

Literature-Based Instruction: The Role of Children's Literature in Teaching of Reading

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Since the introduction of literature in reading and writing during the 1970s, considerable research has attempted to determine whether literature has significantly positive effects upon enhancement of reading proficiency. It is said that literature extends our knowledge of the world. Through books, we can experience other people's thoughts, experiences, and ideas (Frye, 1964). This paper explored the role of children's literature for the teaching of reading through the literature-based instruction. It focused on why and how children's literature serves as an important context for enhancing learner's reading proficiency of English. It also discussed the authentic use of literature-based strategies for practical classroom use, and suggested the future directions for research toward the literature-based instruction in the domain of reading comprehension.

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature for children has been considered to be useful in providing children with the psychological and sociological insights they need to interpret the outer world by reading it. It is believed that literature educates the feelings and the imagination of people (Frye, 1964). Over the last twenty years, research of the use of literature in children's reading instruction has been increasingly growing. Instruction through literature, however, has been uncertain, in that the study of literature might be beyond the cognitive ability of younger children, and that literature-based instruction lacks applicable definitions for practical classroom teachers. While some have suggested that reading instruction should be taught only with children's

literature (Norton, 1995; Peterson, 1992; Peterson & Eeds, 1990), some have regarded basal readers as the main source and children's literature as the supplementary one of reading instruction (Stahl, 1996, Stahl & Miller, 1989). The ways of using literature as an instructional strategy, however, are as many as the forms of literature itself, and many researchers and teachers have studied children's literature to introduce it into practical classrooms, in attempts to produce holistic literacy instructional approaches (Huck, 1989; Hunt, 1991; Gilles, 1991; Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Smith, 1998). The researchers strongly believed that, through introducing literature into children's classrooms, children can learn about the fundamental nature of language in terms of the importance of imagination. The intrinsic value of children's literature has been increasingly appreciated by educators who have sought ways to keep children's natural curiosity and love of learning.

There has been a growing concern about how literature for children can be used to develop their literacy proficiency. Tunnell and Jacobs (1989) explained advantages of literature for children that the broader, more general interpretations of literature in the elementary school should be expanded into use of terms such as language, language arts, personal reading, individualized reading, interests and tastes, reading guidance, literature readers, appreciation, and variations of these. In the studies of children's literature for teaching to read, Coody (1979) asserted that there was a great deal of evidence that a person's success in reading depends largely on the kinds of experiences with literature that takes place during the preschool years at home and during the first years in school. He further emphasized that through the reading of stories children can be inspired to integrate the content into the ongoing narrative that is a version of the story of her or his life.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the importance of literature-based reading instruction designed to enhance children's literacy of English. The paper largely consists of three parts. For the first part, I describe the power, or influence of literature on children's thoughts and feelings, based upon the empirical studies. Secondly, I explore a variety of instruction strategies of literature-based programs designed for the practical classroom, based upon my stance in favor of literature-based instruction. The third part is devoted to the discussion of the importance of literature-based instruction.

II. THE POWER OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ON READING PROFICIENCY

Knowing individual words does not guarantee reading comprehension of text when children encounter sentences in the text. Children must be able to sense the interrelationship of words and show the response to the author's message. In order to develop children's reading proficiency, there has been thought of a wide range of instructional methods such as phonics-based program, and literature-based instruction.

Phonics-based program (Carbo, 1988; Chall, 1983), as the approach designed to teach children about the orthographic code of the language and the relationships of spelling patterns to sound patterns (Stahl, 1996), has been producing a lot of controversial issues such as too many worksheets and meaningless strings of letters. In the phonics-based program, students come to learn a set of discrete skills mastered in isolation and preclude them from paying attention to reading comprehension of text, meaning construction. Goodman (1996) strongly opposed to the idea of phonics, asserting that all language is used and learned in the context of expressing and comprehending meaning. He further emphasized that the role of literacy instruction at school is to facilitate the use by the learners of the resources surrounding them.

Literature not only has the power to give children vicarious experiences, but it contains the power to make them more knowledgeable of the outer world even before they experience it themselves. It also has the power to make progress their imagination through reading literature (Huck, 1990). In the studies of use of literature in the reading program, Huck (1990) outlined the value of literature for children and lists the ways literature can expand children's worlds; (1) literature can help children develop insights and understandings of the world; (2) literature can help children develop imagination; (3) literature helps children develop their "interior landscape" to visualize settings and events; (4) literature helps children develop a sense of wonder and joy in living.

The use of literature in the classroom enriches independent thinking in learners. Students can be involved in independent reading, partner reading, or choral reading. Group conversation as one phase of literature discussion encourages individual responses in the group. After or during the reading of literature they read, students can have time to talk about what they read and understand, share what they

thought, clarify what they were not sure, review the questions or comments emerged from the reading, or share other related ideas and experiences they were interested in. Students talk with each other about their own experiences and interpretations as they read books. All these processes can take place through the way of reading literature.

In the study of children's literature for their reading proficiency, Morrow (1992) examined to determine whether the literacy achievement and use of literature could be positively affected by a literacy program that emphasized pleasant, skill-oriented experiences with literature. The treatment in the study linked literature-based and basal reading instruction together. In the literature section of the program (a) a rich literacy environment was created with the arrangement of literacy centers in environmental classrooms, (b) normal and enjoyable teacher-guided literature activities intended to promote enjoyment as well as skill development were demonstrated by teachers, and (c) self-directed periods for independent reading and writing were provided. In this study, the literature program for reading proficiency was carried out in partnership with basal reading instruction, exposing children to literature through pleasurable, assertive, and helpful experiences. The findings of the study indicated that the execution of regularly scheduled literature activities and the creation of inviting, carefully planned literacy centers with the opportunity to engage in periods of independent reading and writing led to a valuable increase in children's literacy performance in several measures. As for children's use of literature, Morrow (1992) further stated that the review of after-school activities, ability to name book titles, authors, and illustrators, and reported use of books read at home and in school confirmed that the use of books increased among children in the experimental groups over the period of the experiment.

Block (1993) conducted a study in which lesson formats in a literature-based curriculum could have influence upon the use of thinking strategy for reading and self-assessing of learning. The study showed that the students in the experimental group were better capable of transferring their reading and thinking strategies to situations outside of school. Eight dimensions of thinking and examples of the thoughts expressed by experimental students were noting facts, content elaborations, personal elaborations, problem-solving, metacognition, creating thinking processes, and thinking effectively in group. Block's (1993) research indicated that specific elements in the literature-based strategy instruction interacted to expand students thinking, and improved students' reading abilities: teacher-directed, student-selected of the strategy, thinking guides, student

self-assessment, spaced practice and examples. These factors and their interaction provided the support students needed to improve thinking, reading achievement, and self-esteem. The implications of these studies have produced a great amount of interest in children's literature for facilitating reading proficiency, and as a result, the program of basal readers in practical classroom have been changed into literature-based reading instruction.

Of the importance of children's literature, Laughlin and Dardaelff (1991) confirmed that authors and illustrators of children's books communicated so realistically that the reader can share the emotions, experiences, and ideas described in the text. During reading children's books, the reader must bring all his/her reading proficiency and background knowledge to comprehend the author's message in the text. To do so, the reader needs to have the motivation for this task: enjoyment. When teachers share their own enjoyment and love of literature with their students, the children can understand that there is great joy inherent in literature. In that sense, I think that motivation through relevant and significant material becomes an important factor to promote children's drive toward reading literary works. Holdaway (1982) felt that teachers needed to ensure success in learning by making the materials for learning relevant and interesting. He, therefore, called for a program based upon the instantaneous use of real life language, enriched by abundant experiences with outstanding stories, poems, and songs.

III. STRATEGIES FOR READING PROFICIENCY THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

First of all, the language enhancement of children is increased significantly if they are provided an affluent experience through children's books. The more children are exposed to language experience, the higher the reading skill of children would be. Secondly, the connection between oral language and reading has been confirmed through the research. Oral language could be enlarged and significantly developed by interaction with children's books through the way of reading aloud. Thirdly, vocabulary can be learned best in an authentic context of emotional and intellectual meaning. The children's trade book, therefore, is an excellent source for learning to read. If more reading is done, based upon the child's selection in accordance with his/her motivation, the opportunity to improve reading skill would be increased.

Synthesizing recent research could confirm the importance of providing children with opportunities to experience literature in active and pleasurable ways by reading and telling stories to children, and dealing with stories through literal, interpretive and critical discussions. In other words, integrating literature into themes being studied in the classroom throughout the curriculum can help children share books they have read, respond to literature through written and oral language, and participate in independent reading and writing periods (Hoffman, 1992; Morrow, 1992).

Children often exposed to literary works come to accumulate background knowledge not only about the content at hand but also about how language works and how written language differs from spoken language. These children often show an early interest in reading; they tend to learn to read early and enjoy reading (Morrow, 1992). The role of children's literature in the acquisition of reading proficiency is often not known in extensive depth by classroom teachers. Teachers have faced a lot of challenges when they try to make the transition from basal readers to literature-based reading instruction along with the historical and philosophical trends.

To implement literature-based strategies in the classroom, this paper presents several instructional strategies for facilitating reading in the framework of literature-based curricular. There are numerous ways of engaging children in literary experiences.

1. The Value of Reading Aloud

Thorndike's (1973, as cited in Huck, 1990) study of reading in fifteen countries showed that children who came from homes that respected reading and had been read aloud to from an early age were the best readers. Children who learned to read before they came to school were from homes that valued reading and had been read aloud to. Reading aloud is important at all levels of instruction, because it facilitates to provide the motivation for learning to read and reading. When one of the parents cuddles his/ her child to let the child sleep and reads a story, the child starts to be exposed to language with pleasure and enjoyment. Reading aloud to children also enhances their vocabulary level. While the adult is reading aloud to children, they can encounter the vocabulary that they don't understand. In that case, the child may ask the adult questions related to the vocabulary. Exchanging questions and

answers, the child can extend his/her lexical level. The strategy of reading aloud helps children develop a sense of story and knowledge about concepts of the written text. Children begin to comprehend the story grammar such as beginning with "far away kingdom and once upon a time."

2. The Value of Rereading or Retelling

Parents notice that their children call for the same bed time story so many times. In examination of the stories that children select to read over and over again, Huck (1990) identified certain characteristics that helped a child read them easily: language patterns, refrains, or questions that are repeated throughout the story, familiar sequences, story patterns with predictable plots, familiar songs rhymes, cumulative tales, and easy flap books. Upper elementary children enjoy the opportunity to taste specific poems or chapters in a book many times. To provide children with the opportunity, teachers could reread children's favorite poems in the reading and sharing time, or let children read their favorite poems one after another in the sharing time.

As for reading one particular book many times, Sheppard (1990) stated that it could remind readers of another book, or readers may want another title of the same author, or readers may need to check on something they're wondering about. The realization of literature relating to readers' own experiences, backgrounds, and cultures but to other books is accentuated.

3. The Role of Independent Reading

Children could have the time to read silently and independently. After silent reading, children make a small or large group and share their reading experiences. While they are reading selected by themselves, they come to brainstorm ways to comprehend the author's message and to interact with the author. Here are some important directions for accomplishing independent reading in the classroom. First, children should have a book selected, based on their motivation, interests, proficiency levels, and grade levels. Secondly, children could comfortably be able to read their book anywhere in their classroom. Furthermore, children should be able to concentrate upon working their books, so that other children can share the quiet time for reading together.

4. The Study of Literature

The study of literature provides a special lesson in which children can refine their abilities to respond to the written text for the comprehension of text. They come together to discuss in depth a book children and a teacher like to read or already read. It provides the time to contemplate what children wondered, reading the book. Children, therefore, could rethink about the structure, or story grammar of the book and share all possibilities. After all, it would be a good time to create new ideas, interpretations, and meanings of text.

In the literature discussion session in the classroom, as a pre-reading activity, students can brainstorm what they already know about book covers they are shown to, discuss, and share what they want to know after reviewing titles and illustrations of the selected books if necessary. Teacher may ask students to brainstorm possible topics for discussion. After this phase, students start to be engaged in reading books, they may ask their peers and discuss questions about the text they read. During reading, students would jot down any questions and comments on the specific page using post-its. During discussion, group members talk as they look at or read their books that are selected from teacher's choices based on readers' motivation, interests, and grade levels. After discussions, each reader writes a letter or a journal entry of what they read, and to share it with group members. When readers collaborate, their easy, natural, and meaningful talk emerges for helping them understand the text.

5. Creating Information-Sharing Group about Books

The learning community in the classroom can have great influences upon development and promotion of students' knowledge. A learning community that revitalizes collaborative relationships and reciprocal interaction among all classmates creates new possibilities for learning and breaks down obstacles that keep from learning more fully with and from others (Short, 1990). All learners are constructing their own knowledge and understandings of their world through the association with their past experiences. When children are engaged in conversation with other children about the story that they read, they can grow beyond encountering to new understandings of literature.

6. Showing of Thinking Guide

Children are given a thinking guide that describes strategies to learn, for example, the lesson of a certain story. The guide contains graphics so children can guess, predict, imagine, and retrieve a strategy that they would use during reading. Children could put their thinking guide for reading activity on their desks. This activity makes it possible to make reference and reflection as children read, which encourages application of strategies. The checking items for thinking guide are such as selecting a decoding strategy based upon features of the unknown word, asking questions to eliminate fusion and miscomprehension, rereading strategically to understand new meanings, and predicting to increase making inferences (Block, 1993)

7. Writing Response Journals to Literature

According to reader response critics, literature is not a goal to be studied nor does it have an objectified truth, that is one exact interpretation (McGee & Tompkins, 1995). Rather, literature is constructed by a reader's own experience at the time of reading (McGee & Tompkins, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1976). After reading the same book, some children organize an interest group, talk about parts of the story of individual interest, and share connections between their lives and the story. Over the repeated meeting, children can generate a list of possible response activities: writing a simulated newspaper for the day, rereading the story, or writing a report. When children assume the aesthetic position, they taste the feelings, images, thoughts, and associations called to mind during reading literature. The written text serves as a blueprint for the reader's responses that guides, but does not specify an interpretation. Children respond to both their experiences during reading and to the language of the text. Children use several activities that capture readers lived-through aesthetic experiences, such as having students write in response journals and participate in big conversations. They also emphasize not just to the language of text, but to the feeling, images, and thoughts that are aroused by the written text (McGee & Tompkins, 1995).

8. Building Probable Interpretations of a Story

According to the theoretical perspectives called critical literacy (Tyson, 2001) and

cultural theories of reader response (Beach, 1993; Rosenblatt, 1972), children reading certain book are not viewed as having a unique, individual, unified, and coherent essence. Rather, readers are shaped by multiple and opposing cultural institutions. Readers respond to literature subjectively, based upon their socialization into cultural viewpoints (McGee & Tompkins, 1995). At the same time that readers are influenced by certain cultural ideologies, they can also oppose or de-construct the meanings suggested by dominant ideologies. This means that readers must recognize that they adopt individual positions that force them to make ideologically influenced interpretations of text and use these interpretations to name reality (McGee & Tompkins, 1995). Teachers have to provide children with the opportunity to take a stance in opposition to dominant opinion of the group so as to make the edging group members have own power in the discussion. No matter what possibility could be, teachers should be able to listen to any probable and possible interpretation that children would present after reading sessions.

Although a lot of young children have troubled with getting into literature, there are many ways in which classroom teachers could use for their literature-based reading instruction. In the framework of literature-based instruction, children are encouraged to read for comprehension, or meaning, use prior knowledge, activate their schemata, and predict when interpreting text. They are also encouraged to derive meaning from unknown words within the written text by using many strategies outlined above. With approaching of top-down model for reading the text and grasping the meaning, teachers can present young readers with the instructional materials appropriately applied to a particular class.

IV. DISCUSSION

Huck (1990) emphasized the power of children's literature, and strongly asserted that educators have slowly recognized to find out that literature plays an important role in helping children learn to read, even though it is well-assumed that literature can have an influence on people's thoughts and feelings. In order to employ an effective literature-based instruction to teach reading comprehension in the classroom, some researchers asserted that the basis for an effective literature-based instruction should bring together following three approaches: (1) teacher-led instruction with teacher selected literature; (2) teacher and student-led interaction

with teacher and student selection of literature, and; (3) independent application and student selected literature (Hiebert & Colt, 1989). Children need to learn the title of books by favorite authors or illustrators as well as themes and techniques that characterize their works. They are capable of using literary structures as a guide for their explorations of literature during or after reading. They also enjoy reading books as groups or individual and describing links or common things among books for themselves.

Peterson and Eeds (1990) also indicated that the use of children's literature provided an ideal opportunity to develop critical reading. Recent research has shown that reading is a constructive process. In other words, readers come to texts with background knowledge that facilitates them to construct meaning about what they read; further, readers construct meaning as they interact with peers and adults when discussing stories. The significance of children's literature lends itself to drawing on background knowledge and to the use of interactive strategies with peers and adults, such as story discussions, role playing, and retelling the written text to assist to construct meaning about the written text (Morrow, 1992).

Huck (1990) expressed his beliefs in literature, by asserting that literature gives readers vicarious experience to journey through many worlds, that literature makes readers more knowledgeable, that literature develops the imagination of readers, and that literature transforms the readers' self as they read certain books. Even though the lack of the definable model for literature-based instruction has been pointed out as a limitation, much research has proved the positive effectiveness of literature-based instruction upon reading comprehension proficiency (Block, 1993; Hiebert & Colt, 1989; McGee & Tompkins, 1995; Morrow, 1992). It should be noted for young readers in the practical classroom that carefully and appropriately combined strategies of literature-based reading instruction can be one powerful instrument for teaching to read. Future research should explore the good model of literature-based instruction for classroom teachers, depending upon reading skill levels, readers' characteristics, and the kind of literature. Several positive findings and instructional strategies from prior studies have been encouraging teachers to employ literature for teaching to read as a reading comprehension strategy.

Yet, the application of this instructional strategy using children's literature for the Korean EFL learners remains one of those fields to be studied. Therefore, this research would add to the research base on English language learners' reading comprehension processes through literature in the Korean EFL classroom.

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