



## Reading Workshop II: Constructing the Framework for Success

is an excerpt from *Lifers: Learning from At-Risk Adolescent Readers* by Pamela N. Mueller.

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# Chapter 7

## Reading Workshop II: Constructing the Framework for Success

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*In order to develop readers, we must encourage and foster the creative attitudes and activities of engaged readers. . . . By . . . focusing our instruction and support on the construction of meaning, the classroom can become a place where students not only produce and share meanings, but a place where they share ways of reading and being with text, becoming aware in the process of their own strategies and those of others.*

—JEFF WILHELM  
*You Gotta BE the Book*

Marie transferred to Daniel Webster toward the end of her freshman year. She was referred to me by her newly assigned guidance counselor, an educator who often uses my office and my services as a last resort for students who have nowhere else to turn as they struggle with the ever growing demands of high school. “She and her family just moved here from Riverside,” Jim told me. “She’s a discouraged student who seems to be afraid of her own shadow. She has no special education coding, but for whatever reason she’s spent most of her life in self-contained classrooms. Her reading scores are low, and she’s having a hard time in all of her classes here. It’s too late to put her in reading workshop this year, so I think she could use your help.”

When Marie arrived at my office that first afternoon I was quick to notice her slumped shoulders and downcast eyes. Yet even her body language couldn’t prepare me for the first words out of her mouth: “My name is Marie, and you need to know that I’m stupid. I’m stupid, and I can never do anything right.”

As I worked with Marie that spring, helping her as she struggled to make sense of her English and geo-political studies assignments, I soon realized that this needy and discouraged adolescent had misjudged herself. She wasn’t stupid. When given the opportunity to complete an assignment with my support, she drew from a well of intelligence and abilities she didn’t even think existed. It became painfully clear that I was rubbing shoulders with a poster child for learned helplessness, a pupil who through the words and actions of others had come to see herself as incapable and incompetent.

In time Marie started to see herself in a different light. She began to develop the ability to think and work on her own. She displayed the beginnings of self-assurance. Her sophomore year she participated in Reading Workshop I, and at the end of a year of becoming a better reader by reading she had shown remarkable growth. The student who had spent a lifetime saying “I can’t” was now willing to give her courses and herself a try. One June day she delightedly informed me that the spring reading workshop test results had placed her just below the grade 8 reading level, the level at which students were said to “test out” of Reading Workshop I. “I guess I didn’t really test out—but almost! My scores went up almost two years. My comprehension still isn’t all that great, but look at how well I did on vocabulary!”

Marie was right. After a year of corrective instruction she had certainly made progress, and because the school curriculum had nothing more in place to support this developing reader, she was going to have to move ahead on her own. I wondered to myself that afternoon, *Is she ready?* Marie thought she was, and I hoped so.

### “We Can Read and Talk, Read and Talk”

In October of her junior year, a “new and improved” Marie swooped unannounced into my office. I had seen her in the cafeteria earlier that fall, sporting a provocative miniskirt and an updated hairdo to match. “Don’t forget that I’m here if you need me!” I had called to her across a throng of laughing adolescents jockeying for position in the lunch line. “Oh, Mrs. Mueller,” Marie had giggled through a brightly lipsticked mouth that bespoke her march toward young adulthood and independence, “you don’t have to worry about that!” I marveled at Marie’s transformation from self-effacing ninth grader to poised upperclassman.

“So young lady,” I said. “What brings you here today?”

“Not much really. I just need a little help in English,” responded Marie with a smile. “Miss Sizer says that for the new quarter each of us has to pick out a novel and read it on our own. Then in six weeks, at the end of the book, we have to do a project. Geez, I don’t know what to do. I really don’t have a clue. We never had to do anything like this in any other class, not all by ourselves. If we had a book assigned in English class last year, Mrs. T. was always there to help us in reading workshop. Can you believe Miss Sizer really expects us to do this? We all tried to talk her out of it, but she won’t change her mind. Mrs. Mueller, can you help me, *please?* If you want, I can come here three times a week during my study hall. We can do it then. We can read and talk, read and talk, just like they had us do in reading workshop.”

Marie’s request, so simple and yet so challenging, sent both of us on a journey of discovery, as she learned for the first time what it means to *engage* in reading, and I learned firsthand how difficult such a task can be for a newly re-visioning lifer like Marie. My teaching journal captured our belabored voyage, page by page and week by week.

### **October 28**

Today I met Marie in the library. Miss Sizer had given me a list of novels Marie could choose from and I'd gone over the list carefully, discarding those over Marie's head. I want her to be successful. I gave the revised list to Marie and suggested she choose a book she really wanted to read. *Flowers for Algernon* was included; so was *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, my "secret" choice for her. As we were going over the list Miss Sizer walked by and said, "How about reading *Animal Dreams*, Marie? The kids always seem to like it and I'll bet you can really connect with it." I assumed she was alluding to the rumor that this woman-child sitting next to me had suffered a miscarriage that fall; Codi, the main character in the book, has had one too. Since none of the other books seemed to please Marie, she jumped at Miss Sizer's suggestion. I am excited because I love Kingsolver's writing. I don't know the readability level of the book, but if Marie really gets into it what does it matter? Word attack has always been a strength for her; she doesn't get thrown by multisyllable words like lots of her peers. We got two copies and we looked at the cover, a stylized painting of a Native American pueblo, I think. It didn't look at all familiar to Marie. I'll bet she has never been anywhere near a town like Grace, Arizona. Next class I plan to bring in pictures I took when our family was out there two summers ago. That'll give her some background for the setting of the book. I told Marie to go home and look over the book. I'll do the same.

### **October 31**

After looking at my pictures and talking about the West (the farthest from New Hampshire Marie has been is Rhode Island, to visit her father after her parents got divorced), we scanned the book together, talking about how the book is written from different points of view, with flashbacks, dreams, and Native American legends all mixed in. She seems to be comfortable with all of that. She told me they had talked about flashbacks in Miss Sizer's class at the beginning of the semester. We reviewed the names of all the main characters so that Marie will know who's narrating each chapter. She liked the fact that this was about a girl who is looking for her own identity. "So am I," she told me. Maybe this book will do what good stories are supposed to do, letting Marie learn more about herself as she gets to know the people and the plot. We have six weeks to read this book, but I'm going to start off slowly. I asked her to read just the first chapter. I had wanted to read it in class but we ran out of time. We talked too much. Oh well, it's only two pages long.

### **November 2**

Good grief. Here I thought this was a book Marie would enjoy reading on her own, and the first thing she told me was that she didn't get it. Two pages and she didn't get it. Not at all. She got the words, but she didn't know what they were saying. So I suggested thinking about it out loud. I'd read it and tell her what was going on in my mind

when I was reading. She would follow along in her own book. I assured her this was the same as the shared readings she did in reading workshop, the book was just a little harder. When reading, I modeled the seven metacognitive reading strategies they'd gone over and over in reading workshop, and she seemed to understand. Then on to the next chapter, with another character narrating and including a flashback in his musings to boot. Marie wanted me to keep reading and thinking so I did. I questioned, I visualized, I predicted and read between the lines. I drew her into the conversation so she would know that she was a part of this reading and sense making. We covered sixteen pages in ninety minutes. I decided not to ask her to read on her own yet. I think she has to get comfortable in the book before she can go solo. But there are 325 pages to go and only five and a half weeks until the book has to be finished. Yikes!

#### **November 4**

Today I suggested that we take turns reading a paragraph aloud and then stopping to talk about any questions either of us had. Read and talk. Read and talk. I reminded her of how well that strategy had worked when Mrs. T. helped her make sense of *April Morning* last year. It only took me one two-and-a-half-page chapter to realize we are in way over Marie's head. With *Kingsolver* you have to think and reason all the time, pulling in what you already know to make sense of the multiple (and now it seems to me nonstop) nuances of her style and story. For struggling readers her style is truly inconsiderate. And for struggling readers with a limited experiential background it's even worse. We got through another two chapters today; we're on page thirty-six. Three hundred pages and five weeks to go. Still no independent reading. What's the point? Without the talk that goes along with the reading, there is nothing there for her.

#### **November 9**

What a disaster! When we started the book I told Marie that we were going to take turns reading (she likes to read aloud, and she's very "fluent"), discussing what we had read at appropriate points. Well, we're doing that, but let me tell you, we've been doing a lot of discussing. Hardly a sentence goes by without that panicky I-don't-get-it look crossing her face. We then stop while I try to pull out Marie's ideas and model what I want by sharing mine. After sixty-odd pages of hard hard work, it has become very clear to me that understanding this book goes far beyond the Barnell Loft strategies of picking out the main idea and supporting details. In order to grasp the essential, in order to construct meaning, I have reverted to one long "think-aloud." I am looking at comprehension in a totally new light. And I wonder how she's looking at herself. Marie has come so far in two years; I only hope this ordeal doesn't make her fall back into that helpless "I can't" pattern. Whose bright idea was this anyway?

#### **November 14**

Getting close to Thanksgiving, but there's not much to be thankful about when I think of what's going on between Marie and this book. She hates the book. She hates

Codi and her father and all the people in Grace. Not knowing what else to do in our quest to “conquer” this book, Marie and I spent today doing just what we’ve been doing for the past two weeks. Or almost—Marie has given up on reading aloud herself. She has realized that when she does, she puts all of her energy into words and none into meaning. So I read aloud. Marie doesn’t get it. We talk in order to figure things out. And so on and so on. At the end of the session Marie told me once more how much she is disliking the book. So I made her a promise. We will keep plodding on until we get to page one hundred (twenty long pages from where we are now). If by then it is still a struggle, we will throw in the towel. I am almost looking forward to doing that. Don’t know what I am going to say to Miss Sizer. . . .

### **November 16**

Today we had worked our way through a *long* chapter, fourteen pages. I went to close the book and Marie surprised me by saying, “Let’s keep reading. The next chapter’s a short one.” We did; and at the end of the chapter, without any prompting, Marie said, “You know why I think he did that, Mrs. Mueller?” Clearly understanding the essence of the text, she went on to make a thoughtful inference, then a prediction. I was taken aback; on her own she was beginning to reason, to make sense of the story as she read it. On her own she was beginning to see the point as she became an engaged and thoughtful reader. I think we are going to finish this book.

### **November 18**

Suddenly we are moving faster. Marie is beginning to connect with Codi’s pregnancy; without really telling me the details, she is using the novel as a way to come to terms with her all-too-similar history. I can see it in the way her thoughts are beginning to develop and grow, no longer the staccato of making meaning sentence by sentence, but rather the flow of page-by-page understanding. We have decided Marie will do some reading on her own. To try it out, we each read the same short section to ourselves. I told her that the thinking aloud I have been doing would now go on in her own head. When we finished, we talked. It wasn’t smooth and easy; we still had a lot to go over. But some of the responsibility for making meaning is shifting to Marie. Atwell would be proud of this handover! And for the first time I gave Marie a reading assignment. Over the weekend she’ll try to finish the rest of chapter 12 on her own. I suggested that she attach a sticky note every time she comes to something she doesn’t understand or wants to talk about. I will do the same. We’ll see what happens.

### **November 21**

It’s a start. Marie got through three pages on her own—and the sticky notes worked! One asked the meaning of “mortar” (it’s so easy to forget how limited Marie’s vocabulary is) and how a baby could be “mortared” into a wall (even when knowing what mortar is, that picture stretches a reader’s use of the word, so typical of Kingsolver). The other gave Marie’s surprised reaction to Codi and Loyd’s lovemaking: “Do you

think he planned all of this?” followed by “I don’t get it. Does he know about her pregnancy or not?” We read a five-page chapter silently, then discussed it as a whole. It’s hard, though, to get away from the little things that come up over and over to puzzle Marie. I’ve got to realize that what counts for her is the big picture the author wants her to come away with, not the nuances that go right over her head. She needs to make sense of her reading on a level that works for her. On her own she will read the next five-page chapter, again using sticky notes.

### ***November 23***

Marie is really beginning to get into the book now. Today as we read together silently, there was a part about Codi’s attempt to teach birth control to her high school students. Marie laughed to herself, then suddenly looked up and said, “I’m surprised that I know so much!” Then she paraphrased what Codi had been telling her class: “If they’re gonna do it, they’d better know what they’re getting in for!” Of course, it’s easy when Marie can connect with the text; it’s much more challenging when there’s a divide between what she knows and what the book is telling her.

### ***November 25***

For the first time I feel we’re making progress. If Marie works hard over the weekend, we will be halfway through the book. I’m getting worried about her finishing on time; there are only two weeks left. I’m not sure what a stickler Miss Sizer is for deadlines, and I doubt she realizes what a stretch this assignment has been for Marie. Too often teachers are simply unaware of their students’ abilities (but I’d better not forget that I was there when Marie picked this book). It’s not as though Marie hasn’t been working. She’s surprised herself with what she has been able to accomplish. When I mentioned my concern, Marie told me that Miss Sizer is going to give them class time for independent reading. I think Marie will be able to take advantage of that. I asked if she thought keeping a journal would help her understand the book. She’s used to doing journal entries; that was a part of reading workshop that she really liked. She’s going to give it a try.

### ***December 3***

Things are going much better. Between reading with me, reading in English class, and reading on her own, Marie is really making progress. The journal entries seem to be helping her as well. They are taking over from the sticky notes, giving Marie a place to record what she is thinking—and getting her to think more. Here’s part of one entry:

I disliked how Codi’s father wouldn’t talk to her about their relatives. Why does he have to keep it hidden from her? She’s old enough to know. I think that Codi is getting stronger. At first all she wanted to do was leave Grace after a year. Now I think she may hang around. I can just picture Codi standing up and talking to all the ladies

in town. She must have been afraid. But she must have been proud too. I thought the cockfight was disgusting. I wonder how anybody could do that to an innocent bird.

### ***December 6***

Because I want Marie to think about how she is growing as a reader this semester, I have asked her to use her journal as a place to reflect not only on the book but also on the strategies she has used to make sense of it. My goal is to help her realize that she is capable of doing independently what we have done together. I want her to become Clay's self-extending reader. I'm beginning to think she's well on her way. Here is an entry in which she honestly and successfully evaluates herself:

As a reader I have learned that I can read anything as long as I ask questions or stop to think about what I read. I feel that I am pretty good at visualizing what I read. I ask a lot of questions too. I sometimes can predict what's going to happen next. I need to work realizing that books take time and patience and understanding in order to read them.

### ***December 8***

I must admit that I have not stressed synthesizing with Marie. The act of synthesizing is one of the most sophisticated cognitive strategies used by good readers, so with Marie I have stressed other things. We have put a lot of effort into visualizing (she's good at that now), asking questions/predicting (another emerging strength) and inferring (ditto). She has been using fix-up strategies and working at picking out what's important in the reading. And then today, as we finished reviewing some reading that Marie had done on her own (that's how we spend most of our time now, going over text she has read independently), she turned back to a page that had really been puzzling her. "I still don't get this whole thing," she said. After we talked it out together, she wrapped up our discussion with, "I know. Codi feels so alone." A slight pause. Then "Oh, so that's what the whole book is about, isn't it?" She seemed slightly disgusted when she said this, as if she should have known this all along, as if perhaps I should have told her this before we even opened the book. "I know how she feels. I often feel alone, even in the middle of a room full of people."

### ***December 10***

For the past week I've been worried about what's going to happen if Marie doesn't finish the book on time. But I decided to let Marie take care of that; after all, it's her responsibility. It turns out I shouldn't have been so concerned. As break ended today, Marie flew into my office, her face flushed with excitement. "Mrs. Mueller, guess what? I'm not gonna get marked down for being late finishing the book. Miss Sizer has decided to give all of us an extra week. When she asked me how much I have to read, I told her that I had only four chapters left, that I can't wait to find out if Codi is going to leave Grace or not. I can't understand why she would; doesn't she understand how

much Loyd and Emmelina and everybody else really need her? I wouldn't go if I was her. See you this afternoon." As quickly as she had entered my office, she turned to leave, intent on catching the bus to the vocational center. "I really love this book, don't you Mrs. Mueller?" Yes, Marie, I thought to myself as I watched her rejoin her laughing group of friends. *I really love it too. More than you'll ever know.*

## Background

As strange as it seems now, it took more than two years before I dealt with the fact that for some Daniel Webster lifers there is no light at the end of the academic tunnel after a year of reading workshop. Since I corrected the Nelson Reading Skills Test given to all reading workshop classes each spring, I knew that some students fail to "test out," not only those like Marie who are on the cusp of success but also those who still have a long way to go before reaching grade 8 on the standardized test. But my mind was on those who were successful, those who proved ready to use their practiced strategies independently and without support. And my energies as a consultant were focused on making sure that the new reading workshop classes ran smoothly and successfully. The lifers who were unable to make the grade as self-extending readers retreated to special ed, welcomed back and fostered by the nurturing staff members. Or like Marie, they laid claim to the seats in the back of their English and history classrooms, hoping against hope that they could somehow manage to conquer the texts assigned to them.

Working with Brian and Marie forced me to see that one year of reading workshop is not a panacea for all literacy ills. Despite our best efforts, there will always be students who need more than Reading Workshop I, adolescents who after a year of reading, keeping a journal, attending to minilessons, and sharing remain passive readers lacking the knowledge and ability to monitor their own reading process. Some are pupils like Marie, who have more trouble with comprehension than vocabulary, who can decode words fluently but who are unable—or perhaps unaware of how important it is—to make sense of what they are reading. Others continue to trip over multisyllable words, expending all their energy on word identification rather than making meaning. These students, usually eleven or twelve out of a group of forty-five, require more intensive and explicit instruction in what proficient readers do to engage themselves in and comprehend text. They need a curriculum geared to their individual needs. And whatever their differences, they all need more time and support to come to understand who they are as readers in order to take control of their own literacy development.

## Goal

The goal of Reading Workshop II is twofold:

1. To continue to provide a supportive classroom community in which these lifers can persevere in their growth as readers and learners.

2. To replicate in a small group the kind of one-on-one instruction, practice, and interaction Marie and I shared as we worked our way through *Animal Dreams*.

What Marie referred to as “read and talk, read and talk” is a shared reading experience, a time when struggling readers receive the support they need to make sense of meaningful text while building the self-confidence to voice their ideas without fear of failure. It’s a time for these students to understand that the facility they show for making sense of oral language can be transferred to the written word.

I chuckle when a teacher says of a lifer, “He never has anything to say!” Just listen to them as they cluster in the hall sharing stories with their friends during break. Eavesdrop on their animated chatter as they congregate during lunchtime. It’s not that these lifers have nothing to say; it’s that for too long they have been relegated to classrooms where meaningful talk has been all but eliminated for at-risk readers like themselves. Whether working in “special” classes where most learning is done in isolation or attempting to fit into mixed-ability classes where they feel inferior by virtue of their reading struggles, they are “not accustomed to expressing their opinions, solving problems, or gaining group consensus in collaborative decision making” (Allen 1995, p. 112). For all intents and purposes these silenced students have been disenfranchised from traditional classroom discourse.

In the Reading Workshop II community, on the other hand, lifers can discover the power of language, both oral and written. Through lots of shared and independent reading, lots of teacher modeling, lots of focused discussion about interesting books, lots of opportunities to become immersed in a wide range of language activities, these adolescents can take the next step toward reading engagement and independence. Once they learn to tell and value their own stories in a safe and supportive setting, they can move on to reading and valuing the stories of others. They can become readers.

## Learning More About Our Students

When the results of the Nelson Reading Skills Test are announced in the spring, pupils who fail to “test out” of reading workshop meet with me individually. My goal is to assure these disappointed—and often frustrated—students that their time in Reading Workshop I has been time well spent, that although they may have failed to reach the elusive grade 8 reading plateau, they have nonetheless made a move toward reinventing themselves as a reader. My sales pitch is based on fact, for in almost every case test results document meaningful growth over the past ten months. So do the numbers from the spring Reading Attitude Assessment and the students’ year-end self-evaluation. Generally speaking, it’s not that these adolescents haven’t found success in reading workshop; like Marie, they simply need more time and focused support in order to attain reading independence. My concentrated PR blitz usually succeeds; with my gentle nudge, the Reading Workshop II students-to-be accept the importance of an additional dose of reading support, albeit grudgingly.

In the fall I invite each class member to meet with me individually once more, this time in an effort to gather the assessment data needed to plan our classroom instruction. Whereas the large group of Reading Workshop I participants necessitates a fairly generic approach to reading improvement, the reduced number of Reading Workshop II students allows the teacher to focus the curriculum on the specific needs of the participants. To evaluate these needs, I administer the one-on-one assessments I use when learning about a Reading Rebound student. In addition, I choose one oral selection on which to do a detailed oral reading miscue analysis, an exercise that affords me a “window into the reader’s mind” (Goodman 1991), letting me share with the student his reading process in action while at the same time examining how he predicts and monitors his reading for meaning. As I explain what I have learned from these assessments, the student comes to know the individual strengths he brings to reading as well as the areas in which additional growth is needed. This is a crucial part of my assessment. If this adolescent is to continue to grow as a reader, he must be made aware of where he needs to go and what he can build on in order to get there.

The information gathered from these sessions, along with results of the Metacomprehension Strategies Index (Schmitt 1990) administered to the entire class and the data carried over from Reading Workshop I, fleshes out the portrait of each Reading Workshop II class member. It replaces the sterile NRST numbers by which these students have been identified (7.7 vocabulary, 6.8 comprehension, 7.2 composite) with flesh-and-blood descriptors of skills, attitudes, and strategies that can be comprehended, acknowledged, and worked on by a committed re-visioning reader.

## Logistics

Like Reading Workshop I, Reading Workshop II meets three blocks a week for either fifty or ninety minutes depending on the day and is limited to a maximum of eight or nine students per class. The course continues to incorporate the traditional workshop elements of time, choice, and response, and students read, keep journals, and have conferences. However, the schedule is not as regimented. Depending on the needs of the students in the class, lesson plans differ from day to day and week to week. Nevertheless, there are some common elements. For instance, each block includes opportunities for all areas of language development—reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Also, whole-class activities are interspersed with individual and small-group work. The teacher begins every block by reading aloud, and direct instruction takes place along with independent reading and journal writing. Sometimes minilessons are presented to all students. At other times explicit instruction is presented only to those two or three students who need support in a particular area. An instructional theme lasting between six and eight weeks gives continuity to much of the daily work: units include choosing what to read (culminating in a class shopping trip to a bookstore), author studies (Gary Paulsen is a favorite), and favorite picture books (everything from *Green Eggs and Ham* to *Knots on a Counting Rope*). A sample weekly schedule is shown in figure 7-1.

Schedule, Sem. 2 1997	DAY 1 Newspaper day 2/10	DAY 2 2/11	DAY 3 Flex day 2/13
1:21 - 1:35	read aloud <i>that's the one</i>	read aloud <i>Peter</i>	read aloud <i>Peter</i>
1:35 - 1:50	metacognitive strategy <i>mini-lesson</i>	book testing - choosing "the right" book	journal free-write group share
1:50 - 2:05	independent reading ↓	independent reading (choice) ↓	miscue analysis
2:05 - 2:20			plan trip to <i>Paulsen's</i> ↓
2:20 - 2:35	journaling (strategy reinforcement)	dialogue journaling	indep read (if time)
2:35 - 2:50	book talk <i>Maria</i>	book share (focus on strategy tie-in)	word games
also: Conferences 2/mo. outside of class (review strategies, set goals, problem-solve) Bqok Buddies: 2/mo. <i>John, Laurie</i>			
units: <u>Jan-Feb: Choice, field trip to Paulsen's</u> Feb-Mar: Picture books Mar-Apr: Gary Paulsen Apr-May: Drama, field trip to play			
			wk. of 2/10

Figure 7-1. Reading Workshop Schedule

## Reading Beyond the Classroom

Once the class settles into the Reading Workshop II routine, once students and teacher develop a cohesive sense of community, it's time to move literacy learning beyond the classroom so that these students can experience the value and joy of reading in the outside world. It may be a one-time event (going to dinner and the theater at the end of a creative drama unit, for example) or an ongoing activity. In the highly rewarding book-buddies program, for example, these re-visioning adolescent readers become twice-a-month reading mentors to local primary-grade children.

Another popular outreach project, at least after the first timid foray, is “supper club.” Each Reading Workshop II student chooses an adult from the community as a reading companion. The paired readers then pick a book acceptable to both of them and read it within a reasonable amount of time, exchanging journal entries while they do. Finally, all the twosomes meet at the high school for an evening of pizza and book sharing. At the start of the evening the air is pregnant with silence, but with a little urging these reticent readers/thinkers/speakers begin to talk. “Did you like the way it ended?” “What did you think of the main character?” “I couldn’t believe how he reacted when his brother ran away.” Spontaneous questions and comments fill the hour and a half as adolescents once disenfranchised from literacy discourse find their voices in a social setting. This is often the first time these students have been a part of such a discussion outside of the safety of their reading workshop classroom; judging from the sense of camaraderie and the laughter interspersed with the talk, it may not be the last.

## Introducing Effective Reading Practices

Our work with Reading Workshop II students has identified a number of reading practices that encourage students to become more aware of their active role in making sense of text as they revalue both the reading process and themselves.

### *Cognitive Strategies*

Good readers are *metacognitive*—that is, they think about their thinking as they read. In their ground-breaking *Mosaic of Thought* (1997), Keene and Zimmerman demystify reading comprehension by pointing out the seven cognitive processes that all proficient readers use as they seek to bring meaning to the written word: activating prior knowledge, determining importance, asking questions, creating images, drawing inferences, synthesizing, and using fix-up strategies to repair comprehension when it breaks down. Starting the first week of class, the Reading Workshop II teacher models these strategies, introducing them one by one in a series of explicit think-alouds. (A lesson on activating prior knowledge is shown in figure 7–2) Once the strategy has been modeled, students are encouraged to practice it, first as part of a group setting, then as they read independently. If I had to pick the element of Reading Workshop II instruction that is most

## METACOGNITIVE LESSON STRATEGY #1

### Activating Prior Knowledge (Schema)—Connecting the Known to the New

1. Explain that when proficient readers read, they think about things they already know; they relate the experiences they have had to what they are reading. There are three kinds of connections that can be made:
  - Text-to-self connections.
  - Text-to-text connections.
  - Text-to-world connections.
2. Using a book that you have previewed in order to find places where you as a reader make these three types of connections, do a “think aloud” in which you share with your students your use of the strategy.
3. Be explicit about what you are doing. For example:

*Okay, this is how it's going to work. When I'm reading you'll see me looking at the text and sharing it as I always do during our read-aloud sessions. But instead of reading straight through, I'll stop and think aloud about things I know or have experienced that are like the book in some way. You may notice that I stop to think before I speak; after this pause I'll let you know what I was thinking.*
4. Model the strategy for your students, showing examples of all three types of connections. Don't be shy—they need to know exactly what your brain is doing!
5. Remind students that proficient readers activate prior knowledge (usually without even thinking about it) in order to comprehend, to make sense of what they are reading. The meaning, then, comes from our interaction with the text as we read; without the reader there are words but no meaning. It's a two-way street—our prior knowledge gives meaning to the book, and the meaning we gain from the book expands our knowledge.

Figure 7–2. Metacognitive Strategy Lesson

beneficial to these struggling adolescent readers, this is it. These strategies are the means by which readers embark on mind journeys rather than become lost on dead ends.

### ***Retrospective Miscue Analysis***

This powerful instructional practice, adapted from Goodman and Marek (1996), is another tool by which students come to know and understand themselves as readers. In the session, the teacher plays a tape of a short oral reading. The students follow along in the written text, on the lookout for reader miscues (“an instance in reading when someone reads a text in a way that another person listening would not expect,” p. ix). By analyzing these miscues (see figure 7–3), the students begin to see how effectively the reader is using the three basic cueing systems—semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic—that proficient language users employ instinctively as they speak and as they read. They learn that all readers make some miscues, but that proficient readers carefully monitor their comprehension, correcting the miscue when it detracts from the meaning of the text.

Struggling readers not only make a great many miscues but also fail to monitor and correct them when necessary. Without this all-important monitoring and correcting step, they lose control of the reading process and forfeit their ability to construct meaning from the text. Once Reading Workshop II students understand that the same cueing systems they use naturally in their speech can make a difference in their reading, they begin to predict, infer, sample, confirm, and self-correct as they read. Where they once rushed through a selection with barely a thought for what the words meant, they now begin to pay attention to the meaning they are constructing as they read.

### ***Reciprocal Teaching***

This comprehension-fostering and -monitoring activity trains the instructional spotlight on the reading of high school textbooks. Since efficient word callers like Marie “read” the words of a textbook but fail to monitor meaning on their own, they need to be taught to do so through direct instruction and modeling. Then, in order to incorporate this strategy into their daily reading, they need many opportunities to practice and internalize it.

In a reciprocal teaching session (Palincsar and Brown 1984), the teacher works with three or four students. Using a text at their independent (or instructional) decoding level, she reads a short passage aloud as the students follow along. Then she points out and models four activities that help her derive meaning: she summarizes the selection, asks a thoughtful question about what she has read, clarifies the meaning of a particular word or phrase, and predicts what may come next. When the students seem comfortable with these activities, one of them becomes the “teacher.” The next paragraph is read (either silently or aloud, as the group chooses), and the new “teacher” performs the four thinking tasks for his peers. The real teacher provides whatever

Recorder: David, Leon, Pat (group work) Reader: Leon  
 Date: April 30, 1997 Read from (text): Face on Milk Carton (pages: 82-83)

<b>Text / Miscue</b>	<b>Semantic:</b> Does the miscue mean the same thing as what is in the text?	<b>Syntactic:</b> Does the miscue sound like language? (correct grammar)	<b>grapho-phonetic</b> Does the miscue look or sound like what was in the text?	<b>Did the reader self-correct?</b> Did the reader need to self-correct?
1. Rehearsed/reassured	no	yes	no	Yes Yes
2. has/was	Yes	Yes (but the change was syntactic, tense)	No	No No
3. come/came	Yes	Yes (but the change was syntactic, tense)	no	No No
4. Miranda/Martha	Yes	Yes	No	No No
5. shuddered/shrugged	No	Yes	No	No No
6. mother/father	No	Yes	No	Yes/yes
7. Some/so	No	Yes	No	Yes/yes

Figure 7-3. Retrospective Miscue Analysis

guidance is necessary, giving praise and specific feedback. When a particular task needs improvement, she once again models it for the group. All readers get the chance to become the “teacher” and always receive whatever support they need.

Since almost all Reading Workshop II students bask in the feeling of being “in charge” of a lesson, reciprocal teaching is a popular small-group activity. With practice students are able to participate in the sessions with less and less support, and the teacher moves from responsive coach to confirming audience. As the students complete these activities successfully, they transfer their newly developed self-monitoring ability to other expository reading.

### ***Analogy Approach to Word Identification***

How often I’ve heard frustrated high school teachers say, “These reading workshop kids just don’t know their basic phonics!” Based on my experience working with at-risk adolescent readers, I can say this statement is untrue; I can count on my fingers the students who have fallen into that category over the past twenty years. It’s not the individual symbol-sound relationships, the short *a* and the digraph *ch*, that these readers struggle with; it’s the application of these phonetic generalizations to multisyllable words, the terrifying “big words,” that gives them trouble. When I give the ARI, I easily spot the readers who need direct instruction in word identification. They’re not the students who unlock the words ever so slowly; those kids just need practice to become more automatic and fluent. Rather, they are the students who when trying to decode a multisyllable word, zero in on the beginning and the end but ignore what’s in between. For years they have been told to “sound it out,” but they have never figured out how. For these struggling readers, usually three or four pupils in a class of nine, the analogy approach to word identification has proved to be the most successful instructional approach to decoding.

Developed at Irene Gaskins’ Benchmark School, a school for struggling readers grades 1–8, this systematic decoding program is based on explicit instruction, teacher modeling, guided practice, and feedback. It is grounded in research showing that when good readers come to an unfamiliar word, they use what they already know to figure out what they don’t know (Cunningham 1975–76; Mason and Au 1986; Gaskins, Gaskins, and Gaskins 1991). In the analogy approach to word identification, students are taught to use common words (key words) to decode unknown words. After chunking a multisyllable word into spelling patterns they recognize, they compare these segments to the key words they already know in order to come up with the new word. For example, by dividing an unknown word into *in*, *cum*, and *bent* and comparing these parts to the key words *in*, *drum*, and *tent*, the reader decodes *incumbent*.

For many lifers, this new approach to word identification is the piece of the reading puzzle they have been searching for through years of frustration and failure. Gone are the syllabification rules that have never made any sense, the isolated sounds that rarely seem to connect with real reading. In their place is a systematic strategy that with practice leads to the automatic recognition these lifers need in order to succeed as readers and students.

## Learning Together: A Team-Teaching Approach to Instruction

I first began to think about the need for a second year of reading workshop as I was sitting in my office one October afternoon talking to a young special ed case manager about some of her lifers who had not tested out of Reading Workshop I. Michelle was wondering what kind of reading support she could offer these struggling students. “It seems so unfair that we have given them a year of help and now they’re right back in special ed,” she confided. “I can help them with their homework like I always have. Read their English books with them. Be sure they hand in their assignments. Work on their research papers. But that’s not going to do them any good as readers.”

“I know they need something more,” I replied, “but there’s no way with my schedule that I can do anything else.”

“And what about kids like Marie?” she continued. “Uncoded kids who can’t keep up on their own? Most of them are getting no help at all, unless you decide to work with them—or unless we sneak them into the special ed office when nobody’s looking.”

As a part-time reading consultant I was really feeling the pinch. Perhaps if I were at school every day I could have launched a class for these needy students on my own. But not when I was only there three days a week. Not when I already had a full-time job to do in little more than half the time. “I guess I need somebody to job-share with,” I suggested. “That was always the plan, but somehow with the tight budget and all, it’s never materialized. If only there were another reading person in the building. . . .” I trailed off into silence.

“You know what?” Michelle glanced at me with a half smile. “Did I ever tell you how awful I was at reading growing up? How much I hated reading aloud, being expected to read textbooks I couldn’t begin to understand? I’m not a ‘reading person’ now, far from it. But with a lot of work I’ve learned to love books, and maybe I could help you do the same with these kids. I know what they’re going through. I’ve been there myself. Maybe with your support I could become that other reading person.”

Such was the impetus for the team-teaching approach Michelle and I developed together that year. I was the consultant who created an instructional framework to meet the needs of the students; she was the enthusiastic brainstormer who came up with curriculum ideas and activities to go along with it. When I pointed out the importance of teaching metacognitive strategies to these unengaged readers, Michelle had a collection of favorite picture books she wanted to use to introduce these strategies to the class. When I mentioned how crucial I felt it was to get these adolescents talking about and feeling a part of literacy events, she couldn’t wait to get the class involved in creative drama.

During the rest of the semester I supplied her with books and articles about teaching at-risk adolescents, and every week we discussed how to put the best practices we had read about into action. Together we went to Bob and presented our idea of extending reading workshop for a second year. We needed his okay for a case manager like Michelle to teach a regularly scheduled class. “What do we have to lose?” Bob asked. “You’ll all be learning together, right?”

By January we had a classroom, an assigned block, and an overflowing roster of nine students. We had access to the reading workshop library and a weekly schedule to follow. Michelle was the Reading Workshop II teacher; I was her mentor, ready to support her in her new teaching venture. Having tested each student individually, I knew what they needed as readers and I shared this information with Michelle. We chose a curriculum that would build on the students' strengths and attend to their needs. As the weeks passed I introduced Michelle to the reading practices she was unfamiliar with. I came into the Reading Workshop II classroom and worked with groups of students on reciprocal teaching; I tried out the analogy approach to word identification with deficient decoders; I modeled effective instructional practices. In time Michelle was able to do more of the teaching on her own.

Building on the Reading Workshop I support group already in place, all of the educators involved in the corrective reading curriculum—the Reading Workshop I and II teachers, the Reading Rebound teachers, and I—had monthly meetings to plan for the weeks ahead and share what was going on in the different classrooms. Mrs. Daley told us about Brian's success with the analogy approach to word identification, and I was able to take what she had learned and apply it to some of Michelle's struggling decoders. When Mrs. T. said she was worried about the students in her room who didn't seem to be "buying in" to reading, Michelle mentioned that she gave her recalcitrant students comic books. We brainstormed ways to improve the journals our students were keeping, and I suggested we learn more about Atwell's dialogue journals for our next meeting. We discussed the lifers who were making gains and those who might need another dose of reading intervention in the year to come.

## **Assessment and Evaluation**

### ***Ongoing Classroom Assessment***

Since by its very nature the Reading Workshop II class fosters a more intimate teacher-student relationship, Michelle didn't need weekly progress sheets to keep track of her students' behavior and learning. Instead, her anecdotal notes about what she observed in the classroom became a large part of the ongoing evaluation. In addition, she adapted other Reading Workshop I progress and assessment forms to meet her needs. First, she incorporated reading logs into each student's journal. Then, as she grew more confident in her evaluative skills, she transformed the Reading Journal Scoring Guide into a rubric assessing the deeper understanding that was a cornerstone of the Reading Workshop II curriculum (see appendix J). "I hope this is okay," she said when she asked for feedback on her first stab at developing assessment tools.

It was more than okay; Michelle's work was clear evidence that she was learning how to learn more about her students. She continued to use quarterly rubrics as an impetus for self-evaluation and goal setting; and like the Reading Workshop I semester-end assessments, her midterm and final exams gave students the opportunity to reflect on their growth as readers while assessing their ability to use the reading

strategies taught and practiced in class. At the end of each quarter letters home kept parents informed of class literacy goals as well as the progress of their son or daughter.

### ***Periodic Assessment***

We also administered an oral reading miscue analysis for each Reading Workshop II student at the end of every quarter. By collecting each oral reading on a student's personal tape, we created an ongoing record of his or her progress as a reader, one that could move from class to class and teacher to teacher as the reader's development dictated. In individual conferences, the students and I reviewed each reading and the miscues it contained; together we applauded the growth shown and set goals for future learning based on what we were able to see through this revealing "window."

### ***Testing Out***

"Testing out" of reading workshop was never far from these adolescents' minds. It was something they knew they had to do—but something they dreaded. And with good reason. As lifers they had never had any success picking out vocabulary definitions or answering comprehension questions. More often than not they had entered their answers to standardized tests in visual patterns, as if decorating a Christmas tree. But because we live in a world where standardized test results continue to hold clout, we needed to use one to document these readers' growth.

To prepare her students to take the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, Michelle coached them in class. She introduced them to tried-and-true test-taking strategies—narrowing down multiple choices, reviewing the questions before reading the comprehension selections, pacing one's progress through the different sections of the test. She talked of the importance of getting a good night's sleep the night before, of relaxation techniques that can help stressed-out test takers during the session itself. And she gave them plenty of chances to practice, letting them work with alternative forms of the test to bolster their self-confidence.

When testing week came, the class was ready. With the exception of two pupils who had tried our patience all semester, who had refused to commit themselves to making a difference as readers and learners, the Reading Workshop II students took the year-end test seriously. During the long and arduous sessions these invested students gave the test questions their fullest attention in their desire to prove themselves as re-visioning readers. These lifers had worked hard for two years, and they wanted their efforts to pay off. That first year, in a class of nine students, five reached the required grade 8 reading level needed to remove themselves from the lifer roll. Not only that, both in their year-end self-evaluations and in the readministered attitude surveys, nearly all could point to areas of substantial growth, not only in reading achievement but also in how they viewed reading and themselves as readers and learners. They—and we—were making progress.