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Pathways to affective accountability: Selecting, locating, and using children's books in elementary school classrooms

High-stakes testing pressures teachers and often limits the reading curriculum in U.S. schools. But professional development can help to improve this situation.

> Children have a right to access a wide variety of books and other reading material in classroom, school, and community libraries.

This principle appears in the International Reading Association position statement *Making a Difference Means Making It Different: Honoring Children's Rights to Excellent Reading Instruction* (2000, p. 6). The principle quoted and nine others advocate a strong literacy program for children that includes well-prepared teachers, quality instruction, and authentic assessment. The 10 principles, which are on the Association website and were distributed to the 2003 annual convention attendees as a poster, grace the walls of many classrooms and offices. Yet they may not be heeded due to the widespread emphasis on measuring literacy standards through high-stakes testing (Strachan, 2002). In the United States, the latest accountability movement, spearheaded by the findings of the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000), legalized through the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2002), and implemented through the Reading First initiative (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), has resulted in school districts throughout the country seeking compliance with the ultimate goal of all children reading on grade level.

The role of real books—Making a difference

The accountability movement has tilted the proverbial educational pendulum back to the "good ol' days" prior to the literacy reforms of the 1980s and 1990s when teachers engaged their students with children's literature, authentic reading and writing materials, and the opportunity to own their literacy development. Fueled by scientific research, the National Reading Panel presented confusing, if not contradictory, guidance regarding the role of children's literature within the context of a school's reading program (Allington, 2002; NICHD, 2000). As a consequence, many teachers now believe that "authentic" reading materials, including children's trade books, should not be a part of their reading program (MacGillivary, Ardell, Curwen, & Palma, 2004), even though such materials have been advocated by professional associations and educators (e.g., Hancock, 2000; Tompkins & McGee, 1993). Furthermore, although some teachers argue that a sense of security is gained through adherence to a sanctioned curriculum, others seek alternatives to the "collateral damage" that can result from a confined curriculum (Kohn, 2004). We think teachers should examine the reading mandates not for restrictive elements but for classroom literacy practices that they *can* and *should* do. We base our position on years of research (including seminal studies not included in the National Reading Panel's report), the positions of professional organizations, and our own experiences of working with teachers and children. The current accountability movement mandates conformity, but we believe

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that professional educators should not be limited to a constricted curriculum. They should strive to include elements such as motivation, enjoyment, accomplishment, and self-worth—an amplification that we label *affective accountability*.

Teachers can make it different

The term *affective accountability* came from our collaborative work with the faculty of an urban elementary school to select, evaluate, and use children's literature (Williams & Bauer, 2004). Interested in better meeting the literacy needs of their students, the elementary school faculty we worked with was eager to participate in all possible literacy programs (i.e., those of local state reading associations, the Reading First initiative, and other state organizations) and regularly sponsored parental outreach programs that emphasized the power of reading. Through surveys, semistructured interviews, observations, and field notes of professional development sessions, the participants in our study indicated that they valued the role of children's literature in their teaching but confided that they used it only occasionally in their classrooms. Their attempts to use children's books and other authentic materials amounted to using "whatever they had in their room," relying upon books acquired through random methods. Their rationale for such a haphazard "drive-by" approach included (a) lack of time, (b) uncertainty of where to find books, (c) not knowing about books appropriate for both their students and the curriculum, and (d) an inability to align children's books with objectives assessed on the state high-stakes test (used for student, teacher, and school accountability).

Given the stressful climate caused by high-stakes testing and the current accountability movement, the teachers' disconnect between knowledge and classroom application is not surprising. Quality children's literature with authentic applications for classroom use does not magically appear. It is likely that many of these random attempts to share books do not maximize the potential for learning that results when good books and good teachers mix (Lukens, 1999). Furthermore, many elementary classroom teachers are unaware of the instructional enhancements that quality literature can provide for their students (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000). When teachers are convinced that using authentic reading materials such as children's literature is too time-consuming and on the periphery of reading materials both explicitly and implicitly suggested by administrators' varied interpretations of mandates, it is no wonder that most teachers are obliged to use decodable texts, worksheets, and other scripted curricula.

We were encouraged that the faculty of the school in our study was willing to look beyond the standard instructional methods imposed by the current accountability movement and to consider ways in which the school community could better meet student needs. Through our work with the faculty members, it soon became evident that they, like most teachers we encounter, are committed to the students at their school. Their initial comments about using children's books focused on student learning. Many of the students they taught did not speak English as their first language and came from other countries, cultures, and experiences. Therefore, the teachers were cognizant that often the standard curriculum did not provide adequate background information, particularly in the content areas. We were interested in securing informational texts that would provide such knowledge and be appropriate for age, grade, and reading level. The books also needed to align with Florida's Sunshine State Standards (www.firn.edu/doe/curric/prek12/index.html). The teachers were eager to find texts that would meet these criteria because the state-mandated high-stakes test measures mastery of the state objectives and is consequently used to demonstrate both student and teacher accountability. Finding an appropriate book was not easy, however. Teachers at the school reported that they often purchased books or shared those that their students brought in. Others relied on materials that were located in the school media center, including themed units, displayed books, or texts recommended by either the school media specialist or the public librarian. As one teacher stated, "If it is not in my room, I don't use it." However, because these teachers indicated a desire to go beyond the "hit-or-miss" approach and employ professional processes to achieve their goals, we collaboratively planned professional development sessions. Meeting in the school's media center and the preview center for children's literature at the local university, we shared a wide range of resources for locating and obtaining copies of appropriate books and ways to use the books in the classroom. The joy that the faculty members expressed as they became

acquainted with new books and revisited classic children's literature was clearly visible as they discussed the ways the texts would enhance the literacy skills of their students. The teachers were able to go beyond the mandated standard accountability issues to include affective accountability for their students *and* themselves.

Affective accountability for teachers

We believe that the notion of affective accountability is critical not only for students but also for teachers. The National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) suggested that it is important for teachers to be enthusiastic. Garan (2002) emphasized this point by stressing the need for classroom teachers to be motivated and to foster active involvement within the teaching process. This can be achieved by including children's literature in the curriculum. By doing so, teachers not only become enthused by the quality of these authentic reading materials, but they also gain an expansive menu of reader response activities that promote and enhance literacy skills (Hancock, 2000; Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown, 2002). When teachers are allowed to make professional decisions, particularly those that differ from the stultifying scripted curriculum, it is more likely that they will remain committed to teaching.

Retaining teachers is critical in this time of global teacher shortages (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Grimmett & Echols, 2001; Ingersoll, 2002; Santiago, 2001). Teachers leaving the profession report multiple reasons including retirement, mobility, and dissatisfaction with the job. Interference with instructional practices and poor support are among the subcategories of job dissatisfaction (Dworkin, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001). Our experiences with teachers confirm this perception, especially with intrusion into classroom learning actions accompanied by an accountability system with rewards and sanctions linked to compliance. It seems ironic that there is, on the one hand, a need (as well as a mandate) to retain and recruit quality classroom teachers, while on the other hand negative consequences of the accountability movement often persuade teachers to leave the classroom. It is logical, then, to encourage teacher judgment in planning and implementing excellent literacy programs in order to leave no child or teacher behind. This logic was manifested in the results of our study as teachers rediscovered the joy of children's books and began to collaborate more with media specialists and other faculty to secure quality reading materials.

The process of making it different

Given the positive results of this action research, we offer suggestions for teachers committed to using children's literature but conflicted with the notion of compliance to a narrowed, scripted curriculum and overwhelmed with the same difficulties identified by the teachers in our study. We believe that due to national and international accountability efforts, many teachers have similar concerns. They want to have adequate planning time and to find books that align with the mandates and that are appropriate for students. Our suggestions fall within three common areas of teacher concern: collaboration, children, and curriculum.

Collaboration

First, don't go it alone. Secluded planning for the teaching of isolated skills may be adequate for delivering a scripted curriculum, but to plan for a more authentic approach to literacy, teachers should first look to other professional educators at their school. Quality libraries and qualified librarians have positive effects on student learning (International Reading Association, 2004). Collaboration with these (and other) faculty members can be highly successful. Such collaboration and sharing of knowledge broadens and extends the greater knowledge of the group (Darling-Hammond, 1997). It is also a more effective use of time because tasks and expertise can be shared (Routman, 2000).

The number and variety of books can be overwhelming in planning for instruction. Almost 10,000 children's books are published each year (R.R. Bowker, 2000), creating a literary reservoir that is too expansive for most classroom teachers to master. Therefore, it is not realistic to expect classroom teachers to know about even a fraction of them without assistance. The school media specialist can help to locate resources such as reference books that provide subject indexes and lists of children's books (see Table 1 for examples). In addition, in this current age of copious information, especially

TABLE 1
Selected reference titles for children's literature

Reference	Author/sponsor	Features
A to Zoo: Subject Access to Children's and Young Adult Literature	Libraries Unlimited	This book provides a subject index and bibliographic information on children's picture books with emphasis on K–2, listing nearly 23,000 titles.
Adventuring With Books: A Booklist for Pre-K—Grade 6	National Council of Teachers of English	This book provides a subject index to informational texts and fiction suitable for elementary students, including multicultural literature.
The Coretta Scott King Awards, 1970–2004	American Library Association	This book provides lists of quality multicultural materials.
Great Books for African-American Children	Dutton/Plume	This book lists 250 books that celebrate the African American culture and provides ordering information.
Book Links: Connecting Books, Libraries and Classrooms	American Library Association	This journal is published six times a year and discusses old and new titles, including book strategies and classroom connections.
Best Books for Children: Preschool Through Grade 6	R.R. Bowker	This book includes brief annotations for 17,140 titles that have had two or three recommendations in leading journals. There are indexes for author, title, illustrator, and subject.
Literature Connections to American History, K–6: Resources to Enhance and Entice	Libraries Unlimited	This book describes historical fiction novels, biographies, history trade books, CD-ROMs, and videotapes about North America.
Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children	American Indian Studies Center	This book evaluates and offers suggestions for selection of books on Native Americans.

on the Internet, some media specialists have developed school websites to display information on children's literature. (See Table 2 for examples of children's literature Web guides.)

Invitations to join collaborative groups do not end with classroom teachers and media specialists. Administrators, resource teachers, and other support faculty are also stakeholders in the school community and have much knowledge and expertise. For example, many teachers are aware that selections of trade books are featured and reviewed in professional journals such as *The Reading Teacher*, *School Library Journal*, *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*, and *Language Arts*. Teachers are also exposed to children's books through district professional development, visits to bookstores, and learning opportunities at local universities, including graduate courses in education and library science or preview centers where teachers are invited to peruse new releases.

Another strategy for collaborative groups is to reflect upon children's literature courses they took in their preservice teacher preparation or graduate programs. Here, the group can recall knowledge obtained in the course and review the textbooks and other course materials. In addition, they can examine newer editions of classics or read current books on children's literature. Not only do these texts provide a review of genres, illustrations, and other text features, but they also provide reliable selections of sources for book titles (e.g., Freeman & Lehman, 2001; Henderson & May, 2005; Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown, 2002). Not all states or countries require a children's literature course for teacher

TABLE 2
Children's literature Web guides

Website	Sponsor	Features
www.sunlink.ucf.edu	Funded by the state of Florida, maintained by the University of Central Florida	This site is available for anyone who wishes to search for trade books and materials according to reading levels, interests, and topics. It facilitates interlibrary loan, provides PowerPoint presentations for parents and faculty, and offers professional development opportunities.
www.ala.org/ala/alsc	American Library Association, Association for Library Service to Children	This site features award-winning books and information for teachers and librarians.
www.cbcbooks.org	The Children's Book Council	This site features new releases, themed books, and information about authors/illustrators. It gives perspectives from teachers, media specialists, and other educators on books and how to use them and information on events such as Children's Book Week.
www.reading.org	International Reading Association	This site features the International Reading Association's "Choices" booklists, links to special interest groups in children's literature, and articles and position statements on authentic reading and writing.
www.nsta.org	National Science Teachers Association	This site provides links to trade books (K–12) on science topics selected for accuracy and appropriateness and offers lesson plans.
www.socialstudies.org	National Council for the Social Studies	This site links to trade books (K–8) on social studies topics and offers lesson plans.
www.ala.org/Booklinks	American Library Association, online version of the journal *Book Links*	This site provides comprehensive information for using books in the classroom, including thematic bibliographies with related discussion questions and activities, author and illustrator interviews, and essays.
www.lis.uiuc.edu/~ccb	The Center for Children's Books, at The Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	This site offers bibliographies, the Center for Children's Books' best book lists, reading promotion websites, book awards in children's literature, and storytelling links.
www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc	The Cooperative Children's Book Center, The School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison	This site features bibliographies and booklists of recommended books on a wide range of themes and topics.
www.ipl.org	The Internet Public Library, The School of Information at the University of Michigan	This site provides links to other online sites on visual literacy and picture books.
http://pbskids.org	Public Broadcasting Service	This site offers more than 3,000 free lesson plans and activities under the PBS TeacherSource link.
www.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown	Children's Literature Web Guide at Doucette Library of Teaching Resources, maintained by librarian David K. Brown, University of Calgary	This site offers the Doucette Index of Teaching Ideas for Children's Books and links to resources for teachers, parents, and storytellers.
www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander	Kay E. Vandergrift's Special Interest Page, maintained by Vandergrift of the School of Communication, Information and Library Sciences, Rutgers University	This site contains both extensive information and links to other pages, with important pages listed under appropriate headings.

certification, even at the elementary school level (Roberts & Killingsworth, 2004). Teachers without preparation in children's literature are certainly at a disadvantage concerning the selection and use of quality books in their classrooms. In these instances, we suggest that the teachers seek information regarding children's literature through extensive reading, enrolling in university courses, or participating in a teacher book club with other interested faculty.

Teachers can also search for websites on children's literature. Many teachers, authors, and illustrators have their own sites, as do publishers and professional organizations. We suggest that collaborative groups begin their Internet search with the websites of professional organizations and critically examine them for purpose and presentation of children's literature. Examining these references as a group can help teachers navigate websites, consider book selections, examine award-winning booklists (e.g., Newbery, Caldecott, Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Hans Christian Andersen, state awards), and discuss possible classroom use.

Even with these resources, locating books can still present a challenge. There are websites, however, such as http://alia.org.au/links/libraries.html, that list libraries around the world. Some of these websites have additional links that offer instructional connections for parents, media specialists, and teachers. For example, Canada provides these services, including booklists and other opportunities for children, on the website for Library and Archives Canada (www.collectionscanada.ca/litteraturejeunesse/index-e.html). In the United States, at least a dozen states sponsor websites that provide teachers with resources for locating children's books (see Table 3). Some states even link specific books and resources to state objectives. This information can assure teachers that their choices truly enhance learning and address state or national standards. Training in the use of the databases found on websites like these is critical for addressing standards through the use of authentic materials. Although these websites can be used individually, we suggest that pairs of teachers talk about their selection and use of the books they find through them.

Ideally, these collaborations would be among the faculty and would be linked to the school's literacy plan. We recognize, however, that this option may not be possible due to differing philosophies and educational agendas, and teachers may need to be responsible for finding their own collaborative partners. These connections could include friends or new acquaintances met through university classes, professional development activities, or online chat rooms and discussion groups developed specifically for teachers.

TABLE 3
Some U.S. websites for locating children's literature

State	Project name	URL
Colorado	Colorado Virtual Library	www.aclin.org
Florida	SUNLINK	www.sunlink.ucf.edu
Kentucky	Kentucky Virtual Library	www.kyvl.org
Minnesota	MnLINK	www.mnlink.org
Montana	Montana Library Network	http://montanalibraries.org
North Dakota	ODIN	www.odin.nodak.edu
Ohio	INFOhio	www.infohio.org
Pennsylvania	Access Pennsylvania	www.accesspa.state.pa.us
Rhode Island	RILINK	www.rilink.org
South Dakota	SDLN	http://webpals.sdln.net
Wisconsin	WISCAT	www.wiscat.lib.wi.us
Wyoming	WYLD CAT	http://wyldweb.state.wy.us

Children

It is the children we teach who must remain in the forefront of planning, teaching, assessment, and accountability. In this time of increasing student diversity and higher standards and of educators warning against a scripted curriculum and teacher-proof materials (Darling-Hammond, 1998), it is interesting that the centerpiece of NCLB (2002) is accountability through testing. This emphasis on testing rather than assessment tends to marginalize children and forces teachers to assume the role of clerks (Giroux, 1992)—a process that reduces instruction to scripted delivery of the curriculum rather than teaching for understanding (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Our experiences with effective teachers is that they teach students rather than simply deliver the curriculum. We are concerned about the current

trend within educational institutions to treat all students identically, particularly when planning for reading instruction. The diversity of students in today's classrooms contributes to an interesting kaleidoscope of individual needs, including reading abilities and interests. Good teachers become accountable to the students and adjust the curriculum accordingly. They are wise enough to recognize that not all students read at grade level and that some advanced readers could be left behind if they are not challenged with interesting materials on their reading level. Knowing that ongoing assessment informs instruction, teachers must match reading materials to the student. Reading is more than decoding. It is shaped by an individual's experiences, abilities, and interests. Teachers must consider student needs when selecting reading materials.

Matching texts to students can be a daunting task for the naive teacher who relies upon only the textbook and the basal reader for instruction and who believes that all students can easily comprehend the content. To tackle this task, the teacher or a collaborative group can navigate websites to search for trade books and other materials that will target individual reading levels and interests. This information can then be matched with assessment information obtained from students. Running records, interest inventories, and required assessment measures, along with informal conversations, provide a wealth of knowledge that the skilled professional educator can use to pair students with appropriate books.

Curriculum

The consequences of the current accountability movement are punitive and include threats to shut down schools and transfer teachers and administrators if tests indicate that children are being left behind. This climate of fear often coerces educators to abandon former teaching strategies in favor of a "teacher-proof" curriculum. This tendency to follow a scripted curriculum does offer a sense of security because it can provide the perfect alibi if teachers must explain why their students are not meeting the standards and achieving test-score goals. But it offers few opportunities to actively engage and motivate students in real reading and writing. When addressing the curriculum, our suggestion is to first know the expectations that the school, the district, and other authorities have for students and teachers. By knowing the objectives and expectations, professional educators, as well as the students, can more easily reach their goals.

Instead of a limited cover-your-accountability approach, teachers should not only use authentic reading materials such as trade books but also create a democratic classroom environment and use effective teaching strategies. Classroom teachers can include these materials and practices throughout the day in a themed or "transdisciplinary" approach.

Transdisciplinary teaching practices offer multiple opportunities to extend reading into the content areas. Professional organizations for science and social studies have established excellent websites (see Table 2) that offer recommendations for lessons and trade books. In addition, many websites categorize children's books according to particular themes or content areas and often to reading levels, lexiles, and Accelerated Reader levels. These books can then be selected by the teacher and integrated with teaching practices that best meet student needs. Teaching practices can include those suggested by the mandates (e.g., graphic organizers, questioning strategies, semantic features) but should also include the chance for children to read a variety of genres, authors, and topics.

Although the accountability movement reinforces direct instructional practices, the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) suggested that a wide range of reading is beneficial, particularly for vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. We also recognize that children learn to read by reading, and we value the role of silent reading during the school day. But reading should not simply occur in a vacuum. Independent reading (which may or may not be associated with computer-assisted comprehension tests) should not be the sole component of a literacy program. We suggest that a wide range of reading, as part of a carefully planned literacy program, fosters discussion and promotes critical thinking when professional educators guide students. In order for students and teachers to engage in quality silent reading, there must be enough interesting and inviting books available to students.

Quality teachers can make a difference

Several recent research strands offer interesting implications for affective accountability. A

three-year study conducted by the International Reading Association (2003) highlighted the importance of a highly prepared classroom teacher. Teachers who completed quality teacher preparation in reading programs were more confident, successful, and effective, resulting in higher student achievement in reading. Other research studies (Baumbach, 2003; Todd & Kuhlthau, 2004) have indicated that experienced librarians or media specialists can improve student learning. Baumbach discovered that high-stakes reading test scores improved in schools where there were high library circulation rates and when a knowledgeable librarian or media specialist worked with classroom teachers in instruction and professional development. Finally, as advocated by Krashen (1993), children learn to read through reading authentic texts, and silent reading should be a daily practice.

These findings, when taken collectively, have powerful implications for making a difference in leaving no child behind. Accountability, when determined by isolated high-stakes test scores, strips teachers of professionalism and children of motivation, enjoyment, accomplishment, and self-worth. When highly qualified teachers and library media specialists value children's literature and know how to locate and use it effectively in collaboration with students, an environment where children learn can be created. Our action research demonstrates this power and offers hope for teachers grappling with the dissonance between the knowledge and philosophy that they possess and the obedience that the accountability movement demands. Teachers should be recognized for their knowledge and encouraged to teach beyond the mandates to become more accountable to students.

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