

## Introduction

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This research handbook has been compiled to present a synthesis of investigations, issues, and questions that address the acquisition and development of literacy for children and their teachers. A special focus of the volume is on issues of diversity, policy, and equity as they impact research, theory, and practice in literacy. Attention to these issues must be a top priority if national and state goals for closing the reading achievement gap are to be accomplished (International Reading Association, 2002). This is a daunting task, because students today more than ever need to be literate to succeed in the workplace. At the same time, there is clear evidence that the achievement of all children has not been equal. More than half of all American students score below proficiency in reading (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2005). Ample evidence indicates a growing achievement gap in reading and math between (1) minority and nonminority students, (2) those from economically poorer and richer families, (3) students whose native language is English and those whose first language is not English, and (4) students identified for special education services and those in regular education.

Nationally reported data point to four conclusions: (1) There are differences in the emerging literacy knowledge and performance of young children entering kindergarten from various racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds; (2) the gap is greater for children who enter school with a combination of risk factors (e.g., mothers with less education, living in a single-parent family, whether the family receives welfare benefits, and whether the primary language spoken in the home is not English); (3) by grade 4, there is a significant discrepancy between the reading comprehension proficiency of European American, non-Hispanic students and their African American and Hispanic peers, and this discrepancy continues through grade 12; and (4) these gaps have been stable for more than a decade. Research has documented stable differences over time between kindergarten and

grade 7 (Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001) and between first grade and the end of high school (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997); therefore, as time progresses, it becomes increasingly more difficult to undo the “failure to read” syndrome (Al Otaiba & Fuchs, 2002).

Concern about issues of diversity, policy, and equity has traditionally been viewed as a problem in urban and in poor rural districts. However, as the diversity in our country continues to grow daily, the preparation of all teachers must focus on developing proficiency in dealing with language diversity, cultural diversity, policy concerns, and equity (Lapp, Flood, & Chou, 2008; Leland & Harste, 2005; Weiner, 2006).

### THE POLICY OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND: PUTTING READING FIRST

Although it is very controversial, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is the principal national legislative policy response to the illiteracy crisis in the United States and the problem of the failure to read proficiently. It is strongly driven by the recognition that illiteracy can no longer be tolerated as an inevitable state for too many groups of American students. NCLB also represents a departure from past national policy for low-income parents in the education of their children. Parents now have a wider array of educational choices, including public charter schools, and, depending on the academic progress of their children's school, the choice of external supplemental services. If children consistently fail in a given school, NCLB may include sanctions such as reorganization of that institution. Although there are countless problems with NCLB, it heightens awareness about our illiteracy problems; it stresses professional development of teachers and accountability; and it involves parents in decision making.

### ISSUES RELATED TO TEACHER QUALITY

Two important features of NCLB underscore the importance of instruction. First is the emphasis on having well-qualified teachers instructing all students, especially those at risk for school failure. Second is the emphasis on instructional practice based on educational research, that is, evidence-based practice. Well-qualified teachers and related educational specialists are essential both for early identification of students who have difficulty with early reading requirements and for tailoring reading instruction that results in mastery and continued achievement.

One consequence of this legislation is that states and school districts are under great pressure to guarantee a skilled teacher in every regular education classroom. The legislation requires that all teachers of core academic subjects (English, reading/language arts, math, science, foreign language, civics/government, economics, history, geography, arts, etc.) must be highly qualified. This

means that regular education teachers must hold a state license or certificate in teaching, demonstrate competence in the subject(s) they teach, and also be able to demonstrate subject matter knowledge on the standardized tests that states select.

One question regarding the emphasis on quality teachers is: What is an effective teacher? The short answer is: One whose students learn. The effective teacher is an individual with deep knowledge of the subject matter taught, and sufficient pedagogical expertise and experience to be effective with all students. One definition of an “effective teacher” is one whose students achieve at the proficient, or competent, level on a given state’s high-stakes assessments. As desirable as this sounds, this general description of the effective teacher is narrow and vague. Poor students and students of color do underachieve in school for a variety of complex reasons, but it is clear that they often enter school lagging behind their peers in academic preparation. Although schools may have little control over what happens before students come to school, they are able to guarantee that all students receive the single most important resource to reach their potential, specifically, highly qualified teachers. One continuing issue related to opportunity to learn, however, is that research has shown that well-prepared teachers often choose not to teach in communities with “at-risk” students (Peske & Haycock, 2006). When they do, they sometimes encounter little support; therefore, they are not as effective as they might be in higher-achieving middle-class schools.

### RESEARCH AND THEORY ABOUT EFFECTIVE AND EXEMPLARY TEACHING

A major concern in the study of exemplary teachers is to find a reliable and valid way to identify who is exemplary and to describe what these teachers do in their classrooms. Investigators have undertaken this task in several ways. Researchers have identified teachers as exemplary based on the following criteria:

- Selecting teachers with students who have excellent test scores in literacy achievement over a period of time.
- Selecting teachers whose students’ test scores are beyond what would be expected from children considered “at risk” from schools that beat the odds.
- Selecting teachers based on administrator recommendations.
- Selecting teachers nominated by their peers.
- Selecting teachers nominated by parents.
- Selecting teachers nominated by students.

Researchers have used some or all of these characteristics when selecting samples to study (Block, 2001; Morrow & Casey, 2003; Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 1999; Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, &

Rodriquez, 2002; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, Rankin, & Mistretta, 1997). Taylor, Pearson, and Clark (2000), for example, studied the literacy practices of exemplary teachers in schools that beat the odds. Students in these teachers' classrooms were considered to be at risk due to family poverty, yet they scored well in literacy achievement. Two teachers in grades K–3 in 14 schools across the United States participated in the study. Each teacher was observed five times, from December to April, for 1 hour of reading instruction. Teachers also completed a written survey, kept a weekly log of reading and writing activities in their classrooms, and were interviewed in May of that school year. These effective teachers focused on small-group instruction, provided time for independent reading, monitored student on-task behaviors, and initiated strong home communication. The teachers also focused on explicit phonics instruction and the application of phonics in the context of reading and writing, asked high-level comprehension questions, and were more likely to ask students to write their responses to reading.

In a related study to determine exemplary practice, Wharton-McDonald and colleagues (1997) meticulously collected and described through surveys and interviews the most important literacy practices and routines among 89 K–3 regular education and 10 special education teachers identified by administrators as exemplary. These exemplary teachers were described by their peers and supervisors as “masterful” in the classroom, managing time, materials, and student behavior with finesse. These effective teachers held high expectations for their students and had a real sense of purpose, direction, and objectives. Topping the list of classroom characteristics and instructional practices reported by these effective, primary-level teachers was—not surprisingly—a literate classroom environment. In addition, these educators provided explicit instruction in literacy (reading and writing) skills, strategies, and concepts. They provided daily doses of both contextualized and isolated skills and strategy instruction, access to varied reading materials, and a variety of ways to engage students in reading and writing. They adapted instruction to the ability levels or needs of their students, worked to motivate students to engage in reading and writing, and consistently monitored student engagement and literacy progress through systematic accountability.

Morrow, Tracey, Woo, and Pressley (1999) intensively observed six exemplary teachers from three different school districts. Teachers selected to be observed for the study were nominated by school administrators, peers, parents, and students. The selection process also included checking these six teachers' student achievement scores over the preceding 5 years to confirm the effects of their exemplary status on student achievement measures. Approximately 25 hours of observation, as well as individual interviews, were completed on each of the six teachers. The major finding was that these six exemplary teachers provided “literacy-rich environments.” Within these literacy-rich classrooms, teachers orchestrated a variety of learning settings, such as whole-class, small-group, one-on-one, and teacher-directed learning centers and social interactions with adults and peers. A rich variety of print and print-producing materials were available for the children's use on a daily basis. Teachers provided various instruction, such as spontaneous,

authentic, explicit, direct, systematic, meaning-oriented, problem-solving, and open-ended approaches. They engaged children on a daily basis in shared, guided, oral, silent, independent, collaborative, and performance reading and writing. They provided regular writing, word analysis, and comprehension instruction. Moreover, they made consistent efforts to connect reading and writing instruction to thematic content taught at other times of the day. Many of these same effective practices and instructional routines were reported and confirmed 2 years later by Cantrell (1999a, 1999b) in her study of the effects of literacy instruction on primary students' reading and writing achievement.

In summary, the time distribution among regular literacy activities and lessons, and the focus of these lessons, exert measurable influences on young children's literacy growth and development. Effective teachers are masterful classroom managers who balance their instructional time, emphases, and content among a variety of alternative literacy learning activities. Effective literacy learning activities are integrally linked to activities in other parts of the day and curriculum; have an explicit purpose, with learning tasks clearly defined; and engage students across a wide variety of social settings. Synthesis of investigations about exemplary literacy practice in the elementary grades, such as those we have described, indicate that exemplary literacy teachers share the following characteristics: (1) They provide explicit literacy instruction; (2) engage students in constructive exchanges with the teacher; (3) create a supportive, encouraging, and friendly atmosphere; (4) weave reading and writing throughout the curriculum; (5) integrate content-area themes into the teaching of reading and writing; (6) create a literacy-rich environment in their classrooms, with a variety of literacy materials to support instruction; (7) teach to individual needs in small-group settings; (8) have excellent organization and management skills; and (9) develop strong connections with students' parents. Teachers include daily organization and management routines, and organize their instruction so that the environment is filled with the necessary reading and writing materials to support that instruction, purposefully placed for accessibility when needed. There are explicit instructions and time for periods of social interaction for learning in whole-group, small-group, and one-on-one settings. The teacher provides many formats for reading and writing: reading aloud, shared reading, independent reading, collaborative reading, guided reading, performance of reading activities, partner/buddy reading, literature circles, and content-area reading. The teacher organizes the following writing activities: shared writing, journal writing, independent writing, reader response writing, collaborative writing, writing fiction and nonfiction, guided writing, performance of writing activities, content-area writing, and writing workshop (e.g., Allington, Johnston, & Day, 2002; Block, 2001; Cantrell, 1999a, 1999b; Morrow et al., 1999; Morrow & Casey, 2003; Pressley et al., 1996; Pressley et al., 1997; Taylor et al., 1999, 2002; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997). While many of the researchers phrase their findings differently, the categories are remarkably similar.

Exemplary language arts classrooms are informed by sociocultural theory. According to this theory, student learning is dependent on social interaction that

is heavily scaffolded, and on social organization of contexts that allows students to transform what they know with important academic knowledge and skills (Vygotsky, 1978). Well-organized classrooms are collaborative communities, with teachers guiding instruction and student participation. These rich learning contexts take into consideration the relationships among the teacher, the student, the community of the classroom, and the larger community of the school. The socio-cultural perspective is based on the belief that a community of learning occurs among individuals in a well-organized and -managed classroom that is responsive to student learning needs and existing knowledge and skills, including those from home and community settings.

Although many studies of exemplary teaching imply a concern for diversity, and attention to policy and equity, a gap in this research results because these terms are often not explicitly used, nor are concerns for differences in language and cultural background given prominence.

## OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

This book deals with issues of social class, dialect, first language, power, and privilege. The intended audience is college professors and their graduate and undergraduate students. It is also intended for classroom teachers of reading and reading specialists in districts with children from diverse backgrounds.

The stage is set for the book in a foreword with a most appropriate title: "Every Child Must Be Visible If We Are to Succeed as a World-Class Nation." This important piece is written by Professor Emeritus Edmund W. Gordon (from Columbia University).

The book is divided into four major parts. Part I addresses perspectives about learning and diverse students. Special issues concerning literacy, diversity, equity, and policy are discussed in Part II. Strategies for teaching children from diverse backgrounds are elaborated in Part III, and preparation of literacy teachers to teach children with diverse languages, cultures, and experiences is discussed in Part IV.

Part I begins with Chapter 1 by Honorine Nocon (from the University of Colorado at Denver) and Michael Cole (University of California at San Diego), who provide a historical context and discuss theory related to issues about diversity and literacy. In Chapter 2, policy related to diversity and literacy is discussed by Eugene E. García (from Arizona State University) and Ann-Marie Wiese (WestEd). Iliana Reyes, Leisy Wyman, Norma González, Eliane Rubinstein-Ávila, Karen Spear-Ellinwood, Perry Gilmore, and Luis C. Moll (all from the University of Arizona) share ideas about the discourse patterns of diverse students outside of school in Chapter 3. An area of utmost importance when we talk about diversity is family. In Chapter 4, Patricia A. Edwards (from Michigan State University), Jeanne R. Paratore (Boston University), and Nancy L. Roser (University of Texas



at Austin) discuss family literacy and the importance of recognizing cultural significance. In Chapter 5, poverty and its effect on literacy are discussed by Pedro Portes (from the University of Georgia) and Spencer Salas (University of North Carolina). English language learners and literacy development are discussed by Robert T. Jiménez and Brad L. Teague (both from Vanderbilt University) in Chapter 6.

Part II highlights special issues concerning literacy. It begins with Chapter 7 by Cynthia H. Brock (from the University of Nevada), Gwendolyn Thompson McMillon (Oakland University), Julie L. Pennington and Dianna Townsend (University of Nevada), and Diane Lapp (San Diego State University), which discusses teacher talk and academic English development. In Chapter 8, Cheryl McLean, Erica Boling, and Jennifer Rowsell (all from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey) look at engaging diverse students in multiple literacies in and out of school. This is followed in Chapter 9 by a discussion of the consequences of new literacies, poverty, and NCLB by Donald J. Leu, Gregory McVerry, W. Ian O'Byrne, Lisa Zawilinski (all from the University of Connecticut), Jill Castek (University of California Berkeley), and Douglas K. Hartman (Michigan State University), who find that the diverse students who often require the most assistance frequently receive the least. The next topic, in Chapter 10, focusing on guiding children from diverse backgrounds to become engaged readers, is written by John T. Guthrie (from the University of Maryland), Robert Rueda (University of Southern California), Linda B. Gambrell (Clemson University), and Danette A. Morrison (University of Maryland). Defining informal learning and describing such activities with children from diverse backgrounds is then discussed in Chapter 11 by Kris Gutiérrez (from the University of California Los Angeles) and Carol D. Lee (Northwestern University). Georgia Earnest García and Eurydice B. Bauer (both from the University of Illinois), in Chapter 12, discuss assessment of student progress as a guide to planning appropriate instruction. Finally, in Chapter 13, D. Ray Reutzel (from the Utah State University), Lesley Mandel Morrow (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey), and Heather Casey (Rider University) discuss organizing and managing the language arts program with children from diverse backgrounds.

In Part III, the authors present strategies appropriate for teaching children from diverse backgrounds. Chapter 14 deals with language development in first and second languages by María S. Carlo (from the University of Miami). In Chapter 15, Linnea C. Ehri (from the City University of New York) presents studies on acquiring knowledge about print, specifically, phonological awareness and phonics. Issues related to vocabulary development are shared in Chapter 16 by Susan Watts Taffe (from the University of Cincinnati), and Camille L. Z. Blachowicz and Peter J. Fisher (both from National-Louis University). Comprehension through the construction of meaning with expository and narrative texts is discussed in Chapter 17 by Susie M. Goodin and P. David Pearson (both from the University of California Berkeley), and Catherine M. Weber and Taffy E. Raphael (from the University of Illinois, Chicago). The last strategy dealt with in this section addresses

ways to help diverse learners become fluent readers, and is discussed in Chapter 18 by Melanie R. Kuhn (from Boston University) and Timothy Rasinski (Kent State University).

The fourth and final major part in the book is about preparing teachers to teach literacy to children who have diverse languages, cultures, and experiences. Chapter 19 by Django Paris (from Arizona State University) and Arnetta F. Ball (Stanford University) addresses teacher education that connects teachers' and children's knowledge. Next, in Chapter 20, Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher (both from San Diego State University) discuss how to mentor teachers of children from diverse backgrounds during their induction year. Finally, Chapter 21, by Margarita Calderón (from Johns Hopkins University), discusses professional development that helps teachers continue to understand how to teach children from diverse backgrounds.

We began the book with a foreword to set the stage; we end with an afterword—entitled “From ‘Just a Teacher’ to Justice in Teaching,” by Eric J. Cooper (from the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education)—to reflect.

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