

## Curriculum Trends in Reading

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### Hawaii Has Culturally Compatible Reading

One of the challenges facing all of us in education today is to provide instruction for a population of children which is increasingly less white-European-middle class. Census data and our own observations as we walk through schools reveal classrooms with high concentrations of children from what have been ethnic minorities but which, in some cities, are now ethnic majorities.

The Kamehameha Educational Research Institute has for many years been involved in developing instructional programs which promote achievement among native Hawaiian children. These children have not traditionally performed well in school and would as a group be expected to score somewhere in the 30th percentile. Children who have spent two consecutive years in the Kamehameha model classrooms now, on the average, score at the 50th percentile.

The program was begun in a laboratory school and has now been exported to approximately 65 classrooms in five public schools. The schools on the islands of Oahu, Kauai, and Hawaii are in mostly rural areas and serve populations which are 35-100 percent Hawaiian. Teachers volunteer to be part of the program and are given extensive training over a two-year period of time. The thrust of this training is to help teachers set up classroom procedures and environments which are culturally compatible with Hawaiian children and to ensure that, from the beginning, reading instruction is meaning oriented.

Kathy Au of the Institute, cites three different features which are markers of cultural compatibility: an open door policy, a classroom set up in many learning centers, and reading discussion

carried on in "talk-story" style. Au explains that these three features reflect characteristics of the Hawaiian family structure, a structure in which children at home have many responsibilities. They care for and teach young siblings, and view cooperation as more important than individual achievement.

The open door policy permits children to enter the classrooms as soon as they arrive at school. There, they take the responsibility for setting up the 10-12 learning centers which they will use that day. The teacher is trained to allow the children to take the initiative and responsibility at school which they are used to taking at home. And when children work in these learning centers, they work cooperatively. Au describes the learning centers as being busy with "lots of little teachers out there—just like they are used to doing at home." When meeting with the teacher in reading group, the teacher encourages cooperation in producing responses to questions. Individual children are not called on. Rather the group talks among themselves to come up with a good answer.

To achieve the goal of meaning-oriented reading instruction, teachers learn to spend two-thirds of their time on comprehension instruction. This includes modeling the thinking process involved in comprehension and asking questions which focus on higher level interpretive skills. Basals are used for group reading, but the instruction in the teacher manual is modified so that these goals can be achieved.

I have known about the Kamehameha project for many years now. I must admit that I find it difficult to imagine classrooms of 25-30 children and one teacher in which this level of cooperation and responsibility is achieved on a daily basis. The data from this project indicates that children who traditionally score at the bottom of the scale on achievement tests can be taught in a way

that brings their achievement up to national norms. As we all face more "ethnically different" children in our classrooms we can look to the Kamehameha project as a model of how to determine relevant cultural characteristics and how to develop a program which works with rather than against the cultural predispositions of the children. I think all of us who are concerned about the future of our schools owe it to ourselves and our schools to take a trip to Hawaii and see this for ourselves!

For more information or directions on how to get there, contact Kathy Au, Kamehameha Educational Research Institute, 1850 Makuakane St., Honolulu, HI 96817.

### Metacognition—or—Who's in Charge?

It is impossible to go to a reading meeting these days and not hear the term "metacognition." Is metacognition just the latest new research fad or does it have lasting implications for schools and for reading instruction. Wagoner ("Comprehension Monitoring," *Reading Research Quarterly*, Spring 1985, p. 329) defines metacognition as including the questions: "What do readers know about what they comprehend and how they comprehend? Do they know when they comprehend adequately and when they do not? How do readers determine when comprehension is indeed adequate? What kind of compensatory strategies do readers use when they realize they are not comprehending what they read?" These significant questions form the core of metacognition.

Based on available research (see the RRQ article mentioned above and Armbruster, B.B.; Echols, C.H.; and Brown, A.L. "The Role of Metacognition in Reading to Learn": A Developmental Perspective, *Reading Education Report* 40, Center for the Study of Reading, April 1983), younger and

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poorer readers are significantly less aware of what they do as they read and less able to do anything to "fix up" their comprehension when they run into problems. The variety of things younger and poorer readers are apparently unaware of and unable to do anything about is too broad to be reviewed here, but a few examples will serve to demonstrate that these are not erudite skills. Children below seventh grade seem to be unable to determine the important ideas in a text from the unimportant ones. How then do they know what to focus on as they attend to and study text? Of elementary children, only sixth grade good readers were able to adjust their reading when given such diverse purposes as: *read as quickly as possible for only one piece of information or read to study*. Looking back in the text to answer a question about which you are unsure is a "fix up" strategy. Below sixth grade good readers, children did not look back. When instructed to look back, they looked back equally for information which had been presented in the text and for information which clearly had to come from their own experience and knowledge.

While the research is still at a beginning stage, it is shocking to discover that so much of what we thought children "naturally" did as they read, it appears they don't do until much later than we assumed and that poor readers may never learn to do. Metacognition research is forcing us to look not just at what we teach children to do under the direction of the teacher, but what they internalize and become able to do independently as they read and study. The research so far suggests that we need to teach for independence and to not con-

sider something taught until we see children independently applying it. The look at children's metacognitive abilities may enable us to teach children so that they can take charge of their own learning.

### The Great Readability Debate

The ideas that materials in all subject areas should be at the appropriate readability level for the grade level is one of the most commonly accepted notions in education today. Why then would a national meeting of reading researchers sponsor a session titled: *A Debate—Resolved that readability formulae have outlived their usefulness for grading the difficulty of school materials?* What would there be to debate? To an SRO crowd at the National Reading Conference meeting in Austin, Richard C. Anderson of the Center for the Study of Reading argued against the use of readability formulae. Edward Fry of Rutgers University (and Fry Readability Graph fame) argued for the formulae. No winner was declared, but the arguments set forth opposing readability should be considered seriously by all people involved in textbook adoption decisions.

All readability formulae are based on the notion that long words and long sentences make material harder to read. On the face of it, this argument appears unassailable. But consider some of the points made by Anderson. For "naturally occurring text"—that is, text not specifically written to readability, the word and sentence length variables are good indicators of difficulty. *But, because publishers are required to meet established readability levels, they must write and rewrite materials to readability.* This sentence (italicized) has a higher

readability than this rewritten version: *Publishers must meet established readability levels. They write materials to readability. Sometimes, they rewrite to it.* As you can see, the two versions have essentially the same meaning. The second version, because the sentences are short and because some concept words (readability) are replaced with short pronouns (it), has a lower readability. Anderson argued that in order to achieve a lower readability score, causal links are removed (*because, since, although*) when one long sentence is chopped into several smaller ones. Long words are often replaced with words requiring the reader to remember the referent and thus materials written to readability are peppered with words such as *this, it, them, and these*. Anderson suggests that materials written to readability may have lower readability scores but in actuality be harder to comprehend. Anderson called for us to substitute the concept of "comprehensibility" for the concept of "readability."

Fry rebutted that readability formulae were never intended to be used to rewrite materials, that Anderson had no objective way to measure comprehensibility, that until something better came along, readability formulae had worked for years and were the best measure we had. Anderson responded that "if the best medicine available killed the patient, it would be better to use no medicine." The debate heated up and was continued over dinner and in dark corners throughout the conference in Austin. The answers are not yet in, but all of us who want materials children can understand must consider if readability formulae are helping us—or hindering us—from reaching that goal. □

## PAT LINES

**Case note—student initiated religious activity upheld where school made facilities available to students for virtually any purpose.**

The United States Supreme Court decided last year that students on a univer-

sity campus had the right, under the first amendment's guarantee of freedom of religion, to meet on campus for religious purposes. The Court did not indicate that this ruling—under its so-called open forum doctrine—would apply to secondary schools. However, it seems

the basic principles do apply. If a secondary school has opened up a public forum, then it may not close it selectively based on the content of the expression expected by those utilizing the forum.

A district court in Pennsylvania has now ruled that the Williamsport Area

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