

***Teaching Language and Literature in Elementary Classrooms:***

***A Resource Book for Professional Development,  
Second Edition.***

**Marcia S. Popp**

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The author of *The Man Who Became a School*, *American Men of Olympic Track and Field: Interviews with Athletes and Coaches*, and *Learning Journals in the K-8 Classroom: Exploring Ideas and Information in the Content Areas* presents the second edition of *Teaching Language and Literature in Elementary Classrooms*. The second edition initiates class observations and responds to educators and researchers who read the first edition. In addition, this new edition is richer with educational research and review of literature. Popp was an elementary teacher in Evanston, Illinois and has taught in special education classrooms. In addition, she was the director of Teacher Education and chair of the Division of Education at Mckendree College, Illinois.

The book is divided to eleven chapters. Each chapter provides research, practice, and real experiences from existing teachers. The book raises important issues like, teaching and preparing for guided reading, evaluation of independent reading, reading aloud that builds partnerships, perspectives of mini-lessons, conferring with students, writing with meaning, and the importance of listening and speaking in the learning development to the language acquisition. All the chapters follow the same sequence starting by introducing the strategy, providing equivalent easy- to- read research, enriching research with classroom experiences, demonstrating presentation of that strategy and evaluation techniques, and ending by some suggestions called “try out the chapter ideas.” In the appendixes, teachers will find guidelines and checklists, forms, tools that are easy to print and use, and a resource of awards for children’s literature both national and international.

Chapter one is an introduction to the book through describing three different classrooms at three levels: kindergarten, primary, and intermediate. The main idea of the chapter is how integrating language learning and literature can be successful throughout the curriculum from the three teacher’s perspectives. The following chapters present classroom practices that are relevant and applicable for these three levels. Chapter two introduces reading aloud. The author makes connections between reading and listening, provides descriptions of narratives at all grade levels, helps the teacher choose books that

are good to read-aloud, and most importantly guides the teacher to deal with controversial books in the classroom. Reading aloud and choosing relevant literature are not limited to this chapter because the author asserts that reading aloud is vital to develop interest in reading, expands vocabulary, assists language development, and increase comprehension skills regardless of the student's age. The successful independent reading strategy and its importance to language learning is explained in chapter 3. Marcia claims that it is important to let the student choose what they like to read on a daily basis for 10-30 minutes. By the end of this chapter, the author provides classroom teachers with a strategy to examine if their program works. Chapter four clarifies how to create a literature based classroom. This chapter illustrates the differences between textbooks and trade books, book clubs, and the qualities of good children's literature. Chapter five helps the teacher to set up the classroom environment for guided reading. It also explains how teachers can help their students to choose materials to read for shared and guided reading. The chapter provides assessment guidelines as well. Chapter six is mainly about conducting mini-lessons, their purpose, benefits, uses, and how they can be planned and presented. Chapter seven explains individual reading conferences, and how both the teacher and the students should prepare for the conferences. This chapter is very important and practical for teachers with emergent readers in their classrooms. The chapter provides easy to follow steps to fulfill the aim of reading conferences. Chapter eight ensures that the aim of writing is to create meaning, relates reading to writing, relates invented spelling and the quality of writing, and encourages the use of student self-evaluation as a tool for improving writing performance. Chapter nine addresses the relation between listening and speaking. Chapter ten introduces the languages of learning in the content areas and how to use themes to organize classroom learning. The last chapter introduces the language of expressions which is explained by play, media, and the fine arts. The chapter explains the importance of children's play and its contribution to learning, helps the student be able to criticize films, and integrates writing with fine arts.

In the book, the author makes strong connections between reading and writing supported by research. Writing and reading for meaning is what the author scaffolds in her book. Popp explains that the purpose of spelling, reading, and writing is meaning making rather than decoding and sounding out.

Throughout the book, the author asserts the student- teacher relationship. Before explaining each strategy, the author provides ways to build partnership, to care for all students, and to listen to teach other with respect and appreciation. Assessments are various and encouraged throughout the book to detect both the teacher and the student's performance and if the strategy works.

Learning should be interesting and students should be reached through variety of strategies. Students are different individuals therefore teachers should try guided writing, shared writing, writing conferences, responses, guided reading, reading aloud, independent reading, etc. In addition, activities also should vary. The author concluded every chapter with practical ideas and existing experiences to help the teacher reach the fun of learning and teaching.

Children literature is vital in classroom teaching and in the learning process. Popp encourages classroom teachers to build a literature based classroom where the students

can choose, read, and learn happily. Popp also explains how to build an “Award Winning Library” and how to make it work for the students.

Popp raises an important issue to student’s writing development, which is invented spelling. She encourages a classroom where invented spelling is fostered. The author explains that what matters most is allowing the rich literacy environment where all the students can write and express themselves and their ideas without worrying about getting every word spelling conventionally. Popp claims “standard spelling gradually emerges, but is considered an editing procedure, separate from the creative process” (p. 214).

Students who struggled with reading and writing are not forgotten. As the author presents the strategy followed by practical ways to apply it, she makes sure that all the students benefit from that strategy. No student is left behind in Popp’s book. She suggested conferring with individual students, entire classroom participation, and engaging all the students in the reading and writing activities.

The book was open to different thought collectives such as, Rosenblatt and Dewey, Vygotsky, and Bruner. It also presents voices of Duckworth, Gallas, and Ashton. Popp’s book is readable and accessible. It engages the reader in humorous stories from the classrooms, successful experiences, and what happened behind the scenes. The message of the book is clear for the teachers to understand and follow. This book speaks directly to the teacher who seeks perfection in the teaching performance. It provides a solid background for beginning teachers who need to know what do in the classroom based on simplified applicable strategies to foster students’ language and social development.

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| <p>Karima M. Almazroui, PhD is currently an assistant professor in the United Arab Emirates University. She taught different courses such as Children's literature and Language Education. She was the first to address Invented Spelling in Arabic in her Ph.D. dissertation 2006.</p> |
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