37th Annual RAI Conference
September 2013

LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND LITERATURE: RE-IMAGINING TEACHING AND LEARNING

FEATURES:
- Meet the Keynote Speakers at Conference 2013   • More Results from PIRLS 2011
- Munch Time Competition Winner 2013   • High Frequency Words
- Upcoming International Literacy Events

Reading Association of Ireland

Cumann Léitheoireachta na hÉireann

The Reading Association of Ireland (RAI), a national affiliate of the International Reading Association, was established in 1975

RAI aims to promote and disseminate best practice in the teaching and study of literacy

CURRENT PROJECTS
The promotion of research in literacy education
- RAI Literacy Development Awards for Schools
- RAI Biennial Award for an Outstanding Thesis on Literacy

The RAI Book Award
The RAI book award aims to support and promote Irish literature for children and adolescents

Regional development
The development of regional branches of RAI and the provision of professional development seminars across Ireland

Annual Conference September 2013
Theme: *Language, Literacy and Literature: Re-imagining Teaching and Learning*

PUBLICATIONS
- Reading News
- Conference Proceedings

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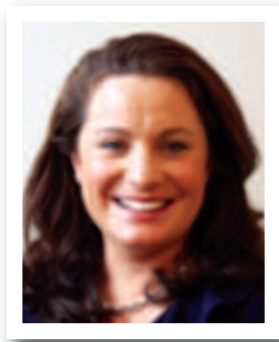Drumcondra, Dublin 9, Ireland

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Editorial

Dear Members,

Welcome to the Autumn 2013 Issue of *Reading News* which arrives to you just weeks ahead of the 37th Annual Reading Association of Ireland Conference. The theme of this year's conference is *Language, Literacy and Literature: Re-imagining Teaching and Learning.*

Robert Dunbar, children's book critic, will open the conference with a keynote speech on 'The Changing World of Irish Children's Literature'. We are also delighted to welcome Dr Catherine Snow, Professor at Harvard Graduate School, who studies determinants of literacy development and academic achievement with special attention to struggling readers and English language learners. Catherine will speak on 'Promoting classroom discussion to improve reading comprehension: Results from the implementation of Word Generation in grades 6-8' and 'The promise and danger of standards-based reform: The current U.S. policy context for teaching literacy.'

The conference will offer an unprecedented 40 concurrent sessions. This year's presenters include representatives from primary, post primary, professional development, teacher education and literacy research, as well as RAI executive committee members. We are delighted to welcome back a number of international speakers including, Professor Margaret Clark (Emeritus Professor, University of Birmingham). This year's conference aims to deliver research-based insights and inspiration that will appeal to the diverse literacy interests of our members. Topics include digital literacy, literacy in the early years, literacy and the arts and literacy in second level classrooms. We are also delighted that this year's conference will include a market hall where delegates will have an opportunity to view the most up to date literacy resources and books. We will also have poster presentations from a number of national and international researchers

and practitioners, which is another exciting addition to the conference. In this edition of *Reading News*, we have included a summary of the conference programme. The programme can be viewed in full on www.reading.ie.

Contributions to this edition of *Reading News* include articles on differentiated reading, high frequency words, results from PIRLS on pupil engagement and attitudes to reading, and an article from our keynote presenter Dr Catherine Snow entitled 'Prerequisites to Reading: Vocabulary or Knowledge?'

Running from September 26th to September 28th at the Marino Institute of Education, the 38th Annual Reading Association of Ireland Conference represents the culmination of months of hard work by the RAI Executive Committee. All information on registering for the conference can be found on www.reading.ie. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the RAI Executive Committee for their hard work in organising this event. A special word of thanks is undoubtedly due to our editors Karen Willoughby, Gerry Shiel and Fiona Nic Fhionnlaoich.

I sincerely hope that you enjoy this issue of *Reading News* and I look forward to meeting you at this year's conference.

Beir bua agus beannacht,

Niamh Fortune
RAI President
2012-2013

RAI 37th Annual Conference – PROGRAMME

Thursday 26th September

6.00-6.30pm	**Registration**
6.30-7.15	**Keynote Address 1:** Robert Dunbar: *The Changing World of Irish Children's Literature*
7.15-7.30	**Launch of Conference Proceedings 2012**
7.30-7.45	**RAI Book Award 2013**
7.45	**Reception**

Friday 27th September

8.30-9.00am	**Registration**
9.00-9.30	**Poster Presentations/Market Hall**
9.30-10.30	**Keynote Address 2:** Dr. Catherine Snow *Promoting classroom discussion to improve reading comprehension: Results from the implementation of Word Generation in grades 6-8*
10.30-11.00	**Tea/ Coffee**
11.00-1.00	**Concurrent Session 1A** Anne Guerin: *The complex case of reading fluency: A study of repeated reading as a method to improve fluency for struggling adolescent readers*

Kathleen Moran and Eileen McDermott:
The JCSP demonstration library project engaging reluctant readers - celebrating a decade of success

Concurrent Session 1B
Pauline Kerins and Bairbre Tiernan:
Challenges and opportunities in today's changing classrooms: Planning to support the development of literacy skills in the early years

Joan Kiely:
Developing children's oral language through dialogic story reading

Lone Hattingh:
Interpretations of meaning: Young children's ventures in literacy

Concurrent Session 1C
Catherine Gilliland:
Active approaches to comprehension through storytelling and puppetry
Michael Flannery:
Fully implementing the visual arts curriculum is a 'valid' way of developing key literacy skills in the primary classroom

Friday 28th September (cont.)

Tríona Stokes:
O, Reason not the need! Examining conditions for forging a reciprocal relationship between Drama and English, through the use of a movie stimulus for oral language development

Concurrent Session 1D
Veronika Rot Gabrovec:
Cultural literacy in Slovenia: Toasts, anchors and dragons

Valerie Maher:
Students with challenging behaviours: An intervention to teach reading and comprehension skills

Eithne Kennedy:
Write to read: Assessing writing

1.00-1.45	**Lunch**
1.45-2.15	**Poster Presentations/Market Hall**
2.15-4.15	**Concurrent Session 2A** Brian Hanratty: *The literature of the Troubles Project: A secondary school – based, cross-community initiative in Northern Ireland*

Michael Delargey:
How can the Common European Framework for Reference for Languages improve the teaching of Project Maths?

Pauline Laurenson, Kevin McDermott, Karol Sadleir and Della Meade:
Promoting reading for pleasure in the first year classroom: The experiences of nine schools

Concurrent Session 2B
Marjorie Kinsella:
New Wine, Old Wineskins! Visual literacy and the challenge to change

Alison Farrell, Paula Kinnarney and Claire McAvinia:
Informing literacy research through an exploration of teachers' attitudes to reading and writing and their experiences of reading and writing interventions

Brian Murphy (Presenter), Paul Conway and Rosaleen Murphy:
Not my job! Perspectives of Irish student teachers on literacy development in the post-primary subject classroom

RAI 37th Annual Conference – PROGRAMME

Friday 28th September (cont.)

Concurrent Session 2C

Margaret Clark:
The role of fiction and faction in creating a stimulating experience for young children learning to read

Julie Brosnan and Rachael Browne:
Teaching 100 High Frequency Words to senior infant students using a precision teaching approach.

Nicole Simpson, Mary Beach and Diana Sarao:
Using nonfiction text to build resiliency in at-risk students

Concurrent Session 2D

Tara Concannon-Gibney:
Using a Big Book to teach essential literacy skills

Mary Roche:
Creating a distinct space for a dialogical approach to literacy: a challenge and an opportunity

Jennifer O'Sullivan:
Comprehension Strategy Instruction using wordless picture books

Saturday 28th September

8.30-9.00am	Registration
9.00-9.30	AGM
9.30-10.50	Concurrent Session 3A

Cara Mulcahy and Caroline Turner:
Newbery Award Winning Novels: Literature for liberation or domestication?

Ciara Ní Bhroin:
Reading between the lines: Visual literacy and critical thinking

Concurrent Session 3B

Anne Burke and Beth Maddigan:
From Apples to Apps: Connecting children, teachers and community through digital tools and tablets

Julia Kara-Soteriou and Helen Abadiano:
Re-imagining instruction in the computer lab by transforming technology-based activities and teaching new literacies

Concurrent Session 3C

Fiona Richardson and Jean Henefer:
The NBSS Teacher as Researcher Project: Addressing the academic literacy needs of students through action research

Saturday 28th September (cont.)

Eemer Eivers, Ann-Marie Craven, Gerry Shiel and Jude Cosgrove:
What can we learn from PIRLS 2011 International Study of Reading Literacy in Fourth Class?

Concurrent Session 3D

Josie Brady and Carol Aubrey:
The impact of community-based writing groups

James Johnston:
Writing to learn in the content areas

10.50-11.20	Tea/Coffee
11.20-12.40	Concurrent Session 4A

Lynda Valerie, Jesse Turner and Cathy Kurkjian:
Expanding student writing through family and community partners

Josephine Brady:
The secret gardens of children's home writing

Concurrent Session 4B

Geraldine Magennis and Gemma Fitzpatrick (nee McKernan):
Reading for pleasure: primary pupils' perspectives

Conor Mulcahy:
An examination of teachers understanding of motivation as a factor in reading attainment in young children

Concurrent Session 4C

Brendan McMahon:
Someone else's baby? Literacy in second level classrooms

Helen Heneghan:
Differentiated reading in primary schools

Concurrent Session 4D
RAI Thesis Award: Presentations by finalists

12.40-1.15	Lunch
1.15-1.45	Poster Presentations and Market Hall
1.45-2.45	Plenary Session

Dr. Catherine Snow:
The promise and danger of standards-based reform: The current U.S. policy context for teaching literacy

2.45	Presentation of 2013 RAI Thesis Award
3.00	Close of Conference

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Meet the Keynote Speakers
Presenting at the 37th RAI International Conference
Marino Institute of Education, Dublin
September 26th-28th 2013

Catherine Snow

Catherine Snow (Ph.D., McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, 1971) is the Patricia Albjerg Graham Professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She studies determinants of literacy development and academic achievement among students in urban schools, with special attention to struggling readers and to English language learners.

In 1990 Snow launched a longitudinal study of language and literacy development among three-year-old children in low-income families. Together with her colleagues Patton Tabors and David Dickinson, she followed many of those children for 15 years. A final report of the study, co-authored with Michelle Porche, Patton Tabors, and Stephanie Ross Harris, is called *Is Literacy Enough? Pathways to Academic Success for Adolescents* (2007). It identifies the determinants of literacy success for children from low-income families, but also defines the additional motivational resources and the school and family supports those students need as they enter adolescence, if they are to be academically successful.

Snow has worked on analyzing and/or promoting literacy development in Mexico, Costa Rica, and Chile. Snow currently leads the Boston Field Site of the Strategic Education Research Partnership, a practice-research partnership which is focused on improving literacy in middle schools. She is principal investigator on one of the IES-funded Reading for Understanding projects; the project, *Catalyzing Comprehension through Discussion and Debate*, is evaluating the effectiveness of engaging, discussion-oriented curricula in promoting reading and writing skills in 4th-8th graders. Snow chaired the National Academy of Sciences Committee that produced the 1998 report *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, and the Rand Reading Study Group that produced *Reading for Understanding* in 2000. She is a member of the U.S. National Academy of Education and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Robert Dunbar

Robert Dunbar was formerly Head of English at the Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines, Dublin, a post he held from 1980 to 2005. During that time he pioneered the academic study of children's literature in Ireland, establishing, in conjunction with Trinity College, the first academic course of study in the subject in the country. He has lectured on many aspects of the subject at home and abroad, has edited (or co-edited) five books for young readers, has published numerous papers and articles on the topic and, for just under twenty-five years, has been a regular commentator on children's books for The Irish Times and a range of RTÉ and other radio programmes.

In recent years he has conducted public conversations with a wide variety of children's writers including John Boyne, Eoin Colfer, Carlo Gebler, Derek Landy, PJ Lynch, Siobhán Parkinson and Kate Thompson. In 2008 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Trinity College, Dublin, in recognition of his services to Irish children's literature.

Prerequisites to Reading:
Vocabulary or Knowledge?

Catherine Snow

In this article, Catherine Snow, who is presenting a keynote address at this year's RAI conference, discusses priorities for literacy teaching and learning. She questions whether sufficient time is given to 'large problem spaces' (e.g. vocabulary) over 'small problem spaces' (e.g. letter recognition). She emphasizes the importance of ensuring that 'large problem spaces' receive adequate focus and equally, that the time afforded to 'large problem spaces' provides genuine opportunities for learners to expand and deepen their knowledge across a range of domains.

Over many years, as I have talked to literacy educators about how best to teach reading, I have emphasized the value of a focus on 'large problem spaces.' Small problem spaces, such as letter recognition, phonological awareness, and spelling rules, must of course be taught. There is incontrovertible evidence of their importance as precursors to good reading outcomes. But I have tried to make the case that those smaller challenges should not take up as much time as they are typically afforded, and that teachers could better prioritize large problem spaces, such as vocabulary, in particular when dealing with children at risk of literacy difficulties. I have argued that the time spent teaching the different literacy skills should be more proportional to the size of the challenge. Children learning to read in English need to master 26 letters, 44 phonemes, a few hundred spelling rules, and the meanings of about 50,000 words, but in the early grades we are spending far more time on the letters and the phoneme-grapheme relationships than on vocabulary.

I don't retract that message, but I am beginning to worry a bit that it was insufficiently precise. We know a lot about teaching vocabulary in the classroom, and teachers are adopting programs and strategies for enhancing children's vocabulary with enthusiasm. Many classrooms (in the U.S., at least) have word walls, and regular vocabulary instruction. This is no doubt a good thing, but is it the best way to build the literacy skills of greatest importance to our children's future?

I fear we have been spooked by the incontrovertible evidence of social class differences in vocabulary size. The book by Betty Hart and Todd Risley, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* (1995), focused educators' attention on the vocabulary deficits of children from families with few educational and language resources – children from low-income families and, by extension, from families where a language other than English is spoken. But the educational response has too often involved treating the symptom. If children know only a small number of words, then it might seem obvious that they should be taught more words. But I would argue that a small vocabulary is, in fact, just a symptom, and that limited knowledge is the underlying cause.

The amount of world knowledge a child has accumulated is, ultimately, the best predictor of good reading outcomes. Comprehending text is much easier if one knows something about the topic. Comprehending even relatively simple texts about completely unfamiliar topics is a huge challenge. Vocabulary is a good, quick index of world knowledge – but it is not the same thing!
U.S. teachers report that many of their middle grades students can read texts accurately and fluently, but are not able to summarize them. These students have benefited from their primary teachers' emphasis on phonological awareness and spelling rules, and perhaps from some vocabulary teaching, but never acquired the informational base on which their technical skills are meant to be exercised. They may have learned how to pronounce the words in the text, even the longer and more infrequent words, but they have not developed webs of meaning around those words that give purchase on the meaning of the text.

In short, the major challenge children face in school is not learning letters, or learning to

decode, or learning to read fluently. Most children, including second language learners, master those skills with decent instruction in the primary grades. They struggle, though, with comprehension, and the reasons are clear. They often lack the information about the world that is presupposed in the texts they read, and similarly lack the vocabulary needed to refer to that information, typically in either the first or the second language.

Early childhood education and initial literacy programs serving children from families with few resources need to shift their focus from practicing low-level skills (letter names, days of the week, shapes and colours) to enriching children's lives with language-infused explorations of interesting topics, ranging from tidal pools to volcanos, firehouses, restaurant kitchens, friendship, anger, ancestry, and community. These are the topics that children of educated parents get to discuss at the dinner table, while riding in the car, or while reading books with adults. We short-change children if we assume that simply teaching vocabulary substitutes for developing knowledge across a range of domains.

We can teach children lists of words without expanding their knowledge, but we can't expand their knowledge without teaching words. In discussing tidal pools, one inevitably uses words like *seawater, ocean, shore, tide, wave, mollusc,* and *seaweed;* one might even use words like *barnacle, marine, saline, habitat, oxygen, lichen, fauna,* and *flora.* Children with large vocabularies are those who have had the opportunity to discuss many different topics in depth, whether because of experiences reading books with adults, taking excursions with adults, or simply having interesting conversations with adults. Those are the children who are ultimately in a position to expand and deepen their knowledge through reading.

19th European Conference on Reading

Literacy in the New Landscape of Communication: Research and the Everyday

Klagenfurt, Austria, 14th –17th July 2015

The 19th European Reading Conference will offer a platform for the findings of current research into the range of contemporary forms and uses of literacy in everyday settings: be it the home, kindergarten, school or beyond school, in institutions of teacher training, in libraries, in the context of social work, in text-design and publishing, in (fictional and non-fictional) media programmes, in social media, in sites formal and informal. This platform will make it possible to relate these findings – with their theoretical and methodological focus – to the questions of learning and teaching of reading and writing, of uses and forms of literacy, traditional as well as new. In exchange and discussion of knowledge and experiences, of proposals and hypotheses, the Conference provides a platform for bringing literacy researchers and literacy educators together in a shared and strengthened project of developing literacy – in its many forms, uses and genres,

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including the aesthetic experience and pleasure of literature – as an essential component of democratic action, interaction and participation.

The main conference language is English. It is possible to present in any other European Language. A call for papers will be issued in May 2014, with a deadline for proposals of November 1st in that year.

Further details will be posted on www.literacyeurope.org

Differentiated Reading in Primary/Elementary Schools

Helen Heneghan

In this article, Helen Heneghan discusses differentiated reading (DR), where instruction is modified through content, process and product in response to student variance. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD), provides a theoretical framework for DR. ZPD applies to the ideas and cognitive skills a child has almost mastered and is an imaginary zone between where the child is at right now and where he/she can reach with teacher guidance. Little research has been conducted in Ireland on DR. This comparative study investigates teachers' implementation of DR between Houston and Dublin primary schools. Preliminary research findings are presented from Houston schools.

Introducing Differentiated Reading (DR)

Reading is an essential life skill and an important component of learning. Effective reading instruction encourages and sustains students' desire to read (Chapman & King, 2003). Effective teachers engage students' interests and possess the skills necessary to meet students' needs (Miller, 2007). In differentiated reading, (DR) teachers attempt to match the 'right students with the right learning tasks at the right time' which enables students to have positive experiences in reading and learning.

In DR teachers adjust the pace, level, support and kind of instruction provided and use various groupings in response to children's needs. Continuous assessment and observation guide teaching and learning strategies. Responding to children's reading preferences and using appropriate reading levels for texts promotes positive students' attitudes towards reading and increases reading achievement (Clark, 2005). Differentiation is not mentioned in the 1999 Curriculum (DES) but is advised in NCCA publications (2007, 2010).

Single-paced lessons delivered through a singular instructional approach disregard students' needs (Forsten et al., 2002). While these methods often focus on exposing and remedying deficits, preparing students for a pattern of failure (Levine, 2003) DR reflects teachers' thoughtful diagnosis of students' learning needs and purposeful activities

that address those needs (Heacox, 2002). Research indicates that learners with differing abilities, first languages, and varying backgrounds can have academic needs met when individuality is accounted for through teachers' instruction (Tatum, 2006).

Increasingly diverse reading classrooms challenge teachers to meet students' needs. Children with different needs present challenges to teachers who attempt to provide relevant, instruction. How can teachers plan DR? There is no 'right way'. It is a work in progress, matching student needs with different strategies and activities. The teacher does not "differentiate everything" (Tomlinson, 1999, p.14). It is best to start small. Choose a specific unit or time every week. Introduce DR gradually as the teacher and children need time to process the changes. Children need to learn to work independently and in groups. DR modifies curriculum and instruction through content, process and product (Tomlinson, 1999). Flexible grouping is at the heart of DR. Pairs, small and large groups afford children different learning experiences and develop reading proficiency. Children are reassigned to different levels, groups and activities according to their rate of development and mastery of skills and concepts.

Figure 1: Three Approaches to Differentiated Reading.

Content, Process and Product

Content covers 'what and why' a skill is taught. Teachers outline clearly what they plan to teach, what the learner needs to understand and do in a given area and what skills and concepts are

essential. Content is differentiated through various texts, matching reading levels and re-teaching or extending content within the small group setting.

How a skill is taught and the methods and activities employed is covered by process and includes different types and levels of activities students use to acquire and practice key concepts and skills. Process begins when children stop receiving information and begin to work on 'activities' where they find out what they know, understand and can do. Activities focus on knowledge, understanding and skill. Teachers differentiate process by increasing or decreasing the numbers of factors or complexity of tasks, while retaining the same outcomes. Teacher support, group work and resources like ICT can also be varied.

The product or 'outcome' (NCCA, 2005, 2007) is what the students know, understand, can do, explain, simulate, demonstrate or transfer the learned knowledge to new contexts (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011). Students can demonstrate the product in assessments, tests, quizzes, construction of objects, games, etc.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Learning Theory supports DR by proposing that learners have two developmental levels - the present level and the zone of proximal development, (Vygotsky, 1962) which provide valuable information to guide DR (Bundoc, 2007). The teacher pinpoints the skills, concepts and knowledge a child is close (proximal) to mastering but cannot yet perform unaided and the child is carefully guided through sequenced steps towards an achievable goal (Blanton, 1998). This strategic teaching tool continuously amends instruction as the ZPD changes. Vygotsky (1962) asserted that children's ZPD must be recognised in order to help children realise their learning potential and that effective instruction moves slightly ahead of children's actual development level. Previous development is recognised as well as processes that are currently maturing and are in need of additional development in both ZPD and DR. Research has proven that students learn effectively when tasks are moderately challenging as in Vygotsky's ZPD (1962).

Differentiated Reading Model

This diagram summarises components involved in DR including continuous assessment and observation, flexible grouping and activities, ZPD, reflection and collaboration.
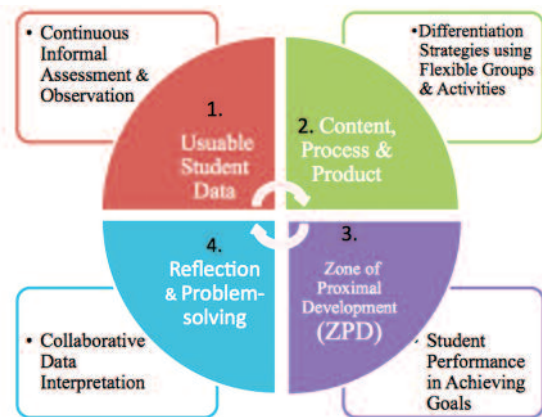

Figure 2: Amended Differentiated Reading Model (Walpole & McKenna, 2009, p.160).

1. In the first quadrant, continuous informal assessment and observation supply crucial, usable information on students' abilities, requirements and interests.
2. This information directs teachers' instructional planning and differentiation strategies (second quadrant) through content, process and product.
3. In the third quadrant the ZPD involves careful assessment of the child's ability, guided participation by the teacher and active learning from the child to achieve mastery in a particular skill. Continuous informal assessment enables the teacher to identify each child's ZPD.
4. The fourth quadrant recognises the necessary reflection on previous instruction and activities and problem-solving strategies teachers use to guide DR instruction and provide students with the necessary support to achieve their potential.

Each quadrant has been amended and ZPD, flexible groups and content, process and product have been added to the original model.

Research indicates that teachers often use DR with struggling readers and that instruction based on students' needs increases fluency regardless of reading ability (Miller, 2007). In America, reading proficiency is required by the *No Child Left Behind Act* (USDE, 2001), but there are no incentives to develop the talents of gifted students (Ziegler, 2010). Ziegler (2010) stated that differentiated instruction can help teachers provide appropriate instruction for all students and maximize gifted learners' potential. In differentiation, when student differences and interests are acknowledged, motivation to learn is increased and students remain committed and stay positive (Stronge, 2004). Failing to acknowledge student differences may result in some students losing motivation and failing to succeed (Tomlinson & Kalbfleisch, 1998). Even motivated and gifted students may become lost if teachers focus on

completing the curriculum to the exclusion of student needs (Tomlinson & Kalbfleisch, 1998).

This comparative, small-scale research between (Grade1–6) teachers in selected elementary schools in Houston, Texas and (First–Sixth Class) teachers in selected primary schools in Dublin examines factors that influence DR and DR strategies. This research employs a mixed methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative data (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Biases in one method help to neutralise other method biases as all methods have limitations. Research will be conducted in selected primary schools in Dublin in September 2013.

Preliminary findings from a questionnaire in Houston elementary schools (n=194) demonstrate that most teachers, (89%) differentiated process in DR, 77% differentiated content and 75% of teachers differentiated product. Further research is required to ascertain why teachers most often differentiate process.

Teachers believed that flexible grouping, detailed preparation and positive learning environments were the key factors that helped provide DR. Continuous assessment was accorded fourth place.

The main obstacles to DR implementation were lack of time and student misbehaviour followed by class size. Previous research cited class size and student misbehaviour as the main factors that inhibit differentiated instruction (Hootstein, 1995). Extensive planning requirements and lack of teacher training cited by Hootstein (1995) did not feature in these Houston findings.

Conclusion

Teachers use DR in primary / elementary schools to meet student needs. DR is influenced by teachers' understanding of DR and recognition of students' needs. Further research will involve lesson-plan evaluations and semi-structured interviews to explore practical implementation of theory and participants' understanding and models of DR.

Research Outcome

This research aims to provide an effective DR model that can be used by teachers to help stimulate a love of reading to help maximise children's learning and to help shape future policies, guidelines and classroom practices.

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About the Author

Helen Heneghan is a PhD student with Trinity College Dublin under the supervision of Dr. Damian Murchan. She has taught in Ireland, Scotland and Houston, USA at primary and third levels. Delivery of the Teaching Qualification for Further Education lecturers (TQFE) enabled her to examine application of theory into practice in the classroom. Her main research interest centres on differentiated reading and teaching methodology.

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County Cork Mum Scoops Story Writing Success

Elaine Moore's story chosen as the winning entry for Munch Time Ireland 2013!

A Cork Institute of Technology Project Coordinator and mother of two from Rosscarbery, Co. Cork has been announced as the winner of this year's Munch Time Ireland children's story writing competition. Elaine Moore's story, Munch and Belle's Riddle, was inspired by the character Munch the Cow and a little girl named after her daughter Isabelle. In addition to the prestige of winning the short story competition, created by Munch Bunch®, Elaine was awarded €1,000 and two runners-up both received €500 each (Anne McDonnell from Sandyford, Dublin 18 and Francesca Murphy from Tuam, Co. Galway).

In its third year, entry levels exceeded those of the previous two years with almost 100 short stories submitted by budding authors from across the country. Elaine's story was originally selected as one of the top ten stories by the judging panel, which included Dr. Gerry Shiel from Reading Association of Ireland and Jill Holtz, Director of parenting website, MyKidsTime.ie. From there, it was over to the public to vote for their favourite, and after one month of voting, with thousands of votes cast, Munch and Belle's Riddle by Elaine Moore topped the polls.

Elaine, who's also embarking upon a PhD in Reading Literacy for Adolescents, added:

Writing is my passion. I have always been interested in reading and writing, but have only recently been confident enough to submit my stories for others to read. I am absolutely thrilled to have won and my children Isabelle and Charlie are over the moon…The quality of the other nine finalists' stories was exceptional and the competition was tough but I'm pleased that the public enjoyed reading my story as much as I enjoyed writing it. Hopefully there'll be lots more to come as I intend to keep on writing with the aim of having a book published someday.

Opening with the line 'Once upon a time there was a cow called Munch', Elaine's story was inspired by the stories that Elaine and her daughter create for bedtime.

The winning tale features Munch the Cow and her best friend, Belle, who encounter a Leprechaun at the end of a rainbow.

Commenting on the winning story, Dr Gerry Shiel from Reading Association of Ireland noted:

Elaine's story is smart, yet simple for young children to follow; it's inventive and has a subtle message weaved into its ending. Munch and Belle's Riddle was one of the best stories that I judged and I'm not at all surprised that it was a hit with the public. The story would be an excellent choice for bedtime reading for the under 5s as it is concise, fun and ends on a happy note…Throughout the story, Elaine's passion for writing for young children was evident and I'm predicting that she has a bright future ahead as a budding author.

Munch Time, created by Munch Bunch®, aims to highlight and celebrate the importance of parents bonding with their toddlers and young children over story time and it gives burgeoning writers the opportunity to shine.

Elaine's winning story is available to read at *www.munchtimeireland.com.*

Elaine Moore (2013 Competition Winner) pictured with her children Isabelle (7) and Charlie (3).

What the Library Can Do for You: Family Reading at Dublin City Libraries

Mark French-Mullen

In this article, Mark French-Mullen writes about the wealth of resources available at your local library. He also describes numerous programmes and initiatives that have been established and are supported by Dublin City Libraries.

Introduction

Libraries are eager to encourage reading. That is hardly a surprise. Particularly we look to encourage children to develop a love of books which they will carry through their life and pass on to their own children. The benefits of reading are well known – vocabulary, comprehension skills, and the skill of expressing your thoughts in written form, are all enhanced by reading for pleasure. And of course being read to from an early age helps children to want to read and having books and reading in their lives and home makes it a normal activity. This can help them integrate into school more easily. Our libraries are full of children visiting with their families and schools and we have story telling times and all sorts of activities and events.

Not all children, however, are so fortunate, and so in 2008, we set up a scheme to visit childcare facilities with a gift of books and then to continue to visit and read to the children. We hoped the children would tell their parents of the great stories they were hearing and after some weeks we would invite all the children and their parents to a special event in the local library – a Teddy Bears' Picnic – with more stories and songs and craft activities tied to the stories. Parents got a cup of tea or coffee as they watched the enthusiasm of their children and were signed up as library members and sent home with some books they had chosen with their child.

Over the years librarians visited dozens of pre-school groups, and there is good contact still with many of these. The model was demanding of staff time, and became more difficult to sustain.

Partnership – The Future

For the last few years we have been working with partners to pursue the same aims of bringing reading to children and supporting their families in doing that. We work with *Northside Partnership* and the *Marino Institute of Education* on the "Storytime" project, and hope also to work more closely with *Dublin City Childcare Committee* to spread *Storytime* to all areas of the city. We also work with the *Write to Read* initiative to support their in-school project. We have branded some stock in local libraries with these projects, to give an easy point of reference for any child or parent entering the library for the first time. Our Libraries are generally in regular contact with local schools and have good relationships with them. We encourage schools involved in *Write to Read,* for instance, to use their local library as a further support to children's reading. *Summer Literacy Camps* have appeared recently and several have tied in with local libraries, either visiting the library or asking a librarian to visit them. This year there were efforts to coordinate this across all the camps. We hope this will be developed further in 2014 and subsequent years.

Our rationale is that children and parents pass through projects and at the end of their participation may still need support to continue the good habits. Whether they require support or not, everyone can benefit from access to the free resources available in the library. We see the library as offering continuity to these and other initiatives,

- over the summer when the school is closed or
- after the child has graduated from that particular project.

The library provides support to readers throughout their lives. Whether reading for pleasure or gain, to get that extra qualification, or learn that language, or just to unwind, the library has the material you need.

Let us help

So I want to make the case for you to include the library in your programmes and projects, and indeed in all your activities. We are happy to engage with primary and secondary schools, pre-schools, clubs and groups, adults and children. We will endeavour to support your projects and schemes.

What can we do for you?

We can provide direct support to school, pre-school, or other group activities through

- Block Loans of books and other materials. (30 to 40 items for up to 3 months)
- Loans from our Classroom Novel collection – multiple copies of popular children's novels.
- We can source or purchase to meet special requirements.
- We will sit down and discuss how we can support your special projects.
- Library visits: Libraries encourage schools and groups to visit, and will show children – and adults – how to get the most from the library, how to search and find what they want – even when it is in another library in Dublin or another county in Ireland.
- Librarian visits: Librarians will visit your school or group, to talk to children or teachers or parents.
- We would especially welcome the opportunity to talk to parents. Children love books. Busy parents often need to be reminded of the benefits of reading to and with their children and of how there is always support and advice available at their local library.
- Programme of Events: Dublin City Libraries always has programmes of events for children and adults throughout the year, but especially important are the
- Summer Reading Activities for children,
- Children's Book Festival
- Science Week
- Maths Week
- Chinese New Year
- and any number of local community projects and celebrations.

We love to involve local schools, pre-schools and any other groups in the community in all of these activities and events. We frequently have author visits as part of the programme. Nothing enthuses a young reader (and not so young) like a meeting with a famous author. Many authors are keen to encourage not just readers, but writers too.

Inside there is more

We want to reach out and support reading wherever it takes place – or is being promoted, but we hope that children will come to the library with their families; teenagers with their friends; and adults will visit because we provide useful services and access to resources. There really is something for everyone. We have:

- Talking Books: Books on CD or MP3 player
- Music CDs and films on DVD
- Free internet access
- Free WiFi
- Exhibitions and displays
- BookClubs for all ages – children, teenagers and adults
- Study Resources – for Junior and Leaving Cert Students
- Playstations you can use in Cabra Library and Coolock Library

Online there is more

There are many resources online available from our websites
- photo collections relevant to Dublin history
- newspaper archives
- encyclopedias
- genealogical resources

Our Blog will help to alert you to some of the gems available. Check out our website at www.dublincitypubliclibraries.com

Contact

To link in with the library, you can talk to your local library – details are on our website – or you can contact me,
Mark French-Mullen. Tel: 01 6744852.
Email: mark.frenchmullen@dublincity.ie

More Results from PIRLS 2011: Pupil Engagement and Attitudes to Reading

Aidan Clerkin

In June 2013, the Educational Research Centre published a report examining some of the factors behind Irish pupils' performance on the PIRLS 2011 international assessment of reading. Aidan Clerkin, one of the authors of the report, discusses some of the main reading-related findings.

In 2011, Ireland was one of 45 countries to participate in PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study). PIRLS is a large-scale assessment of reading achievement at the Fourth grade, or Fourth class in Ireland. More than 4500 Fourth class pupils, and 300,000 internationally, completed the reading assessment. They also took part in mathematics and science assessments as part of a counterpart study to PIRLS, called TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study). As well as these assessments, pupils completed detailed questionnaires about their attitudes and activities, as did their parents, their teachers, and the principals of their schools.

The achievement results from PIRLS 2011 and TIMSS 2011 were initially published in December 2012 (Eivers & Clerkin, 2012). With an average score of 552, compared to the PIRLS scale centrepoint of 500, Irish pupils performed very well on the reading assessment. Only five countries achieved a score that was significantly higher than Ireland's: these were Hong Kong, the Russian Federation, Finland, Singapore, and Northern Ireland. Pupils in eight countries (including England, the US, Chinese Taipei, and Denmark) achieved a mean score that was similar to that achieved by Irish pupils. The remaining thirty-one countries that participated in PIRLS 2011 were significantly outperformed by Ireland. Details on Irish pupils' performance on the mathematics and science assessments can be found in Eivers and Clerkin (2012).

While the initial report focused exclusively on pupils' performance on the reading, mathematics and science assessments, a second, broader report was released in June 2013. *National Schools, international contexts: Beyond the PIRLS and TIMSS test results* (Eivers & Clerkin, 2013) takes an in-depth look at the wealth of contextual data provided by pupils, parents, teachers and principals in their question-naire responses. As well as providing a valuable source of information on the attitudes and practices that surround teaching and learning in Fourth class within Ireland, the fact that PIRLS and TIMSS 2011 were the first large-scale assessments that Ireland has participated in at primary level since TIMSS 1995 means that these contextual data are particularly interesting from a comparative point of view.

Enjoyment of Reading

One positive finding to emerge from PIRLS 2011 is that Irish Fourth class pupils reported more positive attitudes towards reading than their peers internationally. Pupils were asked a series of questions (such as "I think reading is boring" and "I like talking about what I read with other people"), and their answers were combined to create a composite measure of the extent to which they *like reading*. In Ireland, 37% of pupils were described as *liking reading*, compared to just 28% of Fourth grade pupils at the PIRLS average. Similar percentages of pupils in Ireland (14%) and internationally (15%) *did not like reading*, while the remainder were categorised in a middle group, as *somewhat liking reading*.

Greater liking of reading was associated with a substantially better performance on the assessment. In Ireland, pupils who *liked reading* achieved a mean score of 580 on the reading assessment, compared to 543 among those who somewhat liked reading and 514 among those who *did not like reading*. In other words, there was a 65-point gap between those groups of pupils with the highest and lowest enjoyment of reading. The pattern was similar at the PIRLS international average.

In terms of specific national comparisons, Irish pupils were also more positive about reading than pupils in some key "comparison countries" – defined as the highest-performing countries in the assessment and other Anglophone nations. In high-performing Singapore and Hong Kong, for example, only slightly more than one-fifth of pupils *liked reading,* meaning that expressing such a positive attitude towards reading was almost twice as common in Ireland. Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland and England, one-fifth of pupils did not like reading, more than in Ireland, while fewer pupils than in Ireland (29% and 26%, respectively) reported *liking reading*.

Girls expressed much more positive attitudes to reading than boys did, with 45% of Irish girls (PIRLS: 35%) *liking reading* compared to 29% of Irish boys (PIRLS: 21%). Both in Ireland and internationally, boys were about twice as likely as girls to be described as *not liking reading,* with 10% of girls and 19% of boys in Ireland falling into this category (PIRLS: 10% girls, 21% boys).

Engagement in Reading Lessons

As well as their liking of reading generally, pupils were also asked about their engagement with reading lessons in school. Again, they were asked a series of questions (such as "My teacher gives me interesting things to read" and "I know what my teacher expects me to do [in my reading lessons]"), and these responses were used to create a composite measure. This measure provided some different patterns to the *liking* scale.

Irish pupils were about as likely as pupils internationally to report being *engaged* in their reading lessons (43% vs. 42%), to be *somewhat engaged* (49% vs 50%), and to be not engaged (8% vs. 8%). The difference in achievement between categories was also smaller than for liking. In Ireland, there was just a 16-point gap between pupils who were *engaged* and *not engaged*. Internationally, the gap was almost twice this, at 30 points, but still much lower than was found for pupils' liking of reading.

Teachers: Professional Development Related to Reading

From the teaching perspective, one noteworthy finding arising from PIRLS 2011 is that Fourth class pupils in Ireland are much less likely than pupils in other countries to be taught by a teacher with recent participation in reading-related CPD.

For example, 37% of pupils in Ireland were taught by a teacher who reported spending *no time* on reading-related professional development in the two years prior to the survey. The equivalent PIRLS average was lower, at 25% of pupils, and it was also lower in some of our comparison countries (e.g., Hong Kong, 8%; Northern Ireland, 19%). Conversely, much fewer pupils in Ireland (11%) than at the PIRLS average (24%) had a teacher who said that they had taken part in *16 hours or more* of reading-related CPD.

Teachers in PIRLS 2011 were also asked about one specific professional activity – reading children's books for professional development. As with CPD

generally, Irish pupils were much less likely to be in class with a teacher who frequently read children's books (Table 1).

Table 1. Percentages of pupils whose teachers reported varying frequencies of reading children's books for professional development

	At least weekly	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a year	Never or almost never
Ireland	15	30	42	14
PIRLS average	31	42	22	5

Further Information

National Schools, international contexts is available for free download or purchase from www.erc.ie. The report can be downloaded as a whole, or on a chapter-by-chapter basis. Each chapter addresses a particular "theme", and can be read independently of the others. The ten chapters, and their authors, are:

1. PIRLS and TIMSS 2011: Overview
   Eemer Eivers and Aidan Clerkin
2. Features of policy and provision
   Mary Lewis and Peter Archer
3. Pupil engagement
   Aidan Clerkin and Ann-Marie Creaven
4. Pupils' languages *Eemer Eivers*
5. Teachers and teaching practices - *Aidan Clerkin*
6. Home-school interaction
   Eemer Eivers and Ann-Marie Creaven
7. Reading literacy in PIRLS 2011
   Tara Concannon-Gibney and Gerry Shiel
8. Mathematics items: Context and curriculum
   Seán Close
9. Science items: Context and curriculum
   Clíona Murphy
10. Understanding achievement in PIRLS and TIMSS 2011
    Jude Cosgrove and Ann-Marie Creaven

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About the Author

Aidan Clerkin is a Research Associate at the Educational Research Centre. He has authored or co-authored a number of reports on Ireland's National Assessments of reading and mathematics, on PIRLS 2011 and TIMSS 2011, and on Transition Year. He is Ireland's national research coordinator for TIMSS 2015.

High Frequency Words: A Neglected Resource for Young Literacy Learners

Margaret M. Clark OBE

In this article Margaret M. Clark looks at the value of including knowledge of the 100 commonest words in written English in helping children to become fluent readers. She suggests experiences which could give children a much richer diet of written language in the early stages.

Background

Claims have been made over many years for one best method of teaching reading, not necessarily the same method. In the 1960s it was the Initial Teaching Alphabet (ita). In England the current Coalition Government claims that the one best method of teaching reading is by synthetic phonics, first, fast and only. When inspecting schools and colleges training teachers, Ofsted (the inspection body in England) has this as its main focus for judging the school or college as satisfactory in the teaching of reading. This is affecting the diet provided for young children in schools in England in the early stages of learning to read, and even in preschools.

A move towards this emphasis dates back to 2006, however, in 2012 a new phonics check of 40 words (20 real and 20 pseudo words) was made mandatory for all approximately 600,000 Year 1 children in England, aged 5 to 6 years of age, with a pass fail criterion, and providing no diagnostic information. This annual check was to be retaken the following year by any children who failed to reach the pass mark of 32. The emphasis is on further synthetic phonics instruction, even for those for whom it has not succeeded, using commercial programmes, and reading material limited to phonically regular books. Decoding is stressed as the way to read in the early stages. The new National Curriculum for English for Key Stages 1 and 2, which will be implemented in 2014, stresses this approach, limiting reading material for children and encouraging them to use only one strategy in the early stages. In the *Education Journal* in March, April and June 2013, I considered whether there is evidence to support the claim for synthetic phonics (Clark, 2013a); the phonics check, its background results and possible effects (Clark, 2013b) and research evidence so far on the check and whether it is accurate and necessary (Clark, 2013c). In

curriculum materials in England there is little reference to key high frequency words and their value for young children learning to read.

High Frequency Words: Their Contribution to Learning to Read

There are a number of reasons why we should spend time encouraging young children to recognise the commonest words in English in a variety of meaningful contexts:

- The relationship of words to spoken language is much easier for young children to grasp than the abstract concept of letters;
- Relatively few words account for a high proportion of the total words in written as well as spoken English;
- Some of the common words are not phonically regular;
- Few of the most frequent words have meaning in isolation – most take their meaning from the words around them;
- They are not easily represented pictorially, as few are either nouns or verbs – these are much more likely to be influenced by the context.

What are the commonest words in written English? Based on research in the 1960s, McNally and Murray prepared a list of the commonest key words in written English. They claim that these 100 words account for about half the total words in everyday reading material. It is worth noting that a further 100 words contribute only 10-15 per cent more of the words and beyond this, it is a case of diminishing returns as the type of reading material strongly influences the remaining words that appear frequently in a particular text. See *Young Literacy Learners: How we can help them* (Clark, 1994, Chapter 6) for details of this and ways in which young children can have fun experiencing such words from a variety of easily accessible reading materials. In a recent article Solity and Vousden (2009) analysed the structure

of adult literature, children's real books and reading schemes and examined the demands they make on children's sight vocabulary and phonic skills. It is worth noting that these authors used the McNally and Murray 100 commonest word list from the 1960s in their analysis and still found it valuable. These authors claim that 'the debate may be resolved by teaching an optimal level of core phonological, phonic, and sight vocabulary skills, rigorously and systematically in conjunction with the use of real books' (page 503).

The 100 Key Words

According to McNally and Murray the following twelve words account for about 25 per cent of the total words:

a	and	he	I	in	is	it
	of	that	the	to	was	

The following twenty words account for about a further ten per cent of the total words:

all	as	at	be	but	are	for
had	have	him	his	not	on	one
said	so	they	we	with	you	

The following 68 words account for another 20 per cent of the total words:

about	an	back	been	before	big
by	call	came	can	come	could
did	do	down	first	from	get
go	has	her	here	if	into
just	like	little	look	made	make
me	more	much	must	my	no
new	now	off	old	only	or
our	other	out	over	right	see
she	some	their	them	then	there
this	two	when	up	want	well
went	were	what	where	which	who
		will	your		

Practical Suggestions Using Readily Available Materials

Pages from old magazines, newspapers, duplicated stories or other examples of genuine written language are a useful resource on which children can make marks using different coloured pens. Two or more children can be given the same sample, and the same set of different words to

spot and compare their findings. Progressively they can be given more words. Children love to show that they have spotted words that others have missed. This can easily be planned to meet the needs of individual children at different levels.

Provide the children with examples of written language with which they are already familiar such as nursery rhymes or short stories, and ask them to identify how many of the first twelve key words they contain, for example, the, The, THE, or in different sizes of print. This enables them to become sensitised to the 'critical' features of words.

I used this word-hunt technique to great effect with young children aged seven or eight who could barely read, and children who had little grasp of English. I also used a duplicated version of a short story of about 500 words, *When the Moon Winked,* which I read to them several times. I have quoted below the first eight lines of the story, where I asked them to find how many times the first twelve key words appeared. These accounted for 28 of the 78 words.

> *Once there was a king who wanted to touch the moon.*
> *This was the only thing he could think of,*
> *day and night, day and night. He even dreamt about it.*
> *'I must, I must, I really must touch the moon', he kept muttering.*
> *He called his head carpenter to him.*
> *'I've simply got to touch the moon,' he told him,*
> *'and your job will be to build me a tower that will reach up to the sky.'*

A word count of short stories such as that cited above, revealed the value of speedy recognition of the commonest words. It was helpful also to point out the relationship between these words and for example is-isn't, it-it's, was-wasn't, I-I've, I'll, he-he'll, he's, that-that's, you-you'd. In many stories for children in real books (that are not in simplified language), there is a great deal of direct speech, and the children are likely to find many such words. It is also important for the children to be aware that key words may start with a capital letter.

As may be seen, learning the hundred key words can be valuable for children in the early stages of

learning to read, making them more observant of written language in a variety of contexts. It can also be made fun. Some additional words may be guessed from the context by an experienced reader who is following the sense of the passage, or who has a grasp of the structure of English sentences. Some words, though not key words, will appear repeatedly within a particular context, but infrequently elsewhere. The children`s attention could be drawn to these words in advance. One child with whom I was working with on the above story became excited and wanted also to count the words that were key words within the story we were studying.

Concluding Comments

While high frequency words account for about half the *total words*, it is essential to be able to recognise speedily also the words that appear much less frequently. These account for over 90 per cent of the *different words* in written language. For this reason children, if they are to read with understanding, need to develop strategies for speedy recognition of words they have not met before. It is with this latter aspect that a grasp of phonics will assist the children. However, the evidence is that this is better practised within context rather than in isolation or as a part of commercial programmes as currently advocated in England. Time spent in some schools on

practising pseudo words in anticipation of the phonics check, where they account for half the words, could surely be better spent studying the features of real written English.

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About the Author

Margaret M. Clark has a DLitt for research on literacy, an OBE for services to early years education, a Fellowship from the Scottish Council for Research in Education for her distinguished contribution to research and is a past president of the United Kingdom Literacy Association. Her study, Young Fluent Readers, which tracked young children who entered school already reading with understanding, is still internationally cited.

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- **The politics of literacy**
- **Teaching and learning about poetry**
- **Media, multi-literacies and multimodal practices**
- **Inclusion and equality**
- **Creative approaches to the teaching of literacy**
- **The role of libraries**
- **Literacy in the early years**
- **Adult literacy**

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