Those Influential Literacy Teachers: Meaning Negotiators and Motivation Builders
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Those Influential Literacy Teachers: Meaning negotiators and motivation builders

What makes an influential teacher of reading? Ruddell offers some insight into these effective and motivating educators.

I was honored when asked to contribute this article to *The Reading Teacher*. After brief consideration, I knew immediately the topic I wished to address—Those Influential Literacy Teachers. This is a topic I have spent a decade researching and that I believe is so critical to those of us who know the importance of excellence in teaching.

This discussion then, is designed to build an understanding of those Influential Teachers —teachers who have made a vital difference in the academic and personal lives of children throughout the United States and in other countries. As I conclude this discussion I will identify key instructional insights that will, I hope, be of value in your own teaching.

Influential Teachers are those special teachers whom we recall in a vivid and positive way from our academic experience—kindergarten through college years—and who have had a major influence on our academic or personal lives (Ruddell, 1994; Ruddell & Haggard, 1982; Ruddell & Kern, 1986; Ruddell & Ruddell, 1995). Reflect for a moment on your former teachers in your elementary, secondary, and college years. As you search memory you will, in all probability, find at least one such teacher and possibly as many as five or six who have had a major impact on your academic achievement and/or your personal life. You may be surprised to find that you not only remember the name of

your Influential Teachers, the grade level, and subject area they taught, but that you even remember their personal attributes, physical characteristics, and teaching style.

Identify one of your Influential Teachers and jot down the name of that teacher and any memories you have about him or her in the margin of this page or on a slip of paper. I would ask that you use your recollection of this Influential Teacher as a comparative backdrop for the discussion that follows.

The following three areas will serve to focus our exploration of these unique teachers:

- Characteristics of Influential Teachers—student perceptions and teacher self-perceptions,
- Meaning construction, meaning negotiation, and reader motivation strategies used by Influential Teachers,
- Instructional insights from Influential Teachers.

As we begin, however, it is important to provide a brief theoretical context for understanding and interpreting our Influential Teacher discussion. This context is found in the sociocognitive reading theory (Ruddell & Unrau, 1994) that supports the hypothesis that the teacher's prior knowledge and beliefs about instruction and knowledge use and control during instruction is critical to literacy development in the classroom. From this perspective, an influential teacher is perceived as an instructional decision maker who develops clear goals and purposes and conducts daily learning through well formed plans and teaching strategies.

These plans and strategies are characterized by the use of higher level questions, meaning negotiation strategies, and the successful resolution of instructional episodes in the classroom community of students. In turn, these questions and strategies shape and help direct students' reading purpose and actively engage relevant prior beliefs and knowledge.

This constructivist model also incorporates reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1985, 1988). It is hypothesized that a teacher who takes a predominate aesthetic instructional stance, nurturing internal reader motivation to enhance reader transaction with the text, will upgrade the emotional importance of the text in the mind of the student (Renouf, 1990). The aesthetic stance encourages the reader to become absorbed in a text world of imagination and feeling in which "attention is focused on what [the reader] is living through during the reading event" (Rosenblatt, 1985, p. 38). This effect should in turn (a) influence the student's motivation and intent to read, (b) increase attention, (c) aid in forming mental text representation and, (d) enhance reading comprehension and meaning construction.

Characteristics of Influential Teachers—student perceptions and teacher self-perceptions

Our study of Influential Teachers (Ruddell, 1994; Ruddell, Draheim, & Barnes, 1990; Ruddell & Haggard, 1982; Ruddell & Harris, 1989; Ruddell & Kern, 1986; Ruddell & Ruddell, 1995) has extended from the primary grades through the university. Our interviews and questionnaire responses from former students of Influential Teachers reveal that these teachers are perceived as individuals who:

- Use highly motivating and effective teaching strategies,
- Help students with their personal problems,
- Create a feeling of excitement about the subject matter content or skill area they teach,
- Exhibit a strong sense of personal caring about the student, and
- Demonstrate the ability to adjust instruction to the individual needs of the student.

Further, our research suggests that between kindergarten and Grade 12, high achieving students have, on the average, 3.2 Influential Teachers, but low achievers have only 1.5 such teachers. Regardless of achievement level, however, and this was a surprising finding, high and low achievers perceive their Influential Teachers in almost identical ways. These perceptions, corroborated by our observations and video recording analysis, include the following:

- Influential Teachers use clearly formulated instructional strategies that provide

for instructional monitoring and student feedback on their progress,

- They possess in-depth knowledge of reading and writing processes as well as content knowledge, and they understand how to teach these processes effectively in their classrooms,
- They frequently tap internal student motivation that stimulates intellectual curiosity, explore students' self-understanding, use aesthetic imagery and expression, and motivate the desire to solve problems,
- They use sparingly any external student motivation, such as using achievement pressure to "please the teacher" (Ruddell, 1994; Ruddell & Ruddell, 1995).

On the basis of in-depth interviews with the Influential Teachers, identified by former students, from kindergarten through the university level, we can identify common features that these teachers believe important to their teaching (Ruddell & Haggard, 1982; Ruddell & Kern, 1986). These features are presented in the Table.

Now, take a few moments and examine the Table, reflect on the characteristics that you recalled about the Influential Teacher you identified above, and compare your recollections with the five characteristics identified in the Table. What characteristics did you find that were similar to your Influential Teacher? Which were different? Why do you think these similarities and differences are present? How do these Influential Teacher characteristics match your self-perception of your own teaching?

While space does not permit me to develop the origin of belief systems of these Influential Teachers, I will simply note that to judge from our in-depth interviews, their beliefs and teaching effectiveness appear to be shaped by three key influences. These are their parents (Ruddell & Kern, 1986); their own previous Influential Teachers, both in and out of school (Ruddell & Kern, 1986; Ruddell & Sabol, 1992); and their self-identity as a teacher that motivates an intense desire to be-

Shared beliefs of Influential Teachers about teaching

1. Personal characteristics:	—have energy, commitment, passion —are warm and caring —are flexible —have high expectations of self
2. Understanding of learner potential:	—are sensitive to individual needs, motivations, and aptitudes —understand where students are, developmentally —place high demands on learners
3. Attitude toward subject:	—have enthusiasm —create intellectual excitement —consider alternative points of view
4. Life adjustment:	—show concern with students as persons —are attentive to academic problems and personal problems
5. Quality of instruction:	—make material personally relevant —stress basic communication: clear writing, comprehension of text, critical thinking —develop logical and strategy-oriented instruction: (a) clear statement of problems, (b) use of familiar concrete examples, (c) extension to more abstract examples, (d) analysis of abstract concepts involved, (e) application of concepts to new contexts —assist in identifying issues that should be considered before conclusions are reached —engage students in the process of intellectual discovery

come a highly effective teacher (Ruddell & Kern, 1986; Ruddell & Ruddell, 1995). I will now turn to a description of the meaning construction and motivation strategies that these teachers use in their classes.

Meaning construction/negotiation and motivational strategies used by Influential Teachers

I will draw on our most recent research on Influential Teachers at the primary grades (Ruddell, 1994; Ruddell, Draheim, & Barnes, 1990) and at the university (Ruddell & Harris, 1989) in highlighting key aspects of their instructional strategy use. These studies provide important insight into how meaning is constructed and negotiated and the nature of the motivational strategies and instructional stance used by these teachers.

Meaning construction strategies. Our research at the primary grades (Ruddell, 1994; Ruddell, Draheim, & Barnes, 1990) compared meaning construction processes and comprehension development strategies used by Influential Teachers and Noninfluential Teachers in the same school. The Influential Teachers had been identified by former students as teachers who had significantly influenced their academic or personal lives, while Noninfluential Teachers did not receive such identification.

Our analysis of video recordings for the Influential Teachers and the Noninfluential Teachers from controlled settings using children's literature revealed statistically significant and qualitative differences favoring the Influential Teachers in five areas. These areas measured by the Classroom Interaction Scale (Ruddell, Draheim, & Barnes, 1990) were Classroom Communication, Self-view, Management Style, Problem-solving Instructional Approach, and Total Teaching Effectiveness. These findings confirmed our belief that the identification of Influential Teachers by former students was in fact related to teaching effectiveness.

We then completed an analysis of comprehension instruction using four thinking-level descriptors for questions used in successful and unsuccessful instructional episodes for the two groups of teachers. A successful episode was defined as a segment of instruction marked by an opening event, having a coherent or binding purpose, such as a focusing question, a body of discussion involving recall of information or construction of meaning, and an ending, signifying that the instructional purpose had been met (two examples of successful episodes will be presented later in this article). Unsuccessful episodes were defined as segments that failed to meet one or more of the above criteria.

The thinking-level descriptors consisted of the following:

- *Literal*—recall of text-based information (e.g., "Do you remember the name of the wind-up mouse in the story?")
- *Interpretive*—manipulation of text-based information to infer new meaning (e.g., "Why do you suppose one mouse is smooth and the other one's rough?")
- *Applicative*—transfer and use of text-based and personal knowledge to develop new meaning in a novel situation (e.g., "Well, suppose that at the end of the story you were feeling the way Willy and Alexander were feeling. Would you still use those grey colors [as the illustrator did]? Why?")
- *Transactive*—empathetic use of text-based and personal knowledge and values to encourage the reader to identify with a character and to enter into and respond to the story more fully (e.g., "Have you ever wanted to be like Alexander at the end of the story? Why?")

What did we find? Our analysis revealed that the Influential Teachers achieved successful initiation, discussion, and resolution in 96% of their episodes. This was in marked contrast to the Noninfluential Teachers who reached successful resolution in only 57% of their episodes.

Our examination of the emphasis placed on different levels of questions used in successful episode completion disclosed distinct differences in the way in which higher level thinking was developed. The Influential Teachers were found to use factual questions only 22% of the time. In contrast, Noninfluential Teachers relied on factual questions, characterized as text-based and teacher-directed, 72% of the time.

Also of great interest was the discovery that when the Influential Teachers did use fac-

tual questions it was primarily during story initiation (50%); during story development they reduced the use of factual questions substantially (18%) and shifted to higher order questions at the interpretive (56%), applicative (24%), and transactive (2%) levels. The Noninfluential Teachers, on the other hand, placed major emphasis on factual-type questions during both story initiation (88%) and story development (70%). These teachers placed minor emphasis on interpretive (27%), applicative (3%), and transactive (0%) level questions during story development.

Influential teachers not only place greater emphasis on higher order questions but demonstrate much greater flexibility in directing and orchestrating children's thinking processes...

These results clearly indicate that Influential Teachers, in contrast to Noninfluential Teachers, are highly successful in reaching resolution in their classroom discussions, suggesting clear purpose setting, planning and organization, and effective strategy use. They not only place greater emphasis on higher order questions but demonstrate much greater flexibility in directing and orchestrating children's thinking processes through the use of factual, interpretive, applicative, and transactive questions. Further insight into orchestration of instruction is evident in the meaning negotiation strategies used by these teachers.

Meaning negotiation strategies. The meaning negotiation process using comprehension levels and questioning strategies is illustrated in the following successfully resolved instructional episode for one of the Influential Teachers and her primary grade students. This discussion followed the reading and sharing of Leo Lionni's *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse* (1969). The story centers around the theme of friendship and caring as Alexander, a real mouse, saves his friend Willy, a toy mouse, with the help of the garden lizard and a magic pebble.

The teacher and students are examining Lionni's collage illustration at the end of the story showing Alexander and Willy. A child asks, "Which one is Willy?"

Teacher	Can't you tell? [Interpretive level, focusing strategy]
Child 1	No.
Teacher	I don't know. It's hard to tell. How could you tell them apart? [Interpretive level, focusing strategy]
Child 1	Because he's a wind-up mouse.
Teacher	Anything else about them that was different? [Interpretive level, extending strategy]
Child 2	Yes, he had a key.
Teacher	Yes, anything else? [Interpretive level, extending strategy]
Child 3	Round—wheels.
Teacher	Yes, maybe.
Child 4	Kind of like an egg.
Teacher	Sort of.
Child 4	His ears were like two drops of tears.
Teacher	Well, that's a good description. Can you think of anything else about the way Mr. Lionni *chose* to make the mice? [Interpretive level, extending strategy]
	Here's Alexander. Here's Willy (shows picture of each). [Wait time—5 seconds]
Child 3	One's rounder.
Child 2	One of them is smooth and the other one's rough.
Teacher	Why do you suppose one's smooth and one's rough? [Applicative level, raising strategy]
Child 3	Because one's a toy.
Teacher	Which one would that be, the smooth one or the round one? [Interpretive level, clarifying strategy]
Child 2	The smooth one.
Teacher	That's probably the one I would choose—because I would think of a toy—[interrupted].
Child 4	Because a real mouse would have fur.
Teacher	And so he wouldn't be very smooth would he? [Interpretive level, extending strategy]
Child 3	No, he would be rough, with hair sticking out.

This interaction illustrates the teacher's ability to negotiate meaning based on the text as she activates children's prior knowledge, encourages the construction of meaning, and incorporates the children's responses as members of a classroom community. She places emphasis on interpretive and applicative levels of thinking which actively engage the children through the skillful use of focusing, extending,

clarifying, and raising types of questioning strategies.

The interchange below is representative of discussion episodes used by the Noninfluential Teachers. This teacher is also in the process of concluding the story discussion, after reading *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse* to the children.

Teacher	What did you like about the story? [Interpretive level, focusing strategy]
Child 1	I liked the part where he found the pebble.
Teacher	You like where he found the pebble. Where did he find it, Timmy? [Factual level, extending strategy]
Child 1	By a box.
Teacher	Where? [Factual level, extending strategy]
Child 1	By a box.
Teacher	By a box. What were some of the things that were in the box? [Factual level, extending strategy]
Child 2	Dolls—[interrupted]
Teacher	There were old toys in that box. Why had they been placed there? [Factual level, extending strategy]
Child 3	Because they were old and couldn't work.
Teacher	And they couldn't work. What did they plan to do with them, Henry? Henry, what did they plan to do with old toys? [Factual level, extending strategy]

This teacher initiates and focuses the discussion using an interpretive level question that holds potential for active reader response and comprehension development. She might have explored why the first child liked the part "where he found the pebble." The instructional intent, however, immediately shifts to a controlled set of questions based on the teacher's text-based expectations, at the factual level.

Almost no opportunity is present in this episode to activate prior knowledge, construct meaning, and encourage reader response based on participation of the classroom community. In fact, the mode of questioning is text based and teacher directed. With the exception of the initial focusing question, factual level questions are used throughout the discussion and no attempt is made to stimulate thinking through higher level questions. The teacher-controlled discussion is characterized by a very limited repertoire of questioning strategies, primarily extending.

Our study of Influential Teachers at the university level (Ruddell & Harris, 1989) shows striking parallels to the primary grade Influential Teachers described above. Most of the university teachers were found to share the belief that effective teaching is achieved by guiding students through an intellectual discovery process. Although factual questions were asked across all teaching samples, they were used to provide the foundation for higher order questions. Our close examination and analysis of video recordings of their classes reveals a strong emphasis on higher order questions at the interpretive, applicative, and transactive levels.

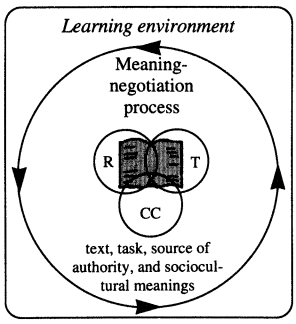
A clear meaning negotiation pattern was evident in large and medium-sized group lectures and in small seminar discussions. This pattern consisted of *posing, exploring*, and *resolving* problems that were embedded in meaningful contexts. The three phases of the process were enacted through lecturing as well as question/response and discussion interactions. Teachers' responses to students were generative in nature, in that they clarified understanding, validated students' responses, raised further issues, and used students' responses to explore alternative explanations. Implicit in this, too, was the teachers' apparent monitoring of students' thinking, made explicit through verbal feedback and the asking of subsequent questions.

Our findings and conclusions differ markedly from those reported on secondary and college teaching that note minimal student-teacher interaction and little or no emphasis on higher order thinking (Goodlad, 1983; Karp, 1985). Our research, however, focused on Influential Teachers who were identified on the basis of their teaching effectiveness. In addition, our study developed in-depth qualitative analysis of effective instructional strategies used by these Influential Teachers rather than a quantitative survey of more global teaching behavior.

The Influential Teachers in our research, regardless of level, appear to be highly sensitive to the use of meaning negotiation as a way of constructing meaning with their students. This process is conceptualized and represented in the Figure and is at the heart of the sociocognitive reading theory (Ruddell & Unrau, 1994) discussed earlier.

The three overlapping circles symbolize the interactive nature of the meaning negotia-

The meaning negotiation process: The text and classroom context



R = Reader
T = Teacher
CC = Classroom community

Adapted from Ruddell & Unrau (1994), p. 1,031.

tion process for Teacher (T), Reader (R), and Classroom Community (CC). Note, however, that process overlaps a real text (shown in the shaded background representing a printed text) upon which the dialogue is based.

Thus, the text itself is not the sole object carrying meaning; instead, meanings arise from transactions with the text. During negotiation for meanings related to texts, readers bring their meanings to the interaction, teachers bring their understanding of the story as well as their understanding of the reading process, and members of the class interact with the text to shape—and reshape—meanings. This process is clearly illustrated in the transcript of the Influential Teacher episode presented earlier.

This process recognizes that the reader and the teacher read much more than text. In effect, students and teacher read several texts—if we take texts to mean events, situations, behavioral scripts, and other symbolic processes that require interpretation (Bloome & Bailey, 1992). Of course, students and teacher read the text-on-the-page. But students in particular also need to read the task, the authority structure (who is in control), the teacher (including the teacher's intentions and expectations), and the sociocultural setting. In addition, they must read the social dynamics of the group, which includes the group's rules, such as turn-taking and question-answer response patterns. Influential Teachers are not only aware of this process, but they have developed instructional strategies to facilitate it.

Classroom community negotiation of meaning is imperative, even if not its ultimate authority for validation. The readers and the teacher share meanings in the classroom community so that, through dialogue, a community of readers comes to hold a possible range of meanings (Ruddell & Unrau, 1994).

Thus, meanings are negotiated in classrooms among readers and between readers and teacher. Meanings are open—not closed or fixed—though they need to be grounded in text. Classrooms form interpretive communities that may share common understandings; however, those understandings, those interpretations are not then fixed forever. Meanings are shaped and reshaped in the hermeneutic circle (Dilthey, 1900/1976) (represented in the Figure by the circle with arrowheads surrounding the meaning negotiation process). So meaning construction is viewed as a circular and changing process of forming hypotheses, and testing, negotiating, and validating meaning. As the reader's knowledge changes, as the reader interacts with other readers and with the teacher in a social context, constructed meanings can be expected to change. In a sense, while a text may be fixed, its meanings for the reader are always becoming (Ruddell & Unrau, 1994). The understanding of this process of meaning negotiation is without question one hallmark of the Influential Teacher.

Reader motivation strategies. Our study of reader motivations used the same primary grade instructional episodes discussed above. This analysis relied on an instructional motivation taxonomy based on the work of Russell (1970), Mathewson (1985), Squire (1989), and Ruddell (1992). The taxonomy accounts for seven categories, which were used to identify the teachers' primary motivational intent of each instructional episode. Six of these categories focused on internal motivations in the instructional episodes and served to define the teachers' aesthetic instructional stance. Examples of books that are highly appropriate for each internal motivation are shown in parentheses (also see Sidebar). The motivations consisted of:

- *Problem resolution*, enabling the student to see himself or herself as successful in problem solving or problem resolution (*Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse,* Lionni, 1969; *Charlotte's Web*, White, 1952).
- *Prestige*, encouraging the child to perceive self as a person of significance, receiving attention and exerting control in his or her life (*Where the Wild Things Are*, Sendak, 1963; *Henry the Explorer*, Taylor, 1966).
- *Aesthetic*, elevating an aesthetic sense, ranging from the appreciation of beauty in nature to the enjoyment of family interaction and harmony (*On the Banks of Plum Creek*, Wilder, 1953; *When I Was Young in the Mountains*, Rylant, 1982).
- *Escape,* enabling the reader to leave the realities of daily existence and travel to far away places doing unfamiliar and exotic things (*Ramona Forever*, Cleary, 1984; *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis, 1950).
- *Intellectual curiosity*, encouraging the child to discover through the exploration of new concepts and new worlds (*Sharks*, Berger, 1987; *The Eleventh Hour: A Curious Mystery*, Base, 1988).
- *Understanding self,* providing opportunity to understand personal motivations and the motivations of story characters (*Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, Viorst, 1972; *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*, Blume, 1972).

The seventh motivation accounted for external motivation and reflected an efferent instructional stance. This motivation was labeled *teacher expectations* and defined as teacher controlled episodes, using explicit text-based questions and discussion with predetermined answers.

The analysis of reader motivations used in the instructional episodes for the Influential and Noninfluential Teachers revealed distinctly different patterns. Influential Teachers relied on internal reader motivations during 89% of their instructional episodes and used external motivation (teacher expectations) in only 11% of their episodes. By contrast, the Noninfluential Teachers used internal motivations in only 39% of their episodes and external motivations in 61% of their episodes.

The Influential Teachers relied most heavily on the internal motivation of problem resolution (46%) with decreasing emphasis on aesthetic (14%), intellectual curiosity (14%), understanding self (11%), escape (4%), and prestige (0%). (The substantial emphasis on problem resolution may be attributed to the many opportunities present for using this type of motivation in the story *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse.*)

As previously noted, these teachers used the external motivation of teacher expectations in only 11% of their episodes. While the Noninfluential Teachers relied predominately on the external motivation of teacher expectations (61% of the time), the internal motivations used by these teachers, in decreasing order, consisted of problem resolution (21%), intellectual curiosity (14%), and escape (4%); they showed no use of understanding self, aesthetic, or prestige motivations.

These findings reveal that the dominant stance used in the instructional episodes of the Influential Teachers was aesthetic, as reflected in their primary reliance on internal reader motivations as they encouraged children to enter into and transact with the text. The stance of the Noninfluential Teacher was predominantly efferent in nature, with major emphasis on specific story content elicited by teacher-directed questions focusing on factual, text-based information.

In short, the Influential Teachers are highly effective in taking an instructional stance that uses internal reader motivations and incorporates children's prior knowledge, experiences, and beliefs in the meaning negotiation and construction process.

Instructional insights from Influential Teachers

In this article I have attempted to briefly highlight critical features of Influential Teachers that distinguish their teaching and cause us to retain them in memory for many years. Our interviews with Influential Teachers reveal that, in fact, their former Influential Teachers served as models and mentors that strongly influenced their teaching many years later. From this discussion, 10 key Influential Teacher insights

emerge and hold implications for increasing our effectiveness as literacy teachers:

1. Develop clear purpose and instructional plans that facilitate successful development and resolution of instructional episodes.
2. Emphasize activation and use of students' prior beliefs, knowledge, and experiences in the construction of meaning.
3. Incorporate higher-level thinking questions, questioning strategies, and sensitivity to students' responses in conducting instruction.
4. Orchestrate instruction using a problem solving approach to encourage intellectual discovery by posing, exploring, and resolving problems.
5. Monitor students' thinking, use verbal feedback, and ask subsequent questions that encourage active thinking.
6. Understand the importance of text, task, source of authority, and sociocultural meanings in negotiating and constructing meaning.
7. Involve students in meaning negotiation based on the text by encouraging interaction between the students, yourself as teacher, and the classroom community of learners.
8. Share teacher authority in discussions to encourage student thinking, responsibility, interaction, and ownership of ideas in discussion.
9. Understand instructional stance, the role it plays in setting instruction purpose for students, and the importance of using internal reader motivation to enhance student interest and authentic meaning construction.
10. Develop sensitivity to individual student needs, motivations, and aptitudes but hold appropriate and high expectations for learning.

In conclusion, I would say that these insights in many ways parallel and extend those found in the writing of Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963), who states: "I reach a hand into the mind of the child, bring out a handful of the stuff I find there, and use that as our first working material" (p. 34). The Influential Teacher enables literacy learning to become an active, exciting, collaborative, and learner-centered process of discovery. Our real challenge, then, is to become Influential Teachers.

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