

Appendix G.1 - An Examination of Teacher Reflection

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Editor's Note

This appendix contains parts of Chapter Four of Rob Boody's dissertation to give the readers enough information to get the most out of chapter 8. The title of Rob's dissertation, which was completed in August, 1992 at Brigham Young University, is "An examination of the philosophical grounding of teacher reflection and one teacher's experience."

Results

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part is primarily descriptive, to give a feeling for how Dave Jensen teaches and how he thinks about teaching. This description is valuable in its own right. Indeed, *Among Schoolchildren* (Kidder, 1986) is one of the best books I have read on schooling, even though it presents little in the way of theory or explicit analysis. But the description is also a good base for the second part of the chapter, which presents six analytic themes derived in the course of the research.

A few caveats are in order. First, please remember that the names used here are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the participants. Second, these results are only part of what I recorded, which is in turn only part of what I saw, which is in turn only part of what was there to be seen. Third, even what seems to only be description is also interpretation. As the succeeding philosophy chapter will argue, there is no neutral or objective seeing, and an observer interprets a research situation by how he or she acts within the scene -by attending to one thing instead of something else, by what he or she thinks, records, and feels- as well as by later analytical processes. Fourth, therefore, readers should not assume that what I say is really what was there or the only way it could be seen. But, fifth, on the other hand, I did not make it all up, and I am presenting good evidence for what I have to say.

(In denying objectivity I do not want to simply substitute a radical subjectivity.) Finally, the intent of this chapter, and indeed the entire dissertation, is to open up and broaden the idea

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of teacher reflection. Towards that end, let me invite readers to join the process by examining their own experiences in the light of these results. Perhaps some ideas will occur that might be useful in making sense of teaching or life.

Setting a Context for Dave Jensen's Reflections

It is Tuesday, January 15, 1991, the first day of second semester at Seacrest Junior High School. I have a certain sense of excitement as I walk up to the doors in the middle of the school building. Part of the reason I am so excited is that my dissertation is really starting to happen, and this is the semester to do it in. But I am also energized by the discussion Dave Jensen and I had just yesterday. It was a Monday and school was out, at least for the students, as a one-day semester break. The teachers came in and used it as a planning period for the next semester. We both knew it would be the only time for us to talk at length in a theoretical or overview fashion, before details, actualities, practicalities, and daily teaching tasks took over our relationship. So I came to talk things out with him. He talked at length about what he would like to see in an ideal reading class, and I am interested to see what he will do today and this semester.

I come in a little late, about 8:40. All the students and Dave Jensen have their desks in a big circle, which takes up the circumference of the entire room. I slip into a chair near the door and behind the circle. Every desk has a poster board tag on it, with one of the following titles on it: Summarizer, Predictor, Clarifier, Question-Asker, Connector, Language Appreciator, or Teacher. I immediately recognize these as roles in the strategy known as *reciprocal reading*, because near the beginning of last semester Dave Jensen and I talked with a first year teacher who came to him for advice. The novice teacher had also talked about reciprocal reading. We both thought it sounded like a good idea. I imagine that Dave Jensen knew about it already, but this is the first I know of his implementing it. This is also a different way of doing reciprocal reading than what the novice teacher mentioned. In his depiction, only one student at a time was a Language Appreciator or Predictor, here, every student has a role.

The roles used today reflect his view of reading, especially of reading this piece of literature (the *Odyssey*). The Summarizer retells what happened. The Predictor thinks about what might happen next, or what might have happened if a character had acted differently. The Question-Asker asks questions in regards to the text, things that are not clear, or things that would help explicate the text, such as wondering why someone did a certain thing, etc. The Clarifier answers or guesses at answers to the questions posed by the Question-Asker. The Connector makes connections between the reading and his or her own life. The Language-Appreciator notes and explains any particularly noteworthy uses of language, a particularly apt role for the *Odyssey*. And the Teacher calls on the other students and records their participation. Dave's only role, in theory, is to read aloud, but in fact, he steps in rather often.

Dave is reading the *Odyssey* aloud as I come in. At about 8:50 he stops reading and says,

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“Time to discuss it.” Dave Jensen asks the Teacher [Jennifer, the student filling the role of Teacher in the reciprocal reading activity] to call on Summarizers first, and especially those who didn’t participate much last time, because they should all be prepared now. The Teacher, Jennifer, has a class roll in front of her, with marks for those who had participated last class period, so she calls on a Summarizer who had not. The student does a fair job retelling the story of Scylla and Charybdis. Then Dave requests the Teacher to ask another student for more detail. The Teacher asks Teresa, who adds more detail. I could see Teresa’s journal and she had a full column of notes. Then a Question-Asker is called, who asks a question about the reading, and a Clarifier is called to try and answer it. On the second round of question and answer, the Clarifier who was called stumbles around a bit, until Dave tells him, “No one knows, just make a guess.” He seems to loosen up a bit after that and makes a good guess. Dave then asks a Predictor to predict how a character might act differently in one of the situations. He says, “I don’t know.” He replies, “Of course you don’t know, predict.” Then he restates his request. This sort of thing goes on a while longer.

Dave is having to take an active role to make sure things happen. The students seem to be having problems with Clarifying and Predicting. Many of Dave’s students do not see reading as other than a mechanical fact-extraction process, and Clarifying and Predicting require students to view reading in another way. Part of the reason Dave wants to use Reciprocal Reading is to get the students to experience aspects of good reading they might not otherwise do.

Then several Connectors are called, who are in the spirit of their role. One connects this part of the *Odyssey* to several Bible stories, another connects very well to a recent international event. Next, Language Appreciators are asked for. Numerous hands shoot up and Debbie is called. She reads a line of the *Odyssey* that she thinks is particularly good use of language. Four other pieces of the poem are given, by four other students. Dave frequently prompts each Language Appreciator to explain why the passage he or she chose is a good use of language.

I wonder if Connecting is easier than Clarifying and Predicting, or if it is just the particular students involved, but two out of the three Connectors said things that showed they were personally connecting with the *Odyssey*. Language Appreciation also seems relatively easy for the students, although they seem to feel it self-evident what the appreciation is and were hesitant to share their understandings.

At about 9:15 Dave has the students switch roles. To do this, each student writes his or her name on the role card they have been using. Then they pass the card on and receive one from another student. They are also to take notes about the next passage from the *Odyssey* that will help them in their new role in the next column in their journal. Dave further reminds them to “think on paper” (i.e., in their journals). Dave wants each student to try a variety of roles to broaden their horizons in responding to literature. Few of them seem to do naturally many of these aspects in their own reading. Thinking on paper also relates to Dave’s overall desire to break them out of the rut of mechanical reading, to help them be more carefully prepared and not as vague in their responses.

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Then Dave reads another section of the *Odyssey*, that of Antinous's speech to the other suitors. He then asks the students if they should start right then on the discussion or if he should continue reading. They respond with a quick and wide-spread outcry to start the discussion right then. This discussion lasts the remaining minutes of the period. The bell rings and all of the students file out.

The next period, third period, is Dave's preparation period. He usually spends the time preparing materials, ideas, and grading, or attending to the numerous, small, miscellaneous errands teachers have to do. As soon as we are in the office, he starts to reflect out loud on what just took place, without any prompting from me. He said, "It went better than last time, but still not lively. Too squelched? Too many kids?" He suggests some possible alternatives: getting them in smaller groups with a reader, or reading all together and discussing in groups, or giving them a checklist so that each student could do any and all of them. He mused aloud on what to do. "Would they keep their roles in the small groups? Or be able to say anything and then label it, sort of meta-cognitive. I'm trying to nudge them out of ruts but don't want to stifle their spontaneity. How to do it?" The bell rings for fourth period. Dave's first class of the day, described above, is a ninth grade English class. The other four classes he teaches are all reading classes. The ninth grade English class goes all school year, but the reading classes last only one semester. Therefore, after the bell rings for the start of fourth period, he introduces himself to the class and informs of what course they are in. Then he begins a get-to-know-you-and-your-name activity. He has everyone tell their names and something about themselves using a word with the same letter as their first name. He starts with "I'm Mr. Jensen and I like jazz." Then the next person says his name and what he likes, and then repeats. The third person does hers and the previous two and so on till the end, whereupon Dave does the whole list. He also spot-checks several students on their ability to remember the entire list. I participate in this activity and learn many of the student's names.

The primary goal of Dave's reading course is to help reluctant readers become active readers. His students can be viewed as belonging to one of four categories: (a) those who read well but don't read, (b) those who read poorly and don't read, (c) those who read well and do read, and (d) those who read poorly but do read. The last category is pretty small, as is category c.

One might ask why any of those groups would be in his class, especially category c. The answer is that placement in his class is not always voluntary for the students, and sometimes good readers who read refuse to do their work in regular English classes and so end up in his class. One good example I can think of is Thomas. He is undoubtedly intelligent, and an accomplished reader. We saw him in the class reading such things as *Metamagical Themas*, a biography of Lenin, and a 'C' programming manual. He refused, however, to do anything in his regular English class telling me, for example, that the way his teacher approached poetry took all the life out of it so his parents forced him to take this class. He also refused to do any of the "busy work" that Dave requires by which Thomas meant any of the writing about his reading that Dave tried to stimulate and Thomas flunked

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his class as well and left at term.

I don't actually know of any that fully fit category d, but there are some, like Susan, who may read one type of book frequently but be otherwise a fairly poor reader. Susan only read Harlequin romances, so it was Dave's desire to help her to broaden her horizons during the class.

Category b contains the largest number of students. Category a is not so populous as b, but more than c or d. One example is Greg. He could read, and read well, but he had not read a book since first grade. Apparently he entered school being able to read, but his teacher told him that he was too young to know how to read and that instead of reading he needed to learn all the sounds and symbols with the rest of the class. He thought to himself then, "Well, if she doesn't want me to read, I won't." And he hasn't. During the year he was in Dave's class he began to read, although it took months before he read much. By the end of the year he had read a number of 300+ page books.

How exactly do students find their way into Dave's reading classes? To see the class in perspective, there are a variety of kinds of English classes available. As well as regular English classes, there is a behavior disorder unit for students with serious behavior problems and a resource (special education) class for those that meet those criteria. The school also offers enriched English, college prep, and AP classes. Dave's class is different than all of the above. His course is meant as an intervention, to remediate kids who aren't succeeding in regular English classes but who don't meet the criteria of behavior disorder or special education. For that reason her reading class lasts only a semester instead of a year. And Dave is not required to cover a particular content.

Most of Dave's students are referred by regular English teachers who have students they think Dave could help. The school counselors are also often involved. Parents play a role as well, as they must approve their child's schedule, and in some cases request their son or daughter be put in Dave's class.

After the completion of the name learning activity, Dave tells the class that he will read to them. He lets them know ahead of time that they will be writing a letter to me about the chapter he is going to read. He advises them to listen carefully and to do a lot of thinking about what they are going to hear. Dave begins to read the first chapter of Robert Newton Peck's *A Day No Pigs Would Die* (1972). Peck is a writer of quality young adult fiction. Dave starts, "I should of been in school that April day." His normally brisk, pleasant voice takes on a louder, more forceful tone as he reads for the group. No doubt part of this is to provide sufficient volume for all to hear. Partly I think it also suggests a desire to be dramatic, to pull in these students who don't like to read, and are probably not used to listening.

But instead I was up on the ridge near the old spar mine above our farm, whipping the gray trunk of a rock maple with a dead stick, and hating Edward Thatcher. During recess, he'd pointed at my clothes and made sport of them. Instead of tying into him, I'd turned tail and run off. And when Miss Malcolm rang the bell to call us back inside, I was halfway home.

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Picking up a stone, I threw it into some bracken ferns, hard as could. Someday that was how hard I was going to light into Edward Thatcher, and make him bleed like a stuck pig. I'd kick him from one end of Vermont to the other, and sorry him good. I'd teach him not to make fun of Shaker ways. He'd never show his face in the town of Learning, ever again. No, sir.

A painful noise made me whip my head around and jump at the same time. When I saw her, I knew she was in bad trouble. It was the big Holstein cow, one of many, that belonged to our near neighbor, Mr. Tanner. This one he called "Apron" because she was mostly black, except for the white along her belly which went up her front and around her neck like a big clean apron.

She was his biggest cow, Mr. Tanner told Papa, and his best milker. And he was fixing up to take her to Rutland Fair, come summer. As I ran toward her, she made her dreadful noise again. I got close up and saw why. Her big body was pumping up and down, trying to have her calf. She'd fell down and there was blood on her foreleg, and her mouth was all thick and foamy with yellow-green spit. [I hear several comments like "ugh," and "gross," and several laughs from the would-be tough guys.] I tried to reach my hand out and pat her head; but she was wild-eyed mean, and making this breezy noise almost every breath.

Dave lowers the book and asks the class: "Are you seeing this? Go to the movies in your head as you listen."

Turning away from me, she showed me her swollen rump. [Several snickers echo around the room.] Her tail was up and arched high, whipping through the air with every heave of her back. Sticking out of her was the head and one hoof of her calf. His head was so covered with blood and birthsoop that I had no way telling he was alive or dead. Until I heard him bawl.

Dave stops reading and asks the class "What could 'purchase' mean here? It surely doesn't mean its usual meaning of buying something. What other word could you substitute in its place?"

He was so covered with slime, and Apron was so wandering, there was no holding to it. Besides, being just twelve years old, I weighed a bit over a hundred pounds. Apron was comfortable over a thousand, and it wasn't much of a tug for her. As I went down, losing my grip on the calf's neck, her hoof caught my shinbone and it really smarted. The only thing that made me get up and give the whole idea another go was when he bawled again. I'd just wound up running away from Edward Thatcher and running away from the schoolhouse. I was feathered if I was going to run away from one darn more thing. I needed a rope. But there wasn't any, so I had to make one. It didn't have to be long, just strong. Chasing old Apron through the next patch of prickles sure took some fun out of the whole business. I made my mistake of trying to take my trousers off as I ran. No good. So I sat down in the prickles, yanked 'em off over my boots, and caught up to Apron. After a few bad tees, I got one pantleg around her calf's head and knotted it snug. "Calf, I said to him, "you stay up your ma's hindside and you're about to choke. So you might as well choke getting yourself

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born." Whatever old Apron decided that I was doing to her back yonder, she didn't take kindly to it. So she started off again with me in the rear, hanging on to wait Christmas, and my own bare butt and privates [snickers again] catching a thorn with every step. And that calf never coming one inch closer to coming out. But when Apron stopped to heave again I got the other pantleg around a dogwood tree that was about thick as a fencepost.

Now only three things could happen: My trousers would rip. Apron would just uproot the tree. The calf would slide out.

Dave breaks into the story again. "Predict. What do you think is going to happen here?" Students shouted out things like: "The calfs gonna die." "The boy is going to die." "That boy is an idiot."

But nothing happened. Apron just stood shaking and heaving and straining and never moved forward a step. I got the other pantleg knotted about the dogwood; and like Apron, I didn't know what to do next. Her calf bawled once more, making a weaker noise than before. But all old Apron did was heave in that one place. "You old bitch," I yelled at her, grabbing a blackberry cane that was as long as a bullwhip and big around as a broom handle, "you move that big black smelly ass, you hear?" I never hit anybody, boy or beast, as I hit that cow. I beat her so hard I was crying. Where I held the big cane, the thorns were chewing up my hands real bad. But it only got me madder. I kicked her. And stoned her. I kicked her again one last time, so hard in the udder that I thought I heard her grunt. Both her hind quarters sort of hunkered down in the brush. Then she started forward, my trousers went tight, I heard a rip and a calf bawl. And a big hunk of hot stinking stuff went all over me. Some of it was calf, some of it wasn't. As I went down under the force and weight of it, I figured something either got dead or got born.

Dave again inquired of the class, "What do you think of the boy now?"

All I knew was that I was marled up in a passel of wet stuff, and there was a strong cord holding me against something that was very hot and kicked a lot. I brushed some of the slop away from my eyes and looked up. And there was Apron, her big black head and her big black mouth licking first me and then her calf.

But she was far from whole. Her mouth was open and she was gasping for air. She stumbled once. I thought for sure I was going to wind up being under a very big cow. The noise in her throat came at me again, and her tongue lashed to and fro like the tail of a clock. It looked to me as if there was something in her mouth. She would start to breathe and then, like a cork in a bottle, some darn thing in there would cut it off.

Her big body swayed like she was dizzy or sick. As the front of her fell to her knees, her head hit my chest as I lay on the ground, her nose almost touching my chin. She had stopped breathing!

Her jaw was locked open so I put my hand into her mouth, but felt only her swollen tongue. I

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stretched my fingers up into her throat and there it was! A hard ball, about apple-size. It was stuck in her windpipe, or her gullet. I didn't know which and didn't care. So I shut my eyes, grabbed it, and yanked. Somebody told me once that a cow won't bite. That somebody is as wrong as sin on Sunday. I thought my arm had got sawed off part way between elbow and shoulder. She bit and bit and never let go. She got to her feet and kept on biting. That devil cow ran down off that ridge with my arm in her mouth, and dragging me half-naked with her. What she didn't do to me with her teeth, she did with her front hoofs.

It should have been broad daylight, but it was night. Black night. As black and as bloody and as bad as getting hurt again and again could ever be. It just went on and on. It didn't quit.

He closes the book and talks to the class again. "What happened there?"

After a discussion he asks them to write a letter to me about what they just heard. "Tell him what you were thinking as you heard it, what you wondered about, what it reminded you of, what struck you about it. Say something that grabbed you, or what you noticed about the writing. Rob will write back to you."

Dave further tells them to use correct letter form, which he describes verbally, and also writes on the board. In addition, the students are to include one or more of the following suggestions: What did you visualize? What did you feel? What part did you like best, and why? What part struck you as important? What did you notice about the writing? What did you experience as it was being read? What questions do you have at this point? What predictions do you have about what might happen next? What did it remind you of? He also writes these questions on the board. As the students write, I ponder what I have seen so far today. What Dave did this day could be labeled under the rubric of "whole language."

But I think it is instructive to note that he was not trained to be a whole language teacher. He was trained in skill and drill and mastery learning, and only came to what he does now as a teacher over time through his reflections on teaching. It is also important to note that although he has read widely in whole language (and other) views of reading and writing, and taken courses and taught them, he is not a slave to any one view or person in the field. He freely borrows ideas from others but usually adapts them in the process. He invents as well. And he thinks deeply about the needs of his students.

He originally received a B.S. in secondary English and then taught junior high English. He noticed that his students read poorly. He tried to teach what he thought were wonderful works of literature, even for that age group, and students couldn't read them. Dave thought, "Wow, we've got to start a little bit earlier." That's when he started getting interested in teaching reading.

Several years later he was teaching elementary school. For teaching reading he was following a skill and drill approach, as he had been taught to do in school. In this approach, reading is conceived of as discrete skills to be broken down into finite behavioral objectives. For each skill there would be a pretest, a posttest, and remediation if the students hadn't

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mastered it. Dave borrowed a book from his principal that looked interesting. He started to read that book and read all night, finally going to bed at 4:30 in the morning. The book was Reading Miscue Inventory (Goodman & Burke, 1972), and it was the most exciting professional book he had ever read.

The message of the book to him was that the mistakes a teacher sees happening in reading are not mistakes at all, they are miscues. That is, they show how a student is thinking and act as a window into his or her head. They show what a student is cueing into. None of the “mistakes” are random; they are based on something. As Dave puts it, “That just blew me away.” It was a difficult book to understand, but it gave Dave the motivation to grapple with the ideas and to implement them in his classrooms. “I tried for eleven years to make sense out of it and to try some of those things just in that one little book. You know, it never occurred to me to write to the author or the publisher for more information. Not until I’ve gotten into writing myself have I realized that I, even though I was the teacher, had to go through the same evolution my students do to learn that there is a human being on the other side of that blackprint.”

He asked about the book at the local university while taking graduate classes and also asked around the school district in which he taught. No one knew much about the book; the most information he received was, “Well, I think those people are somewhere in Arizona.”

He had become very proficient at mastery learning. He was awarded Teacher of the Year in another state. He had students who were at the bottom of a school that was itself was at the bottom of the eleven junior high schools in the district. In his two years there, he brought his students up to the middle of the pack on standardized tests. It looked really good. “But you know what?” he said, “The kids didn’t like to read, and it finally got through my thick skull. So what if they can master at 80 percent or better at cause-and-effect, so what if they can break down words, so what if they can do this, that and the other. If they still won’t touch a book with a ten-foot pole, what have you accomplished?” At the same time he was still trying to make sense out of the Goodman and Burke book, without any support or background knowledge.

At this time Dave was really searching. Even though he was doing what anybody would consider good things, he did not feel he was meeting his goals of helping readers. But then, in 1984 in Secondary Reading, he saw an advertisement for a ten-day workshop by these authors. He went down to the workshop for 10 days. In his own words: “It just changed everything. Everything made so much sense. I took 85 pages of notes. And I have gone over and over those notes countless times. And things have even made more sense as I’ve experienced some of it.” He heard Ken and Yetta Goodman and Dorothy Watson conduct the seminar on Miscue Analysis and whole language. He met the other people attending the workshop who were also struggling, who were going through the same kind of searching and struggles he was, and others who were more advanced and had a lot of experience and were coming just for a refresher, one at a nearby university who was doing exciting things in Dave came back ready to set the world on fire. He had been given their name of some whole language. Dave contacted her and began going to a whole language support group.

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Seven years later he still attends almost every month. The other members are mainly teachers also trying to make sense out of these philosophies of language learning and how such assumptions impact instruction and learners. A professor or two often acts as mentor.

The school bell rings, releasing me from my reverie. The kids file noisily out into an even noisier hallway. Those students assigned first lunch are off to eat, those with second lunch have one more class before lunch. Dave's fifth hour class has first lunch.

The two of us ate our lunch in his room. Dave rarely eats much, often a small can of juice, a piece of fruit, and a piece of bread. During the 25 minutes allotted for lunch, we talk and he further prepares for the next three classes of remedial reading. There have been times we have talked in general, but more usually we talk about specific students and activities. He often changes what he does in the following three classes by how things go in the fourth period class. We often talk while he is grading or running errands around the school.

Fifth period has more students than the other sections, and the name game takes so long they have less time to write a letter. Sixth period, it seems, is the one to worry about this semester—they seem unexcited by his reading, and make unrelated comments. For example, while Dave is talking to the class, Grant belligerently yells "Why am I here?" not once but many times. Another student, Finette, can't remember a thing about the chapter. In sixth period, students finish the name game quicker because there are fewer students, so Dave has them draw a picture of the most poignant part of the chapter for them, and also ask any questions they have about the class. Seventh period goes much like fourth period did.

After school is out, Dave tells me that, overall, the day went much better than he expected. As I sat in his room while he filled out the attendance sheets, I began to think about what I have seen today and what we talked about yesterday. Yesterday, Dave began our discussion by opening the large blue lab notebook in which he keeps his thoughts and writings and notes and says, "I did some thinking over Christmas holiday—totally colored by how much time I spend [doing school related work], feelings of lack of valuing for what I do [by others], and my inundation—so it may not "work." I could see a date written in his notebook—December 30. So I thought to myself, yes, this is a time when he has more time to himself and is released from the daily grind of school. It is also New Years, a time when people reflect back and take stock and make plans for the future. But under the hope of what he could do to help all of his students better lurks a couple of his longtime bugaboos: he often feels burdened by the amount of time and emotional energy teaching takes and the lack of appreciation.

His energy and enthusiasm and confidence built as he continued. "My question was, What would the dream reading program look like in junior high school to really make a difference for the kids? It is not a dichotomy, but I see two general types of kids along a continuum: those who are proficient readers but are reluctant or not into reading, and the less skilled in reading. I need to do something to address the needs of both. To work this out I asked myself two questions: One, what would the students feel like when they left this ideal program, and two, what could they do?"

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“Such a program would have this characteristic: the student would feel competent. It seems to me that many of my students do not read because they do not think they can. But I’m nervous about them simply feeling confident, because I have some students who feel they are competent and are not. So they should both feel confident and show they are competent. But to whom? Probably to me. I also have a distorted view of the world, as do these students who mistake their reading competence in either direction, but I work with other kids and teachers and so have wider horizons.”

Turning to the notes in his daybook, he read, “Behaviors the students should exhibit:

- select a book enjoyable for them to read
- figure out hard words (sounds like English pronunciation)
- also figure out meaning
- be intrigued by words, want to know things, be learners of language (this one is really idealistic, not basic)
- support other readers, be in a community
- learn from print
- formulate meaningful, well-formulated ideas
- infer from clues
- build cultural literacy, be exposed to all kinds of wondrous writing
- be able to discuss ideas from reading
- make meaning from print (this one is basic)
- concentrate while reading and writing
- give up negative attitudes towards reading and writing (this is really pie in the sky).”

Dave continues, “I’m thinking of rethinking the writing part and renaming the class, because writing is integral to reading and literacy. Maybe I should start more basic, with a good sentence, a well-formed paragraph (a meaningless phrase)? But I need to be careful it is still authentic. It should be a reading and writing class, and help kids be competent, proficient, and feel they can handle the demands of both reading and writing.”

From other discussions I know that he sees reading, writing, listening, and speaking all as aspects of literacy. He often encounters resistance from students who don’t want to write. They usually don’t want to read either, but if it is a reading class they are at least willing to do a minimal amount for a grade. But they seem to feel that writing should not be required in a reading class.

The need for authenticity is part of one of his underlying themes. That is, Dave does not want to impose either reading or writing tasks on students just as skill builders, but only in the context of doing important things. At this point in our discussion, Dave began grading exercises from the end of the previous semester (grades don’t have to be in till the end of the week). The next hour or so of our discussion took place as he graded. Because of the pressure of his work, we often talk while he does other things. Experienced teachers seem to develop the ability to multi-task, to do more than one thing at a time. Such teachers often have learned “tricks” to get things done faster as well.

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While continuing to grade papers, Dave continued, "Then I sat down and thought specifically about how I would bring these goals to pass. First, I would have everyone read, and decide which type they were. I would not use the term "reluctant reader." I would put them in a matrix: reluctant yes/no, skilled yes/no. There are a few in each category but most are reluctant."

I chimed in at this point, "And it's even more complicated if we bring in writing. What about the ones who are not so bad at reading but are poor or reluctant writers?" I was here thinking of Thomas as an example, who was an excellent and non-reluctant reader but who would not put pen to paper.

Dave noted that some of the students are really pretty capable, but they don't feel they are and so do not act as if they are in most circumstances. Then he began to detail tactics to bring his desired goals to pass. "I would like to have lots of group sharing of books to read. If they are reading they will have some to share. I will introduce lots of books and provide hooks." Sometimes he introduces books simply by telling about them but more often he tells about a book and reads short selections from it. Occasionally he reads an entire chapter, as with *A Day No Pigs Would Die*. He asks the students to maintain a sheet in the class journal to record books they might like to read in the future. Any of the books he shares are good candidates for this list. Sometimes students come up after he shares a book wanting to check it out right then.

Then he says, "I will provide lots of class time to read." Many days the students read for about thirty minutes, silently and individually, in a book of their own choosing. Some days the activities planned do not permit individual reading, but there are occasional days where the class reads the entire period. He also requires as homework, usually the only homework they do get, that each student read half an hour a night five days a week.

Along with these other pieces Dave wants to "have book discussion groups, not necessarily group books. Each student could share the book they are reading, tell an interesting part, read aloud, tell why they chose that part, discuss issues raised, and have some intellectual discussion." A group book is where all or part of a class reads the same book and discusses it at certain set points along the way. Dave does this once a semester usually, using three different sets of books to choose from every semester.

Group books often used include *Deathwatch*, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, *The Book of Three*, *The Outsiders*, and *A Summer to Die*. Dave continues his list: "I want to have lots of probing of thinking. They just must think here. It is much easier for teachers if students don't think; they don't have to deal with hard questions. I will support the less proficient readers. Not that they will know who is in which group. And I will help all of them reflect on their reading, of course." He sighed. "It sounds so wonderful, but how to pull it off? I have always wanted to do it, at least since learning about whole language."

Returning to his list, Dave says, "We need to do more oral reading. They need to become more confident in that area." I throw in, "Most can't or won't."

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Dave said, "I've been having them read into a tape recorder. Some like to do it in the classroom [at the cubicle set aside for that and for conferences], others like to do it in the hall, and others like to read to other people while recording in the hall." He initially had them do this reading to give him a quick evaluation of their oral reading abilities. He gives the students extra points if they read five minutes a day out loud at home. Next on his list was, "Cloze experiences. If not overdone, they can have a very good impact on developing the ability to see if one's reading is making sense, to use context clues, and in guessing what hard words mean. You get a lot of mileage out of Cloze as far as thinking is concerned." Even though Cloze can be a part of traditional skill and drill reading development methods, Dave does not just reject it out of hand. Instead he has tried Cloze exercises and observed their effects.

After Cloze, Dave moves on to "Retelling. Could be that I'm expecting too much too soon to get them into reflecting. Some don't even know what's in the text, like Kent. That kid doesn't know what he's reading." Dave had checked on Kent as he was reading *Deathwatch*. Kent told him nothing, and responded to Dave's prompts with "I don't like to think as I read."

"Retelling helps students be determined to get meaning. So many of them just keep going on even if it makes no sense to them, they see it as not their problem."

"I wonder how or where they got that?" I wonder. Dave thinks that having students reflect is crucial to reading. But it is also true that if they don't pull anything out of the reading to reflect on, then reflection doesn't make much sense. And he does have students who have trouble getting anything out of their reading. Kent is a very good, or should we say bad, example. As Dave puts it, he has defined reading simply as seeing words and turning pages. Nothing else happens; there is no human connection. I still wonder how students become like that, that they can "read" and get nothing and not worry or care about it. I imagine that the artificiality and coercive nature of schooling has a lot to do with it. At this point Dave finished grading, and I prepared to leave Dave to more grading from last semester and more preparation for the new one.

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