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Children's literature and reading instruction: Past, present, and future

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When the editors of *Reading Research Quarterly* invited us to speculate on the topic "Children's Literature and Reading Instruction in the Next Millennium," we were intrigued. We recognized that the question of whether children's literature is a central, essential material for reading instruction (we will argue that it is) is far more interesting today than it would have been two decades ago when the material that dominated U.S. reading instruction was basal readers. We argue that materials teachers use for reading instruction today are considerably different from those that were used for reading instruction for nearly the entire 20th century. Unlike their colleagues from earlier parts of the century who used basal readers filled with contrived texts, teachers of the current decade have relied more on literature for reading instruction. In order to show how and why literature has moved from the edges of reading instruction to its center, we examine some of the forces that have led to this dramatic change, discuss the current challenges to literature, and, finally, speculate on what lies ahead.

Literature and reading instruction: A historical perspective

During the 20th century, basal readers developed for the purpose of teaching children to read have domi-

nated U.S. reading instruction (although the term *basal* was not coined until well into the 20th century). In this section we take a historical look at the contents of these readers, and then we examine two trends that help to explain why such readers have been the mainstay of reading instruction throughout much of our history: (a) the early paucity of children's literature, and (b) influential professional recommendations about reading instruction.

Looking inside the readers of yesteryear

Across the years there have been some dramatic changes in the contents of basal readers. Unlike the basal readers of this century, in the earliest periods of our history the contents of readers typically reflected beliefs about the purposes of education. In her history of reading instruction in the U.S., Nila Banton Smith (1986) identified a number of broad periods in reading education from 1607 through 1965. The labels she assigned to the early periods reflect beliefs of the day about the goals of education, and those same labels aptly describe the contents of the readers used during the periods.

The earliest period Smith identified (1607–1776) was "The Period of Religious Emphasis in Reading Instruction," and the readers used in this period emphasized religious instruction. For example, *The New England Primer* (1727), the first reading book designed specifically for the American colonies, contained alphabet verses with religious and moral messages, Bible passages,

Children's literature and reading instruction: Past, present, and future

THIS PAPER examines the historical, political, and research roots and the currents of change which have led to the dramatic shift in reading instruction from being primarily basal dominated to being more literature driven. Historically, basal readers provided few, if any, works of literature. Further, literature was not readily accessible in schools even in school libraries until the latter part of this century. Until recently, reading methods textbook authors provided little advice on the use of literature in reading instruction beyond mention of its importance for reading enjoyment. Gradually a variety of complex factors led to the shift toward literature-based reading instruction. Research on early reading including storybook reading provided in-

sights into the importance of literature in reading development, theories of reading shifted to include literary and socio cultural theories, teacher-led movements impacted teachers' use of literature, Texas and California mandated literature in basals and reading instruction, and professional journals increasingly published articles about literature's role in literacy learning. The future of children's literature in reading instruction depends, in part, on exploiting the potential of on line and electronic texts, fine-tuning genres of literature which will counter present and future criticisms of literature's usefulness, and constructing theories of why reading instruction requires literature as an essential component of reading instruction.

La enseñanza de la literatura y la lectura inicial: Pasado, presente y futuro

ESTE TRABAJO examina las raíces históricas, políticas y científicas y las corrientes de cambio que han provocado un vuelco importante en la enseñanza de la lectura: de estar regida por los libros de lectura a estar orientada hacia la literatura. Históricamente los libros de lectura contenían pocos trabajos de literatura. Más aún, la literatura no era fácilmente accesible en las escuelas, ni siquiera en las bibliotecas escolares, hasta fines de este siglo. Hasta no hace mucho tiempo, los autores de libros sobre métodos de lectura proporcionaban poca información acerca del uso de la literatura en la enseñanza de la lectura, más allá de la mención de su importancia como entretenimiento. Gradualmente un conjunto de complejos factores condujo al cambio hacia la enseñanza de la lectura basada en la literatura. La investigación en lectura inicial que incluía la lectura

de libros de cuentos permitió descubrir la importancia de la literatura en el desarrollo de la lectura, las teorías de la lectura comenzaron a incluir teorías literarias y socio-culturales, los movimientos liderados por docentes incidieron en el uso de la literatura por parte de los docentes, Texas y California impusieron la literatura en los libros de lectura y en la enseñanza y las publicaciones profesionales comenzaron a publicar artículos acerca del rol de la literatura en el aprendizaje de la lectoescritura. El futuro de la literatura infantil en la enseñanza depende, en parte, de explotar el potencial de textos electrónicos, seleccionar géneros literarios que contrarresten las críticas presentes y futuras a la utilidad de la literatura y, por último de construir teorías que expliquen porqué la enseñanza de la lectura requiere de la literatura como un componente esencial.

Kinderliteratur und Leseinstruktionen: Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft

DIESES PAPIER untersucht die sich verändernden historischen, politischen und forschenden Wurzeln und Strömungen, welche zu dramatischen Verschiebungen im Leseunterricht von hauptsächlich fundamentalen Anweisungen hin zu einem mehr auf die Literatur bezogenen Unterricht führen. Historisch betrachtet lieferten basal gebildete Leser wenige Werke, wenn überhaupt, in der Literatur. Ferner waren literarische Bücher mit Ausnahme des letzten Teiles dieses Jahrhunderts nicht offen in Schulen zugänglich, nicht einmal in Schulbibliotheken. Noch bis vor kurzem gaben Textbuchautoren von Lesemethoden nur wenige Ratschläge zur Verwendung der Literatur beim Leseunterricht, außer der Erwähnung von deren Wichtigkeit zur Lesemotivation. Nach und nach führte eine Vielfalt komplexer Faktoren zur Verschiebung in Richtung auf die integrierende Literatur innerhalb der Leseunterrichtsanweisungen. Die Forschung über das frühzeitige Lesen, einschließlich dem Lesen von Märchen und Erzählungen, vermittelte Einblicke in die Wichtigkeit

von der Rolle der Literatur bei der Leseentwicklung. Die Theorien vom Lesen verschoben sich unter Einschluß literarischer und soziokultureller Theorien beim Lese- und Schreibunterricht; ferner verlegten Lehrerbestrebungen das Schwergewicht auf die Anwendung der Literatur durch Lehrer; Texas und Kalifornien machten literarische Bücher zur Pflichtlektion im Leseunterricht und fachbezogene Zeitschriften veröffentlichten zunehmend Artikel über die Rolle der Literatur beim Erlernen des Schreibens und Lesens. Die Zukunft der Kinderliteratur im Leseunterricht hängt zum Teil von der Nutzung des Potentials von On-line und elektronischen Texten ab, der Feinabstimmung solches literarischen Genres, welche mithin gegenwärtigen und künftigen Kritiken an der Nützlichkeit der Literatur entgegenwirken und ein konstruktives Schaffen von Theorien über die Einbindung der Literatur als ein wesentlicher Bestandteil des Leseunterrichts fördern.

児童書と読みの指導：過去、現在、未来

この論文は歴史的・政治的に研究のルーツを探り、指導の中心が初期の初級読本から物語へと劇的に変化していった時代の流れを検証したものである。歴史的に見ても初級読本が提供した物語の数は極めて少なかった。物語は学校の図書館でさえも容易に入手することは困難だった。またつい最近まで読みの指導法の著者たちは、物語の指導については読む楽しさの重要性を指摘しただけで、その他の助言はほとんどしなかった。しかし多様かつ複雑な要素によって読みの指導の中心は徐々に物語へと移行していった。童話などの初期の読みの研究によって、読みの発達における物語の重要性に洞察が加えられ、読み

の理論は文学及び社会文化的理論をも包括するようになった。また教師主導の動きは学校での物語の活用に拍車をかけ、テキサス州やカルフォルニア州は初期の読みの指導において物語を使用するよう発令した。さらに専門の学術誌では読み書き学習における物語の役割を論じた論文が数多く発表されるようになった。児童書を使った読みの指導が今後発展し、物語の有効性についての批判に耐えうるためには、オンラインテキスト、電子テキスト、手を入れた物語の活用が読みの指導の重要な要素であるという理論的構築が必要である。

La littérature de jeunesse et l'enseignement de la lecture: Passé, présent, et avenir

CE TEXTE porte sur les racines historiques, politiques, et de recherche, et sur les courants nouveaux qui ont conduit au changement frappant de l'enseignement de la lecture passant d'un enseignement qui reposait avant tout sur un manuel à un enseignement plus dirigé par la littérature. Historiquement, les manuels fournissaient peu ou pas d'oeuvres littéraires. De plus, il n'était pas facile de se procurer de la littérature même dans les bibliothèques d'école et ce jusqu'à la dernière partie de ce siècle. Jusqu'à une époque récente, les auteurs de manuels de méthodes de lecture donnaient peu de conseils sur la façon d'utiliser la littérature dans l'enseignement de la lecture qui fasse plus que mentionner son importance pour le plaisir de lire. Peu à peu toute une série de facteurs complexes ont conduit à changer dans la direction d'un enseignement de la lecture reposant sur la littérature. Les recherches sur l'apprentissage précoce comportant la lecture de livres a donné l'intuition de l'impor-

tance de la littérature pour le développement de la lecture, les théories de la lecture ont changé pour inclure des théories littéraires et socio-culturelles, des mouvements pédagogiques ont eu un impact sur l'utilisation de la littérature par les enseignants, Le Texas et la Californie ont prescrit la littérature dans les manuels et dans l'enseignement de la lecture, et les journaux professionnels ont publié de plus en plus d'articles sur le rôle de la littérature pour l'entrée dans l'écrit. L'avenir de la littérature de jeunesse dans l'enseignement de la lecture dépend, en partie, de l'exploitation du potentiel des textes en ligne et électroniques, du peaufinage des genres de littérature qui contreront les critiques actuelles et à venir de l'utilité de la littérature, et de la construction de théories indiquant pourquoi l'enseignement de la lecture a besoin de la littérature en tant que composante essentielle de l'enseignement de la lecture.

the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed. Only one speller during this period, *The Child's New Plaything* (1750), included what we would consider children's literature today, and only three such stories were included at that— "Earl of Warwick," "St. George and the Dragon," and "Reynard the Fox."

The next period Smith identified was the "Nationalistic-Moralistic Emphasis" (1776–1840) during which the nationalistic aims and moral concerns of the period strongly influenced the selections included in reading texts. One of the widely used texts of the period was Noah Webster's (1798) *The American Spelling Book*, but as with other texts of the period little of what we would today consider literature was found in Webster's text. Of the 158 pages in *The American Spelling Book*, only four pages were devoted to fables, four pages to realistic stories, and half a page to poetry. However, in the subsequent "Period of Emphasis Upon Education for Intelligent Citizenship" (1840–1890), patriotic and moralistic reading selections almost disappeared from readers, which were instead filled with selections written primarily for the purpose of preparing students to "discharge the duties of citizenship" (Smith, 1986, p. 75).

The content of basal readers changed dramatically in the period from 1890 to 1910, which Smith called the "Period of Emphasis Upon Reading as a Cultural Asset." Concern with cultural development led to calls for using literature in readers and for promoting literary interest and appreciation. Professional textbooks on teaching reading, which first appeared during this period, were filled with pleas for the use of literature. In his professional book, McMurry (1899) described preferred reading materials of the day:

With the increasing tendency to consider the literary quality and fitness of the reading matter used in school, longer poems and stories like "Snow Bound," "Rip Van Winkle," "Hiawatha," "Aladdin," "The Courtship of Miles Standish," "The Great Stone Face," and even "Lady of the Lake" and "Julius Caesar" are read and studied as complete wholes. Many of the books now used as reading books are not collections of short selections and extracts, as formerly, but editions of single poems or kindred groups, like..."Gulliver's Travels" or a collection of complete stories or poems by a single author, as Hawthorne's "Stories of the White Hills".... Even the regular series of readers are often made up largely of longer poems and prose masterpieces. (p. 48)

Smith also noted that during this period teachers used supplemental reading materials. Older students had access to classic works of literature, while additional readers, containing stories such as "The Three Bears" and "Jack and the Beanstalk," were typically made available for younger children. In addition, pioneer literary readers

appeared such as *Stepping Stones to Literature* (Arnold & Gilbert, 1897), which contained nursery rhymes like "Jack and Jill," and "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep," and old tales like "The Tortoise and the Hare."

In many ways the thinking in this brief period of American reading instruction resonates with contemporary thinking about the place of literature in reading instruction. However, by 1910, the emphasis on literature in the field of reading had faded and was not to reappear in any significant way for the better part of the century as what Smith called the "Initial Period of Emphasis Upon Scientific Investigation in Reading" began. During this time the contents of readers reflected what researchers had come to understand about the nature of text, which would support learning to read rather than the broad educational goals of society. This is not to say that literature was totally forgotten by all educators; rather, two highly specialized fields appear to have emerged—one focused on reading instruction and the other on children's literature (Martinez & Roser, 1982). These two groups, with their distinct professional interests, formed separate professional organizations with too few bridges between them (Walmsley, 1992).

During the "Initial Period of Emphasis Upon Scientific Investigation in Reading," reading educators openly criticized the literary diet of the previous era and called for factual materials that readers would likely encounter in "practical life reading" (Smith, 1986, p. 172). More important, during this and subsequent periods, reading research flourished, and it was this research—rather than beliefs about the purpose of education—that began to have the greatest impact on the design and content of instructional readers. Smith identified a number of innovations that had a direct impact on the nature of the selections included in readers: (a) the emergence of preprimers and readiness materials, (b) the use of word lists as the basis for selecting story vocabularies, (c) the reduction of preprimer and primer vocabularies, and (d) the increase in the repetition of vocabulary. At beginning levels these features resulted in contrived reading selections that were written in-house by publishers for the purpose of teaching children to read.

Through the 1950s, the content of basal selections was typically narrative in nature and depicted the life of white, middle-class suburban families, but gradually broadened to wider community circles (Hoffman et al., 1998). As criticisms about the quality of selections and lack of diversity in readers were raised in the 1950s and 1960s, publishers responded by portraying somewhat more diverse lifestyles and roles and by including more literature excerpts or adaptations of recently published children's literature. However, selections for beginning readers continued to be written in-house. Despite these

alterations in basal reader content, basals of the later part of the 20th century remained essentially unchanged.

Based on their critical analysis of 10 series of basals published between the years 1981 and 1986, Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, and Murphy (1988) found that at early levels most selections were written specifically for inclusion in the basal, and when children's literature was included, it was typically adapted by the publisher. Adaptations either enabled the selection to fit the readability and skill criteria used by the publisher or made the selection "fit standards of acceptability for content, language, and values" (Goodman et al., 1988, p. 60). Almost all selections were adapted, some only minimally, but most often the changes were so extensive that Goodman et al. argued that the original authors would likely not have recognized their own work.

Paucity of children's literature

Why have basal readers so clearly dominated U.S. reading instruction? Certainly books for children—what Darton (1966) defined as works written for the purpose of giving children spontaneous pleasure—have been written since at least the 18th century in England. However, relatively few books for children were published in the 18th, 19th, and even the beginning of the 20th century, and it was this paucity of children's books in print that forced educators for many decades to rely on readers. Even as increasing numbers of children's books were being published in the 20th century, teachers frequently did not have ready access to them, even in school libraries. Although school libraries were funded as early as 1838 in New York State, it was not until the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 that libraries became a reality in many schools in the United States (Huck, 1996).

Professional recommendations

The lack of children's literature can explain the dominance of readers throughout much of our history, but by the 1950s children's literature had come of age, and federal funding for the purchase of books for use in schools (Elleman, 1987) was becoming increasingly available. There were occasional periods in the first 75 years of this century when there was increased interest in the use of children's literature for reading instruction. For example, the individualized reading movement, with its concomitant use of authentic reading materials, first emerged in the 1920s through the Winnetka plan and was again espoused by Veatch in the 1960s (Huck, 1996). Nonetheless, the clear dominance of basal reading programs throughout most of the century (Goodman et al., 1988; Shannon, 1982) meant that authentic children's literature was not central to reading instruction in the U.S.,

even when availability was no longer an issue. We believe recommendations by prominent professionals in reading methods textbooks account, at least in part, for this state of affairs.

Reading methods textbooks first emerged in the late 1800s and since that time have played a major role in teacher education. Publishers of textbooks, then as now, sought authors who were influential and whose recommendations would be widely read (market considerations being important then as now), and during much of this century those recommendations about reading instruction supported the central role of basal reading material in reading instruction. Authors varied in the emphasis they put on the use of literature in the reading program and in the amount of description they provided for the teacher-in-training about using literature as a part of the reading program. Nonetheless, influential reading methods textbook writers, with one very early period of exception (Martinez & Roser, 1982), primarily emphasized teaching reading using basal reading materials, with literature playing a peripheral role for enjoyment rather than for essential instruction.

When reading methods textbooks first began to appear, prominent educators such as Arnold (1899), Huey (1908), and Taylor (1912) spoke with one voice in recommending that literature play a central role in teaching reading (Martinez & Roser, 1982). However, this early period of focus on literature-based reading instruction was short-lived. Methods textbooks published in the 1920s and 1930s largely ignored literature although they sometimes included a description of a classroom library table that children could visit after all other work was completed (Brooks, 1926). In these textbooks, literature was moved out from the center of reading instruction to its very edge, only to be enjoyed when the real work of learning to read was completed. Patterson (1930), for example, recommended that teachers provide children with opportunities for wide reading, but warned teachers not to let children dawdle or fall into the evils of poor eye movements. Patterson believed that literature should be avoided for other reasons:

...it would seem rather futile, if not worse, to spend all the pupil's reading time with the pleasure of poetry and imaginative literature... [it] should be evident to all teachers as it is so clearly evident to most practical people outside of the schoolroom that children should be taught such skills as will enable them to efficiently to do the necessary reading of everyday life. (Patterson, 1930, p. 220)

However, not all textbook authors of the 1930s and 1940s eschewed literature. Paul McKee's (1934) title suggests his strong belief in the vital role of literature: *Reading and Literature in the Elementary School*. Similarly,

David Russell (1949) in *Children Learn to Read* described literature's important role in enhancing personal growth. He offered numerous literature-based activities and lists of recommended books. However, the majority of content in both these textbooks focused on the skills of reading and the use of basic reading materials toward that end.

Dolch (1955) best summed up the thinking of reading professionals in the 1950s. He recommended that basic readers be used in a reading study period where the teachers help children accomplish a complete reading ("work out the words and discover what sentences mean"). But, he warned, "It will be work and not too much fun.... It has been learning to read, not reading" (p. 95). In contrast, Dolch suggested that daily free reading periods were critical so that children would also learn that reading books was enjoyable and meaningful, not just hard work.

Our examination of textbooks published in the 1960s and 1970s suggests that this period was more of the same: skills first, then literature. Literature was considered a *part* of the reading program, not *the* program. However, literature continued to play a role in developing enjoyment and appreciation. For example, Zintz (1970) argued that children, to some degree, needed all of the skills of word identification, comprehension, study skills, and oral reading in order to develop habits of book use. Not surprisingly the word *literature* does not even appear in the index of this textbook, although Zintz does describe the individualized approach to reading. He does not mention a classroom library, although he does describe the importance of a school library and of children owning their own books.

In her first edition of *Teaching Them to Read* (1970), Dolores Durkin recommended that teachers supplement their basal readers with collections of literature published by textbook companies. She made many references to the importance of reading aloud to children and keeping literature close at hand. Although Durkin often referenced children's literature and clearly believed in its importance, she also reminded teachers that they must keep in mind the distinction between materials used to teach reading skills (basals) and materials used as literature.

Several textbooks of the 1960s and 1970s did challenge basal reader instruction. For example, Lee and Allen (1963) and Stauffer (1970) advocated a language experience approach, and Veatch (1968) argued for individualized reading instruction with literature. But basal readers remained relatively untouched either by the challenges of language experience, individualized reading, or linguists' entry into the discussion about reading instruction (Fries, 1962). As Morris (1998) put it, "Like 'Old Man River,' it [basal readers] simply widened its banks a little—incorporating suggestions for more intensive phonics—and kept on rolling" (p. 7).

Literature and reading instruction: A contemporary perspective

While basal readers were the materials of choice for reading instruction throughout most of U.S. history, the view from the 1990s is dramatically different. In this section we examine the role that literature plays today in reading instruction.

Use of tradebooks to teach reading

Recently, Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, and Duffy-Hester (1998) conducted a replication of the research done by Austin and Morrison and reported in *The First R* (Austin & Morrison, 1963). Their large-scale, national survey queried teachers from prekindergarten through fifth grade about issues and practices related to elementary reading instruction. Their results reveal that literature in the form of tradebooks plays a far more significant role in reading instruction in today's classrooms than it did in the past. They found that the large majority of respondents believed in a balanced approach to reading instruction that combined skills and literature. Among their key findings related to teachers' use of children's literature are the following:

- Overall, 94% of teachers held the goal of developing readers who were independent and motivated to choose, appreciate, and enjoy literature.
- Most first-grade teachers reported moderate, predominant, or exclusive use of Big Books (84%) and picture tradebooks (81%); similarly, 72% of fourth-/fifth-grade teachers reported moderate or greater use of trade chapter books.
- PreK–2 teachers regularly read aloud (97%), accepted invented spellings (85%), and engaged children in oral language (83%), journal writing (78%), and reading response (69%) activities.
- Grades 3–5 teachers regularly taught comprehension (89%) and vocabulary (80%), provided literature response activities (79%), and used tradebooks instructionally (67%). (p. 641)

Baumann and his colleagues found that most teachers struck a balance between the use of basals and tradebooks. Only 2% of the teachers indicated they relied exclusively on basals, and none of the first-grade teachers reported an exclusive reliance on basals. Conversely, only 16% of teachers reported an exclusive use of tradebooks for reading instruction. Rather, teachers typically reported using basals supplemented by tradebooks (56%) or tradebooks supplemented by basals (27%). When the researchers asked the respondents if they had made any

major changes in their reading instruction in the past few years, 69% of the teachers indicated they had. When asked about the nature of the changes, the teachers “often reported changes that involved a philosophy or programmatic shift (e.g., movement to trade books, whole language, balanced instruction, integrated instruction)” (p. 647). It is important to keep in mind when interpreting the results of this survey that the very nature of many basals had already evolved into literature-based readers.

The results of this survey reveal a very different picture than that of earlier decades in which the use of basal readers accounted for between 90 and 95% of all reading instruction in U.S. elementary schools (Goodman et al., 1988; Shannon, 1982). Clearly, children’s literature has become increasingly central to reading instruction in the 1990s, as teachers incorporated tradebooks into their programs and as many basal reader programs themselves shifted to literature. This trend was also reflected in the boom in children’s books sales in the 1980s. Sales in children’s books doubled from 1980 to 1985 and doubled again from 1985 to 1990 (Roback, 1990a).

Changes in basals of the 1990s

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, publishers of basal programs also responded to calls for literature-based reading instruction. The Texas Education Agency’s Proclamation 68 (1990) called for the inclusion of quality children’s literature—unedited and unabridged—in new programs to be adopted in Texas. Five publishers responded to this proclamation. McCarthy and Hoffman (1995) conducted an extensive comparison of older first-grade basals (1986/87) and the newer first-grade basals (1993) produced in response to Proclamation 68. They found that the total number of new words in the new first-grade readers was less than in older readers, but that there were more unique words in the new readers than in the older ones reflecting the lack of vocabulary control and repetition in the new readers. The new readers were more diverse in terms of genre and format (e.g., use of big books, tradebooks, anthologies), and there were far fewer adaptations of children’s literature in the new programs.

McCarthy and Hoffman (1995) also found that the newer materials were of higher literary quality, as judged on the basis of a holistic scale that took into account content, language, and design. In particular, they found that “the new basals appeared to contain selections with more complex plots and more highly developed characters; the selections required more interpretation on the part of the reader than the old” (p. 73). While selections in the new first-grade basals included far more predictable features like repeated patterns, rhyme, and rhythm, the decodability demands of selections in the new basals were much

greater than of those found in the older basals. In addition, the researchers found differences in design features with the newer basals featuring a more creative interplay of text and illustration that is more akin to contemporary picture books (McCarthy et al., 1994). McCarthy and Hoffman (1995) concluded that “innovations were offered on a scale unparalleled in the history of basals” (p. 73).

In a similar study, Reutzel and Larsen (1995) examined a random sample of selections at first-, third-, and fifth-grade levels from the five top-selling basal programs published in 1993 to determine if the basals were “free of alterations, adaptations, and omissions of illustrations, language, design, function, role, and purpose” (p. 496). They found that 35% of the sampled selections contained text adaptations, with approximately a third of those adaptations resulting from selections being excerpted from full-length children’s novels. Most adaptations did not involve changes in storyline or wording.

The majority of adaptations Reutzel and Larsen (1995) identified were illustration changes with illustrations being omitted, cropped, or reduced in size. With the exception of one selection, they found differences between the original book and the basal version in the print-to-picture format—differences that can be especially significant in picture books, a genre defined by the interplay of text and illustration. These findings dovetail with those of McCarthy and her colleagues to confirm that the published reading materials produced in the 1990s highlighted authentic children’s literature to a far greater degree than had occurred over the past century.

Currents of change

In the decade of the 1990s, commitment to the use of literature for literacy instruction has been greater than at any other time in our history. We believe that understanding the future of children’s literature in literacy instruction requires an understanding of how this change came about. However, because of the complexity of the trends impacting literature use in reading instruction, we discuss a number, but not all, of the currents that we believe have combined to bring literature to the forefront of literacy instruction. The relationships among these currents are complex, and we do not try to answer the “chicken or the egg” question. Rather, we attempt to describe what we believe are some of the major currents that have come together to bring about this powerful tide.

Early fluent readers, early writers, and storybook reading research

The critical importance of literature in young children’s literacy development emerged, in part, from several related lines of research. In the early 1970s researchers

became interested in young children who learned to read and spell before entering school (Clark, 1976; Durkin, 1966; Read, 1971; Teale, 1978) and in preschoolers' experiences with literature. Beginning with White's (1954) landmark case study of her young preschooler, many researchers examined the nature of young children's engagement with literature (Crago & Crago, 1983; Martinez, 1983; Snow, 1983). Together, these studies demonstrated that as children interacted with their parents reading literature, they were not only constructing an understanding of the literary work at hand but also learning ways of making meaning and taking up the literary structures, language, and themes found in literature (Applebee, 1978; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Lehr, 1988; Pappas & Brown, 1988; Purcell-Gates, 1988). Similarly, researchers documented that young writers were active learners who notice the print around them and construct understandings about specific print forms and their functions (Bissex, 1980; Clay, 1975; Harste, Burke, & Woodward, 1983). Such research pushed aside notions that young children needed to get ready to read and write but rather were emergent readers and writers whose development reflected the nature of their experiences with specific storybooks, informational books and texts, and writing rather than with contrived readiness materials. Holdaway's (1979) shared reading of Big Books and Clay's (1979) Reading Recovery approach were natural complements to the conclusions drawn from research on emergent reading and writing.

Teacher-led movements

Beginning in the late 1970s and continuing into the 1990s, at least three movements led in part by teachers put literature center stage in reading and writing instruction: (a) the reading-workshop approach to reading instruction, (b) shared reading of predictable Big Books, and (c) whole language. The reading-workshop movement emerged from efforts of teachers such as Atwell (1984, 1987), who borrowed theory and technique from the writing process movement. Similarly, Routman's (1988) description of first-grade instruction based on shared reading and guided reading of predictable Big Books (adapted from Holdaway, 1979) influenced the way many teachers approached beginning reading. Shared reading and the reading-workshop approach were embraced by a larger teacher movement, whole language instruction. (While this movement is critical to understanding literature's current dominant role in reading instruction, a thorough description of its influence on literature-based reading instruction is not possible here; see the entire issue of *The Elementary School Journal*, 1989, vol. 90, no. 2.) Whole language, with its emphasis on the extensive use of authentic literature, student choice and

ownership, language across the curriculum, integration through the use of thematic units, and integration of reading and writing, contributed to thousands of teachers seeking out quality literature for their reading programs (Goodman, 1986; Newman, 1985).

Salzer (1991) described the whole language movement as the most widespread and fastest growing grassroots curriculum trend in U.S. education. TAWL (Teachers Applying Whole Language) groups began to appear in the late 1970s and increased rapidly throughout the 1980s. Smith (1990) attested to the interest in these movements by noting that in 1989 two of the five most frequent requests for information through the ERIC Clearinghouse included "teaching children to appreciate literature" and "defining whole language." He concluded that "integrating language activities with literature seems to be the predominant concern of the writers, speakers, and information seekers in our profession" (p. 680). These movements had a dramatic impact on teachers' use of tradebooks to teach reading and on the basals published in the first half of the 1990s.

Changes in the world of children's literature

Unlike the beginning of the 20th century, the 21st century will open with ample supplies of visually appealing children's book titles from which teachers and children may choose. At no other time in history has so much children's literature been available; in the 1960s approximately 2,000 children's books were published each year. In contrast, in the 1990s approximately 5,000 tradebooks for children were published annually (Cullinan & Galda, 1998). From 1980 to 1988 there was a 73% increase in the output of children's titles ("Top Selling Children's Books," 1990), and today there are over 70,000 children's books in print (Huck, 1996). In addition, improvements in printing technology have resulted in an explosion of full-color picture books with great child-appeal.

We can also identify five trends in children's literature that have met critical needs in literacy instruction: (a) books to move children into beginning reading, (b) books to sustain and expand beginning readers, (c) books to make the transition from easy-to-read picture books to longer and more complex chapter books, (d) books to nourish children's interest in the historical and natural world, and (e) books that reflect the diversity of children and their experiences.

In the early 1980s there was a striking increase in the numbers of predictable books published that support children's movement into beginning reading (Temple, Martinez, Yokota, & Naylor, 1998). Many of these predictable titles were published in Big Book format. Equally important, the number of easy picture books with literary merit written by well known children's authors such as

James Marshall, Cynthia Rylant, and Betsy Byars also dramatically increased (Cullinan & Galda, 1998). These books sustain and extend beginning readers. The numbers of easy-to-read chapter books that included “strong, involving stories with well-honed characters and conflict-rich plots” (Elleman, 1995, p. 156) also dramatically increased. These easy-to-read chapter books, many of which are part of a series, filled the niche needed for transition from easy picture books to more complex chapter books.

Two related trends in children’s literature have represented important developments for educators teaching reading at the upper elementary level. The first trend is the growth of well-researched historical fiction that began in the 1980s; this trend has continued into the 1990s and even broadened with the strong emergence of historical fiction in picture book format (Elleman, 1987, 1995; Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, in press). The growth of nonfiction tradebooks in recent years has been even more striking (Donahue, 1990). Elleman (1995) has noted a rise in quality nonfiction that is well researched, well organized, and stylistically engaging, as well as an increase in the range of nonfiction books to include more photo essays, more multicultural nonfiction, and books that focus in-depth on a single person or topic. In addition, she noted that in 1995 some 700 different nonfiction series for children could be found in the database of *Booklist*.

A notable increase in multicultural literature beginning in the mid-1980s and continuing into the 1990s is yet another trend in children’s literature that has impacted teachers’ use of literature for reading instruction. Educators involved in both the whole language and literature-based reading movements have recognized the importance of reading materials relevant to children’s lives and have sought out multicultural literature for use in their literacy programs.

The profession’s reconceptualization of literacy and literature

While reading methods textbooks in the 1980s, with notable exceptions, continued to focus on teaching skills, other professionals during this time were writing about innovative instructional techniques that captured the unique power of literature. Professional journals offer the most direct way of documenting the shift in thinking of this community. We examined three leading literacy journals published in the last 25 years in order to identify those articles focused directly on children’s literature or on some facet of literacy or literacy learning as it relates to literature. In this section we present these findings and reflect on the trends that emerged.

We analyzed 25 years (1974–1998) of three prominent journals—*Reading Research Quarterly*, *Journal of*

Literacy Research (formerly *Journal of Reading Behavior*), and *The Reading Teacher*. Articles and regular department-like entries were included in the analysis, but features such as editorials and brief commentaries were excluded. We sought to identify articles that focused directly on children’s literature (e.g., content analyses of children’s literature or columns reviewing children’s tradebooks) or on some facet of literacy or literacy learning as it relates to literature. We examined issues of *Reading Research Quarterly* and *Journal of Literacy Research* and placed articles in one of two categories: (a) those focused on some facet of literacy or literacy learning and instruction as it relates to literature, or (b) those with a specific focus on literary response or literary development. An example of an article focused on literature for literacy learning and instruction was Morrow’s (1992) article entitled “The Impact of a Literature-Based Program on Literacy Achievement, Use of Literature, and Attitudes of Children from Minority Backgrounds.” An example of an article with a response focus was Golden and Guthrie’s (1986) article entitled “Convergence and Divergence in Reader Response to Literature.”

Throughout the 25 years covered in our analysis, we identified relatively few studies in *Reading Research Quarterly* that focused on any aspect of literature. From 1974 through 1988, we found only 10 studies related to children’s literature (see Table 1). The number of studies focusing on literature increased after 1988; the greatest number of studies (11) appeared in the years from 1994 through 1998 representing 8% of all the studies published in the journal during that time. The most frequent focus of literature-related studies has been on literary response, with the majority of these studies appearing since the mid-1980s.

No literature-related studies appeared in *Journal of Literacy Research* (*Journal of Reading Behavior*) published from 1974 through 1988 (see Table 2). As was the case with *Reading Research Quarterly*, more studies focusing on literature appeared after 1988 with the greatest number (12) published during 1989–1993. Again, most studies focused on literature response.

Due to the journal’s largely practitioner audience, a different system for categorizing articles emerged for *The Reading Teacher*: (a) articles focused on literature or an author of children’s literature, (b) articles focused on some facet of literacy or literacy learning as it relates to literature, (c) articles focused on literary response or literary development, and (d) articles focused on the use of literature as it relates to goals other than literacy or literary ones (e.g., the use of literature to teach math or social studies concepts or to foster moral development). The picture of literature’s importance in reading instruction is more clearly reflected in the number and in the percent-

Table 1 Studies focused on literature appearing in the *Reading Research Quarterly* from 1974 through 1998

Year	Focus on literature and literacy	Focus on literature and response	Total number of journal articles
1974–1978	0	1	89
1979–1983	1	2	143
1984–1988	2	4	113
1989–1993	3	1	101
1994–1998	5	6	136

Table 2 Studies focused on literature appearing in the *Journal of Reading Behavior/Journal of Literacy Research* from 1974 through 1998

Year	Focus on literature and literacy	Focus on literature and response	Total number of journal articles
1974–1978	0	0	167
1979–1983	0	0	151
1984–1988	0	0	86
1989–1993	3	9	104
1994–1998	1	7	108

Table 3 Articles focused on literature appearing in the *The Reading Teacher* from 1974 through 1998

Year	Focus on literature or author	Focus on literature and literacy	Focus on literature and response	Focus on literature and other	Total literature-related articles	Total number of journal articles
1974–1978	55	11	3	2	71	598
1979–1983	49	11	6	17	83	840
1984–1988	57	17	5	6	85	672
1989–1993	67	35	28	11	141	544
1994–1998	75	29	21	11	136	402

age of total articles devoted to literature published in *The Reading Teacher* compared to the two research journals. Across the past 25 years, there has been a dramatic increase in the total number of articles related to literature appearing in the journal (see Table 3). From 1974–1978, a total of 71 literature-related articles appeared representing 12% of the total number of articles. In contrast, 136 articles appeared from 1994–1998 representing 33% of the total number of articles.

Throughout the 25 years, the largest category of literature-related articles appearing in *The Reading Teacher* has been the category focused on children's literature and authors of children's literature (see Table 3). These articles have primarily been reviews of recently published tradebooks or reviews of tradebooks selected as favorites by children or teachers. We found interesting changes

across the years in the other categories. Articles focused on literacy learning as it relates to children's literature has been the second most frequently appearing category in *The Reading Teacher*. Included in this group were articles such as "What Will Happen Next? Using Predictable Books with Young Children" (Tompkins & Webeler, 1983) or "Using Predictable Materials vs. Preprimers to Teach Beginning Sight Words" (Bridge, Winograd, & Haley, 1983). During the three 5-year periods extending from 1974 through 1988, the number of articles in this category ranged from 11 to 17. However, from 1989 through 1993 and again from 1994 through 1998, there was a dramatic increase in the number of articles in this category. In the first 15 years of issues that we reviewed there were more articles focusing on the use of literature as it relates to goals other than literacy than articles with

a response or literary focus (25 vs. 14). However, during the periods extending from 1989 through 1998, this trend was reversed as far more articles focused on response were published. In fact, over the past 10 years, there have been almost as many articles focused on response as articles focused on literacy learning and literature.

Our analysis of the articles appearing in key professional journals over the past 25 years reveals a remarkable new interest in children's literature as it relates to literacy processes and literacy learning, an interest that has become increasingly evident over the past decade. The roots of this interest most likely extend back several decades to the late 1970s and early 1980s when notable shifts in thinking about the nature of the reading process were underway—shifts that would lead us toward, though not directly to, a reconceptualization of the role of literature in literacy instruction.

Theoretical shifts

Over the past century there have been many dramatic shifts in theories impacting reading instruction. During the 1970s, researchers began to examine reading from a cognitive and psycholinguistic perspective and conceptualized reading as an active process of meaning construction that occurred as reader and text interacted. Psycholinguistic theory emphasized the value of using authentic text in which readers could process all linguistic cues. However, the early cognitive research on story comprehension, while taking into account text factors (especially text structure), did not recognize the need to investigate readers interacting with authentic literature.

It was not until researchers made shifts toward sociocultural and literary response theory that researchers used literature in their examinations of readers' engagement with and responses to literature. For example, Cochran-Smith (1984) examined preschoolers' storytime interactions with their teachers within the larger social contexts of parents' and the school's value toward and expectation for literacy. She drew upon sociocultural as well as literary theory to explain what she called the making of a reader. As increasing numbers of literacy researchers embraced ethnographic and naturalistic observational methods, they came to recognize the importance of ecological validity including the use of authentic texts (Teale, 1995).

The work of literary response theorists, Rosenblatt (1978) in particular, reminded us that literature (not just any text) and our stances toward literature were critical in understanding readers. By the early 1990s, a significant strand of literacy research had emerged that drew upon the work of reader response theorists and placed great importance on the need to investigate literacy processes and literacy learning in the context of authentic literary text.

Recommendations of professionals

Unlike their predecessors, our analysis of more contemporary reading methods textbooks revealed that a new stance toward literature began to emerge in textbooks written in the 1980s. Mason and Au's (1986) textbook was the first (at least as far as we can determine) to describe new methods of teaching reading in which literature played a central role. They described using Big Books in the teaching of beginning reading, using reading response activities based on Rosenblatt's transactional theory as a framework for enhancing comprehension, reading aloud to children daily, and using a classroom library to extend children's voluntary reading. The message in this textbook was that literature was an effective instructional material and that new methods of instruction could capitalize on the power of literature to teach reading. This message was not taken up fully until nearly a decade later.

Leu and Kinzer's textbook, which is now in a fourth edition (1999), demonstrates the radical shift in recommending that reading be taught mainly from basal materials to mainly from literature. In their first edition (1987) Leu and Kinzer used over 20 pages to describe basal materials and how to supplement and adapt them. They described the individualized reading approach in a little over a page. However, they devoted an entire chapter to literature. They argued: "Literature, therefore, is a unique and powerful tool; it may be used to promote all aspects of comprehension" (p. 241). They described how literature can be used in teaching decoding, vocabulary, comprehension, and more. This reflects a shift in stance from earlier recommendations of professionals that basals were the most effective instructional material for teaching reading, to a stance suggesting that both basals and literature were effective reading materials. The fourth edition of *Effective Literacy Instruction, K-8* (1999) confirms that literature has moved to a central role. In this text, Leu and Kinzer devoted 5 pages to a description of basal reading materials and 10 pages to a description of readers' workshop and response journals. Literature moved from the seventh chapter to the fourth chapter, and the chapter title changed from "Literature: Affect and Narrative Discourse" in the first edition to "The Central Role of Children's Literature" in the fourth edition.

The 1990s editions of textbooks written by Zintz (Maggart & Zintz, 1992) and Durkin (1993) stand in marked contrast to their earlier 1970s editions. Their 1970s stance of skills first, then literature shifted to the 1990s stance of literature front and center. By the 1990s every reading methods textbook we reviewed describes literature-based reading programs and activities such as shared reading and response journals. Textbooks of the 1990s are filled with examples of literature and its use in

teaching reading. However, even into the 1990s there are still voices of doubt. Despite Durkin's (1993) obvious regard for the importance of children's literature in a reading program, she remained skeptical about its use as *the* reading material for instruction. Literature, she argued, can encourage children to want to read and even advance reading abilities. However, she recommended that teachers abandon their basal readers gradually and continue to ask themselves what effect it will have on their poorest readers. (Interestingly, this *watch out for struggling readers* is a current challenge to literature that we discuss later).

While this review is not exhaustive and omits many influential textbooks published in the last 30 years, it has interesting implications. It appears that it was not through mainstream textbook recommendations that changes seemed to be made in the nature of reading instruction and the role of literature in teaching reading. In general, reading methods textbooks seemed to follow cutting-edge teaching rather than initiate it.

Political factors

Political forces emerged in the 1980s that were also responsible, in part, for the emerging role of literature in reading instruction. The California State Department of Education's Reading Initiative (1986) generated interest throughout the country, and a direct outgrowth was the National Reading Initiative, a coordinating and disseminating network that was created to promote reading and reduce illiteracy (Cullinan, 1989). Texas's Proclamation 68 (1990), calling for the inclusion of unedited and unabridged quality children's literature, came quickly on the heels of the reforms in California and resulted in the new generation of literature-based basal programs that were described in a previous section. Today, political forces have become a countercurrent to the literature movement, and we will discuss these political changes in a subsequent section.

Parents as a change force

We believe that parents were also a force that moved the field toward literature-based reading instruction in the 1980s. Baby-boomer parents were more affluent and better educated than previous generations of parents and had more knowledge of child development (Elleman, 1987). Many of these parents also remembered growing up with stories. The stories that baby-boomer parents remembered—stories such as those found in the Golden Books series—might not be recognized as quality literature today. Nonetheless, their fond memories of these stories made them seek out literature for their own children. In fact, a 1990 survey of booksellers revealed that mothers constituted the largest group of customers in

children's-only bookstores (Roback, 1990b). This interest in literature also made these parents receptive to the inclusion of literature in their children's reading programs.

The future

We were charged with discussing children's literature and instructional materials for reading in the next millennium—a topic we have succeeded in avoiding for many pages now. Actually, we looked to the past not to avoid talking about the future but to have a basis for doing so. We have witnessed, at the end of this millennium, a revolution in the role of children's literature in reading instruction (McGee, 1992), and we have attempted to describe some of the currents that brought about these changes. Some of these currents have been especially powerful, so powerful that we believe they will continue to carry us forward well into the next millennium. One of these currents is the increasing diversity of the population of the United States. By 2020, estimates place the number of people of color at nearly 50% of the U.S. population (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989), a 25% increase over the 1990 census figure. We believe that parents and teachers in the next millennium will increasingly demand materials that reflect the diversity of their children's experiences. Equally powerful will be the demands of future parents. As the children who have learned to read through literature (rather than basal materials) become adults and parents, their voices will also join the call for literature as a central part of all instructional experiences.

There are also some relatively new currents that are likely to gain strength and have an impact on instructional materials in the future. Educators have increasingly come to recognize that being literate requires that readers be able to deal with all types of texts, including online texts. With more children having access to home computers and more and more schools providing Internet access in classrooms, online resources are likely to become an authentic literacy material used far more extensively in future reading instruction. For example, recent research has demonstrated that computer exploration allowed young children to develop symbolic concepts that would not be achieved using books or pencil and paper (Labbo, 1996). However, we believe that the literacy potential of online and electronic texts is not, as yet, fully realized. While many interactive CD storybooks are available for young children, some CD storybooks are more supportive of children's comprehension than others (Labbo & Kuhn, 1998). CD storybooks with more integrated interactive features encourage more complex cognitive activities and cohesive story retellings. Similarly, online texts do not yet have the literary qualities of print nonfiction.

In the last decade one of the book genres that has experienced tremendous growth is nonfiction. In its current form, nonfiction even for young readers presents complex information and theories using sophisticated and multiple representations such as graphs, illustrations, and diagrams. This genre has taken full advantage of new technological advances in illustrations to fully engage readers in scientific and historical concepts. The information found in today's nonfiction for children is anything but dry, boring, or simplistic. It presents information from multiple sources and encourages critical thinking about controversial topics. In contrast, online resources do provide children with information and illustration, but the extensive graphic capabilities and even the interactivity of computers have not yet been fully harnessed. Compare the sophisticated computer graphics used in many recent movies to the level of graphics found in many web sites or electronic books. However, we suspect that the sophistication of computer graphics will filter rapidly into everyday use, and we will see enhanced interactivity and quality in the nature of illustrations in both online texts and electronic books. In fact, given the rapid pace of advancements in electronic media, we might even witness book forms of literature moving from the center to the margins of literacy instruction. "When considering the computer's capability to provide a whole library at one's disposal in a single, portable, highly interactive, and increasingly readable device" (Reinking, 1995, p. 21), literature in its book form may well be beloved merely for its nostalgia.

While we anticipate that reliance on authentic materials in both book and electronic form will be the wave of the future, it would be naive not to recognize that political forces are already working as a countercurrent. Beginning reading instruction especially is feeling the impact of this countercurrent. By 1995, the California State Department of Education Reading Task Force was attacking the California Reading Initiative in *Every Child a Reader* (California Department of Education, 1995), declaring literature-based reading instruction to be the cause of low reading test scores in the state—a position that has been seriously questioned (Huck, 1996). The strength of this backlash is undeniable with both California and Texas drawing upon the research of Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, and Mehta (1998), Lyon (1994), and Moats (1994) and calling for decodable materials for beginning reading instruction in their next textbook adoptions. These calls are particularly compelling given the needs of struggling readers and the strong relationship between early reading difficulties and deficiencies in phonological knowledge and strategies.

Fortunately, as Teale (1995) suggested, this most recent turn in the beginning reading debate is different

than previous shifts. He observed that in the past, when a new trend emerged, it overwhelmed other positions. However, in today's debate there are voices of reason on both sides (the code emphasis vs. the holistic emphasis) that recognize kernels of truth in the other side's position. If those voices of reason are sufficiently forceful, then young children's need for authentic literature will be recognized in beginning reading programs of the next millennium (Freppon & Dahl, 1998). In fact, we would predict that the renewed interest in beginning reading with its calls for decodable text are not likely, in the long run, to move in the direction of the contrived linguistic readers of the 1960s. We expect that children's publishers may actually move this debate beyond either the decodable text or authentic literature positions we see today. Just as publishers of tradebooks responded to the greater market created by educators' demands for predictable books in the early 1990s (after all, predictable books were not a new genre), publishers are likely to once again recognize the market for highly engaging and easily decodable texts such as *Pat the Cat* (Hawkins & Hawkins, 1985), and *Sheep in a Jeep* (Shaw, 1986). As in the past, when highly respected authors such as Cynthia Rylant and James Marshall were urged to create easy-to-read beginner chapter books, we expect that editors will seek out writers who can respond in imaginative ways to the needs of early beginning readers.

Still, what ultimately must be more fully developed is a theoretical rationale for why reading instruction *requires* literature. This theory must take us beyond arguing the merits of using literature in reading instruction based on its accessibility, capacity to provide enjoyment, or on its superior literary quality. Professionals have long argued that literature engages our emotions, reveals us as humans, and allows us to connect with all of life's diverse peoples. While these are strong arguments that extend beyond the mere purpose of literature's role in teaching children to read, what is ultimately missing is a theory that would suggest that learning to read *is* learning to read literature (Sipe, in press).

One theory upon which we might draw is reader response theory. From this perspective we have embraced the notion that literacy involves more than comprehending the literary object; that reading involves perceiving the complex relationships offered by multiple perspectives. We are moving toward a definition of reading that moves beyond comprehension and response into what we call deep thinking. Deep thinking requires seeing more than one perspective, searching out a variety of interpretations, and finding compelling connections among and between perspectives, interpretations, and self (Wolf, Carey, & Mieras, 1996).

This broadened understanding of literacy *requires* literature. It suggests that only literature provides the multiple layers of meaning necessary for acquiring the strategies, stances, and ways of deep thinking that we are coming to define as literacy. In the early grades teachers may well choose to have young children reading decodable text on their own as they move toward mastery of the code. However, because much of decodable text (as it currently exists) does not provide multiple layers of meaning, it remains critical that young children also engage with thought-provoking literature in order to nurture the deep thinking that will be equated with literacy in the next millennium. We anticipate that teachers who work with older students will increasingly choose to use complete works of literature rather than excerpts that are currently found in basal readers. While this may mean that upper elementary teachers turn increasingly to the use of tradebooks, it is also likely that basal publishers will reconceptualize the contents of readers of the future by finding ways of making complete works of authentic literature the cornerstone of published programs for older readers. Teachers will increasingly recognize the power of reading across several different, but connected, texts in cultivating deep thinking about both literature and content (Hartman, 1995; Many, Fyfe, Lewis, & Mitchell, 1996).

Another theory we might draw upon to argue for the necessity of literature in reading instruction is genre theory. That is, learning to read and write is, in part, genre specific. We know that young children have far more experience with narrative than with nonfiction, and this is often used as a reason for their difficulty in reading and writing this text in the upper elementary grades. In Duke's (1998) assessment:

Extensive experience with storybooks, while beneficial in many respects, will not *alone* result in children being able to read and write information books. Learners must have experience with the particular genres in question in order to fully develop the ability to read and write in those genres. (p. 8) (emphasis added)

Research on the effects of preschoolers' experiences with literature suggests that young children do acquire a sense of specific genre. For young children who have extensive and early experiences with literature, reading other texts for beginning reading may not matter. They may already have acquired sufficient genre-specific knowledge, expectation for the multiplicity of interpretation, and experiences moving in and out of literary worlds in order to move beyond decodable texts or other texts similarly designed for reading instruction (Rowe, 1998; Wolf & Heath, 1992). On the other hand, for children with very little literary experience, reading a steady diet of decodable text or other contrived texts without the addition-

al experiences of literature may not result in the reading stances and deep thinking that we will expect in the next century. Of course, new innovations in the next century should push us beyond the either/or choice of literature versus other kinds of texts in beginning reading and beyond. We are confident that theory, instructional practices, and children's literature will continue to evolve into the next century, allowing literature to remain in its current central role in reading and writing instruction.

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