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## Critical Dialogues about the Reading Process with In-service Teachers and Children

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### Abstract

This article investigates how teacher educators and teachers collaborate via dialogic interactions to support the development of elementary students' reading strategies. By implementing comprehension-centered reading tools such as the Burke reading interview and strategy rulers in partnership with in-service teachers, we are able to sustain ongoing inquiry and evaluation of effective literacy practices that enhance student learning.

It is necessary for current literacy education to have practical and critical lenses to support in-service teachers in resisting current legislative reading mandates, including Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which its proponents claim as “scientifically-based” and “effective.” Often, in-service teachers are required to implement “scientifically-based” programs and materials. And the political pundits arguing for the application of “scientifically-based” reading instruction have been conditioning society to view reading with unexamined assumptions about readers and the reading process (Compton-Lilly, 2005; Garan, 2007). The majority of the assumptions they hold are generated from public media-reported notions about reading as well as from legislation and mandates which rely on questionable “scientifically-based” research. Here are just a few of the so-called “scientifically-based” research “findings”: reading needs to be automatic and accurate; reading is done letter by letter and from left to right; decoding takes place through the process of sounding out (Adams, Forman, Lundbert, & Beeler, 1998). However, a wide range of research findings shows that reading is a dynamic, complex, and socio-culturally constructed process (Allington, 2011; Altwerger, Jordan & Shelton, 2007; Zelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2012; Gee, 2011; Goodman & Smith, 2008; Kucer, 2008).

In this paper, we focus on how dialogic social interaction can help teachers and teacher educators reclaim effective and holistic literacy education (Meyer & Whitmore, 2011) by asserting and honoring the socio-cultural nature of reading. We share examples of how we integrate Burke Reading Interview (BRI) and Strategy Ruler activities as heuristic tools to implement social as well as dialogic literacy instruction. We have collaborated for the last five years to develop community-based reading centers at two locations in the southwest and the northeast of the U.S. In order to illuminate how dialogic and socially-based literacy education can be implemented, we situate particular teaching and learning contexts in the southwest of the U.S. at a university hosted and community-based Reading and Literacy Center in order to illuminate what we have come to know about dialogic and socio-culturally constructed literacy education.

### Theoretical Framework for This Study

A socio-cultural view of literacy pedagogy can help contextualize how our practices influence our own (teacher and teacher educators) as well as students' views and beliefs about reading (Goodman, 2003; Goodman & Smith, 2008; Weaver, 2009). Based on the socio-cultural view,

we value the importance of our students' lives and communities as we negotiate curriculum with students. Also, we employ the notion of dialogic interactions in literacy education settings. Maloch and Boomer (2012) discuss the crucial aspects of discussions in terms of literacy education. Often times, in regard to literacy education, discussion is mentioned in the context of literature discussion; however, this study goes a bit further to talk about how children are engaged in discussions to talk about their own reading processes and strategies that they use when they read authentic children's literature. Retrospective Miscue Analysis (RMA)-related studies (Goodman & Marek, 1997; Goodman, Martens & Flurkey, 2014) have documented how teacher-researchers and readers engage in critical dialogues to discuss the reading process when they talk about miscues.

We use our reflections to guide us when we develop "localized and individualized instruction" (Meyer & Whitmore, 2011, p. 11). Having knowledge and understanding of our students' everyday school and out-of-school lives, family situation, community, and the teaching situation helps us better design instruction that matches our students' needs and supports their development as learners. It also helps us effect educational change that is influential and valuable. An example of how we engage our in-service teachers and our elementary students with this approach is by having all our students respond to the Burke Reading Interview (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005), a heuristic instructional and assessment tool that provides us with readers' "metalinguistic knowledge about reading" (p. 179) and by providing multiple student-centered literacy events including the strategy ruler lesson, another instrument that enables our students to be metacognitively aware of and use multiple reading strategies to construct meaning as they read.

### **Contextualizing this Study**

Koomi and Violet have been collaborating at the Reading and Literacy Center in the southwest at a university-based afterschool reading and literacy center. Koomi started developing the literacy

center six years ago. Violet is one of the very first in-service teachers to work with Koomi. Koomi works with the family resource program and the lab school at the university to better serve the community in and around the university. This program is free of charge so that families with diverse socio-economic backgrounds can have an easy and equitable access to this community-based literacy program.

Part of growing professionally as teachers is to strive to pause and reflect on our practice. One way we have engaged in our own growth as professionals is through dialoguing and reflecting about our practice (Birchak, et al, 1998). Collaborating together has helped us think and reflect with each other as we sustain dialogue; we are reminded that our voices present "perspectives that enacts particular social values" (Pappas & Tucker-Raymond, 2011, p.vii). Our voices with our in-service teachers help us face the challenges of teaching and use them to influence educational practice.

Each semester we look forward to getting to know our linguistically and culturally diverse K-8<sup>th</sup> graders who come to the Reading and Literacy Center. We work in collaboration with our graduate students. Most of them are in-service teachers working on a MA or doctoral degree in literacy education. At the center, they work as literacy coaches. We meet once a week for two hours and thirty minutes. Literacy instruction time is about one hour and 20 minutes, and one hour and 15 minutes is spent to reflect on literacy lessons and professional reading materials as well as current issues regarding literacy education in general. This is one of the requirements for our masters and doctoral students who are focusing on literacy studies.

Violet graciously agreed to share her experiences working at the Literacy Center as a literacy coach. Violet is an experienced teacher who has a master's degree with two teaching endorsements (in TESOL and Reading education). While she was working on her MA in literacy, she worked with Koomi at the Literacy Center as a literacy coach. She worked with two elementary school

children; Aisha, a third grader and Ana, a fifth grader, for one semester as their literacy coach.

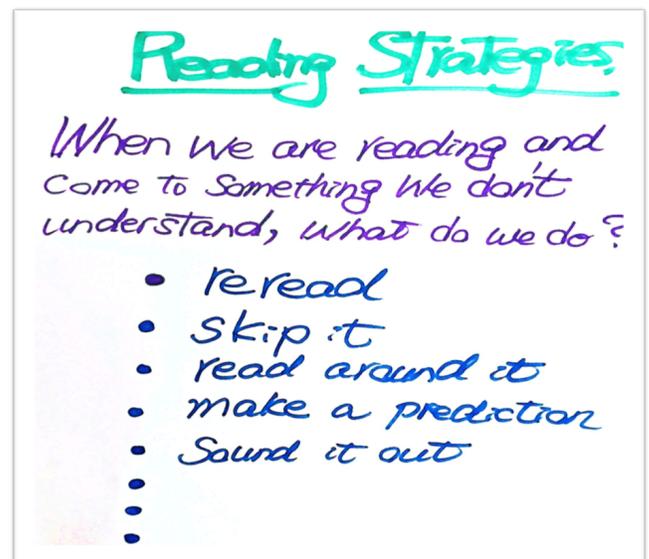
Aisha is a third grader who speaks Arabic and English. She came to the United States two years ago with her family. Her parents are working on graduate degrees. Ana is a fifth grader who speaks Spanish and English. She is a third generation Mexican American who loves sports, and Spanish is her heritage language. Ana shared with us that she speaks and understands Spanish, but English is her first language. Her parents are extremely supportive of Ana's learning, and are actively involved with the afterschool reading program by visiting her and supporting the program each week. Ana's younger brother also attended the Literacy Center. According to Ana, as well as her parents, these two need to improve as readers, and they were explicitly told to do so by their schools. From information/data gathered through the Burke Reading Interview (Goodman, Watson & Burke, 2005) as well as other forms of authentic assessment tools including kidwatching (Goodman, Y., 1978), Violet learned that Aisha and Ana over-rely on "sounding out" and "chunking" as their primary reading strategies.

Violet also learned that the sounding out strategy is being reinforced and encouraged by the instructional strategies their schools implement. We examine the processes by which Violet integrated BRI and then developed a strategy ruler activity to assist the children in becoming consciously aware of their own reading processes (Goodman, 2003) and in beginning to revalue themselves as readers and literate beings. Ana and Aisha (pseudonyms) are working from a very narrow set of strategies that are not adequately serving their needs. Their systematic use of a limited range of strategies is actually impeding their reading development and overall competency. Therefore, a strategy ruler can be used to overtly guide them toward considering alternative strategies with an aim to widen their range of strategies. It also supports the flexible use of multiple strategies that help them make sense of their reading and also to contribute to their own growth as readers. A sense of ownership is developed as well as empowerment when elementary students are able to decide how

they want to work with texts. Here is how Violet uses BRI as a heuristic assessment tool:

### **Burke Reading Interview as a Heuristic Tool to Understand Children's View of Reading**

Our literacy coaches use Burke Reading Interview to get to know how their readers view themselves as readers (see Figure 1). The Burke Reading Interview consists of a set of questions designed "to determine a reader's personal model of reading. It helps to uncover the reader's beliefs about reading. Generally the questions are asked of the reader shortly before the student reads. The interview questions ask readers about personal preferred reading strategies, perceptions about the reading strategies of others, perceptions about appropriate reading support, readers' personal reading histories and reading goals, and readers' self-assessment regarding their proficiency as readers. The BRI also gives information that teachers can use "to think and talk about reading" (Goodman, et.al., 2005, p. 179) with their students.



**Figure 1: Gathering information via Burke Reading Interview**

As a reading coach, I implemented the Burke Reading Interview (BRI), to learn about my students. The BRI allowed me a view into the students reading processes, their knowledge and definition of reading, their perception of themselves as readers, the model of reading instruction used, the strategies they use to

read, the language they use to talk about reading, and the types of books they enjoy reading. In listening to my students read, I noticed that when they came to a word they didn't know their first attempt was to sound out the word. In several instances throughout the reading the observed response was a word that was graphically similar to the expected response but did not fit the semantic or syntactic structure of the sentence. The students had not realized that their responses did not make sense and they continued with their reading, instead of self-correcting.

The BRI allows Violet to begin to formulate a picture of the personal set of beliefs that frame the model of reading that each student has constructed. Information collected from the BRI can be triangulated to uncover relationships among beliefs, instructional experiences, perceptions, socio-cultural settings and their demands, and readers' observed reading behaviors during reading. Meyer and Whitmore (2011), in discussing Meier (1997), expand on the need to have instruction where "educational change...comes from the inside out" (p. 97). Using the BRI, in-service teachers can reflect on their own perception and views of reading.

## Creating Strategy Rulers

We have observed and learned that creating strategy rulers with children can create an opportunity to have a conversation with the children about their reading processes and strategies. A strategy ruler (Goswami, 1998; Paulson & Freeman, 2003) invites students and teachers to engage in a conversation about reading while creating individualized strategy rulers. The strategy rulers support children as well as teachers and teacher researchers to become aware of their own reading processes as well as the range of reading strategies (such as monitoring, visualizing, inferring, predicting and synthesizing) that they are capable of using and developing. Here is Violet's lesson plan to introduce meaning-constructional centered reading strategies:

### Mini-lesson

#### *Objective and Rationale:*

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Implementing this lesson will benefit my readers in facilitating the development of more effective reading strategies and look beyond "sounding out." My objective is to help students become both efficient and effective in reading, and embrace reading as an enjoyable experience.

#### **Materials:**

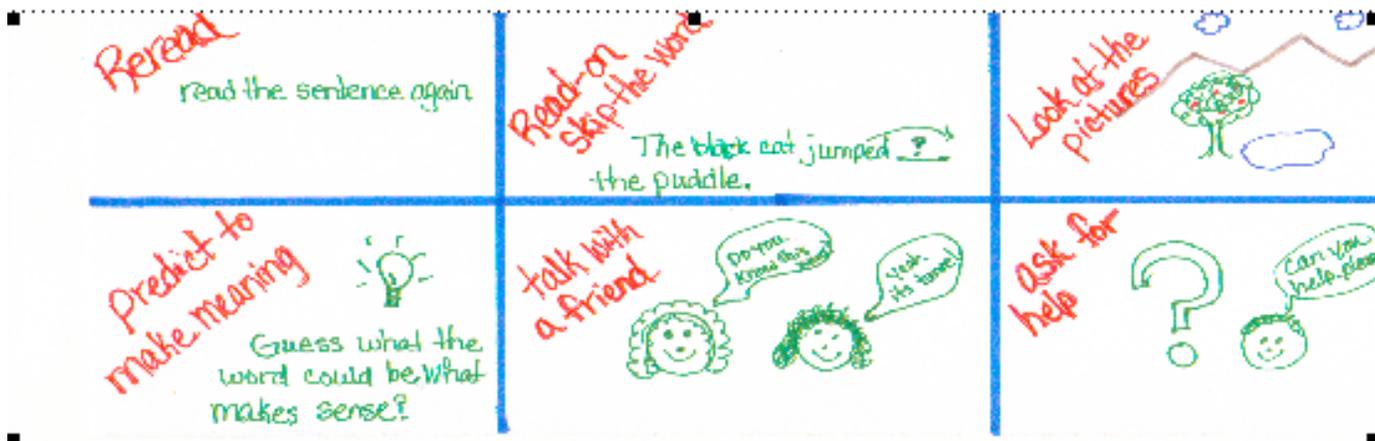
9 X 11 Card Stock (colors optional)  
A sample strategy ruler (see Figure 2)  
Markers

#### **Procedure:**

- Brainstorm with students the different strategies they use when they come to a word they don't know; document student responses.
  - Ask them to think about what strategies they've seen others around them use, such as friends, family, etc.
  - Introduce students to different fix-up strategies such as reread, read on (skip-it), read aloud, look at the pictures, chunk the word, substitute another word that makes sense, predict to make meaning, talk with a friend, ask for help.
  - Model for the students the type of strategy ruler they will make (See Figure 2). Allow them to generate their own strategy ruler.
  - During read aloud, model the strategies for the students.
  - Allow students to use the strategy rulers as they continue with independent reading or during shared reading.
- (See Appendix A for more teaching tips)

## Exploring Multiple Cognitive Reading Strategies via BRI and Creating of Strategy Rulers

The BRI and creating strategy rulers supported children as they began to explore their own reading processes with Violet. Through the implementation of Burke Reading Interview, Violet was able to learn how Aisha and Ana were perceiving themselves as readers (Goodman, Watson & Burke, 2005). As is shown in the strategy ruler created by Aisha, she included the



**Figure 2: Violet’s strategy ruler to share with students focusing on meaning construction reading strategies**

sounding out strategy. Violet negotiated with Aisha to collaboratively decide that the sounding out strategy can be listed but it can be towards the end of her list, since she already knows how to use the sounding out strategy. Violet even pointed out that, at times, Aisha had been overusing the sounding out strategy and that she could use other strategies when she reads. While Aisha was reading the story, *The Golden Sandal: A Middle Eastern Cinderella Story* (Hickox, 1999), Violet helped her to focus on making meaning rather than trying to sound out every word she read. Also, Violet reminded Aisha that comprehension needs to be focused. While Koomi was observing Violet’s session with Aisha and Ana, she noticed that Violet was encouraging Anna to read ahead, skip and come back, and when she got stuck she started overusing her “sounding out strategy.” At one point, Violet offered input such as “Keep on reading,” “You can come back later if you want,” and “What do you want to do here?” At the beginning, Aisha tried to sound out words, but then Violet noted in her journal that, one day, Aisha realized that she was asking for Violet’s confirmation when she was encouraged to keep on reading. Aisha noted, “I can skip here?” At first, she was not willing to take a risk. Violet was confirming that it was okay for Aisha to keep on reading as long as the reading is making sense to her. Aisha shared with Violet and Koomi that, at her school, she is not allowed to read books that contain words she is not able to sound out. By interacting with Aisha and her family, we came to feel that Aisha was in a position of having to

engage in procedural displays that differed depending on the context in which she found herself reading and who was listening to her. Violet generated lesson plans to support both Aisha and Ana to focus on the meaning construction processes of reading by asking them critical questions such as, “Does that make sense?” “What does that mean to you?,” and “How would you say it in Arabic (for Aisha) or Spanish (for Ana)?” Aisha also mentioned that she doesn't have to sound out when she reads books written in Arabic. Aisha intuitively knew that sounding out in Arabic is not an option because most texts in Arabic do not contain phonetic diacritical marks. Arabic is not generally represented phonetically except in the Quran, poetry, or books for beginning reading.

Based on the BRI, observations and parent interviews, Violet decided to create a strategy lesson to explore and examine additional reading strategies with Aisha and Ana. Violet also noted that, due to their instructional strategies at school, Aisha and Ana have been conditioned to believe that they are only to articulate and demonstrate “sounding out” and “chunking” as reading strategies. In the strategy lesson (see Figure 1) Violet demonstrated the use of a wider range of reading strategies while she was reading various authentic children’s books. Aisha and Ana could observe how Violet used various reading strategies in context to make sense of what she read.

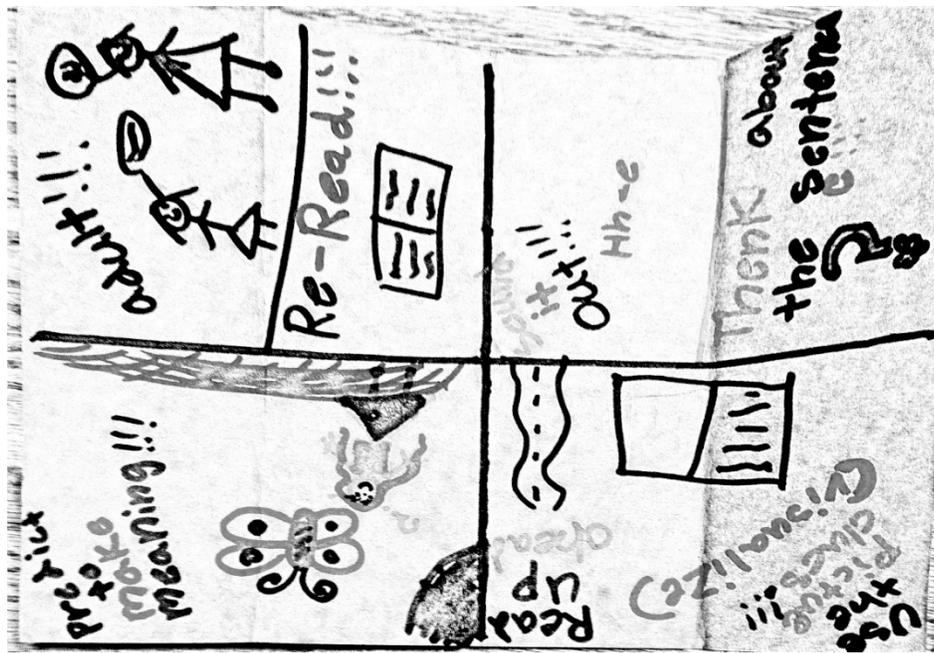


Figure 3: Aisha developing her own strategy ruler after discussing and exploring multiple reading strategies

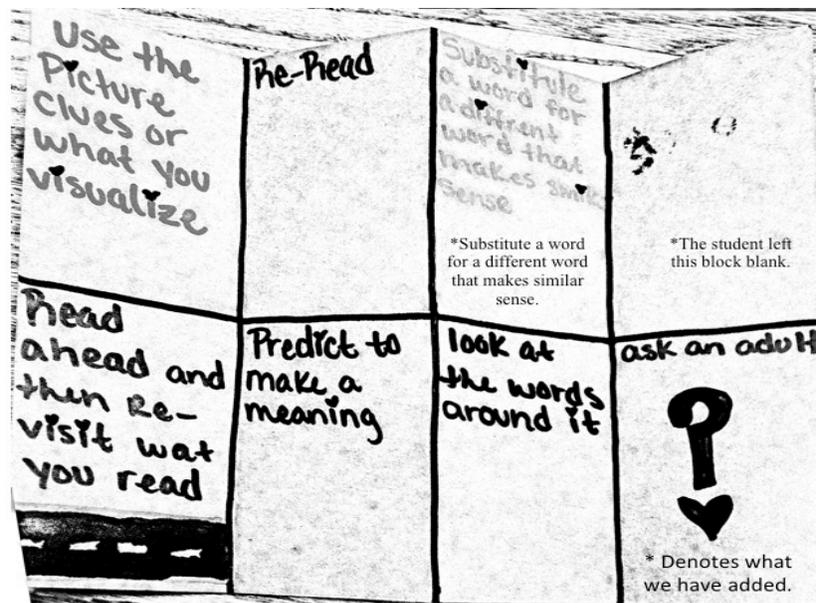


Figure 4: Ana’s reading strategy ruler. \* denotes what we added to clarify the content of her strategy ruler

Ana also included multiple reading strategies (see Figure 4) in her ruler. However, it is important to note that Ana made her own decision to include strategies she wanted to learn and develop effectively instead of including the reading strategies she often overuses such as “sounding out” and “chunking.” She included strategies such as “read ahead and revisit what you read,” “look at the words around it,” “predict to make meaning,” and “substitute a word for a different word that makes similar sense” (See Figure 4). The day that she created the strategy ruler, Ana forgot to take it home with her. However, about 5 minutes later, Violet saw Ana coming back into the Reading Center with her mother noting, “I left my strategy ruler here. I came back here to pick it up.” Then, Ana proudly showed it to her mother, to share what strategies she was using when she reads something challenging and interesting.

Research shows the importance of understanding the complexity of the processes involved in reading (Allington, 2012; Nagy & Scott, 2004; Owocki, 2010; Weaver, 2009; Cole, 2008). Violet shared with us how she made her instructional decisions:

I reflected back to their BRI and the question that asks: “When you are reading and you come to something that gives you trouble, what do you do?” The student’s first, and sometimes only response is “sound out” the word. From other questions in the BRI, I also learned that when students ask for help from teachers or parents they are given the same response: “sound it out.” I considered an article I’d read by Compton-Lilly (2005) where she explains this pervasive cultural model of “sounding out” as a myth with limited usefulness to children. It was then that I realized my students were essentially “stuck” on how to move past this obstacle in their reading. They had not been given the tools they needed to become effective and efficient readers, which was also preventing the enjoyment of a good book. This knowledge informed me in developing and teaching a strategy lesson that would help my readers past this obstacle. I chose to implement a lesson on “fix up” strategies in

the form of a strategy ruler. The students design their own strategy ruler they use while they read, and keep as reference.

Violet’s reflective response demonstrates how she integrates and implements BRI as a way to practice her kidwatching to understand her students’ literacy developmental processes. She also goes beyond her own purposes for using the BRI so that the conversation serves as a vehicle for awakening the children to their own reading process.

### **Supporting Student Learning through Strategy Rulers: Metacognitive Reading Strategies**

By observing the processes Aisha and Ana used to create their strategy rulers, we were able to revisit the importance of using authentic texts (Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2011; Short, 2011) when we discuss the reading process and demonstrate the use of multiple reading strategies. Violet selected various authentic reading materials that were of interest to Aisha and Ana. Violet selected both picture books and chapter books, and then asked the students which books they would like to read individually or together. Also, Violet invited the students to bring in their favorite books from home or the library. When they came to something with which they were not familiar, they began using their own strategy rulers to navigate the text in order to construct meaning of what they were reading. Ana and Aisha became more independent readers. Aisha, began to stop depending on Violet. She gained more control over her own reading process. The strategy rulers she developed affirmed to her that she is a capable reader who can read independently and reflect on what she reads.

By implementing the strategy lesson to reflectively write out a wide array of reading strategies and inviting Aisha to create her own strategy ruler, Violet supported Aisha and Ana in expanding their reading repertoire. They learned more authentic and dynamic ways to use their robust schemata and life experiences in order to transact with texts. Violet later learned that Aisha had become very proud of her reading

strategy ruler, and had taken it to her school to share it with her teacher and classmates. We also learned that Aisha's teacher asked Violet to share more instructional information about how to create reading strategy rulers with her students, Aisha's classmates. For that particular semester, Violet's professional development project ended up being a collaborative project with Aisha's teacher to help children develop multiple reading strategies by creating and using strategy rulers.

## Our Thoughts

By having conversations with our children while they were working on their strategy rulers, we learned that they come to know that reading is not about simply "sounding out." Children realize that they negotiate with texts when they read in order to construct the meaning of what they read.

The children engaged in authentic literacy events to discover and value themselves as readers (Goodman & Goodman, 2011). In addition, as we mentioned here, it is imperative for teachers and teacher educators to demonstrate how effective readers use multiple reading strategies by contextualizing them through negotiating and having conversations with children.

Violet noted:

Working with students as a literacy coach taught me a great deal about myself as a teacher and a teacher-researcher. Many times as teachers we don't necessarily see ourselves in the role of "researcher," but I found it extremely valuable. It enabled me to improve upon my practice and learn from my students to better meet their needs and interests. I looked at the problems they were facing and took actions to solve them. It benefited my students as well by advancing their learning and constructing knowledge for meaningful change. I didn't want to feel "stuck" in my teaching or in my ability to assist students, as they did with their reading strategies. Viewing my role as a teacher-researcher moved me past this obstacle in my practice. As students enjoyed their reading experience I also enjoyed my practice.

We have been learning the value of having a space to implement and explore effective and engaging literacy practices. As Violet states that the Reading and Literacy Center can help position us (teacher educators and in-service teachers) as teacher researchers who value and implement dialogic literacy practices. As teacher researchers reflect on and understand how children transact with texts as meaning makers, our knowledge of dialogic pedagogy via the BRI helps us make instructional decisions that are more engaging and supportive of children.

We believe that to effect change in our educational system, teacher educators need to continue to reflect and reassess their own practices. By collaborating with our in-service teachers in sustaining critical dialogues about engaging teaching practices, we are able to reassess our own teaching and together challenge mandates that minimize the expertise and knowledge of the teaching profession. As we reclaim holistic literacy education for literacy specialists and teacher educators, we position ourselves as teacher researchers, inquiring about our own teaching and implementing dialogic literacy practices that improve learning and living for all.

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## Appendix A

### Helpful Tips: Creating Strategy Rulers with Your Students

Here are some helpful tips we would like to share with teachers and literacy coaches while they are creating reading strategy rulers with their readers:

- To create a strategy ruler, cut an 8 ½ by 11 inch sheet of paper into four halves horizontally. Then, draw four boxes in one of the horizontal pieces to write down four metacognitive reading strategies you intend to demonstrate.
- Teachers/literacy coaches need to demonstrate multiple reading strategies within a context.
- Use authentic reading materials when demonstrating multiple reading strategies that are purposeful and relevant
- Prior to creating a strategy ruler, use Burke Reading Interview questions to understand how your students view the reading process and themselves as readers.
- Share your own strategy ruler (See Figure 2) to demonstrate how you integrate multiple reading strategies.
- Ask your readers to list overused reading strategies at the end of their strategy rulers rather than list them at the beginning, so that they can be consciously aware of additional reading strategies.
- Invite your students to revise their strategy rulers regularly every other week or every month.
- Invite your students to talk about their reading processes by asking them how they use their strategy rulers while they are reading.
- Don't emphasize reading strategies over the joy of reading.
- The order of a strategy ruler can be developed or rearranged depending on your child's needs or desire. (For example, if you are encouraging your child to make a substitution that makes sense, you can put the strategy first.)
- Ask your students to share their strategy rulers with their parents and to create family strategy rulers as a family literacy project.
- Strategy rulers can be recreated and revised as children develop their awareness of diverse reading strategies so that they can keep growing as strategic, effective and critical readers.