
Stepping in and Becoming Books

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BOOKS

They can catch you.
They can grab you.
They can let you step in.
They can let you jump in.
Then I have to try to push out
And out I come.
—Omid

There are words in books.
There are pictures in books.
There are people in books.
There are animals in books.
There is me in the book.
—Shirley (Grade One)

Once Upon A Time

It was a stick - a stick that was just right for smacking a snow-covered tree. Down fell the snow—plop!—on top of Peter’s head!

The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats
“I remember when I was walking in the woods with my dad and he pulled on a tree branch in front of me and a huge pile of snow plopped on my head.”
“You have a dad!!”
“I remember when my sister dropped snow on my head.”
“My brother did that too!”
“This reminds me of when I was outside I took 5 rocks and hit them on the tree. Then the snow fell down on me. It was heavy. It covered my whole body.”

It is through the making of particular kinds of connections, such as those between a text and lived experience, between family relationships and those in a storybook, that learning and understanding take place. If such connections are not made, learning and understanding are increasingly more difficult or non-existent (Anderson et al, 1985, Day, 1994, Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, McDonald, Courtland, Golab, & Mallik, 1999, Short, 1993, Steffensen, JoagDev, & Anderson, 1979).

When children understand how to connect the texts they read to their lives, they begin to make connections between what they read and the larger world. This nudges them into thinking about bigger, more expansive issues beyond their universe of home, school, and neighborhood. (Harvey and Goudvis, 68)

As primary teachers, teaching reading has always been a passion for us. We are both Early Literacy Coordinators involved in planning and coordinating literacy initiatives at our school. Understanding how children comprehend texts has changed over the last century and many theories have evolved. Two theories we found to be most prominent and representative of other theories are the Schema and Transactional Theories. In the Schema theory, the knowledge we have determines how and what new knowledge enters our memory. It is the fitting of new information into prior organized schema, or prior knowledge that allows for comprehension (Anderson & Pearson, 1984, Day, 1994, Hartman, 1995).

Transactional theorists, on the other hand, believe that there is no single meaning or understanding of text (Rosenblatt, 1985). “Meaning is not found in text, but constructed by the reader” (Sipe, 2000, 256).

Although these two theories are distinct entities, they intertwine. This interconnection reinforces the importance of prior knowledge, language understanding, reading skills, cultural background, gender, and personal preference within the comprehension of text. These, in turn, are the basis of how readers connect with text.

Subtext: Connecting Students with Texts

As the decision and responsibility of choosing books for reading programs has shifted from the school or district level to the individual teacher, the necessity to understand our students’ background and interests and to support their reading needs has become even more important. It is our knowledge of students that should determine the methods and materials we use to help our students become proficient readers. As primary educators, we began to wonder if the texts we were using in our classrooms were supporting our students in making these important connections in their learning. In order to answer this question, we decided to discover what events, issues, experiences, and relationships our students were connecting to during their reading.
Characters

Dawn teaches Grade One at Oceanview Elementary (the names of the school and all the students are pseudonyms), a partially funded inner school in Vancouver. The school has approximately 350 students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds where English is not the first language spoken. There are eleven languages spoken in the community with Cantonese, English and Vietnamese being most prevalent.

Dawn’s Grade One class has twenty-one students with eleven boys and ten girls. Nineteen of the students have English as their second language. Their reading and writing skills range from beginning stages to a Grade One level.

Mary teaches Grade Two at Parkview Elementary (names of the school and all student's names are pseudonyms) located in a working class neighbourhood in a central area of Vancouver. The school has approximately 520 students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds with the majority of students being Asian or Indo-Canadian.

Mary's class has twenty-three students, eleven girls and twelve boys. Their reading and writing abilities range from being at the beginning stages to quite advanced. Their participation in class and small group discussions ranged from fairly reluctant to extremely active.

In both classes, all students participated in all the activities but only eight students from each class, four boys and four girls, who had parental consent to participate, were randomly chosen to be included in the study. The eight students were fairly representative of the make up of each class. All the students were able to verbally communicate their connections. In Dawn’s class the students ranged in academic ability. Seven of the eight students had an ESL designation. In Mary’s class five of the students had an ESL designation, four were of Asian descent and two were Indo-Canadian. All of the students were born in Canada.

Storyline

We first began by looking at various books that we thought would cover themes that students at the Grade One and Two level would connect to. We considered the following: gender—including non-stereotypical roles—culture, life experiences, background knowledge, family, and friends. We also looked at different book styles. We took into consideration, vocabulary, print type, and illustrations, especially how the illustrations supported the text, as well as the style of illustrations. Lastly, we considered the length of the text. We chose the following nine books to read with our students.

Nine Books to Read!

In order to see what our students were connecting to in these stories, we decided to model for our students how to make connections as well as the types of connections that could be made. We believe, as Swartz found in his study with students in a Grade Three, Four and Five class, that students need a great deal of modeling and explicit teaching before they are able to express, especially in the written form, their connections with literature (Swartz, 1999). We also believe that good readers select and apply reading strategies to enhance their comprehension, while poor readers do not have the same amount of knowledge about how to select and apply these strategies (Duffy, Roehler, Meloth, Varus, Putman & Wesselman, 1986).
Both of us used the book *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats to model making a variety of connections, using self-stick strips, each with our own class. We focused on text-to-self; text-to-text; and text-to-world type connections:

**Text-to-self**—connections that readers make between the text and their past experiences or background knowledge

**Text-to-text**—connections that readers make between the text they are reading and another text, including books, poems, scripts, songs, or anything that is written

**Text-to-world**—connections that readers make between the text and the bigger issues, events, or concerns of society and the world at large. (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, 21)

The teacher first read the story in its entirety. During the second reading, the teacher placed one of three self-stick strips on a page where she had made a connection. After reading the book the second time, the teacher went through the book discussing the connections she had made. For example, the teacher referred to a snowfall that had happened within the last week, and talked about previously read books, both fiction and non-fiction about snow, along with relating other personal experiences, and background knowledge, to model different types of connections. During the third reading, the students were able to place their named self-stick strips on a page, when they had made a connection. This was done after the teacher had completed reading each page.

At first we were worried about breaking up the story and losing the experience of the story read as a whole. Sipe’s findings suggested that;

> the children's responses...were so often of the moment and in the moment, to hold the response to the end of the reading would have been in many cases, to lose it" (2000, 272).

We decided it would be the best procedure to break the book into smaller parts. We also found that the discussion and literary understanding increased when connections were made during the reading.
After the readings and class discussion, the children then returned to their desks and discussed the part of the story they had connected to as well as shared their other connections with each other. In this activity the students were seated in heterogeneous groupings. At this time, a group of 45 students were called up to the carpet area to discuss their connections with the teacher. This procedure of calling a small group up while others were working was very familiar to our students as it is similar to guided reading procedures we had already established in both classes.

All students wrote and drew a picture about their connections. It was during this time that the teachers took field notes on the discussion and other observations on all the students as the participants were randomly selected at the end of the observations.

The second book we read aloud was My Best Friend Moved Away. The procedure followed the same as outlined with the first book; however, this book was only read twice, once for modeling and once for student participation. The teacher once again modeled the procedure as well as discussed her connections. The second time, the students were able to place their three named self-stick strips in the book when they made a connection. The discussion and writing procedures were the same as the modeled lesson.

All other books were read only once, with both teacher and students placing their self-stick strips in the book when a connection was made. The teacher then discussed her connections, always trying to model a variety of types of connections, before the students went into small groups for their discussions.

After the first book, Dawn’s students were given the choice of how many self-stick strips they would like. Children were encouraged to make as many connections as they wanted, and it was stressed it was okay if self-stick strips were left over at the end of the story. Some children were quick to make lots of connections with the book while others were not.

The idea of letting the children choose the number of self-stick strips was to try and get away from telling them how many connections were needed in a book, since making connections to a book is a very personal thing. Children who said they were unable to come up with a connection to a book were asked to retell the story in their own words. This was
done to prevent reluctant writers from opting out of making connections to the story in order to avoid writing.

Plot Development

After all data was collected and the eight students were randomly chosen from each class, the teachers read both the student’s written responses and their field notes looking for patterns of how and what connections the children made. We, now in our role as teacher-researchers, began coding each student's responses into three types of categories: text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000).

We found that, from reading the eight books, the sixteen children made 266 connections, Two hundred and forty-nine were text-to-self, eleven were text-to-text, and only six were text-to-world. We were not surprised that the text-to-self connections would have the most type of connections, as children of these age groups are still somewhat egocentric. The number of text-to-text and text-to-world connections disappointed us since we had spent some time modeling these types of connections and expected that children would then make these connections.

We believe, like Duffy et al (1986), Harvey and Goudvis (2000), Pearson & Duke (2002), Short (1993), Swartz (1999), and Trabasso (2002), that comprehension improves through the teaching and modeling of explicit comprehension strategies. Therefore, in our first modeling lesson, as well as in our ‘regular’ teaching, we thought we were referring to all three types of connections equally. This may have been the problem: We needed to spend more time modeling and explicitly teaching text-to-text and text-to-world type of connections, as these were new types of connections for the students to make.

The children of this age find it easier to relate to something that connects to their personal life, their schema. Swartz (1990) also found that students needed a great deal of modeling and explicit teaching before they were able to connect with literature in a response journal. After the completion of collecting data, we were pleasantly surprised that the students in our classes had begun to make text-to-text connections on their own as this was an new way for children to relate to stories.

The books that received the most connections from the students in both classes were *The Recess Queen* (41), *I Want a Dog* (37), and *My Best Friend Moved Away* (35). The book that drew the fewest connections differed between the classes. In the Grade One class, *Chin
Chang and the Dragon Dance received the fewest connections even though some children described the story as exciting because the boy was able to dance at the end of the story. In the Grade Two class, Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge received the fewest connections, even though three students liked it because it reminded them of their grandmothers. It is interesting that in the Grade One class, Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge, received more connections because the children connected the story to their grandparents’ lives.

When we took a closer look at the written and oral responses of the students’ connections in relationship to the books read, eighty-three of the two hundred and sixty-one connections were made to an event within the story. The Keeping Quilt had the fewest event connections in both classes. In the Grade One class, both William’s Doll and Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge had the most connections made to an event.

Many of the Grade One students connected to the basketball and the train scene in William’s Doll. David connected to building a train set with his dad from the story. “My dad bought me a train. I made a track. It makes a giant circle. It has ninety-nine pieces. It has buildings and cars. It looks like a real town.”

Shared memories of finding a bird's nest or visiting the beach are some of the events students connected with in Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge. Jordan wrote “I went to the beach and I played in the sea and my dad pretended to be a shark.”

In the Grade Two class, The Recess Queen, had the most connections made to an event. We felt that these connections illustrated the importance of connecting to what is known, i.e. a family setting or a school setting. Of further interest, two of the text-to-world connections were also connected to an event. Manpreet connected the cleaning of her house in preparation for Diwali to the cleaning in preparation for Chinese New Year in Chin Chiang and the Dragon's Dance. Sanjay connected to the celebration and use of fire works in the same book, to his extended family’s celebration on New Year’s Eve.

The next major connection made was to something in an illustration that was not necessarily reflective within the text being read to the class. Kiefer (1993) believes, as we do, that the illustrations of a book will allow children to enhance their listening comprehension by filling in the parts of language that are unknown to them (1993). Seventy connections were made in this area. In the Grade One class, My Best Friend Moved Away and The Keeping Quilt received the most connections in terms of illustration, while in the Grade Two class it was, I Want a Dog and The Recess Queen. A small skipping picture in The Recess Queen reminded Julie of a class skipping presentation and Manpreet of skipping with her family.

Once again, we felt that the setting, i.e., a school and a neighbourhood, presented many opportunities for the students to connect. We found when children were having difficulty making sense of the story they tended to connect with the illustrations in the story as in the case of The Keeping Quilt. Many connections were made to the picture of the Grandmother’s birthday party.
Connecting to the theme of the book was also evident in several other books. The theme of wanting something, as in *I Want a Dog* and in *William's Doll*, as well as a friend moving away in *My Best Friend Moved Away* produced the most theme type connections in both classes. All the children were able to connect with the ideas of something that they really wanted and had to wait some time for as well as the concept of lost friendships.

In *I Want a Dog*, Emma expands upon why she really wants a dog. “This story reminds me that I don’t like to play with my little brother because when we play we always fight because he is so angry. So I want a dog to play with. But my mom said ‘No!’ So I can’t. But when I grow up I will buy a dog.”

Charlie connects to the theme of loosing a friend. “My good friend is Angela. We shared snack with each other. We pretended to fly on the swings together. I will be sad for the rest of my life because she moved away. She went.”

All eight students in the Grade Two class made some connection to a friend moving in the book *My Best Friend Moved Away*. In Grade Two, Stephen, who was rather reluctant in sharing his connections, connected to the theme of Tomie dePaola’s book *The Art Lesson*. Stephen wrote, “This reminds me of when I wanted to be artist. And I still want to be an artist. I haven’t told any one. I am never going to tell any one. And at my house I do doodles. At home in my kitchen I draw dinosaurs, Captain Underpants and some other stuff.”
Twenty-seven connections were made directly to a character. Considerably fewer connections were made directly to the character in the Grade One class than in the Grade Two class, with only three connections coming in total from the Grade One class. Sally, in Grade One did connect Mean Jean to a girl she was having trouble with on the playground. “Diana is mean. She started to be my friend but then she got meaner and bossy. She said she would not be my friend.”

For David, Mean Jean reinforced what a good friend he is. “I am a good friend. I asked someone, can you play with me?” Sanjay in the Grade Two class was able to connect the main character of The Recess Queen to a boy character who is the king of the school playground from a Saturday morning animated series.

While most character connections were to the main character, in the story My Best Friend Moved Away, Bryan, new to Mary's class this year connected to being the friend that moved away. Bryan came up quietly before writing to say, “But Mrs. Smith, I’m the friend that moved away.” He was assured that he could write about that.

Five of these character connections were related to emotion in Chin Chiang and the Dragon's Dance and My Best Friend Moved Away. In the Grade One class, Nancy related to both the words in the story and the emotion. She related to Chin Chang’s feeling of being so scared he wanted to melt in his shoes, to her own experience of being a flower girl at a wedding. In reading the first book, both Julie and Laura, Grade Two students, connected to the sadness and loneliness Chin Chiang felt. Julie connected to Chin Chiang's need to go somewhere by himself, “When I’m sad, lonely or feeling bad, I will go to my room and go to bed and cry until my Mom comes….” Laura connected to where Chin Chiang went when he felt sad, “Usually when I’m sad I like to read and I usually like to read library books….”

Twenty-nine connections were made to a specific word or phrase within the text of a book. In the Grade One class, after reading Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge, one student wrote “My unicorn and smooch are as ‘precious as gold’ because I can’t sleep without them.”

In the Grade Two class, of the sixteen connections made in The Keeping Quilt, eight were
made to a specific word. The word ‘invite’ brought Huo-Shang and Julie to recall a time when they invited someone to their home. The words ‘rich cake’ reminded Laura of the “their [her grandparent’s] cake was so rich.”

All the books used in the Grade Two class were paperback except for one, *The Recess Queen*. One of Manpreet’s connections was to another book she had at home that was also a hard cover book.

Harvey & Goudvis state that

> All kids bring a wealth of experience that we can build on to enhance understanding even though much of the prior knowledge may lie outside the realm of books. (2000, 49)

The differences between the books connected to in both classes were somewhat surprising. For example *Chin Chang and the Dragon’s Dance* received the fewest connections in the Grade One class. In the Grade Two class it was *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*. Also the Grade One students made fewer connections directly to a character than did the Grade Two students. Our combined data showed similarities between the two different grades and their social economic backgrounds. However, small differences between books and students’ responses made us question the role of student’s experience with a strategy, teacher’s presentation, class dynamics, and personal preferences, as elements influencing the connections made by students.

**Hitching Connections**

We found, as Swartz did, that as students discussed their connections to the readings, their conversations moved beyond focusing on their connections to the text at hand into sharing stories about their experiences and families, scaffolding ideas, and learning about each other.

> Students can “hitchhike” off one another to tell stories from their lives. These stories not only reveal their life experiences and ideas but also build a dimension of who they are. (Swartz, 1999, 3)

Students were often reminded of something while listening to another student describing their connection. Bradley and Sanjay were often heard saying that they got a connection from what some character said, or that some character reminded them of something. Reluctant connectors, who had only put one or two self-stick slips on a book, would suddenly talk or remember something that they could connect to when in conversation with their peers. For example, when sharing connections to the story *I Want A Dog*, Emma—a student who did not often share her ideas—shared her experiences of having a fish, but only after other students in her group expressed that they wished they had a fish. “I have fish. I am not very good at feeding my fish. The one big fish grabs all the food. My grandma helps me feed the fish.”

All the students were able to begin writing immediately after their small group discussions. All the students had at least one important thing to write about. Our writing programs in both classes have increased the amount of whole class oral discussion and small group discussions before writing. All our students discovered they had a story; they had something important to write about.
We believe that through the connections children make we, as educators, are given insight into their prior knowledge and life experiences. The connections that the students made almost always made reference to an interaction with their family. Many of the children we teach are from immigrant or first generation families. The extended family network is still in place and is a major part of the children’s lives. Also many children in our schools are not given the freedom to play with their friends out of school hours; their playmates at home are their siblings, cousins, grandparents and/or parents. The importance of the children’s families was not surprising but what was surprising was the constant reference to family in connection with the texts. As teachers we are often quick to suggest ways for parents to interact and be part of their child’s life. This study demonstrates that they are.

Cultural Connections

Cultural background influences how a reader interacts with the text much in the same way as prior knowledge (Narvaez, 2002). The interaction of cultural background and prior knowledge enables a reader to make inferences about unknown text and/or ideas that are explicitly written by the author. (Meacham, 2001, Steffensen et al., 1979). Meacham believes “that cultural connections, particularly within the context of reading comprehension, require cognitive processes nearly identical to those Vygotsky associates with higher-order conceptual development” (2001, 1). We were able to see the those cultural connections in Manpreet’s and Sanjay’s, (both Indo-Canadian), references to their family celebrations in their connections to Chin Chiang and the Dragon’s Dance. Of the four children of Asian descent in the study, two children made a direct connection to their family’s New Year celebration. Our surprise was that the cultural celebration did not make more of an impact, especially when this book was presented during the Lunar New Year. We asked ourselves if the impact of the story was lost due to the story being written in the first person while most of our students could only have lived a similar experience as an observer. The students often watch the festivities but are not active participants in those festivities.

Gender Connections

Just as cultural background is linked to prior knowledge, gender is connected to cultural background. Gender stereotypes are used to make inferences from text that is read (Davies, 2003, Day, 1994). As gender influences the inferences made while reading, gender also influences how reading is approached (Day, 1994). We did not find, as Davies and Day found, that the connections the students made were influenced by gender. The connections students made to all the books gave us the impression that gender was not a factor.

However, when asked if they liked the books and why or why not, three of the boys, who had made other connections that were not based on gender, did not like William’s Doll since it was a book about a boy wanting a doll. Sanjay wrote, “because he was a boy and he wanted a doll and it was for girls.”

Two of the girls did not like the book; Amy “because it was about a doll and I don't like to play with dolls.” Manpreet said “It was not a great book.” When asked to explain further, she said, “It was about a boy and a doll.”

Alan in Grade One seemed somewhat surprised that the character in William’s Doll was a boy. Although he easily found points to connect with in the story, his exclamation of “You mean he was a boy?” would suggest that further study needs to be done looking at how children relate to character gender in non-traditional roles.
Data Reflections: Meeting Each Other Between Texts

Throughout the collecting and reviewing of our data, new insights and questions about our students as well as our teaching practices arouse. We became much more aware of our students’ lives outside of the classroom. We were given, through their many connections, a glimpse of their lives and the things that are important to them. We became more aware of the students as children within a community. For example in Mary’s class she found out more about community events that she had been unaware of, (such as block parties), that many children in her class were attending.

As more connections were made, we redirected some aspects of the curriculum to fit the information that we learned about our students. This was evident in Language Arts and Social Studies. We also felt that the children were given more insight into who we are and our lives. This was especially true for Dawn who felt she shared more about herself during this research then she normally does, thus developing a more intimate relationship with her students.

We have also become more aware of the impact of what we say has on our students and their learning. We are listening more to our own words as we teach and speak to our students. We are also more aware of what our students are hearing. Our personal connections spoke out much louder than our connections to text and to the world even though we thought we equally demonstrated each type of connection based on the theme of the book. Did we emphasize the personal? Did we make our personal connections more important, more exciting? Is that the reason why our students made more personal connections or is it just their age and what is important to them?

Meaningful Connections

Questions also came up about the meaningfulness of a connection. Students were able to connect to stories whether they later said they liked or disliked a story. Our students often made connections that we suspect would not assist in their comprehension of the text. In some cases, however, when children were asked to retell the story it was interesting how helpful their seemingly abstract connection was in the retelling of the story. Also, sometimes their connection to the book did not seem like a connection, until we asked the student more about their connection. We would like to take more time to study the relationship between making connections and reading comprehension. Does making connections to text, improve reading comprehension?

The major question that continued to arise during data collection was, what is a meaningful connection? Is a meaningful connection a connection that adds to the comprehension of the story or one that enhances a student’s understanding of life? Or both?

A further query that came out during our research was the effect of oral discussion and modeling on comprehension. The structure of our study led us to question which strategy, oral discussion or modeling, had greater influence on comprehension. We also questioned whether both strategies needed to be used together to enhance comprehension of the story.

Reluctant Connectors

During the collecting of data, we became aware of a few children who we described as reluctant connectors. They seemed unwilling or at loss to make a connection. A couple of the children seemed to value their self-stick strip with their name on it. We had not used self-stick strips before and felt that the novelty of these could have been a factor. In the
Grade One class, investigation into why certain children were unable to make a connection with a particular story resulted in the following conversations with respect to the *Recess Queen*.

Alan stated “But I have never met anyone that angry on the playground.”
“I have never been as mean as Mean Jean,” said Susan.

For some children not connecting with the major theme of the story or character resulted in them not making other connections. With some of the children, we are still a bit unsure of why connections were not made. Could it have been the sharing of something very private, something very personal that held them back? Could it have been shyness?

Stephen was a very reluctant connector and yet while observing his physical features, his eyes enlarging, the uplifting of his body, during the reading of the story, Mary knew connections were being made. During one small group discussion after the reading of *The Keeping Quilt*, Sanjay and Bryan were ‘hitchhiking’ off each other's connections about grandmothers. Stephen kept quiet as the discussion went back and forth between the two other boys. Sanjay looked at Stephen and said, “Don’t you have any connections—about your grandma — getting sick or anything?” Stephen simply shook his head. The only connection Stephen wrote about was that a name mentioned was the same as his mom’s. Stephen was a silent connector. For some reason he felt he needed to keep his connections to himself, he was not ready to let us, his classmates and his teacher, have a glimpse into him or his world.

Another observation that requires further study is what makes a reluctant connector? Is a reluctant connector someone who has less experience with the connecting strategy, less experience in oral discussion, shyness, lack of English speaking skills, a sense of privacy, or lack of life experiences?

Personal preference did not seem to affect a child’s ability to make a connection to a story. However, we have asked ourselves, can personal preference increase reading comprehension?

**The Next Chapter**
As primary educators, this study challenged us to investigate our teaching practices regarding reading comprehension. We have become more aware of the importance and the need to not only model strategies but also to continually reflect upon what it is being modeled. We have become more aware that the message we think we are giving our students, is not necessarily is the one that they are hearing.

This hidden curriculum appears not only during modeling but also with the selection of books and other materials in the classroom. For the purpose of this study, having to explain our reasoning for book selection, reinforced for us the importance of pre-reading materials for gender issues, culture, illustrations, themes, and personal preferences of the students.

We are now giving our students more time to share their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and life experiences in connection to stories being read through oral discussion. We are no longer afraid of losing the flow of the story by allowing students to openly share their thoughts during a story. In fact we are encouraging such behaviour.

Just as it is important for the children to share their experiences, in order to create a safe, caring, risk taking, classroom environment, we also feel it is important for us to share our lives with the children. As we share our life experiences with our students, our students become more comfortable with sharing their lives in class. We feel that this sharing has brought a stronger community feeling within our classrooms.

Equally important as the sharing within our classroom, is the sharing between colleagues. Palmer refers to teaching as “the most privatized of all the public professions” (1998 142). We are aware of the isolation we and other teacher feel within the profession. The design of schools does not promote the sharing and support that we believe is important. The support and comfort of being able to share and bounce ideas off one another confronted us with new ways to teach reading comprehension. Discussions between the two of us, challenged us to go beyond what we thought was the obvious, and question many of our teaching practices in all areas of the curriculum.

Although this study has ended, we do not see this as the end of our role as teacher-researchers. Instead it is a beginning of further inquiry into the many possibilities within the curriculum.

Those that dare to teach must never cease to learn.

— Socrates

Reflections One Year Later…

As we look back a year later at our research, we continue to believe in the importance of reflecting on our daily practice as well as sharing our experiences and philosophical thoughts with our colleagues through our role as Early Literacy Coordinators at each of our schools. Reflecting on ours and our colleagues’ practices has been a basis for many of our Early Literacy discussions. We also continue to frequently share our experiences with one another on an informal basis.

Creating time to share our experiences and reflect on our practices together seems to parallel our research findings that our students also need time to share and reflect their connections and thoughts of the books they have read or heard.

As well, educators need to be aware of the hidden curriculum with the books and other
materials used and how they are presented in the classroom. Being aware of the hidden curriculum has come to the forefront as we purchase literacy materials for our schools. We take greater care when selecting materials so that both the content and illustrations reflect the students in our schools. The pedagogical importance of choosing our books and materials carefully was highlighted in Dawn’s class when a young girl from Mexico connected to a story Dawn had read and began talking about her life in Mexico. This was a very exciting time for Dawn and her class as it was the first time this young girl had shared her previous experiences.

The connections children make to self, text, and world continue to excite and stimulate us and the children and enables the children to step in and become part of the experience.

Resources


**Picture Books Used**


**About the Authors**

**Dawn Sadler** and **Mary Smith** are elementary school teachers. They have recently completed their Masters of Education at the University of British Columbia. They continue to be the District Early Literacy Coordinators in their schools. Dawn has been teaching for fourteen years in both private and public schools. She has also taught Special Remedial Class for children with behaviour problems. Mary has been teaching for twenty-five years in both private and public schools. She is a certified Teacher-Librarian.