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# Looking inside classrooms: Reflecting on the “how” as well as the “what” in effective reading instruction

*Classroom practices were studied to identify those that were most useful for improving students' reading ability.*

We know a great deal about effective elementary teachers of reading (Taylor, Pressley, & Pearson, 2000). From the research of the 1960s and 1970s (Brophy, 1973; Dunkin & Biddle, 1974; Flanders, 1970; Stallings & Kaskowitz, 1974) we learned that effective teachers maintained an academic focus, kept more pupils on task, and provided direct instruction. Effective direct instruction included making learning goals clear, asking students questions to monitor understanding of content or skills covered, and providing feedback to students about their academic progress.

Roehler and Duffy (1984) focused on the cognitive processes used by excellent teachers. More effective teachers use modeling and explanation to teach students strategies for decoding words and understanding texts. Knapp (1995) found that effective teachers stressed higher level thinking skills more than lower level skills. Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole (2000) found that, compared with their less accomplished peers, more accomplished primary-grade teachers provided more small-group than whole-group instruction, elicited high levels of pupil engagement, preferred coaching over telling in interacting with students, and engaged students in more higher level thinking related to reading.

The National Reading Panel Report (National Institute of Child Health and Human

Development, 2000) concluded that instruction in systematic phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension strategies was important in a complete reading program. The panel's conclusions are consistent with the findings of Pressley et al. (2001) regarding the balance that outstanding primary-grade teachers achieve in their classroom reading programs; Pressley et al. found that outstanding teachers taught skills, actively engaged students in a great deal of actual reading and writing, and fostered self-regulation in students' use of strategies.

In short, we have learned different, but complementary, lessons about the teaching practices of outstanding elementary literacy teachers from research on effective teaching. In this article, we discuss a subset of findings from year 1 of a larger national study on school reform in reading (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodríguez, 2001) funded by the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA). The purpose of the larger study was to evaluate the impact of all aspects of school reform on student performance. The purposes of the present, more focused analysis are to (a) describe the teacher practices we observed in the classrooms, particularly those that are derived from the research of the last four decades; (b) examine the relationship between teachers' practices and students' growth in reading achievement; and (c) provide vignettes that vividly describe what those practices look like in action.

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## Participants and assessments

Eight high-poverty schools (with 70–95% of the students qualifying for subsidized lunch) were included in the study. Across the schools, 2–68% of the students were nonnative speakers of English, and 67–91% were members of minority groups. The schools represented demographic and geographic diversity—the rural southeast, a large midwestern city, and a large southwestern city. Five of the schools implemented our CIERA School Change Framework (<http://www.schoolchange.ciera.org>), and three were comparison schools. In all schools, two teachers per grade (kindergarten through sixth) were randomly invited to participate in the classroom observations. Within these classrooms, teachers were asked to divide their classes into thirds (high, average, and low) in terms of reading performance, and two children from each third, six per classroom, were randomly selected to be assessed.

The children were given a number of literacy assessments in the fall and spring (depending on grade level and ability level), including the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests, 4th ed. (2000; grades 1–6) and assessments of letter names and sounds (Pikulski, 1996; K–1), phonemic awareness (Taylor, 1991; K–1), word dictation (Pikulski, 1996; K–1), concepts of print (Pikulski, 1996; K–1), and fluency (Deno, 1985; 1–6) on passages from the Basic Reading Inventory, 7th ed. (1997).

## Documenting classroom practices

On three scheduled occasions (fall, winter, and spring) each participating teacher was observed for an hour during reading instruction to document classroom practices in the teaching of reading. The observers were graduate students in literacy or retired elementary teachers, all of whom were trained to use the CIERA Classroom Observation Scheme (Taylor & Pearson, 2000, 2001). The structure of our observation scheme was influenced by the work of Scanlon and Gelzheiser (1992). Each observer was required to meet a criterion (80% agreement with a “standard” coding at each of the seven categories of the coding scheme) in order to have his or her observations included in the study.

The observation system combined qualitative notetaking with a quantitative coding

process. The observer took field notes for a five-minute segment, recording a narrative account of what was happening in the classroom, including, where possible and appropriate, what the teacher and children were saying. At the end of the five-minute notetaking segment, the observer first recorded the proportion of children in the classroom who appeared to be on task, that is, doing what they were supposed to be doing. The observer next coded the three or four most salient literacy events (category 4 codes) that occurred during that five-minute episode. Then for each category 4 event, the observer also coded who was providing the instruction (category 1), the grouping pattern in use for that event (category 2), the major literacy activity (category 3), the materials being used (category 5), the teacher interaction styles observed (category 6), and the expected responses of the students (category 7). An example of a five-minute observational segment is provided in the Figure. (See Table 1 for a list of the codes for all the categories.)

*Coding the observations.* On the basis of research on effective teachers of reading, certain aspects of the data from classroom observations were analyzed to investigate the relationship between various classroom instructional practices and students’ growth in reading. Except as noted, for a given teacher each of these variables was constructed by summing the number of five-minute segments in which the target practice was observed divided by the total number of observed segments. The numbers resulting from these calculations might be thought of as rates of inclusion of these practices into the teachers’ instructional repertoires. The research-based classroom practices analyzed included the following:

Whole group—the percentage of five-minute segments in which whole-group activities were coded.

Small group—the percentage of five-minute segments in which small-group activities were coded.

Word skills—a sum of the number of five-minute segments in which the level 4 activities dealing with word skills were observed, divided by the number of segments in which the level 3 code was designated as reading. An aggregate variable was formed by summing the data from the following practices: (a) word identification work, (b) sight word drill, (c) phonics work, (d) phonemic awareness work, and (e) letter identification work.

Comprehension skills or strategies—the percentage of five-minute segments in which comprehension skills and

**Table 1**  
**Codes for classroom observations**

Category 1 Who	Code	5 Material	Code
Classroom teacher	c	Textbook, narrative	tn
Reading specialist	r	Textbook, informational	ti
Special education	se	Narrative trade book	n
Other specialist	sp	Informational trade book	i
Student teacher	st	Student writing	w
Aide	a	Board/chart	b
Volunteer	v	Worksheet	s
No one	n	Oral presentation	o
Other	o	Pictures	p
Not applicable	9	Video/film	v
		Computer	c
		Other/not applicable	o/9
2 Grouping	Code	6 Teacher interaction	Code
Whole class	w	Tell/give info	t
Small group	s	Modeling	m
Pairs	p	Recitation	r
Individual	i	Discussion	d
Other	o	Coaching/scaffolding	c
Not applicable	9	Listening/watching	l
		Reading aloud	ra
3 General focus	Code	Check work	cw
Reading	r	Assessment	a
Composition/writing	w	Other	o
Spelling	s	Not applicable	9
Handwriting	h		
Language	l	7 Expected pupil response	
Other	o	Reading	r
Not applicable	9	Reading turn taking	r-tt
		Orally responding	or
4 Specific focus	Code	Oral turn taking	or-tt
Reading connected text	r	Listening	l
Listening to text	l	Writing	w
Vocabulary	v	Manipulating	m
Meaning of text, lower		Other/not applicable	o/9
m1 for talk	m1	Number of students on task/ number of students	
m2 for writing	m2		
Meaning of text, higher			
m3 for talk	m3		
m4 for writing	m4		
Comprehension skill	c		
Comprehension strategy	cs		
Writing	w		
Exchanging ideas/oral production	e/o		
Word Identification	wi		
Sight words	sw		
Phonics p1 = letter sound	p1		
p2 = letter by letter	p2		
p3 = onset/rime	p3		
p4 = multisyllabic	p4		
Word recognition strategies	wr		
Phonemic awareness	pa		
Letter identification	li		
Spelling	s		
Other	o		
Not applicable	9		

**Table 2**  
**Incidence of classroom factors by grade**

	Kindergarten mean per- centage of segments observed	Grade 1 mean per- centage of segments observed	Grades 2–3 mean per- centage of segments observed	Grades 4–6 mean per- centage of segments observed
<i>n</i> =	16	14	31	33
Whole group*	.72 (.28)	.51 (.29)	.59 (.29)	.68 (.27)
Small group*	.25 (.28)	.34 (.24)	.36 (.29)	.22 (.25)
Word skills**	1.07 (.80)	1.00 (.79)	.26 (.38)	.10 (.24)
Comprehension skills**	.05 (.09)	.04 (.09)	.12 (.17)	.24 (.26)
Meaning of text**	.40 (.33)	.37 (.15)	.57 (.34)	.57 (.34)
Lower level	.36 (.31)	.34 (.15)	.44 (.26)	.45 (.26)
Higher level	.05 (.08)	.03 (.06)	.13 (.18)	.21 (.29)
Telling*	.50 (.22)	.55 (.16)	.51 (.22)	.60 (.25)
Recitation*	.58 (.19)	.65 (.20)	.64 (.16)	.56 (.19)
Coaching*	.20 (.25)	.25 (.15)	.19 (.15)	.13 (.12)
Active responding***	.27 (.13)	.28 (.11)	.29 (.15)	.34 (.14)
Passive responding***	.44 (.12)	.49 (.14)	.57 (.16)	.66 (.14)

\* Percentage of segments coded out of all five-minute segments coded.

\*\* Percentage of segments coded out of all five-minute reading segments.

\*\*\* Percentage of responses coded out of total number of category 7 responses.

strategies were coded divided by the number of category 3 reading segments coded.

Low-level questioning or writing about text—the percentage of five-minute segments in which the category 4 activities dealing with lower level talking or writing about text were observed, divided by the number of category 3 reading segments coded.

Higher level questioning or writing about text—the percentage of five-minute segments in which the category 4 activities dealing with higher level talking or writing about text were observed, divided by the number of category 3 reading segments coded. Because word skill work, comprehension skill and strategy work, or questioning or writing about text were almost always coded when the general focus of the lesson was reading, a decision was made to consider the incidence of these three different types of reading activities out of the number of five-minute segments where reading was coded.

Teacher telling—the percentage of five-minute segments in which the teacher was coded as telling children information.

Teacher using recitation—the percentage of five-minute segments in which the teacher was coded as engaging children in recitation.

Teacher coaching—the percentage of five-minute segments in which the teacher was coded as coaching children for independence. Because only telling, recitation, and coaching were coded with regularity, analyses were limited to these three codes from category 6.

Students actively responding—an aggregate variable: the percentage of responses in which children were coded as en-

gaged in reading, writing, or manipulating out of the total number of student responses coded. Students passively responding—an aggregate variable: the percent of responses in which children were coded as engaged in reading turn taking, oral turn taking, or listening to the teacher out of the total number of student responses coded.

Because all category 7 codes were frequently coded and because multiple category 7 codes were almost always coded during a five-minute segment, a decision was made to consider the incidence of active (reading, writing, manipulation) and passive (reading turn taking, oral turn taking, and listening) out of all category 7 codes recorded.

To ensure maximum consistency across a large number of observers, one member of the research team read through all of the observations to assess interrater reliability. All disagreements were checked by a second member of the research team, and this second team member agreed with the first member in 97% of the cases. All disagreements between the first and second research team member were resolved by a third research team member.

## Descriptive data from the classroom observations

The results from the classroom observations are useful data in their own right (see Table 2),

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quite independent of their relationship to student growth. In a sense, they capture the nature of classroom instruction in schools like those in which we spent the year observing teachers and testing children. These data also provide us with an opportunity to compare what was going on in these “aspiring” schools with the practices we observed two years earlier in our study of low-income, high-performing schools (Taylor et al., 2000) as well as with other research on effective teaching of reading.

*Grouping practices.* Across all grades, whole-group instruction was coded more often than small-group instruction. In contrast, a greater occurrence of small-group rather than whole-group instruction was found to be a characteristic of the most effective schools in our earlier study of primary-grade reading instruction in schools that were beating the odds (Taylor et al., 2000). These findings from the observations are not exclusive to schools serving high-poverty populations. Similar results have emerged from a case study we conducted in a school where only 30% of the students qualified for subsidized lunch.

*Balance between word work and comprehension work.* Not surprisingly, word-level activities during reading were observed more in grades K–1 than 2–3 or 4–6, and comprehension work was seldom observed in the primary grades. These findings are similar to those in our previous study of primary-grade reading instruction in effective, low-income schools (Taylor et al., 2000), where we found that word-level activities were infrequently observed in grade 3 and that comprehension skill or strategy work was seldom observed in grades 1–3. The findings related to word skill activities also suggest that teachers are focusing on phonics instruction in kindergarten and first grade, a finding compatible with the recommendations of the National Reading Panel Report (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000), “that phonics instruction taught early proved much more effective than phonics instruction introduced after first grade” (p. 2-85).

Across all grades a relatively small amount of higher level questioning or writing related to stories read was observed. These findings are, unfortunately, all too consistent with the results of our earlier study (Taylor et al., 2000). It is important to note that effective teachers and teach-

ers in more effective schools are more frequently observed asking higher level questions than less effective teachers and teachers in less effective schools (Knapp, 1995; Taylor, Pressley, & Pearson, 2000).

*Teachers’ interaction styles.* Telling and recitation were major interaction styles of teachers in all grades; coaching was seldom observed. In our earlier study (Taylor, Pearson, et al., 2000), teacher interaction style varied by level of teacher accomplishment: The least accomplished teachers preferred telling while the most accomplished preferred coaching as their primary interaction style.

*Students’ active versus passive involvement.* Across all grades, students in the present study were engaged in passive responding more often than in active responding. Passive responding included turn taking during oral reading (e.g., round robin), oral turn taking, or listening to the teacher. Active responding included reading, writing, and manipulating. In contrast, Pressley et al. (2001) found that exemplary first-grade teachers had their students actively engaged in actual reading and writing.

## **Students’ reading growth and teacher practices**

To take a closer look at the relationships between teacher practices during literacy instruction and students’ reading and writing growth, we conducted Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) analyses (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). The outcome measures for these analyses were reading fluency (as measured by the number of words read correctly on a grade-level passage in one minute) and comprehension (as measured by the comprehension subtest of the Gates-MacGinitie reading tests). Although we were interested in the possible effects of all 11 coded practices, only those practices that were found to be significantly related to students’ reading growth are discussed here. The details of these analyses appear in the report of the larger study (Taylor et al., 2001).

*Fluency.* The HLM analysis for grade 1 revealed that the incidence of students coded as actively responding was positively related to spring fluency scores, after accounting for fall scores. For grades 2–3, the HLM analysis revealed that telling had a significant negative

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relationship with regard to spring fluency scores (after accounting for fall scores).

*Reading comprehension.* Only the classroom-level HLM analysis for grades 4–6 showed significant differences related to reading comprehension. Time spent on higher level questions had a significant positive relationship and telling had a significant negative relationship with regard to spring comprehension scores (after accounting for fall scores).

*Emergent literacy in kindergarten.* For kindergarten, there were fall scores only for the children identified by their teachers as low and average in literacy abilities. The HLM analysis revealed that time spent on word-level activities (positively related) and telling (negatively related) had significant relationships with regard to spring letter-name scores (after accounting for fall scores). The HLM analysis showed that telling was negatively related to spring phonemic awareness scores (after accounting for fall scores). For concepts of print, the HLM analysis revealed that small-group instruction had a significant positive relationship and telling had significant negative relationship with regard to spring scores (after accounting for fall scores). For word dictation, the HLM analysis revealed that telling was negatively related to spring scores (after accounting for fall letter-name scores).

## Summary of classroom findings and descriptions of more helpful and less helpful classroom practices

The descriptive data of typical effective classrooms indicate that, in general, a shift in certain teaching practices, such as higher level questioning, style of interacting, and encouraging active pupil involvement, may be warranted. The HLM results from the current study further underscore this point. Based on the HLM analyses, reliance on telling as an interaction style was not found to be beneficial to students' reading growth. Several practices were found to be beneficial at particular grade levels: active responding (grade 1), small-group instruction (kindergarten), word skill work (kindergarten), and higher level questions (grades 4–6).

To better explain the findings related to classroom factors, we provide descriptions of teachers who illustrate positive practices. We

also provide examples from classrooms in which telling was a common strategy in order to better describe this less helpful practice. These examples were reconstructed from our field notes, and wherever possible, we used direct quotes from teachers and students. All names are pseudonyms.

*Kindergarten.* Ginger Smith embodied all of the characteristics of an effective kindergarten teacher. She taught reading in groups of six. She emphasized word work: The children made words with plastic letters, practiced sight words in drill and game activities, generated rhyming words, generated words starting with the same sound as a key word such as *sun*, and tried to write the sounds they heard as they wrote in their journals.

Instead of telling children information, Ginger involved her students at every turn. For example, as they listened to the sounds in *fan*, they slid their hand from their shoulder to their elbow, then to their wrist and chorally chimed, /fff-aaa-nnn/. For rhymes, the children came up with the words themselves.

Ginger: What rhymes with boat?

Students: *moat, coat, boat, float, troat, soat.*

Ginger: That's great. You can make up words.

During making words activities, the children manipulated their own set of letters as Ginger coached:

Let's do *tub*. Listen to the middle sound. It's not *tab*, it's not *tob*. It's /ttt-uuu-bbb/. You need a letter for /uuu/.

While reading leveled books, students tracked with their fingers as they read independently from their own copies. If they got stuck on a word, Ginger coached by providing hints instead of telling them the word. They frequently read chorally instead of taking turns. While completing a journal entry about their favorite book, children wrote their own sentence(s) while Ginger gave feedback. In another instance, a child needed help with *like*. Ginger enunciated the sounds but allowed the child to generate the letters.

*Grade 1.* Aaron Brown balanced whole-group and small-group instruction in approximately equal proportions. Instead of relying on telling, Aaron used a recitation framework for discussions, provided coaching through

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scaffolding techniques, and emphasized students' active involvement in their own learning experiences. As children were rereading familiar stories independently in their small guided reading group, Aaron often listened to individual children. In these settings, as the opportunity arose, he would coach them on a word-recognition strategy as they struggled to decode a word. The following example describes his actions when a child was stuck on *door*.

- Aaron: Think of how it begins.  
Child: Door.  
Aaron: How did you know it was *door*?  
Child: The *d* and the *r*.  
Aaron: What would be a good strategy to use if you didn't know that word?  
Several students: Chunk it, think about what would make sense, skip it.

Later in the lesson as they were reading, they skipped a word, came back to it, and talked about how they had used this particular strategy to figure out the word.

Additional interactions revealed Aaron's commitment to students' active involvement in all of their literacy activities:

1. When a different group couldn't answer a question about how a character had changed, Aaron suggested that they search the book for a clue instead of telling them the answer.
2. As an introduction to a writing activity, Aaron asked students to think of something they enjoyed doing with a family member and share that with a partner.
3. When a student asked about the spelling of a word, instead of spelling it for him, Aaron encouraged the student to think of other ways to find the answer. This elicited a range of independent strategies such as sound it out, look on the word wall, or look in the spelling book. Aaron circulated, checked work, and coached children with spelling and with ideas as they were writing.

In contrast, a first-grade teacher who relied on telling revealed a different pattern of interaction. For example, she generated a morning message for the class rather than asking the students to coconstruct it. Instead of asking students how

to spell the words in her sentence, she spelled "Today is a rainy day" and then asked the class to recite what she wrote. When she asked the question, "Why do clouds make rain?" she called on two children who couldn't answer and then answered the question herself instead of coaching children to generate an answer by rephrasing the question or providing further prompts.

In word-level work, she sounded out a word herself and then had the children repeat it, instead of coaching them to sound out the word. After asking the meaning of a word and receiving no immediate answer, she answered herself when she could have had students generate a definition after providing the word in the context of a sentence. As children were writing in their journal, she consistently told her students how to spell a word instead of determining which parts they could spell themselves.

Another telling-oriented first-grade teacher reminded children that they had learned that /ea/ could have the short sound as in *feather*, as opposed to asking them what sounds they had learned for /ea/. When discussing a story on machines, this teacher explained how a shovel worked instead of involving the students in constructing an explanation.

*Grades 2–3.* Terry Miller was a second-grade teacher who relied on coaching and active responding on the part of the children instead of telling as a teaching style. As children were working on animal reports, Terry circulated and coached:

How would you spell *nuts*? Say the word slowly.

You need to add some more ideas to this paragraph. Where can you look?

How can a polar bear live in the snow? They have thick fur to keep them warm? Okay, add that idea here.

Virginia Gray, a third-grade teacher, also used very little telling in her teaching. She started her reading lessons with the whole group, listing the lesson objectives on the chalkboard and having children read them aloud. She led them through a quick picture walk, looking at the pictures and making predictions, which she wrote on the chalkboard. Then the children read the story silently, paying attention because they knew they were expected to participate in the small-group discussions that followed. They then formed groups of four in which one student

was the leader and one was the recorder. Each group had a list of lower and higher level questions to answer on the story. During this time, Virginia circulated, took notes, and coached as children answered their questions. When the whole group got back together to share their answers, Virginia used coaching techniques to encourage children to elaborate on their ideas.

In contrast, a telling-oriented second-grade teacher missed many opportunities to involve the children. Here is her introduction to a new book:

Teacher: The previous book we read by Ezra Jack Keats, *The Trip* (1978, William Morrow), was a story about a boy who was moving to a new house. Now we'll read a new one, *Peter's Chair* (1998, Puffin). Keats's books look similar. He is the author and the illustrator. I think the pictures look like wallpaper.

There could have been many ways for the teacher to bring the children into the conversation. As the teacher was reading aloud to the group, she did not stop to ask questions, only to interject a few ideas.

Teacher: He was being sneaky. I couldn't see him hiding, could you?

After reading, the teacher explained the story to the group as opposed to asking them to explain it to her.

Teacher: At the beginning he wanted to keep the chair for himself. That's being selfish.

**Grades 4–6.** John Merryweather was a sixth-grade teacher who engaged his students in frequent lower and higher level questioning on the stories they read, emphasized small groups for discussing novels, taught comprehension strategies, and did all of this with less telling and more coaching as an interaction style. When reading *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* (Barbara Robinson, 1982, HarperCollins), John had his students write a prediction in their journal before continuing to read.

John: What do you think Alice is up to? Write your idea in your response journal.

As the class continued to read, John called four of his struggling readers to a table at the back of the room so he could coach them in word recognition. When John returned to the larger group, he asked them to agree or disagree in their

### Sample of observational notes

9:38 Small group continues. T is taking running record of child's reading. Others reading familiar books. Next, T coaches boy on sounding out *discovered*. Covers up word parts as he says remaining parts. T: Does that make sense? T: What is another way to say this part [cov with short o]? T passes out new book. T has students share what the word *creature* means. Ss: animals, monsters, dinosaurs, Dr. Frankenstein. 9:42

11/12 OT (On Task)	C/s/r Levels 123	r/t/a/r 4567	wr/t/c/or(indv) 4567	v/t/r/or-tt 4567
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response journal with a quote from the book. As the children were writing, he coached an English as a second language child with his answer and then told him he was going to call on him to share that answer with the class. After a few individuals shared their journal responses with the class, the class went to work preparing small-group presentations on questions and vocabulary related to the book to share the next day with the whole class.

In contrast, an intermediate teacher who relied on telling taught reading lessons to the whole class with a great deal of teacher talk, as in the following exchange:

Teacher: What kind of bird is an eaglet?

Without stopping for an answer, he continued,

Teacher: If you put *et*, or *ette* at the end of a word it refers to something being small. So an eaglet is a small eagle.

As the teacher read a basal story to the class, he frequently stopped to tell students about information in the story. As he continued to read aloud to the students from their basal, he stopped to explain the story to the class as opposed to asking them to explain it to him.

Teacher: The point of the story is that the father had to accept the fact that he would never have a son and should be happy with his daughter.

The overwhelming sense one gets in examining our observational notes is that some teachers feel so compelled to make sure that key information is discussed that they bring it up themselves, thereby robbing students of opportunities to test their own knowledge and skill acquisition, and themselves of opportunities to evaluate students' growth toward independence.

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This distinction is rendered all the more important by the consistent relationship we found between an emphasis on telling and lower student achievement at most grade levels.

### How is as important as what

We believe that the most interesting data from the larger study (Taylor et al., 2001) came from the observational data on classroom reading instruction. A consistent finding of the HLM analyses was that the more a teacher was coded as telling children information, the less the children grew in reading achievement. This finding is compatible with our earlier research which found that less-accomplished teachers engaged in much more telling than highly accomplished teachers (Taylor et al., 2000).

This does not mean that teachers should never tell students information; it would be impossible to teach without doing so. However, excessive amounts of “telling,” especially in situations where coaching students to come up with their own responses is possible, may rob children of the opportunity to take responsibility for their own skills and strategies. Telling is indicative of a strong teacher-directed stance, as opposed to a student-support stance toward teaching (e.g., coaching, modeling, and other forms of scaffolding). Our hope is that by receiving feedback on the incidence of telling in one’s literacy teaching, teachers may be able to shift somewhat on the continuum of teacher-to-student directedness if their data from the classroom observations suggest that this would be beneficial. This shift, in turn, will ideally lead to enhanced student performance. Over the subsequent years of the current project, as we provide teachers and schools with data on teaching practices tied to students’ performance, we plan to investigate the degree to which teaching practices at the classroom and the school level shift toward those practices identified as more effective.

Similarly, students in grade 1 demonstrated more growth in reading fluency the more they were coded as actively, as opposed to passively, responding to reading activities. Instead of listening to the teacher or engaging in reading turn taking or oral turn taking, these students were observed actually reading or writing more often than other students. Similar findings about the large amounts of time students were actually reading and writing were reported by Pressley

et al. (2001) in their study of exemplary first-grade teachers.

We did find some evidence for the differential impact of curricular activities across grade levels. Higher level questions emerged as a significant predictor of growth in grades 4–6, while word work emerged most clearly in kindergarten. In light of these findings and those of the National Reading Panel Report (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000), a gradual shift in emphasis may be warranted. However, this does not mean that comprehension should be delayed until grade 4 or that word work should end in the primary grades, only that some shift in emphasis seems warranted. Clearly more research is needed to help teachers determine the optimum balance between word work and comprehension work for their particular students at any given grade level.

Classroom literacy instruction needs to reflect best practices as identified in the research. In addition to *what* teachers teach, the findings at the classroom level in the current study in corroboration with earlier research suggest that *how* teachers teach is also important to consider when seeking to make changes in reading instruction to improve students’ reading achievement. The results of this study show that an overreliance on telling as an interaction mode, indicative of a strong teacher-directed stance, does not appear to be very effective for enhancing students’ reading growth. Currently, the improvement of children’s reading achievement is a major goal in the United States (Bush, 2001). Schools know that a wealth of information exists to help them move toward this goal, but putting all of the relevant pieces together remains a challenge. Ongoing professional development in which teachers work together within buildings to reflect on their practice is one important piece of the total package that is needed to ensure that “no child is left behind” (Bush, 2001).

To paraphrase, we appear headed on a march toward full literacy that includes all U.S. children in the parade. If we are serious about the metaphor of “leaving no child behind,” our data would suggest that we, as professionals, must possess the conviction, the knowledge, and the teaching techniques necessary to ensure that every child in that march is equipped with a “full

backpack” of skills, strategies, habits, and dispositions toward literacy.

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