
COLLABORATIVE CONVERSATIONS FOR LITERACY: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOM

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"You tell me to let go. But you told me to reach out, you told me
to hold on. How can I do all those things together? Gram?"

Cynthia Voigt, *Dacey's Song*

Four years ago I left the classroom to work in New York City middle schools as an on-site teacher-consultant for the New York City Writing Project (NYCWP). I faced a central dilemma in my new role: bringing my twenty-eight years of experience to bear on working with teachers in *their* classrooms while at the same time allowing them to see new opportunities and choices. In particular, the challenge for me was to learn to work alongside an individual teacher as she, in turn, built her students' capacities as independent readers and learners. This story is about my efforts to enact in a new setting my belief that teaching is a kind of collaboration.

As a brand new consultant I needed to learn how to support teachers as they worked on integrating unfamiliar writing and literacy practices into their very real classroom settings. I had many questions: How do I help teachers take risks and expand their practice? How do I develop relationships that are truly collaborative in nature? How do I avoid the image of "outside expert" while translating all that I know and value from my teaching of children so that it appropriately fits this new kind of teaching? How do I stay true to my values in schools where contrary values predominate?

Over the past four years I've learned a great deal about myself and about what it means to work in collaboration with other professionals in their school and classroom settings. It has been interesting and difficult to learn and, as with each group of students I've taught, the teachers I work alongside (Weber 1991) now have their own styles and ways of being in their classrooms. I have had to learn

that consulting is not about making them me, but helping them to discover who they are as they integrate more reading and writing into their existing curricula.

What I Began to Realize About Consulting

In my first year of consulting I worked in two New York City middle schools. One school was located in the North Bronx, the other in Washington Heights in upper Manhattan. Each school had been selected to participate in Students at the Center (SATC), a project funded by DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest. The typical NYCWP model for professional development provides for two days of on-site support for teachers; an on-site academic seminar; and work with a school over time, usually three years. The SATC grant provided for only one day a week of on-site consulting in each school to extend over a period of four years. Only one graduate seminar per semester would be offered for the two schools, and it was to be co-taught and held off-site at Lehman College in the Bronx. The decision to hold the seminar off-site seemed to limit the number of participants from the Washington Heights school.

That first year was hard in a number of ways. I saw myself as an experienced teacher and hoped that the teachers I would be working with would perceive me as a colleague who had some useful ideas to share. Instead I found myself being viewed as an outside expert, there to instruct people in the "right" way to teach writing. I probably didn't do much to dispel that idea. I was new to this type of work, and I missed having my own students. I kept asking myself: What is the work? How can I name it? How does who I am shape it? Is it meaningful work for me? I had to think long and hard about the type of "professional development" I had received over the years. The people who had worked with me successfully were those who respected what I had to bring to teaching and to the conversations we had about theory as it evolved into my classroom practice. Those people were few and far between. In fact, the only professional development organization that had provided this type of respect was the NYCWP. I hoped that my respect for teaching and teachers would drive the work I did. I found that I had to fight hard not to be judgmental and critical. I kept holding onto the vision of the school I had come from and of myself in my own classroom. That vision often got in the way of my seeing what was in others' classrooms and hampered my ability to offer support.

In my second year I continued working in the two middle schools, but spent two days in each school at the school districts' request. During the fall semester I taught two different on-site seminars and was training two new course coordinators. Since I was the experienced member of each teaching partnership, I felt responsible for designing each of the seminars. In hindsight I can't help but realize that my perception of myself as I entered each of these relationships was in fact that of an "expert." Both of the gifted classroom teachers I taught with that year helped me to understand how collaborative work grows slowly over time as trust develops. Rereading my journals, I noticed how in the beginning I kept calling the seminars "my in-service" and how that "my" gradually changed to "our." As my teaching partners and I became more comfortable with each other, I was able to let go of control of the seminars. I think the realization grew that I now did my teaching in these arenas and what worked was what had made me a successful middle school teacher. Over the years I had come to believe that teaching was about forming collaborations with students. My own teaching was all about providing ways to get my students to manipulate material and to talk together and help each other construct knowledge. I could lay the groundwork and guide, but eventually I had to trust my middle school students to take on the responsibility and the direction for their learning. I trusted and respected my students, essential in successful collaborations. Thus, the seminars began to work for all of us -- myself, my new teaching partners, and the participants -- as we grew to trust and respect each other's expertise.

This trust and respect took time to grow. What helped was the realization that we were all part of the same inquiry, and when I reached that point, I was able to give up control and provide the space for my teaching partners and all the participants to exercise their expertise and strengths. I realize that the reason I love facilitating seminars is that it helps satisfy my own desire to be part of a community of learners. We were engaged with the material and each other -- we shared personal stories, putting a human face on difficult issues, which allowed for the discussion of ideas. We were making sense of things together and thinking about how we could create learning communities within our own classrooms. We were learning to look at our students and our work descriptively, trying to keep judgement out of the equation. Early on in that first semester I came to the realization that in order to be more successful in my day-to-day consulting, I had to become more of an observer and listener, something that I had cultivated and worked on in my teaching over the years but not in my consulting. This

realization helped me let go of the idea of expert and begin to approach my work as a learner.

As the year progressed, whenever I went into a teacher's room, I tried to stick to what I noticed and to leave the judgment out of it. I often focused on what I noticed about students and how they were working rather than on what the teacher was doing. I recorded student talk and related it back to teachers. In most cases, hearing these observations, teachers realized what needed to be done and that's when they asked me to work with them to design lessons to achieve specific goals. Being invited into more classrooms increased my contact with students. I missed sharing my love of young adult literature. One of my greatest pleasures as a teacher had been helping and encouraging youngsters to become readers and writers. I realized that during this second year of consulting I needed to do more sustained work in classrooms and began looking for a teacher who would be interested in doing an extended piece of work with me over a period of time. Grace Raffaele, a Communication Arts teacher at Intermediate School 143 (IS 143) in Washington Heights, wanted to experiment with literature circles (Daniels 1994) -- discussion groups in which children meet regularly to talk about books of their own choosing.

IS 143 is a large middle school in the Washington Heights section of New York City. The area is predominantly Dominican, and in 1995-96, approximately 87% of the 1900 students in the school were English language learners. At the time I began working at the school a large percentage of the staff were veteran teachers, some of whom had been there for over 30 years. The school also recruited a large number of Teach for America participants, most of whom stayed for approximately two or three years before moving on to graduate school. The school had a strong principal and was efficiently run. Each grade was set up in three teams, but due to policy changes attendance at team meetings was no longer mandatory. Collaboration among team members was encouraged but was sporadic. Periods were forty minutes in length and subject specific. Instruction was largely teacher-centered: desks were set up in rows, group work was done infrequently, and most teachers were standing in front of a silent class disseminating information. There were some innovative teachers who were working towards a more student-centered environment. The school district was also traditional and produced curriculum guides, workbooks, and pacing calendars on a regular basis. There was a strong emphasis on reading instruction, and extensive test preparation was the norm.

Year One: Developing a Working Relationship With Grace

The summer before I entered IS 143, a four-day seminar was given at Lehman College for teachers from all the SATC schools who had selected the NYCWP as one of their partners. At that seminar, Grace emerged as someone who was already a reflective practitioner (Schön 1984) experimenting with new ways to teach reading and writing. As a graduate student at Columbia Teachers College, she had been immersed in constructivist principles of learning and had begun to put these student-centered ideas into practice in her classroom.

I met Grace in the first year I was consulting at the school, when she was acting as the school's librarian and did not have a classroom of her own. She had held that position for two years. Prior to that, she had been a highly regarded communication arts teacher. Teaching was Grace's second career, and she had been a classroom teacher for only a few years. She was highly committed to the school, one which she had attended as a student. She was on the Middle School Initiative Committee looking into redesigning the school's program and was one of the people responsible for selecting the NYCWP as a professional development partner for the SATC grant.

As the consultant, I was assigned space in the back room of the library, which is where we began our conversations. Consulting in the first year builds slowly. A consultant is thrust into a new school environment, meeting new people, trying to understand school culture, and searching for a way of working within that context. A lot of it is about collecting "local knowledge," being an observer, and looking for opportunities. The work Grace and I did that first semester focused on using journals with eighth grade students participating in the after-school "School to Work" program. More importantly, we were cautiously getting to know each other as teachers and as individuals. Grace asked lots of questions about pedagogy, and I asked lots of questions about 143. We looked at student journals and talked about ways to use them to promote student learning.

Though the NYCWP model grounds the work done in schools by the on-site teacher-consultant in a thirty-hour graduate seminar, usually offered on-site at the school, that first year I only had three teachers from IS 143 in the seminar. This made it difficult to get the work started at the school. Grace, a highly regarded

professional at 143, was my link. Even though she was unable to take the seminar, she was the person I depended upon to introduce me to school culture and teachers she felt would be open to working with me. When she took the second semester seminar, however, our conversations became more intense. We used the same language and had similar ideas and values about what learning should look like in middle-school classrooms. In May of that first year we also designed a staff development afternoon where we invited teachers to share their successful student-centered practices and student work with each other. Our hope was that this meeting would help teachers begin to share their expertise with each other on a regular basis. We were hoping to develop a community of learners consistent with a Writing Project belief that the best teachers of teachers are other teachers.

Year Two: Developing and Implementing a Sustained Piece of Work

In the second year Grace asked me to come into her classroom to observe, to be another pair of eyes, and to get to know her students. We worked together to design a poetry unit which allowed students to read and discover poetry on their own. It was a first attempt at helping her students to respond to literature of their own choosing, and we began to develop a way of working together that satisfied both of us. We met and planned; I visited the class, observed, and wrote in my journal. Grace wrote in her journal, and then we met again to discuss what we had noticed and ways to proceed.

In order to get more IS 143 teachers involved, we held the second semester's seminar on-site. I asked Grace to co-teach this seminar with me. Planning sessions became more than just designing the course -- we got to know each other's ideas about literacy learning, and we began the reading work. In our early discussions about how to get her students to become independent readers and responders, I had given Grace an article that I had written about my work with a class of lowest-percentile readers in the tracked and highly traditional middle school where I had been teaching. I had taken a risk in my own practice based upon my belief that students become proficient and life-long readers when they have time to read, write, and talk about books of their own choosing. Grace also believed that reading is a personal engagement with text and that active readers make their own connections. She had been reading Louise Rosenblatt (1938, 1978), Nancie Atwell (1998), and more recently Harvey Daniels (1994). She

believed everything these and other educators were saying about student-centered learning but within her existing environment, she was reluctant to change her practice.

In the beginning of December, the school administration at 143, worried about the upcoming reading tests, divided one of Grace's sixth-grade classes for reading instruction. At this point, Grace decided to take a risk and use the administration's decision to her advantage. Together, we decided it would be a wonderful opportunity to experiment with Daniels's version of reading circles, a practice we were both interested in exploring as a way to increase students' "effluent and aesthetic" (Rosenblatt 1978) responses to literature. We both realized that we first needed to change student expectations about what reading in school could be like and establish some new habits. Grace had already been working on this before the class was split into two groups. We also had to give students clear and usable strategies for thinking about what they read. Students needed to take charge of their own reading and had to be given the opportunity to make choices about what they would read. We began by letting the students select a name for the group, and they selected "Spice Reading World." Members received their own reading response logs in which they could record their personal responses to the literature they would be reading.

We started by talking, writing, and sharing our reading histories and our attitudes towards reading. Both Grace and I were active participants and shared our own reading with the group. We selected Nicholasa Mohr's short story collection, *El Bronx Remembered*, to introduce the students to the different ways they could respond to literature, adapting Daniels's literature-circle role sheets to meet the needs of the class. When we felt they were ready to strike out on their own, we rummaged through the book room and selected four full-length novels, *Matilda*, *The Witches*, and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl and *The Cricket in Times Square* by George Selden. Each student could choose one. Grace and I worked together to design the groups so that students received either their first or second choice and there was a range of ability levels in each group.

I spent two periods a week in the class so that both Grace and I could sit in on the reading and discussion. We provided writing prompts and helped to model ways to talk about literature, pushing talk to further sophistication. We both documented our work together in our individual teaching journals. At first I wrote about the work we did together after each class meeting. Later on I began

to experiment with recording my observations of students as they read. Capturing the student conversations during reading groups was challenging.

In this context, we truly became collaborators. Grace's decision to do this work was helped by her knowing that I would be there two days a week. I was excited by the prospect of working with her this intensively on a piece of work that she wanted to do. As Grace and I became members of "Spice Reading World," we were collaborating with each other as well as building in supports for students to become "co-constructors of knowledge," and it was not easy. Grace and I have very different teaching styles and ways of dealing with students. Though I was invited to work with her, these were not my students and this was not my classroom. How could I work within someone else's space over an extended period of time? Who has ownership of the work? How would I handle discipline? Initial planning was easy; putting it into practice was difficult. I was still learning to let go of control of the work. As the weeks progressed, facilitating the seminars helped me realize that I had to take an "inquiry stance," -- doing more observing, describing, and questioning than telling or recommending. The way I found to work was through careful observation of student behaviors. I needed to wait for Grace to ask me to participate, and I needed to write what I hoped were nonjudgmental observations of students. We both had to learn to take a back seat as her students became more involved in responding to and sharing their reading with each other.

The Journals

The classroom work and the collaboration became visible through my journal writing. I began to share my journal with Grace, and it was those observations and our talk about them that helped us understand what was happening within her classroom. Grace always had her journal in front of her as we talked. She would take notes and refer to her own writing. I didn't realize it at the time, but my extensive journal writing became a model for Grace who had been using her journal for planning and writing quick notes to herself. She began to share her journal with me, and we both began to watch kids and record their talk more closely. Even though I had let go of control of the work, I held onto the role of being a learner and a member of a learning community. In this way both of us began to use the tensions within the collaboration to make changes in what we were doing.

Our personal journal writing and description of students was part of our learning to work alongside each other. Though we used our journals as we talked about what we thought was happening in the room, we shared selectively. It became a reciprocal relationship in which we both learned a great deal, yet not until I began to write this story did we actually exchange complete journals. Reading Grace's journal was an eye opener for me. We had taught the graduate seminar together, I had spent a year in her classroom, and we had become good friends, yet it was still hard to hear some of what she had to say. It has made me think long and hard about collaboration.

What follows are selections from our combined journals recording the story of our months together. They show two different minds engaged with the same process: supporting students as they become active readers and responders. We notice different things and have a different focus. Although the journal entries I have selected are as much about reading as they are about collaboration, my focus in this writing is to look at what develops when two people are committed to making a collaborative effort. The entries are about how the project evolved and how each of us grew within the work.

To tell this story of discovery, I have juxtaposed my journal entries with Grace's entries so that the reader can see the progression of the work and the thinking we did together. All of us -- Grace, myself and the students -- are in the position of learners. Grace and I work alongside each other as well as alongside the students, who collaborate with each other and with us. Everyone is in the process of shifting behaviors. I'm helping Grace to shift her role and practice, and she's helping me to discover mine as a teacher-consultant. Both of us are helping students shift their way of being learners.

Within these selected passages, two interrelated strands come forward: the reading work and the growing collaboration. As a way of sharing our journal entries, I have divided them into sections. At the end of each section, I share some of my thoughts about the entries in relation to the strands of reading and collaboration. This first section of entries is all from Grace's journal and gives some background to the work we did together.¹

¹ These journal entries have been typed with minimal editing.

December-January

12/10 (from Grace's journal)

Another top-down development. Starting tomorrow, [my class] 606 will be paralleled (divided into 2 groups) for 5 out of the 8 periods. Of course 15 will be better than 30, but it is done rather inconsiderately of the teacher: 1) mid-week 2) week before a holiday 3) mid-marking period. And why only some of the periods. This might create a more departmentalized feeling for the kids.

The bright side:

5 periods a week or 3, using 2 for test practice?

Read something together. Start reading logs.

Literature circles using text stories

Pairs reading the same book

Nancy will be a big help with this.

Writing workshop: 3 periods with the whole class; continue the poetry. All year? Work up to video project with Jeremy; PAL [Performance Assessment in Language Arts] test practice.

12/15 (from Grace's journal)

Students had a hard time opening up to the question "describe a good reading experience." Worked better reworded "When is reading fun/not fun?"

Their answers.

Fun:

You travel and find new things; funny; gets you out of being bored; get into the book, when you know what they're talking about; you can imagine what's going on; there's a problem like your own; you have things in common; you can put yourself into the situation, adventure and danger, puts a spell on you; captures your feelings; makes you stick with it; reading your own writing

Not fun:

boring subject like Social Studies; slow; read aloud by someone who doesn't read well, read aloud so fast so you can't understand it; hard word; hard to understand; unfamiliar language or language like Shakespeare's.

Mid-January no date (from Grace's journal)

Reading Workshop: Read 2 days, write 1, use *El Bronx Remembered* by Nicholosa Mohr, reading logs -- double entry response.

1. Model with chart paper use I think... I feel... + summary, I want to know....
2. Respond to logs

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3. Pairs respond for each other's logs
Folders -- paste in response starters and pre-fill with paper.
 4. Book chart -- recommended books to each other. Cards posted with a color or star rating system
 5. Read-aloud a part, respond to this
 6. Use test practice passages as response generators, then do test questions.

I'll start this right after the midterms -- or maybe the following week when the marking period begins?

1/30 (from Grace's journal)

Handed out notebooks. Kids are so excited and so thankful. Write in response to "Reading is fun/not fun when...." Vote on group name. Nancy joins near the end of the period. Majority rules with: SPICE READING WORLD.

Commentary

On Reading: Grace and I are trying to figure out how to help her students become active readers. Many of Grace's entries reflect some of the talk we had after class. In the undated mid-January entry, Grace is thinking through some of the ideas we spoke about. I had suggested using chart paper as a way of making a visible record of the groups' thinking, as well as reminding students of different ways to respond which could be used later when the students were working on their own.

On Collaboration: We are also trying to develop a way of working within the same physical space. What should my role be in her classroom? I felt that I was there to support Grace and to model some of the ways I had helped students become active readers. I also hungered to be involved with students. We both agreed that we had to become active members of "Spice Reading World." At the same time we needed to be the teachers, modeling and providing instruction and handling discipline.

February 2- February 10

2/2/98 (from my journal)

Grace started by asking the students to write -- When is reading fun? She had asked this same question in mid December, but they had never written about it, and she wanted to have this writing as part of their reading response log. I sat in the class and did the writing with them. After writing we shared our responses with each other. On that same day we began to read the story "A Very Special Pet" from Mohr's *El Bronx Remembered*. Grace and I both felt that we needed to do a few stories with the students in order to give them experience in responding to reading on their own. We read for awhile. I believe we took turns reading aloud because I made a note to myself about Miguel who I noticed never read aloud, and I wondered why. Grace and I both must have stopped the reading to deal with vocabulary because I have words like *cantankerous* written in my book. I also must have explained about compound words at the break in a line. My note to myself was for a need to have dictionaries on all the tables. We stopped and wrote down questions we had about what would happen next.

2/2/98 (from Grace's journal)

I needed to set up some clearer procedural things, like writing the date, story name, etc., what I write doesn't need to be copied, resolve comprehension before responses. A little awkward trying to write and control talk at the same time. Helps to have a 2nd person but not helpful when that person "over directs" as when Nancy said and signaled "Enough" when I was prompting for more understanding. I'm glad I spent the comprehension time and will continue to since they were unclear of who was being referred to -- Rewrote the signs. Looks great and it's their work!

2/3/98 (from my journal)

We read Mohr's "Shoes for Hector" today. We chose it because it was short and could be done in a single period. Tomorrow they have the PAL and won't be able to do the reading workshop. Grace didn't want to start anything new and not finish. We [Grace and I] read the story aloud to the class. They could follow along with us or just listen. Everyone chose to read along except Miguel who seems to resent my presence in the group. After we finished reading, we asked the group to write a response -- what they were thinking, etc. (I suggested adding to or rewriting the end.) When we finished the story Roberto said, "That's it? I want more." I suggested that he write that down and then put the more. It was a valid response. I asked them to notice their talk after the story was read and to put that talk on their papers. We gave them 5 minutes to write. Miguel didn't. We went around the room and read our responses. Luis rewrote the end because he was dissatisfied. His

response also showed his regard for education and pride in his ethnicity's ability to achieve. Many students wrote that they liked the story because they could relate to it. It was "ordinary," and they all had an experience that was similar. After Viviana read, Roberto made a *chichichia* sound that Miguel picked up on. They couldn't take not being the center of attention. I asked Roberto why he made the sound, did it indicate his approval of Viviana's response? The other students tried to explain what it was. I didn't need the explanation. I watch TV too, and I am familiar with the ad. I saw it as a way to disrupt and gain the attention of the class. I felt I needed to let him know that I was aware of what he was doing and that it was rude and disrespectful and unacceptable in a class discussion. We get to Miguel who passes. I push him a little, and he says he didn't write anything because it was boring. What a surprise when I told him that was a good response. What was boring about it? He couldn't say, and I made the point that we need to push ourselves as readers to determine the why. That way we can select books that we like to read. It's O-K to find something boring, but it was also important to notice that what one person found boring, another person liked, in this case it was the ordinariness of the story.

Miguel and Roberto tick me off. They have to know that they are not in control of this group and that rude behavior is unacceptable. Grace says Miguel isn't always this way. He has been every time I'm there. I would guess that at this point he doesn't like me too much because I call him on his behavior.

I hope I didn't take over too much. I told Grace that I just couldn't let them do what they were doing. I know this is not my class and that I shouldn't be disciplining students, but I just couldn't let this one go.

2/3/98 (from Grace's journal)

I'm more comfortable with the pace. Check comprehension. Nancy suggested we note strange words as we go along. Make a list of I want to know and I wonder...

Kids need help recognizing compound words, especially when hyphenated at the ends of lines

We should have a dictionary at each table

Talk to them about reading aloud. Consider reading silently before aloud. I'm glad I didn't say anything to Nancy; it seems to have settled into a comfortable balance.

More thoughts on reading groups: I was surprised that Kevin was able to sound out the word "cantankerous" and also surprised that Julia seemed to struggle with reading aloud. Other than Nancy's presence, I'm not sure why

Miguel was so reluctant to participate. This has happened before, not sure why.

Luis and Roberto are constant distractions. Starting to notice Zora's having difficulty when called to quiet, yet she is a constant affirmation that there are kids seeking knowledge and interested in learning.

2/10/98 (from my journal)

When I was not here the class wrote about pets and also did a chart of their pets. They used a Venn diagram and compared the hen in the story with a cat.

Commentary

On collaboration: In the entry dated 2/2/98 I talk about our reading of "A Very Special Pet." When I read Grace's journal for that same day I was surprised and horrified to find out that she had perceived me as "over directing." I can't imagine that I could have signaled "enough," but I must have. I know that I was grappling with finding a comfortable way of working within her teaching space. This so clearly was not my classroom. When I did handle a behavior problem the next day I worried that I had taken charge and talked to Grace about why I did it. Grace had chosen not to say anything to me about over directing, and in the entry dated 2/3/98, she states that we've "settled into a comfortable balance." I felt that way too, but I also knew that there would be other opportunities to step on each other's toes as the work continued. I had been so deeply involved in classroom teaching for so many years, and now I was having trouble letting it go.

On reading: We begin to slowly introduce ways to respond to literature, and there is talk about accepting and honoring differences of opinion. My presence in the room has given Grace time to watch her students and make some observations about reading behaviors.

February 11

2/11/98 (from Grace's journal)

Sometimes we spend too much time on tangents. I guess it's because they are excited about being able to say what they think and also because there are so many things to explain. Roberto was reading aloud to himself, and

Nancy felt he had difficulty reading. I'm concerned in the same way about Amarilys. Roberto has been an increasing problem. Says things for the sake of saying. Writing very little. He's the lazy one, because I think he can do it, he just wants to look good with doing as little as possible. Miguel, on the other hand, may not be lazy as Nancy felt, but suffering from a very low sense of self-esteem. Luis has come a long way. Zora is a better reader but more literal, less abstract and seems to approach things methodically. What isn't clicking here? Some do not focus, get distracted. Some still say they don't know what to write.

Ideas: spread out the seating, especially for silent reading; read together with one at a time while others read silently on their own; free-write? Yes! This may "loosen up" the head to pen flow.

I don't want to interrupt this story more than we have to in order to start free writing. So read aloud which is what they like and will hold their attention. Then have everyone write, no, we'll write together what happened and make a list of events. Then each one alone will write one sentence and we'll share/write on paper. Or I could have them re-read what they did yesterday, in pairs, both?

Surprise! They don't like pairs! But they did it anyway -- with effort! Then I read the next 2 pages aloud and had us do a summary and responses on chart paper. Responses are better when they're participating and when we do parceled out tasks. However, this does lead to some distraction, side talking and calling out. What will help them to work more on their own?

Commentary

On reading: Grace and I have spent time talking about our perceptions of different students. These are her students, and she knows them well. I come in as a second pair of eyes. In this entry she considers my ideas and also spends time making observations about others. She's aware that something isn't "clicking" and uses her journal to think through ways to get her students to write responses to the reading. After trying out an idea she reflects upon what happened and continues to search for ways to make them more independent.

February 11-March 18

2/11/98 (from my journal)

Today we shared pet stories and finished the double entry on picking favorite lines. We also looked at the book and talked about the cover. We looked at the table of contents and at the introduction written by the author. Talked about dedications and intros and then read the intro together. Again the focus was on vocabulary.

I worked with a reading group again today. Grace has really started to use the chart paper for responding and recording student ideas. They are up around the room and can be referred to all the time. She used them to catch me up on what happened yesterday. At least five students were called out for chorus so we were a smaller group. The kids are trying hard and we did some vocabulary in context as we read the introduction. *Quota* was one of the words, *freighter* was another. We looked at the sentence "They came on a freighter and airplanes." The students realized that it was some form of transportation and guessed bus or automobile. Only one person realized that Puerto Rico was an island and then they guessed boat or ship — yet they didn't know what kind of ship and most guessed passenger ship. It is so interesting to notice how prior knowledge is essential to getting words in context. What we did was point out the different ways people try to understand a word's meaning. With *quota* we looked for words we knew which sounded the same — they came up with quotient and realized the word had to do with numbers. I believe that this type of reading work, making students aware of how good readers make meaning will help them increase their fluency and comprehension.

2/24/98 (from my journal)

We started a new story as a group "A New Window Display" and used double-entry format. One column was The Story and the other column was My Thoughts. I did the work with the class as did Grace.

Noberto read aloud -- whispering the words to himself until the end of the page when he then began to read silently.

Miguel wants someone to read to him -- lots of fidgeting and then he gets started.

We spend too much time on vocabulary. We lose the boys like Miguel, Noberto and Mario.

What do I notice about the way these students read? It takes a really long time to finish anything with them. Everyone wants to talk but as soon as we begin to talk they lose interest. Grace spends too much time explaining and the pace slows down.

Today Loida talked about a funeral she went to. I asked if she thought about that when she read or was it our talk that reminded her of it? She said while she read. I asked if other people also thought about funeral experiences as

they read. Some said yes and I then told them that they could write this reminds me of and tell the story as part of their thoughts side of the page. I'm a little discouraged at the lack of real comprehension. The kids write words they don't know and let it go at that. We need to have dictionaries on desks.

Noberto couldn't figure out whether they were looking at a real body or a photograph even though the word photograph was right there on the page. He also read aloud when asked to read silently.

Miguel never responds to a question. He just shrugs his shoulders.

Roberto makes things up. I'm not sure why. He seems to need the attention. He's very insistent and talks aloud if he isn't called upon. "I have something to say." His hand is up as he says this. Ex. "I have a word, I have a word!" Then when he's called on it is obvious he really doesn't because he fishes around for 2 or 3 easy words.

I'm finding this very discouraging and slow moving. Why? Could the kids get the idea if we modeled less? If this group is the better reading group in the class, what are the others like?

2/27/98 (from Grace's journal)

Everyone is excited after the video project and lunch. Decided on our first free write even though I was going to wait. These are the times we need this to "empty out." Everyone really settles down and enjoys the quiet. Everyone is writing. It's harder to stop them than to start them. Roberto and Dara want to share. Miguel seems engaged. Creates a good atmosphere for reading. Read aloud, they're much more respectful of the order to read in. Jose calls out "Did he die?" Viviana is very sad. Right after reading I ask everyone to write what they are thinking.

How can we use these students' need and ability to interact with each other to make them more independent thinkers? Can we use their dependency to promote independency? We must have them asking more questions. We must show them that this can be "easy". It may be time for them to make their own choices -- to read what they want. Is it time for literature circles using these short stories?

3/16/98 (from Grace's journal)

I must be getting used to the noise. They were quite good but Nancy felt she needed to caution them. Miguel seemed positive about this but then had to have a little bout of objection. He said "This book is boring. I can tell even though I haven't read it." Some need to read aloud. Maybe a problem by encouraging others to talk. Some are distracted by the sheets thinking they need to follow the directions rigidly. I need to explain that it's a guide. I've noticed that Aura in particular does not get a lot of instructions. Some people want to contribute to the other roles, again these people took the roles and the sheets as literal assignments. Later I asked Miguel if it was really a boring story. He said it wasn't. He's coming along.

3/16/98 (from my journal)

I'm not here for a week. Grace has finally let the students' select their own stories to read and they are in groups according to their choice of story. She used the Daniels roles with them last week as they worked on a story they read together. She's selected four roles -- discussion leader, connector, passage finder and word finder.

It's interesting -- in all the classes I've worked with teachers do not give out the role of illustrator. In Eleese's class it's because they all want it, but in Amy's class it's because she feels it isn't an important role. What's Grace's take on it? Too easy or too many want it? So today they are reading the story the group selected and working on developing their roles. I wonder how they selected their stories? Did Grace ask them to process the way they decided? This might say something about how they select books to read.

Grace goes over the roles again

Connector needed description

Connects-----outside the story

(Grace selected who had what role beforehand so there would be no bickering)

Word picker-----words you don't know -- look them up -- funny words

Passage picker-----like word-picker but longer (likes/dislikes)

Discussion leader-----like the teacher

Kids are antsy as she does this. This school is so noisy -- it's hard to hear the kids as they answer

Class settled down to read -- groups of girls although asked to read silently read aloud anyway

Mike took awhile to settle -- counts the pages and sighs

Diana reads with her lips moving to begin with and then stops

Altagracia -- I can follow her eyes and her lips -- she moves her head from left to right as she reads -- lips move as she begins and then stops
Jose holds the book upright on the table, Miguel lays it down and has his head in his hands
Diana holds both arms away from her body at the furthest reach of her kinesphere
Altagracia has the book close in to her body at near reach space
Miguel becomes distracted by the girls reading out loud
Kevin has book in his lap using a finger to follow the sentences -- lips moving
Roberto is reading aloud to himself -- appears to have difficulty focusing -- looks up often, changes his position, shakes his foot, seems annoyed
Noberto is hunched over the book and reads with his lips moving
Mario has the book on the desk chin resting in his hand -- looks up at Roberto often -- appears ready to be distracted
Loida reads aloud to herself--lips move -- book upright
Zora has book flat on the table lips moving
Viviana and Julia read aloud to each other
Aura distracted easily -- reads aloud to herself
Luis -- easily distracted
Rosa -- didn't notice her today
Dara -- didn't notice her today

3/17/98 (from my journal)

Yesterday they read and started on the role sheets. Today they continued with this. Some were still reading, others were working on the role sheets. Those who finished early played around (Miguel, Roberto). I worked with Noberto on picking vocabulary words for his group. I helped him use the dictionary. It always amazes me how kids don't know how to use the guide-words -- it took him awhile to admit he didn't know what some words meant. Later I mentioned to the class as a whole that I always look up words when I read especially when I realize that I don't understand what I'm reading. It would be silly not to. Towards the end of the period we talked about how the roles went and discussion leaders read out some good questions. This went well today. Next time they meet they'll go into discussion groups and we'll see how it goes.

The group as a whole enjoyed the stories they selected to read. It amazes me how just letting kids select their own, even if it's a limited selection, keeps them interested in the material.

3/17/98 (from Grace's journal)

Mostly everyone gets right into it. Who didn't? I should have noted this — Jose? The role sheets have the individual readers engaged but do not help to draw the group together to discuss. Some groups have sub groups even within 3 or 4 people. Cooperative learning needs a group commitment focuser. Ideas: group worksheet; room on role sheet for other ideas; set aside and time group discussions 5 minutes per role? Etc.

3/18/98 (from my journal)

Free-writing first -- then Grace asked them to write down one thing they told their group and one thing they heard from someone else. On Wed. Grace noticed that they talked in pairs rather than as a whole group -- they were still working on role sheets. They never went into groups to discuss.

Commentary

On collaboration: I'm beginning to spend more time watching students and the way they respond to the reading and each other. I'm feeling discouraged about their ability to comprehend and realize why Grace spends so much time explaining and filling in the gaps. I'm realizing how slow the process is for them. I feel we need to model everything, yet maybe it would work better if we modeled less. This is a new population for me, and I'm on shaky ground. I practice observing kids as they settle into silent reading. I try to be non-judgmental but it isn't always easy, as can be seen in my description of Roberto on 2/24/98. What will I learn about them by just describing what I see? How will those descriptions help Grace to see her students more fully?

On reading: We have worked with students on using a double-entry response. Students are looking at the language of the text, selecting favorite lines and giving reasons for their selections. We also spend time looking at words in context and talking about ways to determine what a word means. I hope that I'm modeling and making visible through talk how good readers make meaning. We also spend time looking at the parts of the book and make some predictions based upon the cover illustration. All this in preparation for making reading choices. Grace allows the students to select their own stories to read, and they begin to work with the Daniels's role sheets. The role sheets are taken literally by the students. They

know all about work sheets and are doing their work, diligently filling in the blanks.

March 23

3/23/98 (from my journal)

Grace and I talked before class. She's not happy with the roles. "The role sheets seem to over-focus the kids. They don't seem to generate discussion." I'm feeling the same way after working with them in both Amy and Eleese's classes. I'm noticing the different pace of the groups in this classroom. One group didn't talk at all because they were still reading. Grace has been keeping a journal on these reading groups. We need to spend more time comparing impressions. She knows these students much better than I do and really has a better sense of them as learners. I am constantly discovering things about them. This is a strange role for me. I'm working with the kids and I'm aware of how that is going, but I'm also modeling for Grace keeping an eye on what I'm doing so that we can talk about it. Actually Grace and I do well as a team. I've sort of taken over the [fishbowl] piece (a technique which uses a small group to model a way of working, discussing, etc. for another group of observers) since she asked me how to do it and told me she felt unsure of being successful with it.

Last Wednesday Grace asked the kids to talk about what kind of discussion they had in their Tues. groups. Interesting because I saw the students as still working on their role sheets and Grace saw this as discussion. I thought that this Monday the class was to be in discussion groups. The responses the students gave Grace made me realize that I have preconceived notions of what constitutes a discussion. The students did talk quietly as they worked on the role sheets and I should have paid more attention to the type of talk the sheets were generating. What the groups did do was literally work in pairs as they prepared the roles. They were in essence truly discussing the story as they helped the discussion leader come up with questions. They read aloud interesting passages as they helped the passage picker select things to read. The same help was given to the connector. During this time I walked around helping groups to formulate questions and working with word pickers as they used the dictionary and selected words. Grace did the same thing. It seems to me now that this was valuable talk, possibly more valuable than what occurred as we did the fish bowl. The actual discussion on Monday felt contrived, the talk last week was authentic. What is this saying about the process and about these students? Both Grace and I feel that the roles are contrived and limiting. They feel like just another worksheet. The kids are used to these so there was a comfort level with them, but they didn't seem to go beyond what the sheet asked them to do. Why would they? This is what they know how to do. I need to pay attention to the talk around filling out the sheets. I'm sure there is a lot there that is valuable.

Monday we asked Luis, Aura, Dara and Rosa to be in the fish bowl. The rest of the class watched and critiqued them. Dara had really good questions to ask. She asked the first one and directed the question to a particular student. The student answered and then the next student answered etc. There was no talk. Each student just answered the question without commenting on what the others had said. I realize this is what happens in most classes. The teacher asks a question and a student answers the teacher. Unless the teacher invites comments no one really listens or feels as if they need to respond to that answer. The teacher moves on to the next question and next student. The students in Grace's class were simply mimicking what they knew. Grace and I as outsiders had to intervene to push discussion about a particular answer. When we did this the students answered us directly searching our eyes for approval rather than talking to the group. This too makes sense. It is so easy as a teacher to let this happen. You need to really work at getting the kids to talk and to listen to each other. They need confidence in themselves to believe their ideas are right because right is important. When Grace and I talked we thought about this. We both realized that the students were working from their experiences with school and we both had to look at ourselves and the way we question and listen to responses. Grace realized that although she thought she was getting kids to talk with each other -- she really wasn't -- or if she was, it wasn't enough. It is so easy to fall into telling them what to think. During the time I've been participating in Grace's classroom I've noticed she does that a lot. So often she's filling in experiences for them -- telling them information about things they don't know about. I've also noticed that when she does that the students turn off and get distracted. I realize that I'm also guilty of this. After the fish bowl we asked the class to tell what they noticed. They did pick up on the fact that the leader directed the questions to only one person rather than the group. They realized that this isn't the way they talk about a movie or a TV show. In those discussions people get excited and interrupt each other to agree or disagree. They were aware that this hadn't happened in the book talk, yet they didn't know how to make it happen. We tried another group -- Viviana, Zora, Julia and Loida. The girls had learned from the first group and the talk was more natural. We had to stop because of time. We weren't going to pick up the next day but after Grace and I talked we felt we had to continue modeling. Today the girls tried to finish. It lacked yesterday's spontaneity. We then let the other two groups' fish bowl.

Miguel's group fell apart. He had great questions but refused to take on the leadership role. He got shy and then sullen. Jose did well and picked up the ball as connector. Altagracia took on the leadership role -- she really got into talking about her ideas. Diana was too shy and just kept agreeing with Altagracia.

The fourth group really stopped me and made me realize how poorly some of them comprehend. This group had Kevin, Roberto, Noberto, and Mario in it.

Kevin started by saying he didn't understand the story. As the boys in the group tried to explain, it became increasingly clear that they all didn't understand it. Roberto asked them what the setting was and they all agreed it was in a house. They knew it was about a girl who refused to tell the truth or rather learned it was important to tell the truth, but they had no idea of the context. In the first paragraph it was made clear that she was being questioned by a lawyer. She was in a law office and the word attorney was used. They didn't know what it meant and no one had bothered, nor, thought it important enough to look up. Actually Kevin, the boy who said he didn't understand, really did have a better grasp of the events. Noberto also knew but stayed silent. Roberto, who believes he knows everything, dominated and has them all believing he's the smartest. He silenced all of them and they went along with his ideas. Roberto has had me fooled too. Not really fooled but he's so insistent and so demanding of attention that he makes you believe he knows more than he does. I have noticed how easily he is distracted and how quickly he finishes his reading and is ready to play. I've begun to suspect that it's all a cover up and that in fact he doesn't read well. He asks silly questions -- I know that's judgmental and I really now need to spend time observing him more closely so I can describe what I see. He wants to be part of the discussions, in fact wants to take over, so he asks any question even if it is obvious, redundant or off the topic.

Where do we go from here? Grace and I both agree we need to model this again as a whole group. We'll read a story -- the whole group will read the same one but they will work in groups to make meaning -- doing the roles etc. This way when we fish bowl everyone will be able to answer and ask questions. This round will give me more time to observe them as they work and have a guide as to what to look for.

I need to call Grace and talk with her. I'd also like to get copies of her journal entries on this. After all she knows them better than I do and her perceptions of what they can and can not do are clearer to her than they are to me. These are not my Wagner students. They aren't even like my lowest tracked Wagner students -- I believe language is an issue here -- English vocabulary is really lacking and needs to be expanded in a meaningful way. I haven't been their teacher and I haven't been around all the time to see how Grace works with the full class. I'm not sure how she has held discussions with them or how she has done other reading with them.

I do feel good about this work. I like the kids and I'm getting a real sense of how they work and who they are. I believe Grace is feeling supported and that she's learning a lot about her own teaching. I think her journal and her questions will reflect this.

3/23/98 (from Grace's journal)

Suggest that students comment on previous person's answer before making their own comment. The fish bowl: "The Wrong Lunch Line" Luis says, "they kill her." The group discusses with effort what he meant by that. Still acting like teacher/student. Discussion director asks each one a question like a teacher. Julia asks Luis why he said they kill her and why Rosa was laughing. Discussion about Jewish people leads to how they are different, then Aura says, "But in this story..." now she's getting it! "Fortune Telling" Viviana as director -- very school-like, not a true discussion.

I'm still unhappy with the "discussion leader" role. It seems that each person in their role is a leader of that particular discussion. And, in fact, the goal is for everyone to be contributing something to each type of discussion.

I'm also not happy with the role sheets themselves, however I'm reluctant to say, "chuck 'em" entirely. I think the focus is good but it goes too far -- is too individualized. Does not encourage or even imply a sharing or a group component in the completion of the role.

After talking to Nancy before class, I was feeling unhappy with what I had -- or had not accomplished so far with this group. Have I shown them and allowed them the time to use active listening? Have I generated the types of discussions I want them to now be able to do on their own? Have I focused them on their reading? In all cases I think the answer is yes, a little, but not enough. And I almost missed a valuable opportunity to strengthen their abilities by moving on too quickly. Fish bowling was a needed valuable activity. Gives them confidence and gives us a chance to model. Works much better because we are smaller in numbers, so there are not 26 watching 4, only 12 watching 4 is much easier to focus the "observers." This they did very well. Had I given them time, I think they were on their way to discussion but this will ensure they are clearer about what they are doing.

There's something else going on here. When someone says the kids are not doing this or that, we (me?) may be unconsciously translating or equating that with we (me?) the teacher, has not done what was needed! This is the second time I've caught myself having this "I'm not doing good" reaction when in fact the critique was meant to clarify the situation, not to bring up faults -- in either students or teachers. It was meant as observation yet somehow came across as judgement. I can work through that, but I worry that others -- other teachers -- may not. What a difficult place the consultant must find and that "place" may be different with each teacher they work with.

Nancy says we'll do one more story as a group. She says they're not getting it. This is why and when we become teacher directed. And this is what I said yesterday, and today -- I said we should do a story or book together. And at that time she disagreed. Now when it's clear it's needed she "directs" by telling the class herself. Does she remember what I said earlier? I'm feeling like I need to hear her say I was right about this.

Commentary

On reading: This series of journal entries reflects what we have been learning while doing this work on reading. In particular, we are made aware of the way we question students and the way we listen to answers. I've become aware of the assumptions I hold about discussions, and I am questioning whether we really foster discussion when we keep asking questions and explaining. Neither of us is satisfied with the way things are going, and, in particular, we are finding the role sheets to be unsuccessful with these students. The students are used to teacher-centered classrooms, and this is reflected in the way they hold discussions with each other. But some kind of talk is generated through the roles. Can that talk be extended into more authentic discussion or do the students need a different starting place than the role sheets provide?

On collaboration: We have been working together for some time now. I'm feeling comfortable in Grace's room and really have a sense of who she is as a teacher, yet I am not there all the time and don't really know how she works with a full class. I respect her expertise and want her to share her understandings about her students as learners. She has felt comfortable enough with me to ask me to model a fish bowl yet not comfortable enough to let me know when I have stepped over the bounds and "directed." I'm still always aware of what I'm doing, what I'm modeling for her. We don't seem to trust each other enough to exchange journals and are still sharing selectively. At the end of my entry dated 3/23/98, I realized that Grace was right, and we needed to do one more story as a whole group. I was anxious to move on to the novels. After the last fish bowl I agreed with her, but according to her entry of the same date I didn't acknowledge this. I thought we had come to a mutual agreement and felt comfortable informing the students of our decision. I was wrong. How did I misinterpret our discussion? Also in that same journal entry Grace talks about her reactions to my observations which I have tried to keep nonjudgmental. It is clear throughout the journals that what I see makes her wonder and question, but it doesn't make her doubt herself.

Reading this section has also made me think long and hard about how carefully I need to shape what I say when working with teachers. How are my observations accepted by teachers? Grace is reasonably experienced and confident. What happens when I work with an inexperienced teacher?

March 30-April 21

3/30/98 (from my journal)

We decided to do one more story together. Each reading group is reading the same story. Instead of one child having a single role we decided to have them each prepare all four that we've worked on -- discussion director, connector, passage picker, word picker. We put dictionaries on desks and talked about looking up words to help us make meaning. We read in sections. First section was pp. 142-146. Grace and I did the work along with the students. Zora, Dara, Roberto, Luis and Aura used the dictionary only once; Kevin used it twice; Zora three times; Viviana not at all. Words I picked out -- *ledger, frayed, doted, sparsely*. My question -- *Why do you think Dona Nereida and Don Oswaldo dote on the dog? I also wrote this reminds me of and I remember*. Another of my questions -- *Why do you think they never let Judy into the back of the store?*

We got a list of their questions up on the board. Students did look up words. Second section reading was from pp. 146-151.

3/31/98 (from my journal)

Before we started to read today I asked them to make a prediction about what would happen. Everyone seems engrossed in the story except Roberto. Luis reads on his knees and uses a pen to follow the words. Dara has her book on her lap and has turned sideways trying to get comfortable. Nobody is writing as they read. We stopped their reading to ask them to write -- *Wherever you are in the story, stop and write one thought -- What are you thinking about? What are you feeling? As soon as you've written what you want to say go back to reading the story*. Dara, Rosa, Viviana had a lot to write. Roberto distracted again.

Grace and I read and model the behavior we expect from them. I write questions for myself -- *Judy's mother is really angry with the grocer and his wife. Why are they so cheap? It would be so easy to give her another can of beans. Mrs. Morales knows the beans are spoiled and she also knows that Judy loves that dog. Why does she make Judy feed the dog the beans? Did Mrs. Morales know the dog would be sick? My words -- convulsions, trepidation, unkempt, verge of hysteria. The whole scene when Don Oswaldo*

confronts Mrs. Morales is very strong. Who is right? Who is wrong? I felt sorry for Dona Nereida at the end of the story. She really loved Princess. Why did Judy decide never to go back?

I'm seeing more good reading behaviors in this class. They are using the dictionaries freely and have picked out the really difficult words. Everyone has gotten the idea of the story. Everyone is still talking about the story at the end when the bell rang. They are having a real discussion!! How do we capture that in the reading circles? Miguel and Kevin immediately began to talk about the fact that the dog died and that it served Don Oswaldo right because he was cheap. Everyone stayed around to talk. Mario felt Don Oswaldo was wrong because the beans could have killed the children if they ate them. The only one to run out of the room immediately was Roberto. This is such a frustrating activity for him. He can't be the center of attention if everyone is involved in the story. He also wanted us to read it aloud rather than silently. He played with his pen, stared into space, wrote in another notebook, drew circles on his paper and read very little. Is it because he can't read well and this is too frustrating? Maybe I need to read with him a little to see what I notice about his reading. Kevin shares that when he reads he gets sleepy.

At 3:00 today Dara met me in the hall and started to talk about how she felt about Princess dying. It was six periods later and she still wanted to share her reactions to the story we finished today.

Spoke with Grace about Roberto. She read with him -- he can read -- doesn't stop to think as he reads -- decodes well -- still not sure if he can comprehend what he reads.

Wednesday Grace put up the questions that we had gathered -- the class wanted to talk about the story -- not in small groups but as a whole class. The talk generated a lot of thinking -- they had arguments back and forth -- talk revolved around whose fault it was -- everyone had something to say. Aura didn't understand that the beans were bad -- she's very literal and Grace thinks that her comprehension is only on the surface. (I wasn't there on Wednesday. These notes are from my conversation with Grace.)

4/1/98 (from Grace's journal)

We read "Princess" together on the 30th. The students seemed grabbed by the story. Not distracted. Not fidgety. I really wanted us to start seeing all the roles at all times -- or at the times they work for us. We read a little. Then asked them to write discussion director questions. Next day everyone reading, most got to the end of the story and the period ended. Lots of oohs

and ahs and disappointment at having to leave. Immediate talk about the story. Today what should we do? Read, reread, or write discussion notes using the roles as guides? Some need more time to finish reading. Hard to contain the discussion. The separate grouping tables are a hindrance, we need a circle. I try to negotiate an order to who will speak -- doesn't allow for responses to the speaker -- can't do it. Discussion is a back and forth event not an order of speaker event. One table was left out of the discussion, however Zora made her way in by raising her hand and having something to say. Luis is having a hard time -- he's been bothering students (Zora and Aura again.) He listens to what is going on but Roberto does not. Lots of talk starts to happen. Needs some refereeing, but that does not deter them. I stay out of the comment. Free myself not to direct what to talk about, only who speaks.

4/6/98 (from my journal)

We decided to ask the class to analyze the discussion they held on the story. We asked what got them interested in talking about that particular story. They responded that all of the questions they had come up with were interesting especially the one about who was responsible. They could debate -- agree and disagree with each other like a court. Why was the discussion so good as a whole group and the small groups less interesting? Loida felt that more people and ideas helped her to think about her own ideas. The larger discussion felt more comfortable. This story had them asking a lot of questions and they all had an opinion about who was to blame for the dog's death. (While I ran the talk Grace took notes on what they said.) We got sidetracked onto what caused the dog's death and Aura is looking up salmonella and other types of food poisoning. They have a fascination with things that are morbid and had lots of questions about what kinds of food can kill you. These questions were interesting and could easily have taken us off the track. I've noticed that this happens a great deal with 6th graders and if you're not careful you never finish anything. We ended with Viviana asking a question about the author. This led us to writing letters to her. They got very busy writing. We shared one or two today and will share the others tomorrow.

We're finally ready to get them into permanent groups to read a full novel. We went down to the book room to see what would be good to use with the class. Our choices depend upon what's there and numbers of copies available. Breaking up full sets is not encouraged here, but because it is Grace, Olga agreed to it. The books we selected: *Matilda*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Cricket in Times Square*, *Tiger Eyes*, *Felita*, and *The Witches*. We realize that this isn't total free choice but there is some choice. The students were asked to pick 2 books from the selection. We told them

we would try to give them one of the two. Grace and I talked about how we could do the roles. One idea was to have each group try something different. One group might try the literature roles as they were, another would have each person doing all four roles, a third group would try new roles created by Grace, and the last group would do reading logs. We rejected this idea as being too complicated and not consistent with what we had done to model the responding. Our most successful venture had been with each person doing all four roles and we decided to use reading logs letting the students continue doing all of the four roles we had focused on in class. Grace wrote a letter to the group explaining what was expected. They pasted it into their notebooks. Grace and I worked together to set up the reading groups — we tried to give everyone their choice. This almost happened but we also knew that certain groups would not be successful if we didn't control who was in them. We wanted to make sure that each group had at least one strong reader or conscientious worker in it.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory -- Luis, Viviana, Mario, Diana
Matilda -- Rosa, Loida, Jose, Kevin
The Witches -- Altagracia, Zora, Aura, Roberto
Cricket in Times Square -- Julia, Dara, Miguel, Noberto

4/21/98 (from my journal)

Day before the reading test and Grace did practice work with them. Kids asked lots of questions about passing and failing. There is such confusion about the importance of these tests. Kevin asked what boredom meant and was surprised when I told him that because it was a test that I couldn't tell him. I asked if there were any other words that fit. He said yes and then selected the correct word. Most students got 2H wrong because they didn't know how to read the punctuation in the poem. They went with what was an expected answer -- noise hurts ears not silence -- but the answer was silence. It all had to do with a period and a comma. The obvious answers they all get -- the answers that take some thought and more careful reading are often gotten wrong. Sometimes their own knowledge gets in the way because the answer they think it should be logically isn't often right -- they need to read further rather than rush to answer.

Commentary

On reading: Before we can move on, we decide to read another story together. We are still struggling with ways to get students to talk authentically about the literature they are reading. Our dissatisfaction with the role sheets continues yet we are reluctant to give

them up completely. This time we ask each student to be responsible for all four of the roles they have been practicing. Grace and I continue to work alongside the students and model our own responding. This last full-class story is a turning point. We both see changes in reading behaviors. The students are taken by the story and finally there is authentic talk. I'm still not sure what happened, but my suspicion is that finally we read a story they cared about. There probably are lots of reasons it worked especially after all the modeling we did, but I can't help thinking about how important it is to find material that interests students. We're ready to set up reading groups based upon what is available in the book room.

On collaboration: Grace has asked me to help her determine reading groups, and we spend time talking about students and deciding how to group them and still have everyone get their first or second choice. Since we have experimented with different ways of responding, we need to figure out what to use now that we are letting the students take control of their reading. This is the moment when we both have to let go even more than we have already. We've worked on changing expectations, modeled and used thinking strategies, and had students begin to consider their own processes as readers and responders, but we've always come back to the full group. Now they will be on their own. How will we both deal with the role of observer? When do you intervene?

April 22-May 5

Excerpts from Grace's journal

"Group Bonding" -- first they vented about the choice of groups -- now everyone is on the topic (took 10 minutes) talking about what -- very long time to transition to reading quietly and writing quietly. Comments: I can't read his writing; this story is boring. Noticings: people are talking to each other; no more fights; Zora is fading and seems not interested in thinking hard or trying to achieve. Why? Loss of mother?

Miguel takes a long time to get settled. Julia and Dara insist on reading aloud. Roberto having difficulty staying on the reading while Miguel seems to have settled in with it. Rosa talking to Aura. Miguel's having a big problem sitting still. Roberto also talking. Group 1 is doing the most focused work so far.

Day 2 -- outline is set -- they take their books and notebooks. I'm concerned that only 3 or 4 of the letter responses were engaged with reading content. Only those 3 or 4 applied what we had been doing. Is there a cognitive

reason for how often I've seen 6th graders not applying what they've done before to a new task/Even when prompted to do so?

I resist the temptation to switch books until 2 groups want to switch coincidentally with each other. O-K -- let it happen. Maybe they'll have more ownership of their reading. It's going to be difficult for them to pace themselves. We mixed groups so there are diverse readers in each one. How to keep them reading parallel -- or doesn't it matter? Maybe the letter is a mistake. They can not easily shift to it without us modeling first. Return to the role sheets? Maybe the next pass will be better. 6th graders are easily distracted. They need clear, small step directions. "Decide on your own." "Write about whatever you're thinking" isn't working, -- yet! Need to focus the purpose of the letter to the group.

Miguel's still having a big problem concentrating. Kevin's group decided to read 3 pages, then said they had nothing to write about. Viviana's group started laughing at the story, and they had trouble stopping. When I tell Miguel I'll call his grandmother he calms down. As he does, so does the rest of the group. Luis has been having a day of teasing. He can be such a pest! Reading the entries is disappointing because they have not applied any of the prompts -- except Rosa, Viviana, who else? As rigid as the roles seemed, they gave them a clear focus. Curious to see if their discussions reflect more thinking than the writing did. I wonder if part of the problem is that I am asking them to engage in reading and thinking in a way none of their other teachers do. Some groups focused right away when I helped them to decide how much to read. Peace at last!

5/4/98 (from my journal)

Conversations: The group reading *Charlie and Chocolate Factory*

Reading aloud together and each student is taking a turn reading one paragraph. They read pages 8-10 and then stopped to talk. (When Diana read she stumbled over words and asked the group for help.)

Luis: Before that let's talk about what we read. She doesn't know it's going to go to her grandson.

Viviana: Why does she call little kids brats?

Luis: The little kids are annoying. Charlie is more mature.

Viviana: She wants one of her family members to win. Yo no sabe...she doesn't know

(Everyone agrees and laughs.)

Luis: She'll be sorry in the future. She doesn't know. Let's keep reading.
(They continue to read aloud.)

Luis: Let's talk about it again.

Viviana: Didn't you think he was going to win the ticket?

Luis: The title of the chapter is "Grandpa Joe Takes a Gamble" -- he's going to win the ticket by gambling -- playing cards trying to win the ticket -- that's what we predicted but that wasn't the gamble.

Luis, Viviana, Mario, Diana all try to explain that "Gamble" is different here -- it means to take a risk. He took a risk with his last coin.

(Diana reading ahead to herself to prepare her read aloud section.)

Luis: They're so poor.

I left the group to go over to hear the letters another group had written. The Charlie group finished chapter 10 and started to write their letters to each other. Luis and Viviana dominate the group because Diana is so shy. Mario holds his own but mostly agrees. It's hard to get a word in when Luis gets started. I wonder how the group functions when he isn't there?

I noticed that Mike's group (*Cricket*) is reading silently -- trying to find a comfortable way to sit.

Group reading *Witches*

Amarilys: I think the grandmother is a witch.

Zora: I wrote do you think that his grandmother is a witch?

Amar: On this page she shut her lips when he talked about blue spit.

Zora: She started shivering when he asked her about her childhood and did she see a witch.

Altagracia: I don't think she's a witch because she never said witches smoke (? Not sure of this word)

Amar: She said they use long sticks to smoke (?not sure of this word)

Altagracia: If she were a demon she wouldn't go to church everyday. She knows all of this because she had an experience...since she met a witch.

Zora: He said if I see someone that looks like a witch I can go pull their hair. His grandmother said you can't do that.

Amar: They wear gloves because they have claws like a cat.

Roberto: See I found it -- reads from book proving that they have claws.

Altagracia: like Roberto says...

Zora: She does have a point because...

Altagracia: Maybe she didn't want to talk about her experience with witches because it was too scary and too frightening to talk about it.

Grace is sitting in the group and rephrases/says back what Altagracia said.

Everyone in this group is very involved in the discussion except Roberto who is totally distracted by Miguel who is throwing papers across the room at Kevin. I had to remind him he was part of the group, and for a few minutes he shifted his body to join the group, but soon his gaze is again directed towards the room, and he is no longer attentive to what is being said. I don't think I caught all the talk rather I got the gist of it. I didn't catch the interruptions. I think in order to do that I need a tape.

Suggestion to Grace: Grace needs to respond to letters and push the dialogue between the kids. Later on let them pick one letter to expand and edit for a publication.

5/5/98 (from Grace's journal)

It took a little less time to get started. Maybe they're getting used to the routine? Miguel very fidgety, but gets to it eventually. Maybe the timing isn't so bad -- we still have 20 minutes to read and write. Loida likes to work alone. She does things to isolate herself from the group. Tells others they can't read as fast as she can. Doesn't want to share what she wrote. As a result they call her "robot." Roberto's not focusing at all. When he was reading he was really making it up. He hadn't written anything that he said.

Nancy's observations made me feel really good today. She said that most of them seem to have come a long way. They are much more active readers, listeners and responders and not to worry about the few who have not gotten it. She wants us to publish, or at least, to display what's been going on for other teachers in the school to share. She said that her work here would feel worthwhile if she could set this germ in other teachers as well. I noticed that today when Nancy and I were with groups all the other groups stayed on their reading. More focus! Yes!

Commentary

On reading: The students are responding well to these literature groups. Each group has found a way to work together. Routines are set, and they're comfortable with the process. We've let them find their own way to make it work. There are still some students who can't focus, yet others are helping each other through difficult text and are feeling comfortable in their groups. We're noticing lots of good reading behaviors and feel that the time spent preparing has

paid off.

On collaboration: I was not present when Grace started the reading groups. Her journals have become more descriptive as she watches her students negotiate this new way of working. Now that we are not modeling, we both have more time to observe. I try to capture some of the conversations that are going on in different groups. It is hard to just listen and record the talk. Things feel different in these entries. We're both very comfortable in the role of observer, and it is good to share impressions. Instead of pushing the talk while in the groups, I suggest to Grace that she might want to read and respond to the students' journals and push their written responses. I'm already thinking about how I can use what has happened here to get other teachers interested and excited in trying reading circles. I'm even ready to suggest to the administration that they consider designing ninety-minute Communication Arts periods for next year so that other teachers can try to do this work. I've always been an optimist.

May 11-May 26

5/11/98 (from my journal)

Grace responded to student journals this weekend. Her students are starting to really get the idea. Grace's responses are wonderful and she's truly happy with what's being done. She's noticing things about student responses and the way kids are reading. She's also getting insights into their writing -- places for mini lessons. Examples: Altagracia's responses had an emotive quality to them; Loida's are based on, "this reminds me of." She connects to characters.

Watched as Grace gave back the journals. The kids were very excited by the comments. They read them diligently.

Group reading Charlie (Viviana, Luis, Mario, Diana)

V: Why did Charlie take his grandfather to the chocolate factory?

L: Because he's going to win the ticket.

V: It says nobody else knows more than his grandfather.

M: Damn, I was going to say that.

V: It's on page ...page...well it says somewhere in the story that the mother and father want to go but the grandfather knew a lot.

M: Yeah, what page is that...?

V: What chapter are we on?

D: We read that.

V: Chapter 15

M: No, 14

D: Chapter 17
V: Augustus Bloop goes in the Pipe.
M: We read a lot.
L: I read at home because I have a book. I'm up to chapter 18.
Teacher: Did anyone have any good questions?
M and L: Yeah
L: So go ahead.
M: What do you think about the story? (The group responds that the question is too simple.)
V: What do you think Charlie thought of the other kids?
M: I think they are jealous.
L: How could that be?
M: Maybe because they needed it --
L: Charlie was good and poor.
M: He was a nice kid.
V/L: He gave his mother his food.
M: That was nice.
V: He took the risk of saving his mother's life.
Teacher: What do you think of the others?
V: There was this fat girl named? She was disgusting. She chewed gum and put it behind her ear.
L: That was disgusting!!
M: Didn't they say she bought chocolate to get the ticket -- but she loves gum.
Teacher: Were they funny?
V: There was this girl named Veruga.
M: There's Augustus Bloop.
V: Look at the picture.
M: Veruga whines a lot. Whatever she wants she gets.
V: Instead of her parents dominating her she dominates them.
(Kids are looking at the pictures.)
L: We need the kid with the gun.
M: Oh yeah.
L/M: He liked cowboy movies.
V: Did you ever take a risk?
L: Well-I don't know. Right now I'm taking one. I'm not going to the hospital when I need to go -- I've got a sickness.
T: How about you Mario?
L: When I was over his house...
M: Oh yeah -- my brother was on the sofa and jumped and I fell on the floor to save him. My aunt was there. My brother's five.
T: How about you Diana?
D: No
V: My mother told me to do something and I didn't so she yelled.

5/12/98 (from Grace's journal)

Takes awhile, but they get there. Ask Julia and Dara to sit and read in the group, not by the window. They're learning to read aloud reasonably. Zora's group is reading aloud, others reading silently. Zora directs how much each one reads. I'm tempted to suggest they take notes. Roberto laughs aloud as he reads. Now everyone is reading -- now writing. We need bookmarks! Roberto wrote that today he did the most he's done so far. I think we may have crossed a border -- Nancy had told the group to ignore him if he wasn't reading. This may have gotten to him.

5/12/98 (from my journal)

The group with Kevin, Rosa, Jose, and Loida has decided to read silently today. We're going to see how fast they read.

Rosa must like Jose -- she spends a lot of time flirting with him. The only one in the group really focused on the reading is Loida. She turns all the noise off and focuses. Kevin seems to go about 5 minutes and then loses it. He starts to look around, checks his notebook.

The group with Viviana, Mario, Diana (Luis is absent) is reading together aloud. They are laughing and commenting on the book as they read. Luis is not here. I'd like to see what kind of discussion they have without him.

Julia, Miguel, Noberto, and Dara are reading silently. Miguel is finally reading. He gets upset when he sees me. I have no patience for him. I don't have to. I'm not his teacher.

Zora, Altagracia, Amariyls and Roberto are all reading aloud together. Grace is with them listening. I think it is to control Roberto and keep Zora's voice down.

Group with Viviana -- This group really is functioning well. I think that it's because of the two strong readers Viviana and Luis as well as their involvement in the story.

Grace: Before you continue reading write what you're thinking and feeling. They start to write and then begin to look back into the chapter.

Grace: You might want to copy out a funny part or a disgusting part.

So interesting how this is working out. It isn't what I did with the Reading Mob or what Grace and I expected but these are different kids. It is quite an

accomplishment to read a book on your own without a teacher directing the talk. Most of the class is involved with their books, and it is truly a communal experience.

Checked back to the group who was timing their reading. Most of them read 8-10 pages in the 20 minutes. I asked them to write what they were thinking and feeling. Rosa wrote about the incident where Matilda's father rips up the book. She told how she felt about the father. Jose did the same, but he didn't put in his opinion. I asked him to tell how he feels about the father. Kevin wrote about how he was sure they liked the son better because he got things and Matilda didn't. Loida kept reading and then began to write.

This is period two -- kids really got down to work. Yesterday was period five -- right after lunch. They really were unable to focus and got very little done yesterday. What does that say for designing reading time?

Could we ask Phyllis for a 90 minute reading block? Would she do it?

5/19/98 (from my journal)

Last Friday Grace wasn't here and Aaron H. came in to cover. The kids got their books and notebooks and began to work. He was very impressed with them and asked Grace about what they were doing. We're pretty impressed too. Most everyone gets down to business or at least the books are given out. Monday period five is always messy.

Today they looked at their list on the letter writing to mark the kinds of responses they used. Grace asked them to talk about what they didn't use. Many never used -- a new word: "I can use;" "an important word;" "I'm not sure;" "I was surprised."

Roberto and Miguel are really disruptive today, especially when they aren't the center of attention. These full group discussions don't seem to work well. The students have difficulty focusing on other people's responses. They seem to be centered on what they have to say and once it's said they turn off. Today many of them wanted to continue the reading rather than talk. We need to read the room. This would have been a good day to get them reading rather than trying to make points. Tuesday would be a better day for a full group discussion.

Luis' group anxious to read and get to work--they're all on the same page and even if some have read ahead they'll continue with the full group.

Loida wants to read alone. Rosa and Kevin wanted to read aloud, but Jose is too far behind and wouldn't go off to read alone.

Zora, Altagracia, Amarilys and Roberto -- Roberto is very far behind in the reading; Amarilys is very far ahead. Altagracia is catching up, and Zora is also far behind. How do we help them to plan their reading better or do we let them move at their own pace?

Miguel can effectively sabotage an entire group. He is a strong influence on the other boys, particularly Roberto. He throws things at people -- keeps turning around in his seat to looking at Kevin to get his attention -- actively working at disruption. Grace and I have talked about placing him elsewhere next Monday. Everyone eventually settles down to read, but today it has taken a long time.

5/26/98 (from my journal)

Viviana, Luis, Diana, and Mario finished the book. They appeared to have enjoyed it very much. They told me they liked reading together and preferred it to reading as a full class or alone. They liked taking turns reading aloud to each other and Luis noted that for Diana it was perfect because, "she's so shy and reads very quietly when asked to read aloud in class." Diana agreed that it was easier for her in the small group. They felt that it was less boring to read this way and that they helped each other with the words. They also said it helped to talk about the books they were reading and that the letters were easy to write and helped them talk. I asked them to rate the book for me. Now they are writing why they gave it an 8 or a 9. No one gave it a 10.

Luis's response talked about wonderful details. Mario read his response and talked about personalities of the characters. He then went on to describe them for us. I asked the group, "What did Mario do in his response differently from Luis?" Luis told me that Mario had gone on and on giving every boring detail about the characters. I agreed that he had given lots of details to prove his statement and that was important. Luis had also talked about details using the words "wonderful detailing" but had left us hanging wanting to know more, wanting examples to show what he meant exactly.

Diana wrote about how funny the book was and also how sad because the people were so poor and they were hungry. She felt badly for them and also felt how lucky she was that she wasn't poor. I asked them, "What did Diana do in her response?" Luis said she told about her feelings. I asked which role she touched on from the literature circle roles. Finally, Mario came up with the connector role. Diana had connected the story or a piece of the story to today and all the poor people today who are hungry.

We noticed together how everyone had a different response to the book and that's just what should happen because we are all different. Luis said Diana

should have done this or that. I reminded him that was his response, not Diana's response, and it was what she wanted to say.

Viviana read hers aloud and nailed the theme of the story as she saw it. She said that the book taught a lesson. She felt that the children in the book were exactly like them and didn't follow the rules. The book was about how important it was to follow the rules. This led to a discussion on what else it might be teaching. I asked if they felt the author's purpose or reason for writing was to teach a lesson. Luis said no because if that was so it would say what the moral of the story is at the end. Viviana and Mario disagreed. They said it doesn't have to be said or written, sometimes you just know because it's in the story. Mario said that fables have the moral written down and that they're usually short.

I wish I had taped the talk. I did have to lead it more than I wanted to, but they really took on more as we got comfortable. I keep trying to expand the ways they respond and to get them to trust their own ideas and words as well as respect the ideas of others. I have tried to get Luis to see that he can't answer for everyone because his ideas are his alone and not everyone's ideas. He needs to let everyone say what they think and feel before he disagrees.

When Mario can get a word in he usually has good ideas. He needs encouragement because he easily can slip into just agreeing with Luis. I have to keep giving Diana space and time to talk. She's so shy that she'll stay quiet during a discussion if she isn't asked a direct question. She's finally beginning to feel comfortable with me and can talk. Viviana can be both shy and outgoing depending upon the day and who's distracting her.

I left them trying to decide how they can present their book to the rest of the class. So interesting to see that their ideas all had to do with writing summaries on the board or writing book reports. I really had to push them to become creative about this and to make it fun. It scares me that they're so afraid of art and being laughed at. I suggested writing a play of one scene and acting it out. Luis came up with a comic book. We also talked about posters and dioramas or triptychs with art and writing. Let's see what they come up with.

Miguel has unfortunately just fallen to pieces. He does everything he can to disrupt these periods. He is a leader and has taken three of the boys down the tubes with him. Roberto was an easy mark and has done very little so he throws things across the room. Today it was chalk. Then there is the whistling that starts to happen as soon as it gets quiet. Miguel also sits and sings rap songs at the other boys loudly. He makes sure the class doesn't get quiet for at least 10 minutes. Now he's pulling in Kevin and Jose. Kevin's

work and writing is good, and he's trying, but he can't resist the draw, neither can Jose who isn't as good a reader or as focused as Kevin can be at times. Grace and I have decided that Miguel can no longer be in the room during these periods.

5/26 (from Grace's journal)

Miguel reading but talking to Kevin. Seems to see the aim as finishing the book. Roberto moved away so he can read and write by himself—his choice. I moved away to see if Miguel and Kevin would work without me. Zora asks if she can draw and then write comments. Rosa using the starters “if I were...” Amarilys has begun to use them—at last! She had been so literal. I asked Miguel to find a passage to help him remember what was going on. Afterwards, talking with Nancy, we spoke about how each group could present their book to the class. She shared with me what Viviana's group had said about working in reading groups. Time is running out and the school year is almost over. For the final assignment I'm going to ask each member of the group to rewrite one of their response letters for our publication. Also as a group they need to select a scene for all of us to see in the movie version of their book. They'll use that as a way of presenting the book to the class.

5/26/98 (continued from my journal)

The year is coming to an end. I need to think about how to add to my documentation of this piece of work. Should I interview these students next week? I think so. It might be interesting to follow them next year and see how they fare as readers. They've all written their personal preferences in reading. I hope I have time to go out and buy everyone a book.

Personal reading preferences

Viviana -- fantasy

Diana -- pop up books, funny, and adventure

Luis -- humor (books with pictures) poetry, sonnets, Shakespeare

Mario -- humor

Amarilys -- mystery, history and non fiction

Altagracia -- adventure, scary, poetry and biography

Zora -- adventure, mystery, Judy Blume, *Matilda*

Roberto -- scary stories, fairy tales and tall tales

Kevin -- scary stories and poems, sports, magazines (*Time*, *Sports Ill. Entertainment*) and newspapers like the Daily News esp. sports section
Jose -- horror, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Sports Illustrated*
Loida -- Romances, scary stories, action. *Romeo and Juliet*, *Matilda*
Dara -- funny, adventure stories, mystery.

Commentary

On collaboration: I have taken a back seat and truly feel like that extra pair of eyes. Grace asked me to read and comment on her responses to student's journals. We talked about specific student responses and how she could use what she's learned to design other lessons.

On reading: Each of us intervenes when we feel it is necessary to push a group further. Sometimes we just listen in, sometimes we throw out a question or a challenge, or ask everyone to stop and write. Students are enjoying this experience, and depending upon the time of day, they usually get down to work. In the students' conversations I can see how they have begun to refer back to the text to support their ideas and how they respond to each other. One of our initial goals had been to have the students use writing as a way to respond to reading. This has happened, but not in as full a sense as we intended. The talk, however, shows how well the students are using each other to work through ideas about the text.

Coda

In the summer of 1998 Grace became a fellow in the New York City Writing Project Summer Invitational Institute using the work we did together as a springboard for her own ideas about how visual literacy can help students become independent readers and responders. During the third year of my consulting at IS 143, I was bringing new and interested teachers into her classroom to watch her work, using her class and students as a way to observe and talk about practice. We talked together often, but I did not work in her classroom.

Jeremy Engle, my SATC professional development partner from the Educational Video Center, Grace, and I designed an in-service seminar called "Inquiry into Teaching." Grace and I used our journals and shared what we had learned about

reading through our collaboration the previous year. Our collaboration became the model for teacher participants as they began to take risks within their own classroom settings. This in-service seminar provided an opportunity for both new and experienced teachers to talk about their practice and to support each other. Since the teaching journals were so valuable to us, we asked that participants experiment with them as a way to reflect upon and talk about their practice. The sharing of journal entries became an integral part of the seminar. Teachers began to visit each other's classrooms in order to practice observing in a non-judgmental way. The ideas they took away from these visits and the suggestions they made to each other helped to create a strong community of practitioners. Some found they had classes in common and began to do some interdisciplinary planning. As a part of this seminar, all the teachers selected an aspect of their practice that they wished to look at closely and presented a Review of an Activity or Practice (Prospect Center 1991, 1993) to the group. They examined a range of activities, some choosing to focus on the teaching of writing and others on classroom management issues.

My consulting work that semester centered on visiting classrooms as an extra pair of eyes, helping them to find a focus for their Reviews and suggesting ways to document their work. When I wasn't in the building, Grace gave up her preparation periods to talk with people and help them design lessons and think through the focusing questions for their Reviews.

In the fourth year the circle kept widening as this new support system continued to grow and take on a life of its own. Many, but not all, of the teachers who participated in the Inquiry into Teaching seminar were taking another in-service seminar which I co-led with two other teachers who emerged as teacher leaders. Our focus this semester was on the teaching of writing to English language learners. Grace had left the school, preferring to work in an environment that more overtly encourages and values collaboration.

The SATC grant came to an end at the close of the spring 2000 semester. It was my last year as a teacher-consultant at IS 143. The principal at IS143 recognized the changes in teacher practice and attributed these changes to the on-site support. She noted, "The most important part of the program has been your presence in the school and your support of teachers. You've worked with teachers whose instincts were good and have changed their teaching. What's more important is that the work that was done was geared toward our student

population. You did not come in with a 'program' or demand that things be done a certain way." She asked the district for additional funding to continue the on-site work.

Even if this does not happen, I feel good about the work that has been done. A number of teacher leaders are in place and committed to keeping the conversations going. They encourage new teachers to talk about their successes and their failures, and they have opened their classrooms as models. Since we have integrated Prospect's Descriptive Processes into the Writing Project's seminars there is an existing structure and a commitment to continue to examine student work and teacher practice. I feel that something strong has been set into motion.

Consulting

There really is no formula for on-site consulting. After doing this work for a number of years, I can't say that if you do x, y, or z it will all fall into place. The work, like teaching, depends upon too many variables. Each site and each teacher is different. A consultant needs first to learn what those variables are and then learn to adapt the Writing Project work to meet stated and often unstated needs. Some of the things that I have noticed about my approach to consulting follow.

As an observer in other people's classrooms, I read and write with students. If asked to share, I do. I constantly model literacy behaviors. Everything I do is modeling from journal writing to using language, to asking questions. Do I point that out to teachers? Not necessarily. I hope that eventually they will begin to notice what I'm doing, and it will creep into their practice.

As I work with individual teachers, I am always questioning myself: What's going on here in this classroom? What's the teacher doing? How are the students responding? Who's paying attention? Who isn't? Why? What do I notice that will be helpful to share with the teacher? What do I keep back for another time? What is the teacher ready to hear? How do I shape my responses? I've learned never to tell someone what I think immediately after a lesson. I need space and time to eliminate the judgment from what I've noticed. I usually say, "Thank you, I loved when you did such and such," or "Did you notice how involved the boy in the front was with the lesson?" Things of that nature. I make an appointment to talk later.

If I don't have another appointment immediately after my classroom visit, I find a place to write. I use a double-entry notebook to record what's happening on one side and my thoughts, questions, ideas, suggestions, and, yes, judgments on the other. I review those before I talk with people, and I make choices. A conference with a teacher is often like a writing conference: I say back what I saw, carefully avoiding commentary. I ask teachers how they feel the lesson went. What worked for them? The students? What didn't work? What do they feel they need help with? That's where it begins. Sometimes before I visit a teacher's classroom I ask what they want me to pay attention to and that focuses my observation. I never go into a teacher's classroom without being invited, and I always tell them that I'll be taking notes and why. Now that I'm over fifty, it's easy to explain about my inability to remember details. All the young teachers I work with smile sympathetically at that and usually say something like, "My mom has that problem too." The older, more experienced teachers commiserate. How I handle initial consultations with teachers usually sets the tone for further work. I have learned when to stop pursuing a teacher. After a number of "I don't really have the time" comments, I let it go. I've been working on not taking it personally.

I bring to consulting all of who I am as a person and an educator. As an avid reader of young adult fiction, my knowledge of this genre is extensive. Lately, my work has been with middle-school social studies teachers, and I've immersed myself in historical fiction and non-fiction. I have an extensive library of materials that I willingly share with teachers and with students. I'm always bringing in boxes of fiction, poetry and picture books as well as photographs and other primary source documents. Many times the materials are the way in to working more extensively with a teacher. I am a pack rat. I save teacher-made materials, including my own, and after asking permission, I share them with other teachers doing similar work. I try to hook people up with each other in their own school or across schools. I make myself available when I am on site, and everyone I work with has my e-mail address. I have learned how to listen for what people really need and want from me. The ideal is to do sustained work with a teacher and a class, as I did with Grace and Spice Reading World. That isn't always possible, but when it happens, it is always rewarding.

Consulting As Collaboration

My work with Grace has confirmed that all teaching is a collaboration. In addition, I've learned a great deal about consulting in general through my work with one teacher and one class. It took Grace and me four months to get her students to work collaboratively and to use talk to "make meaning" from text. They needed to break old habits in order to begin to see the possibilities in working with each other, and we needed to provide them with strategies and ways to do this so that they could trust each other and themselves. In essence, we provided them with a common language and structures for talk. We also allowed for choice, listening to and respecting their ideas and supporting them as they tried out new ways of working and thinking. I believe the same thing is true for consulting work in the schools.

It is essential to start out with a respect for teacher knowledge and experience, to recognize what people are already doing. Making that respect visible helps to develop trust over time. Grace and I talked for a full year before I ever entered her classroom. As we got to know each other, we realized we held the same beliefs about teaching and learning. Since neither one of us had a classroom of our own during that first year, we shared old work. She showed me the student journals she had saved and talked about ways she would use them differently if she had a class to work with. I shared what I had done with my students as a way of suggesting other possibilities and strategies. It was easy for us to talk about theory or about old work, but in the second year when I began working in her classroom with her students, it was necessary to create a different structure for our talk. Since we both used teaching journals as a private place for reflection, it seemed natural that they would become part of that structure. Another thing that helped our collaboration was the shared work we did team-teaching the first on-site in-service seminar. We both became part of a community of learners and worked on broadening the community of teachers who would share our vision of what learning could look like at IS 143.

I learned, as a consultant, the importance of maintaining a descriptive inquiry stance and of constantly gathering "local knowledge" to learn the culture of a school and to find the "cracks" or places to situate the work. Grace knew the other teachers in the building who shared our thinking, and she became my link to the larger school community, encouraging teachers to participate in the in-service seminar. We recruited teachers who were beginning to rethink their practice and who needed a comfortable non-threatening place to experience new ideas, experiment and talk. On-site seminars were a way to ground the work in

the school and provide me with new people to work alongside. They provided Grace with a larger community of like-minded professionals who shared an agenda and a common language.

Descriptive journal writing is my means of maintaining an inquiry stance: collecting observations and reflecting on my practice. I'm sure other processes for collecting data will work just as well as long as there is time to reflect upon what has been gathered. My journals have been essential to my work. Like the students' reading logs, my writing is a place to begin the talk. In the journals tensions and differences are revealed. By sharing them with others I have been able to find ways to make those differences generative of thought and even action rather than persistent as obstacles.

Although I come into a school as a consultant for the Writing Project, what I bring is everything that worked for me as a teacher of middle school students. I am continuously discovering ways of consulting with teachers that are congruent with what I value. I bring to consulting a deep belief in student-centered practice, a love of students, young adult literature, and learning, a recognition of the importance of knowing students, and a deep belief in and respect for those special people who choose teaching as their life's work.

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