Ohio's Proficiency Tests...
Raising the bar or raising questions?
"Research in Literacy" is a collaborative session organized by the Studies and Research Committee of OCIRA that is held annually at the Fall Conference. The session provides a forum for discussion of research currently being conducted by literacy researchers. The three studies reported at the 1997 session addressed very diverse topics. Presentations included an ethnographic study of university students’ response to text in the context of the culture of their classroom, a report of a teacher’s success using structured reading and spelling instruction in a classroom for learning disabled students, and a one year investigation of the internship experiences of two preservice language arts teachers. In each of these studies practitioner researchers have reflected upon their personal and professional involvement in promoting students’ learning. This article provides a summary of the papers presented at the session.

Responding to Text In a University Classroom

Nina Eddings, a graduate student at the University of Cincinnati, reported on her study, “In Transaction: The Culture of a Classroom,” in which she observed a class of university students and gathered descriptive information about their transactions with textual material on women’s roles and gender stereotypes. The subjects of the study, eleven female and four male university students, responded to text through group dialogue and reflective writings and participated in interviews conducted by Eddings.

Eddings explored how these readers’ perspectives and experiences contributed to their responses to text. The study is grounded in the transactional view of reading (Rosenblatt, 1978) which holds that a reader interprets text based on many personal attributes, including the reader’s prior knowledge of the topic of the text, attitudes and beliefs about the topic, as well as his or her psychological, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, purposes for reading, and the expectations that the reader has about the text. Eddings hypothesized that the university students’ mindsets for response also included their lived-through experiences as members of their current classroom culture. She postulated that the interests, concerns, and conflicts that arise in a classroom community would be reflected in the subjects’ responses to text.

As a participant observer in a university class that read texts which addressed women’s roles and gender stereotypes, Eddings collected data on factors that influenced the content of students’ re-
responses during group discussions and in individual reflective writings. She also interviewed four students to discuss factors that influenced their responses.

Eddings concluded that her subjects’ responses to text were influenced by three main factors. Students interpreted gender issues in text based on a variety of experiences, with personal and family history, personal goals, and family models, prejudices, and expectations being the most influential determiners of students’ viewpoints. These previously held perspectives appeared to have the greatest influence on students’ response, followed by the influence of cultural orientations. An additional determinant of response was the influence of the classroom culture. Eddings found that the class’s lived-through experiences, that is their collective interests and concerns as well as their controversies and debates, had influence on students’ interpretations of text.

These findings imply that teachers need to be aware of two important determiners of students’ responses to text. First, each student’s home background and personal ideas will form the “lens” through which the student reads a text. Teachers need to know their students well, both as individuals and as persons with a cultural history, in order to appreciate each student’s own transaction with a given text. Second, Eddings’ data imply that the classroom culture in which students and teachers participate can have an influence on students’ responses to texts. Teachers need to provide a classroom community which fosters curiosity and personal construction of meaning as well as discussion and co-construction of meaning.

**Structured Internalization: Systematic Spelling Instruction for Learning Disabled Students**

Richard M. Oldrieve is a teacher in the Cleveland Public Schools who has fourteen years of experience teaching learning disabled elementary and junior high school students. Oldrieve conducted practitioner research on the effects of structured reading and spelling instruction in a classroom for learning disabled elementary students.

Oldrieve developed a program of systematic instruction in rhyming, compare/contrast decoding, and applying spelling patterns that he has named structured internalization (Oldrieve, 1997). This method of teaching decoding and spelling introduces children to phonograms, the thirty-seven consistent letter clusters that contribute, with fairly consistent pronunciation, to approximately 500 words (Wylie and Durrell, 1970). Knowledge of phonograms (such as -ack, -et, -ip, -or, which are sometimes called rimes or word families) can help children compare an unknown word (for instance, “tack”) to a known word (“back”). The structured internalization program teaches students to decode and spell short vowel phonograms first, then teaches initial consonant onsets (as in the letter ‘b’ in “back”). Students move on to learn rules for decoding regular vowel sounds in words, then learn to sound out consonant blends and digraphs, and then apply spelling rules for adding suffixes to words. Students are taught irregular phonograms (as in “-all”) when they are proficient in the use of regular spelling patterns.

Structured internalization was developed in response to Oldrieve’s observation of the difficulties that his learning disabled students have with the phonological system of language. His students frequently have trouble with several phonologically based skills, including distinguishing individual speech sounds, segmenting words into their constituent sounds, and matching speech sounds to the letters that are used to represent these sounds. His students did not readily learn to rhyme and labored to use compare/contrast decoding to read words that have the same spelling pattern, such as “bank” and “tank.” Oldrieve’s strategy is to teach students sound-letter correspondence through daily spelling/decoding instruction. His students create a list of words that target the spelling pattern under study. The words that the students offer are a part of the their spoken vocabularies. Internalization of how spoken phonemes correspond with written graphemes occurs as students engage in multisensory practice by writing the words themselves, by spelling orally while the teacher writes the words, and by chorally reading and spelling the word list. As students progress through the levels of complexity in spelling patterns and new words are introduced, words that were learned previously are intermittently reviewed and individualized instruction is provided for students who have specific difficulties in areas such as rhyming or letter-sound.
correspondence.

Oldrieve has documented students’ progress using spontaneously correct written spelling of the words they have studied. The greatest benefits of structured internalization appear to be that Oldrieve’s students are aware that they are making progress in reading and spelling and their growth can be meaningfully and quantifiably reported to parents. Oldrieve has found that learning disabled students gain self-esteem and a sense of efficacy by working with peers to develop a bank of words that they can use in conversation, decode, and spell.

A One Year Investigation of the Internships of Two Preservice Language Arts Teachers

Tara Rosselot-Durbin, a doctoral candidate at the University of Cincinnati, presented “A Look at Cognitive Restructuring During the Teaching Experience of Two Language Arts Interns,” a qualitative study that documented how preservice teachers progressed through the frustration and cognitive dissonance that can be a part of an internship experience. By building collegial relationships that allowed for interactive dialogue and meaningful reflection, the interns came to understand both the problematic aspects of student teaching and the circumstances of teaching in a multicultural urban high school.

Rosselot-Durbin shadowed two male preservice high school English teachers as they interned for four months. She conducted interviews and observed classes weekly in an attempt to describe the interns’ concerns, investigate their coping strategies, and detail the cognitive restructuring (Norman, 1981) that transformed the interns from doubtful neophytes to more skilled and self-aware young teachers. The theoretical foundation for this study is the cognitive restructuring process posited by Norman (1981) which describes how individuals put together concepts, understand divergent experiences, attempt to resolve dissonance, and apply prior knowledge in new experiences. In this case, interns experienced cognitive restructuring as they synthesized educational theory learned in the university classroom with the real life experiences of preservice teaching and with the process of becoming socialized into the school context as a teacher, not a student. Rosselot-Durbin also cited studies on the professionalization of preservice teachers by Hoy and Woolfolk (1990) and Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985) as well as Schon’s (1983) writings on reflective teaching practice. These studies provide support for the notion that interns tend to go through a phase of dissonance before they can resolve the contradictions with which they are confronted and allow their new experiences to be examined in personal reflection on practice and in discussion with peers, teachers, and supervisors.

The data collected in this study reveal that interns’ concerns coincide with the process of growth in preservice teachers’ professional development described by Fuller and Brown (1975). At first, class management and “survival” were paramount concerns. Focus on presentation of content gave way to concern for student engagement; for example, the interns used less individual seat work and more cooperative learning. They also gained skill in learning to adapt their teaching practices and spotting discipline problems before they occurred. They began to understand that they could examine their own problems and pitfalls without feeling that they were failures as teachers. Perhaps most importantly, the interns learned to observe and evaluate themselves and set personal goals.

Rosselot-Durbin’s study has implications for both new and seasoned teachers. Novice teachers will perhaps see some of their own concerns reflected in the series of transitions described in the current study and in the studies cited by the author as background to her work. Dissonance, confusion, and the need for flexibility and quick thinking will likely be a part of the beginning teacher’s experience. Veteran teachers might review Rosselot-Durbin’s study and recall the patterns of change that they experienced as they began their careers and can, perhaps most importantly, become understanding mentors to preservice and newly hired teachers who are learning to apply their university studies to the real world of teaching.

Future “Research in Literacy” Sessions

For more information on the Studies and Research Committee of the Ohio Council of the International Reading Association, contact the committee co-chairs Dr. Penny Freppon, University of Cincinnati, at 513-556-3574 or by e-mail at Penny.Freppon@UC.Edu or Dr. Monica Gordon
Pershey at Cleveland State University at 216-687-4534, e-mail m.pershey@csuohio.edu. Literacy researchers who are conducting a study as part of the completion of a degree program or who have completed a degree within the past year are encouraged to contact the co-chairs about presenting research at future OCIRA Fall Conferences.

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**Additional Reading on the Topics Discussed at the 1997 “Research in Literacy” Session**

**Responding to Text in a University Classroom**


**Structured Internalization: Systematic Spelling Instruction for Learning Disabled Students**


**A One Year Investigation of the Internships of Two Preservice Language Arts Teachers**


