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## Organization and Management of Language Arts Teaching: Classroom Environments, Grouping Practices, and Exemplary Instruction

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### INTRODUCTION

A major concern of teachers is organization and management of their language arts programs. Teachers are able with appropriate professional development to integrate cutting-edge strategies into their literacy curriculum, but have a difficult time putting the different pieces of the program together in their school day. In this chapter we attempt to review research that could help professionals with management issues. We examine research areas specifically dealing with the organization and management of language arts instruction, and also focus on theory and research about exemplary practice in the language arts, since this line of work can inform and improve organization and management of language arts teaching. Our purpose is to raise awareness, provide implications for classroom practice, and suggest topics for future research. To accomplish this goal, this chapter is divided into topics that answer some of our questions concerning research on the organization and management of language arts programs:

1. How is student behavior and achievement affected by the physical design of the classroom environment, for example, how are space and materials used in language arts instruction?
2. How do grouping practices in language arts instruction affect student behavior and achievement?
3. How is student behavior affected by different social settings during language arts instruction?

4. What can we learn from research and theory about exemplary practice in language arts instruction to enhance organization and management of programs?
5. What does a case study of an exemplary language arts program look like that is based on the findings from a national investigation?

### THE IMPACT OF THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT IN LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOMS

Historically, theorists and philosophers such as Froebel and Pestalozzi have emphasized the importance of the physical environment in supporting young children's learning. Montessori (1965) advocated a carefully prepared classroom environment to promote independent learning and recommended that each kind of material in the environment have a specific learning objective. The nature and quality of the literacy environment plays a central role in literacy learning and the acquisition of literacy behaviors and attitudes. Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin (1990) observed, "No one will debate the idea that a rich literacy environment is helpful for achievement in literacy" (p. 162).

Barker (1968, 1978) is well known for his pioneering work in the field of ecological psychology. One major tenet of ecological psychology states that environment is linked to human behavior in lawful and predictable ways—meaning that what happens in an environment can be explained using theoretically derived principles grounded in the collection and analysis of empirical data. For several decades, Barker studied the connection between environment and human behavior by focusing attention on a unit of study known as the "behavior setting." A behavior setting was essentially defined as a place or location where people come together to engage in predominantly predictable behaviors. As a consequence of this definition, Barker (1978) examined the significance of environment in a variety of behavioral settings such as offices, shops, classrooms, stadiums, museums, grocery stores, etc. and found that each of these environments elicited stable, predictable sets of human behaviors.

Barker's (1968) study of human behaviors yielded three generalizations that have influenced the study of human behavior and ecology: (1) human behavior changes from setting to setting to meet the requirements of each setting, (2) the behavior of people in each setting is more similar than different, and (3) each person's behavior tends to be consistent over time in the same or similar setting.

A study about literacy-rich environments and student literacy behavior (Neuman & Roskos, 1997) substantiates the findings by Barker concerning the effects of the literacy environment and human behavior. In this investigation, the researchers describe in vivid detail the necessary and critical connection between classroom literacy environments and human interactions related to literacy acquisition in the classroom. They assert that classroom environments, which are rich in oral language, reading, and writing experiences, provide opportunities for young children to become involved in literacy-related events. It is not only the environment, but also the human interactions in classrooms that determine in what way, how long, or how often children engage in using literacy-related tools in classrooms for a variety of purposes (Neuman & Roskos, 1992). From a Vygotskian (Vygotsky, 1978) perspective, children use available literacy tools including furnishings, books, paper, and writing tools in everyday problem-solving situations while interacting with peers, teachers, or other available cognitive mentors. As children interact socially with a literacy-rich environment and with significant others, they begin to internalize the literacy processes and practices they observe, and it becomes a part of their behavior. Researchers have found that "children's learning about literacy is integrally tied with practical action, resulting from their need to control, manipulate, and function in their environment" (Neuman & Roskos, 1997, p. 10). Consequently, the context of the language

arts classroom is viewed as inseparable from the child's activity and their interactions with others in the classroom environment. These researchers conclude (Neuman and Roskos, 1997) that classroom learning contexts should support literacy learning by providing opportunities for two kinds of literacy learning: (1) situated learning in authentic contexts with real problems to solve using literacy tools, and (2) structured contexts for teaching children factual and conceptual knowledge about literacy.

Similar to many other behavioral settings, early childhood and elementary language arts classroom environments have been shown to elicit stable, predictable human behaviors (Day & Libertini, 1992; Neuman & Roskos, 1992, 1997). Stable and predictable human behaviors within language arts classroom settings are composed of three interlocking elements (Cambourne, 2001): (1) the presence and organization of inanimate physical objects, (2) ongoing routines, and (3) behaviors and settings in which teachers and students interact.

### THE PRESENCE AND ORGANIZATION OF INANIMATE LITERACY-RELATED PHYSICAL OBJECTS IN LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOMS

It is almost accepted as axiomatic that physical environments have a substantial effect on children's learning and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1978; Garling & Evans, 1991; Kennedy, 1991; Long, Peters, & Garduque, 1985; Nash, 1981). Holmes and Cunningham (1995) found that very young preschool children, ages 3–4, evidenced a keen awareness of their classroom environments. These researchers found that children could, by looking at classroom photographs, identify appropriate activities for spaces in the classroom as well as draw their classrooms representing these activity spaces. In another study, Kershner and Pointon (2000) asked 70 five- and six-year-old children questions using the Individualized Classroom Environmental Questionnaire, to express their views about their classroom environments as places for working and learning. The children expressed strong views about grouping schemes, seating arrangements, wall displays, general tidiness, noise levels, and choices to work alone or in collaboration with others, to name only a few.

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Research over the last two decades has provided plentiful and pertinent information about the design and implementation of print-rich classroom environments. Despite the widespread acceptance and awareness among teachers and children and the abundance of research information available, the findings of current research indicate that implementation of "print rich classroom environments" is lagging well behind what is known (Taylor, Blum, & Logsdon, 1986; Neuman & Celano, 1997, 2001). Teacher educators, teachers, and school administrators need to understand at a deeper intellectual level how to assess the design of classroom literacy environments, which strongly supports instruction, if they are to further their understanding of what a "print rich" classroom environment includes.

A study by Wolfersberger, Reutzel, Sudweeks, and Fawson (2004) systematically reviewed 223 articles, chapters, books, etc., examining the characteristics of "print rich" classrooms to develop an instrument for assessing the print-richness of early childhood and elementary language arts classrooms. They developed a model from the findings of this literature review for implementing print-rich language arts classroom environments shown in Fig. 21.1.

This model depicts the process of implementing a print-rich classroom environment beginning with "provisioning" the classroom environment with literacy tools. Once provisioned, the model speaks to an interactive relationship between positioning or arranging the literacy tools around the classroom space for interactive use by children and teachers in the environment.

Weinstein (1981) was one of the first researchers to report a synthesis of research on the physical environment of schools and classrooms, with attention to how and if the elements within

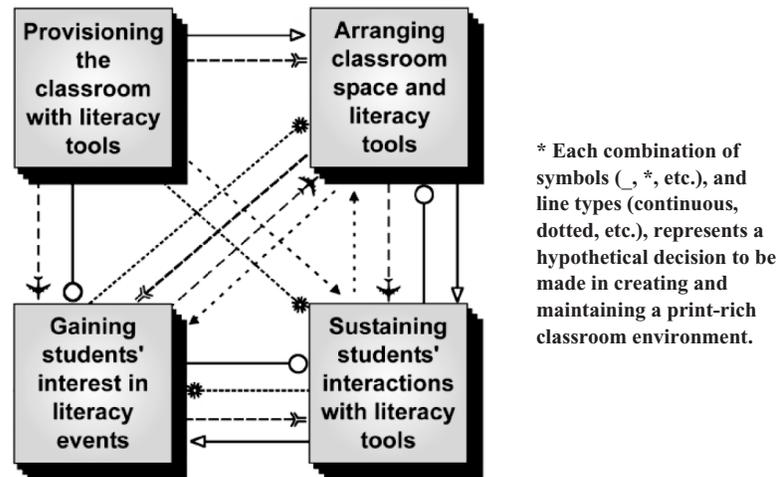


FIG. 21.1. Interactive relationship among the four dimensions of print-rich classroom literacy environments.\*

the physical environment influenced children's opportunities to engage in learning. Recent research has provided significant insights into how the language arts classroom environment influences children's opportunities to actively engage in literacy learning.

### THE EFFECTS OF PROVIDING LITERACY-RELATED TOOLS IN LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOMS

Many past surveys have shown a paucity of access to literacy-related objects in classrooms, including access to books (Fractor, Woodruff, Martinez, & Teale, 1993; McGill-Franzen, Allington, Yokoi, & Brooks, 1999; Morrow, 1990; Neuman, 1999). In fact, Fractor et al. (1993) found that only 4% of classroom libraries were well stocked with books and other print materials and that most classroom libraries, 89%, were characterized as "basic." Several other studies have examined the influence of literacy-related objects in classrooms and play centers on children's literacy learning and literacy interactions (Morrow, 1990; Vukelich, 1989).

Vukelich (1989) enriched a flower shop play center with receipts, cash register, loan application forms, sales forms, etc. Morrow (1990) created a veterinary center with context-appropriate nonliteracy-related props as well as literacy-related objects including books and medical record forms. These early investigations into the effects of infusing play settings with literacy-related objects yielded significant increases in children's literacy-focused play behaviors.

In a study with preschoolers, the researchers investigated how the presence and arrangement of ordinary, inanimate literacy objects in their classrooms influenced young children's literacy behaviors during free play. The researchers designed an experiment in which 91 preschoolers, aged 3–5 years, in two urban day care centers were randomly selected into a nonintervention (Site A) and intervention (Site B) preschool classroom setting. After collection of baseline data, Site B, the play centers at the intervention site were redesigned to accommodate the infusion of a variety of nonliteracy objects such as a couch, area rug, telephone, table, and buttons. In addition, Site B was enriched with a variety of literacy-related objects such as books, telephone book, cookbooks, recipe cards, coupons, store ads, play money, pens, pencils, markers, library stamps, signs, calendars, wall posters, stickers, file folders, ledger sheets, appointment books,

labeled bins, magazines, maps, etc. No changes were made to the physical environment in Site A, the nonintervention setting (Neuman & Roskos, 1992).

Results indicated statistically significant differences among the frequencies of literacy demonstrations observed in three categories—handling, reading, and writing between the two sites, A and B. Similar findings were reported with respect to the duration and complexity of young children’s literacy demonstrations in the intervention group as compared to the nonintervention group. In summary, the design and the amount of literacy objects infused into free play centers along with play center design changes significantly increased young children’s handling, reading, and writing behaviors and the sustained and interconnected nature of their literacy demonstrations within their ongoing play routines. The results of this study, along with the results of earlier studies of literacy objects used as cultural tools in play settings, provide convincing evidence that changes to the physical environment in language arts classrooms influences or “presses” children into literacy learning behaviors and activities.

Recommendations for providing print-rich environments for language arts classrooms are many and varied. For example, Morrow (2005) and Katims and Pierce (1995) discuss access to an attractive library center as an imperative for establishing a literacy or print-rich classroom environment for young learners. Reutzell and Fawson (2002) have similarly recommended that a classroom library should be a major focal point in every classroom literacy program. Other researchers have corroborated the need for access to a classroom library filled with books when they found strong links between access to and use of a variety of print materials in classrooms and increased reading achievement (Fractor et al., 1993; Gump, 1989; Hoffman, Sailors, Duffy, & Beretvas, 2004; Neuman & Fischer, 1995; Roskos & Neuman, 2001). Another recommended component of a print-rich language arts classroom is the presence of a writing center because reading and writing reinforce one another concurrently, rather than sequentially (Katims & Pierce, 1995, Morrow, 2005) Meskill & Swan 1998 found that second-grade children, when given access to multimedia software, Kids Space, and other computer-based technology, were influenced to write and reflect more upon their compositions and creative writing.

Many suggestions are available for creating print-rich environments. Smith, Dickinson, Sangeorge, and Anastasopoulos (2002) saw the need to develop a valid and reliable instrument to help create and assess early literacy environments. They developed the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) form to document the role of classroom environmental factors for two federally funded intervention studies. The ELLCO is composed of three separate components: (1) a classroom literacy environment checklist, (2) a classroom literacy instruction observation rating scale, and (3) a structured teacher interview. This instrument has been shown to be reliable (ELLCO Technical Report, 2002) for use in preschool classroom environments.

Wolfersberger et al. (2004) developed the Classroom Literacy Environmental Profile (CLEP), which is a tool for examining the “print richness” of early childhood and elementary classrooms. The researchers identified, defined, and organized into categories through a systematic and extensive review of the literature, classroom observations, and teacher focus-group characteristics of print-rich classroom environments. Interpreted data were used to write and review the initial items of the instrument. Using generalizability analyses, classrooms and items on the CLEP evidenced large variance components indicating that the degree of implementation of print-rich classroom environments was reliably discriminated using the CLEP instrument.

When using the CLEP instrument to examine early childhood and elementary language arts classrooms for “print-richness,” examiners rated, using a seven-point Likert-type rating scale containing descriptors under points 1, 3, 5, and 7, the: (a) quantity, utility, and appropriateness of literacy related-objects or tools; (b) the quantity of genres, levels, format, and content of text materials; (c) the classroom organization print and student literacy product displays,

and reference materials available; (d) the forms of written communication; and (e) the writing utensils, writing surfaces, publishing supplies, and technology available. To examine the organization of “print rich” language arts classrooms, users of the CLEP instrument assess: storage organization; classroom space allocations by size, location, boundaries, and types; the presence of a classroom library; grouping and accessibility of reading and writing tools; invitations and encouragements to participate in literacy events; authentic literacy events and settings; interactions with literacy tools; a variety of literacy products produced; and sharing of literacy products. Wolfersberger et al. (2004) assert that the CLEP is a valid and reliable tool for evaluating the print-richness of early childhood and elementary classrooms to enrich, refine, research, and redesign classrooms to foster engaged literacy learning for all children. In addition, the CLEP may also serve as a reliable guide for educators to apply “a more calculated approach to the design of literacy enrichments in early childhood and elementary classroom environments” as recommended by Neuman and Roskos (1992, p. 221).

### THE EFFECTS OF ARRANGING THE PHYSICAL SPACE TO CREATE LITERACY-RICH LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOMS

Descriptive studies conducted on the effects of literacy-related settings in early childhood and elementary classrooms were conducted by Morrow (1982) when she observed the physical characteristics of library corners in 133 preschool through second-grade classrooms in a variety of schools in New Jersey. She found that most of these classrooms either had poorly designed or nonexistent library corners or nooks. Later in the same year, Morrow and Weinstein (1982) found a strong relationship between the amount of books and the physical design of the library nooks in kindergarten classrooms and kindergarteners’ frequent interactions with literature during free play.

In 1986, Taylor, Blum, and Logsdon conducted a study in which 13 kindergarten teachers were shown how to implement print-rich classroom environments. The researchers then examined the effects of the teacher training on the implementation of print-rich classroom environments in the 13 kindergarten classrooms. High-implementation classrooms showed substantial student interaction with literacy tools and materials as well as substantial amounts of student-generated literacy products. Quantitative measures of reading achievement indicated that children in high-implementation or print-rich classrooms outperformed children in low-implementation classrooms.

Loughlin and Martin (1987) described the characteristics of 22 print-rich first- and second-grade classrooms by using the Survey of Displayed Literacy Stimuli that they had developed for the purposes of the study. These researchers described print-rich classrooms as well organized into clearly defined areas for children’s use of print materials and other literacy tools. Loughlin and Martin (1987) also described teachers who encouraged children throughout the day to interact with literacy tools and materials as well as honoring children’s products by giving them prominent display space within the classroom environment.

Excellent language arts environments allocate space for storage and use of a variety of instructional materials. Materials are arranged so as to be easily accessible with items labeled and everything in its place. These classrooms contain substantial collections of trade books, textbooks, workbooks, leveled books, and technology. It is recommended that there be seven titles per child as a minimum for a total of 150 to 200 individual trade book titles in a typical classroom of between 20 and 30 students (Murray, 2005).

In observational studies concerning types of books in classrooms for language arts instruction, it was found that language arts and reading textbooks were used in many of the classrooms observed. These materials were used in over 85% of K–6 schools in the U.S. (Baumann,

Hoffman, Duffy-Hester, & Ro, 2000). Contemporary language arts and reading textbooks include a variety of children's literature and information selections and encourage the integration of the language arts: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Leveled books, rated for difficulty by using a particular leveling scheme, were used for guided reading instruction (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000).

Young children evidence an awareness of how their classroom environment is organized and how their work is treated within the classroom. When young children were asked to reflect upon whether the classroom environment had an effect on their learning, they indicated not only an awareness of the classroom environment, but also expressed to researchers that the environment shaped their own perceptions, motivations, and responses to learning tasks (Holmes & Cunningham, 1995; Kershner & Pointon, 2000). When classroom environments are supportive of what children are trying to do, they can more easily demonstrate what they can do (Bjorklund, Muir-Broaddus, & Schneider, 1990; Neuman & Roskos, 1997).

Hastings and Schwieso (1995) conducted a study in Great Britain investigating the effects of seating arrangements on task engagement in primary grade classrooms. Previous research had shown an increase in on-task behaviors, as well as an increase in the quantity and quality of work completed when seating arrangements matched the learning tasks to be performed, for example, rows for individually completed learning tasks and collaborative seating arrangements for small- or whole-group learning tasks (Bennett & Blundell, 1983; Whelldell & Lam, 1987; Yeomans, 1989). Results of the first study indicated that 76% of children preferred being seated in groups rather than rows. Graphic displays of the children's on-task behaviors in different seating arrangements were somewhat telling. Although children preferred grouped seating arrangements, measures of on-task behaviors for completing individual learning tasks increased when the seating arrangement was changed to rows from groups. This was particularly true with the lowest quartile cohort of children in both classes. Hastings and Schwieso (1995) recommended that group seating arrangements be used when interaction, discussion, and collaboration are needed to complete a task or project. But when a learning task requires individual completion or work, seating in rows leads to more on-task time among young children. They concluded by stating that teachers should, "consider the design of physical environments in the context of pedagogical purposes" (p. 290).

Designing classroom space to support effective language arts instruction involves: (a) the structure of space in the classroom, (b) selection of materials and furnishings to place into the environment, and (c) the literacy activities to be carried out (Wolfersberger et al., 2004). Although some classroom teachers design the space in their rooms with the intent to support literacy learning, they do not typically use research findings to inform their decisions (Neuman & Fischer, 1995).

Research has shown consistently that when language arts classrooms are partitioned into smaller spaces such as learning centers, project or activity areas, or small group discussion areas, these bounded and partitioned arrangements of classroom space into smaller physical spaces facilitate verbal interaction among peers and enhance cooperative and associative learning (Loughlin & Martin, 1987; Morrow, 1990; Rivlin & Weinstein, 1984). After reviewing ecological studies from play and cognitive performance research, Neuman and Roskos (1997) successfully validated several environmental design factors that provide opportunities for literacy learning in a variety of activity settings such as centers, play areas, etc. The factors of greatest importance included: (a) organization of settings, (b) familiarity of objects and procedures, (c) meaningfulness of activities or tasks, and (d) social interactions or resources. These four principles have broad application for the organization of learning environments in language arts classrooms.

Cambourne (2001, 2002) suggests that when organizing classroom settings, teachers can decide which literacy tools, props, objects, or paraphernalia will be purchased and made

available for teaching and learning to read and write. But perhaps more importantly, teachers can decide when and how these objects will be used, by whom, and for how long, and even how these objects will be accessed and stored. They also can decide how print will be created, how much print will be displayed (if any) within the classroom, and how furniture is arranged, etc.

Young children demonstrate more advanced thinking when highly typical, familiar literacy objects are available for use in language arts classrooms and in literacy learning activity or independent center areas. Children also demonstrate their competence while engaged in literacy learning tasks when the procedures or operations within a classroom or learning area are well known to them (Neuman & Roskos, 1997). Cambourne (2001, 2002) elaborates this principle by asserting that teachers create and maintain meaningful literacy learning settings “through the language they use, the actions they demonstrate, and the expectations they communicate” (p. 359).

The potential of a print-rich language arts classroom environment is only fully realized when the learning activities and tasks occurring within the environment have meaning for the participants in that environment (Neuman & Roskos, 1997). This suggests that children should experience authentic literacy learning areas within the classroom that reflect what they have experienced in their everyday ecological contexts outside the classroom, as well as having access to familiar literacy tools for enacting literacy behaviors within these same contexts. Lave (1988) maintains that children need to be presented *authentic dilemmas* that offer them opportunities to use literacy tools and objects to create problem-solving situations and experiment with a variety of solutions. Examples of such settings include a post office, a restaurant, a grocery store, or a doctor’s office (Morrow, 2005). Children observe how other people use literacy tools and engage in real-life literacy routines in their everyday lives. One of the best resources for supporting literacy learning in print-rich language arts classrooms is the demonstrations and interactions of other people.

#### REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH OF LITERACY ENVIRONMENTS AND LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION

There is a significant amount of research that deals with the materials we need in language arts classrooms how to design the space, and the effects of those materials on students’ literacy behavior. Children are sensitive to and affected by the physical environment of the early childhood and elementary language arts classroom. The quantity, quality, arrangement, organization, utility, accessibility of literacy tools, and materials in classrooms play a pivotal role in providing opportunities for children to engage in literacy learning. Literacy activities and tools placed into and arranged in early childhood and elementary language arts classrooms need to be purposefully organized, familiar, meaningful, and encourage social interactions (Neuman & Roskos, 1997). However, most research concerning rich print environments is evidenced-based and descriptive in design. It is important research but we need scientifically based studies to add to our knowledge. Most of the investigations talk about student behaviors that deal with social interaction, how materials are used, and increased use of the materials. Research needs to be done that evaluates student achievement as a result of physical environmental factors in language arts instruction. The research about literacy-rich environments has taken place predominantly in preschool and the primary grades and has had a positive effect on shaping these classroom physical environments. We need to carry out investigations in elementary grades to heighten awareness and determine effects of the physical environment for students at these grade levels.

## THE EFFECTS OF WHOLE-CLASS AND SMALL-GROUP SETTINGS ON TEACHER AND STUDENT BEHAVIORS IN LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAMS

Our research thus far has illustrated that teacher and student behaviors are effected by the design of classroom literacy environments. The environments discussed were predicated upon thoughtful planning. Effective use of space in exemplary language arts classroom environments was neither accidental nor incidental. Teachers defined spaces to enhance or promote a particular type of student behavior or activity. We now discuss research about the organization and management of classroom structural plans in language arts classrooms and the results of these structural plans in whole-class instruction and small-group instruction.

### Whole-Class Instruction

Our research revealed that teachers allocated space for whole-class instruction for language arts and other content areas as well. This space was generally located near a large display surface such as a white board or projection screen and well away from designated small-group instructional areas intended for quiet instructional activities. In early childhood rooms there were rugs used for seating an entire class of children. In elementary classrooms, desks or tables were arranged in close proximity and faced the large display surface. Whole-class instructional space was allocated to support explicit instruction of phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, writing, and fluency. Teachers modeled strategies and used a variety of activities to teach the whole class, such as choral readings, echo reading, repeated readings, shared reading, readers theater, reading aloud, interactive writing, language-experience charts, etc. In whole-group instruction teachers used big books, posters, overhead transparencies, power point presentations, etc. The type of activities just described lent themselves to whole-group settings. (Bansberg, 2003; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Collins-Block, & Morrow, 2001; Reutzel & Cooter, 1991; Romeo, 1999).

### Small-Group Instruction

When teachers created space and time for small-group learning, it was designed for a variety of reasons. (Bansberg, 2003; Cambourne, 2001, 2002; Moore, 1986; Olds, 1987; Reutzel & Cooter, 1991; Taylor & Pearson, 2002; Taylor, Pearson & Clark, 2000; Weinstein, 1977, 1981). One type of small-group work was to engage children productively and independent of the teacher. Children worked alone or in collaboration with others. Teachers created areas they called “centers” for this type of collaborative work. The centers were used predominantly during guided reading instruction when the teacher was working with a small reading group for specific skill development. These centers engaged students productively in practicing work that had been introduced to them while the teacher worked with the small guided reading groups. Examples of well-known centers found in K–6 classrooms included: (a) working with words, (b) the library corner, (c) a writing center, and (d) a literacy-enriched play area.

A working with words center included a computer for students to work in pairs. This center was stocked with magnetic letters, individual dry erase boards, markers, erasers, letter sorts, and letter trays with letters for making words. Also present were word and letter games such as letter and word BINGO and Lotto. The working with words center also had a word wall to display high-frequency sight words, student names, theme words, and phonograms.

Teachers had well stocked and well organized library corners where there was easy access to books and other print and reference materials (Katims & Pierce, 1995; Morrow & Weinstein,

1982, 1986; Neuman, 1999; Neuman & Celano, 2001; Reutzel & Fawson, 2002). Teachers taught strategies to support book selection such as selecting from a limited number of books, and making the books all theme-related or genre-related. All exemplary teachers included a time in the library corner for students to read narrative and informational books and other print materials of their own choosing.

A classroom writing center in classrooms had a space for collaborative writing for children to interact with teachers and peers about their projects. A conference area was allotted for conducting peer-student or teacher-student conferences about developing writing projects. The editing area was for students to obtain help from an editor, peer, adult-volunteer, or teacher. In the writing center students composed writing products including books, essays, editorials, poems, jokes, riddles, research reports, autobiographies, etc.

Studies document that literacy-enriched play centers for small groups found preschool children engaged in reading and writing activities (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Neuman and Roskos, 1992, 1993, 1997; Rogg, 2001; Roskos & Neuman, 2001; Vukelich, 1994). Play, according to Vygotsky (1978), involves the child in behaviors that are more sophisticated than expected and seem as if he/she were older. When enriching play centers with a variety of situation-specific literacy materials, researchers have documented an increase in children's use of literacy as a part of their imaginative play. Observations of young children at play have shown that when the presence of literacy tools appropriate to the social situation are available in the play center, children will engage in attempted and conventional reading and writing acts often in collaboration with other children (Morrow, 1990; Neuman & Roskos, 1997). In exemplary language arts classrooms, play centers in K-1 classrooms included: (a) offices—post offices, doctor's offices, newspaper offices, etc.; (b) businesses—labs, restaurants, bakeries, carpentry, grocery stores, auto mechanics and repair; (c) travel services—airports, train stations; (d) home situations—kitchens, workshop, laundry room; and (e) dramatic interpretations—plays, readers theater, puppetry, creative movement, etc.

Another type of small-group work provided a Guided Reading area that had seating and a table to accommodate up to seven students and the teacher (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The Guided Reading area was designed so that the teacher could assess and assist a small group of children during instruction. Materials for providing guided instruction often included: (a) several sets of leveled books or basal stories, (b) white dry erase boards, (c) magnetic letters, and (d) markers and erasers. Teachers often had easels and a pocket chart for working with story structure, sentences, phrases, and words (Reutzel & Cooter, 2004). Students in guided reading were grouped by ability. Teaching and materials were geared to their needs.

### Grouping Students for Instruction Based on Ability and Achievement

Conventional wisdom suggests that grouping students to meet individual needs is important. Yet research results vary widely for this type of organizational practice. Most studies have found that children who are high achievers do better in ability groups for reading than if they were not grouped at all. The data was not as clear in groups of middle- and low-achieving students. Grouping did not seem to help or hurt middle achievers; however, the data about low achievers was not consistent. Some studies found that low-achieving children did not do better in small-ability groups for reading instruction, other studies found that they did (Eder, 1981; Esposito, 1973; Hiebert, 1983; Kulik & Kulik, 1982; Lou, Abrami, & Spence, 1996).

Observations of what happens in small-ability groups during reading instruction help to explain the findings about grouping and achievement. High-ability groups read more text than children in the low-ability groups. They also read continuous, uninterrupted text. Children in high-ability groups were asked analytical questions and received lots of praise. The attitude in the high-ability groups was positive with high expectations for student achievement. On the

other hand, in low-ability groups, students spent less time reading, read segmented text rather than whole texts, and teachers had low expectations for student success. Children recognized when they were in the low-ability groups and had negative feelings about it (Allington, 1984; Eder, 1981; Grant & Rothenberg, 1986).

Students who participated in ability groups during language arts instruction had both positive and negative comments about this type of instruction. On the positive side, students felt that they read more in small-group instruction, they had more positive interactions with the teacher, had more positive interaction with each other, and they felt that independent work during small-group instruction was productive (Hiebert, 1983; Weinstein, 1977). The things students didn't like about ability and group included, once a group is formed you can never move out of it. If you are in a low-group, you feel really dumb. There are a disproportionate number of nonwhite children in low-ability groups. The preponderance of negative comments about grouping came from children in the low-ability groups (Allington, 1984; Eder, 1981; Grant & Rothenberg, 1986).

When questioned about grouping for instruction, teachers said they felt they could attend to more individual differences in small-group instruction and that students had more positive attitudes about themselves and what they were learning (Kulik & Kulik, 1982). Teachers worried about organizing their classrooms so they could meet children in small groups. It was found that professional development had a positive effect on helping teachers to organize and manage grouping in their classrooms and consequently they felt better about using the practice (Lou, Abrami, & Spence, 1996). Teachers were grouped for ability to meet individual needs but also had heterogeneous groups in their rooms for collaborative projects. Homogeneous groups were flexible, since they changed when students needed to change. The work in all groups, no matter what the level of ability, included high expectations for student achievement. Children in different groups learned the same skills but instruction was differentiated (Allington, Johnston, & Day, 2002; Cambourne, 2001, 2002; Cantrell, 1999a, 1999b; Katims & Pierce, 1995; Morrow, 2002, 2005). The expert management of small-group instruction is one of the characteristics of exemplary language arts classrooms and considered a difficult task for many teachers.

#### THE EFFECTS OF DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTAL SETTINGS ON SOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Social interactions between teachers and students and students and students in classrooms are one of the most highly variable aspects of classroom environments as behavior settings (Cambourne, 2002). Although previous ecological research has shown that environmental settings elicit stable behavioral responses, Barker's (1968) ecological critique of human behavior also provided for situations in which changes in the environment induced human behavior to likewise adapt to new demands of a setting.

Day & Libertini (1992) investigated the impact of changes in classroom environments that altered the social interactions experienced by teachers and children. These researchers examined three interaction and grouping patterns used during language arts and mathematics lessons in two primary grade classrooms: (1) teacher-directed, large-group instruction, (2) teacher- and child-directed, large- and small-group instruction, and (3) child-directed only. Three children (two boys, one girl) were selected from a group of five to seven year olds; and three others (one boy, two girls) from a group of seven to nine year olds in each of two classrooms observed in this study. Results indicated that these six children readily shifted their learning behaviors to adapt to the demands of each of the varied social conditions experienced during instruction. Changes in the classroom environments that teachers provide for children, including the

grouping arrangements and social interactions encouraged or discouraged during instruction, evoked differing responses from the children. For example, when the children were asked to complete individual tasks, collaborative seating arrangements actually decreased attention and the quality of eventual task completion. On the other hand, when task completion was structured to require collaboration, isolated seating arrangements interfered with the time needed to complete a task and the eventual quality of the task completed. These researchers recommended that teachers carefully consider the proportion of time allocated for whole-group, small-group, teacher-directed, and child-directed instruction inasmuch as each of these differing combinations of social arrangements during instruction both support and suppress social interactions, interfere with or augment cognitive processes, and increase or decrease the quality and quantity of learning outcomes.

Whole-group, teacher-directed instruction, although efficient for many events or circumstances, may be counterproductive in terms of what can be learned and how long it may be retained. On the other hand, totally child-directed settings where children are “messing about may not always be either a sufficient indicator of productive engagement or an adequate criterion for selecting school activities” (Day & Libertini, 1992, p. 111).

Neuman & Fischer (1995) explored task and participation structures in kindergartens where teachers used a holistic literacy teaching philosophy. Twenty kindergarten classrooms, from 10 schools in a large urban school district, were observed and videotaped for two full days of holistic literacy instruction, totaling 24 hours of observed instruction. Literacy tasks were analyzed on five dimensions: (a) activity format, (b) duration, (c) complexity, (d) organization, and (e) participation structures. With reference to the findings related to participation structures, these researchers, similar to Day and Libertini (1992), concluded that task and talk structures need to be varied to accommodate the variety of literacy behaviors and concepts to be learned in early childhood and elementary classrooms. They stated, “Teachers can include tasks that provide opportunities for collaborative interaction, combined with direct instruction, to promote language and literacy. This suggests a better balance between meaning-based and skill-based instruction. Students need to know both the functions and the forms of literacy” (p. 336).

Cambourne (2002) described the complexity of classroom behavior settings by discussing “episodes” in which teachers and children interacted with literacy paraphernalia and programs to create opportunities to learn. He envisioned classroom literacy interactions as composed of two overlapping layers. The first layer is the least complex depicting classrooms as behavior settings composed of humans behaving, inanimate physical objects, and ongoing routines for operating or behaving that are stable and dynamic. The second layer in Cambourne’s (2002) scheme represents teachers’ attempts to orchestrate behavioral events such as mini-lessons, strategies, activities, etc. in connection with the first layer. Cambourne contends that such deliberate attempts by teachers to create learning opportunities “float on the ethos created by the mix of the three generic components [humans behaving, inanimate physical objects, and ongoing routines for operating or behaving] of the setting, and they are influenced by this ethos” (p. 360). As such, Cambourne paints a picture of the elementary language arts classroom as animated by the intentions of the teachers as they interact with children using the inanimate literacy tools available in the environment.

Hoffman et al. (2004) developed a valid and reliable measure that captures the complexity of the interactions of teachers and children in elementary language arts classroom print environments. In developing their system of measurement, Hoffman et al. drew upon a social practice perspective of literacy development (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000) in which the classroom environment involves more than counting and describing inanimate objects. Rather, they envisioned the language arts classroom print environment to be a dynamic social context conditioning and conditioned by those who work within it. The result was the development

of the TEX-IN3 Observation System that contains three basic components: (1) a text inventory, (2) a text “in-use” observation, and (3) a series of teacher- and student-text interviews. Hoffman et al. found that the TEX-IN3 is a useful instrument for capturing the complexity of social interactions involving texts in classroom settings by observing 30 minutes of instruction in classrooms in which children are engaged with different types of texts. At the conclusion of the 30 minutes, a classroom snapshot of text engagement is captured. This is followed by an “observational sweep” that focuses on three selected children who are reading above, on, and below grade level. The interactions between these three sampled children, the texts, and the teacher are systematically recorded. At the conclusion of the observational sweep another classroom snapshot of class is taken. This research demonstrates that scores on the three TEX-IN3 subscales strongly predicted students’ reading comprehension scores, demonstrating a clear connection between social interactions in print-rich classroom environments and students’ literacy achievement.

### REFLECTIONS ON GROUPING PRACTICES AND RESULTING STUDENT AND TEACHER BEHAVIORS

Discussion about the value of grouping for instruction in relation to ability, achievement, social, and emotional outcomes has been a persistent issue over time. There are pros and cons to support grouping with many unsolved answers. We can only call for more research in this area—both quantitative and qualitative—to determine how to effectively work with children in small groups to meet their individual needs to improve achievement and at the same time not damage their self-esteem.

The research concerning social behaviors as a result of classroom arrangements, such as small, large, or one-to-one groupings, has demonstrated that when teachers make choices about how to structure and support student social interaction in the classroom, it is clearly linked to later reading performance (Hoffman et al., 2004). Some of the choices referred to are student versus teacher control and choice during instruction, an emphasis upon collaboration or isolation, a focus on meaning construction or skill acquisition, the involvement of teachers and students with each other during teaching and learning activities, and access to literacy tools and materials.

### RESEARCH AND THEORY ON EFFECTIVE AND EXEMPLARY TEACHING

Research on effective and exemplary teaching has implications for informing educators about organizing and managing language arts programs. Therefore, we reviewed some of the research and theory in this area that seemed pertinent. The earlier research on effective teaching was not language arts specific. These investigations in the 60s and 70s focused on the teacher as a technician delivering a specific designated program of instruction. In this research effective teaching was based almost primarily on a particular method of teaching. Researchers looked at how the teacher and specific teaching processes affected the product, which was student achievement (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Brophy, 1973; Dunkin & Biddle, 1974; Rosenshine & Furst, 1973). The “first grade studies” and other similar research investigated the “methods” or “approaches”—such as the use of basals, phonics, and the language experience approach to find those that were most effective in teaching first-graders to become successful readers. No single approach proved better than the others (Anderson, Evertson, & Brophy, 1979; Bond & Dykstra, 1964/1997; Wilder, 1977). However, this research laid the foundation

for the more comprehensive research on exemplary practice, which better takes into account organization and management issues related to teaching.

### Research on Exemplary Literacy Teachers

Researchers who began to study exemplary practice did it from a broader perspective than studying only about effective practice. Since there didn't seem to be one method that was most effective for teaching reading, researchers wanted to know not only about good methods, but what was happening in the total classroom that effected achievement. They wanted to know about the interactions between children and teachers, scheduling routines, design of environments, and how the classroom as a community effected growth (Coker, 1985; Duffy & Hoffman, 1999; Genishi, Ryan, Ochsner, & Yarnall, 2001; Haigh & Katterns, 1984; Roehler & Duffy, 1984; Shulman, 1986). Investigators attempted to tap teachers' thought processes about their teaching. For example, teachers were often asked to talk about how they decided to plan their programs, select their materials, and schedule their daily routines (Clark & Peterson, 1986). In one large-scale study of effective teachers, students in grades K–12 were questioned as to the characteristics of their influential literacy teachers in an attempt to build a universal model of effective instruction (Ruddell, 1995; Ruddell & Kern, 1986; Ruddell & Harris, 1989). In this investigation teachers were nominated to participate in in-depth interviews and extensive classroom observations. The results of the study indicated that influential teachers (a) use highly motivating and effective teaching strategies, (b) build strong affective relationships with their students, (c) create a feeling of excitement about what they are teaching, (d) adjust instruction to meet the individual needs of their students, (e) create rich physical environments to support their teaching, and (f) have strong organization and management skills (Ruddell, 1995).

Building on the work of more general effective and exemplary teaching, investigators began to examine exemplary language arts instruction. The purpose was to describe what excellent teachers did when teaching reading and writing and how they made decisions about how and what they taught, what materials they used, how they used space and created structures for social interactions and grouping to meet individual achievement needs. The total classroom community experience rather than a specific practice was considered. This type of research is based on sociocultural theory, according to which student learning is dependent upon what a teacher knows, how students come to understand that knowledge, and the context in which the learning takes place (Vygotsky, 1978). In a setting based on sociocultural theory, school would be considered a collaborative community in which students are assisted by more capable adults or peers. According to sociocultural theory, the entire learning environment or the culture of the classroom needs to be considered when studying instruction since the act of teaching and the learning environment are inextricably linked. A sociocultural concept of learning considers multiple contexts, such as: (a) the relationship between the teacher and student, (b) the community of the classroom, (c) the larger community of the school, and (d) how all of these are organized and managed together and affect each other.

### Identifying Exemplary Teachers to Study

A major concern when studying exemplary teachers is finding a reliable and valid way to first identify who is exemplary and then to describe what these exemplary teachers do in their classroom. There have been several ways that investigators have undertaken this task. Researchers have identified teachers as exemplary based on the following criteria:

- Selecting teachers with students who have excellent test scores in literacy achievement over a period of time

- Selecting teachers whose students' test scores are beyond what would be expected from children considered "at risk" from schools that beat the odds
- Selecting teachers based on administrator recommendations
- Selecting teachers recommended by their peers
- Selecting teachers recommended by parents
- Selecting teachers recommended by students

Researchers have used some, or all of the characteristics listed above, when selecting samples to study (Block, 2001; Morrow & Casey, 2003; Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 1999; Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, Rankin, & Mistretta, 1997).

Taylor et al. (2000) studied the literacy practices of exemplary teachers in schools that beat the odds. The students in these teachers' classrooms were considered at-risk, and from low-income families, yet who scored well in literacy achievement. Two teachers in grades K–3 in 14 schools across the U.S. participated in the study. Each teacher was observed five times from December to April for an hour of reading instruction. Teachers also completed a written survey, kept a weekly log of reading and writing activities in their classrooms, and were interviewed in May of the year of the study. These effective teachers focused on small-group instruction, provided time for independent reading, monitored student on-task behaviors, and provided strong home communication. The teachers also focused on explicit phonics instruction and the application of phonics while reading and writing, asked high-level comprehension questions, and were more likely to ask students to write their responses to reading.

In a study to determine exemplary practice, Metsala and Wharton-McDonald (1997) meticulously collected and described through surveys and interviews the most important literacy practices and routines among 89, K–3 regular education and 10 special education teachers identified by administrators as exemplary. These exemplary teachers were described by their peers and supervisors, as "masterful" classroom managers who managed time, materials, and student behavior with finesse. These effective teachers held high expectations for their students as well as having a real sense of purpose, direction, and objectives. Topping the list of classroom characteristics and instructional practices reported by these effective, primary-level teachers was, not surprisingly, a literate classroom environment. In addition these educators provided explicit instruction of literacy (reading and writing) skills, strategies, and concepts. They provided daily doses of contextualized and isolated skill and strategy instruction, access to varied reading materials, and varied ways of engaging in reading and writing. They adapted instruction to the ability levels or needs of their students, worked to motivate students to engage in reading and writing, as well as consistently monitoring student engagement and literacy progress through systematic accountability.

Morrow, Tracey, Woo, and Pressley (1999) intensively observed six exemplary teachers from three different school districts. Teachers selected to be observed for the study were nominated by school administrators, peers, parents, and students. The selection process also included checks of these six teachers' student achievement scores over the past five years to confirm the effects of their exemplary status on student achievement measures. Approximately 25 hours of observation were completed on each of the six teachers as well as conducting interviews with them. The first finding of these researchers was that the six exemplary teachers had "literacy-rich environments." Within these literacy-rich classrooms teachers orchestrated a variety of learning settings such as whole, small, one-on-one, teacher-directed, centers, and social interactions with adults and peers. A rich variety of print and print-producing materials were available for and used by children on a daily basis. Teachers provided varying types of instructional approaches such as spontaneous, authentic, explicit, direct, systematic, meaning-oriented, problem-solving, and open-ended. They engaged children on a daily

basis in shared, guided, oral, silent, independent, collaborative, and performance reading and writing. They offered regular writing, word analysis, and comprehension instruction. And they made consistent efforts to connect reading and writing instruction to content taught through themes at other times of the day. Many of these same effective practices and instructional routines were reported and confirmed by Cantrell (1999a, 1999b) two years later in her study of the effects of literacy instruction on primary students' reading and writing achievement.

In summary, how time is distributed among and the focus of regular literacy activities and lessons exert measurable influences on young children's literacy growth and development. Effective teachers are masterful classroom managers and balance their instructional time, emphasis, and content among a variety of alternative literacy learning activities. And effective literacy learning activities are integrally linked to other parts of the day and curriculum; they have an explicit purpose with learning tasks clearly defined and are engaged across a wide variety of social settings.

A synthesis of investigations about exemplary literacy practice in the elementary grades found that exemplary literacy teachers shared the following characteristics. They (a) provide explicit literacy instruction, (b) engage students in constructive exchanges with the teacher, (c) create a supportive, encouraging, and friendly atmosphere, (d) weave reading and writing throughout the curriculum, (e) integrate content area themes into the teaching of reading and writing, (f) create a literacy-rich environment in their classrooms with a variety of literacy materials to support instruction, (g) teach to individual needs in small-group settings, (h) have excellent organization and management skills, and (i) develop strong connections with the student's home (e.g., Allington & Johnston, 2002; Block, 2001; Cantrell, 1999a, 1999b; Morrow, et al., 1999; Morrow & Casey, 2003; Pressley et al., 1996; Taylor et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2002; Wharton et al., 1997). While many of the studies phrase their findings differently, the categories are remarkably similar.

### Observing Exemplary Organization and Management Practices: A Case Study

Syntheses of exemplary language arts instruction found that teachers included the daily organization and management routines such as explicit instruction, constructive exchanges, a supportive classroom atmosphere, reading and writing integrated across the language arts and in content area themes, a variety of literacy materials to support instruction, and teaching to individual needs in small-group settings. The following is an observation recorded from research on exemplary practice of language arts instruction in a fourth grade that illustrates these characteristics (e.g., Allington & Johnston, 2002; Morrow et al., 1999; Morrow & Casey, 2003; Pressley et al., 1996; Wharton et al., 1997). Because departmentalization begins to occur in most fourth-grade classrooms, the language arts block is sometimes limited as far as having a large block of time. This day represents the many exemplary teachers observed in the investigations and describes how the teacher fits in the language arts instruction.

When the students enter the room in the morning, there is a "Do Now" message written on the chalkboard. On this particular morning the teacher has asked the students to use certain words in sentences in their journals. While students are responding, they are also carrying out morning housekeeping items described by several charts posted around the room. After about 15 minutes, most students have completed the "Do Now" and the class lines up for Music. They have their "special" during the first period of each day. When the class returns, they file into the room. The teacher discusses classroom matters such as projects due and handing in homework. She also reviews the sentences from the "Do Now."

Next on the agenda is a story read aloud. Before reading, the teacher leads a discussion about predictions for the story based on the cover illustration. As the story is read, the teacher

stops occasionally to discuss issues prompted by the text. Discussion includes where the story takes place and connects the text to what they are learning in social studies. During the story, the questions asked provide a model for the questions children can ask themselves as they read independently. The teacher asks the children to seek clarification of story elements, use context clues to understand vocabulary, and guides them to make connections between the text and their own prior knowledge. She reads with animated expression, and uses different voices and accents to portray the characters in the story. She makes the reading an interactive experience with the modeling of effective comprehension strategies.

In social studies, the class is participating in a unit about the regions of the United States. The teacher connects social studies and literacy development. The teacher uses the popular picture book, *Brown bear, brown bear* (Martin & Carle, 1967) as the format for a project. The students are asked to create books using a state in the U.S. as the topic. The teacher shows a finished product to the class and explains what she did. She reads from her book, "Ohio, Ohio, what do you see? I see Columbus shining at me."

At the end of the social studies period, the work in progress is collected. The unfinished books are placed in a basket to await completion. The children collect the materials they need and proceed to their assigned math classes, which are grouped according to ability for mathematics.

On this day, with the children in her math group, the teacher reviews several geometrical concepts. The teacher reviews an array of shapes and their corresponding names to reinforce the development of a mathematical vocabulary. As the class proceeds, the teacher conveys meaning through multiple representations. She gives a thorough explanation and also presents the ideas with both physical and written models. The children work in all three modalities, and cooperatively with a partner. The same principles evident in the teacher's beliefs about literacy development are evident in her math instruction. She creates an engaging and challenging learning community in all content areas.

After math, the children return to their regular classrooms and proceed to lunch. The remainder of the day is then devoted to the language arts program. Upon reentering the room, the children begin the independent, self-selected reading activity. Children make themselves comfortable, some reading with partners, while others read alone. Reading materials include various genres.

After 15 minutes, the children put their books away. The teacher selects a student volunteer to write and administer the dictation, a weekly assessment for the language arts skills of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and listening. Each sentence, often referring to subject matter from the social studies or science curriculum, is read aloud three times. When students finish writing, the sentences are put on the board for the class to review the correct format.

The teacher has Guided Reading Groups and Literature Circle Groups. The Literature Circle Groups move together with activities for independent work displayed in a pocket chart hanging on the bulletin board. There are five groups formed that are based on children's selection of the books they wish to read. The Literature Circle groups meet and have their activity assignments such as reading independently, discussion of the book that was read, journal writing related to the book, or a reporting activity that might include the use of art materials.

The teacher forms the guided reading groups according to ability levels and student needs. The teacher calls five students for a guided reading lesson. They sit together at a round table. An easel is set up in front of them with a "Point of View" chart posted on it. First, they discuss this literary element in another book they have all read before. Then, they direct their attention to the novel they are currently reading. The teacher selected this book for guided reading. The teacher models filling in the chart with one character then allows the group to work on its own.

After the reading groups have met, the teacher visits the Literature Circles' meetings. One group is sharing their journal responses to the book. Afterward, they address discussion questions provided by the teacher about the book being read.

After about 45 minutes, the teacher asks the class to clean up their reading materials. She then begins her writing workshop. The teacher begins with a whole-class mini-lesson on the characteristics of nonfiction news articles. The students have been routinely publishing this type of writing in a class newsletter. Together, they compile a chart entitled "Amazing Articles." After the topic has been thoroughly covered, the class is given the remaining time to work on their own newsletter articles. The teacher conferences with individuals to help with skill development.

To summarize this teacher organized her instruction so that the environment was filled with the necessary reading and writing materials to support her instruction. These materials were purposefully placed for accessibility when needed. The students engaged in whole-group, small-group and one-on-one settings. There was explicit instruction and time for periods of social interaction for learning. The teacher provided many strategies for students in reading and writing including reading aloud, shared reading, independent reading, collaborative reading, guided reading, performance of reading activities, partner/buddy reading, literature circles, and content area reading. The teacher organized the following writing activities: shared writing, journal writing, independent writing, reader response writing, collaborative writing, fiction and nonfiction, writing guided writing, performance of writing activities, content-area writing, and writing workshop.

#### REFLECTIONS ON EXEMPLARY PRACTICE AND THE ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAMS

How well teachers organize and manage the language arts classroom is the bedrock underlying effective literacy instruction. Research has clearly documented that exemplary literacy teachers have strong organization and management systems in place. Exemplary language arts teachers spend time teaching students classroom routines and rules throughout the school year. Exemplary literacy teachers invite children to help them create classroom rules, which give them ownership in the management of the classroom. An early and sustained emphasis on teaching children the rules and routines minimizes classroom disruptions, and supports smooth transitions. Children have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. The atmosphere in these classrooms is calm, controlled, and encourages respect for others. Exemplary literacy teachers are aware of what is happening in their rooms at all times, give positive feedback often, and speak to students in a respectful manner. When problems occur, teachers have private conversations with students, rather than singling them out publicly. In classrooms that are managed well teachers help children to self-regulate their behavior through cooperative social dialogue.

Exemplary language arts classrooms are informed by sociocultural theory. According to this theory student learning is dependent upon what a teacher knows, how students come to understand that knowledge, and the context in which the learning takes place (Vygotsky, 1978). Classrooms that are well organized are collaborative communities with teachers guiding instruction and student participation. This context takes into consideration the relationship between the teacher and student, the community of the classroom, and the larger community of the school and how this is all organized and managed throughout every school day.

One of the most serious problems about the research dealing with exemplary practice is that we do not have reliable and valid methods for determining what is exemplary practice, and who are exemplary teachers. This needs to be a major effort in this area of research. As in the other topics discussed in this paper, the research in this area has been done predominantly in the primary grades. The research has been descriptive and at best evidenced-based. It is

crucial to continue work on exemplary language arts teaching with older children, and with scientifically based designs.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

This review of literature studies how students are affected by the physical design of the classroom environments including how space and materials are used in language arts instruction. The chapter also investigates grouping practices in language arts instruction to meet individual needs, and finally, looks at what can be learned from exemplary practice in language arts teaching to enhance organization and management of programs.

Research on the effect of the classroom environment on student learning has consistently demonstrated an impact upon student behaviors, achievement, motivation, interaction patterns, social collaboration, and perceptions. Access to print materials provided in classrooms affects students' engagement in literacy-related behaviors. Research has shown, however, that many teachers do not use the results of research on designing classroom environments in their rooms. Because most of the research has been carried out in preschool and primary grades, there is a need to continue this line of research in elementary classrooms. It is also apparent that the research is mostly descriptive, that is, evidenced-based rather than scientifically based in design. The research discusses how to design print-rich environments and the resulting behaviors by children in those environments, with specific attention paid to student's increased use of literacy materials and engagement in literacy activities. We conclude that it is crucial to do investigations that assess literacy achievement as a result of the preparation of literacy-rich environments. This, of course, is the ultimate goal.

Research about small-group instruction based on student achievement has had inconsistent results. A meta-analysis of several studies on small group instruction found that it is the group's achievement level to which a child is assigned, such as high, middle or low, that will ultimately predict a student's success (Lou, et al., 1996). Possible reasons for these results and differing achievement gains in high, middle, and low instructional groups are that teachers teach and act differently when teaching children in high and low groups. They have high expectations for students in the high groups and low expectations for the students in low groups. Also, different strategies and materials are used in the different ability groups (Anderson, Wilkinson, & Mason, 1991). Grouping for instruction has been controversial. Most of the research in this area is quite dated and not necessarily specific to the language arts. Investigations about grouping for achievement specifically in the language arts need to be continued, taken into consideration what we have learned from the past. We need to study grouping with teachers who are able to act the same when teaching children in high and low groups, that is, they need to have high expectations for students in both the low and high groups and use similar strategies and materials for the different groups as well. This line of investigation will undoubtedly add new insight to the controversies that exist about ability grouping.

The studies about exemplary literacy teachers show how excellent professionals consciously design, plan, and allocate classroom space for whole-group, small-group, and individual teaching and learning activities. As we mentioned earlier, exemplary teachers provide explicit literacy instruction, engage students in constructive exchanges, and create a supportive, encouraging, and friendly atmosphere. They weave reading and writing throughout the curriculum, while integrating content area themes into the teaching of reading and writing. Exemplary teachers create a literacy-rich environment in their classrooms with a variety of literacy materials to support instruction, and teach to individual needs in small-group settings. They have excellent organization and management skills and are able to develop strong connections with the student's home. One of the problems with the research on exemplary teaching is how teachers are

selected and labeled as expert. We need to continue to find more valid and reliable techniques for the selection process and subsequently carry out more scientifically and evidenced-based research about expert teaching.

This chapter illustrates the importance of including organization and management as a crucial part of planning language arts instruction. States and school districts spend a great deal of time planning and writing language arts standards and curriculum guides. The course work for the preparation of teachers concentrates on helping future teachers learn about strategies to teach word study skills, comprehension, and writing. They discuss assessment issues, motivating children to want to read and write, and family involvement. In college texts dealing with the teaching of reading instruction, sometimes a section of the book will be devoted to organization and management issues, but it is rarely a large portion. In the professional development of experienced teachers, the issues concerning organization and management of the language arts program are often overlooked entirely or given minimal attention. Organization and management has been viewed as a backdrop related to teaching, rather than as a part of the main agenda in literacy instruction. We know much about reading instruction, more than ever before. We need to refine what we already know and learn how to better deliver the instruction. We believe achievement would be enhanced if the issues related to organization and management were given the same attention and importance as other areas within language arts instruction when putting programs into practice in schools. This is the refinement we have been looking for.

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