

Patricia M. Cooper

## Children's Literature for Reading Strategy Instruction: Innovation or Interference?

*Does reading strategy instruction that targets children's literature unwittingly interfere with the development of a reading life?*

**F**ull disclosure: Readers operate from self-interest. Mine revealed itself in first grade when I encountered Marie Hall Ets's *Play with Me* in the library on Shakespeare Avenue (no kidding) in the Bronx. It was my first time in a library. I only happened to be there because an older sister allowed me to tag along. The unspoken deal was to stay out of the way. I didn't mind, and I contentedly wandered around the picture book section, randomly taking books off the shelves and looking at the pictures. Up to this point, I was not what you would call a reader. Books at home were scarce, and no one read to me or to my brothers and sisters. Reading was reserved for school. This was the early 1960s, though, and only Dick and Jane lived there, although this was not a problem for me. I liked Dick and Jane a lot. They were happy and funny, and wore nice clothes. Plus, they had a dog. But there in the library in the spring of my first grade, the words in that slim, "real" book suddenly called forth. "The sun was up, and there was dew on the grass, and I went to the meadow to play." I read on. And I went, too, to that meadow, so far away from my beloved city streets. Next came independent trips to the library and more books. A year or so later, I was able to go over the big hill in Minnesota with Betsy and Tacy, and then to the prairie where Mary and Laura lived, and then on to the various cities of Europe, where the girls in the Shoe series went. And, while I never grew tired of Dick and Jane, I realized early on that neither one (nor even Sally) could do what Harold could with his purple crayon.

If the prevailing winds did not permit my family or teachers to give me stories, they gave me other things. The library gave me stories. Looking back, I have no doubt that Betsy, Tacy, Mary, Laura, and Harold, not to mention Beezus and Ramona, John Henry, and all the other characters I found in that limestone turn of the century build-

ing were not only compelling, they were essential factors in, first, my literacy, and then my *literary* education. However, I never confused them with lessons.

### THE ROLE OF THE "UNTAUGHT" STORY

To paraphrase Coburn (2006), how we frame reading instruction depends on the problem we are trying to solve. This is extremely clear when it comes to story-based or imaginative children's literature. Of all the questions we ask of its role in the pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first-grade literacy curriculum, the one that seems of least consequence is: What is the value of the untaught story in teaching reading in these years? By "untaught," I mean when a story is read aloud, but unfettered by anything before, during, or after that resembles a skills or strategy lesson. By strategy, I mean any formal task associated with "comprehension monitoring" or "metacognition, executive control, [and] self-regulated comprehension" (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005).

Perhaps the untaught story—or story for story's sake—attracts so little attention in emerging and early reading instruction because research has found no compelling relationship between the untaught story and comprehension skills (see, for example, Meyer, Wardrop, Stahl, & Linn, 1994; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Mistretta-Hampston, & Eshevarria, 1998; Teale, 2003). Thus, as comprehension became a priority in pre- and primary-grade reading education in the late 20th century, the use of story-based children's literature shifted from the traditional, free-ranging read-alouds to lessons in reading strategies. The fact that fewer and fewer teacher education programs require a children's literature course (Hoewisch, 2000) might explain why there has been remarkably little resistance to this trend. In order to resist, we must be certain of the unique

role the untaught story plays in learning to read. Only then can we understand what is lost when children's literature is usurped in the emergent and early literacy curriculum for comprehension instruction external to the stories themselves.

In this article, I argue that the use of imaginative children's literature for overt reading strategy instruction is counterproductive in the pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grades. Aside from the question of whether emerging readers can concentrate on both decoding skills and comprehension at the same time (Taylor, Pearson, Garcia, Stahl, & Bauer, 2006), the untaught story plays a distinct and essential role in fostering young children's *psychological relationship to and need for* story-based children's literature, an essential first step in early or emerging literacy development. (Hereafter, the terms "story-based children's literature," "imaginative literature," "story," and the unmodified "children's literature" are used interchangeably.) I argue that the untaught story helps develop young children's imagination, a key tool in long-term critical thinking. I explore several examples of how the use of children's literature to teach reading strategies in the early childhood classroom can both interfere with this process and fail to meet stated goals as well. I then ask how we came to attach reading strategy instruction to children's literature in the first place for children this young. I provide a short summary of the historical forces that converge in the modern strategy-driven read-aloud. Following this, I discuss Rosenblatt's (1978, 1982) transactional theory of reader-response in terms of young children's "entrance into language," including her own warning against emphasizing efferent ends too soon in the young child's burgeoning relationship to story. Finally, I look ahead to ask how we can reconcile the need to preserve children's literature as story with the need to teach comprehension.

I approach this discussion from the perspective of a teacher educator and researcher of early childhood and emerging literacy. As such, I am concerned that the routine pairing of efferent-oriented reading strategy instruction with imaginative children's literature neglects the needs of pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first-grade

children to first "live through" literature (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1982). As a field supervisor and former preschool and kindergarten teacher, I'm further concerned that the focus on reading strategy instruction is inhibiting new teachers' understanding of how young children's overall "need for story" (Dyson & Genishi, 1994), that is, their desire to know and be known, is much greater than their strict comprehension of it.

### YOUNG CHILDREN, IMAGINATION, AND STORY

Vygotsky (1978) writes that imaginative play between ages 3 and approximately 7 (the start of "formal" schooling) creates a zone of proximal development that fosters problem-solving abilities beyond the child's current capacities across the developmental spectrum. In this way, he argues, imaginative thinking is the precursor of abstract thought. Early childhood educator Vivian Paley (2004) writes that imaginative play allows young children to ask "What if?" of friends, family, and classroom life. In short, imaginative thinking goes well beyond the immediate pleasures of pretend to help young children transcend the present in social, emotional, and cognitive ways.

The link between participation in imaginative play and imaginative literature is found in their mutual support for problem solving and other developmental thrusts (Cooper, 2007). Long-time publisher Jason Epstein observes that the oft-cited joy of reading children's literature is something of an urban myth. Reading is not for fun when you are a child, he writes. Rather it is "for learning something, or more precisely for becoming something—something more grown up than one had been before" (1969, p. 112). In other words, the best children's literature is that which speaks to the lives young children lead, as well as to the lives they intuit. It lends language (and images) to what children *know already*, what they *would like to know*, and what they *might know*, if given the opportunity. "To know" in this context refers to the realization of what it means to be fully human. In a Vygotskian sense, this is learning at its most personal and most possible. Thus, whether it's finding one's way home in *Stellaluna* or making

The link between participation in imaginative play and imaginative literature is found in their mutual support for problem solving and other developmental thrusts.

the world more beautiful in *Miss Rumphius*, the true contribution of story to the early childhood classroom is its power to teach young children, not to comprehend or even decode, but to imagine alternatives to the way things are. Robert Coles (1989), Maxine Greene (1995), and others write on the importance of imaginative literature to individuals and society at large in the development of self, creation of new knowledge, and refinement of social aims.

In terms of reading education, Heath (1986) writes that ignoring the development of the imagination may be counterproductive to the very goal of teaching comprehension. She writes that it is readers' imagination, not their comprehension, that eventually moves them to a higher stage of *interpretation*. Interpretation, she says, unlike comprehension alone, releases readers from dependency on the text. It allows the text "to achieve illocutionary or performative force" for readers through the "recombining of ideas into new wholes" (p. 159). That is, imagination makes possible thought that surpasses what is gained in mere comprehension of the text. Such is the proper goal of a reading education. And imaginative children's literature is, by definition, ideally suited to the task.

The process of teaching to the imagination through children's literature in the early childhood classroom is relatively straightforward. In its most natural (untaught) form, the teacher chooses the time of day and the conditions (children on the rug, in a circle, and so on) for reading a story aloud. The teacher's knowledge of children's literature, as well as the children's interests, inform the selection of text. Based on the demands of the text, the teacher decides the appropriate type of interaction (some or none) with the children before, during, and after the story is read. This decision is based on what questions the text calls forth in and of itself, and what questions the teacher thinks the children might have, which the teacher works to draw out when appropriate. This is in addition to responding to questions the students raise spontaneously. Dramatization of children's literature also supports this process (see Paley, 1981, 1990). The overall effect from the

**Robert Coles (1989), Maxine Greene (1995), and others write on the importance of imaginative literature to individuals and society at large in the development of self, creation of new knowledge, and refinement of social aims.**

child's point of view should be informal, open-ended, and child-centered.

The idea is that with sufficient experience, time, and gentle guidance, young readers' imaginative capacities will be extended through print. Further, stories will serve as an ongoing source of intimate and iconic funds of knowledge, which, as we know, will underscore all facets of their future learning and development. At the same time, we must recognize that, as with all imaginative events in the 21st-century early childhood classroom, access to this process is subject to adult priorities.

### THE PROBLEM OF STORY-BASED READING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

The literature on and descriptions of reading strategy instruction comes in too many shapes and sizes to address in one article. Broadly speaking, every state education English Language Arts website contains a recommended list of reading strategies. Examples include activating prior knowledge, looking for key words, rereading, skimming, and visualizing. More specific strategies are also noted—K-W-L,

Think-Alouds, ReQuest Procedure, etc. For a more comprehensive list, I recommend Tierney and Readance's (2004) objective and organized review of strategies, many of which will find an appropriate home in the upper grades.

What does instruction in these strategies look like from emergent and even early readers' point of view? I begin with perhaps the most innocuous of strategies, "prediction," which is often associated with another strategy, "inferring." Both rely on the activation of prior knowledge. Prediction's most well-known iteration in the early childhood classroom is when teachers ask children to use a book's title and cover art to predict the book's contents. As a field supervisor and frequent visitor to classrooms, I have witnessed the use of this strategy countless times in pre-kindergartens, kindergartens, first grades, and second grades. Owocki (2003) describes a typical scene in which a teacher shows the children a book called *The Lemon Drop Jar*. The teacher then reads the title and asks, "What

do you think this book is going to be about?" (p. 15). In this case, the children offer an educated guess based on the picture. In others, they attempt to infer from the title.

Innocuous as the prediction strategy seems, in reality it reflects a problem common to many reading strategies for young children: it engenders an uncertain sense of success. This is because although there can be no right answer to a question of opinion, there is a clear linguistic suggestion that a right answer exists. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that lots of great picture books have very straightforward titles and cover art, but they yield almost no information about the book's contents beyond the obvious. Take *The Velveteen Rabbit* or *Harry, the Dirty Dog*, for example. What more beyond "a velveteen rabbit" or "a dirty dog" can the children really say? (And, in fact, that's what many do say.) The cover art (on the original editions, at least) shows no more than the title character. At the other end of the spectrum are book titles and cover art that are more literary, such as *Outside Over There* or *Follow the Drinking Gourd*, which on first blush would appear more promising as predictors of the book's contents. Yet, if anything, the more interesting titles and cover art are even more unyielding. Young children will almost always try to oblige the teacher and come up with an answer, but with experience, they learn that the text is bound to amend whatever they offer upfront, and they naturally grow wary of a false choice.

The prediction strategy also reveals another reason why comprehension-driven reading strategy instruction is problematic for young children. Theoretically, these strategies aim to help readers mimic what proficient readers do to comprehend a text. But proficient readers, as we know, enact these processes discriminately. They only employ prediction, for example, when they are able to bring background knowledge to bear on a book's title and cover art. Even without that, though, their prior experience with imaginative literature makes them *willing to be pulled in*. I have been in many early childhood classrooms, however, where the teacher will not commence reading until she has engaged the children in efforts to predict the book's contents well

Innocuous as the prediction strategy seems, in reality it reflects a problem common to many reading strategies for young children: it engenders an uncertain sense of success.

beyond what its title and cover art can productively foreshadow.

Even more complex risks confront emerging readers as they engage in strategies designed to get past the book's cover. One is "questioning." Harvey and Goudvis (2000, p. 83) describe a typical situation in which the classroom teacher is reading *Charlie Anderson* to her second-grade class. This is a 15-page picture book with about four or five lines per page. It tells the story of a cat who lives in two houses, just like his owners—two sisters whose divorced parents have joint custody of them. It's a beautifully illustrated story with a poignant message. The authors describe how after reading each page—which I estimate to mean about every ten seconds or so—the teacher stops and asks the children what questions they have about the lines she has just read. The teacher writes the questions on chart paper. When she's finished reading, she reviews the questions with the class, and then discusses them.

Putting aside the debate over whether a quality text like *Charlie Anderson* even raises questions in the reader's mind every four or five lines, this scenario suggests that proficient readers always employ an active questioning strategy as they read. While this may be theoretically true, we must acknowledge the fact that this is neither a practical approach to reading nor a

consistently necessary one. Most mature readers persist with a text despite unanswered questions because they like its rhythm, topic, illustrations, and so on. In other words, they tolerate the unknown or the unclear because what they're getting from the whole is greater than what they don't understand, especially in the beginning. The Harvey and Goudvis's (2000) example, however, asks the children to make sense of the text one detail at a time. This is bound to limit their engagement with it as an event greater than the sum of its parts.

Other popular strategies in a similar vein require young children to keep reader-response logs or journals as they read, or to record their questions, reactions, and responses on sticky notes as they go along. These are problematic for developmental reasons. At minimum, these tasks can

become a burden beyond the assignment itself, for young children's still immature small-motor control makes it hard to write their thoughts in such a small space. More important, these tasks force young children to create a *secondary* response to the text that disrupts their primary imaginative and psychological experience.

As problematic as strategies may be that ask young children to respond to text, however, they are not nearly as vexing as reading strategies that require young children's *metacognitive reflections on their own thinking* (that is, thinking about what one is thinking) while listening to or reading a story. A well-known example is the Think-Aloud strategy. Again, though young children may attempt to comply with the teacher's request, it is difficult to believe they are accurately reporting on their thought processes when they do. The fact is, children under seven or eight are just learning to articulate *what* they are thinking about. *How* their thought processes work requires a level of cognitive sophistication that is only beginning to emerge by the end of first grade or so, and is so inexact as to be of very little practical use to young children.

These are just some of the reasons that reading strategy instruction in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade runs the risk of exerting developmentally inappropriate control over young children's response to children's literature. What is needed, in fact, is an effort to help them experience and control it firsthand.

## HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL FORCES BEHIND COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION

Early reading research and education has not always been preoccupied with either comprehension development or children's literature. How, then, did the two become entwined in instruction?

Well into the 1970s, early literacy research focused on decoding, epitomized by Chall's (1967) seminal and highly influential comparison of sight-word and phonics-based methodologies. In the field, practice was dominated by such skills-based basals as Scott Foresman's ubiquitous *Dick and Jane* series, which were typically introduced in first grade. The last quarter of the last century, however, saw the concern with decod-

ing give way to a focus on reading for meaning, beginning in kindergarten and, more recently, moving into pre-kindergarten. Contributing to this shift in interest was the "whole language movement" and the application of psycholinguistic theory to reading instruction (Goodman, K., 1992; Goodman, Y., 1989), which came to prominence in the early 1980s. A whole language approach relies on contextualized learning opportunities to stimulate children's engagement with reading. One of its most notable features is the use of authentic children's literature across the curriculum and for a variety of purposes.

The ascendancy of whole language created a new divide in the field by the early 1990s. Whereas Chall's "great debate" concerned decoding methods, the "reading wars" described the conflict between a focus on decoding approaches and an immersion approach in which function and interest dominated curriculum. Though it retains a strong

following to this day, the whole language movement lost its starring role in reading instruction after it was accused of lacking direct instruction and blamed for plummeting reading scores in the late 1990s.

During this same period, research such as Durkin's (1979) on the paucity of instructional time given to comprehension yielded to a call for reading strategy instruction. In its earlier phase, research on the efficacy of reading strategy instruction has focused on the intermediate and upper grades, but now it is increasingly aimed at the pre-primary and primary grades. For example, in their review of the research in the primary grades, Pearson and Duke (2002) emphatically state "the terms 'comprehension instruction' and 'primary grades' should appear together often" (p. 247). Moreover, various iterations of Readers Workshop for primary grades include a focus on teaching comprehension through children's literature that often employs metacognitive techniques (see Calkins, 2000, 2001; Collins, 2004; Daniels, 2002; Fountas and Pinnell, 1996; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997).

In recent years, reading strategy instruction received unexpected assistance from the return of such code-focused research as Snow, Burns,

### Early reading research and education has not always been preoccupied with either comprehension development or children's literature.

and Griffin's (1998) report to the National Research Council, which promotes the need to directly teach all aspects of reading in the early years, including comprehension. However, the question that defines the current climate around teaching young children to read is not *what methods best teach children to decode or comprehend*, but rather *what keeps them from learning*. This has reframed the problem of emergent and early reading instruction, focusing efforts on "preventing reading difficulties." It invites an intense focus on measuring young children's progress in learning to read. As a result, reading instruction in the early years, from skills to comprehension, has been largely narrowed to methods associated with measurable outcomes. Somewhat remarkably, children's literature has not completely lost its place in this conversation.

At this time, the use of children's literature for reading strategy instruction, aiming to prevent reading difficulties, is represented in the two discourses that dominate the field.

The first, generally regarded as the less child-centered of the two, is a greatly expanded emphasis on skills-based and direct instruction around phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension in kindergarten through third grade. Evidence abounds that these skills are also being taught in the pre-kindergarten years (Neumann & Roskos, 2005). Nowhere is this more evident than in the curricular approach suggested by the National Reading Panel in its *Put Reading First* (Adler, 2003).

The second discourse follows a "balanced" approach. Although, as Sadoski (2004) writes, "there is no universally agreed upon balanced approach" (p. 130), in common practice, instruction retains many of the holistic and authentic literacy practices associated with whole language, including children's literature-inspired activities. But, decidedly distinct from a whole language approach, it also employs direct instruction of all skills, including reading strategies through children's literature. The usual tag for this is "literature-based reading instruction." Morrow and Gambrell (2003, p. 349) write that the most obvious theoretical home for literature-based reading instruction is Louise Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory, which also took root in read-

ing education in the 1980s. However, Rosenblatt herself assiduously disavowed this practice as early as 1982.

### READER-RESPONSE THEORY AND READING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Reader-response theory evolves from Rosenblatt's (1978) perspective on the positioning of one's stance towards text. She writes that if readers' primary objective is to "carry away" knowledge, they will adopt an efferent stance and consider the text in terms of the information it provides. This stance will allow them to focus on details to be retained. By contrast, if they are looking for a "sense of feelings, ideas, and attitudes," they will adopt an aesthetic stance, which is most compatible with a "story, a poem, a play." Rosenblatt points out that the relationship she draws between expository and narrative texts and efferent and aesthetic stances represents dominant tendencies, not rigid dichotomies. There may be reasons why, despite normal expectations, readers would want to take an aesthetic stance towards an expository text and vice versa.

Reading strategy instruction, by definition, defaults to the efferent side of the continuum.

The use of reader-response theory as an instructional tool requires teachers to help children develop expectations of texts that will signal them where to position themselves along what can be described as the aesthetic-efferent continuum. Yet, reading strategy instruction, by definition, *defaults to the efferent side of the continuum*. This is a problem because it co-opts young children's opportunities to take an aesthetic stance and experience the story for story's sake. The irony is that Rosenblatt (1982) anticipated this situation 25 years ago in her essay, "The Literary Transaction: Evocation and Response." Beginning with a focus on young children's "entrance into language" and their evolving relationship to story, she writes that young children's initial response to word and language is at the root of their "affinity for the aesthetic stance" towards story in general (p. 78). It is cultivated through a prolonged engagement with stories in the mode of, as noted earlier, story for story's sake. "A most eloquent verbal sign that the story or poem is being aesthetically experienced," Rosenblatt writes, "is the child's, 'Read it

again.” What concerns Rosenblatt, and fuels my concern, is the idea that this phase in the child’s relationship to story is undervalued. “The notion that first the child must ‘understand’ the text cognitively, efferently, before it can be responded to aesthetically is a rationalization that must be rejected. . . . The child may listen to the sound, hear the narrative ‘voice,’ evoke characters and actions, feel the quality of the event, without being able to analyze or name it” (p. 80).

Rosenblatt calls for the “maintenance of the aesthetic stance” throughout all of elementary school, not just in the early years. This makes clear why sacrificing it in the early childhood classroom is even more troublesome. The bottom line for Rosenblatt and this discussion is that we cannot justify the misappropriation of one activity for another. Rosenblatt calls the use of stories to teach efferent reading skills a “deception.” She finds this deception tucked inside teaching practices that employ stories as a launchpad for reading strategy instruction that aims to develop skills in abstraction and analysis, such as searching for details, generalizing, paraphrasing, and summarizing. She writes of the need to be receptive to young children’s reactions to story, but to avoid asking them for verbal responses, which she calls “the greatest hazard.” This can only “reveal a testing motive” (p. 84), she warns. She also admonishes us to avoid theoretical explanations of the purpose and processes of reading, and the premature teaching of concepts, such as metaphor, and other literary conventions. Acknowledging the need to teach certain early reading skills that do not naturally derive from the story experience, Rosenblatt writes:

*Exercises and readings that do not satisfy such meaningful purposes for the child, but are considered defensible means of developing skills, should be offered separately, honestly, as exercises. If needed, they should be recognized as ancillary and supplementary to the real business of reading for meaning, whether efferent or aesthetic.* (italics mine; p. 83)

Vygotsky (1978) wrote that the teaching of reading must make it clear to young children that reading is “necessary for something” (p. 117).

I had to learn, as all teachers of stories do, which pieces of literacy instruction went with story and which went elsewhere.

If young children are to account for what they know about the world, what they want to know or might know, if only given the opportunity, then the place of imaginative literature in the curriculum must be secured. Also, if Rosenblatt’s transactional theory really is at the heart of literature-based early reading instruction, then we must do it greater justice.

## LOOKING AHEAD

By the time I began teaching at the end of the 1970s, I had worked part-time for two children’s literature professors and spent a year in children’s book publishing. I loved the field enough to wonder every time I read a book to my kindergartners

whether they liked it and why. Most often they did, for young children are generous listeners. Occasionally, they did not. In either case, I was fascinated by what drove their preferences. Sometimes it was a

word or a phrase, other times, a character. Often it was an illustration. We would chat for a few minutes about some picture or plot twist that appealed to them, or some important point (could *we* make stone soup?), but that was all.

In time and with more education, I learned to center even more of my interactions with the children around stories. I would follow up their questions with my own questions that the text didn’t answer for us. Research on family and classroom literacy (Barbarin, 2002; Cooper, 2005; DeTemple, 2001; Heath, 1986) tells us that young children gladly allow adults to lead the way, earnestly and playfully, through literacy events. Naturally, I also learned that the read-aloud did not obviate the need for skills instruction, and that I had to develop a plan of action for most of it. That is, I had to learn, as all teachers of stories do, *which pieces of literacy instruction went with story and which went elsewhere.*

I am *not* arguing that pre-primary and primary grade teachers should refrain from initiating purposeful and incidental observations, conversation, comments, or questions around children’s literature that serve comprehension. Young children can learn a lot from a provocative question and classroom discussion. I also don’t see anything wrong with some authentic post-reading activi-

ties that extend young children's understanding of a story. My point is not to debate whether comprehension can be taught to children under eight. It should. Or that literature can't ever successfully service this goal. Clearly, it can. Rather, my purpose is to ask: *Is this the proper role for imaginative children's literature in the pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grades?* What is the justification for imposing such extrinsic and restrictive learning goals on a process that is so naturally suited to other intellectual tasks when alternatives exist?

Effective comprehension instruction in the pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grades begins with an overall program of rich oral language development, particularly around story and narrative. This requires a teacher's guidance in the *production, retelling, and use of personal and borrowed narratives* throughout the school day that simultaneously cultivate young children's control over semantics and details, as well symbolic and abstract thought (Bielmiller, 2006; Britton, 1993; Cooper, 2005; Cooper et al., 2007; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Heath, 1983; Snow, Tabors, & Dickinson, 2001; Watson, 2003; Wells, 1986). It also requires the teacher's assistance in the regular interrogation of print and information-oriented events, from curricular material to computer literacy. In addition, the curriculum must comprise ample activities in which children are free to talk and converse about written ideas and claims. If nothing else, such opportunities are greatly reduced when the schedule is top-heavy with skills and strategy lessons, often related to lengthy readers' workshop periods. This has serious implications for all young children, but especially for those who rely on school to help them meet the language demands of the first- and second-grade curriculum (Strickland, 2002).

Next, teachers must recognize that the specific teaching of story for story's sake builds on oral language and print-based activities in a critical way through the production and stimulation of young children's imagination. This, as Heath suggests, leads to the development of their interpretive skills. The importance of imagination in the process cannot be underestimated, overruled,

or postponed. This means the untaught story as described above must be a centerpiece of the daily curriculum.

The explicit teaching of comprehension (and other skills) must be taught through a different venue than story-based children's literature. I propose we reconsider the need for dedicated texts and other delimited events for this purpose. I am not talking about choosing between teaching children's literature and teaching comprehension. I am talking about both. As Rosenblatt suggests above, supplementary education in comprehension skills is acceptable in the right context. As for what skills-based reading material to use, there are many modern programs available that could suit this purpose. The only issue is creating a balance between skills-based reading material and story for story's sake. I recommend consistent brevity in the first case, and consistent indulgence in the second.

Finally, some might see teaching for the imagination through children's literature as a privilege only the middle and upper classes can afford. Research suggests that children from lower-class backgrounds enter school with significantly less storybook experience than their more advantaged peers (Bowman, 2002; Bus, 2002; Heath, 1996; Strickland, 2002; Tabors, Dickinson, & Snow, 2001). It follows, therefore, that children who have been read to less at home need *more stories for the sake of stories* in school than middle- and upper-class children, not fewer.

I would also argue that in an age when young children in every community spend less time in libraries and more time in non-print-based experiences, schools cannot afford to abandon their unique potential to impact young children's literary imagination.

## CONCLUSION

Conventional wisdom has it that the use of children's literature for instructional purposes in early reading instruction is an unqualified good. I argue that the absence of the untaught story in the early childhood classroom is an unqualified loss. My goal in this article has been to explore how reading strategy instruction that targets imaginative children's literature can unwittingly interfere with

**What is the justification for imposing such extrinsic and restrictive learning goals on a process that is so naturally suited to other intellectual tasks when alternatives exist?**



the development of a reading life. Story-based literature should be preserved as a repository for the confluence of feelings and instincts, small and gargantuan, that define young children's lives. I suggest that the acquisition of reading, let alone the *habit* of it, has its healthiest start in the deep and prolonged satisfaction of children's earliest urges towards story. A curriculum that discourages this relationship cheats young children out of a future relationship with learning literacy, as well as things literary.

## References

- Adler, R. C. (Ed.). (2003). Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read. National Reading Panel. Retrieved 9/8/08 from <http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/faq/faq.htm#19>.
- Barbarin, O. A. (2002). The black-white achievement gap in early reading skills: Familial and sociocultural context. In Bowman, B. (Ed.), *Love to read: Essays in developing and enhancing early literacy skills of African American children* (pp. 1-16). Washington, DC: National Black Child Development Institute.
- Bielmiller, A. (2006). Vocabulary development and instruction: A prerequisite for school learning. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research, Vol. 2* (pp. 41-51). New York: Guilford.
- Bowman, B. (2002). Love to read: An introduction. In B. Bowman (Ed.), *Love to read: Essays in developing and enhancing early literacy skills of African American children* (p. vii). Washington, DC: National Black Child Development Institute.
- Britton, J. (1993). *Language and learning: The importance of speech in children's development*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Bus, A. (2002). Joint caregiver-child storybook reading: A route to literacy development. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (pp. 348-360). New York: Guilford.
- Calkins, L. M. (2000). *The art of teaching reading*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Allyn & Bacon.
- Chall, J. (1967). *Learning to read: The great debate*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Coburn, C. E. (2006). Framing the problem of reading instruction: Using frame analysis to uncover the micro-processes of policy implementation. *American Educational Research Journal, 43*, 343-379.
- Coles, R. (1989). *The call of stories: Teaching and the moral imagination*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Collins, K. (2004). *Growing readers: Units of study in the primary classroom*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Cooper, P. (1993). *When stories come to school: Telling, writing, and performing stories in the early childhood classroom*. New York: Teachers and Writers.
- Cooper, P. M. (2005). Literacy learning and pedagogical purpose in Vivian Paley's storytelling curriculum. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 5*, 229-251.
- Cooper, P. M. (2007). Teaching young children self-regulation through children's books. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 35*, 315-322.
- Cooper, P. M., Capo, K., Mathes, B., & Grey, L. (2007). One authentic early literacy practice and three standardized tests: Can a storytelling curriculum measure up? *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 28*, 251-275.
- Daniels, H. (2002). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in book clubs and reading groups*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- De Temple, J. M. (2001). Parents and children reading books together. In D. K. Dickinson & P. O. Tabors (Eds.), *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school* (pp. 31-52). Baltimore: Paul H. Brooks.
- Dickinson, D. K., & Tabors, P. O. (Eds.). (2001). *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brooks.
- Durkin, D. (1979). What classroom observations reveal about reading instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly, 14*, 481-533.
- Dyson, A. H., & Genishi, C. (Eds.). (1994). The need for story: Cultural diversity in classroom and community. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Epstein, J. (1969). Good bunnies always obey. In Egoff, S., Stubbs, G. T., & Ashley, L. F. (Eds.), *Only connect: Readings on children's literature* (pp. 70-90). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fountas, I., & Pinnell, G. S. (1996). *Guided reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Goodman, K. S. (1992). Why whole language is today's educational agenda. *Language Arts, 69*, 354-363.
- Goodman, Y. M. (1989). Roots of the whole language movement. *Elementary School Journal, 90*, 113-127.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. New York: Jossey-Bass.
- Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brooks.
- Harvey, S., & Goudvis, A. (2000). *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension to enhance understanding*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heath, S. B. (1986). Separating "things of the imagination" from life: Learning to read and write. In W. H. Teale, & E. Sulzby (Eds.), *Emergent literacy: Writing and reading* (pp. 156-172). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Heath, S. B. (1996). Re-creating literature in the ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly, 30*, 776-779.
- Hoewisch, A. K. (2000). Children's literature in teacher-preparation programs. *Review of Research in Education, 19*, 269-297.
- Keene, E., & Zimmerman, K. (1997). *Mosaic of thought*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Meyer, L., Wardrop, J., Stahl, S. A., & Linn, R. (1994). Effects of reading storybooks aloud to children. *Journal of Educational Research, 88*, 69-85.
- Morrow, L. M., & Gambrell, L. B. (2003). Literature-based instruction in the early years. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research: Vol. 1* (pp. 348-360). New York: Guilford.
- Neuman, S. B., & Roskos, K. (2005). Whatever happened to developmentally appropriate practice in early literacy? *Young Children, 60*(4), 22-26.
- Owcock, G. (2003). *Comprehension: Strategic instruction for K-3 students*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Paley, V. G. (1981). *Wally's stories: Conversations in the kindergarten*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Paley, V. G. (1990). *The boy who would be a helicopter: Uses of storytelling in the classroom*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Paley, V. G. (2004). *A child's work: The importance of fantasy play*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pearson, P. D., & Duke, N. K. (2002). Comprehension instruction in the primary grades. In C. C. Block & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Comprehension instruction: Research-based practices* (pp. 247-258). New York: Guilford.

Pressley, M., Wharton-McDonald, R., Mistretta-Hampston, J., & Eshevarria, M. (1998). The nature of literacy instruction in ten grade 4/5 classrooms in upstate New York. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 2*, 159-194.

Rosenblatt, L. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of literary work*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Rosenblatt, L. (1982/2005). The literary transaction: Evocation and response. In *Making meaning with texts: Selected essays* (pp. 72-88). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Snow, C. E., Griffin, P., Burns, M. S. (Eds.). (2005). Knowledge to support the teaching of reading: Preparing teachers for a changing world. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Snow, C. E., Tabors, P. O., & Dickinson, D. K. (2001). Language development in the pre-school years. In D. Dickinson & P. Tabors, *Beginning with literacy and language: Young children learning at home and school* (pp. 1-26). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Strickland, D. (2002). Bridging the gap for African American children. In *Love to read: Essays in developing and enhancing early literacy skills of African American children* (pp. 63-72). Washington, DC: National Black Child Development Institute.

Tabors, P. O., Dickinson, D. K., & Snow, C. (2001). Homes and schools together: Supporting language and literacy development. In D. Dickinson & P. Tabors (Eds.), *Young children learning at home and school: Beginning with literacy and language* (pp. 313-334). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Taylor, B. M., Pearson, P. D., Garcia, G. E., Stahl, K. D., & Bauer, B. (2006). Improving students' reading comprehension (pp. 303-315). In K. Stahl & M. McKenna (Eds.), *Reading*

*research at work: Foundations of effective practice*. New York: Guilford.

Teale, W. H. (2003). Reading aloud to young children as a classroom instruction activity: Insight from research and practice. In A. van Kleeck & S. A. Stahl (Eds.), *On reading books to children: Parents and teachers* (pp.114-139). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Tierney, J., & Readance, J. E. (2004). *Reading strategies and practices: A compendium* (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Watson, R. (2003). Literacy and oral language: Implications for early literacy acquisition. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research, Vol. 1* (pp. 43-53). New York: Guilford.

Wells, G. (1986). *The meaning makers: Children learning language and using language to learn*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

### Children's Literature Cited

Abercrombie, B. (1990). *Charlie Anderson* (M. Graham, Illus.). New York: Aladdin.

Cannon, J. (1993). *Stellaluna*. New York: Harcourt Children's Books.

Cooney, B. (1982). *Miss Rumphius*. New York: Puffin.

Gray, W. (1936). *Dick and Jane* (basic pre-primer). Chicago: Scott Foresman.

Sendak, M. (1981). *Outside over there*. New York: HarperCollins.

Widman, C. (1992). *The lemon drop jar* (C. Kieffer, Illus.). New York: Simon & Schuster.

Williams, M. (1958). *The velveteen rabbit* (W. Nicholson, Illus.). New York: Doubleday.

Winters, J. (1988). *Follow the drinking gourd*. New York: Random House.

Zion, G. (1976). *Harry the dirty dog* (M. B. Graham, Illus.). New York: Harper Trophy.

**Patricia M. Cooper** is assistant professor of Early Childhood and Literacy at New York University.

### CEE AWARDS ANNOUNCED

A number of awards were presented by the Conference on English Education at the NCTE Annual Convention in San Antonio. The **2008 James N. Britton Award for Inquiry within the English Language Arts** was presented to Leila Christenbury for *Retracing the Journey: Teaching and Learning in an American High School* (Teachers College Press, 2007). The **2008 Richard A. Meade Award for Research in English Education** was presented to George Hillocks Jr. for *Narrative Writing: Learning a New Model for Teaching* (Heinemann, 2007). The **2008 Janet Emig Award for Exemplary Scholarship in English Education** was presented to Suzanne M. Miller for her article, "Changing English Teacher Learning for New Times: Digital Video Composing as Multimodal Literacy Practice," (*English Education*, October 2007). The **2008 Cultural Diversity Grants** went to Amira Akl for her proposal, "Understanding Arab and Arab American Students' Experiences in Writing with Technology," and Myrrh Domingo for her proposal, "Digital Technology: Strengthening the Literacy Practices of Diverse Learners."