

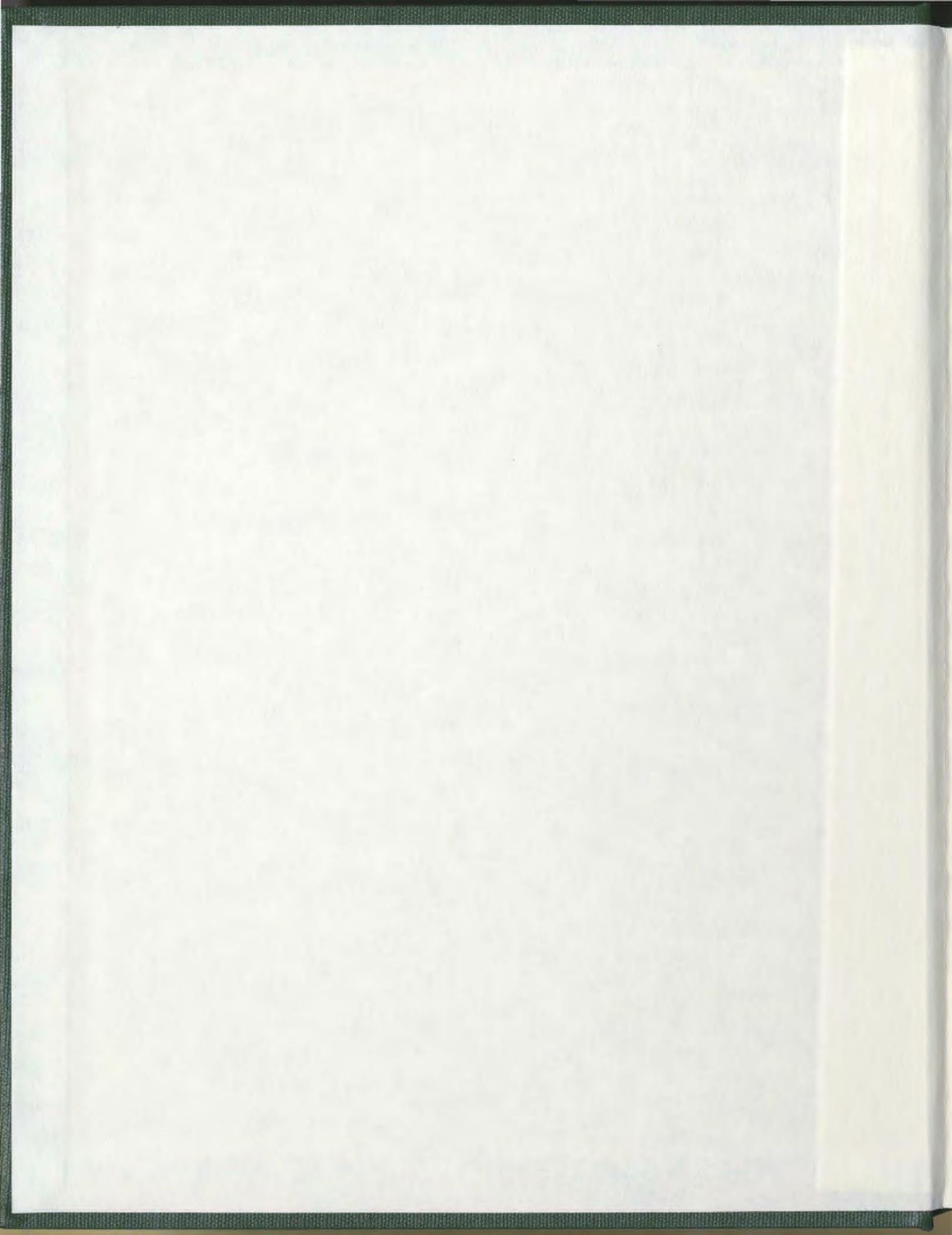
THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF  
THE EFFECTIVE LITERACY TEACHER  
AN INTERNSHIP REPORT

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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PATRICIA BROWN







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**THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF  
THE EFFECTIVE LITERACY TEACHER  
AN INTERNSHIP REPORT**

**By**

**Patricia Brown, B.A., B.Ed.**

**An Internship report submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Education**

**Faculty of Education  
Memorial University of Newfoundland**

**April 2003**

**St. John's**

**Newfoundland**

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **OVERVIEW OF THE INTERNSHIP**

### **Internship Setting**

The place chosen for my internship report is a grade one primary classroom at school X in an urban area of Newfoundland. The school consists of two classes per grade level starting with Kindergarten through to grade six with an average of 20 - 25 students per class. The staff consists of fourteen teachers, four student assistants and two administrators. There is a student body of approximately two hundred and eighty students. Many of the teachers are long-time members of this school staff and have worked together in this setting to address the literacy needs of their clientele, parents and the community. The teachers are a supportive team and work collaboratively.

### **Rationale for Internship Option**

The Masters of Education (Teaching and Learning in Literacy) requires students to complete a course of study that includes theoretical grounding in current paradigms, pedagogy and research in literacy, combined with practical experience. Students completing this program have the option of completing a minimum of 18 credit hours plus a thesis, or 24 credit hours plus an internship report, a project or paper folio. The choice of the internship option gave the intern the opportunity to participate and observe what other teachers are doing as literacy teachers to enhance students' reading abilities, particularly in the primary grades.

It is the intern's belief that to effectively prepare a graduate student for the role of literacy teacher, observation of practice is essential. The observer's role can provide unique insight one is unable to gain as a teacher. It gives the intern the opportunity to see, from an alternative perspective, which practices are effective with students.

The practices can then be incorporated into his/her own repertoire. The internship helps to develop personal and professional competencies. It highlights the many and varied theories studied throughout the course work, and fosters a sense of resourcefulness and reflectiveness within the intern.

### **Objectives of The Internship**

The primary goals of this internship is to observe the primary teacher's role in literacy development in an attempt to understand the role of an effective literacy teacher. Often resources within our school system such as other colleagues can offer a mentor relationship. The intern feels that the internship placement provided the intern with the opportunity to have a mentoring relationship with the classroom teacher. This liaison helps the intern further understand and learn the many skills necessary to be an effective literacy teacher. The objectives for this experience include the following:

1. To develop a mentoring relationship with a literacy teacher and positive relations with the staff and the students in the environment in which meaningful skill development and learning occur.
2. To survey the direct and indirect literacy instruction in the following settings:
  - a) the primary grade classroom
  - b) the learning resource center
  - c) the family resource center
3. To document the roles and responsibilities of a literacy teacher and to compare these roles and responsibilities with current trends in the research literature.

4. To reflect upon and refine my orientation to education and to teaching.
5. To gain insight into and engage in activities for self-development related to literacy in an educational organization.
6. To accumulate and document a data base of literacy activities to expand upon the author's existing repertoire of instructional strategies.

### **Strategies for Goal Realization**

This experience gave the intern the opportunity to participate in and observe emergent literacy experiences that are happening at the onset of a child's formal schooling in a grade one classroom. Throughout the internship, the intern employed several strategies to help achieve a thorough understanding of the many complexities involved in facilitating literacy development teaching:

1. The intern engaged in daily journal writing as a means of documenting the observations and reflecting on the daily experiences. These journal entries will serve as a basis for discussion with the cooperating teacher as well as being used to reflect on the philosophies of the intern.
2. The intern participated in and observed the daily interactions of the teacher with the students and other staff as literacy development was fostered.
3. Through observing these teachers, the intern gained specific knowledge of the roles and responsibilities that these teachers have as literacy educators.

## **Organization of the Report**

This report is organized into three chapters. The first chapter contains a rationale, specifies the objectives of the internship and provides an overview of the report. Chapter two outlines the role placed on parents and the roles and responsibilities of effective literacy teachers. Chapter three presents an overview of the pertinent experiences of the intern. The content is personal and reflective in nature. It includes activities suggesting how teachers can continually promote reading and writing to improve the literacy skills for children in the school. Recommendations for the parents and teachers are also included.

## **Definition of Terms**

The following terms will be utilized throughout this report and will be defined in the following manner.

“Participant-observer” is a person who is skilled at participating in group work and observing group process. Ideally, a competent group member actively participates in the group’s work while also observing the process being used to achieve the group’s goals. To accomplish this goal, a group member must function on two levels as a participant and as an observer. A person skilled in process observation can participate in group work and observe group process at the same time, thus becoming a participant-observer.

“Cooperative Education” is a structured educational strategy integrating classroom duties with learning through productive work experiences in a field related to a student’s academic or career goals. It provides progressive experiences in integrating theory and practice.

**“Job Shadowing” is a school/community experience that allows students to observe people in the community as they perform their regular job duties. During job shadowing, students observe an employee for a short period of time to learn about the business, industry, or profession of the employee, with an emphasis on exploration, not work.**

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE TEACHER OF LITERACY**

### **Introduction**

Integrating students with various reading abilities into the classroom places demands on the school system. The challenge for teachers today is to integrate students at all reading levels into the classroom instruction. This challenge is even greater when students with special needs are included in the general make up of a classroom, increasing the range of abilities and skill levels for which the teacher must plan. All adults who are involved in children's lives can be effective in their literacy development. Teachers are responsible for the formal instruction of literacy at school; equally important are the parents at home and the caregivers in the community. This internship report reflects the responsibilities of a teacher at school and parents at home as literacy teachers in a changing and demanding system of education.

Chapter two provides the literature review on literacy and the role the teacher has as an effective literacy teacher. Chapter three contains the critical reflections in the form of a descriptive narrative of daily experiences observed by the intern. These reflections indicate that many characteristics of an effective teacher are evident in this internship setting. Through these reflections, the intern developed a deeper and more thorough understanding and appreciation for the roles a teacher must assume in order to meet the needs of the many students in the Newfoundland and Labrador educational system.

## **Definitions of Literacy**

In researching literacy, it is difficult to formulate an exact definition. The definition of literacy is dependent on many factors such as changes in society and the community over an extended period of time, and culturally-based conceptions of what is considered literate. All are factors in the definition of literacy. Literacy once referred to a very narrow, simplistic notion, simply stated, the ability to read and write. The more recent definitions outline a broad, complex notion addressing multiple literacies. The intern has not been concerned with adopting any one term of literacy. She has embraced parts of various definitions, as literacy can have many different personal and theoretical positions for what constitutes the concept of literacy and whether one is literate or illiterate and by whose standards.

The earliest use of literacy refers solely to the ability to read and write; one either could or could not read effectively. In 1978, UNESCO revised their view of literacy from a " socio-psycholinguistic perspective" to one in which literacy is more than the ability to read and write. Berghoff (cited in Stroup, 2001, p. 15) states this change in UNESCO's definition reflects a change from a narrow set of behaviours in reading and writing to a broader sense of community functions. It extends to the use of oral and written language as well as other sign systems, such as mathematics and art, to make sense of the world and communicate with others. Michaels and O'Connor (cited in Disinger & Roth, 1992) describe literacy as an inherently plural notion. The general term literacy included mathematical literacy, computer literacy, cultural literacy and so on. Each of these "literacies is an integration of ways of thinking, talking, interacting, and valuing, in addition to reading and writing. Literacy then is less about reading and writing per se, and is rather about ways of being in the world and ways of making meaning with and around text" (p. 3).

In 2000, the authors of *The Report of the Literacy Review for Queensland State Schools* used a broad definition of literacy. They define literacy in more future-oriented terms as “the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken language, print, and multimedia” (p. 3). The focus of the report further states that learners become literate members of information societies, which include three ways of communicating:

- \* Oral: the spoken language
- \* Written: the systems of alphabetic writing and print culture
- \* Multi-mediated: The blended systems of linguistic and non-linguistic sounds, and visual representations of digital and electronic media. (p. 3)

In the report, the multi-mediated blend is an extension of the oral and written definition of literacy.

Abilock (2002) commented in her Literacy Project that “literacy is best understood as a myriad of communication forms and cultural competencies that construct and make available the various relations and experiences that exist between learners and the world”. Literacy gives us the power to name or identify things and ideas, to communicate effectively using the code and the symbols, to understand the effect that literacy has on others or us.

The use of technology and computer based knowledge are referred to as “information literacy.” The availability of computers alone will not prepare students for a world of expanding and rapidly changing information. It is Marques’ (1999) belief that “today’s students need more than technology in order to cope with such a future. They need to know how to be able to gather information from varied sources, synthesize it, interpret it, and evaluate it. Unless you are taught to do this, the students will become less than fully participating workers and citizens of the future.”

He goes on to state (cited in Abdullah, 2000) that “it is imperative for educators to teach media literacy so that learners can be producers of effective media messages as well as what Rafferty mentions being critical consumers of ideas and information” (p.1).

The literacy plan for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, as stated in the document “Words To Live By” (2000), defines literacy traditionally as the ability to understand and use the printed word in daily activities at home, at work and in the community. Research has indicated that literacy levels are lower in the province than in any other provinces across Canada, and the mandate for the current government is to have Newfoundland and Labrador’s achievement levels among the highest in the country when Statistics Canada reports on literacy in 2004. A curriculum that is current and well-developed is essential to the realization of this goal. The Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF) curriculum was adopted by this government to improve the quality of education for all students.

The APEF Curriculum for English Language Arts (1995) identifies the development of literacy as a priority. This document delineates what it means to be literate, and states that literacy will continue to change as visual and electronic media become more and more dominant as forms of expression and communication. Communication technology has made this possible and many young people today can access this knowledge. It is necessary for schools to focus on the acquisition of skills associated with the processing of information. The definition of literacy in the APEF document has been adopted by this province’s schools.

## **Parents as First Teachers**

Teachers have an important role in the development of children's literacy; however, parents also have a role to play in their development. Parents and "significant others", like grandparents, caregivers, and relatives can be effective teachers of literacy. Traditionally, the family was the primary source of learning, and children were taught at home by their parents, older siblings, grandparents, and other relatives. Today, most children go to school, although some parents have opted to teach their children at home. The "Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy" has shown support of the family as "a primary source of learning by funding programs that provide training and assistance to families for the promotion of literacy" (Brown, 1998, p. 17). Children have five years at home with their parents before they begin formal schooling. The family is a strong element in shaping lives. It is with the family that the cycle of learning begins.

The term "family literacy" has several overlapping definitions. The first concept implies that the significant adult exerts influence on children's literacy development, for instance, parents helping their children learn. The second definition recognizes that literacy, or failure to become fully literate, tend to perpetuate themselves across generations, namely, support for parents' own literacy learning (Handel, 1999). Family literacy also includes intergenerational programs that focus on both child and adult in their literacy learning, in other words, programs that are designed to foster literacy for parents or other adult caretakers, as well as for children. Literate parents, good parenting, and job skills can help parents to boost children's academic achievement and can help parents improve their own lives.

Programs, such as the Significant Others as Reading Teachers (S.O.R.T) program by Joan Oldford-Matchim, that teach parents how to read aloud to their

children facilitate the success of children in the beginning stages of learning to read. These programs must provide parents with instruction in a variety of literacy skills and assist them in promoting their children's educational development. A successful program in literacy development validates the participants' capabilities. Family literacy programs build on families' strengths and provide the tools and support they need to become stronger and more self-sufficient. The goal of all "family literacy programs is to develop the skills of parents to enable them to be more personally successful and fulfilled, and to more effectively promote their children's learning at home and achievement in school" (Schwartz, 1999, p. 23). When adults model reading, children will imitate this activity, too. Imitation is an important method of learning for children. Children imitate what they hear and what they see. As one scholar notes, "It is this ability to imitate that allows the 15 month old child to say its first words. By age 2, the average child will have 300 words in their vocabulary, 1600 words by age 4, and 2100 by age 5" (Trelease, 1982, p. 21).

It is incumbent upon parents to provide a rich, literacy environment for their children. When they enter school they can build on the experiences established at home and continue to develop a positive literacy environment. The home environment is crucial to the development of children's literacy, specifically in terms of how parents can help. Even before children come to school, parents must become committed to developing an appreciation of, and familiarity with books. Adams writes in 1990, " We hug them, we give them treats and good things to eat, we teach them to be polite and fair. We do these things because it is the best way we know how to set them off on happy, healthy lives. We must do as much with reading" (p. 48). As food is for bodies, books stimulate the growing minds of young children.

Parents need to realize that they can still interact with books even if their literacy skills are weak. Reading aloud benefits children as well as parents. Specific activities

for children and parents are looking at the pictures, talking about the pictures, building a valuable relationship, and demonstrating the enjoyment reading can give. If parents or caregivers of children take even ten to fifteen minutes a day to partake in literacy events, it can make the difference in the children's interest and attitude toward reading. Trelease (1982) expresses,

I can promise that once you begin the daily experience of reading aloud, or looking at books with children, it will become one of the best parts of your day and the children's day, minutes and hours that will be treasured for years to come (p.15).

More importantly, reading aloud shows that parents value and enjoy reading and hopefully children will as well. The benefits it has for children make it worthwhile. When time restraints are an issue, making those ten minutes count is fundamental. Use good quality literacy events such as talking, listening, or reading aloud.

Adults or significant others reading aloud to their children has several benefits. Reading aloud to young children indirectly teaches them about reading. After children have heard a book read several times, they are likely to read it themselves. The second benefit is vocabulary development. Sulzby (1991) claims vocabulary increases more in children who have been read to than those who do not have this same exposure. Thirdly, reading aloud develops bonding with children through enjoying books and reflecting on the book's form and context. Lastly, oral reading develops and supports children's curiosity about books (Trelease, 1982). It is evident that reading aloud has many advantages, which are far reaching and a positive influence upon the success of reading in each child.

Reading aloud to children daily can be done with just three stories. Fox (2001) comments how, "If every parent understood the huge educational benefits and intense happiness brought about by reading aloud to their children, and if every parent - and

every adult caring for a child - read aloud a minimum of three stories a day to the children in their lives, we could probably wipe out illiteracy within one generation" (p.12). When three stories a day are considered for a year, this will result in a thousand stories in one year. If this reading is followed through by parents or significant others, children would have thousands of stories read to them prior to entering school. The ideal three stories a day are one favourite, one familiar, and one new. The same book read three times a day is also fine in helping children along their way to this goal of a thousand books. This practice would lead children well on their way to reading.

Long before a child begins formal schooling there are many literacy activities a parent can do to provide stimulation and prevent reading problems (Fox, 2001). Conversation is one way to provide oral stimulation to children. Children hearing their mother's voice or an adult caregiver's voice in conversation is one language development activity. The more stimulation a child has the more rapidly a child's brain develops (Fox, 2001). The more language a child experiences through books and through conversation with others, the more the child will benefit socially and educationally. Conversely, the fewer words a child learns and uses before school, the more stunted a child's brain will be (Fox, 2001). In some cases television has replaced conversation. Television does very little to help a child learn to speak. Television does not talk "to" children, it talks "at" them and they cannot talk back. It is the interaction between the child and others which provides the important aspect of language growth (Fox, 2001).

Literacy development needs to be a shared responsibility. Families, schools and communities should work together in an environment of mutual respect to promote the pleasures the world of reading can present. The preschool years are of key importance to the progress children will make in reading and in the success of

their schooling. This is the message that community agencies need to communicate to parents as soon as their children are born and possibly even before birth. The school and other community agents need “to take on the responsibility of getting information to homes about the need for rich literacy environments even before children enter school” (Morrow, 1997, p. 70). It is time for all adults involved in children’s lives to become proactive and responsible for reading to children so the children who may experience difficulty will be reduced to a minimum.

### **The Role and Responsibility of the Teacher**

This section of the report focuses on some of the responsibilities and tasks of teachers. Teachers play many roles, some of which overlap. Much literature exists to describe the various tasks and the daily functions of the classroom teachers. The classroom teachers assume multiple responsibilities. These responsibilities are categorized as follows: (i) instructing the curriculum, (ii) planning the instruction, (iii) employing teaching strategies, and (iv) assessing the instruction. As classroom research continues, other effective teaching roles will be added and modifications will be made to the existing roles. The following paragraphs will explore each of these categories further, giving a broader understanding of the complex roles the teacher plays to improve reading with all students.

## **Instructing the Curriculum**

The first and most important role performed by a teacher is one of instructional expert, in other words, the person who plans, guides, and evaluates learning. It is the role of the classroom teacher as instructional expert, "to make the decisions related to what to teach, what teaching materials to use, the best method to teach the selected content, and how to evaluate the learning" (Moore, 2001, p. 3). The classroom teacher will decide what literacy skills and teaching strategies are required to meet the instructional needs of the students and in particular those who are experiencing difficulties. The struggle to provide appropriate literacy instruction for all students depends on several factors: the literacy backgrounds and experiences of students, availability of materials, and the additional support provided by special services. At some schools, when students have difficulty with reading they will leave the class for a portion of the day to work with a special education teacher. However, for most of the day the student remains with the classroom teacher. This self-contained classroom holds one teacher responsible for all instruction.

Teaching is "the action of a person imparting skill, knowledge or giving instruction; the job of a person who teaches" (Moore, 2001, p. 5). It is the responsibility of teachers to ensure that the curriculum is followed and that programs are facilitated to meet the outcomes at the grade they are teaching, in other words, to facilitate the expected student learning. A majority of students can follow the prescribed curriculum which is mandated by the Department of Education for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. However, there are some students who will need intensive and personalized instruction in order to thrive in school. The teacher begins with the prescribed curriculum and then finds ways of enhancing it to fit the students' needs.

## **Planning the Instruction**

Planning for instruction is a large part of the teachers' role which begins before the teaching day. It is essential to effective teaching. Planning is a process that begins with preplanning thoughts and ideas, and moves to active planning preparations. Planning is a way of managing time and events, to ensure that the outcomes are met. It allows for purposeful instruction and provides a guide for both teachers and students. The role of teachers is to make the decision about the *how* and the *what* of teaching and for whom it is targeted. Driscoll and Freiberg (2000) state that "teacher planning is the thread that weaves the curriculum, or the *what* of teaching with the instruction, or the *how* of teaching" (p. 21). Knowing the students in the class, the teacher plans a range of instructional strategies that respond to diverse abilities and backgrounds of the learners. This recognition is particularly important for students who are experiencing difficulty with the curriculum or special needs students.

The curriculum allows the flexibility of adapting instruction to the individual learning needs of the students (Borich, 1996). A careful plan takes into account each child's learning barrier and includes appropriate intervention and strategies. Lessons and unit planning decisions are crucial for developing effective lessons. The teacher may need other resources outside the prescribed curriculum such as alternative reading materials for a student. An effective teacher ensures that the instructional needs and reading abilities of the students are met.

Teachers may improve their planning effectiveness by monitoring their teaching during and after instruction and giving thought to the strengths and weaknesses of their lessons. Planning is always ongoing and revisions are made even as the instruction is being implemented as the students' formative development necessitates change. This accommodation becomes part of visualizing what could be, and should

be implemented into the planning process for future lessons. When a lesson or a unit is planned, the teacher needs to develop the activities or teaching strategies to teach the unit. Experienced teachers will enrich and expand their repertoire of teaching to revitalize and build on new ideas for instruction.

### **Employing Teaching Strategies**

The third role performed by teachers is employing many teaching strategies which assist students to learn. Some strategies the classroom teacher uses to help the literacy performance of readers in general, or struggling readers in particular, are reading aloud, guided reading and independent reading.

One strategy the teacher uses is reading aloud. Reading aloud is when the teacher reads a story orally to the class. Oral reading to the students has many benefits. One benefit is the teacher can model reading such as using expression to make it interesting. Subsequently, the students will likely imitate these examples. "Children seeing us read will likely want to get in on the act. Young children learn new behaviours by imitating the behaviours of their significant others. They copy the behaviours that are demonstrated to them." (Oldford-Matchim, 1994, p. 5).

Another advantage to reading aloud is it extends children's reading range and strengthens their ability to take in complex language. Barton (1986) indicates children's capacity to take in language is generally ahead of their ability to read. Reading aloud introduces children to new words, new sentences, and new ideas. "Greatest progress occurs when the vocabulary and syntax of the materials are slightly above the child's own level of linguistic maturity" (Adams, 1990, p. 46).

Listening and talking about books provides children with the benefits and pleasures of reading. Reading aloud encourages better listening habits and increases

children's attention span. It broadens their reading interests, experiences and stretches children's ability to appreciate literature that they would not be able to read independently.

A second strategy the teacher employs is guided reading. Guided reading is one part of a literacy program which offers small group work with the teacher for the purpose of developing children's reading ability. The smaller groups and the direct attention to engaging the student in the reading activity are two advantages of guided reading. Children in the group are more focused and attentive to the story than in a larger group. The teachers can use instruction specific to the children's needs; therefore, it maximizes the literacy learning that can take place. The smaller groups provide a greater opportunity for teachers to use instruction that builds on the learning and absorbs the learner (Opitz & Ford, 2002). It allows for a more effective type of strategic coaching to take place. The teacher may instruct a mini lesson on a specific skill that the group may be missing, such as a strategy to perform when a student notices an unknown word in the story. Although guided reading has been used with struggling readers providing them with more reading time, it can be used with readers at all levels. Instructions provided from guided reading engage children and enables them to strive for success so that they see themselves as independent readers. "It is designed to create independent, lifelong readers" (Opitz & Ford, 2002, p. 710).

Another strategy the teacher uses is independent reading. Independent reading is when students choose a book and sit quietly to read it. Providing the opportunity to read independently is very important. It gives the children the opportunity to choose a book they would like to read. It also gives the children time to practise and explore what they have learned from their reading instruction. Independent reading allows students the time to practise learning to read so they can read to learn. Providing time for students to practise what they have learned can help

students learn how to learn (Friegberg & Driscoll, 2000). To ensure that the struggling reader does practise the reading, he or she can read one-on-one with a classmate, teacher, or student assistant. A goal for students is to choose reading as an activity outside of instructional time. It is the hope that this practice time will create an independent reader. Students should always be encouraged to read when they are waiting for instruction with the teacher. It is a role of the teacher to use strategies, to create activities for practice, and to instruct the students to increase their reading abilities to be able to function in the classroom.

### **Assessing the Instruction**

Another role of the teacher, which is considered an important part of teaching, is the assessment of the students. Assessment is a measurement which provides data for making a judgment regarding students' performance and what should be done next in the learning process. Assessment is a benefit to both the student and the teacher. The benefit to the students is receiving feedback with respect to their progress and assessment of their needs. The advantage for teachers is to identify students experiencing difficulty in achieving the desired learning outcomes and therefore plan for reteaching. Assessing the behaviour evaluates the learners performance with tests, homework, and assignments (Borich,1996). Assessment has many purposes: planning, making decisions, promoting learning, and communicating to students, parents, and other teachers. Assessment helps the teacher better understand students and their abilities, interests, and needs in order to better teach and motivate them. In classes today there are so many special learning barriers. The teacher needs to understand, in order to assist students with regards to their unique learning and assessment style. No matter what their unique needs, "our students can

be welcomed to our classrooms as unique and valued individuals - labeled only as important, cared for, and wanted" (Eby, Herrell, & Hicks, 2002, p.67).

There are many means of assessment under the categories of formal, (i.e., a structured assessment) and informal, (i.e., unstructured assessment). Both forms of assessment are valuable. The primary informal means utilized for assessment are observation and listening. "Running records" are formal assessments in which a student reads a story and answers comprehension questions indicating the student's instructional reading level. After several months of assessment, the students' accomplishments are reported to their parents. Parents, as children's first teachers, need to continue to be involved with their children's development and progress. Several times throughout the year, teachers invite parents to the school to report on students' achievement.

Additionally, the role of the teacher is their own assessment of their teaching methods. Teachers are continuously looking at how their teaching can be done differently in order to help the student achieve their best learning potential. Simmons contends assessment is an essential ongoing component of instruction that guides the process of learning (cited in Driscoll & Freiberg, 2000).

## **The Curriculum**

### **Atlantic Province Education Foundation (APEF)**

In 1993, Newfoundland and Labrador became a partner with the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF). The APEF became the new model for curriculum development, the new plan for learning. Through the APEF the province has developed Essential Graduation Learnings (EGL), which are the learnings students are expected to demonstrate at the end of certain key stages in their

education. On completion of the students' education, all graduates should be able to think, learn, and communicate effectively, to acquire the skills needed to function as productive and informed members of society.

There are ten general goals or General Curriculum Outcomes (GCO) in the core subjects of Math, Science, English, and Social Studies. There are also the Key Stage Curriculum Outcomes (KSCO) which specify what students need to know at the end of each grade level 3, 6, 9, and 12. There are curriculum guides for each subject area and grade level with Specific Curriculum Outcomes (SCO).

In the Atlantic Province Education Foundation (APEF) curricular guides, it states that "all teachers share the responsibility for helping students think, learn and communicate effectively" (p.45). Each teacher has a role and responsibility to develop language and help students use it effectively even during math or science classes. This goal can only be realized with the input and cooperation of all school personnel. All teachers, regardless of discipline or grade level, need to become active in improving reading, writing, speaking and listening skills for every student. This statement would include learning resource teachers, music teachers and physical education teachers. In high school this deposition would include the math teachers, science teachers, as well as the language arts teacher.

The vision of the APEF (1993) language arts curriculum is "to encourage students to be reflective, articulate, literate individuals who use language successfully for learning and communicating in personal and public contexts" (p.5). The curriculum states that what it means to be literate will continue to change as visual and electronic media become more dominant forms of expression and communication. The APEF curriculum at all levels "extends the traditional concept of literacy to include media and information literacies. This concept of literacy offers students multiple pathways to learning through verbal, visual, and technological means" (p.1). Students

need to read and use a range of texts, a variety of books, magazines, and the internet, to participate fully in today's society and to function competently in the workplace. The APEF (1993) uses the term text "to describe any language event, whether oral, written, or visual" (p. 1).

The social skills of speaking and listening to each other may be taught in the early grades, but just as much attention is essential in practising the art of speaking and listening in the upper grades. Likewise, in reading, some children do not become "readers" until the age of twelve or even later in life. It is at this point that the teacher continues to encourage the students' growth to become literate, functioning individuals.

## **Primary English Language Arts Curriculum**

### **An Overview**

The Primary English Language Arts Curriculum Guide has been developed to support teachers in the implementation of the English Language Arts curriculum. It specifies the prescribed curriculum, or outcomes for a particular grade level. It provides a comprehensive framework for teachers of Kindergarten to grade three. The primary teachers use the guide for purposes of ensuring that the learning experiences, instruction, student assessment, resources, and program evaluation are implemented throughout the school year.

The Primary English Language Arts guide provides the Specific Curriculum Outcomes (SCO). This guide includes the specific curriculum outcomes and what is expected of the students in the emergent, early and transitional levels. These levels follow the language processes of speaking and listening, reading and viewing, writing and other ways of representing. These are the processes which are performed and

observed in the classroom (see Appendix A).

For the purpose of teacher effectiveness the intern utilized the APEF Language Arts Curriculum guide to confirm what literacy instruction was being used by the classroom teacher. From the Language Arts Curriculum, the intern devised a list using a four-point scale to include always, frequent, infrequent, and never. The intern's journal confirmed what curriculum was covered and to what extent. The purpose of this list was to demonstrate what literacy skills were implemented (see Appendix A). It is not a complete list of the Specific Curriculum Outcomes, but shows a fair sampling at each literacy skill division.

### **Conclusion**

There are many definitions of literacy. Specifically, the APEF (1993) curriculum document "extends the traditional concept of literacy to include media and information literacies. This concept of literacy offers students multiple pathways to learning through verbal, visual and technological means" (p.1). There is more than one path in becoming literate. Parents and teachers both work towards developing children's literacy.

During the first five years of a child's life, parents are their first teachers. They take on the role of encouraging literacy or book experiences with their children. Burns and Snow (1999) write in their foreword, "reading is essential in our society, for creating a healthy mind and for building the capacity needed for a lifetime of learning" (p.7). When parents and grandparents read aloud to their younger family members a strong bond is created between generations providing them with many enjoyable shared experiences. It is these memories that the children remember even after they have become excellent readers.

When children begin school, teachers continue the book experiences and encourage literacy development with children. In preparing students for tomorrow, the APEF (1993) curriculum guidelines help to focus teachers on the need to continuously find ways to help all learners become literate, functioning individuals. In this view, the increased demand on teachers' time, and the expanded roles teachers face meeting the needs of all students, are a challenge. "This challenge will require us to break from the mold of a limited approach to teaching and expand the options to meet the needs of every learner. This is the challenge of teaching for tomorrow" (Moore, 2001, p.18).

# **Chapter 3**

## **Personal Observations and Reflections**

### **Introduction**

The main objective of this internship placement was to observe the direct and indirect literacy activities used in the classroom and the teacher's role in literacy development. Within the context of our own school system, there are professionals who we can have a mentoring relationship in developing our principles in the area of literacy teaching. As described in the methodology of the report, the intern used an observation list as a guide to confirm what literacy instruction was used by the classroom teacher. The list was devised from The Primary English Language Arts Curriculum Guide (see Appendix A). Three areas of the school were selected to highlight the literacy activities: the primary classroom, the learning resource center, and the family resource center. This particular experience has allowed the intern to observe and elaborate various aspects of literacy within the school.

In this section of the paper, the intern made use of a daily journal to record ideas and reflections about the daily roles and responsibilities of a teacher in literacy. The qualitative method was the best choice to complete the study as it allowed for reflection and personal interpretation. It includes specific literacy events that occurred in the classroom and the school. These experiences collectively illustrate a school with a vision and teachers who are part of that vision to be effective literacy teachers.

This chapter also includes specific events that occurred within the school during the period of the internship. School X has made great efforts in literacy development and improving children's reading levels through their "School Improvement Plan". Development and planning are evolving in creating changes the staff would like to see, as they assess the progress gained on what has already been tried. The teachers

incorporated many activities to promote reading during the year, as a result, students are getting the message that reading is an enjoyable and an excellent activity to choose in their leisure time.

Through the School Improvement Plan many goals have been implemented to support literacy progression. It took many years of formulating and planning to bring the school to where it is today. A block of three years was proposed to create their in-school literacy environment. Through the school's initiatives, School X could be deemed a "model school" in terms of the direction taken to improve and promote literacy.

### **Reflections and Internship Experiences**

#### **School Improvement Plans**

Educational change involves the vision of many stakeholders: teachers, students, parents and community. Organization, direction and an action plan are required to initiate any changes. In observing the students at School X, the staff noticed a need to improve and promote reading. In order to create this change in the school, a School Improvement Committee was formed. The committee was composed of teachers and an administrator. The committee first looked at past activities, who they were as a school, and how they were doing. They developed a sense of what needed to be done, and the direction they wanted to move. Having teachers' input from the beginning ensured that the changes and vision became a part of the goals of the entire staff.

In this process of change, a mission statement was devised to state what the school was all about and what the teachers wanted to see in their students overall. In the mission statement they not only wanted to foster the students intellectual and

personal growth, but they also wanted the students, parents, teachers and anyone who entered the building to feel accepted and respected in a happy and caring environment. By creating a mission statement, the stakeholders were committed to providing a rich learning experience throughout the school, not just in the classrooms, so that students would become contributing members of the school environment. The ideals of this mission statement were evident on a daily basis. From the time one entered the building one could see how positively every person, whether it was a student, a teacher, a parent, or a visitor were greeted, cared for and acknowledged as an individual. This helped in creating a warm, welcoming feeling to all who came through the doors of this particular school.

Next, the committee involved the students, the parents, and the teachers in a survey to research the needs of the school. The deeply devoted staff saw possibilities for school improvement and committed to making the process work. It was necessary to work as a team for the benefit of everyone concerned. After recording and assessing what the main needs were, they decided on two goals to address in this current school year: one academic and one social. From there, the school planned to reach these goals. Their academic goal was promoting and improving reading levels and their social goal was fostering self esteem. These goals were implemented and on-going throughout the school year. The changes that have taken place to this point have been gratifying to the students and staff.

### **The Role Of The Teacher**

This section of the paper is based in theory and practice with concrete examples provided for clarity from the internship. Four examples of the teachers' roles as previously discussed are instructing the curriculum, planning the

instruction, employing teaching strategies and assessing the instruction. These roles are a few examples the intern observed demonstrated by the teacher.

### **Instructing the Curriculum**

Effective instruction helps students develop a sense of purpose. A part of teachers' effectiveness is the ability to articulate their thoughts and opinions about what makes learning happen. Allen (2002) claims teachers' effectiveness is the criterion on which the "success or failure of current instructional strategies are judged, and the mental framework from which decisions are made regarding future instructional choices" (p.8).

When the teacher begins a lesson she has an objective clearly in mind. In practice, the professional teacher begins any and all lessons with a clearly defined objective in view. The lesson can include one of a number of objectives including reading, writing, listening and speaking. The teaching of objectives are related to themes in which learning happens. Themes are a way to teach several subject areas simultaneously in order for students to learn under the various objectives. One theme the intern observed concerned bears.

The teacher that the intern observed used categorizing as the objective because it is core to the grade one program. From the students, the teacher compiles a list of "bear" related stories with which they are familiar. This list of stories is categorized under the appropriate headings of fiction and non-fiction and serves as a reference point for the class throughout the theme or unit of work. Students clearly learn to understand each category.

Throughout the unit the teacher reads several stories related to bears. After the teacher reads a story, the students discuss if the story contains real facts about bears

or if it is fictional with bears talking. All answers are encouraged. Students decide under which category the story would fit; fiction or non-fiction. The teacher then writes the title of the story under the appropriate category.

Writing is an activity used throughout the bear theme creating many stories and journals. A class writing activity involves modeling from the story Brown Bear, Brown Bear What do you see? by Bill Martin Jr. The teacher reads this story aloud to the class. The children patterned the book with their thoughts, each contributing a page in creating a class book Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?. This book is assembled as their own book to be enjoyed by all students of the class. It is then put on the shelves in the classroom, and bar coded for the library. Students from the whole school have the opportunity to borrow and read their class story.

After Christmas, the students were quite able to spell many words on their own. To this point, they have learned various strategies through their teacher such as how to decode an unknown or unseen word. Such strategies would include sounding the word out phonetically, observing charts and signs in the classroom, scanning theme-related books on the shelves, using shared reading charts with students' own responses, asking an able student for help, or simply by asking the teacher. The students rewrote the story of "The Three Bears". Some words were provided for them on the board. The teacher would ask where they would find the word "bear". The students' suggestions confirmed that they, indeed, knew the spelling strategies to produce their own writing. The key to effective teaching, Freiberg and Driscoll (2000) reveal "is the ability to match the instructional approach with the learner, content, and context" (p. 202). The teacher encourages the instructional approach that is best suited to the individual abilities.

To conclude the unit on bears the teacher had students write their own stories about bears. This writing activity is a culmination of the objectives plus the knowledge

students learned about bears throughout the theme. The teacher discusses and reviews the students' knowledge about bears. For example, how many kinds of bears are there, what kind of bear is white, and which bears live in Newfoundland. Students had a choice to write a fiction or non-fiction story, telling all the information they learned about bears. Before starting, the students discussed what ideas they had and which genre they would choose. In a fiction story the students are told that they may start with "Once upon a time", and in the story bears could be talking or going on a picnic. These were some suggestions provided by the children. The teacher requests the students to close their eyes to think about what kind of story they will write, how they will start their story with an interesting sentence, and how they will sound out their words thinking of the first, middle, and last letters of a word. All this prompting is done before a child takes a pencil in hand. Then the students go to their seats to begin writing their stories on paper. The children are given the time to write. The teacher assists students who need help with their writing. When they have completed their stories, the students read their story to the teacher. The teacher then writes the corrections of the story at the bottom of their paper. The stories are then displayed on the wall.

The listening objective is presented through the genre of poetry. One selection is a book of poems by Jane Yolen about bears. Before the reading, the teacher inquires what is a poem. The students' ideas about poems are verbalized. Another listening as well as speaking activity involves the traditional story of "The Three Bears". Since this story is such a familiar one to most children, the teacher reads the story with the students' help. Next, the class dramatizes the story. All students are involved as a group, so no one who may feel shy is embarrassed with their performance. A few students played papa bear, some played mama bear, and some played baby bear. A final group played Goldilocks. Another

day, the teacher reads a story called Beware of the Bears by Alan MacDonald, which is a reversal of the "The Three Bears" story in which the three bears visit the house where Goldilocks lives. A review of the students' knowledge of bears is discussed, to see how much the students remember. The teacher encourages the students to provide all answers orally in complete sentences.

To encourage speaking and oral reading, the teacher has the student read a story to the class. Each child in the class chooses a book from home and prepares a story to read in front of their classmates. The students had done this oral reading earlier in the year, and now the teacher provides another occasion for the students. The teacher talks about the event in a positive, encouraging way, expressing how much fun it is. Their parents or family members can come and hear the students read their story on the day it is their turn.

There are daily literacy routines and scheduled activities. However, there are events planned during thematic units that lend themselves to embracing "real life" literacy events. For example, when the theme on "cats" was completed the students celebrated their learning by having a visit from a veterinarian. He brought along his tools and his two dogs. In his presentation, he demonstrates the care people should take with their pets and what a vet does to help the animals if they are sick. After the visit, the class writes a thank-you letter with everyone contributing to the discussion and ideas. Many experiences like this one are created in the classroom to provide exposure for all students who may not have sufficient background knowledge. The students in the class can contribute to discussions about pets even if pets are not part of their home lives.

## **Planning the Instruction**

Once the teacher has decided on the objective for the lesson or identified the skill to be learned, the teacher then selects the means for students to achieve the intended outcome. Freiberg and Driscoll (2000) note "effective teaching is not a haphazard process. Expert teachers plan ahead to create an environment that is conducive for both their teaching style and student learning" (p. 21). Effective teachers carefully incorporate some form of planning in their lessons. What is taught in the lessons cannot be left to chance. Freiberg and Driscoll (2000) suggest "how the plan is formed appears to be unique to the individual teacher" (p.21). The plans range from providing the strategies for the lesson, listing materials to be used in the lesson, and setting up the classroom for the lesson or thematic unit.

Knowledge is an important starting point in planning to teach (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2000). The intern observes the first decision the teacher makes is the selection of literacy materials. The teacher utilizes the school library to choose all resources available to her for the unit as well as some of her own personal resources. The teacher sets up the classroom with the theme to be studied by the students. The classroom is decorated with pictures, words, and good quality books of various genres related to the subject that students are learning about in class. This learning takes place in the form of discussion, reading, and writing.

Hunter (1994) states that the teacher must determine what information the students needs "in order to achieve the target objective" (p. 24). A new unit begins with a story read aloud to activate prior knowledge. The teacher selects books on topics of interest to the children representing a wide range of ability levels. A great deal of good quality children's literature including several genres are displayed on the shelf. "Boys and girls of all ages should have the opportunity to hear good literature

and one of the best ways to interest children in books is to read to them frequently from the time they are first able to listen” (Huck, Hepler, Hickman, & Kiefer, 2001, p.425). Once a story is read then students brainstorm and contribute what they know about the topic, their experiences or what they may have heard in the story. These responses are recorded on chart paper and left for reference during the unit.

The teacher planned a Grandfriends’ Day to bring together readers of all ages. A local senior citizens home joined with the school in bringing the grade one class to the Seniors’ Home a couple of times throughout the year. Buses and programming were provided by the recreational leaders from the Senior Citizens’ Home. The children participated in events like Hallowe’en parties, dressing in costume, Valentine’s Day party, and making Easter bonnets. In June, the residents from the Seniors’ Home came to visit the school. The children sang songs, read a story, gave special cards and had tea and cookies with the elders.

### **Employing Teaching Strategies**

The active planning period brings together the content to be taught with the strategies for teaching. Freiberg and Driscoll (2000) points out the content can be “transformed into new learning for the students by the teacher directly or indirectly, depending on the teacher’s role as lecturer or facilitator” (p.37).

Teachers must engage in activities that affect the literacy achievements of the students. The primary classroom is a very busy place. The teacher provides many opportunities for all kinds of reading. She is continuously including activities such as peer reading, guided reading, independent reading, read alouds, creative writing and journal and creative writing. These activities are to increase the students’ ability to read and write, to feel special and learn within a rich literacy environment. Even

before the teacher arrives to the classroom there is reading, conversation, and note writing already happening among the students.

Students are read to providing the model of positive reading behaviours. Reading aloud generates interest in books. Huck, Hepler, Hickman, and Kiefer (2001) comment "good oral reading should develop a taste for fine literature" (p.576). Additionally, silent, buddy, peer, independent and choral reading opportunities are arranged to practise the reading strategies they have learned. Group storybook reading promotes children's literacy development. In group storybook reading students are divided into groups based on reading ability. Each group is given the time to read from their reader. This opportunity is an important strategy, in that it does not single out any one student who is a struggling reader. Each student gets to participate, as they are familiar with the story. As well, other students in the group will help those along in their reading who are unsure of the words. The students who are the audience give the group a round of applause showing courtesy and providing positive encouragement in reading before another group takes a turn.

### **Assessing the Instruction**

Assessment is a tool utilized for understanding the students' needs as well as the teachers' own assessment of their teaching. This reflective teaching is to provide the best teaching strategy for the individual students. Deschamps and Louisell (1992) claim "the best way to determine if a student has acquired a basic or cognitive skill is to ask the student to submit a tangible product which demonstrates that the skill has been learned" (p.95). A few examples of this product are tests, assignments, drawings and story writings. Hunter (1994) suggests an effective way for a student to know what is an acceptable finished product is " by providing an example or modeling what is

required" (p.12). The teacher would model a good response both orally or in writing before the students are asked to complete a question and answer activity sheet. Prior to the children writing a story, the teacher would discuss the five w's (i.e., who, what, where, when and why). These details would be included in the students' stories.

One of the school's goals is improving the reading levels of students at each grade level. The school used a pretest/posttest for their own school baseline assessment. In October, every child at each grade level was given a sight word vocabulary and a reading comprehension passage. The same test was administered in May of the school year, and a comparison was made as to how the children improved over the year. All students showed improvement in their scores from the pretest to the posttest. Also during the year, the grade one teachers determined areas needing improvements. At the grade one level, a weekly story was assigned. Students had to answer questions both orally and in writing. In this activity, students made improvements in answering questions in complete sentences as well as enhancing their reading comprehension. The teacher gave these areas of concern specific attention during the class instruction.

A formal assessment utilized by the teachers in the classroom is the "running record." This assessment indicates how well the students improved in their reading over a period of time. The assessment is used at several points throughout the year. Over the year, all students have shown varying levels of improvements with their reading. Some students who were struggling with their reading made improvements, although some may show below grade level results in reading for other reasons.

The teacher is constantly searching for ways to improve the literacy skills of all the students in her class and to augment the students' reading ability so that they can cope with the many factors involved in learning. Teachers who look to meet the needs of their students can improve their learning so they can be successful.

Teachers who are willing to learn from their mistakes can enhance and improve their own satisfaction with their teaching thus motivating the students to learn. To judge the effectiveness of the teaching, the intern used an observation list to determine the extent to which the curriculum was included in the classroom instruction (see Appendix B).

Moore (2001) suggests that to be effective, teachers must change “their view of teaching as static, with simple formulas and cookbook rules, to teaching as dynamic and ever changing. This change will require a teacher to become a reflective teacher” (p. 5). Reflective teaching suggests that teachers think deeply and examine their own teaching. Through this process teachers become thoughtful and wiser teachers. In other words, teachers who reflect on their effectiveness become better decision makers and, consequently, more effective teachers.

At this school, teachers are individually looking to improve their own teaching along with the school-wide instruction. Teachers have taken time to look at the overall students’ growth in reading. It is difficult to take the time to reflect when many activities are occurring simultaneously with the intensive day-to-day teaching responsibilities. For this reason, in June, this school took one of their professional development days to look at the results of their school based assessment in reading and to develop plans for the next academic school year. In observing the comparisons of pretest and posttest, one completed in the fall and one in the spring, the staff could clearly see the performance of the students and their improvements. Utilizing this professional development day provided the much needed time for reflection and planning. The teachers examined the results and appreciated the success of the students before moving ahead to plan the next steps. From these results, the staff observed how the students continued to grow and obtain academic progress, which is in itself rewarding. This time for reflection helps a teacher stay the course and move forward in the right

direction for the benefit of all students under their care.

### **The Learning Resource Center**

The Learning Resource Center (LRC) is a very active and central part of the school. Many students enjoy going there during school, at break time and after school to use the computers, and to have quiet time for reading and completion of work. The LRC, which was once well known as the library, has much to offer the students as well as the teachers as a resource for information and space for preparation work. The learning resource teacher has a role in promoting reading among the students outside of the classroom setting. She is also a helpful resource person to the teachers by supplying books, materials, and visuals on various themes. The learning resource teacher is a prime example of supporting the goals of the APEF document. She has shared the responsibility for helping students become literate individuals who communicate effectively using language. She has made a difference to the students in supporting their education and helping them become, as the APEF (1995) states, "productive, informed and literate members of society." The school that was the setting for this internship report has attempted many initiatives in supporting students in their reading programs and emphasizing the value and joy of reading. Students need to learn to read, so they can read to learn new knowledge, as well as experience the pleasure that reading can give!

The school has made very good use of the resource center. One way the students made use of the LRC is through weekly visits. The primary students have a half hour a week to listen to a story being read and then to exchange their book for the week. At another scheduled time, they spend a half hour learning to use the computer. They learn how to log on to the computer and how to use different reading

and math programs, such as Story Book Weaver and math games such as Treasure Cove. The elementary students have an hour a week in which they exchange their books and then spend time learning about the computer using many different programs in reading and math, such as Storybook Weaver Deluxe and Mathville Junior.

In addition, the resource teacher employs various activities during computer time. Throughout the year she sets up a math challenge with the elementary classes. It is a friendly competition within each grade level to see how many points they can get in a set amount of time. They are given three chances. The best total is taken, and the class with the top score is acknowledged for their accomplishments. A second computer activity involved a grade five class who participated in writing stories and e-mailing their stories to a local high school. The high school students edited and replied to the stories by e-mail. Another activity involved the students in the After School Computer Club. They developed and published a newsletter several times throughout the year. The successful newsletter provided enjoyment.

The students have used the internet as a source of information while working on different themes throughout the year. It is emphasized with the elementary students that the internet is one tool to use when researching information for their projects. During the winter of 2002, the Olympics was the focus on several television stations. The resource teacher saw this opportunity as a very interesting theme to research on the internet with students. The elementary students were given a sheet of about ten questions to answer from the Olympic Web Site.

To encourage reading, the resource teacher involved several elementary students in the "Hackmatach Reading Club" which involves students across the Atlantic Provinces. These students read different books written by authors from the Atlantic Provinces. The students then completed a form about the story and why they

liked or did not it. The students voted for the book of their choice. The author won the Hackmatach Award based on students' choices. This year's winning selection was Charlie Wilcox by Sharon McKay.

The resource teacher is very helpful in cooperative teaching of different themes throughout the year. Each class may have the opportunity to do two or three theme units a year for a duration of a two-week block. The primary classes are involved with units from their curriculum, and the elementary classes are involved with the curriculum units, but they also study themes like Remembrance Day or St. Patrick's Day.

The classes of each grade work cooperatively with the resource teacher on specific themes. The two classes are divided into three groups since there are two classroom teachers plus the learning resource teacher. Dividing the classes gives each teacher a smaller group with which to complete an activity. In each group, the students do an activity on the theme. The next day each group rotates to another activity within the theme. One activity is in the resource center where the students learn how to search and use information in dictionaries and encyclopedias. The students are excited about this block of time. They get to do different activities outside their classroom work. The students work in a smaller group with other students outside of their own classmates, while learning a lot about a certain subject. A theme on butterflies, for example, may involve such activities as viewing a video, listening at a center with a story about butterflies on tape, reading a butterfly informational booklet for learning the parts of a butterfly, making a comparison between a butterfly and a moth, writing a story based on what the students learned about butterflies and choosing a free center. A unit on space may include a video, a math assignment, a dictionary activity, an informational booklet about space, a listening center, a story writing activity, or an art project in making a rocket . Students are graded on what they

have learned at the end of the unit.

The resource teachers have many roles to play. They are teachers to the students, facilitating the development of their literacy skills as well as assisting and training the teachers in integrating information literacy into the curriculum and getting the most out of technology. The resource teachers are very active in advocating well-rounded, information-literate students providing the alternative pathways of learning through visual and technological means (Lowe,2000). The teachers are managers and providers of quality collections of books and other materials to support the curriculum for both students and teachers.

### **The Family Resource Center**

The particular school utilized in this internship experience has a close relationship between the home and school through the “Brighter Futures” group. “Brighter Futures” is an independent organization supported by the federal and provincial governments and is unique to this particular school. The “Brighter Futures” group is an outlet for parents with preschool children to come and interact with other parents and observe and participate in reading activities in a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere. As previously stated, parents are their children’s first teachers. This community group also shares the responsibility for building literacy in preschool children, as well as assisting parents with their own education. Programs such as this one can only help boost children’s academic growth and assist parents to improve their parenting and literacy skills. This support is the concept of family literacy, as mentioned earlier in the paper, which includes intergenerational programs that are designed to nurture literacy for parents or significant others, as well as for children.

The Family Resource Center has occupied a space at the school for a couple

of years and is directed by "Brighter Futures". The center offers many programs for families with children ages preschool to twelve who attend this school or are living in the area. The Community Committee meets once a month to plan programs and set the direction for the center. The committee involves the parents, the school resource people and the "Brighter Futures" staff. There are several programs in place for both children and parents. The play group and Children Only Programs are for children. The parenting programs are computers for parents, Parent Club, and aerobics.

One program is the Play Group for children from birth to six years of age and their parents. Children have fun, interact with age related children, spend quality time with their parents, and develop their language, social, pre-literacy, creativity and physical skills in a play-based environment. Other services involve borrowing materials, there is a book and toy lending program available at the center. Another program is the Children Only Programs involving such events as cooking, games, art, music and movement. These programs are offered for six weeks at a time as available.

Another project involves parenting programs. These programs, such as "How to Talk so Kids Will Listen," and "Nobody's Perfect" are workshops and lecture sessions offered to small groups of parents in a comfortable and familiar setting. At the center, there are brochures and materials available to the parents on various issues involving children. Another service is the Computers for Parents, which supports the children's literacy. Parents learn computer skills and other literacy skills such as computer basics, keyboarding, job skills, word processing, email, internet and composing web pages. One more program is the Parent Club, which involves parents regularly getting together for cooking, games, a movie or other social events that they plan together. An exercise activity for parents is the aerobics fitness session offered once a week at the school.

The Family Resource Center, located within the school, is effective not only for providing the children with the best support possible in their quest for literacy learning, but by also giving guidance to parents as to which activities they might do to promote literacy development. Teale and Sulzby (1989) mention one way to facilitate early literacy learning is by adults demonstrating it. When parents are reading, they demonstrate the act of literacy to their children. Parents are also present at the center to provide support to each other and to discuss common concerns which they may have about their children. As parents become more comfortable with the teachers and more familiar with the school surroundings, they are more willing to partake in their child's education when they begin school. Parents are volunteering more, and are more visible in the school, sharing their responsibility of being involved in their children's educational development.

### **Literacy Events In The School**

The literacy involvement at this school is not just contained within the classroom walls. As a staff, the improvement and promotion of reading was a school wide objective to generate changes in the students literacy abilities. The school's primary goal was to get students reading. The following are some of the reading activities the school has adopted over the years through the actions of the School Improvement Committee: Silent Reading, Buddy Reading, Read-a-thon, Community Readers, Public Speaking, Computer Club/ Newsletter and The Hackmatach Reading Club. Each year the activities are assessed as to whether to continue them or to supplement some other innovative experience.

The Community Readers activity is a meaningful way to include many persons from the community. They come to the school to read a story aloud to individual

classes. These readers may be someone from the municipal or provincial government, the business community, or parents who have a few minutes to share with the students. By coming and giving their time they show the students the value of reading. The school staff shows they appreciate the community readers' efforts by providing refreshments of tea or coffee and treats. This event occurs once a month and is enthusiastically anticipated by the students, staff and community readers.

Public Speaking involves all the students of the school from kindergarten to grade six. The primary students individually recite a poem in their classroom for their parents. The elementary students prepare a speech and present it to their class. Three representatives from each grade level are chosen to present and be judged on public speaking night. On this evening, honours for first, second and third place are awarded.

Another goal the school wanted to enhance was the students' self-esteem. The staff believed if students felt good about themselves then it would enhance their overall work efforts. Some self-esteem activities included monthly self-esteem awards, announcements of birthdays and students' accomplishments. The self-esteem awards are presented to the students in front of their peers and parents in the gym during their monthly assembly. The Principal or Vice Principal, during their morning greetings to the school body, would announce the students' birthdays and achievements. A gift of a birthday button or pencil is given to the students to highlight their day and make them feel special. In the morning, special awards that students receive outside of school are announced. These awards can be a badge through Scouts, an award gained through bowling or hockey or certificates through dancing or singing. Other programs offered for self-esteem are an anti-violence workshop, Elmer Safety Program, Second Step, Intramural Sports, and After School Programs such as drama, tap dancing, chess, and animal rights club.

Each month the School Improvement Committee would decide on a social skill the school would practice for the month, such as taking-turns or thinking positively. The social skill would be posted in each classroom as a reminder to students how they could improve themselves and their school. Both of these reading and self-esteem goals have improved the students' interest in reading and feeling good about themselves. Students want to be in school knowing they are cared about and there is an interest in them to do well by their teachers.

### **Conclusion**

This internship provided the intern with the experience of working with and observing the role of the teacher in the day-to-day routines. These routines include the interaction with the students and staff, the organization and planning, the implementation of the teaching strategies, and the assessment of the students' performance. The intern can appreciate and develop a better understanding of the role of a teacher in today's classroom. The intern can infer that the responsibilities of teachers are complex, diverse, and exciting. The role of the teacher is multidimensional as it encompasses many duties, which are seemingly infinite and unpredictable. The internship provided the intern with insights to the challenging and rewarding aspects of teaching.

While effective teaching research offers much insight into common and universal functions of a classroom teacher, the intern concludes, after having this practical experience, that the individual teacher with a sense of commitment, a focus, and a vision in mind for his or her students, constructs what he or she feels are the teacher's main responsibilities and roles. Clearly, it was evident from the intern's role as observer and participant that the primary task of the teacher is improving the quality

of instruction so all students can learn. All other responsibilities are dependent on the instruction and should reflect the fulfillment of this goal. As Hunter (1994) agrees, "the major thrust of education is on promoting and maintaining learning so that 'all students will learn' with whatever professional assistance is necessary to ensure their success" (p. 24). The ability to maintain and accomplish these self-determined responsibilities will characterize the success and the effectiveness of the teacher as an educator in literacy.

The intern has internalized that an effective literacy teacher has a sense of commitment and dedication to the students to achieve the mission and vision of the school environment. The intern has learned there are many partners involved, parents, teachers, and community in the continuation of the students' learning. The intern realizes that the responsibility of each contributing partner is a valuable individual investment in literacy development. Everyone working together contributing their own unique expertise and experiences helps reach the lofty achievement of literacy for all. The collective efforts of the teachers could also have a focus towards bridging the gaps found in children who do not have an adequate preschool background. All teachers, within this school, work in unison to present a well rounded literacy program. As a result, the culmination of the in class and school literacy activities, students display an increase in their reading abilities.

The authors of the document entitled APEF (1993) contend that teachers are responsible for the formal instruction of childrens' literacy at school. To deal with the responsibilities and the many major tasks that teachers must perform requires a strong individual of varying abilities. The intern observed these abilities in the teachers at this school. Moore (2001) suggests the following as abilities a teacher must possess: (i) to be self-monitoring individuals, (ii) decision makers, (iii) reflective, and (iv) sensitive to the student.

All stakeholders need to continue to be active in building children's literacy. If one goal of the whole community is to make changes in the reading abilities of children, it is vital to demonstrate reading as a valuable and enjoyable activity. When the community as a whole agrees to take on this responsibility of reading to children, they highlight reading as a natural, everyday activity, not leaving the responsibility solely to the teachers in the educational systems. Love (cited in Trelease, 1982), a Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools stated, "If we could get our parents to read to their preschool children 15 minutes a day, we could revolutionize the schools" (p.11). It cannot be stressed enough that reading aloud at home, before children come to school, is a preventive measure to many reading difficulties a child may encounter later in the elementary or junior high grades.

Parents, teachers, and the community are all significant in the development of literacy in children. They sow the seed. It is rooted in daily reading experiences, tenderly nurtured by caring parents, teachers and community. The child sprouts into a budding reader who in his/her own good time blossom into a fluent, independent reader. Goal achieved!

## **Recommendations:**

From my personal experiences as a classroom teacher there are still many children reaching kindergarten unprepared for formal literacy instruction. Parents have an important role to play in their children's literacy development. While there are parents we have reached, there still remain parents whom we never seem to reach and are the very ones needing guidance on how to offer rich literacy experiences to their children. When students enter the education system the teacher begins the role of instructing the child at the child's instruction level. Some suggestions to provide guidance to these parents are:

- A "bedtime story session" offered at the school, perhaps between 7 and 7:30 with teachers reading a story and modeling for the parents what can be done as a story is read aloud. From the modeling, in a non-threatening atmosphere, parents can observe, what they can do to promote their child's educational development. Even parents with low literacy levels can partake by opening a book, looking at the pictures, talking and interacting about what is happening in those pictures. This activity can be short and delivered with ease, concluding the evening with a treat such as juice and cookies.
- An information session to explain how parents can foster their child's literacy development would be valuable. There can be a demonstration of ideas so that moms, dads or childgivers support preschool development. Some examples include: practicing the alphabet by pointing out letters in their environment, reading alphabet books, reading books with rhymes, and playing language games such as tongue twisters and riddles. Even before children come to school, we must become committed to developing their appreciation of and familiarity with text.

-This internship report offers some suggestions or activities that can be used to maximize the literacy learning of students (see Appendix B). The extent to how effective the activities are will depend on the individual teachers and the students with whom they are using them. How effective the literacy practice or teaching will be is an inquiry for future research.

- Continued action research, such as the utilization of the "Significant Others as Reading Teachers" (S.O.R.T) (Oldford-Matchim, 1994) might be undertaken to further extend the focus of parental involvement in early literacy experiences.

# Appendix

**Appendix A**  
**Observation List for Grade One**  
**Language Arts Curriculum**

**1.Always            2.Frequently            3.Infrequently            4.Never**

**Speaking and Listening:**

- 1 listen critically to others' ideas and opinions
- 1 participate in conversation; understand when to speak, when to listen
- 1 demonstrate a growing awareness of social conventions such as turn - taking, politeness and basic courtesies in conversation
- 1 speak in full sentence
- 1 use vocabulary that shows respect for all people
- 1 use intonation, volume, projection, facial expressions, gestures and tone of voice to the speaking occasion
- 1 ask and respond to questions to clarify information
- 1 give and follow instructions and respond to questions and directions in complete sentences
- 2 identify some forms of oral language that are unfair to particular individuals and cultures
- 1 recognize some examples of unfair and hurtful vocabulary, begin to make vocabulary choices that affirm rather than hurt people
- 1 Monday morning news telling
- 1 engage in critical discussions in expressing their thoughts and why they think this way, giving reasons for answers.

## **Reading and Viewing:**

- 1** regard reading/viewing as sources of interest, enjoyment, and information
- 1** select, independently and with teacher assistance, texts appropriate to their interests and learning needs
- 1** read widely and experience a variety of children's literature
- 1** identify different types of print and media texts; upper and lower case letters have specific forms and functions( first word in sentence and proper names)
- 1** predict content using text information along with personal knowledge and experiences
- 1** predict on the basis of what makes senses, what sounds right, and what the print suggests
- 1** makes meaningful substitutions and attempts to self- correct predictions that interfere with meaning
- 2** begin to monitor their own reading by cross-checking meaning cues with cues from beginning and last letters of the word (Did it sound right, It it's tiger, would it start with a "p" or end with "u")
- 1** use title, cover, pictorial, organizational features of written text to determine content, locate topics and obtain information
- 1** describe their own reading and viewing processes and strategies
- 1** answer, with assistance, their own questions and those of others by seeking information from a variety of texts
- 1** express and explain opinions about the work of authors and illustrators giving the reasons for their opinions (Why do you think that? or Why do you say that?)
- 1** question information presented in print and visual texts
- 1** identify instances of prejudice, bias, and stereotyping
- 1** engage in research process with assistance;locate appropriate information (classroom, library, home, community) interact with the information
- 1** use of children's literature read aloud , students reading silently and aloud in small or whole groups.

1 a variety of books and genres used as fiction, non - fiction, informational, fairy tales and poetry.

### **Writing and Other Ways of Representing**

1 use writing and other forms of representation to express feelings, opinions and imaginative ideas.

3 begin to develop with assistance some way to make their own notes like webs, story maps

2 begin to experiment with language choices in imaginative ways.

1 use a variety of familiar texts such as messages, letters, lists, stories, and poems.

2 simple corrections in spelling, punctuation,-- capitals, periods, using a class made word list, or locating a word within the classroom environment whether in book or on the wall.

1 use some conventions of written language

- spacing between words
- an increasing number of letters to represent sounds
- using an increasing number of words spelled conventionally
- use simple sentence structures
- attempt to use punctuation periods, question marks, exclamation marks
- use capital letters for proper nouns, pronoun "I" and sentence beginnings

1 choose to write independently during free choice

1 contribute observations and information during shared writing activities as class letter, records of field trips, science experiments

3 with assistance, develop strategies for making and organizing notes

1 imaginative story writing based on thematic units

1 journal writing

## **Technology**

1 with assistance, experiment with technology in writing and other forms of writing

4 create illustrations/drawings with a computer graphics drawing program

4 compose simple text with a word processing program( begin to revise and edit)

4 share writing on - line

1 to interact with with resources (print, non-print, or human) to answer their own questions or learning needs.

2 share their information in a variety of ways.

-The APEF and English Language Arts Primary Curriculum

## **Appendix B**

### **Usable Activities for the Literacy Teachers**

These activities relate to the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing and have been used successfully by teachers to help children in their literacy development.

#### **Listening**

- have students tell you why they need to be good listeners when someone is reading a story, or when someone is speaking.
- give students listening reminders so they are focused and attentive (i.e. eyes looking at the speaker, ears listening, lips closed, hands are still, feet are quiet). This would be the grade one listening style. These listening cues can be posted in the classroom. When the teacher begins to say the listening reminders this would give clues to the children what they need to do.

#### **Speaking**

- have students share Monday morning news . Each child takes a turn to tell any news they have. Children can choose not to share. They may not have news to share every time you do this. Incorporate the good listening and speaking routines here. Use good manners. Look at the speaker. Make no comments. Be a good audience. Hands down to emphasize this is listening time.
- have students dramatize a familiar story like "The Three Bears"
- have students each recite a poem to practice dramatic reading and reciting with expression and fluency.
- have a public speaking afternoon and invite the parents in to allow them to hear their

children recite their poem, or talk about a favourite toy or something that is special to them.

-have students solve a math equation at the board. Students verbalize what is happening by explaining the process they used to arrive at their answer.

## **Reading**

-have students share their baggy book, the book students take for homework practice, to another student in the class before they change their book for a new one. You may also have reading buddies, older students listen to the children read .

- have students read a morning message on the chalkboard (i.e., Today is Tuesday, November 15, 2002. It is day 2. We will have music at 2:05. Sam will read to us today!)

- have student choral read familiar stories.

- have students practice reading a book from home. Then read it to the class. Parents can be invited to listen when it is their child's turn to read a book.

- have students practice their weekly sentences created by the teacher from events of the week or from things students should know ( i.e., When were you born? Sunday is Mother's Day). On Thursday students can read their sentences to you.

- guided reading with students who have difficulties in their reading. The other students are given work they can do independently while you work uninterrupted with your select group of students. (Students would have to understand previously the procedure to follow as to what to do while you work with a group without interruption).

-individual reading with students. At this time other students are quietly at their seat reading books independently. Depending on the number of students in your class, you can choose about five or six students a day to read with you one-on-one. Comments can be kept in a notebook on the story read, date, and how the student was handling the book chosen by them in areas such as word recognition, sounding out skills,

concepts about print and comprehension. By the end of the week you will have listened to your whole class reading individually to you. In this way you are able to give time to hear everyone read on an individual basis. You may decide to hear students experiencing difficulty read more often than those you know are well on their way to being readers! This activity has met with great success in getting students to become serious about their reading!

### **Writing**

- have students rewrite a familiar story like "The Three Bears"
- journal writing. Prepare the students before they begin writing. Discuss what they might want to write about by giving examples such as Easter holidays, the weekend, something special coming up, the news from the weekend they shared that morning or ask students what they might like to write about. Tell them or discuss where, when, and why it happened, and who you were with when it happened.
- creative writing. Have students write their own stories after you have read many stories from your theme and have had many discussions with the students on a particular subject such as bears or cats. A discussion of what kind of story they would like to write, fiction or a non-fiction story and what each story might involve such as animals talking in a fiction story or using facts about the animal in a non-fiction story.

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