That Story Makes Sense Now!

School started August 20th. On August 21st, it was Jo’s turn to read to me. I handed her the book Rain Rain by Joy Cowley (Ready to Read, Wellington, New Zealand). The story is supported by detailed illustrations. As she read, I sat alongside her taking a miscue analysis of her reading. I noted each miscue Jo made as she read.

Once - yup tent
We went up the track
comes done.

and the rain came down.

How puts yup
We put up the tent.
comes don’t.

and the rain came down.

mill.

Dad cooked a meal.

comes and the rain came down.

≠ Now’s - p mom
"No sun," said mum.

"Too bad," said dad.
of out down.

Off came our boots.
of out s-

Off came our socks.
people swimming.

We paddled in the stream
keeps.

and the rain came down.

Rain.

Rain.

After she read, we discussed the story. "I didn't like it. It didn't make any sense," she said right off. "The words were silly."

Jo’s reading and her response let me know that, although she had some useful reading strategies, at this point in second grade, seven-year-old Jo did not realize that all texts should make sense whenever she reads, nor did she seem to believe that it was within her grasp to create meaning from texts. While she was aware that a text that did not make sense was "silly," she did not deem it necessary to look for meaning in the text.

This informed my instructional decisions for Jo. She had a basic understanding of graphophonic relationships (she basically controlled what sounds may be used for some letters), she had perseverance, yet she did not focus on meaning much at all. During my Language Arts time block, I worked with Jo and a few of her classmates in a homogeneous group in guided reading strategy lessons. Our focus was building meaning.

We read patterned language books predicting meaning based on picture cues and our own expertise. I chose books that had simple basic patterns with complex changes. Such as Joy Cowley’s Where Is Miss Pool? In this short book, a group of children are looking for their teacher.

The line, "Where is Miss Pool?" repeats as the children look around the school. Place names, such as playground and staffroom, challenge the kids. The familiar context, clear illustration, and repeated, natural language support them.

"What could it say?" "What would you say?"

"Does it say that?" and "How do you know?"

are key questions I use to guide the small group members into sharing the strategies they use to probe the unknown. I don’t push for perfection but rather keep the focus on meaning. When the kids refer to the teacher as Miss Pool, I say nothing. Later the text reveals, "She’s at home in bed with a cold in her head." The following page shows a sick teacher at home surrounded by cards from students with the text, "Get well, Miss Pool. We miss you at school." At that point, we discuss the meaning and spelling differences between Ms., Mrs., and Miss.

I continued to work with Jo in small heterogeneous group about twice weekly throughout the year. This was by no means the only reading. As part of a well-balanced program, I did the guided reading, read to Jo, and encouraged her to read alone. We wrote and read a wide variety of genre daily. I monitored Jo’s reading strategies throughout the year as well. By November, she was focusing on meaning, so I changed focus to build a wider repertoire of predicting strategies. In February, I saw a major change. Jo made many miscues, but most were corrected and all were meaning-related. When pictures were unavailable to support the text, Jo could be heard saying, "What should it say?"

By April, Jo was able to read texts like Lobel’s Frag and Toad or Macy’s There’s a Nightmare in My Attic with ease. She even completed an Arthur Bedelia (Parish) and read through two Nate the Great (Sharaat) mysteries with a friend.

For a point of comparison, on April 30, I asked Jo to read Rain Rain to me again. She was happy to oblige:

Trees.

We went up the track
comes.

and the rain came down.

We put up the tent.

and the rain came down.

cook’s the.

Dad cooked a meal.

and the rain came down.

No sun," said mum.

If bade.

say "It’s come."

looks at teacher.

books.

Off came our books.

off came our socks.

On.

We paddled in the stream.

and the rain came down.

and the rain came down.

Rain.

Rain.

"Hey," she said. "That story makes sense now. Did you know that I went camping with my mom and my dad and my brother and my uncle, and it rained the whole time, and we got soaked and then . . ."

See: Goodman, pp. 20, 53, 58, 59, 72, 73, 146, 147, 148.

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Language and Learning

Marie Eimmitt and John Pollock

A very complete book on its subject, Language and Learning examines the nature and functions of language to assist teachers in decision-making processes and classroom practices. The authors present the theories and concepts most significant for teachers and discuss implications for their classroom use.

Eimmitt and Pollock encourage the reader to be involved in an interactive process of negotiating meaning while reading. After completing the book, readers should be able to construct their own theory of language and language learning. Topics the authors consider include: functions of language, language as a social process, semantics, communication, culture, language variation, linguistics and phonology, morphology and lexicology, syntax, and discourse analysis.

Terri Torkild}

Collaborative-Apprenticeship Learning: Language and Thinking Across the Curriculum, K-12


For present and future teachers of language arts reading, and writing, Collaborative Apprenticeship Learning presents important ideas—such as greater student responsibility for learning and heterogeneous class groupings—for educational change. While the theoretical base is broad, there is an emphasis on social learning as detailed in L. S. Vygotsky's writings. Specific strategies for changing the curriculum, planning within a specific content area, evaluation, and communicating results are discussed. Case studies, which include actual class discussions and written exercises, illustrate how the model works in classrooms from kindergarten through college.

The Whole Language Catalog Supplement on Authentic Assessment: Teaching as Inquiry