


READERS, TEACHERS, LEARNERS



Michele L. Simpson

William G. Brozo

Expanding
Literacy in
Secondary
Schools

SECOND EDITION



Readers, Teachers, Learners

Expanding Literacy in Secondary Schools

Second Edition

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Merrill,
an imprint of Prentice Hall
Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey Columbus, Ohio



Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brozo, William G.

Readers, teachers, learners : expanding literacy in the secondary schools / William G. Brozo, Michele L. Simpson.—2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-02-315661-9

1. Reading (Secondary)—United States. 2. Language arts (Secondary)—United States. I. Simpson, Michele L. II. Title.

LB1632.B7 1995

428.4'071'273—dc20

94-16927

CIP

Editor: Linda James Scharp

Production Editors: Jonathan Lawrence and Louise N. Sette

Text Designer: STELLARVISIONS

Cover Designer: Brian Deep

Production Buyer: Deidra M. Schwartz

Electronic Text Management: Marilyn Wilson Phelps, Matthew Williams, Jane Lopez,
Karen L. Bretz

This book was set in Kuenstler 480, Avant Garde, and Swiss 721 by Prentice Hall and was printed and bound by Book Press, Inc., a Quebecor America Book Group Company. The cover was printed by Phoenix Color Corp.



© 1995 by Prentice-Hall, Inc.
A Simon & Schuster Company
Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

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Earlier edition © 1991 by Macmillan Publishing Company.

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN: 0-02-315661-9

Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited, *London*

Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty. Limited, *Sydney*

Prentice-Hall of Canada, Inc., *Toronto*

Prentice-Hall Hispanoamericana, S. A., *Mexico*

Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, *New Delhi*

Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., *Tokyo*

Simon & Schuster Asia Pte. Ltd., *Singapore*

Editora Prentice-Hall do Brasil, Ltda., *Rio de Janeiro*

Preface

As we put the finishing touches on this second edition, we once again realized how much more we could have said; how many more scenes of quality teaching and learning we could have shared; how many more literacy innovations we could have described. Four years have done little to alter our view that to publish is less an end point in the writing process than a place for rethinking, redefining, and planning for an even better text the next time.

As authors of this text, we remain readers, teachers, and learners who have learned from each other, from users of the first edition, and most of all, from our students. Our hope continues that the readers, teachers, and learners of this text will remain open to the mind-expanding possibilities and personal pleasures of change.

Although change and transition are obvious themes in this second edition, the overarching goal—to communicate to teachers *through* teachers—has been reinforced. With fresh and exciting reading, writing, and literacy research as a backdrop, we have tried in a collaborative spirit to empower teachers with the confidence to make their own best decisions about the learning that goes on in their classrooms. As in our first attempt, we have made a serious effort to avoid prescribing, offering “canned” answers, or demanding certain behaviors from teachers that ignore the realities of the everyday world of secondary schools, whose major goal is to teach content-area concepts.

We hope another clear message of the book is that teachers inform *us* as much as we inform *them*. In a very real sense, the growth and improvement of students’ language processes in secondary schools will depend on the strength of the transaction between teachers in higher education and teachers in public schools.

This edition includes even more actual teaching scenarios and examples than the first. We demonstrate the valuable lessons to be learned from those content-area teachers struggling and triumphing as they implement stimulating reading, writing, and learning strategies. Theory and research are embodied in these scenarios and examples, which provide glimpses of teachers making literacy learning and content acquisition work.

Assumptions Underlying the Reading and Writing Strategies in this New Edition

A major theme of this book is that teachers who employ language-based strategies are more likely to build active learners and expand literacy in secondary schools. Throughout the book we describe strategies that exploit students' beliefs and backgrounds and provide students with new, imaginative experiences that will help them find reasons to learn. The strategies we discuss demonstrate how teachers can move students to become active learners by building independence. Above all, the strategies in this book strive to make learning fun and accessible for all.

We believe students develop misconceptions about literacy and learning as a result of their experiences in school. The strategies and ideas in this second edition stem from the belief that students can become interested and enthusiastic users of literacy to expand their sense of reality and their sense of themselves. Students are touched and moved by learning when teachers bring together teaching and learning experiences in positive and authentic ways, when learning is meaning centered, when teachers and students work together to shape the learning environment, and when students are given real-world reasons to learn.

Several assumptions, therefore, underpin the strategies in this book. These assumptions form the theoretical foundation on which our ideas for teaching and learning rest.

1. Teaching is more than dispensing information, because learning is more than receiving and remembering information.

Learning is the construction of meaning, an active process on the part of the learner. Teaching is creating classroom contexts that support the acquisition of new knowledge through literacy.

2. A major goal of education should be the development of critical thinkers and active, independent learners.

Students should be provided opportunities to play active roles in the meaning-making process. Students should be engaged in learning experiences that help them critically evaluate their worlds and participate in active problem solving of real-world concerns.

3. To be literate is to use literacy as a tool for learning.

In supportive learning environments, students can learn to use literacy as a vehicle for meaningful and functional learning.

4. Content and process can be taught simultaneously.

Students should be led to see that *what* is learned is inextricably tied to *how* one learns.

Organization and Special Features of the Book

This text is designed to help you to teach your content more effectively and to help you develop independent learners who can think about your content in creative and critical ways. This text is also designed to help you envision the possibilities for exciting teaching and learning in your classroom. To this end, we have filled the book with actual, practical examples, teaching scenarios, and classroom dialogues. Using an informal tone, we share our own teaching experiences as well as those of many secondary classroom teachers like yourself. We provide many alternatives, not with the intent that you should adopt every one, but with the expectation that you will select the strategies that best suit your subject area, your students, and your teaching style.

New to this edition, Chapter 1 provides a thorough description of major trends in literacy, themes in this book, and principles of language-based teaching and learning, as well as a much expanded explanation of cooperative learning. Chapters 2 and 3 are critical in that they explain the processes involved in developing active learners. We recommend that you read these first three chapters before reading the others, because the remaining chapters build on this foundation.

Regardless of the content that you teach or plan to teach, each chapter can provide you with insights into effective classroom interactions and practical examples of teaching strategies. Even when these examples of strategies and classroom applications do not come from your particular subject area, they can be invaluable as guides for helping you modify instructional practices within your own classroom context. Therefore, we recommend that you read each one, and as you do, rather than implementing the strategies exactly as explained and presented here, consider how the strategies can be adapted to your content, students, classroom, and teaching style.

Woven throughout the 11 chapters of this edition are many common threads. For instance, although we devote an entire chapter to writing in the secondary school (Chapter 7), writing strategies—in combination with other literacy processes as vehicles for learning in a variety of classroom contexts—are offered in nearly every chapter. The same holds true for using young adult literature and trade books to engender interest and spice up content learning (Chapter 8).

Readers of this second edition will be especially pleased with all of the updated references to professional literature. In addition, we have added a major section on authentic assessment, including portfolio assessment/teaching, in Chapter 4. New also to this edition are the case study sections in Chapters 3 through 10. The case study format asks you to consider a particular problem or issue from an actual teaching scenario related to the content of the chapter. At the conclusion of

the chapter, the case study is revisited, and you are invited to offer teaching or problem-solving suggestions. This feature makes the second edition more interactive and hopefully a more useful text for secondary school teachers.

It is with great confidence that we stand behind the methods and strategies discussed within this book. In fact, many of the teaching scenarios and examples come from our own teaching and research experiences with middle school, junior high, and high school teachers and students. Other examples come from past students who have told us about or invited us to view their successful creation of literacy innovations or application of strategies.

We have taken great pains not to write another instructional recipe book that lists activities without connections to actual classroom environments, without a grounding in theory and research, without a focus on process. Dorothy Watson suggests that "instructional cookbooks carry teachers from one activity to the next, but do not empower them with knowledge that leads to flexibility in future decision making" (in Gilles et al., 1988). Instead, we have tried to provide the encouragement, strategies, and examples needed to help you transform your classroom world into a learning place where you and your students' mutual desire to learn will never disappear.

These opening remarks would be incomplete without a very special thanks to Jeff Johnston and Linda Scharp, our editors at Merrill. Without their unflagging confidence in us and their prescience in recognizing the need for secondary school teachers to become more knowledgeable of holistic literacy strategies, this second edition would never have become a reality. Thanks as well go out to our production coordinators, Jonathan Lawrence and Louise Sette, and to our copy editor, Luanne Dreyer Elliott. We are, of course, indebted to our diligent reviewers—Carolyn S. Andrews-Beck, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville; Gerald Calais, McNeese State University; J. Richard Chambers, Boston University; Patricia N. Chrosniak, Western Illinois University; Dennis J. Kear, Wichita State University; Lorita G. Manning, Baylor University; and Judith B. Schaumberg, Carthage College—whose helpful insights made this second edition a better text. We thank all the students and teachers whose experiences inspired us and whose wisdom mentored us, especially, Dr. Keith Thomas, Dr. Ned Ratekin, and Hannah Katherine Brozo. Finally, we thank with all our hearts the two special teachers to whom we are married, Carol and Tom, for their love and support during the past 4 years of writing.

In physics they call it the "butterfly effect"—small influences creating dramatic effects—derived from the idea that the mere flap of an insect's wing in your backyard can cause a hurricane on the other side of the globe. This book is dedicated to small influences that can bring about big changes in the way students and teachers in secondary schools interact and the quality of student learning.

Reference

- Gilles, C., Bixby, M., Crowley, P., Crenshaw, S., Henrich, M., Reynolds, R., & Pyle, D. (1988). *Whole language strategies for secondary students*. New York: Richard C. Owen.

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Readers, Teachers, Learners: An Introduction

A . . . plausible argument, substantiated over three hundred years of insight and research, is that knowing is an activity, not a condition or state, that knowledge implies the making of connections, not an inert body of information, that both teachers and students are learners, that discourse manifests and realizes the power to learn, and that teaching entails creating incentives and contexts for learning, not a reporting of data. Specifically, learning is the process of an individual's mind making meaning from the material of its experience.

—Knoblauch & Brannon (1983)

This book is about readers, teachers, and learners in the secondary school; it is about contexts for learning; and it is about how students can be supported in their use of language processes for learning course content and expanding their sense of self.

Our purpose for this chapter is fourfold: (a) to share our philosophy of literacy; (b) to build a case for why literacy processes should be integral to secondary-content classroom instruction; (c) to describe what we believe to be important principles of language-based teaching; and (d) to lay down the assumptions about literacy and learning underpinning the strategies and ideas contained in this text.