THE LITERACY ACQUISITION OF TWO SIX-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN: A CASE STUDY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of literacy is a fascinating process which can be observed in young children. Hall (1987) contended that "children control and manipulate their literacy learning in much the same way as they control all other aspects of their learning about the world" (p. 8). It is through experiences with literacy that they gain an understanding first, of its purpose and second, of its workings. "Learning occurs only when learners have opportunities to gather new information and formulate hypotheses about written language, which then need to be trialed and tested before becoming part of the learner's repertoire" (Cambourne and Turbil, 1987, p. 69).

Hall (1987) felt that implicit in the term "emergent" is the notion that "development takes place from within the child" (p. 10). Although children are taught all the features of literacy, they must ultimately derive their own meaning from that information. Based on this thought, Hall has developed four corollaries:

1. The emergence of literacy is promoted in more ways than just by teaching.

2. Emergence occurs gradually.

3. Literacy emerges from children's basic abilities through which they come to understand their world.

4. Emergence requires proper atmosphere, including a supportive environment and authentic literacy tasks (p. 10).

According to Yetta Goodman (1990), children's understandings of language develop from the "context of their own culture, society, family, and socio-economic group, which strongly influences their views and beliefs about who is literate and who may become literate" (p. 116). The emergence of oral and written language evolves from the search for meaning. "Children expect print to make sense and they expect their own writings to make sense" (Hall, 1987, p. 63). As they manipulate print through reading and writing, youngsters achieve command over the form of written language. Harste, Burke and Woodward (1984) contended that this experience might be of even more importance than intelligence and development.

Yetta Goodman's (1990) synthesis of the literature revealed that children enter school with a good knowledge base about print. But in a classroom there is a wide variation in the depth of this knowledge among the students. The teacher must observe students during the literacy events that take place daily in the classroom in order to assess their strengths and weaknesses. Armed with this knowledge, the teacher can then design learning experiences to support the students.

Stahl, Osborn and Lehr (1990) summarized Marilyn Adams' caution that

> it is not just the presence of a variety of activities that makes a program of reading instruction effective or ineffective. It is the way in which its pieces are fitted together to complement and support one another, always with the full consideration of the needs and progress of the young readers with whom it will be used (p. 122).

Nor is the teacher in sole charge of the learning. Clay (1991) insisted "effective teaching is an interaction and a major part of that interaction is outside the teacher's control" (p. 3). According to Yetta Goodman (1990), teachers are co-learners with their students as they "collaborate and learn together from interaction, observations, and struggles" (p. 121).

Statement of The Problem

Effective instruction, it seems, depends upon a well-integrated, interdependent system of knowledge, skills and activities as well as a teacher who is well versed in the understandings necessary to guide such instruction (Stahl, Osborn and Lehr, 1990). Teachers can carefully construct a holistic literacy environment and provide literacy events which will nurture the emergence of literacy. However, "in the end it is the children who learn to actively integrate their experiences and the parent or teacher is powerless to do more than contribute to this active construction completed by the learner" (Clay, 1991, p. 1). It is important then to identify those factors which best seem to aid learners in their acquisition of literacy.

The purpose of this study was to focus on the literacy acquisition of two students and on the conditions which appeared to support the acquisition process in first grade. Closely examined were two conditions: literacy environment and literacy events.

The collection and analysis of the data were driven by the following research questions:

I. Literacy Background

A. What emphasis is placed on literacy in the home?

B. To what degree does the child engage in acts of literacy at home?

C. To what extent does the child have an understanding of the concepts of print upon entry into first grade?

D. What literacy events in the classroom appear to aid the understanding of the concepts of print?

II. Literacy Environment

A. What role does the teacher play in establishing a supportive atmosphere?

B. What physical aspects of the classroom seem to aid literacy acquisition?

III. Literacy Events

A. How does a whole language approach to instruction appear to affect literacy acquisition?

B. How does the allotment of time for literacy events affect the attainment of literacy skills?

C. What effects do varying methods of instructional grouping have?

Limitations and Assumptions

Because this study focuses on two children, its ability to be generalized is somewhat limited. However, it is assumed that the subjects were reasonably representative of students in many first grade classrooms.

The very nature of ethnographic study will cause some differences in student behavior when the participant observer is in the classroom. It will be assumed that because of the abundant amount of descriptive data that was collected over time this "Hawthorne effect" was considerably offset.

Another limitation is that all observations must pass through a researcher's mind and interact with his/her own knowledge, biases, concerns and beliefs. The conclusions of the investigation then are the result of this filtration process. It is assumed that through triangulation of much of this data, this limitation was minimized.

A further limitation is the fact that the low-achieving child was a student of the researcher. He received extra assistance amounting to two hours per week in a pullout program of Chapter 1 reading.

Definition of Terms

AUTHENTIC: The definition stated in The Random House College Dictionary (Stein, 1984) is "entitled to acceptance or belief because of agreement with known facts or experience" (p. 91). Authentic texts are unadapted, unabridged pieces of literature. Authentic tasks include those which are children's real responses to literature rather than contrived activities.

LITERACY: In regard to this study of first graders, literacy is the ability of students to derive meaning from print as well as pictures. Additionally, it includes the ability to convey meaning through the use of print or pictures.

LITERACY EVENTS: These are learning experiences which engage students in meaningful contact with oral or written language. Frank Smith (1988) termed them "enterprises," that is, "undertakings whose purpose is self-evident . . . authentic activities in their own right" (p. 70).

The events can be conducted in numerous ways and can be student or teacher initiated. They can include student/teacher interactions which can range from direct instruction of the whole class to one-on-one assistance. Peer interchange can involve students in paired activities or cooperative groups. Students can also be individually engaged in literacy events.

LITERACY ENVIRONMENT: This includes the physical surroundings of the students, such as room arrangement, instructional materials and supplies. The cultural, social and emotional context of the setting is also part of the literacy environment.

READERS: In contrast to trade books, these are, according to A Dictionary of Reading and Related Terms (Harris and Hodges, 1981) "book[s] used for instruction in reading, as McGuffey's Readers (p. 263). Also referred to as basal readers, these texts are graded in difficulty.

WHOLE LANGUAGE: This philosophy is based on the belief that reading and writing are learned through the actual experiences of reading and writing. Bergeron (1990) defined whole language as

> a concept that embodies both a philosophy of language development as well as the instructional approaches embedded within and supportive of, that philosophy. This concept includes the use of real literature and writing in the context of meaningful, functional, and cooperative experiences in order to develop in students motivation and interest in the process of learning (p. 319).

PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION: This is a research technique in which the researcher's primary aim is observation of the group being studied. Subjects in the research setting are aware of his/her presence and may interact to some degree, but this participation is definitely a secondary role. Gans (1982), terming the investigator a "researcher participant", explained that he/she is an individual "who participates in a social situation but is personally only partially involved, so that he can function as a researcher" (p. 54).

Summary

The emergence of literacy is, from birth, a process of unfolding, of meaning seeking, of striving for control of language. Parents, teachers, materials, learning experiences, and home and school environments can support this process. But it is the child, himself, who must make sense of it all, integrate it, and become a literate individual.

This study looked at two children's journeys toward literacy as well as the supporting roles that the literacy environment and literacy events play. Chapter II will review the current literature pertinent to literacy acquisition. Chapter III will delineate the method and procedures used to research the problem. A discussion of the data follows in Chapter IV, while Chapter V offers a summary and conclusions of the results along with recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter is devoted to a review of the literature important to this study of literacy acquisition. Five areas will be presented. A discussion of whole language will give the reader an understanding of its meaning in the context of this study. Literacy background will be explored as it relates to the knowledge which children have as they begin first grade. A third area, concepts of print, will be defined and discussed. Studies relevant to literacy environment and literacy events will also be reviewed.

Whole Language

The Philosophy

Arriving at a definition of the whole language philosophy is not simply a matter of turning to the dictionary. Literacy experts do not agree on one concise meaning, but each generates a definition that comes out of his or her own range of experiences. As they continue to learn and grow in the field of literacy, their evolving definitions of whole language are altered by that growth (Watson, 1989).

Routman (1988) defined whole language as a "philosophy which refers to meaningful, real, and relevant teaching and learning"

(p. 26), while Bird (1987) viewed it as "a way of living and learning with children in classrooms" (p. 4).

A definition of whole language was stated by Watson (1989): "Whole language is a perspective on education that is supported by beliefs about learners and learning, teachers and teaching, language and curriculum" (p. 133).

A complex definition of whole language was offered by Edelsky, Altwerger and Flores (1991):

> Whole language, then, is an explicit theory in practice incorporating several views. It sees language as social, aesthetic, and predictable. . . . It views language learning as profoundly social. . . . It also looks at language learning as necessarily linguistic. . . . Whole language holds that what is true for language is true for written language--for reading and writing. . . . A whole language view of learning also attends to the social and the hypothesizing character of learning as well as the importance of direct experiences (p. 26).

Kenneth Goodman (1986), who coined the term "whole language," recognized that each teacher brings something to its meaning.

> Whole language is clearly a lot of things to a lot of people; it's not a dogma to be narrowly practiced. It's a way of bringing together a view of language, a view of learning, and a view of people: kids and teachers (p. 5).

Constance Weaver (1988) claimed that whole language teachers "approach reading and writing by building upon the language and experiences of the child" (p. 44). Gordon Anderson (1984) said simply that it was "written and oral language in connected discourse in a meaningful contextual setting" (p. 616).

Termed a "grass roots movement" (Hood, 1989), whole language has drawn interest from administrators and researchers in addition to throngs of teachers (Goodman, 1989b). As Rich (1983) put it: "Whole

language goes beyond the simple delineation of a series of teaching strategies to describe a shift in the way teachers think about and practice their art" (p. 165).

It is important for practitioners to arrive at their own definitions of whole language, for in the process they must consider ". . . the research in literacy and learning that is accepted as credible by whole-language advocates; . . . the pedagogical theory that emerges from that research; and finally, . . . the practice that is consistent with the theory" (Watson's emphasis) (Watson, 1989, p. 130). She also admonished teachers to "make sure that what occurs in classrooms is supported by and consistent with their definition" (p. 131).

Cambourne (1988) has delineated the following principles based on the whole language philosophy (Cambourne's emphasis):

a) immersion in appropriate texts.
b) appropriate demonstrations.
c) the responsibility for making some decisions about when, how and what they [the children] read and write.
d) high expectations about themselves as potential readers and writers.
e) high expectations about their abilities to complete the reading and writing tasks they attempt.
f) freedom to approximate mature and/or "ideal" forms of reading and writing.
g) time to engage in the acts of reading and writing.
h) opportunities to employ developing reading and writing skills and knowledge, in meaningful and purposeful contexts.
i) responses and feedback from knowledgeable others which both support and inform their attempts at constructing meaning using written language.
j) plenty of opportunities, with respect to the written form of language, to reflect upon and make explicit what they are learning (p. 203).

The reader's understanding of whole language is even more sharply focused by the characteristics which Kenneth Goodman (1986) listed as those not exhibited by whole language:

1. isolating skill sequences
2. slicing up reading and writing into grade slices, each slice neatly following and dependent on prior ones
3. simplifying texts by controlling their sentence structures and vocabulary, or organizing them around phonic patterns
4. equating reading and writing with scores on tests of "sub-skills"
5. isolating reading and writing instruction from its use in learning, or in actual reading and writing
6. believing there are substantial numbers of learners who have difficulty learning to read or write for any physical or intellectual reason (p. 34).

Pinnell (1989) insisted that a move away from more traditional philosophies is necessary if "we want to make changes to promote language development and to foster literacy" (p. 106). Teachers who use a whole language philosophy strive to do just that "in the context of the culture(s) of the learners" (Goodman, 1986, p. 58). He feels that its use could eliminate the need for remedial programs. Because of the "community" nature of whole language, Newman (1985) promoted its use so that teachers can learn from and along side of their students.

Newman (1985) offered the following components as ones commonly found in whole language classrooms which foster emerging literacy:

1. Involvement with environmental print.

2. Use of predictable reading materials.

3. Use of language experience stories for writing development.

4. Shared readings involving big books.

5. Paired reading involving peers, an older and younger student and/or parent and child (at home and, when possible, at school).

6. Daily sustained silent reading for students and teacher.
7. Empowerment in learning allowing for student input and choice.
8. Encouragement and support of risk taking.
9. Profuse use of children's trade books.

The Teacher

From their 1987 study of teachers and their approaches to reading instruction, Richards, Gipe and Thomas compared teachers of whole language and more traditional orientations. They determined that teachers who had greater diversity of training and teaching experience than their counterparts were more likely to operate with a whole language philosophy. Sommer (1988) noted three characteristics apparent in whole language teachers: belief in the philosophy, flexibility and curiosity. He added that to be successful, whole language teachers must possess a higher degree of skill than teachers who apply a traditional approach.

In their 1981 study Berlak and Berlak developed a set of continua which indicated how teacher belief affected their instructional decisions. These can help educators visualize the teacher's impact on the classroom experience. More specifically in the field of literacy acquisition, DeFord (1985) devised a profile called the DeFord Theoretical Orientation to Reading (TORP) which measures teacher belief in regard to reading instruction practices.

Teacher belief is fostered by what teachers experience and what they learn. From her review of the literature Weaver (1990) concluded that teachers, like children, ". . . progress at their own rate and in

their own way, coming to understand how to foster learning" (p. 11). Further, she said that their learning could be aided but not forced upon them and that they had to view it as valuable to themselves in order for them to incorporate it into their belief systems.

Marek, et al, (1984) set forth the following characteristics as those apparent in whole language teachers.

1. They understand child and language development.

2. They display expertise in children's literature and in the content areas.

3. They approach assessment with an "understanding [of] the dynamic nature of errors and risk taking" (p. 3).

4. They provide a language-laden environment with opportunities for children to use written and oral language.

5. They promote language through observation of and interaction with their students.

Clearly then, the whole language curriculum empowers teachers to make choices about the literacy environment they establish for students. Their decisions, in turn, empower students to make choices about their own literacy learning. This was corroborated by a case study of third and fourth graders conducted by Sumara and Walker (1991). As Watson (1989) put it, "in the context of a classroom that is natural and appropriate for every learner in it, whole-language teachers never do for students what students can do for themselves" (p. 135).

The Benefits

What draws the whole language practitioners to the use of this philosophy? Perhaps Watson's (1989) case study of "Patty" will illustrate the reasons.

Patty came from a home rich in literate behavior. Her entry into a whole language kindergarten was a further adventure with print in a supportive environment. She viewed herself as a reader and a writer, independently writing her own fairy tale the summer after completing kindergarten.

First grade found Patty in a very traditional, skills-emphasis program which made use of isolated practice activities devoid of meaning. She quickly lost confidence in her abilities and would no longer risk writing words beyond those which she was sure were error free.

Once again Patty entered a whole language environment when she began second grade. Her alert teacher recognized her abilities and set about to repair her shattered confidence by providing her with real reasons for reading and writing. Within a couple of weeks she had regained her control over language and her enthusiasm.

Freeman (1990) contended that there are benefits for both teachers and learners. She said the great latitude of flexibility offered by whole language allows teachers to better meet individual needs. Children are rewarded by the self satisfaction that is generated by their gaining control of the reading and writing processes as they come to love literacy.

Other positive benefits are the increased quality of expressive language which occurs in children who are exposed to literature and heightened interest in the literature presented in class due to their greater understanding of story structure (Cullinan, 1987).

Manly's (1988) study on children's attitudes toward reading indicated that the use of literature created a more positive attitude. He warned against the use of reading programs which exclusively use basal readers.

Research in reading and in effective schools points to the need for more of students' time being spent in reading literature (Lehman and Crook, 1989). Whole language classrooms spend considerably more time reading children's literature which "helps focus students' attention on comprehension, exposes them to the best written language, maximizes learning time, nurtures lifelong readers, and provides both pleasure and learning" (Huggins and Roos, 1990, p. 6).

Another component common to whole language classrooms is the use of predictable literature. It has been found to be effective in the instruction of both emergent readers and slow learners (Heald-Taylor, 1987). Bridge, Winograd, and Haley (1983) showed that its use was effective for developing sight vocabulary in slow learners, for improving their attitudes toward reading and for strengthening their abilities to use contextual clues when they were reading.

Literacy Background

Children do not arrive at school as a blank slate or an empty vessel

waiting to be filled with literacy learning, but come with an abundance of such knowledge (Harste, 1990; Mellon, 1983). This learning begins at birth when the child enters a languaging world. Infants immediately begin developing language, for it is the means of sharing thoughts, of thinking and of learning (Goodman, 1989a). By age five a child has amassed a two-thousand word vocabulary (Gesell, Ilg, and Ames, 1977). This oral language, according to Glazer (1989), "is a vehicle for the development of writing and reading . . . a companion to the development of both" (p. 19). Cazden (1972), Chomsky (1972) and White (1954, 1984) showed that children internalize, then use the language they hear used around them or read for themselves.

The children who are read to from an early age are fortunate, but all youngsters are exposed to a wide variety of environmental print. "These early contacts with print can be thought of as the beginning of a lifelong process of learning to read and write" (Teale and Sulzby, 1989, p. 3). Studies by Doake (1981) and Harste, Burke and Woodward (1981, 1983) revealed that young children expect print to have meaning.

Kenneth Goodman (1989a) wrote that children begin their development as readers and writers without being formally taught and well before school entry. He said that early on they gain an implicit understanding of the functions of writing, dabble with writing for their own purposes and learn to use the forms of written language. Vacca, Vacca and Gove (1991) stressed the critical nature of early literacy experiences. "Intellectual deprivation during a child's preschool years is likely to have profound and long-lasting effects" (p. 74).

In a study of a family-oriented intervention program which they had designed for three-year-olds, Cochran and Henderson (1986) found a positive correlation between family participation in the intensive program and improved performance when the children began school. Charles Benson, et al. (1980) conducted several studies on families' use of time. He concluded that the quantity of time spent and the quality of activities in which they were engaged made a considerable impact upon school achievement. A review of the literature by Henderson (1988) indicated that although parental involvement had positive effects on secondary school performance, it was significantly more beneficial at the beginning levels of school.

Piaget (1928) theorized that "the social need to share the thought of others and to communicate our own with success is at the root of our need for verification" (p. 204). Children learn to communicate in a social setting and in so doing learn the necessary forms of expression (Pinnell, 1985). The social context within which children first begin to use and learn about language is the home.

Clay (1991) asserted that successful literacy learning will take place in school if a preschooler has:

- developed a good control of oral language
- taken an interest in the visual detail of their environment
- reached the level of experience which enables them to coordinate what they hear in language with what they see in print
- acquired enough movement flexibility, or motor coordination of hand and eye, to control the directional patterns required for reading (p. 41).

A study by Rasinski, Bruneau and Ambrose (1990) of successful but

not exceptional kindergarten children revealed some interesting commonalities in their home environments such as reading aloud to the child being done in each home. Other frequently-found activities included parents taking dictation for their child's messages or stories, parents encouraging their child's early interest in words, and the child's interest in writing for meaningful purposes. Every home was a rich literacy environment in which literacy events were useful and were not forced on the children in the form of practice. Books and other reading materials abounded and the parents regularly modeled literate behavior. Their homes, as noted in the study, were whole language learning environments, naturalistic settings that nurtured literacy development. The whole language kindergarten which the children attended was an extension of that same kind of learning.

Reading aloud to children, encouragement of reading and writing and parental modeling of literate behavior were significant findings in studies of young children who successfully learned to read (Durkin, 1966; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). A study of children in fifteen different countries who had been read to and whose homes promoted literacy revealed that they were better readers than their peers who did not have those advantages (Thorndike, 1973).

Concepts of Print

Marie Clay's extensive research in the area of emergent literacy has revealed three areas of understanding a child must come to possess as he learns to read:

. concepts of basic reading terms such as letter, word, sentence,

sound, drawing, reading and writing.
- hierarchical understandings that letters compose words, words compose sentences. . . .
- positional and directional terminology as related to print (Clay, 1991).

The 1978 study of Yetta Goodman confirmed the knowledge of print that youngsters bring with them to school. Other researchers concurred with this finding (Clay, 1972; Evans, Taylor and Blum, 1979; Hiebert, 1981; and Mason, 1980). Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982), in studying the poverty-stricken children of Mexico City, found that amidst their deprivation they still had knowledge of environmental print gained through life in their society. An Australian study (van Kraayenoord, et al., 1989) of 100 children showed that those having reading problems showed less awareness of the concepts about print than the others in the study who did not have reading difficulties.

As mentioned previously, one area of understanding regarding concepts about print which literacy learners need is the terminology for dealing with units of language. Teachers who take for granted that students understand terms like letter, word and sentence invite confusion into their instructional programs (Clay, 1991). Studies by Reid (1966) and Downing (1970) indicated that the comprehension of those terms is fully achieved <u>after</u> children are reading.

Clay (1979) has developed an assessment tool called Concepts About Print (CAP) which helps track student progress over time. Students respond orally to indicate their knowledge of book orientation, of whether pictures or print carry the message, of the function of punctuation and of the concepts mentioned above. It can be administered

periodically to nonreaders through those who have completed the first year of reading instruction (Clay, 1979).

A 1984 study by Harlin of kindergarten and first grade students showed the CAP to be an adequate predictor of reading achievement. More recently in a comparison of the two tests, Harlin and Lipa (1990) found the CAP to be a highly effective predictor of at-risk children as compared to the Metropolitan Readiness Test.

In Yetta Goodman's (1982) review of CAP she stated that through its use, a teacher is able to:

> 1. observe what a child is doing in response to print as a teacher reads;
> 2. determine what needs to be taught by examining the actual behavior of a child interacting with print in a book; and
> 3. gains [sic] insight into aspects of written language over which a child is developing control (p. 85).

Armed with the knowledge gained from the CAP, the teacher can begin to to create, with input from his/her students, the appropriate environment and events which will nurture literacy acquisition.

Literacy Environment

Taylor, Blum and Logsdon (1986) had this to say about the literacy environment:

> Children learn best in a language- and print-rich environment, with many opportunities to observe, try out, and practice literacy skills in genuine communication situations. In this way, they can construct a theory about reading and writing. All children need the functional role of print to be made explicit, but this may be particularly acute among children from certain socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds (p. 147).

The importance of the physical setting of the classroom to learning

was stressed by Montessori, Piaget, Vygotsky and Dewey (Morrow, 1989). "Any classroom designed to provide a rich literacy environment and optimum literacy development will offer an abundant supply of materials for reading, writing and oral language" (Morrow, 1989, p. 124). Hall (1987) included an adaptation of Loughlin, Cole and Sheehan's "Survey of Displayed Literacy Indicators" in his discussion of creating a classroom with "a high profile for literacy" (p. 82). The value of literacy, he claimed, is reinforced when it is readily apparent in such ways as labels, directions, messages, children's work, writing instruments, a wide variety of print sources, and space for working and display. But he issued this caveat: "Print and space, however, are of little value if they are not in constant use, and if that use is not accompanied by discussion and reflection" (p. 84). Obviously instructional planning is but one part of providing for the needs of young literacy learners. Morrow (1989) cautioned teachers not to overlook the importance of careful environmental planning when addressing those needs.

"Settings exert an influence on the way people behave and use language when they choose to participate in them (or find themselves in them)" (Cambourne & Turbill, 1987, p. 30). Trelease (1989) related the case of an inner city Boston junior high school principal. Through his influence and his emphasis on literacy, the school was saved from scheduled closing and became an example of academic success.

In order to create a print-rich environment the teacher must have an abundance of trade books. Durkin's (1966) study of children who easily learned to read without benefit of formal training revealed that

a common factor shared by those youngsters was ready access to books. Another study found that students who had an in-class collection of trade books read twice as many as those who only had access to the school library collection (Bissett, 1969).

The study conducted by Taylor, Blum and Logsdon (1986) looked at preschool and kindergarten classes whose teachers had been trained to use a holistic teaching approach. Several factors were present in classrooms where implementation was successful.

1. The print-rich environments offered many opportunities for various reading experiences.

2. Likewise, they presented many and varied writing experiences.

3. Print was used throughout the day for nearly every activity.

4. Daily routines, such as check-in procedures, included the use of print.

5. The printed materials were obviously child centered, reflecting their interests, language and purposes.

To organize the collected data the researchers used four categories that could be useful to classroom teachers who wish to maximize the benefits of a print-rich classroom.

1. "Type of language used in the displays." Print tended to be longer than one word, child originated, and reflective of the children's interests.

2. "Location of print in the room." Displays were conspicuously evident about the room.

3. "Availability of print to the children." Print was placed at child level and its use was encouraged.

4. "Time frame." Print displays reflected on-going learning, were changed as children's needs dictated, and stimulated the generation of more print (p. 138).

More subtle aspects of literacy environment include teacher belief. A teacher's personal philosophy is apparent even if unverbalized, in the way she speaks to children, her expectations of them, her style of teaching and even her conduct (Routman, 1988). "An educator's personal philosophy must be congruous with the whole language philosophy in order for that teacher to have an effective program" (Steeley, 1990, p. 10). This philosophy will either sustain or inhibit a supportive language environment in which children are willing to take risks (Routman, 1988).

This supportive environment is what Hansen terms "community." The "supportive community begins with the teacher's belief that each child has something to share" (Hansen, 1987, p. 59). If this notion is true, then it should impact a teacher's decisions about instructional grouping, a third aspect of literacy environment. More whole-group instruction is seen in today's classrooms. Small-group work often consists of collaborative learning situations with mixed ability levels allowing each student to contribute what he is able (Klein, Peterson, and Simington, 1991). "The learning process is primarily social" asserted Taba (1962). "The innate tendencies of an individual are modified, suppressed, or encouraged according to social demands" (p. 131).

In a review of sixty studies on cooperative learning, Slavin (1990) found the benefits of such learning to be clearly positive. Further, he noted that cooperative methods which established clear

group goals and individual accountability were most effective. Johnson and Johnson (1990) concurred and noted that the results of 323 studies over the last 90 years indicated that "cooperative efforts result in more frequent use of higher-level reasoning strategies, more frequent process gain and collective induction, and higher performance on subsequent tests taken individually (group-to-individual transfer) than do competitive or individualistic efforts" (p. 33). Based on her review of the literature in which she, too, found clear evidence of the positive effects of cooperative learning, Sharan (1990) called for teacher training institutions to emphasize its use as a teaching model "(actually a set of models)" (p. xiv).

Literacy environment includes tangible elements of the classroom, such as room arrangement and materials, as well as intangible ones, such as teacher belief and practices. DeGrella (1989) put it well: "Just as a good chef takes a pan and combines the individual ingredients to make a superb sauce, so does the teacher uniquely combine these implications for a literate classroom environment" (pp. 13-14).

Literacy Events

Literacy events are those oral or written activities in which children are actively engaged or are observing for the express purpose of learning. Based on their research, Taylor, Blum and Logsdon (1986) urged that "when literacy-related experiences are lacking in the home environment, the provision of these experiences in a meaningful and relevant fashion in the school curriculum becomes a critical factor in the acquisition of literacy . . ." particularly for children from low

socio-economic and culturally different situations (p. 147). The teacher's beliefs again come into play when determining such factors as time utilization, student engagement, skill modeling, teacher-student interaction, and monitoring and evaluation (Cambourne, 1988).

Allington's (1983) research on reading instruction suggested that there are differences between what is offered good and poor readers. He insisted that there should be differences, but in the direction of more time being allotted poor readers for silent reading and strategy instruction. He made other suggestions that are profitable for students of any ability level: daily reading of easy material to improve fluency and decreased use of workbook-type assignments.

Teachers should plan authentic speech and literacy events. These will include discussions and written responses to literature selections that students read or have read to them. Carol Edelsky asserted that "schools decontextualize language making it difficult to learn" (Goodman, 1986). "Only in the social context of language usage does it have meaning potential for the learner, and only in such context is it language and easy to learn" (Goodman, 1986, p. 20).

The use of children's literature is imperative in a whole language classroom. Studies by Cohen (1968) and more recently by Reutzel and Parker (1988) demonstrated that the use of literature as a vehicle for reading instruction, either alone or along with a basal reading series, significantly increased reading achievement. New Zealand, Australia, Canada and England have had success in using literature-based reading instruction for a number of years (Routman, 1988). Cullinan (1987) stressed the importance of literature in the reading program when she

said it

> . . . does more than merely attract willing readers. Literature educates the imagination, provides language models, and molds the intellect. The heritage of humankind lies in books; we endow students with the key to their legacy when we teach them to read (p. 6).

The following elements were offered by DeLapp (Hickman and Cullinan, 1989) as necessary for a quality literature-based program:

1. Children are read to on a daily basis.
2. Children have time to read books of their own choosing.
3. Children discuss and reflect upon the books they read.
4. Children respond to books through writing, art, drama, music, and talk.
5. Children write on topics of their own choosing.
6. Children share their reading, writing, and art products with the entire class.
7. Children use a variety of good books as an essential part of any theme or unit of study.
8. The daily schedule is flexible (p. 222).

Reading aloud is a mainstay in whole language classrooms, its benefits being examined in numerous studies (Teale and Sulzby, 1986; Sampson, 1986; Durkin, 1966; Clark, 1984; Morrow, 1983; Hall, 1987; and White, 1954, 1984). An investigation by Wells (1986) revealed a direct correlation between number of books read and/or heard to literacy achievement. After synthesizing 20 years of reading research, the 1983 Commission on Reading (Anderson, et al., 1985) determined that "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (p. 23). Further, they stressed the importance of preschool experiences that their parents provide for them with books. Trelease (1989) contended that the verbal exchanges between parent and child during the course of the read-alouds are important. He encouraged parents to answer their child's questions about the stories because "there is no time limit for

reading a book but there is a time limit on a child's inquisitiveness" (p. 84).

Shared reading is an important part of whole language classrooms. It is the bedtime story of home brought to the classroom setting (Doake, 1985; Holdaway, 1979). Often done with big books, oversized books with enlarged print and illustrations, shared readings provide opportunities for teachers to model good oral reading. Rereadings of these stories have been shown to be valuable for building conceptual understandings in emergent readers (Holdaway, 1979; Clay, 1985).

Writing is another cornerstone of a whole language foundation. Children who begin those experiences in their preschool years reap the benefits of great literacy understanding when they reach the classroom (Calkins, 1983; Harste, Burke and Woodward, 1984; Graves and Stuart, 1985; Klein, 1985). The reciprocal benefits of combining writing with reading instruction have been noted in the research of Mason and Au (1986), Teale and Sulzby (1986) and Horowitz and Samuels (1987).

The issue of student choice should be addressed as teachers plan for instruction. Self selection of reading material was at the heart of the individualized reading instruction movement led by Jeanette Veatch (1985). Routman (1991) found that student choice in reading and writing strengthened the decision-making skills of the children involved. Student choice in writing topics (Graves, 1973) improved the length and frequency of their works while it lowered the amount of extrinsic motivation and supervision needed for them to write. These findings were born out in studies by Birnbaum (1980) and Bissex (1980).

Morrow (1989) suggested ways in which literacy events can enhance learning:

> . . . real life experiences that are meaningful and interesting to the child.
> . . . integration of literacy and content areas to add enthusiasm, motivation, and meaning.
> . . . direct instruction in small group and individual learning settings.
> . . . learn[ing] independently and with peers through manipulation, exploration, and play. (p. 132).

Summary

Whole language is concerned with "the whole spectrum of how children learn, the nature of language, and using language as a tool for all learning" (Siera, 1989, p. 60). Although there is not common agreement on a single definition of whole language, several elements are to be found in most of them: meaning-centered reading and writing experiences, a child-centered curriculum, and a focus on the learning process rather than the product. Teachers who apply this philosophy provide conditions whereby literacy development is nurtured.

Whole language teachers display respect for the learner and for learning as well as knowledge of child development. They must be highly skilled in the art of teaching, very knowledgeable in the field of children's literature, and flexible. These teachers should have arrived at their own definitions of whole language so that they can be sure their classrooms truly reflect their beliefs.

Practitioners and researchers have observed several benefits from the application of whole language philosophy. Students are highly motivated and increase their self confidence as they gain control over

language. The intense focus on literature improves expressive language, strengthens reading skills and strategies, and allows for large blocks of time for students to spend in reading good quality literature.

Children arrive at school as experienced language learners. The depths of their literacy knowledge varies from child to child according to the amount of exposure to reading and writing events that took place in the home. An issue that surfaces early in formal instruction is children's understandings about print. Clay's CAP test is one means of charting their conceptual development in this area and aiding teachers in making instructional decisions based on their test results.

Literacy environment in relation to the physical setting includes print sources as well as supplies with which to create print, work and display space for that work, and other materials which encourage reading, writing and oral language development. Providing children with examples of print in action, teachers should read trade books to their students, write with them in various contexts and encourage their reading and writing efforts. Arrangement of the room to promote collaboration among the learners and to provide access to literacy materials is also important.

Intangible aspects of literacy environment include the teacher's personal philosophy, an atmosphere supportive of risk taking and a feeling of community among learners despite variable grouping situations.

Authenticity is the key to worthwhile literacy events; coupled with student choice it stimulates the motivation to learn. Time usage

and suitability of task should be geared to individual need. The opportunity to experience reading and writing in a multitude of contexts is important to the acquisition of literacy. Motivation to learn is enhanced by student choice in literacy events.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A study of the natural development of literacy acquisition calls for a research method that sets up no artificial conditions. Hall (1987) concurred when he suggested that children should be observed in their natural environment revealing their knowledge of literacy in their own way. Such a research method is ethnography, "the art and science of describing a group or culture" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 11).

> When applied to the classroom or other educational settings, ethnography means that the researcher wants to understand what is occurring in the education setting, how it is occurring, what definitions of the event the participants hold about these occurrences, and what it takes to participate as a member of the various groups within and across these occurrences (e.g., peer groups, friendship groups, instructional groups, adult-child groups) (Green and Wallat, 1981, p. xiii).

In ethnographic research one of the data collection methods is participant observation. Lofland and Lofland (1984) defined this as "the process in which an investigator establishes and sustains a many-sided and relatively long-term relationship with a human association in its natural setting for the purpose of developing a scientific understanding of that association" (p. 12). According to Fetterman (1989) it "combines participation in the lives of the people under study with maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data" (p. 45).

The ethnographic researcher needs to work in the setting over a long period of time in order to "internalize the basic beliefs, fears, hopes and expectations of the people under study" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 45). This also allows for copious, richly descriptive field notes to be amassed and patterns to emerge. Green and Wallat (1981) stated that "the ethnographer describes what is occurring and after considering the recurring patterns of behavior in the environment, defines rules and processes for participation and membership" (p. xiii). It is reasonable to think that the study of holistic instruction and learning should be researched in a holistic manner as with ethnography. The "acquisition" of literacy implies that the focus will be on the achievements and successes of young students rather than on their failures. Kenneth Goodman (1976) noted: "We have been too preoccupied for too long with what children cannot do. We have lost the significance of what they have going for them that we can build on" (p. 23).

According to Merriam (1988), case studies in education which investigate problems of practice are often approached holistically. She considered the qualitative case study methodology to be the preferred approach "for addressing these problems in which understanding is sought in order to improve practice" (p. xiii).

Guthrie and Hall (1984) were concerned that "much of the experimental research done today in the area of reading has little or no relationship to reality" (p. 10). Therefore, the focus of this study was the holistic examination of the literacy acquisition process of two children.

Subjects

The subjects for this case study were selected from among 20 students in a first grade classroom. The goal was to study the highest and lowest students based on their performance on the Gates-MacGinitie Pre-Reading Evaluation-Level PRE (MacGinitie and MacGinitie, 1989), the screening instrument given to the entire class at the beginning of the school year. However, because of the high mobility of the school, the researcher selected the two highest and lowest children to guard against attrition. Data was collected on all four children until March when one of the high students moved. The data for the highest and lowest children, Derel and Micah, were presented in this study.

Setting

The setting for the study was a first grade classroom in a public elementary school in a large suburban Oklahoma community. The teacher in this classroom had developed a strong background with regard to the whole language philosophy and had increasingly incorporated it into her instructional program during the past two years. She was selected to participate in the study because she applied this philosophy much more than the other first grade teachers in the building. For example, she made extensive use of literature to supplement learning in all the subject areas and presented skills in meaningful contexts rather than in isolation. She was also selected because she felt more at ease than the others with an observer in the classroom.

Instructional materials included the newly-adopted 1991 Houghton Mifflin basal reading series which takes a much more holistic approach to literacy instruction than most traditional basal series.

Another aspect of the setting was the Chapter 1 reading resource room in which Micah, the lowest scoring child, received instruction for two hours per week. This author played a dual role in the study as researcher and Chapter 1 reading specialist. The relationship between the researcher and the two subjects was somewhat different because of this additional time spent in direct contact with the one child.

Data Collection

Data collection consisted largely of field notes, student work samples and various types of progress reports. Less frequently used were audio recordings and interviews of the students, their mothers, and their teachers. The use of a variety of techniques to gather information (observation, interview, and physical evidence) is termed "triangulation" (Merriam, 1988). In Denzin's (1970) view "the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods observers can achieve the best of each, while overcoming their unique deficiencies" (p. 308). Foreman (1948) promoted the use of triangulation as a means of determining validity, while Merriam (1988) encouraged its use in order to strengthen reliability.

The period of data collection ran from September, 1991, through April, 1992. Merriam (1988) noted that there is no set amount of on-site time which is considered as ideal for the collection of data. She suggested that it range from an intensive initial period through a

gradual discontinuation when it becomes obvious that no new data is coming to light. That pattern was followed in this study. In September three and one half hours per week were spent in the classroom on nearly a daily basis. During the period of October through December, two and one half hours per week were spent in observation several days weekly. One and one half hours each week were observed in January and February and one hour per week was spent during March and April. The majority of the observations took place during mornings because the most intense efforts toward literacy development occurred then.

Data Analysis

Field notes, student work samples and progress reports were analyzed to determine patterns of development in the literacy acquisition of the subjects. This triangulated data was further scrutinized to discover which factors in the literacy environment and among the literacy events appeared to best contribute to the acquisition process. Audio taped interviews were transcribed and categorized along with the data above in order to allow for interpretation. Blumer (1969) stressed the importance of analyzing data acquired through triangulation as a means of "getting a clearer picture of what is going on in the area of social life" (p. 41).

Instruments

One instrument was used to measure the teacher's philosophical stance with regard to methods of reading instruction. The DeFord Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (DeFord, 1985) was

administered in September. The teacher's responses by means of a Likert scale indicated with which reading orientation, phonics, skills or whole language, the teacher felt comfortable.

Two instruments were used to gauge student progress in reading development. The Gates-MacGinities Pre-Reading Evaluation-Level PRE (MacGinitie and MacGinitie, 1989) was administered in September, 1991, and again in January, 1992, in order to track their acquisition of readiness concepts. This test consisted of four subtests: Literacy Concepts, Reading Instruction Relational Concepts, Oral Language Concepts (Linguistic Awareness), and Letter and Letter Sound Correspondences. Since norming information was available only for the fall testing session, raw scores were compared.

In April, 1992, the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test-Level 1 (MacGinitie and MacGinitie, 1989) was given to assess the students' abilities to read. The vocabulary subtest checked understanding of word meanings as well as skill in identifying words. The comprehension subtest determined their abilities to comprehend passages read silently. Percentile scores were examined in this test.

Writing development was assessed using the rating scale which Marie Clay (1975) devised for use in her research on emergent literacy. This tool rates four areas of writing through six levels of development. The Language Level ranged from alphabetic writing through a punctuated, paragraphed story with at least two themes. The Message Quality began with concepts of signs (use of accurate or invented letters) and continued through a successful composition completed independently. Directional Principles progressed from no evidence of these

principles through an extended composition which demonstrates correct directionality and spacing between words.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The First Grade Classroom

Mrs. K.'s students were one of five heterogeneously-grouped classes at the school. "I don't think I have an extreme amount of top students and the middle group is rather sparse, but I have a large group on the bottom end" (Interview, 3-17-92). Her assessment of her class was supported by the fact that the number of her students qualifying for Chapter 1 help equaled the total from the other four first grades in that school. The random placement found in heterogeneous groupings sometimes creates unusual situations as it did in this case.

The Environment

Room Arrangement. Upon entering the classroom, one noticed two main work areas: a large carpeted area near the front chalkboard and three clusters of student desks in the back half of the room. The carpet was used to define the areas in which the children sat during whole group instruction. "It does put boundaries. Sometimes we sit around the carpet square when we work together as a group as a whole. Sometimes we're in rows" (Interview, 3-17-92). The desks were grouped to provide more space in the room as well as to provide a feeling of community.

> I don't do rows because I think they [the students] learn from each other. About a month is all I leave them together. Then I always try to regroup them into a different pattern so that they learn to work with everybody in the room. I like sitting strong students with weaker ones because the strong ones learn from the weaker ones and vice versa. The last week of the year I let them have the choice of sitting by anyone they want (Interview, 3-17-92).

A large bulletin board on the wall adjacent to the chalkboard displayed the calendar and the materials used daily for opening exercises. At that end of the chalkboard was a student desk equipped with a tape recorder, earphones and tapes for the listening center.

The teacher's desk stood at the opposite end of the chalkboard. Mrs. K. explained that that was her "unfavorite part of the room."

> I've asked to have it removed because all it does is collect junk because I'm never there. In fact, one of the things that's ironic, the kids ask me probably a dozen times, "Mrs. K., why do you even have that desk? Just so you can mess it up?" I went with that to our principal and I haven't got an answer back. But to me it's wasted space that I could develop another center, another place that the children could go and focus on one particular goal. I was thinking if we could get rid of my desk, I could have a good art center . . . where they could have a writing center attached to it (Interview, 10-23-92).

The next wall had a tall built-in closet in the corner flanked by storage shelves that ran the length of the wall. A window was centered in that wall and a small bulletin board was to the left of that.

Along the back wall was a large easel and a tall filing cabinet with a table perpendicular to it. Next to that was a long bookcase, above which was a small bulletin board attached to a small chalkboard. Another bookcase was next in which books could be displayed with covers showing. A carpeted area in front of the two bookcases completed the library center. Behind the bookcase was a large storage cabinet on rollers. Its surface was used for storage and display.

The north wall contained the coat hooks and the door, which was centered in that wall. The other half of the wall contained a storage cabinet for math manipulatives and the calendar area described earlier.

The overall appearance of the room was bright and cheerful. Space was used carefully.

> We utilize nearly every space on the walls because I think learning goes on [when students look at the things on the walls]. And sometimes if they're at their desks, or wherever they are, maybe they are tired of listening to what you have to say and there are always things of very high interest on the walls (Interview, 3-17-92).

Students' art projects were frequently displayed about the room on strings suspended from the ceiling. Their pictures and written endeavors were sometimes placed on the wall just outside their room (Figure 1, p. 41).

Instructional Grouping. Mrs. K. used a variety of groupings to maximize learning. Large blocks of instructional time for reading were devoted to whole group instruction. Using this approach, Mrs. K. encouraged a strong sense of community among the children and provided a supportive, risk-free environment. Thus, individual differences in ability were less obvious to the students.

During small group activities, instructions were carefully given so that students were clear as to what was expected of them. Roles within the group were defined so that chaos and discipline problems were minimized. For example, the "helper" passed out supplies, while the "chairman" was in charge of order and reported problems or directed questions to Mrs. K. Each child was expected to be a contributing member of the group and to help each other as necessary. The weakest

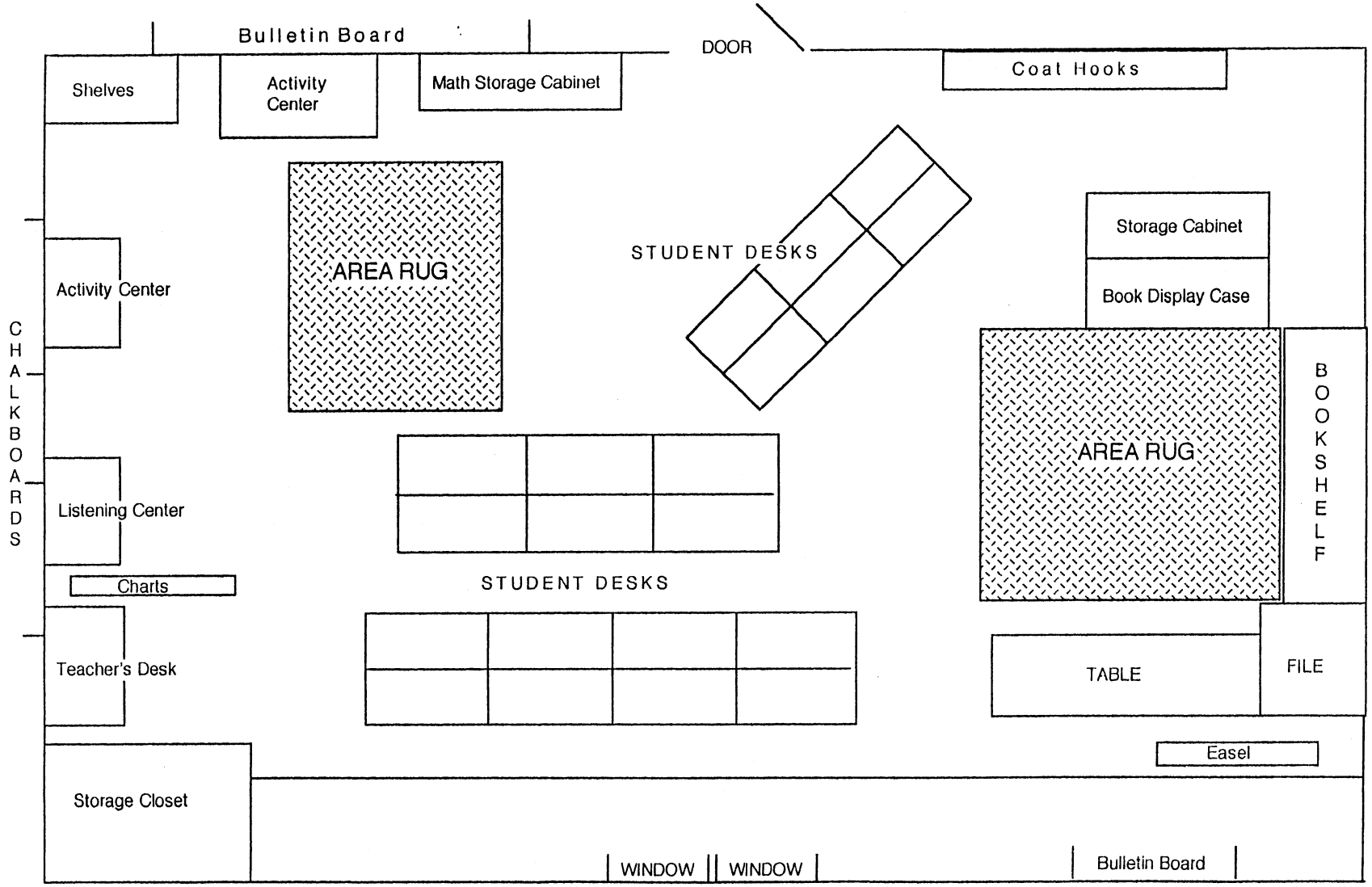

Figure 1. First Grade Classroom

members were not put on the spot if they could not complete their task independently, but had the ready support of the rest of the group.

This point was brought home in a conversation the researcher had with a group whose assignment was to read a story together. Included in the group was Nikki, a weak student in the class; Kendra, a new student who functioned well above anyone in the class; and two other children. The researcher had asked Kendra, the chairman, what her responsibilities were. Since she had been in class only a couple of weeks, she was unclear beyond "keep them quiet." One group member piped up, "Boss us around." Nikki made the observation, "She [Kendra] doesn't know it, but she's reading too fast. We can't keep up" (Field notes, 2-21-92). It was noteworthy that Nikki did not feel intimidated by her inability to keep up, but felt that the rest of the group was also struggling. Even though that was not the case, no one in the group refuted her statement.

Further evidence that the cooperative grouping used in Mrs. K's class made student weaknesses less obvious was pointed out in separate interviews of the case study subjects. The researcher wished to uncover whether Derel would identify himself as the strongest student or whether Micah would identify himself as the weakest. When asked which child in the class had the most difficulty reading and which had the most difficulty writing, Derel quickly responded, "No one." Further questioning revealed that he thought everyone in this class could read and write adequately. Micah paused a long time after each query while he thoughtfully considered his classmates' abilities. He

hesitantly offered, "Nikki?" each time as if he still wasn't completely sure (Interviews, 5-5-92).

Classroom Management. The manner in which Mrs. K. managed her classroom contributed to the literacy environment. She prepared her students with simple, clear directions for each new activity, upcoming events, and changes in their routine. She gave them reminders near the end of each literacy event which enabled the children to come to satisfactory closure in time for the next event. Mrs. K. followed a predictable routine yet remained flexible for unexpected interruptions in the schedule and for the needs of her students. These factors created a calm, orderly learning environment in which the children could function.

Mrs. K. was also adept at "kidwatching" (Goodman, 1986); she paid close attention to the children's body language to determine whether they were tuned in or frustrated, comfortable or tired, etc. Lessons were geared to the students' attention spans and included opportunities for verbalization and movement as well as for listening and writing.

Discipline. Mrs. K's approach to discipline contributed to a tranquil learning environment. She began the year by closely observing her students for the first week to see how each personality fit into the mosaic of the class. During that time she let the children work out their problems, intervening only when a child might cause harm. The second week the class met to discuss any problems they had encountered and to discuss the need for rules. The children then generated a long list of rules they felt were important while Mrs. K. recorded them

on the chalkboard. She then pointed out how difficult it would be to remember all of those rules. So together they consolidated them into five basic rules. Having thoroughly discussed the need for rules and having helped to establish them, the students felt an ownership and were more likely to follow them, according to Mrs. K.

The third week of school she put up her discipline chart which consisted of empty pockets labeled with each child's name.

> I have a three-sign program. We have just a regular little stop sign and it's green, yellow, or red. They just go put that sign in when they misbehave. That just says, "Oops, my behavior's getting a little bit offensive to others, and I'm breaking some rules." That calls their attention to getting back on track (Interview, 9-20-92).

The first two times they broke one of the rules, the children changed their stop sign and received verbal warnings. The third time they took their chair to the back table and set the timer for one minute while they regained their self-control. On double red she called their parents.

> I try, if possible, to go back there [during their time out] and we just have a little chit chat about, "Has it been a rough morning?". Sometimes it has and I'll say, "Well, let's start all over." I'll let them go take all the signs out if I see that it's been a bad morning and let them start all over (Interview, 9-20-92).

At Open House she explained her discipline plan to the parents and told them that few children get to the red stage. She liked to try to work through difficulties with the child rather than sending them to the principal or calling the parents.

Mrs. K. had great patience and enjoyed her students. The children knew her expectations for their behavior and could depend on her fairness when they had a lapse in self-control. She stayed alert to

avoiding potential problems rather than pouncing on offenders. Her experience at this grade level and her understanding of child development allowed her to be realistic in her demands on her students. Thus she created a relaxed atmosphere where the children's focus was on learning rather than on the fear that they might displease Mrs. K.

The Teacher

Mrs. K. had a total of 13 years of teaching experience spread out over 26 years. Her first two years were spent as a half-day home economics teacher at the high school level and half-day elementary teacher with a combination third and fourth grade class. Moving to another town, she taught fifth grade for two years. In an out-of-state move, she taught for five years in a fourth grade position.

During a hiatus, she devoted her time to her family and worked in retail sales for several years before returning to teaching. She had been in her current position for the past four years.

Teacher education training prepared Mrs. K. to use basal readers, workbooks and the sight word method of reading instruction. As a first year teacher in a small school in a rural community, she found herself facing 34 third and fourth graders with ten outdated readers. In order to try to improve that situation she traveled back to her hometown once a week where she checked out a large sack of library books to use in her classroom. "I felt like there was so little to offer [in the way of school resources] that I had to go out and find things" (Interview, 3-20-92).

Also during that first year, each of her students kept a notebook of the reports written about the books read. Some were written individually and shared with a partner. (Mrs. K. reported that in her combined class, students of both levels could often be found working together.) Some reports were done as a group event following a story she had read to the whole class.

Writing and sharing their own stories were literacy events which her students enjoyed.

> I remember we made books from paper sacks. I happened to be good friends with the grocer. The kids and I would walk down to the grocery store, get some sacks and come back. He gave us enough so that each child had one. That would be our little field trip for the day.
>
> We'd start using those [sacks] and making books. Then we always had to go back and share with him what we'd made (Interview, 3-20-92).

Her first teaching experience also taught her to integrate subject areas. Since she taught high school home economics each afternoon, she had to fit reading, spelling, English and science into the morning session at the elementary school. Those time constraints caused her often to use science as the vehicle through which she taught the other subjects, supplemented with appropriate library books.

Throughout her first nine years of teaching, she used children's literature selections and some writing activities to enhance her reading instruction. For the next thirteen years she left her teaching career, then returned as a substitute in a first grade class to finish out the school year for a teacher on leave. In that position she felt that she should not make any changes in the way the class was set up.

That summer she attended two workshops which dealt with whole language and the ideas presented intrigued her. "It opened the door for me to start finding out that there was not just a reading series and to go through it and make no stops on the way . . . to start trying to incorporate whole ideas" (Interview, 3-20-92).

The next fall she was hired as a first grade teacher in that same school. She began to implement some of what she had learned in the workshops, but still closely followed the basal and emphasized isolated phonics instruction as the other first grade teachers did. The following year she made a definite swing to more holistic instruction.

> It being the last year of the reading series [a new one would be adopted for the next school year], I didn't figure anyone would be worried about whether they knew their stories for the next year or all the words in the series. I took all my word charts down from the year before and threw them away. I was no longer worried about the words. I also was sick and tired of grading all those phonics sheets and sending them home (Interview, 3-20-92).

Spurred on by her children's interest that year, she continued to search for more information on whole language, reading books and articles and attending workshops. She was excited to see her students making steady progress even though she had changed from word identification to a meaning emphasis. The summer preceding this study she had attended a three-day workshop that extensively covered whole language.

> That workshop gave me a little more courage to venture out on my own. It made me feel very comfortable doing what I had started doing last year. I was still a little apprehensive last year and at times this year I have felt the same way. When I see a finished product of what they've done, then I'm OK. I know they're learning what they need. But as we go along and my buddies [the other first grade teachers] ask me, "Do they know all the words?", to be honest, I can't tell them if they know all their words. That's not our focus now (Interview, 3-20-92).

Mrs. K.'s development as a whole language teacher was an evolutionary process that took place over many years. Not only did her classroom practices exhibit a belief in that philosophy, but her score on DeFord's (1985) Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile placed her firmly in that camp when the instrument was administered to her in September.

The Curriculum

The reading series used in the district, Houghton Mifflin, was a literature-based one which contained unadapted selections of children's trade books. The readers were called anthologies while the two workbooks were referred to as a journal and the student resource book. The journal encouraged written responses to the literature selections and the student resource book contained skill exercises.

The text levels provided in the first grade were the same as in previous basal series: three soft-back preprimers and two hard-back books, the primer and the first reader. The difference in the usage was in the fact that all students were allowed to cover all of the books through the use of whole group instruction. Low-achieving students were not held back on one of the lower levels of readers. Individual differences were addressed when Mrs. K. worked with children singly or in small groups for additional instruction. Here, again, Mrs. K. was a keen observer who noted those students with additional needs. Since less time was devoted to small group work than is expended on traditional reading instruction with homogeneous grouping,

it allowed for more time to be used for extension activities on each story in the readers.

Since she had begun using the new basal series, Mrs. K. had dispensed with her traditional use of ability groups for reading instruction. Report cards used for each grading period consisted of checklists rather than the use of letter grades. Thus Mrs. K. was able to move away from comparing students with each other to gauge their progress, but rather looked at how each individual was doing compared to how he or she had performed at a previous point in the year.

Students had a personal journal of unlined paper that Mrs. K. had bound for each of them. At least once a week they made an entry in their journals. Usually the topics were assigned and often consisted of responses to a story they had read in their anthology, to a trade book she had read to them, or to some type of activity on which they had worked in class. Early in the year they did some pattern writing which gave them a framework which supported the weaker writers (e.g., I like _____.; I wish I could _____ because _____.) Sometimes they retold a story, a song or an experience they had at home.

In addition to the district curriculum, extra units of study were developed by Mrs. K. Some of those themed studies were on high-interest topics such as dinosaurs and undersea life while others were extensions of the themes presented in the basal anthologies. She used the units as vehicles for literacy instruction through integration of all the subject areas.

An important element that this researcher noted throughout the study was the celebration of effort that took place frequently through

the day. Time was taken for students to volunteer to read from books or their own written endeavors. Often this was done before the whole group, but when time was short, pairs or small groups could be found sharing.

Whether it was a shared reading or writing sample or a response to a question or a game, the child's efforts were met with positive remarks. Mrs. K. reminded them of the progress that they were making: "Do you remember that you couldn't have read that last October? Now you can read the whole story all by yourself" (Field notes, 2-10-92). She took advantage of opportunities to improve their self esteem as readers and writers.

A Typical Day

Students entered the classroom beginning at 8:40 a.m. They hung up coats, indicated their lunch choice, went to the restroom, then had free choice of several activities until class began at 9:00. Mrs. K. greeted each child as he or she entered the room and most of them had a brief conversation with her. Activities included puzzles, trade books, and games with which students could work singly, in pairs or small groups, at their desks or scattered about the room. Once in a while Mrs. K. would have a math sheet or a craft activity waiting for them on their desks.

> I have been amazed at the fact that most of them choose books every day. They especially like the ones I have read to them. They read more than any group I have ever had and I think it's because I read to them so much. My big bookcase helps too. They can see the fronts of the books where in the other one they can't. It's more inviting (Field notes, 10-7-91).

At 9:00 class began with the flag salute, a patriotic song, and a few poems, fingerplays or other songs they had been learning. Then they gathered on the front carpet by the calendar bulletin board where she read one or two stories. Each day a helper was chosen to assist her with the Math Their Way opening activities which consisted of concepts about time (both clock and calendar), money, weather and counting. Much language development took place during Calendar Time as the students learned to express the concepts in complete sentences. The students observed concrete examples of the math concepts being developed as they counted the minutes on the clock, built a number line and demonstrated various ways of expressing an amount of money (e.g., four pennies, 4¢ and $ .04).

At 9:15 nine students left the room to go to the Chapter 1 room while the remainder finished the calendar activities.

> I never have a certain order that I do the calendar. That way if Reading Rainbow kids leave at 9:15 and we aren't finished, they miss a different part of it each week. Sometimes I reverse it and start with the right [end of the calendar activity board] and go to the left (Interview, 3-17-92).

After the Calendar Time was finished about 9:25, Mrs. K. worked in whole or small group reading extension activities with the remaining 12 students. It was also a time when she could pull individual children for assistance or assessment.

Mrs. K. was quite flexible in regard to the time allowance for her children in the Chapter 1 class. Because of the large number of students that were in the group, they sometimes needed more than the normal 30-minute period to complete a literacy event. They returned to their room between 9:45 and 10:00.

At that time the whole class took a restroom break. When they finished, they usually spent until 11:10 participating in various literacy events. The largest portion of that time Mrs. K. used for teacher directed whole group instruction during which time she introduced the basal story, discussed and reread the story with the children, played games to reinforce skills to which they had recently been introduced, etc. This was followed by a shorter time period in which they sometimes worked in small groups or pairs on literacy events such as making big books or buddy reading. On other days this time block was used for individual tasks such as silent reading, working in one of their reading workbooks or writing in their journals.

Lunch, recess and restroom break were usually finished by about 12:00, at which time they completed their reading work.

> I've found with this group of children that to come in directly from noon, they're not ready to settle down and listen. So we finish up our reading program and then they're ready to listen to one or two books, depending on the size and how well they are ready to sit and listen. Sometimes we've been known to read three or four right at a time if they're a short little story and they're really into reading or if somebody brings a special book to read. And they love for me to read a book over again (Interview 11-17-92).

After this was math which began with about 20 minutes of whole group instruction followed by about 20 minutes of small group time. This "tubbing time" consisted of hands-on manipulative activities which reinforced the concept introduced during the whole group instruction.

Handwriting instruction was given until 1:25 when the children went to special class which consisted of music, art or physical education.

At 2:05 the class returned, occasionally had a brief recess on the playground, or immediately began their science or social studies unit.

> I try to correlate my science and social studies as much as possible with my reading series. Then I try to read to them. I'm always throwing a good literature book in with my science or social studies. I also like to fit in appropriate poetry with these units (Interview, 3-17-92).

About 3:20 the students began to prepare the room to go home. Then Mrs. K. had one last read-aloud time before the children lined up to leave at 3:40.

The Reading Club

Early in the year Mrs. K. began sending home supplementary preprimers with her students in order to provide reading materials commensurate with their budding abilities. As a child returned one, he or she would be allowed to check out another reader for several nights of home reading reinforcement.

In November, Mrs. K. began to be concerned that some of her parents were not getting involved in the home/school connection as she felt that they should. She shared her concerns with a friend who taught first grade in the same district. That teacher explained the reading club which she used with her class to stimulate parent involvement.

Mrs. K. began to think about how she could adapt that idea for her students. She wanted something that would involve the parents with their children on a regular basis. Through consistent practice on a variety of trade books, the children, she hoped, would show an increase in both reading performance and self concept (Conversation, 12-12-91).

Before Christmas break, she gave the class a hint of something exciting in which they could be involved when they came back.

Upon their return in January, Mrs. K. told the children about the reading club and how they could qualify to come. Each child was supposed to read nightly for a few minutes to one of his or her parents who would then record the book title and minutes read on a special form which both parent and child had to sign (Figure 2, p. 55). She explained that she wanted them to read from trade books to count for the reading club rather than the supplementary readers as they had been doing. It was interesting to note the decline in requests for the readers as the reading club progressed.

Each morning before opening activities the class gathered on the carpet at the back of the room to turn in the reading club notes. One at a time she took the notes, acknowledged the child's efforts and made a comment or asked a question about the book the child had read. Often she would relate it to a book they had heard in class or note that its author or illustrator was one with which the class was familiar. Then she recorded the minutes read on the chart posted on the back bulletin board. When they earned entry into the club, the children received a sticker on the chart. When the child had read a total of 60 minutes, he or she was eligible to join the club. For each additional 100 minutes read, another sticker was placed on the chart for them.

The sessions were conducted quickly, but each child who returned a parent response form was given brief recognition. Even after weeks of the same procedure the group was attentive during the check-in time.

Discussion was lively as Mrs. K. invited their verbal responses to the literature.

Date _____

_____ read for
Child's Name

_____ in a book titled
Number of Minutes

_____
Title of Book

_____
Child's Signature

_____
Parent's Signature

Figure 2. Reading Club Parent Response Form

About two weeks after their return from Christmas break, on January 13, they held their first club meeting with all but one child participating. To create excitement the previous day, Mrs. K. had shown them the big book she was going to read, but would not let them handle it. At 8:30, 30 minutes before class normally started, the meeting began. Mrs. K. made a big production of welcoming them and

special badge she had made for each member. Then she shared the big book and they asked to hear it a second time. That time there was enthusiastic discussion of the storyline and illustrations. The meeting closed with the children being served muffins and juice.

The first few meetings Mrs. K. shared the story with the group. Then she asked the physical education teacher to be a guest reader. She read Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears (Aardema, 1975), and brought her pet iguana for them to handle. The next week Mrs. K. invited parents to come to see what the meetings were all about and asked this researcher to be the guest reader. As word about the reading club spread around the building, Mrs. K. had several faculty members volunteer to be guest readers.

Parent participation was excellent; they were faithful to read with their children and brought them early each week to the meetings. One father who owned a print shop offered to keep the class supplied with the reading club forms they were to use. Mothers began to take turns bringing the snacks on meeting days. For several of the last sessions Mrs. K. even had a few of the parents participate as guest readers.

Enthusiasm among the children also ran high. By the second club meeting, everyone had qualified to be a club member. By March 12, the class had read a total of 8,087 minutes.

> One of my boys told me today, "Mrs. K., I don't have to read anymore."
> I said, "Do you need a note?"
> "No, I don't have to read any more."
> I said, "Oh, you don't?"
> "Nope. I'm to the end [of the row on the chart]. I've finished."

> I said, "Oh, you've finished that, but Mrs. K. is going to move the chart over and add another one."
>
> "Oh, good. Then I'll read tonight."
>
> He thought that was as far as he was supposed to go. So the chart is a real incentive for them to keep moving (Interview, 3-17-92).

On May 5, when she ended the club, Mrs. K. noted that the attendance was just as good as when the club began. "They said, 'Well, Mrs. K., does this mean we have to stop reading?' 'Of course not,' I said. But they still want to use the reading notes so I let them." (Field notes, 5-5-92). Total minutes read by the class was 16,860. The two case study subjects, Micah and Derel, each read 1,660 and 2,020 minutes, respectively.

The Chapter 1 Program

Known to the students as the Reading Rainbow class, Chapter 1 was a federally funded pull-out program designed to supplement classroom reading instruction in first, second, and third grades. Nine students came from Mrs. K's class on Monday through Thursday mornings each week for 30-minute sessions of remedial help. The group included one of the case study subjects, Micah.

The Environment

Room Arrangement. The large classroom was divided in half by a long bookcase, the back of which was often used as a display area for student work. On one end of the room eight desks faced a large chalkboard. At the other end three tables clustered together faced a large chalkboard which was flanked by two small bulletin boards. A third big

bulletin board near the front door presented a display of book jackets which were changed frequently to tie in with a holiday or a theme of study. Tables were spaced along each side of the room by the windows. These were used to display trade books currently in use, to store writing journals and to provide work and storage space for projects involving various Chapter 1 classes (Figure 3, p. 59).

The Teacher

This researcher has been the Chapter 1 reading specialist for the past six years at this school. Previously a classroom teacher of kindergarten, first, and fourth grades, the researcher had a total of 21 years of teaching experience. While training in reading instruction was of a traditional skills orientation, it was tempered over the years in practice by the researcher's personal interest in the language experience approach, student writing and the use of literature to supplement basal reading instruction.

The turning point in orientation occurred in 1976 when the researcher was tutoring a bright five year old. Despite all indications of readiness for reading the child balked at traditional methods of instruction. In searching for a successful alternative, the researcher discovered Sylvia Ashton-Warner's (1963) book, Teacher. After reading, adapting and applying some of the ideas in that book, the researcher was able to provide more positive learning experiences for the child, who then eagerly learned to read. Similar applications were made in the researcher's first grade classroom following this initial success.

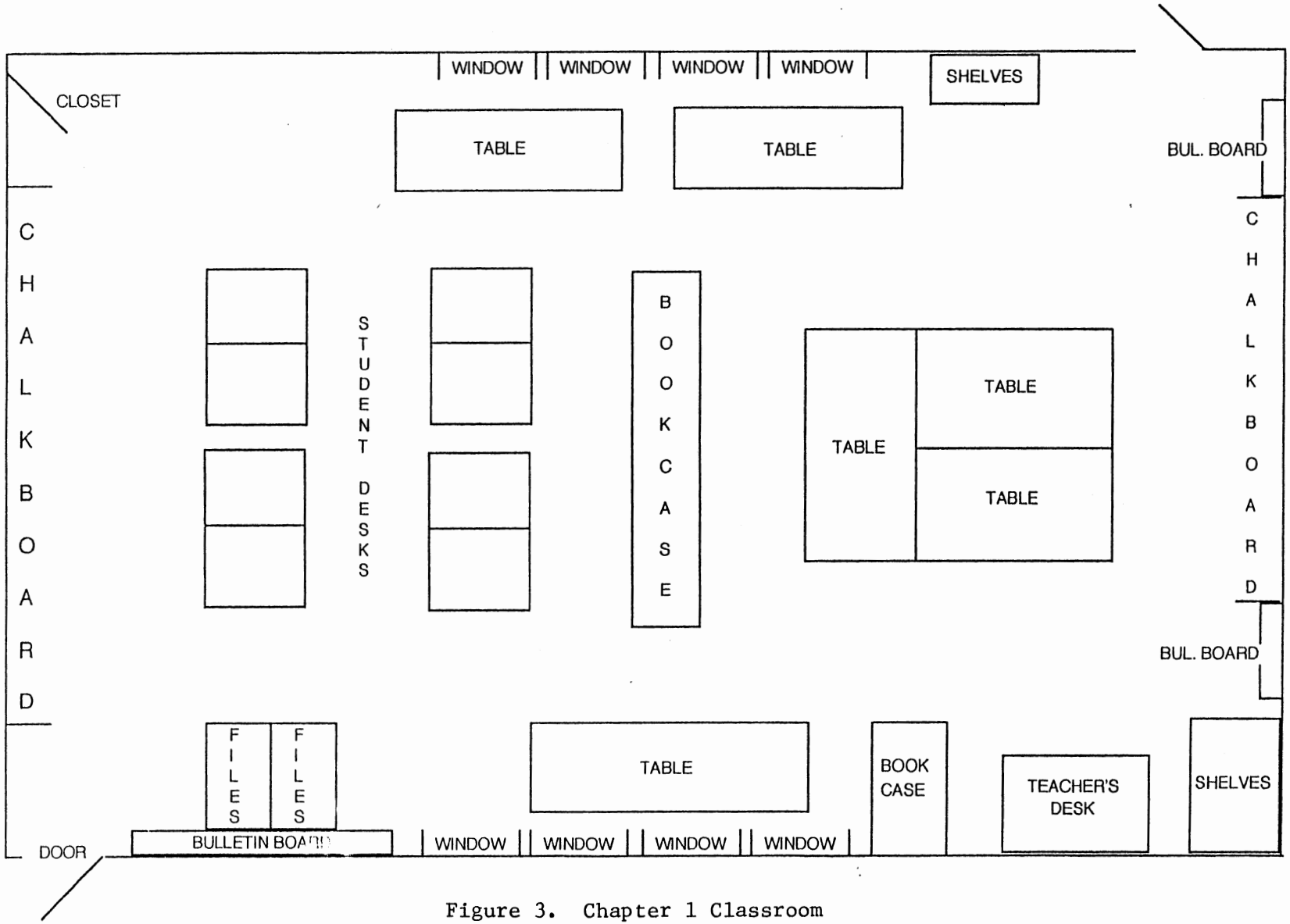

Figure 3. Chapter 1 Classroom

Several years of reading articles and books and attending workshops led to greater understanding of the language experience approach as the researcher implemented it in the classroom. During this time, an increasing interest in children's literature resulted in its pervasive use in the researcher's curriculum. The quest to know more eventually led to a masters degree in reading.

About this same period of time the whole language movement had become prominent. So, although the graduate training was quite traditional, it was balanced by the researcher's search for knowledge of the whole language philosophy through reading, workshop attendance and continued professional development. Through this evolution, the researcher had arrived at a strongly holistic view of teaching. This philosophy set the stage for the changes introduced into the school's Chapter 1 reading class.

The Curriculum

Traditionally, Chapter 1 programs across the nation have heavily emphasized isolated reading skills and phonics drills (Archambault, 1986). This had held true in the district in which this study took place. However, the design of the local program allowed for great flexibility in the instructional and curriculum decision-making of the individual Chapter 1 reading specialists within the school district. No set instructional methods or materials were mandated.

Thus the researcher was able to remain true to holistic beliefs when coming to the Chapter 1 program. The students were viewed as emerging readers and writers and were encouraged to view themselves as

such. A strong literature component from which strategy, skill and phonics instruction naturally arose was supported by an abundance of writing. For instance, while reading The Napping House (Wood, 1984) one of the students noticed the alliteration in "the dozing dog". The group then created an alliterative list of animals: clawing cat, running rat, sneaking snake, etc. During this spontaneous activity, the discussion included the fact that the two components of the phrases were "doing" and "naming" words (Field notes, 11-14-91).

Eight weeks into the school year the first graders began coming to Reading Rainbow class. In years past they had begun a month earlier, but due to changes in the district's Chapter 1 program, they started later in the year of this study. The reason for this was that kindergarten students were no longer pretested to give scores used to determine placement of children into the program. Instead, the teachers made a recommendation list for placement purposes. The extra month gave the first grade teachers an opportunity to observe their students and determine which of the listed children should remain on the recommendation list and which of their classmates also needed to be placed on the list.

One drawback was that those children who were identified as in greatest need of extra support lost out on a full month of that help. One minor advantage, from the Chapter 1 teacher's point of view, was that the students had extra time to develop an awareness of appropriate classroom behaviors, to begin attending to the teacher or a task for increasing lengths of time, and to become comfortable with the routines of their day at school.

Literacy events were geared to the children's attention spans with two or three different activities occurring during the earlier class meetings. By the third month of school they usually could attend to one activity lasting the entire period, especially if it involved movement at some point.

Typical literacy events included the memorization and dramatization of songs, poems and fingerplays. Listening to and discussing picture books and big books was a frequent activity, as was the use of easy and familiar stories for paired reading. Shared and independent writing was also a regular feature of the program.

Each book shared provided an opportunity to discuss concepts of print such as title, author, cover, spine, page, etc. Shared writing experiences developed other basic concepts such as word, sentence, capital, period, etc. The focus of the lessons was always on the meaning of the piece, but mention of the concepts of print in each context aided in the gradual understanding of the terms.

Some of the independent writing was done in the students' individual journals. These were bound booklets of 8 1/2 by 14 inch paper, lined on one side. At least once a month students made an entry in their journals. They usually began with drawing a picture, then moved to the writing. As they become more proficient writers, they less often needed to use a drawing as a stimulus for their writing. Spelling approximations were encouraged and even celebrated in an effort to keep the children's focus on meaning rather than on conventions of writing. Other independent writing activities were either displayed in the room or taken home the same day.

During individual conferences the last week of January, the researcher explained the intent of the journal to the parents. Those dated samplings would provide a chronology of their child's development when the journal was taken home at the end of the year.

A shared writing event was planned with almost every unit of study. This allowed students to walk through the writing process with the support of the teacher and the group. Rereadings of the text as well as think-alouds demonstrated to the children what goes on in the mind of the writer during the creation process. Conventions of writing were mentioned along the way, but always the instructional focus was on the meaning of the piece.

Micah

In September, when the class took the Gates-MacGinitie Pre-Reading Evaluation-Level PRE (MacGinitie and MacGinitie, 1989), the lowest scoring boy was Micah. On the basis of this test result, he was chosen as one of the subjects for this study.

Home Environment

Micah's middle-class family consisted of his sister and his two parents. Two years older than Micah, his sister qualified for the gifted education program. Both parents were registered nurses.

An interview with his mother (3-11-92) revealed a print-rich home environment. A variety of print sources were available in the home: newspapers, adult and children's magazines, pleasure and professional books belonging to the parents, and personal collections of books for

each child. Reading was a valued activity and family members regularly engaged in it.

The mother reported that from infancy Micah had had almost daily exposure to stories, as he was usually present when she or her husband read to the older child. By the time he was about three and one half years old, he would object if someone tried to abridge one of his familiar stories. Currently he was read to at least three to four times weekly as part of his bedtime routine.

At the time of this interview (3-11-92) Micah's choice of reading matter, according to Mother, was usually the Berenstain Bears and Dr. Seuss books and anything related to the study of the ocean, although he could not yet read these materials independently. He liked to have the stories in his children's magazines read to him and enjoyed doing the rebus stories and hidden picture pages himself.

The public library was a familiar place to Micah, who had begun going there at about age one and a half years when Mother took his preschool-age sister. He now had his own library card and checked out books about every other week. During the summer, he usually got involved in their reading program. The family took advantage of their church's library, occasionally visiting it after Sunday services.

Micah enjoyed drawing and writing, and initiated these activities two to three times a week. He had plenty of supplies available to him: paper, pencils, markers, crayons, paints and colored pencils. Most of the writing he did at home involved labeling the pictures he drew. He also liked to write notes to family members and had sometimes written letters to his grandparents.

His mother recalled that Micah began reading aloud to family members sometime between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Until the middle of January, he had to be encouraged to read each day. After the reading club began, however, he became very interested in reading. "Thursday mornings [the day of club meetings] he springs out of bed and is ready to go to school to the reading club" (Interview, 3-11-92). His mother was quite supportive of the reading club and pleased with the enthusiasm for reading that Micah was displaying.

Kindergarten Experiences

Micah's kindergarten teacher, Mrs. H., characterized him as a "quiet observer, a little shy." She added, "When he took on a role or sang before the group, he was expressive, showing lots of personality. Without props he lacked self confidence" (Interview, 5-1-92).

He displayed a love of books and a keen interest in listening to stories. His attention span was extremely good; however, acquiring knowledge of phonemes and graphemes seemed difficult for Micah. Mrs. H. recalled his struggles:

> If I hadn't known his mother, I'd have thought no one helped him at home. He was a puzzle to me because he had a good background and home life. I thought maybe he was a little immature and not ready for reading things--the "late bloomer" type (Interview, 5-12-92).

Micah was very aware of his learning difficulties. His mother confided to Mrs. H. that he had asked if something was wrong with him because his friends were ahead of him in learning the letters and sounds. This anxiety extended to his family. The mother requested a conference with this researcher near the end of Micah's kindergarten

year to discuss the situation and to get some guidance on how she and her husband could help him learn. During the conversation, it became obvious that the parents were comparing him to his older, gifted sister and the ease with which she had learned to read.

By the end of the year Micah was able to identify both upper and lower case letters in isolation, but could not successfully match all of them. He had also mastered initial consonant sounds (Kindergarten report card).

First Grade Literacy Acquisition

Reading Development. In September, 1991, this researcher administered the Gates-MacGinitie Pre-Reading Evaluation-Level PRE (MacGinitie and MacGinitie, 1989) to Mrs. K.'s class. The researcher noted that Micah appeared somewhat anxious during the examination, but he carefully considered the choices for each question before selecting his answer.

Of the 20 students taking the test Micah was the lowest scoring child with a percentile score of three. His total raw score, 62, was significantly below the class mean raw score of 78.68 (Table 1, p. 67).

The first subtest, Literacy Concepts, was comprised of twenty items dealing with concepts of print. Micah scored below the class mean in this area, being unable to identify the following concepts: writing, letter, capital letter and numeral. He was also unable to locate the starting point for reading a page of text and a book. His raw score on this subtest was 13; the class mean was 17.18. This was a

TABLE 1

GATES-MACGINITIE PRE-READING EVALUATION
SEPTEMBER, 1991

	Subtest 1 Literacy Concepts	Subtest 2 Reading Instruction Relational Concepts	Subtest 3 Oral Language Concepts	Subtest 4 Letters and Letter-Sounds Concepts	Total
Total Possible Raw Score	20	25	24	29	98
Class Mean	17.18	21.64	15.36	24.50	78.68
Micah	13	19	11	19	62
Derel	20	25	20	29	94

surprisingly low score considering his consistent exposure to print from an early age.

Reading Instruction Relational concepts, the second subtest, contained 25 items which tested the children's knowledge of terms referring to the units of language, such as letter, word, and sentence, and positional terms which indicate the relations between those units, such as first, between and after. Micah's raw score was 19 while the class mean for this subtest was 21.64. He demonstrated difficulty with the positional terms beginning, in front, next and before in relation to the letters in a word. He was unable to discriminate a word which began differently from a group of words, and he could not identify the word in a group which began and ended with the same letter.

The subtest of greatest difficulty for Micah as well as for the class was the third one, Oral Language Concepts (Linguistic Awareness), which included 24 items. These questions checked the children's abilities to hear the sequence of sounds, to match sounds, to analyze sounds in words (phonemic segmentation), and to compare the lengths of spoken words. Micah achieved a raw score of 11, the mean being 15.36. He had difficulty matching words with the same sound, whether in the initial or final position. He missed three of the six phonemic segmentation tasks and four of the five word length comparisons.

The final subtest, Letter and Letter Sound Correspondences, consisted of 29 items. This tested the children's abilities to recognize letters and to make phoneme-grapheme correspondences. His raw score of 19 was below the mean of 24.50. He missed two of seven letter

identification tasks and misidentified eight of fourteen initial sound items.

Based on Micah's performance on this evaluation, he seemed to have a poor understanding of the concepts of print. Judging from his scores, one might predict that he could have greater than average difficulty acquiring literacy skills.

Mrs. K. recalled that Micah began the year with limited letter/sound knowledge. He could identify most of the capital letters, some of the lower case letters and only a few sounds (Interview, 5-20-92). She noted that his parents were very helpful, his mother stopping by nearly every day to see how she could help Micah at home. "They always did everything I sent home for him. Sometimes I had to caution them not to work too long on things and wear him out" (Interview, 5-20-92).

Micah always worked hard and was eager to please. Mrs. K. remembered his being in tears at the beginning of the year when he didn't succeed. By the middle of October, she began to be a little concerned about his slow progress. "It seemed like something was stifling what he was learning" (Interview, 11-20-92). In conferencing with his mother, Mrs. K. learned that his sister was usually present when Micah was practicing on his work at home. The mother admitted that his sister Erica often answered for him and put him down when he didn't know something. Mrs. K. recommended that the big sister not be present when Micah was working as this was putting undue pressure on him. A couple of weeks later this researcher, in the role of Chapter 1 teacher, had a similar conference with his mother and suggested that

she work on developing an attitude of encouragement in Erica which would foster positive self esteem in Micah. By early November the problem had been resolved.

> It seemed like after he was rid of "sister pressure," everything started coming easier. Even Mom noticed a big difference when she removed Erica. It was like gradually the light bulb began turning on as he got more comfortable with things (Interview, 5-20-92).

According to Mrs. K. it took Micah almost twice as long to learn sight words as it did her top students. She used clues and gimmicks to help him remember them. He received additional exposure to these words in Chapter 1 class where he read them in context in the big books that were practiced, and he saw them in the word games that were played with the same vocabulary. Mneumonic devices were also used in the Chapter 1 class to help the students remember.

Between Thanksgiving and Christmas Micah began to read from his preprimers, relying heavily on memorization of the stories the class had reread many times. During Christmas vacation, Micah took home all three preprimers to practice reading. Mrs. K. asked that he spend most of his time on the first two since the third preprimer was rather difficult for him at that time.

This was a significant point in Micah's literacy acquisition. Upon his return she noticed a great improvement in his fluency and his retention of basic sight words. The researcher observed his heightened verbal participation during both large- and small-group activities. His newly-found assertiveness continued to gradually increase throughout the remainder of the study.

In the Chapter 1 classroom he showed greater confidence in his abilities and began to occasionally volunteer to read aloud for the group. He demonstrated an eagerness to participate in paired reading and seemed to enjoy the challenge of figuring out unknown words with the help of his partner.

In January, when Micah was retested on the Gates-MacGinitie Pre-Reading Evaluation-Level PRE (MacGinitie and MacGinitie, 1989), he worked with obvious confidence. His raw score on the Literacy Concepts subtest improved from 13 to 19 out of 20 possible points (Table 2, p. 72). The Reading Instruction Relational Concepts score increased from 19 to 23 points out of 25 points. His Oral Language subtest score went from 11 to 21 out of 24 points. With a total possible score of 29 points on the Letters and Letter-Sounds subtest, Micah improved from 19 to 28 points. The total possible raw score was 98 points with Micah scoring 62 in September and 91 in January. He was at or slightly above the class raw score mean in each category.

Micah was an eager participant in the reading club which began in January. The nightly practice boosted his reading skills and fostered tremendous growth in his self confidence. Previously he didn't always answer when called upon and rarely volunteered. By March he was much more interactive in class discussions, was usually correct in his responses, and would often volunteer to read aloud in Mrs. K.'s class.

At the end of April, the researcher administered the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test-Level 1 (MacGinitie and MacGinitie, 1989) to Mrs. K.'s class. Micah scored in the 16th percentile, well below the class mean of 34.50, on the Vocabulary subtest. His percentile score of 23

TABLE 2

GATES-MACGINITIE PRE-READING EVALUATION
JANUARY, 1992

	Subtest 1 Literacy Concepts	Subtest 2 Reading Instruction Relational Concepts	Subtest 3 Oral Language Concepts	Subtest 4 Letters and Letter-Sounds Concepts	Total
Total Possible Raw Score	20	25	24	29	98
Class Mean	18.18	23.86	19.82	27.82	89.55
Micah	19	23	21	28	91
Derel	18	25	21	29	93

was also below the mean of 38.95 on the Comprehension subtest. His total percentile, 20, was considerably below the 36.77 percentile mean for the class (Table 3, p. 74). Although he faced a very challenging test, he showed no signs of frustration and used the full allotment of time to complete the instrument.

In May, Mrs. K. felt that Micah was a little below the average child in her class with regard to sight word acquisition. More often than not he could successfully figure out an unknown word in context and could do a fair job of reading independently from the first reader.

Chapter 1 Progress. Literacy events in the Chapter 1 classroom were geared to a slower pace than that of the regular first grade classroom. Micah seemed to be comfortable with the pace of the class which was set to challenge, but not frustrate the group. The researcher's informal ranking of Micah's ability in his group of nine was approximately in the middle during October, through December. As he grew in skills and confidence, he performed increasingly better within that group. His most rapid growth in literacy skills occurred during the second semester. By the end of April, Micah was consistently one of the top two students in the group. At that point he could read fluently from a third preprimer level book, using good expression and observing punctuation. On more difficult material he attempted to solve unknown words by using a greater emphasis on decoding ability than on context clues.

Micah enjoyed reading trade books with a partner, particularly if they were literature that had previously been shared in class. Some of

TABLE 3

GATES-MACGINITIE READING TEST LEVEL 1
APRIL, 1992

	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Total
Class Mean	34.50	38.95	36.77
Micah	16	23	20
Derel	20	32	25

the selections were presented in big book format in which the researcher read the book aloud, reread it with student participation, and made available regular-sized copies for individual or paired readings.

Micah also enjoyed taking home a "share pack" containing a book on his independent level. This backpack was intended to involve parents in helping their child with practice material. Typically, if nine Chapter 1 children took home share packs, at least two came back with excuses such as forgetting to take the book bag home from their classroom; not having time to work on it; having no one take the time to listen to them; or forgetting to bring it back. Micah always returned the share pack promptly with the parent response form filled out indicating that he had read the book on the evening that it was sent home.

It was noteworthy that the researcher had more contact with Micah's mother during the school year than with any other Chapter 1 parent. She initiated all but two of the conferences, showed her concern with Micah's progress and sought ways that she and her husband could help him at home. During the first third of the year, she was obviously quite anxious about his slow progress. At a conference with her in October, this researcher had her take home the book Leo, the Late Bloomer (Kraus, 1971) to read to Micah. It was hoped that she would pick up on its message that everyone "blooms" in their own time. No feedback was received from her about the book.

On January 22, when she came for the annual Chapter 1 parent conference, the researcher shared with her the results of the pre-reading evaluation that Micah had taken in September and again in January.

Mrs. S. was encouraged by the improvement in his score and had begun to notice progress in his reading at home. During the second semester, she began to relax about the rate of his progress and started to focus on his blossoming abilities and confidence.

Writing Development. Marie Clay's (1975) rating scale was used to rate writing samples taken monthly from Micah's journal in Mrs. K.'s class. Ratings of one through four were considered "not yet satisfactory" and ratings of five or six were deemed "probably satisfactory" (Clay, 1975, p. 67).

In September, Micah showed weaknesses in both Language Level and Message Quality but showed strength in Directional Concepts. From December through March he maintained a level four in Language Level which demonstrated his ability to write in sentence form. In April, he moved up one level when he began to add punctuation.

Through September and December, his Message Quality remained at level two where his alphabetic writing had meaning only for him. In December, it jumped to level five, then to level six in January, where it stayed during the remainder of the study.

Micah's concept of directionality was evident from the beginning of the study. Spacing between words, level five, appeared in October and from January on he was able to demonstrate these two concepts when writing extended text.

From the beginning of the year the researcher noted Micah's willingness to try. He never said, "I can't" but attempted every writing assignment. Rarely did he ask for assistance, preferring to work

through difficulties on his own. Usually he began his work with a brief thinking time, then worked undistractedly through the completion of his task.

Writing was hard work for Micah until the phoneme-grapheme correspondence began to fall into place for him. As his confidence grew, so did the length of his texts. His first journal entry was one word; in March, he easily wrote a 68-word retelling of a basal story on which the class had been working (Appendix A, p. 116). By second semester it was obvious that Micah enjoyed writing.

Derel

The results of the Gates-MacGinitie Pre-Reading Evaluation-Level PRE (MacGinitie and MacGinitie, 1989), that was given in September, 1991, indicated that Derel was the highest-scoring individual in Mrs. K.'s first-grade class. For this reason he was selected as one of the subjects for this study.

Home Environment

Derel, an only child, was born when his mother was sixteen years old. His adoptive father joined the family when Derel was 18 months old. A middle-class family, Mrs. T. was a secretary; the father, a warehouse manager.

The mother revealed that there were few print sources in the home (Interview with Mrs. T., 3-10-92). She admitted that she did not like to read and usually limited her pleasure reading to a ladies magazine. Her husband, a little league coach, did much more reading than she,

mainly the newspaper and sports materials. Derel had a collection of his own books which had been handed down from Mrs. T's little brother who was only eight years older than Derel. However, many of those books were too difficult for him to read yet.

Derel's mother recalled that he had a bedtime story read to him since he was about age two. Both parents still read to him, one parent on one night, the other on the next. Mrs. T. liked to read his "older" books to him, as she called them, ones that were above his reading level. She noted that his attention span varied from one read-aloud session to the next.

When Derel was five, the summer before entering kindergarten, he was taken by his father to the story hours at the public library. He got his own library card that summer. They currently visited the library once or twice monthly, according to the mother. She had noticed that he preferred making his own book choices, using the illustrations as his basis of selection.

Derel had a variety of writing materials available to him. Many of these were art supplies passed down to him by his uncle. He liked to draw, copy words out of his books, and write the alphabet. He also liked to draw pictures for Mrs. K. or his grandmother and put messages on them like, "To _____ from Derel" or "I love you." Mrs. T. stated that he liked writing activities better than reading by himself.

Derel did little reading aloud to his parents before the reading club began.

> We had some problems. He didn't like to read. Me and Mrs. K. had to have some talks with him to get him to. He was more interested in socializing.

> At first he came home and told me about it [the reading club] and the main thing was we get to go to school early and have snacks. At first I had to make him sit down and read to me, but since we've had our talks, he's the one that's initiated it. He likes it and understands that it's not just snacks, [and] that he gets to go Thursday mornings [to hear a story] and eat (Interview with Mrs. T., 3-10-92).

His mother reported that his reading aloud occurred nightly, followed by a story which one of his parents read to him.

Kindergarten Experiences

Derel also had Mrs. H. for his Kindergarten teacher. She recalled that he was an aggressive child who showed leadership qualities. "School seemed easy and fun for him. I felt he'd do well academically as he continued through school." She found that he was "always quick to catch on to new learning, quick to think and respond faster than most of the kids. He was frustrated when he had to wait on others" (Interview with Kindergarten Teacher, 5-1-92).

While Derel excelled academically, he faced some challenges with regard to social development which Mrs. H. attributed to his only-child status.

> He was frustrated when he wasn't chosen first or given enough attention. Sometimes he cried when he wasn't called on. He was impatient and had a difficult time using self control. He had a quick temper if things didn't go his way, such as when someone messed up his blocks (Interview, 5-1-92).

Mrs. H. didn't remember Derel as being any more attracted to books than most of the rest of the class. However, he did seem especially to enjoy listening to the stories she read to the class.

Derel's kindergarten report card indicated that he could identify upper case letters by the end of the second nine weeks and lower case

letters by the end of the third nine weeks. At year's end he could successfully match upper case and lower case letters, as well as distinguish initial consonant sounds.

First Grade Literacy Acquisition

When Derel took the Gates-MacGinitie Pre-Reading Evaluation-Level PRE (MacGinitie and MacGinitie, 1989), he scored higher than anyone in the class with a percentile ranking of 86. His raw score was 94 and the class mean raw score was 78.68 (Table 1, p. 67).

He accurately completed the first, second and fourth subtests indicating an understanding of literacy concepts, reading instruction relational concepts, letter names, and letter-sounds concepts. In the Oral Language Concepts Subtest he mismatched an ending sound, incorrectly identified an example of phonemic segmentation and was unable to determine the longest-sounding of a group of words. His raw score on this subtest was 20 while the class mean was 15.36.

He approached the test with confidence, listening carefully and considering the choices for each question before marking his answer. Based on Derel's performance on the pre-reading evaluation, he seemed to possess an above average understanding of print and its function. One might predict that his literacy acquisition could be accomplished easily.

Mrs. K. reported that Derel began the year knowing all of the capital letters and, with the exception of occasional reversals, all of the lower case letters.

He started off with a bang and was really seeing success. He

> said that he could read, but he could memorize easily and that's what he called reading. He didn't use sounds (Interview, 5-20-92).

Early in the year the researcher noted Derel's strong short-term memory ability. When he participated in a cumulative memory game as part of a whole-group activity, he was by far the best player (Field notes, 9-27-92). His long-term memory, however, was definitely weaker. On checking her students for instant recognition of the readiness words that the class had been working on for several weeks, Mrs. K. found that Derel knew only nine out of 26 words (Checklist, 10-3-92). He was not discouraged, though, and continued to work at learning the vocabulary. In watching him play a teacher-made game that matched number words with corresponding numerals, the researcher observed his playing the game by actually reading the words rather than by matching the shapes (Field notes, 10-8-91).

Derel enjoyed the status of being the leader when the class worked in small groups, but he needed many opportunities for group work in order to learn to actually function as a leader. In a class project each small group was responsible for contributing a page to a big book that the class was making. Through discussion, each group was to determine the text, illustration and placement on the page. Then duties were to be divided up in order for each child to have a part in the production. Afterwards, each group was supposed to share their page with the class.

Although Derel was supposed to lead the discussion, divide the duties fairly and determine how the group would present their efforts, he did not seem to know how to go about it. In his group of five

children, two members were high-achieving, goal-oriented girls. When they saw his lack of leadership, they immediately got the group organized and on task. Toward the end of the project, Derel did make the decision on how the group would present it to the class (Field notes, 9-25-91).

By Thanksgiving Mrs. K. noticed a change in Derel's interest in learning to read. He gave up easily when confronted with words he didn't know. Although he seemed to have a good grasp of three-letter, short-vowel words, he would balk at decoding longer words. Sight words were quickly memorized, but many of them were never transferred to his long-term memory. "In reading to me now he's missing words that he knew back at the beginning in the early books" [preprimers] (Interview, 5-20-92).

The year began with Derel's parents showing a great deal of interest in his doing well. As winter approached, Mrs. K. noticed less involvement. She spoke to his mother about the importance of nightly reading with Derel. Mrs. T. said that they did read, but Mrs. K. did not detect its influence in Derel's reading performance at school.

Derel's work habits were rather poor. He took longer than many of his classmates to get started on independent tasks and was easily distracted. He seemed unsure of how to go about his job and frequently copied from those seated around him even though he was capable of completing it unaided. During times of free-choice activities, Derel flitted from one job to another, spending more time in social interaction than on the task at hand. The researcher observed Derel's use of time during an activity period. Within 20 minutes he had moved to

nine activities, participated to a small degree in five, and concentrated for a lengthy time (10 minutes) on only one (Field notes, 10-25-91).

Derel continued to display an interest in books, although by November he was still concentrating more on the illustrations than the text. In an incident in his class he used his enjoyment of books to console a distressed friend. For DEAR time (Drop Everything And Read) Mrs. K. had each child to select several picture books from a large supply she had available for them. At that point in the year most of the children had very limited reading skills, so her instructions were for the students to enjoy their books for the ten minutes of DEAR time. The class had been quietly engrossed in their books for about five minutes when the researcher noticed that Nick, a high-achieving boy, was in tears. He was in the middle of a class favorite, Chicka Chicka Boom Boom (Martin Jr., and Archambault, 1989), and couldn't figure out some words. Going over to him, this researcher suggested that he just enjoy the pictures for now and he could find out the words after DEAR time was over. Derel, engrossed in his own book, scooted over by him and shared Nick's book for the remainder of the time. He listened with interest as Nick read the alphabet to him from the end papers of the book (Field notes, 11-13-92).

In January, Derel was retested on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Evaluation-Level PRE (MacGinitie and MacGinitie, 1989), His attitude was one of confidence, but he did not seem to listen very carefully. He marked his answers quickly without giving the choices much consideration. On the Literacy Concepts subtest his score declined from a raw

score of 20 to 18 points. His score on the Reading Instruction Relational Concepts remained the same at 25 points. The raw score on the Letters and Letter-Sound Correspondences remained at 29 points. His total raw score decreased from 94 to 93 points (Table 2, p. 72).

Derel enjoyed the reading club mostly for the socialization aspect. Mrs. K had to urge him to read and finally had a conference with the mother again to gain her cooperation. At first he brought back notes a couple of times a week indicating that he had read for long blocks of time. Mrs. K. visited with the mother and finally got across the point that ten-minute nightly sessions would do more good in the long run than occasional 45-minute ones in which he got too tired. Derel's competitive nature became apparent when he tried to bring in enough reading notes to stay ahead of his friend on the reading chart.

By second semester it was obvious that Derel's reading performance had declined. Mrs. K. estimated it to be about average. "Derel is a dependent reader. He wants to be independent, but he still needs your help--still wants you right there to encourage him to go on" (Interview, 5-20-92).

At the end of April, Derel took the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test-Level 1 (MacGinitie and MacGinitie, 1989). He rushed through the test, one of the first to finish the subtest. After "finishing" the comprehension portion of the test, the researcher showed Derel a couple of pages he had overlooked and he rapidly filled them in. Again the researcher had him go back to another two pages he had skipped, but the time limit ran out before he could answer more than one of the test items (Field notes, 4-29-92).

He ranked in the 20th percentile on the Vocabulary subtest and in the 32nd percentile on the Comprehension subtest, where he omitted seven items on that subtest. His total score was in the 25th percentile while the class mean percentile was 36.77 (Table 3, p. 74). These scores reflected Derel's seeming regression and they qualified him for Chapter 1 services for next fall.

Mrs. K. reflected on Derel's future:

> Everyone's going to have to stay with Derel. He's going to probably have to have more help than even Derel wants. If someone doesn't keep an eye on him, he's one that's probably just going to sit there and pass the years one through another. I think the athletic aspect of his life's going to be more important than the academic, which is a shame because he has so much ability (Interview, 5-20-92).

She had a conference with the mother on the matter of emphasis that was being placed on sports at home, suggesting that it needed to be "a 2/3 to 1/3 blend of academics over athletics." The mother admitted that it would be hard because her husband wanted Derel to be involved in all types of sports. Mrs. K could foresee a power struggle between the parents with Derel in the middle. "Derel already has the attitude, 'I'll do just enough so that the teacher won't be calling Mom saying I'm not doing my best'" (Interview, 5-20-92).

By the end of the study Derel could read from the first reader with just a little difficulty. He was about average in sight word recognition and knowledge of phoneme/grapheme correspondences. Usually he could figure out an unknown word in context successfully, but preferred to ask someone else rather than to do it on his own.

Writing Development

Using Clay's (1975) rating scale, the researcher was able to evaluate Derel's written expression development. His first two samples were at level two on the Language Level scale indicating his ability to write a recognizable word. By November, he had moved to level four, writing a simple sentence, where he stayed through the remainder of the study. Only in the March sample did he rise to level five by adding punctuation.

Starting at level three (a copied message that he could understand) on Message Quality, he progressed to level five by November when he would write his own text with little assistance. In January, he reached level six, complete independence in writing a message, which he maintained through the remainder of the study.

Derel's correct directional patterns but lack of spacing between words caused him to remain at level four of the Directional Principles scale throughout the entire study.

The researcher observed that Derel was somewhat anxious about writing tasks. Although he knew letters and sounds, he did not seem to relish expending the effort it took to form them into a message. He usually had a hard time getting started, making several false starts and then erasing. Often he would watch the students seated around him, particularly the high achievers, and copy their beginning efforts. If Mrs. K. or the researcher happened to walk near him, he would readily ask for help.

He tended to linger over the illustration part of assignments and rush through the writing portion or even sometimes omit it when he could. Text lengths on the monthly samples taken averaged less than 30 words (Appendix B, p. 118). The sharing was another matter; he was always one of the first to volunteer to read his story to the group.

Summary

The first grade classroom was a cheerful, print-rich, child-centered environment. A variety of whole and small groupings were used in the instructional setting, but ability grouping was avoided. Mrs. K.'s classroom management and discipline techniques contributed positively to an atmosphere conducive to learning.

The teacher, Mrs. K., was a 13-year veteran who embraced the whole language philosophy. This author contributed to the study as both researcher and teacher, serving one of the case study subjects as a Chapter 1 resource teacher. The Chapter 1 classroom also provided a whole language environment. Both teachers incorporated a strong literature component as part of their curriculums.

A weekly reading club was started by Mrs. K. in January. It encouraged regular home reading practice involving children's literature selections, fostered parent/child involvement and stimulated motivation in parents as well as their children.

Micah was the case study subject who scored the lowest on the screening instrument given at the beginning of the study. He came from a print-rich home environment and had parents whose involvement

remained high throughout the school year. Micah seemed to get off to a slow start, requiring more effort to acquire sight word vocabulary than most of his classmates. His interest and effort levels, however, remained consistently high during the entire school year. Christmas vacation was a turning point in Micah's literacy acquisition. He made steady gains from that juncture, showing increasing confidence and more active involvement in literacy events in the classroom. Micah was highly motivated by the reading club enjoying the reading as well as the meetings; the extra practice enhanced his reading progress. The struggle to gain mastery over the language code required great effort, but Micah persevered and displayed enthusiasm in expressing himself in writing.

The highest-scoring subject was Derel whose home was not particularly supportive of literacy experiences. His parents' involvement was rather intermittent and a divergence of priorities existed between the parents regarding academics and athletics. Derel learned quickly but did not seem to transfer that learning to his long term memory and his progress began to falter by November. He was very responsive to the social aspects of learning, but was reticent to push himself to excel at academic endeavors. He required the encouragement of his teacher and his parents to participate in the reading club. He enjoyed it mainly because of the social feature of the meetings and because he could compete with his classmates in number of books read. Derel viewed writing as a laborious process that he tried to evade whenever possible; however, he did like to share his efforts.

By the end of the year their performances on the posttest placed both boys in the middle third of their class.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the literacy acquisition of two first-grade boys and to uncover conditions which appeared to support the acquisition process. Because the focus of the research was the examination of the influence of holistic instruction on two individuals' literacy acquisition, it required the use of a qualitative, case study method. Observations were made weekly from September through April with follow-up interviews being completed in May. Two factors were scrutinized for their influence on the acquisition process: literacy environment and literacy events.

Based on pretest scores, the case study subjects appeared to have quite different potentials for success. Micah, the lower-scoring child, came from a print-rich home where literacy achievement was expected and valued. He progressed at a slow but steady pace of literacy learning throughout the school year with parent support ever present. While Derel's home environment contained print, it did not strongly encourage its use. He began the year learning with ease, then quickly lost momentum. Parental involvement seemed to be sporadic and their support of Derel was divided with the mother seeming to encourage the academic development and the father promoting Derel's athletic

involvement. By the end of the year, Micah had improved while Derel had seemed to decline to the point that their performance was almost at the same level, with Derel being slightly the stronger of the two.

Micah received reading assistance in a Chapter 1 pull-out program which geared instruction more closely to individual needs than was possible in the regular classroom. The major influence on his literacy learning came from his homeroom class where he spent 74% of his week compared to 8% of his week spent in the Chapter 1 class. The Chapter 1 class played a small but supportive role in this study.

Room arrangement, instructional grouping methods, and the teacher's beliefs, classroom management approach, and discipline techniques contributed to the overall literacy environment. The curriculum included a literature-based basal reading series and teacher-designed units of study taught in a holistic manner which also contributed to the literacy environment of the classroom. A special reading club, which began at midyear, was an important factor in the motivation of the students, their improved reading performance and parental involvement.

Conclusions

Based on the observations of Mrs. K.'s class, several important influencing factors emerged.

Literacy Background

1. The influence of the home environment is very strong on

first-grade students. The children's goal orientations are reflective of behavior that their parents value. Attitudes about the importance of literacy acts and attitudes toward work are formed early in life and affect classroom performance. In writing to parents, Butler and Clay (1979) declared that the most valuable contribution a parent can make towards their child's school success is to instill in their preschooler a love of books and the knowledge that books are filled with a wealth of ideas.

Coming from a home that very obviously valued school success, Micah reflected that attitude in his approach to his work; even when tasks were difficult, he persevered. While Derel's parents wanted him to succeed in school, they, particularly the father, seemed more concerned with his athletic achievement. He usually approached school tasks with the minimum effort necessary to complete them.

2. Knowledge of concepts of print is not necessarily related entirely to the amount of exposure a child has to print sources. Holdaway (1979) cited Clay's findings that intelligence and language background, too, affect, but are not entirely responsible for a child's success in coming to understand the concepts of print.

Vacca, Vacca, and Gove (1991) stressed that "the more repeated and meaningful experiences that children have with written language, the more they clarify and begin to exercise some control over the processes involved in learning to read" (p. 73).

Despite Micah's extensive exposure to print from a very young age, he evidenced weakness in knowledge of literacy concepts. Derel did not receive as much experience with print yet he displayed strength in this

conceptual area. Frequent reference to these concepts in meaningful classroom contexts enabled Micah to integrate them by midyear.

Literacy Environment

1. The teacher's role is central in establishing the literacy environment of a classroom. She sets the climate by her management skills, discipline approach and her attitude toward her students. Her instructional decisions dictate what is emphasized in the curriculum. She inspires in her students the desire to learn based on the degree to which she celebrates their efforts. Smith (1988) emphasized the importance of the teacher's role. "Teachers must understand what they are doing. Teachers make the difference, not prescriptions, materials, or activities" (p. 128).

2. The physical appearance of the room contributes to the literacy environment through visual appeal. Easy accessibility to books and other literacy materials reflects the emphasis on literacy acquisition. Arrangement of the student desks and work areas fosters a feeling of community among the learners.

According to Routman (1991), a teacher's philosophy of teaching and learning is reflected in his or her classroom arrangement. It was evident from displays of children's work and from the number of trade books available about the room that Mrs. K. was child and book oriented. She used ready-made and child-created displays to stimulate interest in the units under study.

Literacy Events

1. Literacy events that appear to aid in children's understanding of the concepts of print include frequently reading and being read to from a variety of print sources; attention being drawn to the names and functions of print in a variety of contexts; and the frequent opportunity to develop a working knowledge of concepts of print through writing. Demonstrations of reading and writing allow children to be apprentices to these literacy processes.

Smith (1988) summarized Vygotsky who asserted that "everything children can do with help one day, they can do by themselves another" (p. 8). According to Smith, "the classroom should be a place full of meaningful and useful reading and writing activities where participation is possible without evaluation and collaboration is always available" (p. 11-12).

Haussler (1985) suggested that teachers key in on the home and community environment to gain ideas for structuring their classes in such a way as to foster their students' developing literacy. "We can no longer believe that children come to school knowing nothing about written language. We need to observe to learn what they know and then build on the knowledge they bring to school" (p. 79).

Mrs. K. used shared book experiences to point out pertinent concepts of print, such as left-to-right and top-to-bottom progression and punctuation marks, in the context of the stories. Repeated presentations of this type allowed her students to come to recognize these

concepts. Daily opportunities to read and write enabled them to apply this knowledge as they became able.

2. Goodman (1986) stated that "integration becomes the central motif in a whole language curriculum" (p. 30). Through her use of thematic units, Mrs. K. reinforced her learning objectives by linking the subject areas together. A multitude of trade books was woven throughout her integrated curriculum.

The whole language approach to literacy instruction promotes understanding through the presentation of mini-skill lessons in context. Repeated exposure to the desired skills and strategies at appropriate opportunities provides reinforcement of this learning. Before reading a new book to the class, for example, Mrs. K. and the group discussed the terms title, author and illustrator. She did not expect mastery of those concepts the first time or two she explained them, as she knew they would be covered numerous times throughout the year.

3. Time allotment communicates to the children what the teacher considers important in respect to literacy events. Because Mrs. K. devoted great amounts of time to books and book-related activities, she established an atmosphere of intense interest in books and writing. She read aloud at least four times each day and placed the books where they were accessible to the students. These books and the books created as class projects were popular selections during leisure time. Both case study subjects listened intently at story times and usually chose the book area for at least part of each free-choice time.

The use of a traditional group rotation necessitates long periods of time in which students are engaged in seatwork and other activities. Adams' synthesis of the literature summarized in Stahl, Osborn & Lehr (1990), revealed that "seatwork is associated with lower levels of engagement and achievement. High levels of student engagement and classroom achievement are associated with teacher-led activities" (p. 112). Through the extensive use of whole group instruction, Mrs. K. was able to engage more children in active learning.

Time was often devoted to writing and sharing those products in Mrs. K.'s room. Micah was a diligent worker and as his writing ability increased, so did his love of writing. Derel found writing to be too tedious a task on which to spend much time, but he loved to share his efforts with others when he finished.

4. Results of the study indicate that early and profuse use of trade books can enhance both parental involvement and student motivation. Particularly popular with the children was taking home trade books which had been shared and enjoyed in class more than once. Mrs. K.'s practice of sending home supplementary readers for practice during the first half of the year was met with much less enthusiasm by both parents and children than her later practice of encouraging the use of children's literature selections.

5. Repeated readings of quality children's literature selections can be a strong force in the acquisition of literacy. The preprimers that Micah took home over Christmas vacation contained unabridged stories from trade books. Each of these stories had been read more than once in class and extended with discussion and a variety of relevant

literacy events. During his vacation, Micah read through these again with his parents who provided an enthusiastic audience and help as needed.

The combination of these factors created a confidence base from which he made significant gains. He had begun to internalize the story structure and make the stories his own. In turn, he as able to apply these learnings to new situations as evidenced by his stronger performance during the rest of the year.

6. Heterogeneous grouping promotes a sense of community among the students because each group member is considered a worthy contributor. It fosters learning by increasing student involvement and bolsters self esteem and confidence. The research of Borko and Eisenhart (1988) indicated that reading groups function as social and linguistic communities that can aid or impede literacy success because ability groups differ in regard to all aspects from instruction, to expectations, to evaluation. According to Smith (1988), "Learning is a social activity and its most important aspects from the learner's point of view are the other people in the situation, the [literacy] club that the learner must join" (p. 122).

The use of small groups for instruction or reinforcement is a necessary instructional practice. Clay (1991) said that although such groups may contain a mixture of age and general ability, they contain students who share a similar need at that particular point in time. She further urged that groups should continually be changing in response to the effects of learning during the school year.

Through the use of mixed-ability grouping, Mrs. K.'s students reaped the benefits of learning and improved socialization skills. Micah gained enough skill and confidence as an observer in the groups to move to the status of an eager participant. Derel made strides toward learning that he could be a contributing member of the group without being its leader every time.

In interviewing children about their views on ability grouping, Routman (1991) discovered that they were aware of the negative impact of leveling on students' self esteem. Since this type of grouping was not used in their classroom, neither case study subject experienced that impact. Both could easily identify classmates with the strongest literacy skills, but neither could readily name the weakest learners. By the end of the study, the two boys demonstrated competence and confidence in their own literacy abilities.

Parental Involvement

1. Parental involvement is important to the students' success. Time consistently spent by the parents with their children in literacy activities helps improve performance and, equally important, helps promote literacy events as a priority in the home. Routman (1988) found parental involvement and communication to be an important link in understanding her students better and in helping the parents understand the instructional aims of the teacher.

The reading club was a highly-successful attempt to engage parents in home activities with their children which not only reinforced literacy learning that had taken place at school, but provided the

additional practice necessary to improve that learning. The extent of parental involvement was evident from positive comments noted by the researcher from both parents and students, as well as from enthusiastic participation. It was notable that even though the parents had to bring their child to school early on club meeting days, almost 100% attendance was maintained each of the fourteen weeks of the club.

Micah's parents sustained their high level of involvement in his schooling throughout the course of the study. His nightly practice for the reading club was eagerly supported by his parents who were excited by his increasing success.

The sporadic help and encouragement Derel received from his parents communicated to him that schooling was not a priority in their family. This attitude was apparent in his classroom performance as well. There was a halo effect of improved effort at home as well as in the classroom after each parent conference, but as days went by, both parents and child slipped back into old habits.

2. Children benefit from parents and teachers working in concert. Establishing a sense of trust is necessary for this two-way communication to take place freely. Some parents feel very comfortable initiating contact. Micah's mother was so interested in learning how she and her husband could best help him that she even requested a conference with this researcher during the spring of his kindergarten year. This was several months prior to Micah's first grade placement in the Chapter 1 program. The frequency of contact and the rapport that developed between the mother and Mrs. K. enabled them to get to the bottom of the cause of Micah's stifled learning early in first grade.

This mother eagerly sought ways to be supportive of her son's emerging literacy skills.

When parents are not nearly so aggressive in their involvement as mentioned above, they should be contacted as needs arise. Mrs. K. did not wait until Derel was in dire straits before calling his mother nor did she give up when the effects of each conference were short lived.

Part of Mrs. K.'s success in gaining the involvement of so many of her students' parents was due to the fact that she was not always the bearer of bad tidings; she tried to keep them informed of their children's successes as well. Her belief in a strong home-school connection was evident in the consistent effort she made to involve and inform all the children's parents.

General Recommendations

1. More teacher training needs to take place at both the in-service and pre-service levels to help teachers acquire efficient "kidwatching" skills. When used properly, observation helps not only with instructional decisions teachers must make, but also with other areas such as motivation and discipline. The focus needs to be on how to use the observed student behavior to determine appropriate teacher action for cognitive as well as affective considerations.

2. Schools need to make an intensive effort to increase parental involvement. Included in that effort should be provisions for parent training to educate them to the importance of such involvement as well as to provide them with effective reinforcement techniques designed to enhance cognitive and affective development. Smith (1990) supported

that conclusion when he stated that "until parents appreciate their personal influence on the education of their children, simply listing instructional practices will do little to expand parental involvement" (p. 332). Stressing what a powerful influence that parents are to their children, Miller (1986) pointed out that if the significant people in their lives are seen reading regularly, then the children will come to value that act as an avenue of learning.

Derel's father, with his heavy involvement in sports, was a negative influence on Derel's interest and effort in school. His mother's intermittent support following each conference with Mrs. K. was reflected in Derel's stop-and-go school performance. Likewise, Micah's home emphasis on literacy learning and his parents' continuous involvement was mirrored in his steady progress during the year.

Trelease (1989) expressed concern regarding the heavy emphasis that many fathers place on athletics over academics. He proposed that they can be instrumental in turning around the trend in the United States for fathers to be educationally uninvolved with their children. "It is not only possible, it is preferable for fathers to be both athletically and intellectually involved in their children's lives" (p. xxiii).

Recommendations for Further Research

1. This case study of the two boys is analogous to the story of the tortoise and the hare. Micah's progress was slow but steady throughout the year; Derel's development was characterized by spurts and plateaus. Both finished the race with performance levels that were

close to the same, yet at the beginning they were at extremes. This was especially noteworthy in that the two boys were from the same socioeconomic level. It would be interesting to follow the boys through several more years of school, documenting their progress, their work habits and their interest in literacy experiences.

2. The boys were a contrast in personalities with Micah being shy and quiet while Derel was very much the extrovert. Their work habits differed greatly also. Little distracted Micah while he worked methodically on his tasks through to completion, often checking over his work when finished. Derel, however, had difficulty getting started, was easily distracted and tried to finish quickly with as little effort invested as possible. When he finished, he often brought his work to the teacher rather than to check over it himself. A study of students' personalities and how the children approach learning tasks would likely reveal some interesting implications for the classroom teacher.

3. This study points to the value of classroom research and suggests that teachers as well as researchers would benefit from its more widespread use. Its benefits extend beyond the questions answered by the study to a more personal level. The teacher in this particular study was subjected to scrutiny as part of the quest for the answers to the research questions. Casual conversations and informal interviews with the researcher during the course of the school year caused Mrs. K. to do some introspection regarding her beliefs. Being "on stage" during the many hours of observation also caused her to reflect on how well her beliefs were played out in practice.

The choice of a teacher/subject can be critical as Elbay (1981) found in her qualitative case study of a teacher. "One guarantee of capturing the teacher's knowledge in a real way was the choice of a teacher who was committed to her work, able to articulate her point of view, and interested in doing so" (p. 51).

Self scrutiny results in professional growth as the educator seeks to analyze why they do what they do. When the teacher is also the researcher as in this case, he/she is afforded even more opportunity for introspection. The researcher's own teaching can be examined in the light of what is being observed and what he/she has found in the pertinent literature to support sound teaching practices.

4. The use of the whole language approach to reading instruction may have different effects among students. Such a philosophy values the individual and avoids labeling children and segregating them into ability groups. Micah thrived in his whole language environment. He was not placed in the "low group" as his pretest score would have relegated him had he been in a traditional classroom. Little successes led to bigger ones allowing his literacy acquisition and confidence to crescendo.

Derel was much more socially oriented than was persevering Micah. His literacy progress peaked early, then faltered through the rest of the year. Had he been in a traditional classroom he would have been placed in the "high group" based on his pretest scores. This researcher conjectures that if he had had the status afforded top group students, considering his competitive nature, he might have put more

effort into his school work so that he could remain in that elite group.

Broadly generalizing, it is likely that low achieving students may benefit from the lack of ability groups and the associated stigma. However, high achieving students may strive to live up to the status of top group placement. Further investigation of this hypothesis is warranted.

5. Each subject's progress in literacy acquisition was reflective of his parents' involvement. Micah made steady progress and had continuous parental support. Derel's poor progress was influenced by his parents' inconsistent involvement compounded by his father's desire that Derel excel in sports.

Based on the results of this study, the need is clear for further research into the influence of parental involvement on literacy acquisition. Particularly needful are studies on the academic involvement of fathers with their children.

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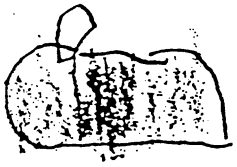
APPENDIX A

WRITING SAMPLES

MICAH

AUG 30 1991



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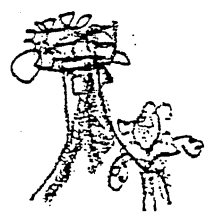

MAR 1 8 1992

APPENDIX B

WRITING SAMPLES

DEREL

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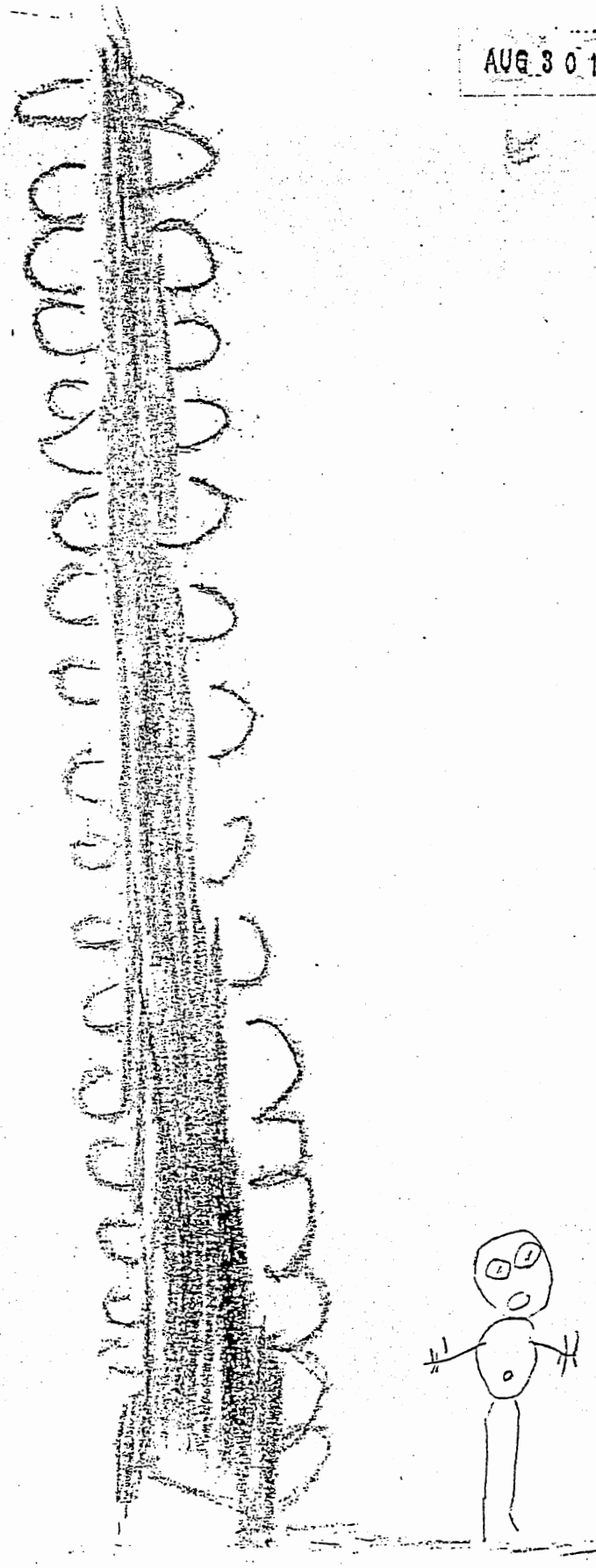

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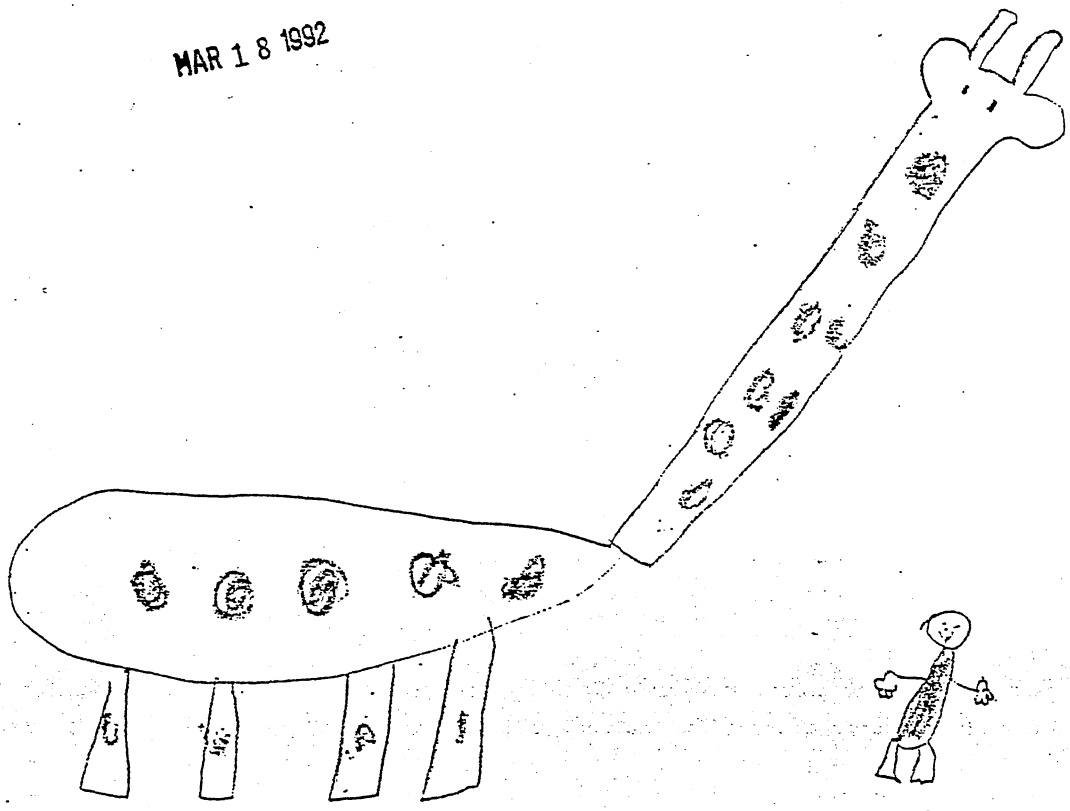

VITA

Jill Edwards Steeley

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Doctor of Education

Thesis: THE LITERACY ACQUISITION OF TWO SIX YEAR OLD CHILDREN: A CASE STUDY

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