would choose to use them if you were teaching the course.
8. Write about something that surprised you from these readings. It could be a fact you didn't know or an idea you'd like to challenge.
9. Describe an emotion (happiness, sadness, anxiety, excitement, etc.) you felt while reading. Explain what you think may have caused this emotion.
10. Select one word from the readings that you feel is essential. Explain the significance of this word.
11. What expectations did you have before you read the readings? Did the readings meet or exceed your expectations? Why or why not?
12. Draw a detailed illustration from a significant part of the readings. Explain why your illustration depicts the ideas in the readings.
13. Write a list of 5 projects the readings inspire you to do. Tell why you feel compelled to do these things after reading the readings.
14. Draw a web to show how the main points of the readings support a central idea from your personal theory on reading. Your central ideas could be simple statements like 'reading is fun,' 'reading takes you places,' or 'reading helps people connect with others,' or as complex as 'books offer readers the chance to experiment with life's choices without the risk of real failure.'
15. Think of a way that you would like to improve the readings (a feature, chapter, examples, etc. you'd like to see added). Why would your idea make it better?
16. Create a ten-question quiz on the readings. Be sure to include an answer key.
17. Think about why a reader rereads text. Tell about a part of the readings that you reread, why you reread it, and what you gained from rereading.
18. Imagine you are writing a statement on your ideas about teaching content area literacy for your teaching resume. Reflect on the readings and use information you have learned to write your statement.
19. Choose five objects that represent ideas from the readings. List the objects and explain how each relates to the ideas conveyed in the text.
20. Select five unfamiliar words from your reading. What do the words mean, and how did you figure out the meaning of each word?
21. Outline the readings by recording the main ideas and supporting details.
22. Write five main ideas from the readings and then restate the main ideas so that elementary age students could understand them.
23. Which features of the readings (pictures, diagrams, examples, etc.) best helped you understand the text? Why?

New Books, New Opportunities: The Best Picture Books of 2017

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The Book Lovers are back again with their favorite picture books from 2017! In addition to presenting a strong rationale for using picture books and read aloud in P-6 classrooms, the authors argue the importance of choosing physical books over e-books to captivate children. Categories this year include Children's Literature, Beloved Authors and Illustrators, Just for Laughs, Poetry, Biographies, Social Studies/Civic Education, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Books, Mindfulness, Health, and Wellness, Science, and Math. In addition to the latest book titles a brief summary and practical ideas for classroom use are shared.

Keywords: children's literature, read aloud, elementary

With the rise of technology, school districts and teachers are working diligently to put devices in the hands of all children. Rideout (2013) explained that 75% of all children, ages 9 and under, have access to the internet on some form of mobile device. As electronic books (e-books) flood the market, there is increased book choice for classroom teachers and readers of varying levels and abilities. Although e-books have many advantages, the authors of this article want to remind teachers, parents, and administrators of the power of a good picture book.

This article begins with a brief definition and the characteristics of the picture book. Immediately following we provide the reasons why we are still in love with picture books. The remainder of the article focuses on the identification of newly published 2017 picture books that we have categorized by topic, subject, or genre. For each book, we share a brief summary and practical ideas for classroom use. Our ultimate goal is to offer new titles and new ways of incorporating these titles in the early childhood/elementary classroom.

Picture Books Defined

Norton (2010) described the picture book as a story developed through a complimentary balance of words and pictures to convey an overall meaning or message. Picture books are often referred to as picture storybooks because they consist of a plot and a thoroughly developed story line (Galda, Liang, & Cullinan, 2016). Memorable and unique characters; compelling language; a clear story line; a fully developed setting; and theme are defining characteristics of a picture storybook (Russell, 2014; Short, Lynch-Brown, & Tomlinson, 2013).

For the Love of Picture Books

Amidst the inundation of e-books and countless forms of digital text, we are still madly and deeply in love with picture books for several reasons. First, picture books have a way of captivating and calming children. Teachers and parents in a variety of settings have long documented this phenomenon, explaining that the calming effect begins the moment the book is opened (Trelease, 2013). Part of the reason for this enchanting effect is the unfolding of the theatrical experience, rolling out of the physical book right before the eyes of the viewer. When an adult opens a good, quality piece of children's literature, they are opening another world, a world that engages even the youngest and most active child.

The second reason we still love picture books is the command of a good story to build a classroom community and a shared language. Peterson (1992) identified reading aloud as a powerful part of the classroom rituals and routines. When reading aloud to students, we are helping children understand more about their own lives as well as the lives of their peers inside and outside of the physical classroom (Hill, Ponder, & Summerlin, 2016; Serafini & Moses, 2014). This increased knowledge about others builds the necessary relationships for growing a classroom community where risk-taking is welcomed and encouraged. Knowledgeable educators understand the necessity of risk-taking for effective learning to take place (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2012).

Finally, we continue to be enamored with picture books because of the joy they bring to readers of all ages. Reading pioneer, Rosenblatt (1982), described reading as a two-way interaction between the reader and the text. The reader takes one of two stances, efferent or aesthetic. The pleasurable experience of a good picture book promotes an aesthetic reading stance, one in which the reader enjoys the text. Sharing informational texts with children builds their background knowledge, resulting in an efferent stance, one in which the reader learns something new. We believe that well-written picture books support both aesthetic and efferent reading stances, developing well-rounded readers who understand that text are both pleasurable and informative.

Clearly, we value reading aloud and sharing quality books with children for a variety of reasons. Our hope is to inspire you to relax and take a moment to open and share a great picture book from 2017 with the children in your life. The remainder of this article presents a myriad of newly published picture books to incorporate into the P-6 classroom. Although not an exhaustive list, here are a few of our favorite books that we hope will become a few of your favorites too.

Children's Literature

Literature enhances children's lives and is valuable for several reasons. First, using children's books within the early childhood/elementary classroom setting facilitates the development of a strong classroom community (Serafini & Moses, 2014). A quality picture book promotes rich classroom conversations where children are able to build authentic relationships through the sharing of life experiences and beliefs. Children's books also provide mediated experiences allowing children to grow in their awareness of themselves and others, all necessary for developing empathy (Aerila & Ronkko, 2015). These experiences may be a child's first journey outside of his or her home, neighborhood, or school community (Hillman, 2002). The value of children's literature is immense, here are some of our suggestions for new children's literature.

After the Fall by Dan Santat (author-illustrator)

Have you ever wondered what happened to poor Humpty Dumpty after his fall? Well, Caldecott Medal Winner, Santat, continues the story for us. All the king's men were finally able to put Humpty together again. But... Humpty now has a fear of heights, which keeps him from climbing the wall to sit at his favorite bird watching spot. He finally gets up the courage to go back up the wall and learns to fly again. Try to encourage children to make a connection to who Humpty used to be, to who he is now when he flies from the wall. This book is the perfect way to help children learn to try again!

This book can be used as a springboard for creative writing. Read the original Humpty Dumpty with children then discuss how Santat extended the story. Children can then explore many other nursery rhymes and try to extend the story to help them grow as authors and illustrators.

Be Brave Little One by Marianne Richmond (author-illustrator)

This sweet story inspires courage in little ones... and big ones too! Richmond presents all the small ways we can show bravery in our everyday lives. From standing up and telling our stories to sitting down and meeting a new friend, this book celebrates the power we have to be courageous! This is a perfect book for building classroom community. In many classrooms, teachers select a text to read together chorally at the beginning of everyday as part of their rituals and routines (Peterson, 1992). Reading this book at the beginning of everyday provides the shared experience that you can refer to during the day when you want children to be brave and courageous as they are learning to work with others and include everyone in the classroom community.

Life on Mars by Jon Agee (author-illustrator)

A young astronaut sets out to prove there is life on Mars! He brings with him a package of cupcakes as a gift for the life he is sure he will discover. As he treks the planet, he can see no sign of life. Finally, he spies a single flower! He has found it... there is life on Mars! He scoops it up and heads back to the ship to return with his proof. As he sets out for home, he opens the package of cupcakes only to realize they have been eaten. What he misses, the readers see all along. A friendly Martian has followed him on his journey for life, but the poor astronaut never notices him. Children will be pointing out the Martian on each and every page as if they can help the young voyager turn to see him! This is the perfect book to teach young children the reading strategies of inferring and drawing conclusions in authentic, meaningful ways. In fact, they will use those strategies in this book without any prompting!

Rapunzel by Bethan Woollvin (author-illustrator)

If you loved *Little Red* (Woollvin, 2015), then you will adore Woollvin's newest treasure. Similar to the pops of red in her illustrations for *Little Red*, we get bursts of bright yellow contrasted among black, white, and grays in *Rapunzel*. Woollvin puts a new spin on this classic story. Rapunzel is presented here, not as a damsel in distress, but as a clever, courageous girl who takes matters into her own hands! With the help of a new forest friend, she escapes the tower and never worries about the witch's curse again. However, Rapunzel and her new friend now have the witches on the run!

Teachers can use Woollvin's books to launch an illustrator study with children. Compare how Woollvin uses color in the illustrations of *Little Red* and *Rapunzel*. This simple addition of one bright color to black, white, and gray is an illustration style that children can explore in their own work as author-illustrators. In addition, this new twist featuring an empowered Rapunzel is a great way to compare and contrast multiple versions of the same story, which meets Common Core Anchor Standard nine for Reading Literature.

More Children's Literature to Explore:

Happy Dreamer by Peter Reynolds (author-illustrator)

Noisy Night by Mac Barnett (author) and Brian Biggs (illustrator)

Perfect Day by Lane Smith (author-illustrator)

The Wolf, the Duck, and the Mouse by Mac Barnett (author) and Jon Klassen (illustrator)

Beloved Authors and Illustrators

This category is built around the powerful connection between the reader and the story. Children's responses to text are quite complex because readers bring their own experiences, beliefs, and interpretations with them when they open the cover of the book (Cullingford, 1998; Rosenblatt, 1983, 1985a). There are many factors involved in a child's attraction to a specific author, illustrator, or even character. These factors relate to the child's personality, cognitive and social development, age, and level of maturity (Norton, 2011). On the other hand, Galda, Liang, and Cullinan (2015) identified style, form, point of view, text complexity, and genre as being a few critical text-related factors for shaping a child's response. Awareness of the reader along with the books provided in this section is a great place to start making the perfect book-reader match. Below you will find some of the newest treasures from treasured authors and illustrators.

The Mermaid by Jan Brett (author-illustrator)

The beloved Jan Brett offers a twist on the classic Goldilocks tale. This sea inspired version, features Kiri, a young, curious mermaid. When the Octopus family goes out for a swim before breakfast, Kiri and her puffer fish friend, Puffy, come in to explore. Kiri is delighted with just the right breakfast, chair, and bed that sways with the current. When the family comes back, they find that someone has eaten their breakfast, broken their chairs, and slept in their beds. Baby Octopus finds the culprit still sleeping in her bed, but before she makes her get away, she leaves a gift for Baby. True to Brett's style, the detailed illustrations are captivating! This is yet another book you can use to compare and contrast with different versions of the same classic tale.

Sarabella's Thinking Cap by Judy Shachner (author-illustrator)

From the creator of *Skippyjon Jones*, we are introduced to Sarabella through this sweet story of a girl who is not always understood. She is a thinker and daydreamer with a big imagination. Those characteristics are typically embraced, but not when she should be paying attention in school. Thankfully, Sarabella has a caring teacher who allows her to show who she really is and what she is thinking by creating a thinking cap. Sarabella creates a hat with doodles and daydreams to wear as she shares with the other students. Her classmates find a new appreciation for her. The next day, a new friendship is formed when Bob comes in with a thinking cap creation of his own.

This is a great story to help children begin to learn more about one another. Teachers can read aloud this story and encourage children to create their own thinking caps to visually showcase who they are and what is important to them. What a perfect way to help students build a positive identity while combining visual arts, community building, and reading.

When's My Birthday by Julie Fogliano (author) and Christian Robinson (illustrator)

This award-winning author and illustrator duo bring us a story that captures the joyful anticipation of a child awaiting a birthday. So many questions: When's my birthday? Where's my birthday? and How many days until my birthday? All the questions children ask as they eagerly await their special day. This is the perfect birthday book to share with children as they think about what will make their birthday the best ever!

More Beloved Author and Illustrator Books to Explore:

Bizzy Mizz Lizzie by David Shannon

Good Day, Good Night! by Margaret Wise Brown (author) and Loren Long (illustrator)

In the Middle of Fall by Kevin Henkes (author) and Laura Dronzek (illustrator)

La, La, La by Kate DiCamillo (author) and Jaime Kim (illustrator)

Life by Cynthia Rylant (author) and Brendan Wenzel (illustrator)

Mary McScary by R.L. Stine (author) and Marc Brown (illustrator)

Robinson by Peter Sis

Just for Laughs

The books featured in this section are sure to build opportunities for joyful classroom moments. Successful and lifelong readers exhibit a positive attitude towards reading and are highly motivated to spend time reading (Fisher, Flood, & Lapp, 2003). An outcome of high reading motivation and the ability to choose reading materials is the investment to read regularly which leads to increased levels of reading achievement (Allington, 2009). When teachers read aloud humorous books, or incorporate them within the classroom setting, there is an increased association between enjoying a book and the joy of reading (Serafini & Coles, 2015). So, let the good times roll right out of one of these fabulously funny books for children!

Be Quiet! by Ryan T. Higgins (author-illustrator)

Author-illustrator of *Mother Bruce* (Higgins, 2015), Higgins, has done it again! This side-splitting story will have readers of all ages laughing out loud! Rupert the Mouse sets out to write a wordless book. However, he has two very talkative friends who are messing everything up! Rupert wants his book to be artistic and visually stimulating; his friends take that to mean they will "poke their readers in the eyeballs with pictures". The mice share what they think will make a great story though their hilarious dialogue, but Rupert isn't up for any of their ideas! Finally, he vents his frustrations, only to be reminded that he needs to be quiet because, after all, it is a wordless book.

Teachers can use this as a mentor text to include humor and dialogue into writing. To take writing to a new level, let children select wordless books to adapt. Encourage them to create characters, problems, and dialogue in the wordless book by borrowing from Higgins' craft.

Bears Make the Best Reading Buddies by Carmen Oliver (author) and Jean Claude (illustrator)

Adelaide's teacher assigns everyone a reading buddy; except Adelaide already has one. She is quite adamant that bears make the best reading buddies. They know how to sniff out a good book. Their claws are perfect for page turning. And they are always hungry for another good book. Teachers can share this delightful story with children to introduce partner reading in the classroom. From how to sit, to encouraging your partner when reading gets tough, this book includes the essentials for successful buddy reading!

Thelma the Unicorn by Aaron Blabey

Poor Thelma wanted to be a unicorn more than anything. Her loyal friend, Otis, loved her just as she was though. But, when Thelma saw a carrot on the ground she had the most wonderful idea. She tied that carrot to her nose and as luck would have it, a truck carrying pink glitter paint swerved by and covered her in a new identity. Oh, Thelma looked amazing! Her fans cheered her name and chased her around to get her autograph. Although she had many followers, there were naysayers, too. One lonely night, she realized how much she missed Otis and that maybe fame wasn't all it is cracked up to be. Although this book will certainly trigger a great deal of laughter, it has a powerful message too. It encourages children to love who they are, even if they don't have sparkles or a magical horn!

More Just for Laughs Books to Explore:

The Legend of Rock, Paper, Scissors by Drew Daywalt (author) and Adam Rex (illustrator)

Welcome by Mo Willems

XO, Ox: A Love Story by Adam Rex (author) and Scott Campbell (illustrator)

Poetry

The books featured in this category are located in the genre of poetry. A poem is a concise and intentionally chosen set of words used to convey a story, message, emotion, or description. Poets often employ figurative language, rhythm, metaphors, symbolism, personification, or alliteration to create a complex, rich text that is pleasing to the ear and inspires a strong image for the reader (Hillman, 2002; Russell, 2014). There are many subgenres of poetry for children to explore: ballads, free verse, haiku, concrete poems, narrative poems, lyrical poems, cinquain, and diamante (Hillman, 2002).

We encourage teachers to focus less on getting children to "know" the type of poem or the technique used by the poet; rather, our expectation is that by surrounding students with quality children's poetry throughout the days and weeks, they will come to see the pleasure and power of a well-written poem. Gill (2007) charged teachers to help children understand that poems are written by real people for real reasons. Here are some new poetry books that are worthy of being added to the classroom collection.

Bravo! Poems about Amazing Hispanics by Margarita Engle (author) and Rafael Lopez (illustrator)

This beautiful collection of poems by award-winning author, Engle, showcases important Latinos from many different places and backgrounds. Engle celebrates the accomplishments of botanists, librarians, musicians, writers, activists, athletes and many others with short biographies written in verse. Engle included a poem highlighting Pura Belpre. It is in her honor that the Pura

Belpre award for Latino children's book authors and illustrators is given, which Engle has received three times. This book is the perfect starting place to help Latino children in the classroom honor and celebrate their culture and rich history. Teachers can use this book to launch biography studies. For children who enjoy writing poetry, but are required to write non-fiction within the standards, this is a great mentor text to explore how to merge these to writing genres.

My Daddy Rules the World: Poems about Dads by Hope Anita Smith

Celebrate the special bond between father and child with this heartwarming collection of poems. Through the voice of children, the everyday acts of fatherly love are told. Eating breakfast, dancing, reading, wrestling and more, a daddy's love comes to life through words and illustrations. With a variety of poetic styles ranging from rhyming to free verse, there are scores of mentor texts to inspire the young poets on their journey as growing writers. This collection can also be used to help children transform everyday moments into poetry.

Miguel's Brave Night: Young Cervantes and His Dream of Don Quixote by Margarita Engle (author) and Raul Colon (illustrator)

Another book of poems by Engle, this time she presents fictionalized, first person biographical verses of Miguel de Cervantes. The poems share Cervantes' difficult childhood and how he escaped those troubles through daydreaming and storytelling. His imagination eventually leads to the creation of the brave, yet clumsy knight, we all know as Don Quixote. Pair this book with other books about Don Quixote to help children make connections and ask deeper questions.

More Poetry to Explore:

Out of Wonder by Kwame Alexander, Chris Colderley, and Margory Wentworth (authors) Ekua Holmes (illustrator)

Runny Babbit: Another Billy Sook by Shel Silverstein (author-illustrator)

That is My Dream! By Langston Hughes (author) and Daniel Miyares (illustrator)

Biographies

Biographies offer children an opportunity to literally walk in another person's shoes! Walking in the footsteps of others is important for building empathy. Recent research has identified an increased prevalence of bullying among children and adolescents (van Noorden et al., 2014). Bullying has detrimental effects on a child's mental health as well as his/her physical health (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008). Reading aloud and encouraging children to pick up a good biography may be a catalyst for helping students reflect on the feelings and emotions experienced by others. Hillman (2002) explained that biographies "present models of achievement, compassion, and heroism—people who have worked under difficult circumstances to create lives worth living and telling" (Hillman, 2002, p. 220). We suggest these new biographies to add to your collection.

Schomburg: The Man Who Built A Library by Carole Boston Weatherford (author) and Eric Velasquez (illustrator)

History is often presented in our textbooks as a one-sided, watered-down, and often, incorrect version of history. As a result we must use a variety of resources to present information about historical events and people, while also teaching students to be critical consumers of information and explore multiple perspectives to get the whole story. Author Boston Weatherford models this beautifully in her new book, *Schomburg: The Man Who Built A Library*. This story introduces the reader to Arturo Schomburg, an immigrant from Puerto Rico who came to America in 1891, determined to unearth the contributions that his African-American brothers and sisters made to world history. By telling his story, the author brilliantly highlights the stories of Phillis Wheatley, the first African-American woman to have a book of poems published in 1773, David Walker, a free black merchant who published a pamphlet in 1829 to encourage slaves to rise up and fight for their freedom, along with identifying the whitewashed African heritage of icons such as naturalist John Audubon and author Alexandre Dumas. This book serves as an important reminder that multiple perspectives, stories, and primary source documents should be the backbone of historical inquiry.

She Persisted by Chelsea Clinton (author) and Alexandra Boiger (illustrator)

Women, like other marginalized groups throughout history, have had to struggle and fight for equal rights in our country. In her first book, former First Daughter Clinton, highlights the stories of 13 women who have persisted in their quest to overcome adverse conditions and make their voices heard. Many of the stories in this book will introduce readers to powerful women who are often left out of our nation's history books. Not only does this book introduce our girls to powerful role models, it also sends a clear message about the strength, determination, and intelligence that women possess.

Strong as Sandow by Don Tate (author-illustrator)

Inspired by his own ventures in bodybuilding, Tate tells the story of how Sandow became the world's strongest man. As a young boy, Friedrich Muller was a weak, sickly boy, but he longed to be like the ancient Roman Gladiators. He exercised to no avail. Later, he studied at the university to learn more about the human body and was trained by a professional strong man. Friedrich later changed his name to Eugen Sandow. He became famous for his strength and physique and was named the strongest man on earth. Sandow is considered the father of modern bodybuilding.

Through a carefully crafted story and captivating illustrations, Don engages readers in the challenges and successes of Eugen Sandow. Tate includes an afterward with more information on Sandow and an author's note that includes a picture of him in his bodybuilding days! Tate believes that children should be physically active, so he includes suggested exercises for kids.

More Biography Books to Explore:

A Time to Act: John F. Kennedy's Big Speech by Shana Corey (author) and R. Gregory Christie (illustrator)

Grace Hopper, Queen of Computer Code by Laurie Wallmark (author) Katy Wu (illustrator)

Frida Kahlo and Her Animalitos by Monica Brown (author) and John Parra (illustrator)

Ruth Bader Ginsburg: The Case of R.B.G. vs. Inequality by Jonah Winter (author) and Stacy Innerst (illustrator)

The Youngest Marcher: The Story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, A Young Civil Rights Activist by Cynthia Levinson (author)

Social Studies / Civic Education

Children's literature enriches the social studies curriculum in the early childhood/elementary education classroom. Critical literacy, as defined by Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2015), is a reader's ability to analyze and question the relationship between language and power. Lewison et al. encouraged students to use language for questioning the everyday world, for analyzing popular culture and media, and for determining the actions necessary to promote social justice. Furthermore, critical literacy literature is then defined as high-quality books that promote classroom discourse around social issues affecting the daily lives of children (Meller, Richardson, & Hatch, 2009). Critical literacy literature provides opportunities for children to question social issues that may have been normalized while also critiquing the text. The books in this section provide a starting point for engaging children in deeper conversations that move beyond the traditional 5 W's (Who, What, When, Where, & Why). These classroom conversations not only help children build background knowledge and empathy but this is placing them on the path to developing an emerging level of critical literacy.

Come with Me by Holly M. McGhee (author) and Pascal Lemaitre (illustrator)

The message in this book is simple and pure: Be kind to one another! The story begins with a little girl who is frightened by all of the news stories of anger and hatred in the world. When she asks her parents what she can do to make the world a better place they respond by modeling kindness, tolerance, and respect in their daily interactions with people they encounter. The illustrations showcase diversity and highlight groups of people who often face discrimination and stereotypes because of how they look. The story concludes with the little girl going out into the world and spreading kindness to all living things. While this might seem like a tiny contribution to many people, it really does matter. Think about how wonderful the world would be if everyone did his or her part and practiced love instead of hate. What a powerful message for our children!

Why Am I Me? by Paige Britt (author), Sean Qualls and Selina Alko (illustrators)

This story takes us on a colorful subway ride through the city with two children who are asking the same question, "Why am I me?" Have you ever considered all of the qualities and characteristics that make you unique? There is no one else on this Earth exactly like you. Throughout the story, the two children wonder if they were someone else would they be taller, darker, smarter, faster, older, or bolder. As they ponder this question, the colorful illustrations highlight diversity in race, culture, age, size, gender, and physical abilities. This book reminds us that as humans we are all connected and that we should celebrate diversity, rather than discriminate.

The Bad Seed by Jory John (author) and Pete Oswald (illustrator)

Have you ever met someone whose reputation preceded him or her? Meet: "The Bad Seed". All of the other seeds have either experienced his bad behavior or heard about it from

another seed. What we eventually learn is that “The Bad Seed” wasn’t born bad. In fact, he was “A Good Seed” at one time in his life. Unfortunately, his life changed after his family landed in a sunflower seed snack bag after the death of their sunflower. After narrowly escaping digestion, he found himself all alone. This made him angry, sad, and bitter.

The Bad Seed reminds the reader that everyone has a story. Our attitudes and behaviors are often shaped by our life experiences, and most of the time there is a reason why someone is making bad choices. Of course, this does not mean that we should overlook these negative behaviors, but kindness and empathy from other people have the potential to spark a positive change. This book leaves the reader wondering what their role should be when they encounter a “bad seed”. And for those who are already labeled as bad seeds, the story reminds us that, *it is not what happens to you, but how you respond to it that matters.*

More Social Studies and Civic Education to Explore:

Around the World Right Now by Gina Cascone (author) Bryony Willams Sheppard (author) and Olivia Beckman (illustrator)

The Rooster Who Would Not Be Quiet by Carmen Agra Deedy (author) and Eugene Yelchin (illustrator)

We’re All Wonders by R.J. Palacio (author and illustrator)

Willow at the Wedding by Denise Brennan-Nelson (author) and Cyd Moore (illustrator)

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Picture Books

Books that emphasize individual differences positively help young children see their own differences as unique and advantageous rather than negatively (Giorgis & Glazer, 2009). The power comes when teachers choose literature that focuses on how individuals vary and emphasizes the value of this difference. Inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse picture books in the classroom fosters opportunities for students to build respect for members of underrepresented, misrepresented, or marginalized groups (Norton, 2010). Diverse literature opens a window for children in the majority culture to challenge misconceptions and myths present in their belief system.

In addition, diverse literature provides children in minority cultures with positive role models and stories that represent who they are and what they believe (Russell, 2002). Here are some wonderful new books that celebrate diversity!

Miguel and the Grand Harmony by Matt de la Pena (author) and Ana Ramirez (illustrator)

Celebrate the joy of music with this new book from Newberry Award-winning author de la Pena. The story is told from the perspective of La Musica. La Musica exists everywhere in the town of Santa Cecilia. In the strum of a guitar, the beat of drum, the buzz of wedding bells, she roams the city. She comes upon Miguel, a boy who has music in his heart, but not in his home. La Musica vows to help him find his passion. She leads him to a broken and discarded guitar, which he repairs and plays as he becomes part of the grand harmony. This book can be used to encourage children to think about how to find their own passion!

The author includes many words in Spanish throughout the book. What a beautiful way to celebrate language diversity. Teachers can use this to encourage multilingual children to explore how they can use de la Pena’s craft by including multiple languages in their texts as well.

Up! How Families Around the World Carry Their Little Ones by Susan Hughes (author) and Ashley Barron (illustrator)

This is a heartwarming story to share with Pre-K and Kindergarten. All around the world little ones are carried in different ways. This book highlights how babies are carried in different countries including Afghanistan, Canada, Peru, Korea, India, China, West Africa, Egypt, and Poland. They are carried in slings, backpacks, baskets, on hips, and in the arms of loved ones. Various family members are depicted carrying the babies including moms, dads, grandparents, siblings, aunts, and uncles. With the variety of families and countries represented, this book celebrates genuine diversity.

Where Will I Live? by Rosemary McCarney

This book needs to be on the shelf of every library and readily available in every classroom. McCarney, Canada's Ambassador to the United Nations, shares the story of child refugees. Every child needs a home, but where do children go when their home is not safe anymore? Because of war and conflicts, children and their families have to flee their homes to find a safe place. During this time of uncertainty, children are left with many questions. Where will I go? How far will I travel? Will I have a place to sleep? Will I find a friend? But when they get to their new home, will they be welcomed?

Through both heart wrenching and heartwarming photographs, courtesy of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, we get a glimpse into the lives of real children as they seek to find a new, safe place to call home. We see fear and uncertainty, but we also see joy, hope and love. The pictures include children on the move and in refugee camps from countries including: Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Hungary, Kenya, and many more. This book provides the perfect opportunity for sparking conversations with children about the importance of home as well as the importance of acceptance of refugees.

More Cultural and Linguistically Diverse Books to Explore:

All the Way to Havana by Margarita Engle (author) and Mike Curato (illustrator)

Danza! Amalia Hernandez and EL Ballet Folkloric de Mexico by Duncan Tonatiuh

Hey Black Child by Useni Eugene Perkins (author) and Bryan Collier (illustrator)

Malala's Magic Pencil by Malala Yousafzai (author) and Kerascoet (illustrator)

Mindfulness, Health, & Wellness

Currently, many research studies have focused on the power of mindfulness, health, and wellness development among adults; few studies have explored this effect among children (Greenberg & Harris, 2011). Experts argue incorporation of mindfulness training can potentially help children increase attention, focus, self-management skills, self-efficacy, and improve memory (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). Fontana and Slack (1997) encouraged the use of mindfulness practices to help children become aware of how their mind works and their own thinking processes. The picture books presented in this section offer a beginner's, practical approach to mindfulness of the body. The increased focus and awareness of the body leads to a stronger self-awareness (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). When students exhibit increased levels of self-awareness, they are able to more accurately assess their own performance and exhibit an increased ability to respond appropriately in a variety of social situations (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). These are a few of the new books that promote mindfulness with children.

I am Peace: A Book of Mindfulness by Susan Verde (author) and Peter Reynolds (illustrator)

This book is a follow-up to *I Am Yoga: A Book of Mindfulness* (Verde, 2015). The author has partnered with Reynolds, beloved illustrator, to create a serene text filled with brilliant, watercolor illustrations emphasizing the unique and natural world that surrounds us. This book connects readers to nature, providing opportunities to be present, alert, and alive to the sights, smells, and textures all around.

This is an ideal text for building a classroom community because it fosters discourse centered on valuing nature, ourselves, and others. Students will become aware of their own feelings and begin to understand that everyone experiences emotions of insecurity and uneasiness. These types of classroom conversations build awareness of self and empathy for others.

Meditate with Me: A Step-by-Step Mindfulness Journey by Meriam Gates (author) and Margarita Surnaite (illustrator)

This book teaches children how to meditate through several simple breathing techniques that focus the body and settle the mind. The authors do an excellent job of building an awareness of the sensations in the body and how to use meditation for calming and centering. The end of the text offers a clear 4-step process or quick meditation guide that can be used anytime and in any place.

The text provides a repeating refrain that is quite poetic in nature. Creating a poetry anthology is a natural and easy way to help children make the connection between the mindfulness of meditation and the power of the poet to take the ordinary and make it extraordinary.

Yoga Bug: Simple Poses for Little Ones by Sarah Jane Hinder

This board book is a wonderful way to introduce any young one to the art of yoga. The children featured in the book represent diverse cultures as they pose in a variety of beginning positions. Each page offers a new pose or stretch that is associated with the movement of animals in nature. For example, stretching like a stick insect or imitating the crawl of the caterpillar provides a fun and engaging way to introduce this mindfulness technique to the youngest of children.

For an Interactive Shared Reading experience, introduce or have kids share new stretches and poses. Take pictures and create a classroom version of Yoga Bug for a Shared Writing Experience. Revisit both books throughout the week as kids need a brain break.

Zoo Zen: A Yoga Story for Kids by Kristen Fischer (author) and Susi Schaefer (illustrator)

This is yet another book that will teach children the art of yoga. Layla sets out to learn some new yoga poses from her animal friends. She learns from bear, cobra, eagle, dolphins and many more who give her tips on her stances and poses. She learns a total of 11 poses. In the back of the book, the author provides the names and descriptions of each pose.

This is a wonderful book to use to introduce yoga as a calming technique in the classroom. Practice each pose and stance with children. This is a great way to start the school day to help them relax and focus on positive energy. For children who find themselves upset during the school day, offer the book and have a yoga mat in the room. Allow them time to go

and work through the poses to calm down. This is a great way to encourage positive self-correction.

Scientific Reading and Thinking

Science powerfully supports children's language and literacy development (Conezio & French, 2002). Language-based interactions centered on scientific concepts promote meaningful interactions among children in the classroom setting. In addition to language-based interactions, quality children's literature about scientists or scientific concepts supports a rich conversation between children and adults (Conezio & French, 2002). Finally, Conezio and French (2002) explained that a child's natural interest in science and the world around him/her helps build the foundational skills of reading, writing, and scientific thinking. Below are the newest books in scientific literature for children.

Grand Canyon by Jason Chin (author-illustrator)

Chin, author and illustrator of award winning non-fiction books such as *Redwoods*, *Coral Reefs*, and *Gravity was a Kirkus*, takes you on a historical journey through the *Grand Canyon* that will leave you with a yearning to visit this natural wonder of the world. The information in this book, along with the realistic and clever illustrations connects the reader with geology, paleontology, and ecology. Be sure to look for the page cutouts that reveal fossils hidden inside rocks, along with the page borders that introduce the reader to the vast array of plants and animals that call the Grand Canyon home.

On Duck Pond by Jane Yolen (author) and Bob Marstall (illustrator)

How often do you stop to appreciate the natural world around you? In the book *On Duck Pond*, author Yolen, takes the reader on a nature journey around a pond. In addition to introducing a variety of plants and animals that live in and around the pond, Yolen's story reminds us that it is important to slow down and really SEE the world around us. This book would be a powerful springboard to introduce nature journaling in science, which supports a sense of wonder, questioning, and a deeper awareness and connection with the earth.

Rube Goldberg's Simple Normal Humdrum School Day by Jennifer George (author) and Ed Steckley (illustrator)

Rube Goldberg's granddaughter, author Jennifer George, brings 14 of her grandfather's greatest inventions to life in this hilarious picture book. The story follows young Rube as he uses engineering design to accomplish everyday tasks. If the ultimate goal of engineering is to solve problems and make life easier, young Goldberg has a knack for taking the simplest task and making it complicated. This book is guaranteed to inspire creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration with children!

More Science Books to Explore:

Astronaut Scott Kelly: My Journey to the Stars by Scott Kelly (author) and Andre Ceolin (illustrator)

A Hundred Billion Trillion Stars by Seth Fishman (author) and Isabel Greenberg (illustrator)

My Awesome Summer by P. Mantis by Paul Meisel (author-illustrator)

Who Am I? An Animal Guessing Game by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page (author-illustrators)

Math in Literature

The books recommended in this section offer a fresh perspective on mathematics through the innovative use of children's literature. One of the most significant reasons for incorporating quality children's literature during math time is the context provided in the story. The context of a mathematical task supports a student's mathematical connections and problem-solving ability (Carpenter et al., 2015). Children's picture books create meaningful contexts to help children connect and successfully complete the mathematical task presented. Spend time sharing a few of these great new books with children, building on the context to empower your young mathematicians.

Baby Goes to Market by Atinuke (author) and Angela Brooksbank (illustrator)

Who can resist a baby? Certainly not the sellers at this Nigerian marketplace! The humorous illustrations, along with the rhythm and repetition in the text make this a perfect selection for a shared reading. The story also introduces the reader to common items that can be purchased at a West African marketplace, while also making connections to basic subtraction and addition.

Goodnight Numbers by Danica McKellar (author) and Alicia Padron (illustrator)

This bedtime counting book highlights the connection between numbers and the world around us. The repetitive and rhyming text will encourage children to read along. The word and the symbol for each number are highlighted in colorful text on each page. Challenge children to carefully explore the illustrations to discover all of the different sets of objects for the number represented on each page. Be sure to pay attention to the ten frames disguised as art on the wall. The author also includes ideas for read aloud and mathematical connections at home.

Groovy Joe: Dance Party Countdown by Eric Litwin (author) and Tom Lichtenheld (illustrator)

Groovy Joe is back, and he is groovier than ever! Litwin and Lichtenheld have teamed up again to bring us another Groovy Joe classic. In this rhyming story, all of Joe's doggy friends come to jam with him at the disco party! But the more dogs that show up, the less room there is for Joe. Does he get upset? Goodness no! This catchy refrain will have children reading along right away! Litwin also provides us the perfect opportunity to connect to math. Each time new friends join the party the reader is asked to answer the question, "How many dogs are there now?" In addition to solving the math problem, the author and illustrator have also included a number sentence to reinforce the mathematical operation and the answer.

More Math Books to Explore:

Triangle by Mac Barnett (author) and Jon Klassen (illustrator)

Love, Triangle by Marcie Colleen (author) and Bob Shea (illustrator)

Conclusion

Reading aloud matters but so does selecting high-quality, newly published children's books for inspiring, motivating, and developing students' joy of reading. We hope this list of new children's literature will inspire, motivate, and support your development of an authentic literary environment. A literary environment where students see themselves, learn to value

others, and grow in a variety of academic areas through the richness of hearing, sharing, and reading great books!

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