Submission
No 4

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC DISTURBANCES AT MACQUARIE FIELDS

Organisation: Ingleburn Uniting Church Council

Name: Dr Nita Smith King

Position: Secretary

Telephone:

Date Received: 25/10/2005

Theme:

Summary

The Uniting Church in Australia

INGLEBURN CONGREGATION

A.B.N. 66 850 123 542

MINISTER: (02) 9618 2716
CHURCH OFFICE:
Cnr Oxford & Cumberland Roads
P.O. Box 536, INGLEBURN 2565
Telephone: (02) 9605 2557

Tuesday, 18 October 2005

Ms. Jan BURNSWOODS, MLC,
Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Matters,
Legislative Council,
Parliament House,
Macquarie Street,
Sydney.

Dear Ms. Burnswoods and members of the committee,

Our church recently received notification about the Parliamentary Inquiry into the riots at Macquarie Fields. That letter was considered at the Church Council meeting on Sunday, 16 October, 2005. It was the recommendation of the meeting that we respond in regards to Section 3, namely service provided to the Macquarie Fields community.

Although many people in our congregation come from that area, we believe that the contribution made by the Ingleburn Literacy Centre has been our most significant contribution towards helping change the direction of young lives–and that continues to be the case.

In helping children make sense of what they are reading and by showing them how they can make their reading sound more like that of "good readers", we empower Year 1 to Year 6 children with a resultant growth in both reading and self confidence. By modeling how parents can help their children read in a way that builds relationships and breaks the cycle of frustration, family dynamics are changed.

I have provided a pamphlet which summarises the work of the Literacy Centre, a quality program. Copies of some research that was conducted to evaluate the program is also enclosed.

Although our costs are minimal (currently $14 per session of 50 minutes) some of our families need to withdraw when family calamities (such as loss of parental employment or mobility) befall them.

Should you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me either in my role as secretary of the Ingleburn Uniting Church Council or as resource person at the Ingleburn Uniting Church Literacy Centre.

Dr Nita SMITH KING
Secretary Ingleburn Uniting Church Council

Email: nita@radio-active.net.au

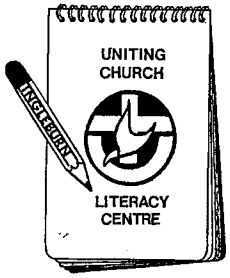
CENTRE PERSONNEL

1 . Classroom teachers: Teachers are fully trained and paid by the fees. Fees include extras such as taxation and workers' compensation requirements.

2 . Volunteers: All other personnel give of their time freely because they want to help families that are hurting because of the frustration they feel when a child has trouble reading. They also help so your fees can be kept to a minimum.

3 . Ingleburn Uniting Church supports the work of the Centre by the provision of the premises, including lighting and heating costs. They also pray regularly for the children at the Centre and their families.

4. **The Centre Resource person,** Dr. Nita SMITH KING has had almost 20 years of classroom teaching in a variety of settlings. Following her initial teacher training she received training in Special Education, following that with postgraduate qualifications in language/literacy learning. A degree in educational psychology followed. Her recent doctorate focused on how children get the hidden message/s of stories written on two levels... and what teachers do to help in that process. She also works part-time for the university supervising student teachers in local schools.



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Literacy Centre

P.O. Box 536
Ingleburn, N.S.W. 1890
Australia
Church Phone: (02) 9605 2557
Contact Phone (02) 9829 5414
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Ingleburn Uniting Church

Literacy Centre

THE PLACE WHERE READING MAKES SENSE

AND

PARENTS ARE WELCOME

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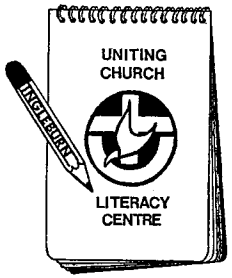

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THE PLACE WHERE READING MAKES SENSE

AND

PARENTS ARE WELCOME

GETTING HELP FOR YOUR CHILD IS NOT ALWAYS EASY

By the time you found this pamphlet, you had probably tried many avenues to get your child the help you KNOW is needed.

At the Ingleburn Uniting Church Literacy Centre we recognise parents have a wealth of knowledge about their children and a commitment to help them achieve their potential. We also believe that parents have a wealth of life experiences that can be used to help their children make sense of what they are reading.

FINDING US

We use the Vestry of the church as a meeting/waiting room. One way of finding the Centre is this: If you parked your car behind the Ingleburn Library (in Cumberland Road) and looked across the road, you would see an unpaved driveway and a small galvanized fence. If you look through the galvanized fence you will see a green door marked VESTRY. That is where you will find us.

TRAINED STAFF

There are no more than three children in each classroom and all teachers are fully trained.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN ENROLLING YOUR CHILD IN THE LITERACY CENTRE

1. Leave your name and contact details on the church answering machine. Please make sure you speak clearly. Call again if you are not sure your message was recorded. OR

2. Email: nita@radio-active.net.au OR

3. Call into the Literacy Centre (on the Cumberland Road side of the church) between 4-6 pm on a Tuesday or Thursday afternoon during term for an enrolment form. OR

4. Call 02 9829 5414

INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS

Because we believe that each child has been created uniquely by God, we offer individual programs designed to meet the individual needs.

AT FEES YOU CAN AFFORD

Our fee structure is designed to reduce the financial drain on families. Committed volunteers support paid staff to enable this to happen.

Call (02) 9605 2557 OR (02) 98295414 now

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW?

The Literacy Centre was the focus of some research in 2000 into changes seen by parents and children in relation to (a) understanding how to make reading make sense, parents and children cooperating in their reading, reading by choice, and feeling good about themselves as readers. The results were published as the only Australian study in an international book on language and literacy learning in 2002. A teacher-oriented article was also published in 2002.

Teacher version published by the Australian Curriculum Studies Association:

Smith King, N. (2002). *Oral reading: Pain or pleasure?* The Primary Educator, *1*, 8-13.

Version including statistics:

Smith King, N. & Harrison, H. (2002). Putting children through their p.a.c.e.s. in an after hours literacy centre. In Pandian, A. & Baboo, S. B. (Eds.), *Learning to communicate* (pp. 55-57). Altona, Victoria: Common Ground.

contact and connection with other human beings is the life source for us all.

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Chapter 5

Putting Children through their P.A.C.E.S. in an After Hours Literacy Centre

Parent and Student Perceptions of Oral Reading Changes

Nita J. Smith King and Helen M. Harrison

Introduction

The Importance of Oral Reading

Language and literacy learning underpin much of the teaching and learning that occurs in primary schools. The ability to read is valued in our culture. Indeed, the inability to read places enormous stress on individuals and families in a society that increasingly uses print to communicate social, educational and political changes (Luke & Gilbert, 1993).

Although written activities such as cloze tests can be very valuable teaching/testing tools, oral reading can have two main advantages for the teacher who deals with children in a specialist reading environment. Firstly, oral reading can provide 'windows on language processes at work, as oral and written miscues appear to mirror the processes that underlie silent reading (Goodman & Goodman, 1994:120-122). Secondly, when children have a reading problem, training their parents to listen to them read in a way that builds relationships can break the cycle of frustration and powerlessness for both parties.

However, merely using oral reading as a strategy with poor readers, although necessary, is not sufficient to achieve the optimum improvement. Also necessary are conditions that will enhance the

Paper presented at the Seventh International Literacy and Education research Network Conference on Learning, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia, 5–9 July 2000.

reading strategies that have been put in place to improve the children's reading.

Optimising Oral Reading Using the p.a.c.e.s.

Conditions of Learning

The context of this study was a Literacy Centre that already had an oral reading program in place and that intentionally implemented the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning. These conditions were identified initially as a cluster by Holliday (1994, 1997) as necessary for teacher learning and have been further refined and tested by Harrison (1998, 1999a, 1999b) and Smith King, Harrison and Holliday (1998). Initial testing indicates these conditions may actually enhance learning in *all* contexts. Now to be summarised in Harrison's work by the acronym p.a.c.e.s., the conditions are [p]ersonal meaning, [a]ction, [c]ollaboration, [e]mpowerment and [s]elf-affirmation. Although they are treated as separate entities in this paper, in reality the conditions usually work together for optimal learning.

[p]ersonal meaning

The [p]ersonal meaning condition must be present because students *need* to think about the learning outcome in a way that makes sense to them. The focus here is *intellectual*. The teacher helps students to work mentally with their own and others' opinions, ideas, theories and the like, so they can retain, discard, or blend these as personal meaning is achieved.

[a]ction.

The [a]ction condition must be present because students need to do in order to learn. The focus of this condition is *physical*. At the teacher's prompting or on their own initiative, students use their bodies as well as other physical resources to make real or concrete what is being learned.

[c]ollaboration.

The [c]ollaboration condition must be present because students need to connect, communicate and co-operate with relevant others while achieving the learning outcome. The focus here is *social*. The teacher must ensure that students are not isolated while attempting to learn.

For their part, students must recognise when to collaborate with others and when to work alone.

[e]mpowerment

The [e]mpowerment condition must be present because students need to be able to shape the learning process. The focus here is *motivational*. The teacher grants, and the students must seek, autonomy, self-direction and appropriate control over learning.

[s]elf-affirmation

This condition must be present because students need to have a positive perception of themselves as learners. The focus of this condition is *emotional*. The teacher gives constructive, perhaps corrective feedback to the effect that the student is good at learning. Alternatively, students can provide their own feedback.

All the previous work or research that has been done using the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning have occurred within adult learning environments. Our next step, therefore, was to investigate whether the five conditions are also relevant to children.

We know that each learning condition can be located within recognised psychological frameworks (Harrison, 1999b). It is also well documented that when parents volunteer to read to children there are increases in positive attitudes to reading (e.g., Fear, 1991). Many schools are using parents increasingly within the classroom to hear children read orally. In an action research project based on oral reading with Grades 5 and 7, DeAngelo (1997) reported favourable results from using parental involvement in a daily oral reading that also involved an incentive component. However, a search of the literature suggests that parents and children do not always agree in their estimations of the children's involvement and improvement in reading once parents are also involved and even with incentives (Anderson, 1993; Yap, 1987; Heerman & Callison, 1978; Lamme & Olmsted, 1977; Schwarz, 1975).

These studies might be seen to have inadvertently implemented the collaboration and self-affirmation or one or other of the conditions of learning. But no study has so far intentionally operationalised all five conditions in a concerted effort to enhance reading outcomes. This study was therefore conducted for that purpose. It compared parents' and children's perceptions of the degree to which each of the five

p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning were present (a) before the children came to an after-school Literacy Centre and (b) since they had been at the Centre and had been intentionally exposed to those conditions through the oral reading program.

Method

Context

The Literacy Centre is situated in a rapidly growing region of south-western Sydney. There are fourteen government schools within a radius of five kilometres from the centre. This Literacy Centre was an offshoot of one that commenced in 1992 in the regional centre in response to families who were unable to get help for their children who were not eligible for school-based schemes or, if eligible, there were no places available for the children.

The Literacy Centre is professionally run, although it is not-for-profit. All referrals come through the school system and parents, classroom teachers and school counsellor complete the application form. Since the opening of the Centre in 1994 there has always been a representative of the NSW Department of Education and Training on the Board of Management and the District Superintendent is the Centre's Patron.

The Centre's guidelines are:

A. only trained teachers teach the children,
B. there are no more than three children per class,
C. teachers are paid award rates from the minimal contributions paid by parents,
D. volunteers collect fees and are available to make a cup of tea for waiting parents,
E. sessions are 45 minutes long once a week,
F. small home assignments are given, and
G. only clean, new, and up-to-date material is used.

Participants

The parents of students who had been at the Literacy Centre for two ten-week terms were approached for permission to participate in the study. At the time of the study there were 23 children enrolled at the Centre. Two of those children, although making considerable progress, were excluded from the study because they had been at the

Centre for less than a term. Sixteen pairs of parents and students participated in the study. Parental ages range from 28 to 42 years. The children were between 7 and 11 and there were equal numbers of boys and girls.

The Oral Reading Program: Implementing p.a.c.e.s.

[p]ersonal meaning (intellectual focus)

Immediately following an assessment children are shown (in the presence of the parent) how they can make more sense of what they are reading. They are given specific instructions to 'look at the sentence with your eyes and when you know what it says read it to us like a good reader'. Younger children are asked to 'whisper' rather than 'look' until they no longer sub-vocalise.

Where there is one word that is a problem, the teacher supports the child through the process of checking for meaning and whether the necessary sounds can be found in the given word to check if the suggested word is correct. Children are told that reading always has to make sense and always has to sound like the language we talk or the language we read. Children are reminded of what they already know about the content (e.g., birds) and how that can help in the reading process. They are also reminded of language patterns found in oral and written language when that information can help to predict or confirm a 'guess'. They are intentionally taught that they already have a store of information that they and the writer have in common and that good readers use that information in their reading.

Where children are not making sense of their reading [p]ersonal meaning is either missing or less than required. Parents and children can (and do), ask why the teacher does (or does not do) something. The teacher links the information to what adults know about reading from their experiences as well as to basic psycholinguistic theory in a simplified form and with the use of diagrams and illustrations.

[a]ction (physical focus)

This condition is implemented at the Literacy Centre by providing specific times when the children can put into practice what they are learning. It has become the norm at the Centre for parents of children who previously disliked reading to walk into the Centre and announce that 'Jeremy picked up a book and took himself off to read the other

night' or 'Guess what! Tina reads to herself in bed of a night these days!' It was a constant flow of such information that prompted this study.

[c]ollaboration (social focus)

Parents, children and the specialist teacher are in a collaborative three-way process at the Literacy Centre in regards to the oral reading program. The program occurs within sight and sound of parents who choose to stay while the lessons are on. That means there is a constant modelling for parents of how to listen to children read in a way that builds relationships. Sometimes adults (who can not see what is being read) are asked to suggest words and explain why they would choose that word. There is an abundance of anecdotal evidence that parents who come to the Centre, with their busy lifestyles and their intuition that reading should make sense and sound like reading, very quickly take on a more co-operative role in their interactions.

[e]mpowerment (motivational focus)

This condition of learning is implemented by placing the child at the centre of the oral reading process, giving them responsibility and some choice for what is being read. The child sits in the reading chair with an audience of from one to seven adults. Sometimes there are also other children present who are invited to sit beside the child so they can see the pictures. The onus is on the child who is reading to make sense of each sentence unit and to produce a sentence that makes sense and 'sounds like a good reader'. Often the child is asked to read their favourite part of the story if they have already spent some time on it, giving them a sense of ownership of the reading program.

[s]elf-affirmation (emotional focus)

Once they have initial success with reading during assessment, the children are assured they *will* be able to learn to read, for several reasons. Firstly, they have skills they are not yet using. Secondly, the Centre has a long history of success even with very poor readers. Thirdly, they have just shown the parent and the teacher that they have successfully read a story that was slightly harder than the one they just had a lot of difficulty reading. In the oral reading setting, when children show improved reading behaviours such as self-correcting or reading fluently, they are told they have just done something that good

readers do and are asked if they know what it was. If they don't know, they are told what they did and why it is good. At all stages in the process, children are reassured that they can learn to read. Children are told 'Your teachers at school must be pleased with you!' and given other affirming comments.

The Questionnaires

In order to test the degree to which the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning were perceived to be present before and after entry to the Literacy Centre, two variations on the same questionnaire were produced, one for parents and the other for children. Initially 35 questions that would tap into each of the five conditions of learning were constructed. Twenty questions were chosen from this pool on the basis of (a) relevance to children's reading practices, (b) appropriateness to each specific condition of learning (including no overlap into another condition), and (c) relevance to the teaching practices at the Centre. The questions that were used for the children were also used for the parents, except for changing the grammar so that the parents were being asked for their perceptions of the child's reading and related behaviours.

Four questions were selected for each of the five conditions and each question had a 'before' and 'after' component. The 'before' was defined as before the child started at the Literacy Centre and the 'after' component was defined as 'now' or 'at the Centre' depending on the material in the question. The four questions for each of the five conditions were systematically varied throughout the questionnaire to obviate potential response bias. Within each subset of questions at least one question was phrased in the negative form and scoring was adjusted later to take account of that fact.

The questions chosen to assess the presence of the *[p]ersonal meaning* condition of learning concerned making sense of reading (including a lack of confusion), knowing that one can use more than one strategy when reading, and how to check to see if 'guesses' are correct. The questions designed to test for the presence of the *[a]ction* condition of learning tapped into behaviours such as book-borrowing, quantity of reading (including avoiding reading), and opportunities to put into practice what was being learned. The questions chosen to assess the presence of the *[c]ollaboration* condition of learning concerned the helpfulness (or otherwise) of adults in the oral reading

process, talking with adults about the content of material and talking together about how the adults work out words they are not sure of. Questions to assess the presence of the *[e]mpowerment* condition of learning included *choosing* to read, and choice of materials. The questions concerning the *[s]elf-affirmation* condition of learning tapped into such areas as feeling comfortable/uncomfortable when the child was supposed to be reading, perceptions of improvement in oral reading ability, perceptions of themselves as readers and a judgment of how 'hard' it is to read.

Procedure

Two weeks before the interviews, parents were given a form to explain the study, its emphasis on examining the Centre's oral reading component and the expected benefits to parents and children. Parents were also told that participation was entirely voluntary.

Children were interviewed at the Centre. The children did not have to do any reading for the study. The codes were written on a thick piece of A4 board and were 1=no or never, 2=sometimes or now and then, 3=usually or a fair bit, 4=often or mostly, and 5=always or yes. When children hesitated, the researcher re-read the question, pointed to the chart and read out the codes again for the child. No other help was given. The younger children appeared to have no problem with doing the study except for one question that had a double negative. Once it was realised that was a problem, that question was phrased in the positive.

Parents completed their questionnaires at the Centre or took them home to complete and then mailed them to the researcher later using a stamped and addressed envelope that had been provided.

Results and Discussion

Scoring

All the 'before' and 'after' ratings were adjusted so that an increase in the scale represented an increase in behaviours that would indicate perceived increases in the presence of each of the five p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning. There were four question for each of the five conditions.

Lack of mainframe facilities has meant that we have been unable to conduct a two way, between and within subjects ANOVA.

Therefore the results of this study have not yet been finalised. In the interim, however, the statistical procedures we have used in this paper provide sufficient information for us to be optimistic that the final results will be most useful as well as being compact and more reliable statistically.

Looking at the Conditions Separately and within Groups

Results are summarised in Table 1. A related measures t test was conducted to compare children's before and after scores for each of the five conditions of learning. Corresponding tests were also undertaken to compare parents' before and after scores for each of the five conditions of learning.

Results show that children perceived all five conditions to be significantly more present after their entry into the Literacy Centre ([p]ersonal meaning, $t_{rel}(15) = -11.06$, $p < .0001$; [a]ction, $t_{rel}(15) = -10.18$, $p < .0001$; [c]ollaboration, $t_{rel}(15) = -3.98$, $p < .002$; [e]mpowerment, $t_{rel}(15) = -3.16$, $p < .01$; [s]elf-affirmation, $t_{rel}(15) = -11.99$, $p < .0001$). Likewise, results show that parents perceived all five conditions to be significantly more present after their children's entry into the Literacy Centre ([p]ersonal meaning, $t_{rel}(15) = -10.13$, $p < .0001$; [a]ction, $t_{rel}(15) = -7.09$, $p < .0001$; [c]ollaboration, $t_{rel}(15) = -7.02$, $p < .0001$; [e]mpowerment, $t_{rel}(15) = -6.23$, $p < .0001$; [s]elf-affirmation, $t_{rel}(15) = -12.29$, $p < .0001$). These results can be interpreted as follows.

[p]ersonal meaning

As can be seen from Table 1, both children and parents perceived that there had been a significant increase in the degree to which personal meaning was present after entry into the Literacy Centre and therefore children could make more sense of what they were reading. The children said that before they came to the Centre they were confused and didn't really know what to do when stuck, or how to check an answer they thought may be correct. The children said they now no longer see that is the case. Their parents had the same perceptions.

[a]ction

As can be seen from Table 1, both children and parents perceived that there had been a significant increase in the physical act of reading. The children said that they recognise they now borrowed more books,

and read more in terms of both volume and frequency. Their parents had the same perceptions.

[c]ollaboration

As can be seen from Table 1, both children and parents perceived that there had been a significant increase in positive collaborative experiences when reading orally since the children had been at the Centre. According to the children, their reading had been greatly helped by talking with the adults at the Centre and now with their parents at home, about the content of material. They had also been helped by talking together about how adults work out words they were not sure of. Children said that when they read to the adults who help them at the Centre and at home, the adults were now more helpful than the adults who had helped them before the children came to the Centre (e.g., school, home or alternate help). The parents had the same perceptions.

[e]mpowerment

Again, Table 1 shows that both children and parents perceived that the children had greater control over their reading since they had been at the Literacy Centre. The children said that now they were able to select books they really wanted to read and their parents agreed.

[s]elf affirmation

As can be seen from Table 1, both children and parents felt significantly more affirmed as readers since coming to the Literacy Centre. The children were saying they now felt more comfortable when they were supposed to be reading, and they perceived an improvement in their oral reading ability. They now saw themselves as better readers and saw that reading was no longer 'hard'.

	[p]ersonal meaning	
	Before	After
Children	8.06 (3.02)	18.50 (1.67)
Parents	7.44 (2.22)	16.38 (2.42)
	[a]ction	
	Before	After
Children	9.50 (2.13)	16.13 (2.55)
Parents	8.81 (3.02)	16.00 (2.71)

	[c]ollaboration	
	Before	After
Children	12.56 (4.23)	17.75 (1.98)
Parents	11.31 (3.52)	17.50 (1.93)
	[e]mpowerment	
	Before	After
Children	11.63 (4.54)	16.31 (4.39)
Parents	9.50 (2.99)	5.38 (3.01)
	[s]elf-affirmation	
	Before	After
Children	8.31 (3.26)	18.25 (2.74)
Parents	6.50 (2.03)	17.18 (2.71)

Table 1

Looking at the Conditions across Groups

Scores were summed across [p]ersonal meaning, [a]ction, [c]ollaboration, [e]mpowerment, and [s]elf-affirmation to give a total score that was assumed to represent the five conditions of learning operating simultaneously. An independent t test on the *before* total scores for children ($M = 49.63$, $SD = 9.96$) and parents ($M = 44.00$, $SD = 8.01$) was not significant. However, a further independent t test was conducted to compare this total score for children ($M = 88.13$, $SD = 6.28$) and parents ($M = 81.87$, $SD = 9.49$) regarding their perceptions of the degree to which the p.a.c.e.s. conditions were present *after* the children entered the Literacy Centre. This result was significant ($t_{ind}(30) = 2.20$, $p < .05$).

These findings show that children and parents agreed on the relative absence of the five conditions as a cluster before the children came to the Literacy Centre. However, the two groups differed in their perceptions once the children were at the Centre. More than parents, children were convinced that the five conditions of learning were then still present for their oral reading.

Conclusions

This study examined perceptions by children and parents of the presence of the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning in regards to the children's oral reading at an after-hours Literacy Centre. Although caution needs to be exercised because of the preliminary nature of the

statistical analyses, they nevertheless have produced some interesting findings. These findings are so robust that they are very likely to be confirmed in a more sophisticated statistical analysis.

Comparisons were made at entry and after two terms at the Literacy Centre. Parents and children agreed that the children did not find reading, especially oral reading, personally meaningful, active, collaborative, empowering, or self-affirming prior to entry. The conditions of learning were conspicuous by their absence away from the Centre. Parents and children then agreed that the five conditions were present once the children had been attending the Centre. However, there was a heightened perception among the children that their reading had improved in these five ways after two terms.

These findings are compatible with those of a study that also encouraged children to (a) take their time and (b) take responsibility for how they worked with parents and other adults in an oral reading program (Schwarz, 1975). That children and parents in the present study perceived the five conditions of learning to be relatively absent prior to the children coming into the Literacy Centre does raise concerns about oral reading programs in primary schools. This is despite the increased emphasis now being placed on literacy by the NSW Department of Education and Training, including its reading recovery program.

This study adds to the growing body of quantitative and qualitative evidence that putting learners through their p.a.c.e.s. really does enhance their learning. We now know that children respond, as do adults (Harrison, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Smith King et al., 1998), to the presence of the five conditions of learning. A next step could be to back-up the findings here by confirming that children's oral reading is significantly improved at the Literacy Centre, and that this improvement is directly related to and even caused by the Centre's implementation of the five conditions of learning. This would be a further demonstration that oral reading, like all aspects of reading, and indeed all learning, should always be personally meaningful, active, collaborative, empowering, and self-affirming.

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ORAL READING: PAIN OR PLEASURE?

– or what football can teach us.

NITA SMITH KING

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The pressures of finding time to effectively hear children read can be quite daunting. The issues for teachers are: Why hear children read? What to do with the rest of the children when I am hearing children read? How can I be confident that others who hear children read are not undoing the effort I exert in working on achieving syllabus outcomes? What carry over will there be at home? ... and many others.

Recent training of teachers in the taking of running records has demonstrated to teachers something of what Goodman and Goodman (1994:120-124) meant in referring to oral reading as "windows on language processes at work". In other words, understanding which cueing systems children are over-relying on when they read can provide a store of information about what concepts children have about the reading process.

THE QUESTION is what to do with that information—that is, how to change children's perceptions of the reading process and help them become successful readers?

Vocabulary building, mixed words, word building, and such related activities that look at the "micro" level of each of the cueing systems (semantic, syntactic and graphophonic) can be very useful activities to under-gird the reading process. *But they are no more "reading" than Thursday night's training session is "football".*

FOOTBALLERS may work really hard on passing, on general fitness and game strategies, but, come Saturday, it's about the game. It's about enjoyment. It's about training during the week for a real reason—not just to be good at the individual skills. In fact, most football fans would recognise that being the best person in the team at kicking a ball will be of no benefit if there is little awareness of the point of the whole game—or if the player is incapable of working outside a training mentality.

Good footballers integrate every skill they have with all they know about the world of football. Intuitively they examine what good football players do and take on board what skills may need strengthening. But, at the end of the day, they know it's about playing the game. Training is a means to an end—not an end in itself.

READING is also about one or more "end points" not the skills practice. Primarily, reading is about communication. The writer has one or more messages to share with a wider audience. Readers do not sit with blank minds, waiting to be filled from the reading material. On the contrary, each mind that comes to any particular piece of writing will bring to it varying amounts of knowledge about the world and about how language works. The greater the degree of the match between the reader and the writer, the greater the comprehension on the part of the reader (Cambourne, B., 1988).

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Convincing children that they have gleaned a huge store of information about the world and about language in the few short years they have been alive, is one of the tasks (and one of the joys) of any teacher who wants to make a real difference in regards to how struggling readers see both themselves and the reading process.

THIS ARTICLE starts by describing the context of a recent study that examined oral reading outcomes. It briefly describes how the program works and the results of the study. It concludes by suggesting ways it could be adapted for use in the classroom (a) to enable the teacher to reinforce good oral reading strategies, and (b) model strategies to parents who may be available to help either in the classroom or at home.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY: As early as 1979 the official NSW DET Reading K-12 Policy statement stated in capital letters "READING, ABOVE ALL, IS SUPPOSED TO MAKE SENSE " (p.5). It should also be noted that the language of reading also needs to conform to other generally accepted oral and written patterns. These two basic premises relate to the semantic and syntactic aspects of literacy that teachers are familiar with.

Almost every child who comes to the Ingleburn Uniting Church's Literacy Centre reads as if these two crucial elements were optional extras. Considerable effort is expended focussing on each word as if it were the source of all wisdom—clinging to a hope that the graphophonic clues they have usually spent so much time honing will somehow magically make them read like other children can. They do not expect reading to make much sense—and often it doesn't. The more they struggle, the harder they appear to cling to the hope that the secret lies in "sounding it out", often doing that more poorly than they would do in specific phonics exercises.

For the last 18 years I had encouraged students to make sense of what they were reading by positioning myself *physically (sitting across from the reader)* and *emotionally* as the listener. Within the Centre it was usual practice to invite the parent to observe the child read. However that was always done in a secluded environment.

Involving parents more fully in the oral reading program at the Literacy Centre happened "accidentally" when the roof of the main building was in danger of collapsing. That meant moving three small group classrooms plus a group of waiting parents and a few siblings into a medium sized hall.

Parent comments such as *"why do you do X?"* or *"I've started hearing*

my child like you do" increased. Children seemed to make more progress in their oral reading; they were sounding increasingly "like good readers". So the move back into the renovated building with its multiple rooms and/or spaces caused some anguish as I dealt with my preconceived ideas of the role of parents in the oral reading progress. In my long teaching career in NSW, the ACT and NZ I had always encouraged parents to listen to their children read, but I had rarely asked myself how that might happen.

Of course I had encouraged parents occasionally to listen to me hear their own child read, but in the hall *all* parents could see and hear me at work with all the children if they chose. A dialogue began inside my head: *"You can't keep doing that!"* "But it's been working" *Children won't cope with other parents able to hear them!"* "But they have been!" *"What would other teachers think about that practice?"* "But who is important here...isn't it the children?" *"Do I have the right to stop doing something that is working—something that seems to be empowering parents and children?"*

Once I had sorted out my priorities (i.e. what was good for the children and their families) we settled into the practice that had started in the old hall – a practice that has become a corner stone of what we do.

ORAL READING AT THE CENTRE: The child and I sit to the side (but within hearing distance) of the group of parents in the waiting room. The atmosphere is relaxed with a helper providing hot or cold beverages. The recliner chair is referred to as "the reading chair".

As I listen to the children read I intentionally concentrate on the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning. None of these conditions is new in educational and psychological literature but the work done by Holliday (1994) in isolating them as a cluster and that of Harrison (1999) in clarifying the definitions helped set the scene for explicitly focussing on what had been done previously in a more implicit and intuitive way.

These aspects of learning are [p]ersonal meaning (knowing what to do to make sense of what reading is all about), [a]ction (having positive opportunities to put what they are learning about reading into practice), [c]ollaboration (interacting with supportive others in the reading process), [e]mpowerment (having as much control over the decision-making in reading process as possible) and [s]elf-affirmation (feeling good about one's self as a reader).

The child and I sit to the side (but within hearing distance) of the group of parents in the waiting room. The atmosphere is relaxed with a helper providing hot or cold beverages. The recliner chair is referred to as "the reading chair".

IMPLEMENTING THE CONDITIONS

[p]ersonal meaning *(intellectual* focus)

Immediately following an assessment I show the children (in the presence of the parent) how they can make more sense of what they are reading. I give them specific instructions to "look at the sentence with your eyes and when you know what it says read it to us like a good reader". Younger children are asked to "whisper" rather than "look" until they no longer sub-vocalise. Where there is one word that is a problem, I support the child through the process of checking for meaning and whether the necessary sounds can be found in the given word to check if the suggested word is correct, teaching them a way to check when they are on their own, and encouraging them to decide (after being reminded of the evidence) whether or not they are right. Often the children are most uncertain about that so I tell them "Yes, you are right because..." Children are frequently reminded that reading *always* has to make sense and *always* has to sound like the language we talk or the language we read. Children are reminded of what they already know about the content and how that can help in the reading process. They are also reminded of language patterns found in oral and written

language when that information can help to predict or confirm a "guess". They are intentionally taught that they already have a store of information that they and the writer have in common and that good readers use that information in their reading. Where children are not making sense of their reading [p]ersonal meaning is either missing or less than required. Parents and children can (and do), ask why I do (or do not do) something. As the specialist reading teacher I link the information to what adults know about reading from their experiences as well as to basic psycholinguistic theory in a simplified form and with the use of diagrams and illustrations.

(a)ction (*physical focus*)
I implement this condition at the Centre by providing specific times when the child can put into practice what s/he is learning. It has become the norm at the Centre for parents of children who previously disliked reading to walk into the Centre and announce that "Jeremy picked up a book and took himself off to read the other night" or "Guess what! Tina reads to herself in bed at night these days!" It was a constant flow of such information that prompted this study.

(c)ollaboration (*social focus*)
Parents, children and I as the specialist teacher are in a collaborative three-way process at the Literacy Centre in regards to the oral reading program. The oral reading program occurs within sight and sound of parents who choose to stay in the waiting area while the lessons are on. That means there is a constant modeling for parents of how to listen to children read in a way that builds relationships. Sometimes adults (who also can not see what is being read) are asked to suggest words and explain why they would choose that word. Parents become active partners in the process, sharing what they know of how language works. A plethora of anecdotal evidence suggests that parents who come to the Centre, with their busy lifestyles and their strong sense that reading should make sense and sound like reading, very quickly take on a more co-operative role in their interactions.

(e)mpowerment (*motivational focus*)
This condition of learning is implemented by placing the child at the centre of the oral reading process. The child sits in the reading chair with an audience of from one to seven adults. Sometimes there are also younger siblings present and they are invited to sit beside the child so they can see the pictures. The onus is on the child who is reading to make sense of each sentence unit and to produce a sentence that makes sense and "sounds like a good reader". Often the child is asked to read their favourite part of the story if they have already spent some time on it.

(s)elf-affirmation (*emotional focus*)
The initial demonstration of successful reading in the assessment situation is followed by assurances that the children *will* be able to learn to read because they have skills they are not using, because the Centre has a long history of success with poor readers and because they have just shown the parent and the teacher that they have successfully read a story that was slightly harder than the one they just had a lot of difficulty reading. In the oral reading setting, when children show improved reading behaviours such as self-correcting or reading fluently, they are told they have just done something that good readers do and are asked if they know what it was. If they don't know, they are told what they did and why it is good. At all stages in the process, children are affirmed that they can learn to read. Children are told "Your teachers at school must be pleased with you!" and given other affirming comments.

In the oral reading setting, when children show improved reading behaviours such as self-correcting or reading fluently, they are told they have just done something that good readers do and are asked if they know what it was.

Parents who observe these strategies being demonstrated frequently take them on board. They report they do that because they can see the difference in how their children are approaching print.

The outcome of this explicit oral reading program was that parents frequently told us how family relationships had been enhanced through the changes in how they were now hearing their children read. The purpose of the study therefore was to test that volume of anecdotal evidence.

THE STUDY: Both children and parents responded to a series of questions that were based on the five aspects of educational practice that underpin the oral reading program at the Centre. There were four questions per condition with each response requiring ordinal evaluation in regards to both "before entry" and "after entry".

Parents were free to take their sheets home but children were interviewed at the Centre in the presence of another adult. The four questions for each of the five conditions were systematically varied throughout the questionnaire to obviate potential response bias. Within each subset of questions at least one question was phrased in the negative form and scoring was adjusted later to take account of that fact. The rating scale used was written on a sheet and children were frequently reminded of the scoring system. The children did not have to do any reading for the study. The parents used the same code that had been set out at the top of the question sheets. As stated, their questions reflected the same format as the children's questions. However the questions were phrased in terms of observations of their child's behaviours.

Those interested in a more detailed description of the study (including the scoring) may wish to read the article by Smith King and Harrison (2000).

THE RESULTS of this study have not been finalised. However, the statistical procedures used provide sufficient information to be optimistic that the final results will be most useful as well as being compact and more reliable statistically.

These results indicated that both parents and children believed that children knew more now about reading and how it related to language ([p]ersonal meaning). They were now reading more books (volume and frequency) ([a]ction). Both parents and children were more positive about working together ([c]ollaboration) and felt the children had more control over the reading process and thus were more motivated ([e]mpowerment). Children and parents were also in agreement that the children now felt far better about themselves as readers. Recalling the [p]ersonal meaning results we know these feelings were based in the reality that these children actually knew what they were doing. They were explicitly implementing sound strategies and making sense of what they were reading. Best of all they were enjoying reading, sometimes for the first time ever. These results very strongly suggest that children perceived all five conditions to be significantly more present after their entry into the Literacy Centre. Similarly, parents perceived all five conditions to be more present after their children's entry into the Literacy Centre.

TRANSLATING THESE PRACTICES INTO THE CLASSROOM may not be easy because of the constraints of time and the numbers of children. It is encouraging to remind ourselves that our good readers have usually worked out their own successful strategies for themselves. Hearing these children read is a joy.

Some children will require this kind of one on one help only when encountering a text they are highly motivated to read but which is bordering on their frustration level. It is the weaker readers in the classroom who will have most to benefit from these strategies.

Many teachers plan to hear four or five children read each day, either while the rest of the class is reading independently or as part of groups that rotate. The teacher with many children who stumble in their oral reading may need to employ alternate strategies. The principle of processing print at sentence level (at least) need not (nor ought not) be relegated to the one-on-one situations. Demonstrating the process of predicting what the unknown word might mean and then confirming or rejecting those predictions through a process of checking the semantic and graphophonic clues can be taught incidentally as well as more formally.

The key factors are time, trust and training: *time* for the child to process print integrating all strategies they have, *trust* that what the child knows about and uses language usually far outweighs what they don't know, and *training* in the process of tapping into that rich source of background information that the child may be disregarding.

PARENTS who observe these strategies being demonstrated frequently take them on board. They report they do that because they can see the difference in how their children are approaching print—they are retrieving the writer's idea as expressed on the page and communicating that to the parent listener in a way that makes sense. Many parents, used to replacing peculiar words they encounter in their own reading with alternate words that make sense, express a sense of relief that their children are now *expecting* print to make sense, something their past reading miscues indicated they had given up on.

The best way to train parents of children struggling with oral reading appears to be through exposure to a variety of situations using several children. Indeed, many schools are using parents increasingly within the classroom to hear children read orally. In an action research project based on oral reading with Grades 5 and 7, DeAngelo (1997) reported favourable results from using parental involvement in a daily oral reading that also involved an incentive component. However, a search of the literature suggests that parents and children do not always agree in their estimations of the children's involvement and improvement in reading (Anderson, 1993; Yap,1987; Heerman & Callison,1978; Lamme & Olmsted,1977; Schwarz, 1975). One of the most exciting aspects of this particular study is the fact that both children and parents have observed statistically significant positive differences between aspects of oral reading before and after participation in the explicit oral reading program at the Centre.

CONCLUSION

One of the great joys of working at the Literacy Centre is seeing the looks of understanding and/or joy on faces that previously showed pain and confusion. The other joy is seeing parents relax and enjoying hearing their children read. The roar of the crowd at a football match is always exciting, but the parent or teacher may well argue that seeing a struggling reader "get it all together" is far more satisfying. Any strategies that have these effects are worth learning about.

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