Book Review

by Pamela J. Dunston, Clemson University

How does literacy develop in young children (preschool to Grade 3) and how do early childhood educators assess that development and provide exemplary literacy instruction to all children, including English language learners? These questions are ones that experienced teachers might debate at length and ones that might cause preservice teachers to doubt their professional preparedness, if not their career choice. Diane Barone, Marla Mallette, and Shelley Hong Xu offer answers to these questions in their recent book as they examine the literacy development, assessment, and instruction of young children. The core of the book focuses on stages of literacy development and includes practical suggestions for teaching and evaluating reading, writing, and word study at each stage. Several chapters end with teachers describing the organization of their classrooms and the instruction they provide.

Early literacy development and the role of literacy educators

The first chapter includes a concise summary and discussion of findings from seminal research investigating the characteristics of exemplary literacy teachers and their role in successful literacy instruction. Some readers may feel this review of research too brief and limited as findings from some major research investigations were not included (e.g., Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001; Pressley, et al., 2001). However, the research cited is sufficient to make the authors' point. The authors then define social-constructivist teaching and provide the theoretical foundation supporting this approach to learning. One of the most valuable aspects of this chapter is the broad descriptions of children's literacy behaviors at the developing, beginning, and transitional levels of development. The authors clearly emphasize the need for assessment through "moment-to-moment, day-to-day observations of students as they talk, read, and write in the classroom" (p. 7) as a basis for instructional decision making.

The literacy learning community

Chapter 2 begins with suggestions for creating a welcoming classroom and learning community that aids children in making the transition from home to school. Barone, Mallette, and Xu provide classroom organizational ideas aimed at facilitating children's social interactions as well as teaching and learning. In addition, they describe a variety of methods for developing and evaluating early literacy learners' oral language, reading, writing, and word knowledge. The practical nature of this text is apparent in the informal, teacher-friendly assessments the authors include in the chapter. Purchasers of the book may reproduce the assessments for personal use. There are two instructional points in the chapter worth mentioning. The first deals with four levels on which teachers can work with environmental print as they move children into reading (p. 25). The second is a clear and concise description of the difference between phonological awareness instruction and phonics instruction (p. 38).

Teaching English language learners

A unique aspect of this text for early literacy learners is apparent in chapter 3. The entire chapter deals with English language learners (ELL). The chapter begins with a discussion of challenges ELL students face in learning to speak English for personal communication purposes, while also learning academic English required for content knowledge acquisition. The authors discuss the importance of classroom teachers learning about the ELL child's native language and the child's progress in learning English. A well-conceived ELL parent survey is included in the chapter along with recommendations for welcoming ELL children into a nonthreatening classroom setting. The need to familiarize ELL children with classroom routines is presented. One teacher's approach for familiarizing her ELL students with the classroom routine is presented through the teacher's verbal interactions with her students. The authors offer teachers strategies for communicating with ELL children through oral language and text. Factors worth considering when teachers select texts for ELL students are discussed at length. A quick and practical book selection guide is included. Suggestions for scaffolding and evaluating ELL children's oral language, reading, and word study learning are presented.

Beginning readers

Chapter 4 addresses instruction and assessment of children whose literacy is beginning to develop. The authors use the National Reading Panel (NRP) report (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000) components of reading, i.e., alphabetic principle, fluency, and comprehension, to organize their discussion of beginning reading. They address vocabulary, the NRP's other component of reading, in a separate chapter. The authors present a concise discussion of the alphabetic principle

and role of phonics instruction in the literacy program. While preservice and novice teachers who purchase this text will find the definition of alphabetic principle vague, they will find worthwhile information related to effective phonics instruction. A point of concern in this chapter is the discrepancy between descriptions of beginning readers and descriptions of beginning writers. Barone, Mallette, and Xu describe beginning reading as follows:

> Perhaps one of the most noticeable characteristics of beginning readers is their lack of fluency. They tend to read word by word, and thus their reading sounds very choppy. Due to their limited but growing knowledge, this type of reading should be expected. And it is when they move past this type of reading that they are actually transitional readers. (p. 86)

Descriptions and examples of beginning writers and the instructional recommendations provided by the authors imply writing ability exceeds reading ability at this stage of development. The authors began describing children's first efforts to write as scribbling, drawing, and generative writing and then, within two sentences, offer examples of one beginning writer writing a story about a flying saucer and another child writing a news script. An extended discussion of children's egocentric writing tendencies (writing about themselves, family, pets, and friends) and instructional recommendations for moving children beyond this phase are needed to reassure and support teachers who find their students stuck in this developmentally normal stage.

Role of technology and new literacies in the early childhood classroom

In chapter 5, Barone, Mallette, and Xu argue the benefits of including technology and new literacies in classrooms as a means of actively engaging children in literacy production. The authors' notion of young children's technology use moves well beyond the practice of using computers for skill and drill purposes. They support their position with compelling evidence of the influence technology can have on children's literacy development through excerpts of dialogue between children and teachers as they interact while using classroom computers for literacy activities. The need to expand children's understanding of print and its functions, i.e., text and sign systems work together to create meaning, is worth consideration. Barone, Mallette, and Xu offer Web sites appropriate for children and suggest teachers join other classrooms in Internet projects. Compared to the practical instructional recommendations provided in earlier chapters, the authors fall short in making similar suggestions for integrating technology in early childhood classrooms. They can strengthen their position by including realistic teaching recommendations for integrating technology in the literacy program. The poor quality of photographs of children and their work on computer screens is another weakness of the chapter. The images are

frustratingly difficult to decipher. Readers who are not familiar with the software program discussed (Kid Pix Studio Deluxe/Broderbund) may need these images to better understand the significance of the children's interactions.

Transitional readers

The authors discuss in chapter 6 the characteristics of children in the transitional stage of literacy development and the instructional challenges teachers face when working with children at this level. Key issues for reading instruction at the transitional stage, the authors say, include developing oral reading fluency, comprehension beyond the literal level, and vocabulary. Barone, Mallette, and Xu contend that fluency encompasses three components: (a) decoding accurately; (b) recognizing words automatically (automaticity); and (c) using pitch, stress, and phrasing. They do not include reading pace as a component of fluency yet discuss the number of words a child reads per minute in grade-level materials as an important developmental benchmark. Repeated reading, readers' theatre, and reading 'series' books are recommendations for improving students' reading fluency.

The authors briefly discuss the need to move children to deeper levels of comprehension through "connections between their personal and world experiences and the text, as well as intertextual connections among the various texts that they are reading" (p. 119). Barone, Mallette, and Xu should expand their reference to Allington's (2006) text-to-self, text-to-world, and text-to-text connections for the sake of clarity and understanding of the role these connections play in advancing students' comprehension. Descriptions of informational texts (Duke, 2003) and differences between types of nonfiction (narrative nonfiction and informational texts, as defined by Duke and Bennett-Armistead (2003), should be addressed along with reasons for including informational texts in the early literacy curriculum (Duke, 2000). Barone, Mallette, and Xu should make an effort to dispel teachers' misconceptions that children prefer narratives to informational texts (Pappas, 2006) and that informational texts are too difficult, exceed students' reading levels, and hinder students' acquisition of reading skills. Duke's (2004) work indicates growth in decoding and word identification when students are exposed to informational texts. Of greater concern is the authors' lack of information concerning the importance of preparing students to read, guiding students' reading, and providing opportunities for children to reflect on their reading. Many of the instructional activities included in the chapter activate prior knowledge, organize knowledge, and summarize learning, but information about which activities serve which purpose is not included.

Advancing English language learners' literacy

Chapter 7 focuses on ELL students acquiring academic language necessary to learn content-specific information while, at the same time, continuing to develop conversational fluency. Suggested activities for improving ELL children's oral and written language fluency include (a) embedding oral communication within content area reading through content-specific show and tell; (b) extensive reading; (c) listening to books on tape; (d) reading variations of the same story, e.g., variations of folk tales and fairy tales; and (e) reading multiple books on the same topic. The need to extend ELL children's prior knowledge for reading is discussed and a helpful chart noting differences between narrative and expository text structures is provided. The chapter includes several practical examples and suggestions for developing vocabulary and extending ELL students' writing.

Developing family-school partnerships

Barone, Mallette, and Xu encourage teachers to consider their personal values and beliefs about family structures, i.e., who lives in the home and takes responsibility for raising the children, and family involvement in children's education in chapter 8. They caution teachers about forming misconceptions about families and misinterpreting limited family participation in school-related matters. The authors challenge teachers to put forth effort to learn about students' home literacy experiences through interactive visits to the communities where their students live and by conducting in-home visits for the purpose of establishing positive relationships with students' families. A guide for conducting in-home visits and questions to ask when engaged in interactive community visits are included. In addition, the authors offer practical suggestions for engaging families in classroom activities. A clever feature of this chapter is an alphabetical listing of 26 activities parents can use to engage their children in literacy learning. Each activity is clearly described and most include examples for carrying out the activities.

Meeting the needs of struggling readers

In Chapter 9, the authors describe four approaches for working with children who struggle to learn to read. Historically, these children were labeled as *at risk*. Barone, Mallette, and Xu explain the tenets of each of the four approaches to working with struggling readers and identify intervention programs associated with each. They describe at length one school-wide intervention program, The Anna Plan, that is designed to meet the literacy learning needs of all kinder-

garten, first-, and second-grade children in one elementary school. This program serves as a model for other schools interested in improving literacy in the early elementary grades. The authors end the chapter with an interesting discussion of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and the ramifications of the legislation for schools and teachers.

Helpful resources and final thoughts

The final chapter includes an extensive annotated bibliography of Internet Web site resources for teachers. Barone, Mallette, and Xu did an excellent job of selecting Web sites for inclusion in the list. While many Web sites found in similar texts are frequently discontinued or contain dated information, those listed in the annotated bibliography in this text were functional at the time of this review. Teachers will find a range of sites covering information from literacy research laboratories and professional organizations where teachers can find research reports, as well as position and policy papers. In addition, Web sites with information about literacy instruction, children's books, poetry, authors and illustrators, puzzles and games, and books for ELL children are included.

I strongly recommend this book to early childhood educators who do not have years of experience working with and observing the literacy behaviors of young children. Preservice teachers with whom I work found the benchmarks of literacy development table (p. 8) extremely helpful. The authors include numerous samples of children's writing and work samples, child-adult conversations, and a variety of informal assessments that purchasers of the book can photocopy for personal use. A particularly noteworthy aspect of the book is the authors' attention to the needs of English language learners in classroom settings. Veteran and novice teachers alike will find each chapter of the book filled with practical information and suggestions for teaching and assessing literacy. Teacher educators will find the book an easy to read, practical companion for other texts that focus primarily on early literacy research findings and theoretical models of reading.

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