

CHAPTER 5

Adolescents Who Struggle with Literacy

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In this chapter, we refer to *literacy* as a lifelong continuum of experiences with the processing, interpretation, and production of texts of all sorts. We consider the factors that influence the struggles that some adolescents experience in accomplishing the kind of literacy tasks that are valued in schools and that influence social and economic mobility. Whereas discussions of literacy struggles typically address pedagogical issues as the primary factors to influence development, our review of the research literature emphasizes that hope for struggling adolescent literacy learners derives from the interplay of three domains: (1) the establishment of supportive and trusting relationships between teachers and learners; (2) the cultivation of partnerships among families, their communities, and the schools; and (3) the refinement of teaching practices that connect with the lives of learners in a culturally and socially responsive way.

Any discussion of adolescents who struggle with literacy invites definitions of *literacy* and of *struggling adolescents*. In the climate of assessment and accountability engendered by the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), school leaders who aggregate achievement test data see time and again that, as a group, the learners for whom English is a second language and learners from low-income homes are the adolescents who appear to be struggling with literacy. As noted by Smith and Wilhelm (chapter 23, this volume), one could also add adolescent males as another pertinent—and vulnerable—subgroup. Of course, in an NCLB context, literacy is defined in large part by how learners perform on standardized assessments of reading.

From our perspective, literacy is not a static level of language achievement that separates the *literate* from the *illiterate*. Instead, *literacy* refers to a lifelong continuum of experiences with the processing, interpretation, and production of texts of all sorts. Other commentators in this volume (see, e.g., Langer, Chapter 4, Schoenbach & Greenleaf, Chapter 7, Marshall, Chapter 8, and Rhodes & Robnolt, Chapter 11) explore the many contexts, facets, and complexities of literacy. For our purposes in this chapter, though, we consider the factors that influence the struggles that some adolescents experience in accomplishing the literacy tasks that are valued in schools and that influence social and economic mobility.

Gee (1989) provides a frame for thinking

about literacy that is germane to the discussion. He notes that as an individual emerges as a literate person, he or she develops a primary discourse and is immersed in a discourse community. Gee insists that one's identity is inextricably bound to one's discourse, and he notes the challenges confronting a learner who attempts to move in and out of different discourse communities. From this perspective, an obvious source of the struggle for many adolescents is that their primary discourse does not match readily with the literacy activities sponsored by schools and inherent in many academic assessments. At the same time, Delpit (1996) and Lee (2005) offer encouragement to educators to help all students to develop a positive sense of self and to recognize their potential to navigate through the discourses that dominate schools and their assessments.

As we discuss the ongoing concern for adolescents who struggle with literacy, we focus primarily on reading and writing. Although most suggestions regarding intervention for struggling learners typically address pedagogical issues as the primary factors to influence development, we recognize from our review of the related literature that the potential for struggling adolescent literacy learners derives from the interplay of three domains: (1) the establishment of supportive and trusting relationships between teachers and learners; (2) the cultivation of partnerships among families, their communities, and the schools; and (3) the refinement of teaching practices that connect with the lives of learners in a culturally responsive way.

TEACHING PRACTICES IN READING

Johannessen (2004) points out that the traditional approach to dealing with low-achieving or struggling students is through compensatory education; however, he maintains that this widely accepted prescription for teaching such students has largely failed. He points out that this prescription has attempted to remedy students' reading deficiencies by promoting a discreet skills approach to instruction; in other words, educators believed that the most effective way to reach these most reluctant students was through a heavy emphasis on basic

skills. The implication of this approach is that "lower track" students lack the skills they need to have meaningful transactions with literary texts. Johannessen (2004) maintains that a more productive approach to teaching struggling students is based on cognitive views of learning that focus on problem-solving learning tasks. Indeed, a number of researchers raise questions about the basics approach and suggest that a more productive approach to teaching struggling adolescent readers is based on cognitive views of learning. This view challenges the value of direct instruction that focuses on basic skills. Two prominent educators and psychologists who advocate such views of learning, and are critical of the basics approach to teaching struggling or at-risk adolescent readers, are Means and Knapp (1991). They argue that a summary of critiques of standard approaches to teaching academic skills to at-risk students offered by a prominent group of national experts in reading, writing, and mathematics education found that such approaches tend to:

1. underestimate what students are capable of doing; 2. postpone more challenging and interesting work for too long—in many cases, forever; 3. and deprive students of a meaningful or motivating context for learning or for employing the skills that are taught. (pp. 283–284)

Furthermore, Applebee (1989) argues that such basic approaches to learning tend to "focus on the mechanics of language and low-level recall at the expense of the reading and discussion of literature" (p. 35). Cognitive approaches offer hope for struggling adolescent literacy learners because they derive their strength from the interplay of three domains discussed above.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CLASSROOM DISCOURSE

Applebee (1996), Nystrand and Gamoran (1991), Nystrand (1997), and Nystrand (2006) maintain that classroom discourse has a powerful impact on shaping literacy skills as a result of how it establishes classroom epistemology. They maintain that what counts as knowledge and understanding in the classroom is largely shaped by the ques-

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teachers ask, how they respond to their students, and how they structure small-group and other instructional activities. As we argue, recitation and other monologic practices in teaching reading comprehension are largely ineffective, especially when compared with discussion and instructional conversation, because meaning is realized only in the process of active, responsive understanding. In other words, this research suggests that teaching practices that are based on discussion and instructional conversation have a powerful effect on reading comprehension in part because these practices foster supportive and trusting relationships between teachers and learners. Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, and Long (2003) found that the effects of using authentic, open-ended questions and uptake, a discussion strategy that involves turning a student response into a statement or a question in order to encourage further elaboration, were even more pronounced for struggling readers, negating the potentially negative effects of tracking, socioeconomic status (SES), race, and ethnicity. In a review of research on classroom discourse and reading comprehension, Nystrand (2006) argues that "this finding clarifies the critical importance of high-quality classroom discourse in English language arts instruction" (p. 403). He adds that it also makes clear the importance of quality classroom discourse for creating and sustaining supportive and trusting relationships between teachers and students. The research also indicates that struggling readers need teaching practices that connect to their lives in culturally responsive ways. Nystrand (2006) and Nystrand et al. (2003) examined more than 200 eighth- and high-grade English and social studies classrooms in 25 midwestern middle and high schools and found that using authentic questions and uptake by teachers expressed potentially negative effects of variables such as track, SES, race, and ethnicity on instruction and learning. It appears that using authentic questions and uptake can help students connect reading to their lives out of school. Langer (2001) even goes so far as to make the case that schools should make dialogue with students the central medium for teaching and learning. In a large-scale study conducted by the National Research Center on

English Learning and Achievement, Langer (2001 and Chapter 4, this volume) examined 25 schools in four states, 44 teachers, and 88 classes over a 2-year period each. The study focused on English language arts programs in schools that have a large proportion of poor-performing at-risk students. The study examined performances among schools that were demographically comparable. In other words, the study looked at schools that beat the odds, and the results found six features that permeated those schools:

- (1) Skills and knowledge are taught in a variety of types of lessons;
- (2) tests are analyzed "to inform curriculum and instruction";
- (3) the school curriculum and instruction encouraged connections "across content and structure to ensure coherence";
- (4) the curriculum and instruction emphasized "strategies for critical thinking and doing";
- (5) the school and/or curriculum and instruction encouraged "generative learning"; and
- (6) "classrooms are organized to foster collaboration and shared cognition." (Langer, 2001, p. 876)

What is most striking is that Langer maintained that it is the "whole cloth" environment that included all of these features that enabled students to internalize the knowledge, strategies, and skills to use on their own in and out of school. Langer (2001) maintained that making dialogue with students the central medium for teaching and learning may be one key way to bring about the complete environment of all of these features. For example, she described one practice observed in her study in which the teacher, or a more experienced peer, models a powerful thinking strategy for students by leading the class through a discussion aimed at interpreting a difficult text passage before asking students to try it on their own. This kind of modeling scaffolds the strategy for students as they learn how to use it. Indeed, much of the research discussed in this chapter might be linked to one or more of the six features that Langer identified in her study that characterize schools that performed far beyond expectations.

Another effective strategy that Langer

(2001) observed and that places dialogue with students at the center of classroom instruction is reciprocal teaching. According to Palincsar (1986) and Palincsar and Brown (1984, 1989), the goal of reciprocal teaching is to help students think deeply about what they read. In a series of studies, the researchers, working in small groups, taught struggling readers four strategies: summarizing, asking a question, clarifying, and predicting. These are strategies that skilled readers apply almost automatically, but poor readers seldom apply, or perhaps do not know how to apply. To use the strategies effectively, poorer readers need direct instruction, modeling, and practice in actual reading situations.

First, the teacher presents these strategies, usually focusing on one strategy each day. The teacher carefully explains and models each strategy and encourages students to practice. Next, the teacher and the students read a short passage silently. Then the teacher again provides a model by summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting, on the basis of the reading. The next step is that everyone reads another passage, and the students gradually begin to assume the teacher's role. Often the students' first attempts are halting and incorrect; but the teacher gives clues, guidance, encouragement, support in doing parts of the task, and models (scaffolds) to help the students master these strategies. The final goal is for students to learn to apply these strategies independently as they read so they can make sense of the text. A key element of reciprocal teaching is dialogue.

After many years of working with at-risk students in inner city alternative and charter high schools, Stern (1992, 1995), offers an approach that echoes some of the ideas expressed by Langer (2001), Palincsar (1986), and Palincsar and Brown (1984, 1989). Stern asserts that at-risk students need a balance of structure and spontaneity. She designed and taught a series of instructional units that contained a number of interesting features, such as a focus on comprehension and interpretive and/or critical thinking strategies, a mixture of conventional and unconventional works, connection to the lives of students outside school through addressing "everyday topics, artifacts and materials that serve as the critical bridge between

school and life," and dialogue through co-development of the units with students and numerous discussion activities, including oral presentations (1992, p. 53). Stern maintains that her work taught her that instruction for struggling students must treat their lives, "their realities," as a positive source for planning instruction rather than a liability that must be overcome. The curriculum, she argues, should reflect student experience, and larger goals and topics within courses should fit the students both academically and socially and, most important of all, "must be determined with them" (1992, p. 55). Finally, she asserts that instruction should involve students at all levels, including planning, teaching, and assessment.

Alvermann (2001) suggests that effective literacy instruction for adolescents must address the multiple literacies that young adolescents possess. According to this view, school-related literacy often favors print-based literacies over other types of competencies such as adolescents' ability to interact effectively with technologies. Alvermann believes that effective literacy instruction for adolescent learners must address self-efficacy and engagement in reading. Instruction also needs to help students perform their academic reading and writing tasks. Further, Alvermann calls for culturally responsive reading instruction for adolescents who struggle, as well as instruction that teaches students to read critically. Finally, effective instruction for all adolescents should foster the use of participatory approaches to reading such as readers workshops, book clubs, or discussion groups, as opposed to teacher-led reading formats. Alvermann (2001) suggests that instruction for struggling adolescents is appropriate when it "taps into struggling readers' funds of knowledge, encourages them to use their textbooks and other sources of information, and supports such usage through strategy instruction" (p. 15).

Guthrie and Davis (2003) concur with Alvermann and suggest teaching practices for middle school reading instruction that encourage engagement with reading. First, reading instructional practices need to emphasize strategies for the effective comprehension of texts. Explicit strategy instruction should include modeling of strategies, teacher support in the use of newly learned strate-

gies, and contexts that allow students to practice strategies independently (1992, 1995), Guthrie (2003) further assert that reading strategies should include what they read, the social interactions or occasions for reading, a variety of texts in different formats, and, finally, much like Stern, reading instruction should allow adolescents to choose topics to explore, to engage in dialogue, as well as context for interaction with their peers. For those students who struggle with reading, increasing the likelihood of success is the goal.

GIRLS AND BOYS WHO STRUGGLE WITH READING

Struggling adolescent girls in classroom instruction have different kinds of interaction with critical thinking and reading strategies. DeBlase (2003) studying eighth-grade girls interviewed 11 girls in order to understand and insights into their lives about the literature they read, in which they participated in thinking about texts, and regarding their reading experiences. The girls represented a variety of backgrounds, and most came from culturally challenging backgrounds. DeBlase found that the girls in her study readily to characters in literature who shared life experiences similar to their own. The girls in DeBlase's study expressed conflicts between their academic behavior and their popular culture behavior; the behavior of male cultural models often represented male behavior represented in reading assignments. DeBlase recommends that adolescent girls move away from female representations in the teaching of critical thinking in order to arm them with the traditional ways of reading, allowing girls to "question the authority of text" and recommends a variety of interactions in the classroom.

contexts that allow students time to practice strategies independently. Like (1992, 1995), Guthrie and Davis further assert that reading instruction should include what they refer to as real-life interactions or occasions to interact with a variety of texts in authentic ways. Much like Stern, these researchers allow adolescents some voice and choice in topics to explore through their reading, as well as contexts that encourage interaction with their peers and support for students who struggle, thereby enhancing the likelihood of engagement even

AND BOYS WHO STRUGGLE WITH READING

Reading adolescent girls may benefit from instruction that emphasizes different kinds of interaction or dialogue along with critical thinking and comprehension strategies. DeBlase (2003) spent 6 months studying eighth-grade girls. The researcher interviewed 11 girls in order to gain understanding and insights into their perceptions of the literature they read, the contexts in which they participated in reading and thinking about texts, and their thinking regarding their reading experiences. The girls represented a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, and most came from economically challenging backgrounds. DeBlase found that the girls in her study related more to characters in their reading who had life experiences similar to their own. The girls in DeBlase's (2003) study experienced conflicts between the texts they read and their popular cultural models of female behavior; the behavior of their female popular cultural models often clashed with the female behavior represented in their classroom reading assignments. DeBlase's findings led her to recommend that one way to help adolescent girls move away from stereotypical representations in texts is through teaching of critical reading strategies in order to arm them with the ability to question the traditional ways of being female and encourage girls to "question and problematize the authority of text" (p. 634). She recommended a variety of interactive reading arrangements in the classroom such as discussion

groups and opportunities to read and discuss multiple texts that offer depictions of females in real-life situations where girls can see themselves and other women they know.

Gender and its relationship to the literacy of adolescent boys has received its share of concern in the literature as well. In a study involving 49 middle and high school boys, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) sought to better understand adolescent boys' poor performance and subsequent declines in reading performance on a variety of measures, as compared with the performance of girls of the same age. Smith and Wilhelm used interview data of boys' literate activities in and out of school to conclude that the boys in their study often turned away from reading activities in school because they found it difficult to perform well on most of the reading tasks they were asked to do in school. The boys in their study tended to gravitate toward and become engaged in activities that would make them feel more competent, such as photography, sports, or mountain biking. The results of this study indicate that adolescent boys feel that school texts are too difficult, that they are often asked to read unfamiliar genres, that they therefore feel unsuccessful, and that they routinely feel unsupported by teachers in their reading classrooms. Smith and Wilhelm concluded that boys, indeed all students, benefit from activities that pique their interest in the texts they are asked to read as well as supportive contexts, such as assistance from capable peers and other expert readers, in order for them to gain a sense of accomplishment in reading. The data from their study indicates that because of the ways in which boys encounter reading in school they often dislike and reject it. What can schools do to reverse this disturbing situation? Smith and Wilhelm argue it is very important that reading programs provide instruction that involves dialogue as a major component of teaching and learning.

Extending the scope of their recommendations from their 2002 study, Smith and Wilhelm (2006) argue further that schools need to connect outside-of-school literacy to school purposes and encourage students to continue to grow as readers and writers. They maintain that boys' and girls' engagement is crucial in literacy learning. They provide a variety of high-interest prereading

or "frontloading" activities and show teachers how to create units of instruction that will engage struggling readers in learning strategies crucial to comprehension and interpretation of literature.

"LEARNING-CENTERED" INSTRUCTION

In a similar manner, Wilhelm, Baker, and Dube (2001) note that students' reading skills do not grow automatically to meet the demands of reading challenging texts in middle and high school. Struggling readers, especially, need assistance in learning how to read, not just what to read. Wilhelm et al. question the value of what they term "student-centered" and "teacher-centered" instruction and offer in its place a "learning-centered" approach to reading. Their "learner-centered" approach places a premium on "scaffolding" instruction, providing numerous kinds of "frontloading exercises." Many of these activities involve drama, as well as "quick-writes," opinionnaire, scenario, and role-playing activities that are designed to engage students and prepare them for complex reading tasks. Wilhelm et al. place an emphasis on learning how to learn and making students active participants in their own education, thus becoming part of a classroom community of learners. Many of their sample activities tap into students' own experiences outside school, and they argue that an inquiry approach, one that makes problem solving and critical thinking key features of instruction, is crucial to helping students learn how to learn. The authors indicate that their students have pursued projects that inquired into the role of sports in American culture and social justice issues in their school, town, and nation, and attempted to define the nature of good romantic relationships, among many other issues. Another feature of their approach is that interaction in the classroom, with high levels of student talk, is an essential feature of instruction that makes reading processes visible and available to students. Modeling by the teacher and more experienced peers and practice in different contexts with a variety of strategies are key elements of their approach to helping students learn comprehension and interpretive strategies that they will

use in the English classroom and in lives as well.

In a long-term study of six adolescent readers, Wilhelm (1997) examined engaged and struggling readers. He found that using drama and visual art is a powerful way to encourage less proficient readers to participate more fully in literacy activities and experiences. Participatory activities such as role playing or dramatic reenactments of scenes from stories can offer struggling readers multiple opportunities to interact with texts in active ways. In addition, participatory activities may foster engagement and build confidence and competence in less proficient readers. This study reinforces the findings of Wilhelm et al.'s (2001) work because both focus on the kinds of instruction that encourages a high level of student engagement.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR ENRICHED READING

Wilhelm et al.'s (2001) "frontloading exercises" provide one approach to prereading or introductory activities that can scaffold reading skills and strategies for struggling readers. Smagorinsky, McCann, and Kersh (1987) and Smagorinsky (1993) offer a variety of activities designed to engage students in thinking strategies that are key to comprehending and interpreting literature. These activities prepare students for reading and interpreting complex texts, and Smagorinsky et al. (1987) also offer activities that can connect reading to writing.

Johannessen (2004) focuses specifically on a scenario-based prereading activity for struggling readers. McCann (1996) focuses on a simulation activity to prepare students for reading and writing about complex literature. Johannessen (2004) and McCann (1996) recommend that the use of these activities to initiate the reading of classroom texts, which is similar to Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) recommendations, relies on inquiry units to read and study literature. Similarly, Tatum (2005) uses a comprehensive framework of literacy teaching to help Black adolescent struggling readers. In addition, Kahn, Walter, and Johannessen (1984) offer a comparable approach with an emphasis on activities, including prereading ac-

that encourage comprehension of literature and use in a classroom context. A critical thinking and similar approach specifically for struggling readers, Hammett (1997) examines the impact of a unit on two lower-trace classrooms. The students to which direct instructional strategies would be management with literature that students took a quick literary texts, read books made personal connections. Authors report that play strategies at the center of the teacher from end of interpretation and helps recognize priority in the classroom. Students in the study were interactions with literature. Students included focused narrative setting with strategies they could experience as that literature can provide is interesting to not. Wilhelm's (2002) model, active instructional practice, variety of cultural backgrounds. Components of Tatum's (2005) comprehensive literacy teaching work with African American students, careful examination suggests that such approaches for students who struggle. Indeed, all of these approaches of what struggling students of instruction and opportunities for growth engagement, as well as strategies for reading beyond.

These approaches should focus on complex and problems so that writing can be in the inquiry, and they embed in the context of including reading composing skills in interactive writing activities or in they make connections school experiences model critical thinking.

that encourage comprehension and interpretation of literature and writing about it in a classroom context that emphasizes critical thinking and discussion. In a similar approach specifically focused on struggling readers, Hamel and Smith (2001) examine the impact of an inquiry-based unit on two lower-track secondary classrooms. The study examines the extent to which direct instruction of specific interpretive strategies would promote critical engagement with literature. The study reports that students took a questioning stance toward literary texts, read between the lines, and made personal connections. In addition, the authors report that placing interpretive strategies at the center of the curriculum freed the teacher from endorsing a particular interpretation and helps redistribute literary authority in the classroom. Although the students in the study were capable of complex interactions with literature, the key ingredients included focused practice in a collaborative setting with specific criteria so that they could experience the rich transactions that literature can provide.

It is interesting to note that Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) model, which focuses on effective instructional practices for boys from a variety of cultural backgrounds, shares key components of Tatum's (2005) model for responsive literacy teaching, as based on his work with African American boys. Furthermore, careful examination of such practices suggests that such approaches would benefit all students who struggle with reading. Indeed, all of these approaches extend the notion of what struggling readers need in terms of instruction and offer increased opportunities for growth in self-concept and engagement, as well as mastery of skills and strategies for reading in the classroom and beyond.

These approaches share common features that focus on complex meaningful questions and problems so that students' reading and writing can be in the service of genuine inquiry, and they embed basic skills instruction in the context of more global tasks by including reading comprehension and composing skills in introductory reading and writing activities or instruction. Furthermore, they make connections to students' out-of-school experiences and cultures, and they model critical thinking strategies for stu-

dents and utilize various types of discussions to help students figure out a difficult reading passage before they are asked to make interpretations on their own. These approaches also provide scaffolding to enable students to accomplish complex reading tasks, encourage students to use multiple approaches, and involve students in describing their answers aloud to the class so that all students hear different ways to solve problems. Most important, these approaches make dialogue with students the centerpiece of teaching and learning, and they use strategies that will help students internalize the questions that good readers ask when they read literature.

RESEARCH ON THE TEACHING OF WRITING

In considering how to support struggling adolescents as they develop writing skills, it is reasonable to turn first to the research about effective approaches to the teaching writing generally. The teaching of writing is a complicated business, but Hillocks (1984, 1986, 1995, 2005) provides the reader of the research with a useful framework for assessing a large body of literature and offers accessible language for categorizing treatments and talking about the data. Hillocks (1984, 1986) classifies treatments under four *modes* of instruction: *presentational*, *environmental*, *individualized*, and *natural process*. *Presentational* instruction features teacher lecture and large-group discussion led by the teacher. A presentational mode of instruction is comparable to what Goodlad (1984) describes as a "frontal" style of teaching in most classrooms. In contrast, an *environmental* approach engages students in problem-centered activities that allow for high levels of student interaction. For writing instruction, students would, for example, work with each other in examining a body of data and work out processes that are appropriate to a particular writing task. In his meta-analysis comparison of the four modes of instruction for writing, Hillocks (1984, 1986) reports that instruction in the environmental mode resulted in greater mean effect sizes than instruction in the presentational, natural process, or individualized mode. These results indicate that instruction in the envi-

ronmental mode can hold great promise for improving students' writing skills.

In addition to comparing four modes of instruction, Hillocks groups experimental treatment studies by *focus* of instruction: *grammar/mechanics*, *models*, *sentence combining*, *scales*, *inquiry*, and *free writing*. A comparison of the relative effects of the six foci of instruction suggests that instruction that focuses on the practice of *inquiry* can have the greatest effect in developing students' writing.

Hillocks (1986) discusses at some length Troyka's (1974) study that focused on the effects on writing quality that were produced through the use of simulation role-playing activities. Hillocks reports that the overall experimental/control effect size for the Troyka study was 1.69 standard deviations. This effect was so large that it represented an outlier and could not be included in the meta-analysis. The experimental treatment in the Troyka study had these features:

1. The students worked toward solving a particular policy question.
2. The teachers provided students with relevant data that they could use in their analysis.
3. The students recognized a specific context for addressing the policy question.
4. The students worked with particular strategies for making sense of the data and addressing the problem.
5. The activities relied on purposeful peer interaction.

The results from the Troyka study and from others in the Hillocks meta-analysis suggest that an *inquiry* approach, in which students interact with each other in the process of analyzing data and responding to particular policy questions, can be an effective way to teach writing.

Hillocks, Kahn, and Johannessen (1983) report that students who had been engaged in extended discussions about problem-based scenarios developed related composing strategies for writing extended definitions. Under the experimental condition, the students work in small groups to discuss the scenarios. The students make judgments about the appropriateness of the actions of the characters in the scenarios. Through discussion, the students engage in the processes for de-

fining. They offer criterion statements and explain why they think they are appropriate. In the discussion, group members challenge the speaker to defend the statements. It is common for students to offer other scenarios that test the validity of each other's observations. Students learn defining strategies by engaging in the defining process with peers: stating defining criteria, offering examples to illustrate the general ideas, and explaining the connection between the general assertions and the examples.

The essential element in the Troyka (1974) study was the use of role-playing simulations to teach students to use a variety of strategies to analyze and compose. Simulations like those used in the Troyka study have these features in common:

1. A carefully constructed simulation immerses a student in an environment that has much in common with his or her own world.
2. Each participant usually has a clearly defined role and functions according to the rules of the environment.
3. Students attempt solutions to a problem with which they are familiar or that has a connection to their lives.
4. Students have data available to help them complete their tasks.
5. Students interact with each other—to plan, to negotiate, to argue, to resolve. These interactions engage students in thinking about issues and allow them to rehearse their approach to ideas before writing.
6. The simulation, especially if there is some sort of game component, provides motivation for subsequent reading and writing.

The approaches to the teaching of writing that have the greatest positive effect on learners in general offer the greatest promise for supporting learners who struggle with literacy learning. The examples above are two among many possibilities for engaging struggling learners in an inquiry process that can support their development as writers. In each case, students focus their attention on a specific problem: In one case, they attempt to define a standard; in other cases they defend a policy through logical argument. The students interact with each other so that

direct their discussion rather than filter her. The students engage appropriate to the writing. To explain, they illustrate these activities have been (201) associates with E. programs that "beat the" whose participation in cohort groups in several authorities of approaches to environmental mode. How to promote a tool for descriptive. Smith (1984) explains how to overcome their. Johannessen, Kahn offer a design for sequential writing in an environment. (1984) offer approaches about literature. Smagorinsky offer thinking strategies to write and to connect reading. Hafertepe and apart common writing ways to help students collect the data needed for their compositions. (2006) and McCann Smagorinsky, and Smagorinsky of ways of engagement of writing. The among these practices students to relevant they are needed for plan for a great deal and they provide strategies access the data the stance of their writing struggle with literature detailed elaboration organizational mode helping them to develop posing strategies to knowledge relevant. The research on taking an environmental focus on inquiry. It not provide the environmental classroom left to invent the invite students to sources discussed useful activities.

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direct their discussion through each other rather than filter it through the teacher. The students engage in processes appropriate to the writing tasks: They define, they explain, they illustrate, and they argue. The activities have features that Langer (1991) associates with English language arts programs that "beat the odds": that is, programs whose participants far outperform their cohort groups in measures of literacy. Several authorities offer further illustrations of approaches to teaching writing in an environmental mode. Hillocks (1975, 1979) shows how to promote careful observation as a tool for descriptive and narrative writing. Smith (1984) explains ways to help students overcome their apprehension of writing. Johannessen, Kahn, and Walter (1982) offer a design for sequencing lessons to teach writing in an environmental mode. Kahn et al. (1984) offer approaches for writing about literature. Smagorinsky et al. (1987) offer thinking strategies to prepare students to write and to connect their writing to their reading. Hafertepe and McCann (1995) take apart common writing tasks and suggest ways to help students to solve problems and collect the data necessary for completing their compositions. Smith and Wilhelm (2006) and McCann, Johannessen, Kahn, Smagorinsky, and Smith (2005) suggest a variety of ways of engaging students in processes of writing. There is a common thread among these practitioners: They introduce students to relevant thinking strategies as they are needed for the writing task; they plan for a great deal of student interaction; and they provide students with the means to access the data they will need for the substance of their writing. For learners who struggle with literacy learning, inserting detailed elaboration within a boilerplate organizational model makes less sense than helping them to develop a repertoire of composing strategies to use with the substantive knowledge relevant to each task.

The research underscores the promise of taking an environmental approach that focuses on inquiry. Composition textbooks do not provide the blueprint for creating an environmental classroom, and the teacher is left to invent the inquiry-based lessons that invite students to work with each other. The sources discussed above provide examples of useful activities. The individual teacher can

adapt or invent new activities to help students develop their writing skills during a relatively short period of time.

RESEARCH ON TEACHING WRITING TO LANGUAGE-MINORITY LEARNERS

The research on the teaching of writing provides guidance in designing writing instruction for the general school population. For the English language learner (ELL), the process of learning to write well may be a long and arduous one. Multilingualism is, of course, a valuable resource, and educators should take care not to categorize all ELLs as academically struggling. However, with school curriculum structured as it is, many ELLs do face challenges in navigating new discourse communities. Typically, the non-native speaker can take years to learn the complexity of new lexical and syntactic structures in a second language (Leki, 1992, 2000; Samway, 2006). The teacher should reflect on his or her role in the long-term process of development. It is not realistic to expect to see the same pace of growth that one would see in native speakers as a result of a relatively brief period of instruction in writing, even though in the current climate of accountability, assessment practices presume that language-minority learners can develop literacy proficiencies rapidly, even at a pace more rapid than that of the native speaker and writer of the language.

Many of the practices that are effective for native speakers of English (L1) are also appropriate for ELL students, as long as one keeps in mind that the rates of development for ELL students and L1 students will not be the same. Language development is complex, and there are nuances of language proficiency. Part of a teacher's assessment of students' readiness for contending with a particular writing task is the recognition that the students' demonstrated proficiency in the social language of the halls and cafeteria does not mean mastery of the cognitive academic language proficiency that most academic writing demands. Although it is not possible here to address the challenge in all its complexity, we can operate safely under two assumptions:

1. Language-minority students, including long-term language learners, have greater difficulty than their middle-class, English-speaking peers in composing texts in English, because they have less developed *cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP). According to Cummins (1981), CALP refers to the communicative skills necessary to comprehend and use "academic" language to complete cognitively demanding decontextualized learning tasks. In other words, students who may have never been in English as a Second Language (ESL) or bilingual classes in school and speak English fluently in social settings, can still have great difficulty in producing the kind of texts required in conventional academic writing.

2. As a general rule, all students are responsive to teachers and schools that set reasonably high standards and convey an expectation that they can achieve, regardless of their language or cultural background. McGee (2003) reports that schools that make a difference in achievement set consistently high standards, expect students to achieve, and provide the necessary support to help them to achieve.

Padron, Waxman, and Rivera (2003) review the research on effective practices for teaching language-minority learners, especially for Hispanic learners. They conclude that effective instructional practices have the following features: They (1) rely on cooperative learning structures, (2) are culturally responsive, (3) engage students in extended instructional conversations, (4) are cognitively guided, and (5) provide a technologically enriched environment.

Students benefit from working collaboratively with peers. The cooperative learning structures and activities must be carefully planned so that the work is truly collaborative and not parallel work in groups. Group work certainly cannot mean that one person does the work and the rest copy it. Cooperative effort means that tasks must be completed through the sharing of materials and responsibilities. The teacher will need to direct the position of the groups and the appropriate manner of functioning within each group. There must be an overtly expressed standard for functioning in collaboration.

One must be cautious not to generalize from one culture to another. For example, although Hispanic learners might thrive with

cooperative learning, students from other cultures might feel uncomfortable and resist working in such structures. One's understanding of the values and predispositions of a culture should guide the choice of learning activities and structures.

Culturally responsive teaching means that teachers know the students: their academic knowledge, their individual traits, their talents, limitations, interests, and concerns. As a basic principle of learning, teachers need to connect new knowledge to what students already have stored in memory. Language-minority learners find instruction especially appealing if it connects with their lives, with their immediate concerns, and with the issues in their community. Teachers also need to be sensitive to the values within families and the obligations that sometimes challenge academic work.

The process of getting to know students through informal and formal methods can help teachers to build rapport and serve teachers in planning strategically for instruction. ELL students benefit from having opportunities to write about topics they value and know much about.

Freeman, Freeman, and Mercuri (2002, 2003) offer similar considerations for approaching instruction in a culturally responsive way. Furthermore, Kaplan (1966, 1987) invites teachers to reflect on the possibility that learners who enter schools from a variety of countries and cultures may not think in the dominant sequential way that most U.S. schools seem to privilege. Kaplan (1966) suggests that a "contrastive analysis of rhetoric" can offer teachers clues as to whether learners approach problems in a sequential, circular, zigzag, or other pattern. Although Kaplan (1987) pulls back a bit from his earlier generalizations about specific rhetorical patterns, he maintains that "the point is that scholars looking at other languages have perceived significant differences between languages in their rhetorical structure, even if, in all fairness, they have not agreed on the nature of the differences" (p. 10). The safe approach is not to assume that the dominant structures and modes of thinking that seem rational to most native speakers of English will necessarily seem rational to the newcomers to U.S. schools.

Cognitively guided instruction emphasizes the development of procedural knowledge

reading, writing, critical thinking (problem solving) as opposed to the rote memorization of declarative knowledge (e.g., "the capital of France is Paris," etc.). The development of procedural knowledge means that teachers transfer the learning to other contexts, leading to the teaching of writing processes on helping learners to understand the processes of composing. The importance to *teaching processes* is in familiarizing learners with the processes (Hillocks, 2005). The processes include planning, generating, and revising. Transfer to many new occasions is cognitively guided instruction. It is that there is a meta-cognitive approach to teaching and learning, in that students monitor understanding and transfer to self-correct. Writing develops in distinct stages for planning, and editing is an example of guided instruction because it helps the learner in making judgments. A comparison to a recognized model (Applebee (1996) recommends the curriculum as conversational to engage students in problem solving or authentic discussions and concepts that are essential but connect with student experiences. Imagine the importance of extended dialogue for language learners and students from other cultures who are required to have language proficiency in conventional academic writing. One practices extensively in academic language, the more they develop proficiency. Provide opportunities for all students in extended dialogues so that all learners will meet academic standards.

Seldom can teachers provide the quality of the instruction available to learners. There is a broad gap in technology when one compares students from low-income backgrounds who are middle-class. If schools have the opportunity for planning, revising, and editing of ELL students and

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of declarative knowledge alone (e.g.,
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knowledge means that the learner can
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ard to the teaching of writing, the empha
is on helping learners to take command
of the processes of composing, elevating the
importance to *teaching procedures* rather
than familiarizing learners with a particular
process (Hillocks, 2005). The procedures for
planning, generating, and refining a text can
transfer to many new occasions.

Cognitively guided instruction also means
that there is a meta-cognitive component to
teaching and learning, in that the learner can
monitor understanding and make adjust
ments to self-correct. Writing instruction that
builds in distinct stages for reflection, revi
sion, and editing is an example of cognitively
guided instruction because it involves the
learner in making judgments about the work
in comparison to a recognized standard.

Applebee (1996) recommends envisioning
the curriculum as conversation. The idea is
to engage students in purposeful conversa
tions or authentic discussions about issues
and concepts that are essential to a discipline
but connect with students' lives. One can
imagine the importance of participating in
extended dialogue for language-minority learn
ers and students from low-income homes,
who are required to have cognitive academic
language proficiency in order to produce ex
tended academic writing. In short, the more
one practices extensively in the use of aca
demic language, the more one is likely to de
velop proficiency. Providing structures and
opportunities for all students to engage in
extended dialogues signals the expectation
that all learners will meet challenging aca
demic standards.

Seldom can teachers control the amount
and quality of the instructional technology
available to learners. Typically, however,
there is a broad gap in the access to technol
ogy when one compares new arrivals or stu
dents from low-income families and others
who are middle-class native speakers of Eng
lish. If schools have technology that sup
ports the planning, researching, composing,
revising, and editing of texts, then teachers
of ELL students and students from low-

income homes should seek to have their stu
dents access the technology.

GENERAL RULES

The teaching of writing to ELL or other
language-minority students is a complex en
deavor, requiring patience and careful plan
ning. Several sources (Freeman, Freeman, &
Mercuri, 2002, 2003; Hill & Flynn, 2006;
Padron et al., 2003; Samway, 2006) offer sug
gestions and models to help teachers design
instruction for ELL students. To simplify,
however, here are a few general rules:

- At first, emphasize *fluency* rather than
correctness. Students need to be at ease in
their attempts to produce texts, without the
inhibitions of self-conscious error avoidance.
Once students can begin to produce compo
sitions with some fluency, then they have
texts to work with in order to revise and re
fine.
- Expect development over the long term.
No teacher is going to influence overnight
gains in writing quality. Realize that the
ELLs begin school years behind L1 peers
who have already become familiar with a
sizable working vocabulary in English. Simi
larly, students from communities where the
primary discourse is distinct from the dis
course of the academic community need to
know how to make the conscious shift into
the language that is appropriate in a given
context. The mastery of a broad vocabulary
and familiarity with "standard" English syn
tax will take years. Each teacher's work with
a student is one step in a lifelong process,
and the development of writing proficiencies
takes an especially long time.
- Familiarize the students with instruc
tional processes (e.g., writing conferences,
peer review, etc.) and technical language that
might be unfamiliar to them from past school
experiences. Although many teachers teach
writing as a process that includes prewriting
activities, drafting, revising, and editing, the
language used to identify the stages and the
process itself may be unfamiliar to the ELL
student and other language-minority learn
ers.
- Capitalize on the cultural and social in
terests and knowledge of the learners. Any
student has a wealth of knowledge and ex

perience from which to draw when composing. Teachers need to learn what their students know and what interests them. The learners should have opportunities to write about subjects they know about and care about.

- In the composing process, build in stages that allow for extended, purposeful peer interaction. All students, including ELL students, need opportunities to engage in extended discourse, including times when they simply listen to the more proficient English speakers as they use academic language. Over time, the ELL students will make attempts to talk the way the L1 peers talk and then transfer that talk into writing.

- Provide oral and written feedback that supports positive efforts and growth and does not subject the learner to public criticism. Like most other writers, ELL students want to have support for the things they are doing well and gentle guidance in improving those things they are still learning.

- Reassure and encourage ELL students to ask for help. ELL students may not readily ask for assistance. In some cultures, asking for help suggests that the teacher has not done a good job of teaching. A student may resist "disgracing" the teacher by admitting that he or she does not understand the teacher's instruction.

In the end, researchers such as Rose (1989), Gilyard (1991), Au (1993), and Villanueva (1993) point to the importance of respecting students' language and mining the rich reserve of knowledge that all learners can bring to the various writing tasks they encounter in schools. In this sense, teaching writing in a "culturally responsive" way requires that the teacher make the efforts necessary to understand the issues that are critical to the learners, to their families, and to their communities. Au (1993) emphasizes the importance of affirming for learners and their families that their home languages and literacy practices have value, even though they may be different from the literacies often most privileged in the schools.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Researchers and some teachers know quite a bit about some of the best ways to teach

reading and writing to adolescents who struggle. We have come a long way from the days of compensatory education. As Johannesen (2004) asserts, this widely accepted prescription sought to remedy students' deficiencies by teaching "the basics" through skill-based instruction, which has the effect of numbing young minds and is "demeaning and boring for students and teachers alike" (p. 639). Although Langer (2001) and others show exemplary teachers and teaching practices, as Hillocks (2006) asserts, "most teachers appear to know little about the teaching of writing beyond the most general knowledge" (p. 74), and, as Snow and Biancarosa (2003) note, instructional approaches like reciprocal teaching are underutilized by teachers. Furthermore, as Williams (2006) suggests, the underuse of effective instructional practices for reading must be addressed through improved teacher education and professional development. She asserts that teacher education programs can promote more responsive teaching in reading instruction by introducing preservice teachers to models of instruction that focus on participatory approaches rather than more traditional teacher-centered models of teaching.

Although we certainly seem to have a way to go in preparing English/language arts teachers to meet the challenges of struggling readers and writers, the research presented here provides a map for what we need to do. The research points to the need to establish supportive and trusting relationships between teachers and learners, cultivate partnerships among families, their communities, and the schools, and utilize and improve teaching practices that connect with the lives of learners in a culturally responsive way. At the heart of all the approaches and strategies presented in this review is the idea that instead of focusing on the mechanics of language and accumulating facts and information, all of those concerned with educating struggling students need to work toward providing instruction that will enable non-academic, struggling students to learn how to learn. As Smith and Wilhelm (2002) argue, this "learning-centered" approach

aims to capitalize on the expertise that students bring with them to class, and to teach them what we know as more experienced read-

ers and writers so they can bring their own ways of reading, writing, and thinking to the classroom. (pp. 192-193)

Furthermore, the research presented here suggests that we need to move away from the one-way, teacher-driven and is not driven by student-centered instruction. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1970) describes the change that occurs in a democratic classroom:

The teacher is no longer merely a transmitter of knowledge, but one who is himself a learner, who is in dialogue with the students, who is taught also teaches. The teacher is responsible for a process in which the student becomes a subject (p. 7).

A review of the literature on the struggle with literacy suggests an important role of frequent writing that creates a community that promotes literacy learning and social justice.

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ers and writers so they can become more expert in ways of reading, writing, and thinking that are valued in the classroom and workplace. (pp. 192–193)

Furthermore, the research presented in this review suggests that we need to create a new kind of classroom, a classroom that is inquiry driven and is not driven by teacher-centered instruction. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1970) writes about the change that occurs in a discussion-based classroom:

The teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (p. 67)

Our review of the literature about learners who struggle with literacy underscores the important role of frequent student interaction that creates a community of learners that promotes literacy learning and advances social justice.

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