Check out these Book Motivation Projects!
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Volume 35, Number 3  Summer 2007

Table of Contents

1  Editor's Page
    Kathy Barclay

Articles

3  Multiple Activity Literacy Centers: Promoting Choice and Learning Differentiation
    Cecile Arquette

10  Enhancing Comprehension Competencies Through Questioning
    Edward J. Dwyer

14  Motivate First-Grade Writers by Providing Choices and Clear Expectations
    Keta Foltz

Reader's Contribution

9  Poem: “I’d Like to Teach the World to Read”
    Lucia Schroeder

Columns

23  Logging on with Literature: Fantasy: Suspending One’s Disbelief
    Angela Ferree, Pam Campbell, and Betsy Hommel

29  Terrific Teaching Tips: Vocabulary: A Link to Comprehension
    Laurel Borgia and Carol Owles

33  Parent Involvement in Reading: Adult and Family Literacy Grants: Three Ideas for Family Literacy
    Frances Steward and Diana Goff

36  Professional Development: Oh, the Possibilities . . .
    Sara D. Simonson

39  Leadership in Reading: Action Research: Putting Teachers into the Driver's Seat When Planning Classroom
    Research Studies
    Pamela Terry Godt with Guest Author, Bjorn Godt-Hansen

44  Research in Reading: Every Teacher a Teacher of Reading: The Rhetoric, the Research, and the Reality
    Therese J. Kiley and Rita Jensen

49  Insights from Illinois Authors: A Conversation with Esmé Raji Codell
    Ronda J. Mitchell

54  Excerpts from the Motivational Book Projects

56  Calls for Contributions for Future Issues of the Illinois Reading Council Journal
The Illinois Reading Council Journal (IRCJ) is published quarterly and is distributed as a service to all members of the Illinois Reading Council. Membership in the Illinois Reading Council can be obtained through local and special interest reading councils in Illinois. For information, contact the Illinois Reading Council at 1210 Fort Jesse Road, Suite B2, Normal, IL 61761-1836. IRC staff may also be reached by telephone at the toll-free number, (888) 454-1341, or at (309) 454-1341. Libraries and educational institutions can subscribe to IRCJ at an annual rate of $40.00; address inquiries to the Executive Director at the IRC office.

Because the IRCJ serves as an open forum, its contents do not necessarily reflect or imply endorsement or advocacy by the Illinois Reading Council, its officers, or its members.

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About the Cover

The cover displays the class projects of the following students in Diana Goff's Early Childhood 356 class at Western Illinois University: Front Cover: Top Row (left to right): Ashley Dawson (Jan Brett's The Umbrella), Lisa Massey (The Boxcar Children), Faith Davis (Dr. Seuss's One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish); 2nd Row: Casandra Ashmore (A Silly Snowy Day), Erin Ford (White Rabbit's Color Book); 3rd Row: Samantha Valentine (Giles Andreae's Giraffes Can't Dance); Christina Muller (Marc Brown's Arthur's Town), Cristine Purdy (Chicka Chicka Boom Boom), Carisa Swanson (Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?), Tori Savage (If You Give a Mouse a Cookie), Bottom Row: Ashley Diemer (If You Give a Mouse a Cookie), Sheri Manovski (Happy Birthday Jesse Bear), Alissa Hoover (Lilly, Purple Plastic Purse); Back Cover: Top Row (left to right): Lorissa Lambert (Where Is My Mommy?), Kirsten Smiricky (The Mitten), Jessica Langenstrass (Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type); 2nd Row: Crystal Wensel (Dream Party), Jennifer Lichter (Five Silly Monkeys); Bottom Row: Jennifer Cummins (Good Enough to Eat), Jessica Lundberg (If You Give a Mouse a Cookie), Andrea Weirather (Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?). Diana Goff is an associate editor for IRCJ and an assistant professor in the Curriculum and Instruction department at Western. Excerpts from three of these projects can be found on pages 54 and 55 of this issue. Complete projects can be found at the Western Illinois Reading Council website.

Erratum: The author of the book Prindle, whose characters appeared in the bulletin board pictures on our cover last issue, is Andrew Clements not Clement. We apologize for the error.

MISSION

The mission of the Illinois Reading Council is to provide support and leadership to educators as they promote and teach lifelong literacy.

VISION

The Illinois Reading Council advocates quality literacy opportunities for all learners and serves as a primary organization that provides educators at all levels access to research, materials, and methodologies to promote and teach lifelong literacy and learning. Support of an active, well-organized system of local and special interest councils and state committees provides a viable network for communication, exchange of information, and grassroots involvement of a diverse membership. The Illinois Reading Council's publications, special projects, conferences, and workshops stimulate the personal and professional growth of educators.
Editor’s Page

Kathy Barclay, Editor

As this issue of IRCJ goes to press, the national spotlight is still shining brightly on NCLB and, of special concern to reading educators, Reading First. Our parent organization, the International Reading Association, has taken an active role in providing its members with timely and relevant information regarding these and other important issues affecting reading educators. According to a random sample of IRA members conducted by IRA in 2006 and reported in the February/March issue of Reading Today, almost 82% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Children’s reading achievement will improve when research-based curriculum and instruction are fully implemented” (p. 1). Yet, as can be seen from the headlines of the April/May 2007 issue of Reading Today, concerns about the management of Reading First at the federal level continue to surface.

According to the February 2007 report released by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO),

Despite the statutory prohibition against mandat- ing or endorsing curricula and the department’s stated approach to rely on state plans, and the processes articulated in them, to assess compliance, states reported to us several instances in which Reading First officials or contractors appeared to intervene to influence their selection of reading programs and assessments (pp. 32-33). . . . Education failed to develop comprehensive written guidance and procedures to ensure that its interactions with states complied with statutory provisions. Specifically, Education lacked an adequate set of controls to ensure that Reading First’s requirements were followed, while at the same time ensuring that it did not intervene into state and local curricular decisions (p. 35).

While this report certainly cast a negative light on Reading First at the federal level, it is important that we also note positive aspects highlighted in other reports. For example, in a report which appears on the webpage of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), an organization charged with the task of assessing performance of all federal programs and making recommendations as to strengths and weaknesses of each, Reading First was rated at the highest level of effectiveness. Only four programs within the U.S. Department of Education were rated as “Effective”: Adult Education State Grants, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment for Educational Progress, and Reading First State Grants.

Does this good outweigh the bad? In my opinion, yes . . . and no. Continued oversight at the federal level is a must, and I for one appreciate the efforts of the IRA in not only keeping its members informed, but in working to affect positive changes within the legislation. At the same time, there are so many positive elements of Reading First that need to be supported and celebrated.

During the past few years, I have had the opportunity to talk with many teachers, coaches, and administrators in our Illinois Reading First schools and have observed remarkable changes in classroom environment, instruction, and student performance being attributed to the Reading First program. I see schools and districts embracing intensive and ongoing professional development in reading, and reading coaches (something almost unheard of before Reading First) going into classrooms to help teachers apply and fine-tune new instructional methods. I see teachers aligning instruction with ongoing progress monitoring and assessment, and schools where uninterrupted blocks of reading instruction have become the norm. As one administrator said during a discussion of how school assemblies, picture day, and any and all other interruptions are scheduled around an uninterrupted block of reading instructional time, “It starts with a commitment to put that (reading) first . . . that’s why it’s called Reading First.”

As we seek to re-energize our bodies, our minds, and our spirits in preparation for a new academic year, let’s keep the positive results of our local and state efforts in mind as we continue to place reading first throughout Illinois.

For more information on federal program accountability and assessment, check out the following websites


Reference