

Papers From a Problems Court
The Literacy Recollections Project:
Building Reading Courses on Oral History Literacy Biographies

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This Problems Court and the following four papers are a result of interactions among a group of regular ARF attendees. We meet for lunch after the last session each year to discuss how we can use what we have learned to improve our practice. The closing session of the 1997 conference was the presentation by James King and Norman Stahl (King & Stahl, 1997) on oral histories. We decided to return to our campuses and attempt to integrate some of the concepts from that address into our content area reading courses. Our experiences at ARF led us to the literature on personal narrative and story. In turn, we developed the Literacy Recollections Project. We continued our dialogue over email, and constructed a website that was used to organize the project and record our students' oral histories. What follows are individual accounts of our experiences. These four papers attempt to synthesize our thinking on how instructional activity that engages students in the active telling, writing and reading of personally relevant narratives effects their education as teachers.

Trathen and Dale begin by framing a theoretical perspective on narrative story. The purpose of their paper is to examine ways that the reading and writing of narratives contribute to teacher education, in particular, the potential of narrative to shape ways of thinking, attitudes and beliefs. Next, Ulmer describes how students in her content area reading course interviewed teachers and students gleaning stories that connect instruction to real life experiences. Moorman follows with a description of the "Literacy Recollections Room," a web-based literacy biography project. Students in this project attempted to capture the story of the process of acquiring literacy, both their own and others. Gilbert* concludes with an examination of narrative reflections that students wrote as part of participation in email discourse.

*The former Susan Nelson was married during the summer of 1999, and now goes by Susan Gilbert—but that's another story.

Narratives in Teacher Education

Woodrow Trathen, Michael Dale

A man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them; and he tries to live his life as if he were telling a story. (Jean-Paul Sartre)

Teaching, then, is intimately tied to the understanding and telling of stories--stories of communities, students, and the lives we all live, as well as the stories embodied in the disciplines we teach. Learning to teach involves becoming attuned to particular narratives, learning to do what teachers do, learning to think and talk as teachers, and ultimately becoming what a teacher is. Stories embody language (the primary tool) as the vehicle for developing concepts, meanings, and understandings about teaching. Through stories we learn to think, feel, and talk like a teacher. Skill use, ways of thinking, and language use are embedded in the narratives of the teaching community, and we develop the identity of a teacher by engaging in these. Borrowing from James Gee's (1990) articulation of literacy as social practice: Becoming literate in the discourse of teaching, then, means that we must acquire the tool use skills, ways of thinking, language, attitudes and beliefs of the members of the community of teaching. Narratives offer a means of entering the discourse of teaching. Jo Anne Pagano (1991) has described the relationship between narrative stories and teaching in this way:

Teaching is, among other things, a discursive and interpretive practice When we teach, we tell stories about the world. Some stories are scientific, some historical, some philosophical, some literary, and so on. Educational theories are stories about how teaching and learning work, about who does what to whom and for what purposes, and most particularly, educational theories are stories about the kind of world we want to live in and what we should do to make that world. (p. 197)

Why narrative?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* relays the following meanings for narrative and related terms:

Narrate: 1) To relate, recount, give an account of; 2) to make a relation. Narration: 1) The action of relating or recounting; 2) a story; 3) that part of an oration in which the facts of the matter are stated. Narrative: 1) That part of a deed or document which contains a statement of the relevant or essential facts; 2) an account or narration, a history, tale, story, recital.

From these meanings, three characteristics of narrative seem germane: (a) Narratives are an accounting of information, a way of relating information; (b) the information that narratives present ("state") is deemed important and relevant; (c) the tale or story form is used to present this important information. Yet, narrative is much more than is contained in these descriptions.

Narratives (stories) contain the potential for an emotional connection to our lives and imagined ones. "Reading great works of art and reading life are different but not unrelated activities" (Putnam, 1990, p. 183). What Putnam suggests through this comparison is an intimate connection between the narrative form and understanding human lives, our own and the lives of others. Narrative forms are a means to experience and touch the world, its joy and despair (Iser,

1972; Johnson, 1993; Touponce, 1966). Narrative, both the construction of our own individual stories and the reading of others', is a way of seeing and understanding the richness and complexity of human lives.

Narrative can be a crucible, a meeting place of experience and philosophical ideas, where emotion is transmitted as narrative shows us worlds we do not know, or corrects our perspective toward the world we know all too well (Freund, 1965). In essence, the narrative form elicits a morally imaginative engagement. Martha Nussbaum describes aspects of moral imagination in *Cultivating Humanity*:

We are drawing on Socrates' concept of "the examined life," on Aristotle's notions of reflective citizenship, and above all on Greek and Roman Stoic notions of an education that is "liberal" in that it liberates the mind from the bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world. (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 8)

To become world citizens we must not simply amass knowledge; we must also cultivate in ourselves a capacity for sympathetic imagination that will enable us to comprehend the motives and choices of people different from ourselves, seeing them not as forbiddingly alien and other, but as sharing many problems and possibilities with us. . . . Here the arts [narratives] play a vital role, cultivating powers of imagination that are essential to citizenship. (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 8)

[Through narrative, readers] embrace the ordinary. . . [and] concrete realities of a life of poverty are brought home to them with a textured vividness unavailable [in other types of text]. (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 95)

Novels and other narrative forms enable what Louise Rosenblatt (1994) calls "aesthetic" reading, a personal, lived through experience of the text which can have a liberating, fortifying effect on the reader's life. Although Nussbaum has argued eloquently and persuasively in a number of her writings that novels are unique constructions for rendering the richness of human life, other narrative forms also are capable of revealing "the interaction between general human aspirations and particular forms of social life that either enable or impede those aspirations, shaping them powerfully in the process. Novels [and other narrative forms] present persistent forms of human need and desire realized in specific social situations" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 7).

In teacher education programs, then, fictional narrative and other narrative forms (Bullough, 1994; Bullough, Crow, & Knowles, 1992; Bullough & Gitlin, 1995) are critical (arguably necessary) components if we want prospective teachers to understand education as a "liberating art," and not primarily as a means of slotting students for narrowly defined economic roles. In particular, given the characteristics of students entering teacher education, these prospective teachers need a richer and more enriching story of education. They need a story (a theory) of education to counter the narrow and corrupting economic story they currently live and enact.

Dewey (1904) and others have argued the importance of a coherent theory of learning and education--in Pagano's (1991) terms, a coherent *story* of learning and education--to guide teachers' instructional decisions. Yet, researchers have found teachers' theories and beliefs to be

shaped by years of experience (their lived stories in school), often experience that runs counter to perspectives engendered by teacher education programs. Furthermore, these beliefs seem to be resistant to critical reflection and change (Kagan, 1992; Liston & Zeichner, 1991). Students entering teacher education possess what Martha Nussbaum (1995) has referred to as an “economic mind”—what we would call an economic story about the meaning and value of education. No one who has been in teacher education for any length of time can fail to recognize the characteristics of these students; the most salient one is the seeking out of “techniques” that will be “useful” in their imagined classrooms of the future. Such students come to us already disposed to see education and teaching and learning (including their own learning) through a particular story, one which is in complex and subtle ways tied to an oftentimes unreflective acceptance of economic utilitarianism. So, like any other form of education, educating teachers is a process of building upon, extending and reconstructing past experiences—particularly schooling experiences (Dewey, 1938)—and assisting students in creating new stories of teaching.

However, it is not just the narrative but also how one reads the narrative. In teacher education, novels and short stories about the complexity of human lives inside and outside of school settings give occasion for students to confront the narrowness and limitations of an economic perspective of education and to develop a richer conception of education, one tied to discovering truths about the human condition and our role in it. Adler and Van Doren (1972) refer to this kind of reading as syntopical, and argue that it requires the highest level of reader engagement: “A book is like nature or the world. When you question it, it answers you only to the extent that you do the work of thinking and analysis yourself” (p. 15). Students can critically reflect on perspectives of education and begin to develop alternative conceptions of education through thoughtful reading of narrative and critical discussion in class.

The “call for stories” in education and teacher education and arguments for their value is not new (Booth, 1988; Bruner, 1996; Coles, 1989; Greene, 1978; 1988; Nussbaum, 1986; 1990; 1995; 1997). However, the assault on narrative seems especially intense as the next millennium begins. From state mandated accountability measures to the pervasive framing of education within a narrow economic perspective we find a constriction of vision, an obtuseness in seeing the world of teaching and learning. This constriction of vision represents an immense challenge for teacher educators as the 21st Century approaches. But as Nussbaum has concluded: “Obtuseness is a moral failing; its opposite can be cultivated” (Nussbaum, 1990, p.156). Constructing and reading narratives within teacher education are powerful ways of cultivating sight which is “finely aware and richly responsible” (Nussbaum 1990, p.136).

Unless prospective teachers can come to see themselves and their own learning within a perspective that respects the mystery and complexity within each life, then they will never be able to see this mystery and complexity in the children and adolescents they will teach, never see and understand the ways in which their students' desires and aspirations are either enabled or impeded within the social context of schools, homes, neighborhoods and society. Narratives (reading and writing them) have a critical role to play in both eliciting and developing the ability to see and understand the complexity and richness of human lives. Each of the remaining papers will examine various narrative forms (oral stories, written biographical stories and narrative reflections) as critical tools in teacher education. In the next paper, Connie Ulmer uses teacher and student historical narratives to explore the implications of classroom experiences on literacy development.

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Oral History Interviews As Instructional Learning "Texts"

Constance J. Ulmer

As societal needs and goals of the new millennium change, governmental, educational, social, and political forces combine to promote the growth of individuals so that they can become better citizens of the world. This challenge is not new, but how it is approached is changing. The lines of communication are fluctuating between horrendous and stupendous with the bombardment of the information age and improvements in technological communication. With these fast paced advancements (email conversations, video on line interactions, telecommunications internets, websites, webtv's, virtual reality encounters, etc.), dialogue can get lost in the movement, and it is from the dialogue that learning and growth take place. Dialogues that occur between different arenas of society support learning from the past and dreaming for the future.

In the educational arena, theory and research are embracing the constructivists' theories of learning (Rosenblatt, 1978; Smith, F., 1985; Wells 1986). Constructivists, beginning with Piaget (1923/1926), Dewey (1938), and Vygotsky (1978), have laid the foundation for us to consider dialogue as a key player in growth and learning. For Piaget, children construct their learning through cognitive development where "the dialogue" is internal (Ginsburg & Opper, 1969), and for Dewey and Vygotsky individuals are always constructing meaning through their own participation in events where "the dialogue" is external. The dialogues that occur in these events often provide the medium for learning to take place. As participants construct their own understanding, they are better able to communicate that understanding and transfer it to new situations. It is important that students in these classrooms are encouraged to learn from a variety of dialogues.

One form of dialogue that is conducive to introspective thinking is an oral history interview. Through oral history interviews, students learn from others informally; the conversation sets the pace and direction in which the dialogue could evolve. "Classroom oral history is a process whereby student interviewers and their historical informants create tape documents of lasting personal and scholarly value" (Sitton, Mehaffy, & Davis, 1983, p. 115).

Oral histories begin with historians learning about events that happened in the past from interviewees who were present or who were members of the time when an event occurred. The focus of oral histories is the event. During the taped interview the interviewer takes notes and later transcribes the tapes, which are then recorded and preserved for the future. Another form of oral histories is storytelling. Through storytelling a great deal of unrecorded information is passed from one generation to the next. Storytelling keeps history alive because it emphasizes the "humanity" of the events that take place. Unlike the taped oral history interviews, storytelling is about the people in the event and takes the form of monologue, which does not allow the listener many opportunities to dialogue with the individual.

Combining the two (storytelling and interviews) allows for a more interactive conversation. Qualitative researchers use this combination more often today as a way of interpreting oral

histories for a variety of studies investigating literacy processes (Freeman & Lehman, 1998; Pile, 1992). As a result, using oral history as a learning tool, the focus of the interviews continues to change. The process is being considered as well as the product. What can be learned by doing oral history interviews? Sitton, Mehaffy, and Davis (1983) state “the participation becomes the focus rather than the event. Learning is created in an authentic setting. . . Students feel they are ‘doing real work’” p.115.

Method

This is a descriptive study of the use of oral history interviews in two different classrooms. Two questions related to the use of oral history interviews were examined. The first class was asked what they could learn about literacy instruction in content classes from oral history interviews. The second was asked what they could learn about curriculum design from oral literacy interviews.

Participants

Following the Foxfire principle of inquiry (Wigginton, 1986), using oral history interviews, two university classes set out to find what they could learn about literacy instruction in their future classrooms. The term literacy is inclusive of traditional parameters such as reading and writing, but it is not exclusive of newer parameters that invite literacy as discourse (Burbules, 1993; Gee, 1989). The first group consisted of pre-service teachers (13 undergraduate students) whose content subject areas included mathematics, science, history, Spanish, physical education, health education, and art education. They were preparing to be secondary teachers. Students in the second group were teachers in the field (9 graduate students) seeking to learn more about language arts (reading, writing, speaking, listening, and visualizing) instruction at the elementary and middle schools. Both groups wrote their own autobiographical literacy histories and then interviewed others from the community about their literacy histories and what it means for literacy instruction in the future. For clarity, the first class will be called the content class and the second class will be called the language arts class.

Materials

The materials for analysis evolved from discussions following readings and demonstrations in the classrooms. The materials evaluated were autobiographical literacy histories, parameters for interview design, taped literacy interviews, write up of interviews, literacy history website, and reflection papers. Each will be discussed separately.

Autobiographical literacy histories. Both classes wrote their autobiographical literacy histories before they did the oral literacy history interviews. These autobiographies explored literacy as students defined it from their own disciplines. As a physical education major for example, one entry in your autobiography may be descriptions of different aspects of your childhood that supported your chosen career and descriptions from your childhood that deterred you from your choice. This included your choices based on likes and dislikes of school, community, or governmental encounters that affected your literacy development from childhood to the present.

Parameters for interview design. The parameters for the content class to design their questions for the interviews emerged from discussion students had about their expectations and fears of literacy demands they could encounter when they taught. The students also wanted to know if teachers taught using some of the same methods they were taught with. The prompts for the interview questions were related to the interviewees':

- literacy upbringing.
- teaching field.
- positive and negative experiences with reading and writing in their field.
- college courses and classroom practices.
- changes seen in the future.
- specific content literacy needed to teach in their discipline.

The parameters for the language arts class question design were given in the instruction package the students received with their course syllabus. The directions were:

*Write autobiographies

*Design literacy questions considering the following parameters:

1. Student to student interactions - Discuss what activities promote students working together or hinder students working together. Discuss when students interact.
2. Teacher to student interactions - Discuss who initiates the interactions and how often. What types of conversations occur in the discussions?
3. Tasks - Discuss the types of events that occur in the classroom and when. Describe the activities that occur and who initiates.
4. Time frame - Discuss the duration of events or interactions when they do occur. Who loses interest?
5. Prompts/interjections - What type of prompts or interjections are used to keep interactions going in the class? What types of interjections and who interjects?

*Interview at least one of each: a student, pre-service teacher, elementary school teacher and a middle school teacher.

*Pair up, listen to tapes, and discuss categories that emerged related to literacy.

*Write information on an overhead that related to the five classroom interaction parameters to share with class.

*Write high points most often mentioned from all groups together on the overhead.

*Make a list of positives and negatives for the classroom. Design a classroom considering these changes to use in your language arts class.

Taped literacy interviews. Students in both classes picked out similar themes or issues that most interviews had in common and discussed them in small groups. They shared at least one taped interview that addressed one of the issues or topics.

Interview write ups. After the classroom discussion, students from the content class wrote up what they learned from the literacy interviews and class discussions about literacy in their content area, compared to the different interviewees' perspectives. The students in the language arts class charted what they learned from the interview class discussions and wrote up what a lesson could look like if all the points they learned from the interview were considered.

Literacy history website. Journey into Our Literacy Histories is a website created for students (the content class) to write to each other about their autobiographies and interviews from other professors, parents, community members and elementary or primary students. (Due to technical difficulties in creating the website, not many students were able to post to the site in the time allotted. Therefore the website is not the major focus of this paper.) The purpose of this paper is to discuss what students learned from oral literacy interviews and the autobiographies about "literacy practices" that should and could occur with successful classroom practices.

Reflection papers. The reflection papers from both groups compared and contrasted what they had written in their own literacy autobiographies and what they heard from the interviews. The process students went through to participate in this literacy project was also included in the reflection papers. In addition, students discussed strategies they tried and will try in the classroom as a result of some of the discussions about the interviews.

Design and Procedure

Considering learners as thinkers and participants in their own knowledge, these two classes were designed to elicit a great deal of dialogue about literacy. The first class looked at literacy in different content fields, and the other investigated changes in the definition of literacy and instruction in language arts classrooms. Instead of the text being a book in the classroom, it was decided that the oral literacy histories and autobiographical histories would be the text for discussion. The content students were introduced to literacy by writing their own autobiographical literacy histories on the website, along with the oral literacy interview write-ups. When students read each others' interviews, they were fascinated by the similarities in their own beliefs, experiences, and fields of study. On the other hand, they were disappointed that routines in some of the classrooms didn't foster excitement about learning.

In the sample interview summary (see Appendix A), the student describes what she has learned. Throughout her summary, she interpreted and interjected her views, discussing what she learned and what she thinks about what she learned. In her own autobiographical literacy history, she said she always wanted to be a math teacher but she wanted ways to make math fun and not so routine. In her summary she is faced with a teacher similar to those in her past. She has always had teachers who, as she stated, "make the class boring with busy work." Having the

opportunity to evaluate her own experiences helped this teacher reinforce her beliefs about teaching. She could see changes she would like to implement in the classroom when she teaches.

Other math teachers in the class shared ways that they could counter the type of teaching the teacher found routine in this particular class. A few students shared some of the hands-on games teachers talked about in their interviews that would increase motivation to enhance learning in math classes. While discussing their interviews, students in the other disciplines (science, history, etc.) explored the idea of becoming change agents because some of their students might fall behind if left in an uneventful environment like the one described in the oral history interview (see Appendix A).

At the onset of the project students were concerned about testing expectations in their field, but in the interviews they found that teachers at the middle school level did not share their testing fears. The classroom teachers discussed ways to help students individually through the testing process. Two interviewers were glad and surprised to see that literacy issues were being dealt with across content areas.

In the language arts setting after the students tallied all the major points from the taped literacy interviews that correlated to the parameters set in the question design, they created a chart describing categories that evolved from the data (see Appendix B). The chart showed all the positive and negative comments from the interviewees (parents, students, teachers, and others), describing their feelings about the type of classroom interactions that occur. Many of the comments about writing, fun, and choices came from the students. Teachers named grammar and task-oriented interactions as the top two things they would like to work on.

The final stage of this project was to design a classroom that takes into account more of the positives and fewer of the negatives described. Students went into their own classes using some of the practices they learned from the oral literacy interviews. The results were good. One teacher said she couldn't believe how easy it was to try *cooperative grouping*, one of the positives she had always heard about. She didn't think her students would work well with each other because they never did. Another teacher talked about having more *choices* in her classroom because all five of the people she interviewed mentioned this as an important part of instruction. Four of the nine teachers said that even though a focus on *grammar* was presented as a negative and *not really creative*, they felt it had to be a major part of the class because of testing.

One reading teacher in the class admitted that she had a very negative attitude in her class many times; but after listening to two of her interviews, the elementary student in particular (Bob), she wants to diminish that negativity. "How do you feel about your school experiences now that you are in the fifth grade?", "I don't like school anymore because they moved me in a low group with a teacher who doesn't like us because she thinks we are stupid. . . and I guess. . . we are. . . dumb." Bob's answer was an eye-opener for her and perhaps a beginning in her own learning about her role in the language arts classroom.

Discussion

Looking at the discussions that occurred when using oral literacy histories as a learning instructional tool, a few implications for classroom instruction become apparent.

1. Discussions become more knowledge based with information from actual classroom settings. Classes should be set up to allow for more dialogue.
2. Teachers begin to listen more and have a sense of ownership of the conclusions they develop. Both undergraduate and graduate students learned by listening to their classmates share information about themselves as compared to others. Students also took more ownership in designing curriculum.
3. Using oral literacy histories also allows students to go beyond themselves in their own thinking process. They think about what learning is all about and about ways to improve environments to provide opportunities for successful learning to take place.

After reading the students' reflections on this study, there is a need to include more oral history interviews in the learning process. In the content reading class, all thirteen students said even though it was a lot of work, the oral history interviews were worth doing; they learned about classroom practices they could and should be taking back to their own teaching. Seven of the students said they never thought they were responsible for any literacy instruction until the interviews. They thought reading skills were the responsibility of reading and English teachers. The other six said they see a need but they feel they wouldn't have time to deal with the reading issue because they would lose content instruction. They did say that a few of the teachers and students they interviewed made them think about the importance of connecting literacy to their content teaching.

The language arts students were all impressed with the process of listening to the tapes in the class. They said they were finding more information from the discussions in class while listening to the tapes. Dialoguing with others helped them interpret what was being said. Three admitted they didn't think they would learn anything from all this work, but they did. A first year teacher was so excited about an activity she learned involving two of the positives on the result chart, she wanted to share it in her final presentation for the class: *Journal writing and experiences with reading*. She brought her 4th grade daughter to class the day we were making books, and her daughter caught on immediately. The daughter not only finished sewing her book together, but she also filled it with three short stories. The mother was so impressed she went to her classroom and had her third graders make books. She shared their books with the language arts class. Overall, using oral history interviews as "text" enhances the transactions that must occur for meaning to transfer into great learning experiences (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Like oral stories as presented in my study, written stories also provide a powerful means for self-reflection and learning, as Moorman reveals in the next paper.

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Appendix A

Oral History Interview Summary of a Mathematics Teacher

He has been teaching there for five years now. . . I interviewed him on February 2, 1998 on issues concerning literacy. His responses and reactions to his responses follow in five main categories: personal literacy, the teaching field, high school teaching, teaching high school math, and implications/ issues raised from the interview.

He remembers doing math "way back in school." He has always liked math, and he especially thinks fondly of his high school years. "I had some math teachers that were good...and math was always my best subject. I enjoyed figuring out other ways to do it (the problems) that the teacher wouldn't teach." His subject preference was not skewed toward mathematics alone. He also enjoyed English. "I had a great English teacher my senior year. . . Mr. Grant " However, he readily admits that he did not like English as much because he felt like he had a stronger aptitude in math. His perceptions of his ability in math molded the decisions of his future, as well as the influences of his teachers.

He had many teachers in high school that influenced him in becoming a high school teacher. "They (his teachers) looked like they were having a good time with their profession. And that's when I started thinking about becoming ... a teacher. Mr. Grant had the most influence over me becoming a teacher because we had a lot of fun in his class." It seems that he was heavily influenced by his teachers to pursue a career in the teaching profession. However, it seems that his motivation for becoming a high school teacher was driven by his passion for high school mathematics and a desire to coach soccer.

He did not speak directly on the subject of high school teaching. However, implied from the conversation is that he loves doing high school math, especially algebra. He feels like he can make a difference in the lives of the kids, and he wants to help them to achieve their goals. From his experiences, he felt that a career in high school teaching was appropriate for him.

The most important aspects of the interview were the issues that he raised about literacy. He established his definition of literacy as being "not only the ability to read, but the ability to understand what has been read." He also distinguished between math literacy and literacy. Math literacy mainly has "different vocabulary." It is important for students to be able to read so they can understand "the instructions to the different parts of the test, or worksheet or your homework." However, very little independent reading is done from the textbook. He tries to provide as much of the material to the students during class, so that the book is used as little as possible. But he does go over the example problems in the book, helping students to understand the steps taken by the authors of the textbook.

I have the opportunity to observe his class on Mondays and Wednesdays. His class is in a routine every day. The students arrive each day, review homework, learn a new lesson, and then do their homework. The derived implication of the students is that math is the same day in and day out. The implication is that math is only a different set of vocabulary. The focus is that math is something memorized, not something that is gradually learned. However, this is the very

reason so many students have problems with math. Math needs to become a process for each student, not discrete facts and vocabulary that when memorized, guarantee success. Math is like any other subject; it requires extensive thought, analysis, and synthesis to make certain ideas more understandable.

Appendix B

Positive and Negative Result Chart of Classroom Interactions

Positive	Negative
Peer tutoring	Fear of failure
Cooperative groups	Fear of risk taking
Partner reading	No chance for creative outlets
Choice of reading	Understanding curriculum
Teacher enthusiasm influenced learning	Pressure to exclude spelling or novels
Empathizing with students	Lack of training
Safe environment	Incorrect grouping
Flexible to change	Favoritism
Respectful	Grammar focus, not creativity
Flexible to learning styles	No effective writing instruction
Reading aloud	No phonics instruction
Reading contests	Negative attitude stemming from instruction
Many experiences with reading	No pleasure reading
Choices	Just function
Comprehension through discussions	Pressure to exclude grammar
Emphasis on speaking skills	Accommodating all levels
Enthusiasm for new teaching ideas	

Different modes of communication to teach skills	No games used to teach LA
Enjoys reading groups	Isolation in reading
Writing in journals about personal experience	Time is limited for teaching
Had fun, teacher used projects, and prompts	
Liked correcting grammatical errors in class	Not covering curriculum
Children are their own best critics	
Has students read in different modes	Broad based curriculum
Spelling integrated with novels being read	Preparing students to communicate with other people
Hands on projects	Student reading aloud without warning
Practice time before reading aloud	Rote memorization
	worksheets without purpose
Volunteers to read aloud	Round robin reading
Literature rich classroom	Writing without experience
Tell a story before writing	
Change stories endings; sequels	

Results of the tally of all the student and teacher interviewees showing positive and negative events that occur during literacy interactions in their classrooms. The graduates used these categories to evaluate their own teaching.

Literacy Recollections Website

Gary Moorman

I returned from the 1997 ARF conference with four interrelated concepts running through my mind. First, I have been impressed with the power of narrative as a pedagogical tool, as Trathen and Dale (1999) discuss. I have found that getting my students more in touch with their own personal narratives was an effective way of helping them find the "inner self" that is crucial to effective teaching (Palmer, 1998). Second, I was interested in applying new technologies to my teaching. Particularly, I was interested in the "webboard" software at my university that allows the construction of websites with interactive dialogue capability. Third, I was actively looking for ways to help my students write to authentic audiences as part of an effort for them to see writing in my courses as more than a mere assignment. Finally, I was intrigued with what King and Stahl (1997) had presented in the final keynote address. Could I use oral histories as a tool for uncovering insights into the reading and writing processes, and to literacy instruction? The course I designed for the following semester was based on these concepts. I believed that by integrating literacy biographies into my instructional repertoire, I could enrich my students' theoretical and practical understanding of literacy and literacy instruction. In the following sections, I first provide a description of the course and my thinking during its development, and of the technology I integrated into the course. Then, using mostly the words of the students themselves, I explore some of the insights that students acquired as a result of their participation in the course.

Designing and Implementing the Course

I implemented this project in the spring semester, 1998, in a master's level reading course entitled "Reading to Learn." There were 13 students enrolled in the class; all had teaching experience beyond student teaching, and all but two were currently teaching. This course traditionally focuses on theories of reading comprehension, reading comprehension instruction, and content area reading. Recently, I had struggled to include socio-cultural perspectives on literacy, but had found it difficult to find appropriate ways of framing the theory. Based on King and Stahl's (1997) insights at ARF, my intention was to engage students in a theoretical dialogue by centering the course on the development of a written literacy biography. In other words, the literacy biography would serve as an instructional tool to clarify and illustrate this theoretical perspective. Personal perspectives derived from the biographies would be the basis for broad discussions of literacy and reading and writing instruction.

An important part of the process of developing and implementing the course was my active participation in all activities and assignments. I joined the students in writing and posting all biographies, as I describe below. Parenthetically, I found this process highly insightful in terms of my own understanding of literacy and literacy instruction, as well as the power of these activities in teacher education.

To prepare for the interview and authoring of this biography, I had each student write two autobiographies. The first focused on students' earliest recollections of literacy events; emergent literacy and early schooling events. The second autobiography explored the students' experiences as literate adults. The students kept a "literacy log," cataloging literacy events during a single day. From this log, they constructed a picture of themselves as a reader and writer, and of how these reading and writing activities fit into their socio-cultural lives.

The experience of writing the autobiography helped in the construction of "interview protocols," which were used to guide the students' interviews. In small groups, students brainstormed questions and prompts, which were then placed on the class listserv, an email network that distributed messages to all class members (see details on the listserv below). Each student then could "cut and paste" from the listserv to develop their own "custom made" protocols.

After securing informed consent from their interviewees, students conducted interviews. I suggested that interviews should last for about an hour, but most students' interviews were substantially longer. All but one student tape-recorded the interview (the exception found that her subject was intimidated by the presence of the tape recorder). Most transcribed at least part, and some all, of the interviews.

During this process, a number of other instructional events were taking place. We read Lee Smith's *Oral History* (1983), a novel about life in the rural Appalachian mountains. Parenthetically, the setting for the book is within a short driving distance of our campus. This book served two purposes. First, it connected students to the Appalachian oral tradition. And second, it allowed me to integrate and discuss content area reading strategies into the course. I would assign the readings along with various strategies, then we would discuss the effects of the strategies in relation to our expanding understanding of literacy. I also integrated "writers' workshop" into the class. I provided class time for students to assist one another in revising and editing the biographies and autobiographies. This served both as a model of current best practice in writing instruction, which was explicitly addressed, and to improve the quality of the students' biographies.

Technology Components

Two significant telecommunications technologies were woven into the project. All students subscribed to a "listserv" established specifically for the class. Listservs are email network systems that distribute messages to all subscribers. Students made regular posts to the listserv to discuss class, make suggestions, ask for assistance, provide advice, and generally extend our discussions beyond the classroom walls. In addition, as mentioned above, the listserv was a tool for constructing the interview protocols. All students were able to access protocol ideas from all class members via the listserv. Students could "cut" those suggestions they found useful off their email, then paste them onto word processing documents. This greatly reduced the amount of work required to construct individual protocols, while simultaneously increasing the quality. Gilbert (1999) analyzes the dialogue from this listserv.

The second technology is a website that I constructed with the assistance of Susan Gilbert (1999). This website is available via the World Wide Web

(<http://am.appstate.edu/~moormang/CLiC/CLICDS.HTM>). All autobiographies and biographies were posted on the website. This made all student work public, and the writing and posting of texts an act of authentic publishing. In addition, webboards allow responses to individual posts, which allows feedback from the instructor, classmates, and anyone else who might be interested. In fact, several of the biography subjects posted responses.

Student Insights

This project turned out to be a powerful experience for both me as the instructor and for the students. Using students' personal and first hand experiences as a springboard for discussion seems to intensify the learning experience and bring life to concepts that often remain inert, if learned at all. To illustrate, I will explore how three concepts emerged from the process: (a) that learning to read and write is a powerful process that provides vivid and lasting memories; (b) the importance of being read to as a child; (c) the lasting effects of both good and poor instruction. I will use unedited text from students' early literacy autobiographies. These writings were far more powerful than I had anticipated. When designing the course, I had thought that the interviews and biographies would be the primary source of discussion. As the course evolved, however, I found the autobiographies to be an additional source of insight into literacy and instruction.

The process of writing the autobiographies enabled students to reconstruct many long forgotten childhood memories. One student describes the process:

When I started to write about learning to read as a child I thought I would have a hard time trying to remember the details. The memories came fairly easy once I started. It is always fun to travel back in time to when I was a child. I was very lucky in many ways. My overall view of reading instruction seems to be fairly positive.

The power of these memories is captured in the following post. Note the initial denial of vividness of the recollection.

My earliest recollections of learning to read and write are sketchy, fragments. Most involve a concrete object or person that triggers a memory of my childhood. Most likely, these recollections are equally memory and imagination. Nonetheless, they seem genuine and indisputable to me. I have many memories of being read to as a child. It was a nightly routine for me to be “tucked in” and read to. All of my memories of this include my father and my grandmother. I’m sure other members of my family read to me but they are the ones I remember. I also remember my father letting me pick the book. I had many books but there were a few I choose every night. These were *Two Little Miners*, *Horton Hears A Who* and *Mother, Mother I feel Sick*. The latter two of these are filled with rhyming words which I am sure had a great deal to do with my choosing them continuously. *Two Little Miners*, was published in 1949. This book was my father’s when he was a child. I think this may have been the reason I initially liked the book but eventually it became one of my favorites. My fascination with this book could be explained in many ways. It is the story two men that in the mines get covered in black soot and by nighttime they were “black as night, black as a crow, black as black, coal black” (I can’t believe I still remember that!). My interest in this

book may have been because I grew up in Monroe and was fascinated by the many different races surrounding me. It may have been because I was a naive little girl that thought if we all covered ourselves in soot we could all be just alike and everything would be better. It could simply be that getting that dirty without getting in trouble seemed too good to be true!

Two themes emerged from the early literacy autobiographies that I would like to explore in the remainder of this paper. The first is on the powerful effect of being read to as a child. The following post is typical of the way students were able to capture a sense of warmth and well being associated with early reading experiences:

One of my fondest childhood memories is of my parents reading a bedtime story just before tucking me into bed each night. My mother and father would take turns with the nightly ritual. I don't particularly remember having a favorite book, maybe a book about bears. I can visualize the pictures in a Bible storybook. The pictures were always the most important part of a book for me. I guess I have always been a visual person. At one point my parents joined a book club and we received a Disney book periodically in the mail. This bedtime reading continued to take place even after I began school.

The second theme was the lasting effect of both good and poor instruction in the early primary grades. This student writes of a warm (and humorous) memory of school:

Miss Stamey, my kindergarten teacher, was young and had long soft hair. She kind of reminded me of the pictures I had seen of my mom in the late sixties. I remember singing and writing the alphabet, although I am not quite sure how Miss Stamey went about teaching the alphabet. I do remember a time when Miss Stamey was assessing my alphabet sound knowledge. I was very nervous. She asked me, "What sound does this letter make?" pointing to a "M" on the page. I didn't know. I thought real hard about it and, as I often do when I am perplexed, I took a deep breath and pressed my lips together to make my thinking sound, "mmmm". Of course she replied, "That's right." Well I was so confused. How could I be right when I had not even given an answer? This thought somewhat distracted me during the rest of the assessment.

And a more negative recollection of poor instruction:

In second grade we had spelling test. This was a somewhat difficult experience for me. I broke down in tears and sobbed through many of my tests. I couldn't spell perfectly, and I was embarrassed. I fixed my weekly anxiety in third and fourth grade. I learned to cheat. I was not very good at cheating, in fact my strategy was quite blatant. I don't understand why I never got caught when I had my spelling book either hanging half way out of my desk, or laying in my lap.

Oh well, I don't believe that question is important enough to ponder. For some reason I stopped cheating on my spelling tests when I reached the fifth grade, but I still hated spelling. I refused to play spelling games or participate in spelling bees. I still had my anxieties.

Many students became uncomfortably aware of how the effects of a good early literacy start in the home were offset by poor instruction. Note how this student begins with a warm

recollection of reading in the home, but follows with clearly negative memories of her early education:

My earliest memories of reading are the ever popular bedtime stories. From the very beginning I always had tons of books. Every night at bedtime I would pick out at least two of my favorites & have mom or dad read them to me. I always wanted “just one more” when the last one was read. I remember two of my favorites were *The Poky Little Puppy* & one that mom and dad ordered special just for me. It was a version of Snow White, but it had my name & and my mom & dad’s & some friends of the family’s names in the story. I can’t remember the actual story all that well, but it something to do with a rose & I was helping Snow White & Dopey. Those two books were my absolute favorites & I had to have them read to me over & over again...

Today, I don’t like to read. One of the reasons for this was because from first to third grade every night we had a homework assignment to read certain pages in our reading book. We had to read them three times; once silently, once out loud to our parents, & once more silently. Do you know how old a story becomes when you read it three times, and then again in class the next day? Another reason that I dislike reading is because in third grade we had “timed readings.” We had three minutes to read a story then we were graded on what we read. Well I’ve always been a slow reader and three minutes was never enough time for me. I would always do poorly on the quizzes.

I blame my poor penmanship on my third grade teacher. I’m left handed, so I would slant my paper to the left. But Mr. Page felt all papers should be slanted to the right regardless of whether you’re right or left handed. So every time we had writing class he made me slant my paper in a way that was not natural to me at all. Thus it was very awkward for me to write anything, much less the appropriate form of a certain letter. I make C’s in writing that year, whereas in second grade I make A’s. You figure that one out.

So today I’m ashamed of my handwriting. I don’t think it’s pretty at all, and I just hope that anyone who has to read it can. Reading is more work than fun. As a matter of fact, I don’t read for fun; I read when I have to. I read well but slow.

This student is even more explicit in pointing out the paradox of the joy of reading in the home with the tedium and stress of reading in the classroom:

Learning to read and write was an unforgettable experience for me. In Kindergarten, reading was a frustrating task, but it was for reasons other than the material being too difficult, as was thought. As do most Kindergarten classes, we had the three basic reading groups. I was placed in the middle group, and that began my hatred for reading. I would become so angry during our lessons at all the kids who couldn’t read, “See Jane run,” within a five minute time span. The whole subject of reading was introduced as a tedious and boring process... At night, my whole attitude on reading altered. My father would sit me on his lap for hours reading to me. I would follow along, turn the pages, and sometimes read aloud with him. My attention could not be diverted during this time. Come bedtime, I would refuse to get under the covers unless my mother or father was holding a book, preferably Dr. Seuss.

Because of this, my parents couldn't fathom the reports coming back from my teacher about my poor reading attitude.

Conclusions

These excerpts from students' early literacy autobiographies provide substantive evidence of the power of the experience. Too often, teacher education relies on telling students that learning to read is an intense experience; that reading to children is a cornerstone in the process; and that instruction, both good and bad, has a lasting impact on each child. These excerpts demonstrate that writing literacy biographies brings these abstractions to life. Students clearly demonstrate reflection on their own experiences as a learner, the cornerstone for any meta-level understanding of instructional practice. Understanding their own experiences in learning how to read provides a powerful scaffold on which to base their instruction.

On a more anecdotal level, I found the quality of course dialogue to be among the richest in my teaching career. Students were able to connect to abstract concepts about literacy and learning to read and write in ways that seemed far more powerful than I had previously experienced. The autobiographies and biographies provided a common text which anchored our discussions of reading and writing instruction. Questions of "why" an instructional strategy might be effective seemed always to find their way back to the personal experiences we had uncovered in our writings. I have continued to use and refine this activity for three more semesters. I'm convinced that this is a viable and powerful tool for teacher education.

To gather further evidence of the effects of the project, we archived and analyzed email messages sent by class members to "lit-l", the class listserv. Students were required to post some class assignments to the listserv, but for the most part, it served as a sort of electronic extension of class dialogue. In the following paper, Susan Gilbert, analyzes these email messages. Susan, a doctoral student and research assistant, assisted in planning and organizing the class, and took an active role in contributing to the listserv. Her paper provides further insight into how personal narratives can be utilized in teacher education.

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Lit-L Reflections

Susan Dean Gilbert

Dewey's (1938) assertion that the "history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without" (p.17) illuminates what student literacy reflections address: teachers developing as professionals, engaging in concrete activities that support and challenge their own professional development. It was in this spirit that the "Lit-L" listserv was established especially for the literacy biography project described by Moorman (this volume). Any email submitted to Lit-L was distributed to all members of the class. The original intent of the listserv was to provide the students with a less structured, informal "place" where their dialogue extended beyond the classroom walls. Lit-L enabled them to reflect on their classroom experiences, university class discussions, Website postings, and readings, evolving into another way for students to reflect, not only on their own work, but on the work of their colleagues. This extended their reflections to another level: what Kusnic and Finley (1993) refer to as self-reflection. At this level students think and write not only about what they have learned, but also about what they have learned in relation to others. Taken as a whole, the emails are an articulate report on the effects of class activities on students' beliefs and practice.

Students submitted over two hundred email messages to Lit-L. Our analysis of these electronic exchanges pointed to an important distinction: that learning to read and write are socially and culturally embedded activities. Students reported a shift away from beliefs about literacy being merely the ability to read and retain information. What emerged instead were new beliefs, ideas and perceptions about literacy that included one's ability to participate in the discourse of a particular setting. Literacy, from this perspective therefore, became, for the students, a social, cultural, and political project (Gee, 1999).

In the following example, a student reflects on how her teaching was influenced by her recalled experiences as a student. She reports that she learned how to read and write with "worksheets and embarrassing read-alouds." In reaction to her own negative experiences as a learner, she now approaches reading and writing with her students differently. She has shifted from an explicit instruction paradigm to a more democratic, respectful, socially constructed learning environment:

As for considerations about curricular development of reading instruction, I feel like the first thing that needs to be done to accomplish successful instruction is to find some way of linking reading instruction to students' interests and needs. This includes making the instruction fun and interesting, providing a multitude of reading materials and experiences linking reading to future endeavors like jobs and school.

Another student writes:

I have learned that there are several things that go into how a person learns how to read. Not all of these things are school related. For instance, I believe that a person's surroundings and community play an important role. Also, people will best learn how to read if they are reading things that are of interest to them.

This student reported that as a result of recalling her own experiences, she engaged her students in a conversation about their literacy orientations. As a result her belief changed from thinking that everyone learned to read and write in a similar way to understanding that children come into the classroom with varied and sometimes profoundly different literacy histories. What resulted from this dialogue was the knowledge of her students' "Discourse" which Gee (1989) defines as "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network.'" She discovered her students' "identity kit" (Gee, 1989) which resulted in a deeper understanding of their culture:

I was really excited about my class and the reflections. What will my students say about me? Will I be mentioned at all in their recollections? If I am mentioned, will it be positive or negative? In the beginning of the year I was really tested and questioned about why the students needed to know how to read. Many of their parents and grandparents don't know how to read or don't read very well. In fact this type of knowledge is not highly regarded in the culture of my students and it shows. One of my students told me that he didn't have to know how to read, because they didn't have to know how to read in jail. Many of them think jail is a place everyone goes. I have twenty-two students and sixteen of them have at least one parent in jail. Needless to say, there is more of a focus on surviving in their community than on reading. But they are beginning to see that knowledge/literacy and the ability to read and reason can open doors. I don't want to dismiss the idea that literacy depends on community, but it can also be challenged and I am praying that for my students it can also be changed.

Another concept that emerged was how early experiences with books and writing with primarily parents and teachers impacted how the students read and write as adults. These experiences have a direct impact on how they currently teach reading. In their literacy autobiographies, many recalled in full sensory detail, including feelings and nuances, their early reading and writing experiences as pleasurable and pleasant. Through their reading and online discussions they discovered that fluent readers share common incubating experiences involving a special time of being read to, usually in the lap or in the arms of a parent, or in the environment of a nurturing classroom. These discussions were particularly powerful as the students allowed themselves to fully immerse in an adult version of their emotions, coming as close as one can ever get to the originating experience. Again, they discussed how this writing/reading/reflecting-through-email experience translated directly into their classroom practices:

There was this major focus on penmanship, on the mechanics of writing rather than the personal pleasure writing can provide. I think that writing needs to be legible, but many times as teachers we focus on this aspect of writing more than the pleasure that can come from good writing. If we are having a writing workshop in class I think it should be separate from instruction dealing with the mechanics of writing—I had positive experiences with writing in elementary school. My second grade teacher would brag to my mother about my stories.

Children need to understand that writing can take you on a journey, so that we need to introduce it in a way that it becomes a means expression for personal reasons.

It was her recollection of positive early literacy experiences with her father, her writing of poetry, and journaling and peer-review in high school, that caused this student to consider the influences of early home and school experiences:

This recollection got me thinking about how much I do remember from school and the influences in my life in the world of writing. I remember in sixth grade we had a poetry assignment. I don't remember the poetry, but I do remember the feelings I had while writing and the environment. I also remember my Dad and how encouraging and helpful he was. He was in the Air Force during this time of my life and he wasn't home a lot, but I do remember he was while I wrote my poetry. I also remember my high school senior English teacher. She was one of the greatest inspirations of my writing/reading career. We would begin the day by responding to a journal prompt she had on the board. We would write a great deal. We were avid creators, writers and publishers. We learned through this and peer-editing about the sense of audience, different styles of writing, writing for specific purposes.

Conclusions show that changing the fundamental beliefs systems of teachers is difficult. This resistance to change stems from teachers' prior experiences as students. Zeichner and Liston (1987), in their analysis of teacher education apprenticeship models, concluded that "conventional approaches to self-directed growth inhibit student teachers and thereby fail to assist in their full professional development." These emails, I believe, are examples of what true reflective practice is: an activity that provides an opportunity for true, fundamental personal and professional growth. This development is ultimately a personal charge and with it must come the willingness to confront what works and what does not, how one changes as a result, and what makes sense in light of those changes. This process puts responsibility for growth and development in the hands of educators themselves. Growth thereby becomes an ethical and moral requirement, a must for the informed practitioner. Stories provide a powerful avenue for understanding and reflection that can lead to such growth.

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