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Primary Teachers' Explorations of Authentic Texts in Trinidad and Tobago

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The present study focused on investigating (a) what authentic texts were used and (b) how they were used for instruction in three elementary schools, where learners' L1/D1 was a Caribbean Creole. Three findings emerged: First, teachers focused considerable attention on developing students' vocabularies and knowledge of English grammar. Second, they used a variety of easily available textual resources for developing children's reading and writing skills. Third, they explored topical issues, which they felt would provide meaningful prompts for wanting to read and write. The findings suggest that authentic materials can be seen as supplementing, not supplanting, established basal readers and workbooks.

In Trinidad and Tobago, a former British colony in the English-speaking Caribbean, elementary school teachers attempt to build learners' knowledge of Standard English grammar and idiom through controlled texts, such as graded readers and workbooks. The central government provides schools with these controlled texts, which form the primary, and most times exclusive, source of pedagogical content for teachers. Typically, texts contain a variety of genres with culturally recognizable content: poems, descriptive passages, stories, and informational texts, such as biographies and brief histories, as well as expository passages.

Despite the availability of such a range of discourse types in basal readers, some researchers, such as Forrest (1993), have argued that teachers should make more use of "material which is much more true-to-life [for students]" (p. 10) than the traditional textbook. Her dissatisfaction with the latter is that it presents exercises which "tend to be short and disconnected from any meaningful context [and which] offer students little opportunity to test their skills in a realistic way" (ibid. p. 10). Forrest sees newspapers and other print media as "textbooks" because they can be used to teach about global events as well cross curricula "content":

Although newspapers and magazines can be used to acquaint students with virtually all aspects of the current global situation, one learns from them much more than merely what is happening in the world. From them one can learn... and to a very useful extent teach... history, political science, mathematics, English composition, social science, natural science, andcritical thinking. (p. 4, original ellipses)

The claim Forrest (1993) makes for the efficacy and currency of authentic texts has been echoed in more recent research, such as Beach, Ward, and Mirseitova (2007), Komesaroff and Morrison (2001), Purcell-Gates, Duke and Martineau (2007), and Whitmore, Gartens, Goodman and Owocki (2004), which have all documented the powerful, motivating influence of authentic texts and tasks on student reading and writing. The major argument has been that authentic texts and tasks replicate real world ones and are more meaningful to learners.

The Research Context

The participants in the study were native speakers of English lexicon-based Trinidad Creole. The language of instruction in schools is Standard English. All in-school as well as high stakes, national examinations require proficiency in the language of instruction. Since Trinidad Creole (TC) is categorized as Caribbean Creole English (Clachar, 2003), the acquisition of Standard English (SE) is sometimes considered Second Dialect Acquisition, where TC is the first dialect (D1) and SE is the second (D2) (Clachar, 2003). More commonly, the acquisition of SE is considered second language acquisition (SLA), where SE is the L2. From a pedagogical perspective, attempting to have these learners become proficient in D2/L2 reading, writing, and speaking can be difficult for two reasons: 1. They believe they are already performing competently in the target language since they can be readily understood when they use their L1 in the classroom. 2. They may not actually perceive differences between the dialects (Craig, 1966, as cited in Siegel, 2003).

Conceptual Framework

The present study attempts to describe and analyze literacy activities in classroom contexts that offer organized and systematic instruction, embedded as these are within a national curriculum. In order to pursue these goals, the study makes use of activity theory as its conceptual lens for data analysis. Activity theory proposes that any activity, such as teaching and learning in classroom settings, occurs through the actions of a subject upon an object and that this action is mediated through tools to produce an outcome (Gallego, Rueda, and Moll, 2003). The following additional explanation comes from Hung, Tan and Koh (2006):

Activity theory is a framework that could be used to analyze teaching and learning activities within constructivist epistemologies at a particular instance. It examines the activities that teachers and students are engaged in, the types of physical tools/mental models that they use in the activities, the goals and intentions of the activities and the learning outcomes, and/or artifacts produced within the socio-cultural contexts in which they operate. (p. 38)

This is a potentially useful framework for analyzing literacy activities because it emphasizes the situated and contextualized nature of classroom instruction. It guides the researcher to consider

how what is done, what is produced or created, and what is intended are mediated by physical and mental tools. In the present study, authentic materials comprise the tools.

The Research Problem and Research Questions

Research suggesting the efficacy of using authentic materials has been conducted with native English speaking students. An exception to this was the Beach, Ward, and Mirseitova (2007) study, where students in Kazakhstan participated. What remains relatively unexplored are attempts by teachers in D1 contexts, such as exists in the Caribbean, to use authentic materials for instruction. There are at least two questions that remain unanswered about authentic text usage in D1 environments that can extend knowledge about the efficacy of this pedagogical approach. These are: 1. What authentic materials do teachers use? 2. What pedagogical procedures do teachers employ in using them? These two questions were the focus of the present study.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore three elementary teachers' use of authentic materials in a D1 context. The study makes use of three case studies, which furnish contextualized examples of how this occurred.

Review of the Literature

Some researchers have suggested that school curricula should be flexible to sources of language arts content and not be confined to, for example, basal readers, textbooks, and workbooks. Shreve, Danbom and Hanhan (2002), for example, were concerned that language arts curricula should be flexible enough to admit children's responses (and needs) rather than be inflexibly programmed.

Like Forrest (1993), McCallister (2002) believed that teachers should make greater use of news. She observed, "The news media as discourse tend to be undervalued and underutilized in schools....Students need support and time in the school day to learn about the world outside the confines of the school and home" (p. 11). Forrest's and McCallister's (2002) notions are similar to those that have become synonymous with the integrated perspective on language arts pedagogy. Pappas, Kiefer and Levstik (1999), for example, identified student interest, power sharing between teacher and student, use of authentic text and student production of authentic text as four key ingredients of the integrated language arts approach (pp. 41-44). Additionally, they alluded to the two principal types of language integration: integration of language skills across the curriculum and integration of the six language arts. Their chief contention was that children learn language naturally and efficiently when they interact with 'real' texts. Thus, Pappas et al. (1999) made frequent reference to 'authentic language' and 'authentic texts'. They used these terms interchangeably to mean holistic and "genuine" use of language in the service of meaningful communication.

Defining Authenticity

The International Reading Association/National Council of Teachers of English (IRA/NCTE) glossary of *Standards for the English Language Arts* (1996) defined 'authentic' as:

Something that is meaningful because it reflects or engages the real world. An *authentic task* asks students to do something they might really have to do in the course of their lives, or to apply certain knowledge or skills to situations they might really encounter. (p.70, original italics)

This concern with authenticity was reflected in McCallister's (2002) lament that "rarely does the school curriculum involve children in any authentic consideration of issues, events, or people outside the school community or the text-based worlds of curriculum materials" (p. 10). Consequently, a divide emerges between school texts and curriculum content on the one hand and the out-of-school world which children inhabit on the other.

For Little, Devitt, and Singleton (1988, as cited in Guariento and Morley, 2001) an authentic text is one "created to fulfill some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced" (p. 347). That is, the text is connected to real people living real lives and engaging in real activities. Thus, Guariento and Morley (2001) argued that teachers bring authentic text into language classrooms in order to "bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and a student's capacity to participate in real world events" (p. 347). Furthermore, they noted that there is now more widespread use of authentic materials because of the recognition that it increases student motivation to learn the target language.

Authentic Instructional Activities

There have been diverse approaches to engaging children in authentic learning activities, only some of which have had an explicit language/literacy focus. Students in Komesaroff and Morrison's study (2001) raised money for playground equipment by using reading and writing skills, such as preparing a rationale and budget for their project, and evaluating suppliers quotes for equipment. They also interacted verbally with equipment distributors and sales representatives. Later, the students' work on the school newspaper was re-conceptualized as core curricula and given scheduled class time, as opposed to being seen as a "Friday afternoon activity" (p. 7).

In the second and third grade science classes that Purcell-Gates, Duke and Martineau (2007) experimented with, pupils produced either brochures based on authentic ones they studied from natural science sites, or procedural texts for accomplishing an objective. To produce brochures, pupils brainstormed a topic, read "a variety of science texts" (p. 21) and wrote about what children would want to know about what lives in a pond. The grade 3 group who produced procedural texts performed several psycho-motor activities. After they were explicitly taught features of a science procedural text, they wrote directions for the second graders explaining how to test which objects would slide faster and further off a tilted surface. Both groups read, wrote, and spoke about intrinsically interesting topics, and had powerful reasons for wanting to engage in those literacy practices.

Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall and Tower (2006) reported on teachers responding immediately to events that had instructional opportunities. For example, students' interest in the eruption of a volcano in Mexico and their disagreement on "where the lava comes from and how hot it is" (p. 348) led to purposeful reading to find answers to the questions. Similarly, a Michigan teacher's students learned "compare and contrast techniques" (p. 353) while exchanging information about the weather in their own state with an audience in Costa Rica. These students also wrote for within-school audiences: they responded to "a demonstrated need or request for such texts" (ibid. p. 353) and produced science brochures, bookmarks on

dinosaurs, posters of the type found in museums, and factoids about the weather, which were read over the school's PA system.

In all of the descriptions of authentic literacy practices, authenticity was defined in terms of speaking, reading, and writing in response to real needs of a live audience, whether an in-class or an external one.

Since research literature is unequivocal in advocating use of authentic texts to connect classroom instruction with the real world and to integrate the language arts, there has been a slow and careful expansion of investigations of how teachers have responded to the NCTE/IRA challenge. The present study attempts to augment this body of knowledge by examining how three teachers in a small Caribbean island treated with authentic materials and "life practices" (Beach, Ward, and Mirseitova, 2007) of the students they interacted with daily.

Methodology

The data presented in this study was collected over five school terms starting in October of the first term and ending in May of the fifth term. It comprised observation of classroom practice and interviews with teachers.

Participants

The research participants initially comprised nine elementary school teachers, who were enrolled in an in-service literacy course at a small, publicly-funded university in Trinidad and Tobago. Seven of the participants were female and averaged 11 years of teaching experience. The two males had an average of 9 years experience. The schools at which participants taught were widely distributed throughout the country, so detailed case studies were only done with the three teachers (two females and one male) whose schools were within one hour's drive from the university, since this permitted frequent observation of classroom practice. Prior to commencement of the study, I engaged the participants in a discussion of authenticity in literacy and the role of authentic texts, in order to gauge whether their sites would be data rich. It was based on their verbal responses that the three participants (whose pseudonyms are Sarah, Margaret and Mark) were selected and formal permission to conduct research at their schools was obtained from the Ministry of Education and each school's principal.

Observation

Over the course of three school terms, I sat in teachers' classrooms and observed a variety of lessons: social studies explorations of topics, such as government and civic responsibility, safety in the home, reducing pollution, and the role of the family; and language arts lessons on grammar, mechanics, teaching of composition, and poetry. I did not observe science lessons. Observation meant sitting as unobtrusively as possible at the back of participating teachers' classes and recording instructional sessions. "Recording" meant typing into a word processing program on a laptop computer to produce a near verbatim transcript of all verbal interactions in classrooms. At times, though, it was not possible to capture all that students said, especially when animated conversations occurred between them and their turn-taking overlapped. In addition to the verbatim report I described activities, such as sequence of instruction, and resources used. Interspersed through this narrative were comments I generated based on my

observations. The following example comes from my observation of a comprehension lesson where the teacher focused on a newspaper article describing the circumstances in which a man's house had been pushed over by a mudslide:

Teacher exercised great choice in bringing this passage to class today, since students are very aware of similar problems caused by hillside erosion in their community. Their responses are deafening and Margaret is having difficulty maintaining order. It seems all of them know about "slash and burn" farming methods and its effect on slopes. There is some disagreement, though, because some pupils feel the problem is one of littering, whilst others think it is as a result of agricultural practices. Interestingly, each side has a "true story" to offer from their observations of what occurs in their neighborhood.

I did not observe or compare classroom practices of non-participating teachers with those of the three teachers whom I had permission to observe. In all, observation time amounted to approximately 43 hours spread over the three terms. The least observation time was spent in term three, when schools were preparing for high stakes examinations.

Interviews

There were two types of interviews: the first was a general exploration of the teacher's use of authentic text and his/her philosophy as it related to use of authentic materials. The second typically occurred after my observation of a lesson. I asked teachers what aims they had had for the session and what issues arose when they attempted to execute those aims.

Research Sites and Participants

Sarah had been teaching for 12 years, eight of which had been at Orange Valley Primary School. She taught a class of 24 students, 16 of whom were girls. The mean age of girls was 10 years; boys' mean age was 10.5 years. Prior to enrolling in her undergraduate degree, Sarah had completed several literacy courses and described herself as a committed and knowledgeable teacher who was always in search of professional development. Orange Valley Primary was a mid-sized school located close to an affluent housing community, but receiving no students from it. Instead it served mostly lower income families, which were typically single-parent homes. I observed her classroom for approximately 16 hours. The second research participant, Margaret, had been teaching for eight years at the time I enlisted her participation in this study. Unlike Sarah, she taught at a large public school for boys in the heart of the nation's capital and had started her career there. Unlike Sarah, too, she had not taken any special literacy courses and confessed to practicing bits and pieces of interesting things she saw her peers using in their classes. In particular, her interest in authentic texts started when she collaborated with one of my former literacy students to produce a pupil-researched brief history of their school that was eventually printed and distributed to parents at the end of term meeting. Margaret's school, Evergreen Elementary, served almost 600 children, whose socio-economic backgrounds were similar to Sarah's. This meant they seldom brought extra reading books to school and had limited access to print at home. Her class comprised 21 boys, whose average age was 10 years. I observed her classroom practice for approximately 12 hours.

Mark had been teaching for seven years, all of which were at La Vacca Government Primary School. This is a medium-sized, rural school serving mainly the children of farmers, small proprietors and minimum wage earners, who find work in a nearby mid-size town. The

school was 22 years old at the time and obviously in need of repairs and new equipment. He taught 18 students, 11 of whom were girls. Students' mean age was 10 years. When I first entered Mark's classroom, I was struck by the fact that its walls were covered with children's drawings, teacher-made charts on the digraphs /st/ and /sp/, writing "tips" charts, which reminded children about important principles in process writing, and word wall charts with the latest additions from stories the children encountered in their basal reader. I observed Mark for approximately 15 hours.

Data Analysis

Observation and interview data were transcribed electronically, imported into Ethnograph V5.0 (Qualis Research Associates, 1998), coded, and reduced to fewer, more inclusive themes. Analysis followed the method described in the software user's guide by Seidel (1998). It consisted of searching for patterns in the "data trees" that the software generated, writing memos about emerging themes, manually checking the transcripts to verify the contexts in which coded data occurred, and aligning emerging themes with descriptive notes from the data.

Data Presentation

I used the data to create three individual cases (Sarah, Margaret and Mark) in order to accurately report what authentic materials teachers used and how they used them. At the end of each case I offer an analysis of emerging issues then conclude the section with an analysis of emerging issues and themes.

Findings

Sarah's Practices

During the time that I observed her, Sarah taught a class of 10 year olds. On one of those days I was present for the middle lesson she was teaching in a unit on the effect of hurricanes. This was part of a larger class project on weather in the Caribbean. This in turn had been inspired by a reading passage in their basal reader on a hurricane that had hit the island of Tobago decades before. Sarah and her class were responding to news that tropical storm Olga was heading towards The Dominican Republic in the Caribbean Sea. Despite the fact that the storm posed no threat to her and her students, and was several hundred miles away in the north western Caribbean, Sarah had decided to explore with them what the coming of such a weather system meant for their Caribbean neighbors. To do this, she first showed them, on a medium sized map, the location of Santo Domingo, since no one knew where the country was. A few students had heard of Haiti though, which was Santo Domingo's neighbor. Following this, Sarah used materials she had collected from doing a similar unit when Hurricane Ivan had hit Grenada.

The specific title of her previous unit was "Grenada in Ruins", since she was focused on the destructive power of Hurricane Ivan, which had virtually crippled the country's economy in 2004. She had photocopies of the article, "Grenada in Ruins" from a daily newspaper and organized the students into groups of four. When she presented them with their copies, students immediately began reading, while Sarah wrote "Grenada" on the left side of the board and 'new words' on the right hand side. Under the former she placed any information students thought relevant and interesting about Grenada in the newspaper article. The section on 'new words' was

reserved for any unfamiliar words students met in the text and for which they had guessed at meanings. Words that Sarah wrote in this column were, “fury”, “spared”, “havoc” and “braced”.

About ten minutes into the reading, one girl exclaimed, “Oh ho! Is Grenada we does get nuttenmeg (nutmeg) from!” Sarah immediately asked the class to justify whether the bit of information was valuable or not. They agreed it was since, as one girl explained, “Is like oil from Trinidad. It telling something about the country.” Armed with this operating definition, students gleaned from the newspaper information about Grenada’s capital, its main export crop, the Prime Minister’s name, and the size of the population.

Towards the end of the session, some 90 minutes later, students began inquiring about the location of Tropical Storm Olga, or as one boy asked, “Where Olga gone now, anyway?” In response, Sarah directed attention to the map of the Caribbean and she and the students charted the course Olga was taking. Finally, Sarah had her students think of the possible loss Grenadians had suffered many years before and what physical needs they might have had. Most of them immediately identified food and water as basic needs. She let her class brainstorm for a few minutes then wrote their ideas on the board. She asked them to think about whether or not the citizens of Santo Domingo would have the same needs as the Grenadians did. When everyone agreed with alacrity that they would experience the same misery, Sarah enlisted their help in reorganizing the list to create what the class called a “Help Santo Domingo” list of supplies that could possibly be collected and shipped to the island.

Reorganizing the list meant creating meta categories or superordinates, such as “food”, “building supplies”, “personal hygiene”, and “security”. The following day, Sarah sought to extend her lesson by introducing the element of “community” that Duke et al. (2006) spoke about. She achieved this by allocating students to one of three groups and having them write (a) a factual description of Santo Domingo and its people (b) a projection of what was likely to happen (“When Olga hits, there will be...”) and (c) a letter to parents soliciting donations of money or supplies. Sarah later said that the last idea was not actually implemented, since it would have necessitated negotiating too many bureaucratic procedures and was not certain to receive approval from the school’s PTA. However, the other two ideas were presented to the school’s acting principal when she accepted a formal invitation to visit the class that very afternoon.

Subsequently, when Tropical Storm Olga made landfall as a relatively weak system that brought heavy rainfall rather than extremely high winds and torrential downpours, the class engaged in “post-storm” writing. Sarah had them cut out rectangular strips of pink Bristol board, approximately 7 inches x 12 inches, on which they practiced Standard English structures, such as the following: “Olga threatened Santo Domingo”; “Olga ran out of steam”; “The storm scared all of us”; “We prayed for our neighbors”. The students stuck these to the class walls at about eye-level, so that their friends from neighboring classes could share what they had written.

The foregoing description of Sarah’s practice during one unit was typical of her teaching during the three months I observed her. Most often she created stand-alone, single lessons on topics that emerged from events reported in the media. An example of the latter occurred following a newspaper report which described a tragic incident in which an infant had ingested weedicide from an improperly labeled bottle. Sarah had explored the issues raised pragmatically. She read the report to the class the next morning, discussed it for a while talking about safety in the home. Then she took her class to the farm (a small area at the back of the school devoted to vegetable crops), where she showed them properly labeled bottles of chemicals. She compared these with what had happened in the story and talked about the proper storage of the bottles.

After that they went back to class and Sarah did two comparison words, “unlike” and “but”, with them. She asked them to speak about “safety at home” by comparing what they had just seen on the farm with what they had read about in the newspaper.

Sarah’s explorations of authentic materials appeared to target primarily language arts and social studies curricula, which she taught in significant blocks of time devoted to those subjects. Her method was to find interesting stimuli and weave instruction around them so that learning could be contextualized. She depended heavily upon current events as reported in the media, especially newspapers, for authentic materials and used these for teaching English grammar, sentence structure and vocabulary. Notably, some of Sarah’s explorations were community focused, although that community was restricted to the school and did not include visitors from the wider neighborhood or correspondence with a larger external audience. The relevance of and sensitivity to this local audience was reflected in the display of student writing at eye-level for their peers from neighboring classrooms to read.

Margaret’s Practice

Margaret’s primary authentic texts were newspapers and popular magazines, such as *ELLE*. Her main pedagogical purpose appeared to be the teaching of language arts content that she approached on a lesson by lesson basis. She did not plan units or mini units. She said, “It (the newspaper) stimulates and maintains interest among pupils. It is highly interactive and pupils express themselves with greater confidence as the issues are real to them. I think it’s because they (the materials) represent real issues about real people. However, this increased talk means the lesson takes a lot more time than usual and I think I will have to use the block method in my class.” Typically, her lessons were of 35-40 minutes duration.

With respect to selecting and preparing materials, Margaret said, “the selection of authentic material is time consuming as it needs to be sourced, studied and planned for extensively to ensure its effectiveness.” For example, in one lesson, she displayed a picture from *ELLE* magazine in which a woman dressed in a pink summer dress was walking her dog in a park. Margaret’s stated focus in the lesson was on verb inflection, since in Trinidad Creole there is no inflection of third person singular verbs. She used the picture as a stimulus for having students produce English sentences such as, “I am, he is, it is”. On other occasions, she explored the use of newspaper pictures to teach vocabulary.

Early in the December term, when her students had just come to her, Margaret created a unit on floods. It was entitled, “Floods: Water, Water Everywhere.” In it Margaret set out to challenge her students to think about the effects of perennial flooding during the rainy season in Trinidad, which spans the period June to December. She had students bring in cuttings from newspapers displaying pictures of severe flooding and she affixed them to the classroom walls. Following that, she engaged her students in a general discussion of paradigmatic categories (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004) of selected words so that they could evaluate for themselves the varying effects of word choice on sentence meaning. For example, Margaret stuck a picture from a weekend newspaper in the middle of the chalkboard, invited students to tell her what they were seeing, drew lines out from the picture with these labels then created sentences with some of the student-generated vocabulary. In one case, students responded to a picture of a completely submerged plain, out of which just a sign post and a few cars were visible. The students generated sentences such as the following: “There is a lot of dirty water everywhere.” “The villagers were stranded in their houses and had to depend on the army for help.” “The people in

the cars looked really sad because they had nowhere to go.” In all, students created 17 sentences in less than 10 minutes simply by looking at the visual stimulus. Margaret wrote sentences like the preceding examples then she used a different colored chalk to suggest a more sophisticated lexical item by enclosing the target word or phrase between parallel lines.

Following this, Margaret asked for suggestions on alternative words/phrases and wrote these below the target word. With respect to “sad”, for example, her chalkboard contained the following paradigmatic possibilities:

|sad|
|unhappy|
|glum|
|dejected|
|forlorn|
|despondent|
|miserable|

After Margaret put it to a vote, the students chose “despondent” as most apt for describing the expressions on the people’s faces. She then drew a line from one person’s face in the picture to the chalkboard and wrote the word “despondent”. She repeated this procedure for each sentence until students had a fresh bank of words to choose from. To complete her unit, Margaret had her students write letters to the editors of several daily newspapers offering their opinions on the discomfort and loss people felt when they were affected by floods. However, Margaret did not post the letters, she simply had authors read their letters to the class and she made comments about their grammar and the extent to which they had successfully used the new words.

On other occasions, Margaret explored stories that students wanted to discuss. For example, a student brought to class a front page picture from a newspaper of a man jumping across the hood of a parked car. Pursuing him was a uniformed policeman. Margaret appeared surprised, but pleased, at the student’s request for class discussion of the image. The class then discussed the probable reasons for the incident. This took about 15 minutes and was conducted entirely in Creole. Most students said, “Miss, he mad,” about the man being chased; however, some wanted to talk about police brutality and offered anecdotes about persons dressed as policemen beating their (the students’) neighbors and arresting them. Mike and Rawle were the most vociferous, responding to the visual stimulus as follows:

Rawle: Miss, Miss, it does happen like everyday down by we. Them (the Police) does come and real brutalize people. Las’ week it had a man get beat up because they say he pushin’ weed (marijuana), and he...

Mike: Yeah, Miss is the same t’ing by me. ‘Cause them Police always lookin’ for drugsman and sayin’ the people by me in t’ing. They like to beat yuh up and take yuh down to the station.

Margaret: So what are you trying to say about this picture then?

Mike: He coulda be a innocent man nah, Miss. He coulda be mindin’ he own business and that Police decide to..

Rawle: But, Miss, is known them Police does chase man down for nothin’. Is like my cousin, he doh do nothing’ and them push ‘im on the groun’ and handcuff ‘im.

Margaret: So, Rawle, what can people do about this?

Rawle: Nothin’. Nobody cyah do nothin’. Is the Police.

This conversation went on for about three minutes more and culminated in a suggestion from Margaret that the class write a letter to a newspaper describing their experiences. However, students groaned and complained that they had just written a short story the previous day and had been writing “whole day and we tired.” After that, Margaret did not pursue the matter and did not re-visit the issue on any subsequent day. She indicated during the post-lesson interview for this particular class that she had been very surprised at the reaction she had had from the two boys, since they never spoke about their communities in class. She confessed to some nervousness in discussing the topic:

I was really surprised today because I .this came right out of the blue. It really shocked me and I wasn't prepared for Rawle and Mike to be so outspoken. Usually they will contribute to class, you know? But today they seemed to hit—the papers seemed to hit a sore spot. I never realized that that is what they see when they are home. I wasn't really sure, you know, how to handle it because these things don't really come up often; come up at all, I should say.

Though she was enthusiastic about using authentic materials, Margaret did not use them everyday. She estimated that she used them twice per week. Also, Margaret frequently talked about balancing the need to use authentic materials on the one hand with the requirement of completing her syllabus and teaching to the program of instruction that had been set out for the term.

Margaret used visual prompts to stimulate her students' oral responses, as a precursor to writing activities. She focused considerable attention on English grammar and sentence construction whether or not she was teaching social studies or language arts. What the visual stimuli appeared to do was provide a recent, contextualized nexus for their conversations, especially when they had been following events in the news. In the vocabulary building exercise, where students had to choose what they considered *le mot juste*, the focus was on teaching new words as D1 vocabulary. It was notable that Margaret used an inductive approach to teaching new words and did not “give” the words to students. Most remarkable for the teacher too were her students' reactions to the picture of a policeman in pursuit of a man. Margaret's surprise at their animated and engaged response suggested that even though she allowed free expression and was aware of some of the students' backgrounds, she was unprepared for the spontaneous discussion that arose and was unable to “guide” it very much, even if she wanted to.

Mark's Practice

Mark had an interest in social studies, which was reflected in the frequent links he made between current events and topics in the social studies syllabus. In addition to a major project on Carnival, which he undertook annually in February, his students explored small topics, such as making maps of their communities, which remained papered to the classroom wall for the better part of the term; writing weekly reviews of their favorite episode of *Sponge Bob Squarepants* (a TV cartoon character) modeled after reviews Mark had read to them from newspapers; and adding to a tally chart and creating the weekly histogram. In the latter case, students tallied weekly sales of stationary items they sold on behalf of the school, created a bar chart to show the daily sales and worked out how sales had fluctuated across the week. The weekly chart was mounted immediately to the right of the chalkboard, where it competed for space with reviews, drawings, and poems. These weekly authentic activities were not as elaborate, or as extended, as Mark's major annual project on the theme of Carnival.

Every year, around carnival time, Mark poses an intriguing/provocative question to his class: “Are Carnivals a waste of time and resources?” This is usually a provocative question because as Mark explained:

“We have a situation where Carnival is not a public holiday, ok? But the country shuts down for almost a week, you know? Schools shut down, businesses close, that kind of thing. Then on Carnival Monday and Tuesday about half the population runs off to the beach or some church camp or something, and those who could afford it take a plane and fly off somewhere, usually Miami. But the Government gives millions of dollars for Carnival, so it is important for children to talk about these things before we have our school celebration.”

To begin answering the question, the teacher took his class on a field trip to a Carnival camp in the neighboring town. The trip lasted approximately 40 minutes and before setting off, Mark reminded his pupils about what they had to observe when they got there: descriptions of what workers were doing, the kinds of tools they worked with, the texture of materials they used, and what emotions they [the students] felt when they saw the costumes for the first time. Since they were required to make notes on their trip, students took along their notebooks and Mark carried the school’s new digital camera. Once they arrived at the Carnival camp, the person in charge of the production greeted the children and gave them a brief “do’s and don’ts” lecture prior to the commencement of their tour. After this, the children walked about in pairs and small groups observing workers and asking process questions, such as “How do you get that neat circular shape?” “Why do you have to use this kind of material?” and “What happens after this piece leaves your table?”

During their tour, children had opportunities for touching materials, measuring finished items, and collecting scraps. After lunch, when they returned to school, Mark worked on the chalkboard and questioned his pupils about the sequence of activities that they had engaged in and observed that morning. His explicit intention he said was “To teach students how to use adverbs of time to sequence events that occurred in the past, because they could rattle off parts of speech like parrots, but never use them when they are writing.” Thus, he posed questions to have them recount the morning’s experiences and gave them several target adverbs and adverbial phrases that they wrote into their books:

- First, we got onto the bus, which took us past other schools in the area.
- After that, we spent some time measuring the length of the dragon’s tail.
- As a result, even though the king’s costume is really big, yet it can move about...
- Finally, we collected some scraps of foam and cloth of different colors, which...

In order to encourage affective connection between students and the writing activity, Mark had them talk about how they felt during the trip. He also prompted them to describe the setting in the Carnival camp. To get discussion going, he connected the digital camera, which he had used to take photographs at the camp, to the class computer so that students could view the images of their morning’s experiences. This activity provided an opportunity for students to use a variety of adjectives, but there was one proviso: Mark reminded them that he was not accepting “nice”, “good”, and “glad” as descriptive terms. Instead, he modeled for them how to use more sophisticated vocabulary. For example, he said, “When we got to the Carnival camp, we were all bubbling over with joy because we had never visited such a place.” “The most satisfying part of our trip was that we got to use the camera.” “I was astonished to see the amount of work that went into making the dragon costume.” After about 10 minutes or so of pair discussion, the class collaborated to write two paragraphs about their trip, which they dictated for Mark to write on

the board. Their finished product went into their writing books, where they had the option of adding to it if they so desired.

The following day, I again sat in on Mark's class. Since he budgeted two hours for a language arts block, Mark was able to explore a significant amount of reading and writing. During that time, he read several brief articles from Internet sources, encyclopedias and printed books on carnival. The readings focused on just three ideas:

- How Carnival started.
- What Carnivals look like in various countries [what people do]
- What benefits/drawbacks that derive from Carnival, if any, are mentioned in the reading?

During reading, Mark frequently stopped to question his class about the content of the articles and to guess the meaning of new, unfamiliar words. He wrote these new words onto the class word wall at the end of the lesson. Since much of the reading was chronological (detailing as it did the history of carnivals), the teacher drew a timeline on the board and got students to supply the details, such as dates and events as they occurred in chronological order. Students also had opportunities for talking about what intrigued and interested them about other countries' carnivals.

The next day, Mark structured his language arts block as a writing workshop. Students arranged themselves into small groups to engage in process writing. Their task was to create a variety of texts that would present their opinions about Carnival. They used the information that was read to them the previous day as well as other sources that several of them had researched on the Internet. Since they had copies of those readings, students first spent time re-reading the stimulus then they looked at their tasks. Mark had assigned each group three genres: 1. a letter/email to a friend describing what they had experienced on their trip to the carnival camp, how their country's celebration compared/contrasted with the celebration described of another country, and what they thought about the issue of Carnival being a waste of resources. 2. A story in which someone either benefits from or suffers as a result of participating in a Carnival. 3. A poem using rhyming couplets, on the theme of Carnival. These tasks occupied students for four days, with the poetry writing being especially difficult for them.

During students' deliberations, Mark circulated amongst the groups clarifying tasks, asking questions about what had been written, helping with spelling, vocabulary choice, and sentence structure and reminding writers about what they had already learned about writing conventions, by sometimes pointing to the charts on the classroom walls. Once students completed a piece and were satisfied that it was ready for publication, they turned it in to Mark, who offered comments on it. Notably, students kept returning to their readings to gather further supporting information for their pieces. At the end of all the tasks, Mark had one of the students create a large invitation measuring 11 inches x 17 inches, signed by all the students, which was delivered to the principal. It requested her presence at the formal reading of everyone's pieces. After the principal left, Mark told them that they would be having another visitor the next day. The children were excited and very curious, but their teacher insisted on keeping it a secret.

The following day, Mark introduced his mystery guest: the owner of the Carnival camp that they had visited several weeks before. He took a tour around the classroom visiting the various exhibits. Following this, he listened to the children present their work, just as they had done for the principal the previous day. At the end of the session, the visitor expressed his thanks for the invitation and discussed with students the merits of their positions as articulated in the pieces they had read. Following this, the teacher closed the project when he affixed samples of

each group's work to the walls for viewing by other classes and allocated marks to groups for their written products.

A core aspect of Mark's practice was his use of sensory experiences for teaching language concepts. He immersed students in visual and tactile experiences that provided them with opportunities for describing, negotiating, and commenting on what they were learning. The planned trip to the Carnival camp, for example, was a staple experience he provided annually and it furnished learners with concrete experiences about which they could write and speak. In this respect, too, the use of digital technology was invaluable, since it refreshed students' memories and offered immediate visual stimulation for their discussions.

Discussion

From the data presented, three core findings emerged. The first finding was that teachers used a variety of easily available textual and visual resources for developing children's reading and writing skills. That is, in addition to being strongly visual, the materials teachers used were from the "real-world": they were not created for instructional purposes (Duke et al., 2006), and the situations chosen for exploration were topical, "current events" type of situations, which were unfolding in real time (Forrest, 1993; McCallister 2002).

However, as Duke et al. (2006) and Beach, Ward and Mirseitova (2007) showed, authenticity does not have to be synonymous with current events and breaking news, which are just two examples of situations that generate multimodal texts. In Beach et al.'s study (2007), for example, there were authentic "interactions around books" (p.7) during literature circles. The three teachers in the present study chose to focus on current events during the period I visited their classrooms and it is possible that a more extended stay in those contexts would have provided evidence of wider usage of authentic materials and situations.

Despite the authenticity of the materials used and experiences provided, however, the teachers' practices do not qualify completely as "authentic" if one uses the definition proposed by Duke et al. (2006). The missing ingredient in Sarah and Margaret's practices was an authentic external audience or consumer of the classroom products. The science teachers Duke et al. (2006) studied, for example, had their students create a brochure, which was displayed in the front office of a nature center. The closest that either Sarah or Margaret came to this ideal was Sarah's students' displaying of "post-storm" writing for their friends from neighboring classes to read. Margaret's students simply shared amongst themselves. In contrast, Mark's invitation to the owner of the camp to visit the classroom was an explicit use of an external audience.

Second, teachers used these materials to focus considerable attention on developing students' linguistic knowledge, particularly their vocabularies and knowledge of English grammar. This was not done using contrastive grammar or lexical analysis, though. Instead, grammar instruction dealt with the D2 as a second/foreign language. Also, since Trinidad Creole has an English-based lexicon, vocabulary instruction in new lexical items resembled what Chall, Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, Hemphill and Jacobs (1982) described about Mrs. Pasquale's fourth grade classroom, in which children were "bombarded with vocabulary" (p. 147).

Third, teachers explored topical, interesting issues which they felt would intrigue students and provide meaningful prompts for wanting to read and write. Teachers used stimulus materials with strong visual content, and provided opportunities for students to interact, often in a hands-on way, with materials. This was most evident in Mark's classroom, as well as Sarah's, but

relatively less so in Margaret's, which could have been a function of the topic she was exploring during the period I observed her. For example, the field trip and subsequent reading and writing activities Mark's students engaged in had the flavor of language experience approach (LEA) lessons, whereas Margaret's students only received visual stimuli. Sarah's students engaged in relatively more hands-on activity than Margaret's and actually created artifacts for an external audience.

Based on these findings, it is apparent that the connection between instructional activities, tools used (authentic texts), and pedagogical intentions in the lessons observed is an uncomplicated one. The three teachers' desire to secure students' engagement in core literacy learning motivated them to experiment with new tools. The major issue they faced was in engaging Creole speakers to learn English in settings where that language is not spoken widely, though it can be comprehended because it shares the same lexicon.

Implications for Teachers

Based on teachers' practices, it appears that at the three sites "authentic" means (a) responding to current events issues that are not part of the pre-planned scheme of work for the week/term and (b) treating with and exploring the scripted curriculum through "real life" activities and materials that have been planned for. Typically, unplanned and spontaneous lessons emerged when teachers seized opportunities for teaching core curricula skills and concepts based on what news story/stories were splashed across morning newspapers. Planned and scheduled authentic activities operated through units and projects. In the Trinidad and Tobago context, teachers' ability to engage in either of these approaches assumed that (a) the school administrator/s were willing to permit use of materials other than the basal readers (b) teachers enjoyed a lot of autonomy in determining what was taught and how it was delivered and (c) they felt sufficiently in control of subject matter content to use instructional materials and activities that were not "scripted" in the prescribed official textbooks.

Based on the observations reported here, one may conclude that the pedagogical foci, and methods, of the three classrooms were not significantly different from those described in previous studies. The primary difference was that teachers explicitly targeted learners' knowledge of English syntax and lexis, since they spoke Creole. Though Trinidad Creole morphology differs significantly from English, authentic texts were not used for treating with this aspect of instruction in observed lessons. That is, instructional and learning activities did not differ radically from what may be observed in classrooms where authentic texts are used to teach English-speaking students.

The findings of this study suggest that authentic materials can be used successfully to teach language arts content in D1 instructional settings, such as that of Trinidad and Tobago, if teachers have a sound grasp of English language arts concepts. When the three teachers in the present study devised units on carnival, floods, and Hurricane Olga they were in effect acting as textbook authors, who were creating lessons to illustrate specific principles and teach pre-defined skills. When, for example, Sarah chose to create a web of reading, writing and speaking around the hurricane, it was necessary for her to do so whilst targeting the syllabus content her department had agreed upon for that term. It was not that she had free rein to arbitrarily teach concepts as they arose, or that she felt "ought" to be taught. Instruction focused on developing language and literacy skills that had been set out in the planned curriculum for the term. Whilst

this may appear as limiting, it does have the advantage of ensuring accountability for time spent on non-traditional pedagogical approaches.

In terms of ease of use and ability to immediately deliver core curricula content, basal readers and other commercial texts have a perceptible advantage. What they lack is the ability to respond to live events as these unfold before learners' eyes. Even the most well-thought-out text book cannot deal with and present reading (with associated tasks and discussions) on any but a discrete number of author chosen topics taken from the universe of possible readings. Consequently, language arts instruction must be characterized by teacher flexibility and creativity if the linguistic tools teachers are teaching students to use are to appear relevant when exigencies arise in real life. As such, approaches to instruction using authentic materials are supplements rather than replacements or substitutes for pre-planned and pre-packaged instructional material.

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