

# What's After "What's That?": Preservice Teachers Learning to Ask Literary Questions

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*This year-long study analyzed the effects of using carefully assisted case studies to prepare preservice teachers to be more knowledgeable and skilled in supporting children's response to literature. As part of an undergraduate course in children's literature, 43 preservice teachers read weekly to individually selected children. The purposes of the assignment were (a) to expand the preservice teachers' understandings of response to literature by analyzing an individual child's responses over time and (b) to enhance their instructional strategies and critical stances toward literature. Over time, preservice teachers' question types shifted in amount and content, moving from teacher dominance to child-teacher dialogue. Within the dialogue, the preservice teachers learned to create or at least reflect on a balance between comfort and challenge. As the preservice teachers changed, the children changed as well, moving from hesitancy to confidence, even to the point of contradicting the preservice teachers. Additionally, the course emphasis on questioning as well as on detailed fieldnotes heightened preservice teachers' attention to the results of their own questioning strategies, causing them to be more reflective about the content and consequences of their queries.*

OVER THE COURSE OF A CASE-STUDY ASSIGNMENT for a university class in children's literature, one preservice teacher read with a small boy. At first, the teacher "rarely asked questions," and the boy, in turn, "did not say much about the text." Finally, the teacher "decided to be daring and ask him a question." As she explained, "I was hoping for an exciting discussion, but he just said, 'No,' and I did not know what else to say." Initially tongue-tied, she next moved to a stage of rapid-fire questions and ultimately, near the end of the study, to a more interactive conversation. In her final paper on the child's response to literature, she reflected:

The more I questioned him, the more his answers seemed to shorten or he would respond with "I don't know." I was so excited about asking questions that I lost sight of the purpose.... My questions were not aimed at drawing him into the literature but were shallow and random. In turn, he did not discuss the text but instead gave shallow responses to my drilling questions.... Comparing my questions and his responses at the beginning [of this case study] to the end, I see progression in both of us. I went from "drilling" him with questions to interacting with him. He began to converse with me and often modeled my questions. (MKQ, 4/21/93, age 4)<sup>1</sup>

Drawing children into literature – moving from the "drill" of known-information queries to "conversation" spurred by intriguing interpretive questions – is a daunting task for a new teacher. Without explicit guidance as well as extended experience with children, preservice teachers may be doomed to repeat the initiation-reply-evaluation pattern so firmly entrenched in elementary schools today (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1978). Under these conditions, literary discussions look more like the rote repetition of a prepared script than an authentic discussion taking individual interpretations into account. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the potential for novice teachers to move beyond the "What's that?" known-information interrogatory to a balance of questions that encourages a more reflective response.

During the spring and fall semesters of 1993, Shelby Wolf, the first author, asked preservice teachers enrolled in her children's literature class to conduct a "reader-response case study" with a young child. The preservice teachers, including the two coauthors of this article, read weekly with individually selected children, carefully documenting each session with reflective fieldnotes. The preservice teachers submitted their field notebooks twice for Shelby's commentary and used both notes and commentary as the foundation for a final paper on an aspect of their child's response to literature or on their own growth as future teachers of children's literature. The assignment had two main purposes: (a) to expand the preservice teachers' understandings of response to literature by analyzing an individual child's responses over time, and (b) to enhance their instructional strategies and critical stances toward literature.

1. See the section on data collection and analysis for an explanation of data-segment notation.

This article focuses on the preservice teachers' growth in asking literary questions. Over time, as they asked and answered questions about the literature they were reading with their children, as well as read relevant research and participated in university discussions centered on questioning possibilities, their own questioning strategies shifted. The preservice teachers realized that their expectations for response, often cast in straightforward comprehension questions, were often the cause of limiting children to literacy skills, rather than engaging them in literary dialogue.

## Theoretical Framework

Asking a known-information question, receiving an expected (or unexpected) answer, and complimenting (or criticizing) the child on his or her response is a common pattern in elementary classrooms (Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1978, 1983; Mehan, 1978) and has strong links to mainstream storybook reading patterns (Ninio & Bruner, 1976; Snow, 1983) as well as early theories of reader response. Initial studies in response to literature focused on the mismatch between expert and inexpert evaluation of text implying "a correct response which the children were somehow failing to perceive" (Purves & Beach, 1972, p. 7). More recently, however, research (e.g., Rosen, 1985; Rosenblatt, 1991) has stressed that the creation of a text world is an active response to literature in which the reader alters self to meet the perspective of text and restructures text to match personal perspectives. Still, the remaining challenge is how we can best create an environment for children to be actively *engaged* in literary response. In other words, how can we encourage and even amplify the voices of children as they construct a dynamic and personal interpretation of literature?

In thinking about this question and others, Bruner (1986) discussed his own experience with a teacher who departed from a traditional pattern. He explained, "She was a human event, not a transmission device," (p. 126) and later concluded, "If a teacher wishes to close down the process of wondering by flat declarations of fixed factuality, he or she can do so. The teacher can also open wide a topic of locution to speculation and negotiation" (p. 127). Bruner suggested that teachers' abilities to open up conversation are connected to a philosophical stance that is often marked by the use of modal auxiliaries (e.g., might, could, would). Although these markers are predominant in teachers' talk with their colleagues, they are rare in child-teacher talk (Feldman & Wertsch, 1976). Rosenblatt (1982) came to a similar conclusion, suggesting that teachers in general tend to adopt an efferent stance (pulling information from text) with students rather than an aesthetic stance (putting the self into text). She concluded that teachers can encourage the aesthetic experience with a "truly receptive attitude" and with questions that "foster expressions of response that keep the experiential qualitative elements [of the story] in mind" (p. 276).

A teacher's stance toward questioning is a critical issue, particularly when research has shown that the answers teachers get often depend on what they ask. For example, in a study of child-parent and child-teacher groups, Roser and Martinez (1985) found that "[young] children tended to respond to literature more like the adult in the situation than they did like other children" (p. 490). The same is true for older students who are adept at predicting the kinds of questions their teachers are likely to ask (Alexander, Jetton, Kulikowich, & Woehler, 1994). When the focus of literary discussions is on "comprehension" of a relatively frozen text rather than "interpretation" of the multiple possibilities within text, the results may be "a slavish fidelity to recounting the story line or the main ideas of a passage" (Hartman, 1991, p. 373), rather than an expansive and expressive understanding of the connections between the text on the page and the texts of children's lives (Wolf & Heath, 1992). Although research has shown that the use of higher level queries such as "Why?" questions can positively affect students' factual memory (Menke & Pressley, 1994), the benefits are more far-reaching because diverse and open-ended questions encourage students to be engaged in substantive and sometimes highly personal issues. Good questions allow students to construct interpretations actively and, even more importantly, to think about how their literary interpretations might have import for the construction of their lives. Moreover, good questions are generative, for the adult is not alone in forming questions and responses. When provided with clear models and opportunities, children take the initiative to ask their own questions and make their own comments (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Commeyras & Sumner, 1995; Oldfather, 1993).

Nevertheless, knowing the kinds of open-ended questions and substantive opportunities for personal interpretation we want does not ensure that preservice teachers will take current theory and put it into practice. Multiple studies (e.g., Borko & Putnam, 1996; Lortie, 1975) have shown novice teachers' resistance in shifting from the ways they have been taught to new theories of effective practice. This is especially true if we lecture on these possibilities without providing preservice teachers with opportunities to try out the ideas with children. As O'Loughlin (1995) argued:

Students come to us with embodied conceptions of teaching and learning – ideas they have built up not from learning about these topics intellectually but from experiencing them over many years of schooling.... Prospective teachers do not *think* teaching should be done a certain way; they *know* it from their lived experience.... A central tenet of critical teaching is the need for praxis – critical reflection that leads to action. We have failed in our responsibility to our students if we unveil possibilities for them, yet deny them opportunities to reinvent their teaching philosophies in action by seeing and doing the kinds of teaching we advocate. (p. 114)

In other words, what is the use of *teaching about* Bruner's (1986) eloquent plea for teachers as "human events not transmission devices," unless we provide ample opportunities for our preservice teachers to *experience* Bruner's point of view.

Lincoln (1995) suggested that "In most teacher education programs, too little emphasis is placed on eliciting and negotiating student contributions to curriculum.... Little attention is given to the problem of simply asking the right questions" (p. 89). Thus, the central question in this research asks: *What are the ways that preservice teachers' questions shifted as they both learned about and experienced questioning with children over time?*

## Method and Sources of Data

The participants in this study were 43 undergraduate, elementary, preservice teachers (37 women and 6 men) who were enrolled in a children's literature class in the spring and fall semesters of 1993 in a state research university in the Southwest. Predominately European American and female, most preservice teachers do their coursework for teacher certification while completing undergraduate degrees in Liberal Arts. The remaining preservice teachers have already completed undergraduate degrees and enter the School of Education as fifth-year students. The admission requirements for the School of Education are among the most stringent in the state, and the program itself has a strong emphasis on theory and research. The case-study children – also predominantly European American – were selected by the preservice teachers and ranged in age from 20 months to 11 years, with the average at 6 years of age. Three preservice teachers read with two children (either siblings or cousins) bringing the total number of children to 46, with 21 girls and 25 boys.

### *The Central Assignment*

The assignment built on methods of cross-grade tutoring, where older students not only read to younger children but kept careful fieldnotes on the reading sessions (Heath & Mangiola, 1991). As instructor of the course, Shelby had three reasons for asking the preservice teachers to read to the children, rather than have the children do the reading or have all the children read a text silently and then discuss it. First, she wanted the preservice teachers to experience the art of story reading, challenging them to engage their readers with a relatively dramatic rendition of their texts. Second, she felt that such a reading would highlight the emphasis on interpretation, for accent, stress, and tone signal vocal choices supported by interpretive decisions (Wolf, Edmiston, & Enciso, in press). Third, she wanted to take away any potential burdens on children who might struggle through the decoding process. Shelby wanted the children to listen, think, and talk about the text's words and illustrations, rather than concentrate on an accurate translation of the print on the page.

The preservice teachers' fieldnotes provided details on each session and were an opportunity to reflect on what they had learned. Although their

fieldnotes would undoubtedly have been more accurate and reflective if they had tape-recorded their sessions, Shelby decided against this for predominately practical reasons. Helping 43 preservice teachers locate tape recorders, teaching the minutiae of transcription techniques, and requiring selective but accurate transcription from busy undergraduates seemed to push beyond both the time and commitment boundaries most preservice teachers had for the course. The case-study project was but one assignment in the class, albeit a central one. Without outside funding to support and sustain the preservice teachers in such an endeavor, she simply felt it would be too much to ask.<sup>2</sup>

To support the preservice teachers in their understanding of fieldnotes, Shelby provided an outline of basic requirements in the class syllabus:

For each session, be sure to document the date and time spent, book(s) read, questions asked, intriguing comments made by the child, and activities connected with the reading of the text. Most important, offer some reflections on the child's response in terms of his/her mode of response (e.g., through talk, physical interactions with the text, drama, artistic representations, and/or writing). It is also important to include reflections on your own growth as a teacher of literature.

In class, Shelby suggested that for every half-hour spent with the child the preservice teachers should reserve at least an hour to write up their notes, which would include as much language and detail from the scene as possible. She explained that they could take brief "scratch notes" while in the company of the child, but if they felt it was too distracting to take notes openly, they should get down as much as they could as soon as they could after the session. She suggested that at each session's end they could sit in their car or on the bus and write out as much as they could remember. Then, as soon as they got home (or to a computer), they could "thicken" their scratch notes into fieldnotes. The basic idea was that they needed to provide enough detailed information to write the story of where they were and what they did, particularly the language used to accomplish the work-play of the literary discussion. She reminded them not to assume that they would remember what they or their case-study child said, heard, or felt, and they must get as much out of their heads and onto paper as soon as they could following each session.

2. This practical bent was born out of recent experience. In the fall of 1995, Shelby taught a special seminar on leading literary response for six preservice teachers who had participated in the case-study project. The central assignment for this course involved twice weekly transcription of small-group literary discussions with children in their student-teaching classrooms. She emphasized careful transcription techniques, and the preservice teachers uniformly told her how "hard" and "time consuming" the process of transcription was. Yet, they felt it was worth the time and emphasized how much they learned about themselves and their children as they repeatedly played and replayed their literary conversations. Nevertheless, the preservice teachers in this class (including coauthor, Angela Carey) were exceptionally hard-working students who took on this unrequired but additional coursework because they were intrigued with studying and improving their own literary interactions with children.

Shelby collected the field notebooks twice during the semester to comment on the depth and quality of the fieldnotes and reflect on patterns she saw emerging in both the preservice teachers and the children. She offered explicit advice on literature the preservice teachers might want to consider for their children as well as academic literature that might help them think about the response patterns they were uncovering. Although she counseled the preservice teachers to connect their findings to a range of issues associated with research on children's response to literature (e.g., intertextuality, the role of drama), the art of questioning was emphasized both in fieldnote commentary as well as in lectures, handouts, and university class activities. At the end of each semester, the preservice teachers looked across the patterns in their fieldnotes and wrote a final paper on a self-selected theme supported by the research literature.

### *The Evolution of the Research Team*

At the end of the first semester of the study, Shelby asked two of the undergraduates, Erikka Mieras and Angela Carey, to join her in the analysis and write up of the work. She chose these students because of their enthusiasm for the project as well as their specific interest in larger issues of research on literary response. She asked Erikka to join the project, because she was one of the few preservice teachers to tape-record independently her sessions with her case-study child. Her fieldnotes were distinctive not only in their level of detail, but also on the wide range of issues she and her case-study child discussed as they read through a number of fairy tales. Shelby also chose Erikka because of her willingness to question and challenge assumptions – a stance which ultimately helped to make her a valued collaborator in a situation where issues of status between a university professor and an undergraduate are not easily dismissed.

Shelby chose Angela Carey, because she too represented an exceptional case of dedication to the project. Rather than focus on a single child, Angela chose to compare and contrast two boys' responses to literature. She met with her children more than any other preservice teacher – conducting 15 sessions in all – and her fieldnotes were rich in detail. Angela's positive attitude toward her own responsibilities as a teacher, combined with her commitment to integrating the research literature into her reflections, made her contributions particularly relevant, for she often took the lead in searching out academic answers to our own team queries.

During the course of our work together, we were supported by various grants including an Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program grant funded by our university. In their final report for this grant, Erikka and Angela commented on their "growth as researchers":

In the beginning of this research project, we had a tendency to be relatively quiet and passive. Our contributions to initial conversations were minimal,

for we expected directions and were not used to voicing our opinions regarding research. Our growth was much like that of some of the children who participated in the case studies; the children began in relatively passive positions waiting for the preservice teachers to ask the questions of them. However, an interesting shift occurred over the period of the case studies. The children slowly began to ask questions of the preservice teachers and took the initiative for the direction of the reading sessions. Much in the same way, as we became more comfortable with this research, we gradually found ourselves asking more questions. We began to explore new possibilities for the research, challenging previous ideas and opinions when it seemed necessary. Initially, Shelby took the lead, but over the course of our work together, the project became equally collaborative. (May of 1994)

Just as Erikka and Angela learned to listen to the voices of children, they also began to develop their own voices in the research community. Through the analytic work of the study, presentations at national conferences, as well as opportunities for coauthorship (Wolf, Carey, & Mieras, 1996a, b), they were able to work toward what Oldfather (1995) called “*epistemological empowerment*,” a sense of intellectual agency and ability to know that emerges from a strong sense of the integrity of one’s processes of constructing meaning” (p. 132).

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Data for this study included preservice teachers’ fieldnotes and final papers (collected at the end of each semester) as well as Shelby’s commentaries on their fieldnotes, class lecture notes, and handouts. We began by reading all the preservice teachers’ written work to ensure that we were equally familiar with the data. We then met to discuss general patterns and formulate possible codes that combined some a priori themes that Shelby strongly emphasized in the course with themes that emerged as we discussed the cases as a team. For example, with regard to questioning, Shelby had talked in class specifically about “known-information” questions and “conditional” questions, emphasizing the strengths and limits of both. As a team, we felt that we could recognize and code these questions as well as the children’s responses, but we wondered what other “kinds” of questions would be used by the preservice teachers. Would they ask the children to predict? Would they ask for opinions? How could these varying question types be organized for coding? Would the children themselves ask questions, and if so, what kinds of questions?

From here, we divided the cases between the three of us to enter data segments into the computer and tentatively apply our initial codes. These data segments included passages from fieldnotes and final papers in which preservice teachers reflected on what they were learning about children’s response to literature, as well as representative examples of the literary discussions and activities that occurred. Data segments were bounded by topic shifts which were often signaled by paragraph markers, skipped lines, or transitional statements.

The data segments used in this article are taken verbatim from the preservice teachers' fieldnotes or final papers. Words in parentheses are comments the teachers wrote that are asides or additions to their main text. Only words in brackets are our own, and they often serve to provide reference information or to add clarification. Each data segment is marked by the preservice teacher's code name, the date of the passage, and the age of the case-study child (e.g., ACT, 10/24/93, age 8).

Our initial coding served to alert us to inadequacies in our original codes and places where we could possibly collapse or expand categories. For example, prediction questions ("What do you think will happen next?") seemed to be a subcategory of the larger category of opinion questions, because prediction questions still ask a child for his or her opinion but send the child in a particular direction (in this case, toward the future). Rather than create a new category for each type of question, we chose to group similar questions under larger umbrella categories.

At this point, we redistributed the data, making sure that we were responsible for different cases, and entered what individual members of the research team believed were additional and needed data segments. We recoded the data and then redistributed the cases once more. During this third run, each of us worked to make sure all pertinent passages were entered and coded. Finally, as principal investigator of the study, Shelby went through each of the cases a fourth time and brought any discrepancies in unentered data and questions of coding to the team for discussion and resolution. Although we began our analysis with a relatively broad selection of data segments, over time and familiarity with the data, we narrowed our selection to segments that added insight to our typical cases as well as unique or contradictory information.

Thus, following qualitative methods in research on teaching outlined by Erickson (1986), we established analytic categories and coded the data to confirm or disconfirm key assertions warranted by multiple evidence sources (fieldnotes, Shelby's commentary on fieldnotes, and other sources), as well as search for discrepant cases. For example, within the larger study, we had a hypothesis that as the preservice teachers progressed in their work they would read fewer books per session, thus leaving room for more literary questions and responses. Erikka, as a case in point, had initially felt pressure to fill her session time with reading: "For next time, more books. Lots of extra books! They go so quickly" (2/13/94, age 6). Yet, this attitude shifted over time to allow for a more leisurely discussion of only one or two texts. In thinking about this example and others like it, our team developed a scheme for counting the number of books the preservice teachers read each session. Because of the differences between chapter and picture books, we equated the length of one picture book to one chapter of a book. If the chapters in a book were exceedingly long, we sectioned off every 10 pages. Angela spent long hours in the library seeking out esoteric books, and we tabulated the number of books (full-length texts, chapters, and sections of pages) read in every session. We then grouped the number of "books" read into three session sets – the initial

sessions of the study, the middle sessions, and the end sessions – and compared the numbers over time. Our hypothesis was wrong, for the number of books the teachers read per session actually shifted very little. Although the reasons were varied, there was a tendency for many teachers to read less in the middle sessions and then read more in order to finish up a particular chapter book before the case study ended.

For the purposes of this article, all of the approximately 2,000 preservice teachers' questions were analyzed, and four main question types emerged from the data. Because the lines between question types were often blurred, we brought specific questions to the team for discussion. Ultimately, we decided to label each question with only one code, and the decisions were usually determined by specific linguistic markers such as requests, verbs, or modals. The four central question types, with examples of their typical markers, were (a) known-information questions with only one answer expected (*What's that?*), (b) opinion questions (*Why? What do you think about that?*), (c) conditional questions (*If you were in the story, what would you do?*), and (d) connection questions (*Does that remind you of something in your life or in other texts we've read or discussed?*). Thus, if a preservice teacher asked a child, "If you were Red Riding Hood and met the wolf on the path, what would you do?" the question was coded as a conditional question (even though it also asked for an opinion) because of the linguistic markers of "if" and "would."

Each of these four question types had subcategories which concentrated on particular purposes for asking the question (See Table 1). For example, for known-information questions, the subcategories consisted of labeling and counting of objects (Ninio & Bruner, 1976) as well as text explicit and text implicit questions (Pearson & Johnson, 1978; Raphael, 1982; Raphael & McKinney, 1983), which asked the child to find specific information in either an immediate or inferential sense. Connection-question subcategories included text-to-life and life-to-text questions (Cochran-Smith, 1984), which asked the child to connect the text with his or her life, as well as text-to-text questions (Wolf & Heath, 1992), which requested connections between written texts. Children's responses to these questions were coded using the same constructs.

After coding the data, the preservice teachers' questions were tabulated in beginning, middle, and end session sets to look at the prevalence of certain question types as well as how the subcategorical purposes shifted over time. For example, a teacher who read with her case-study child nine times in a semester had three sessions in each of her first, second, and third session sets, and we made careful counts of the types of questions asked in each time period. We then specifically analyzed the relationship between question type and response type – coding each response according to our known-information, opinion, conditional, and connection scheme – to discover what kinds of questions led to what kinds of responses in terms of match or mismatch, age of the child, type of text read, length of text discussion, and personal engagement in the literature. Thus, the central focus on question type led us to also analyze the question-

TABLE 1. Question Types and Subcategories

Question type	Prototypical questions & answers	Subcategory examples
Known information	What's that?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Labeling</i>: Requests to identify objects and match with specific labels.</li> </ul>
	I know ... ; I don't know. <sup>a</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Counting</i>: Requests for counts of objects, characters, etc.</li> <li>• <i>Text explicit</i>: Request to provide information found directly in the text.</li> <li>• <i>Text implicit</i>: Request to provide information from textual synthesis.</li> </ul>
Opinion	Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Generalized opinion</i>: Requests for the reader's general attitude toward the written text, author, or illustrations.</li> </ul>
	What do you think?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Predictions</i>: Requests for the reader to synthesize textual information in order to make predictions for subsequent action.</li> </ul>
	Because .... I think ....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Character analysis</i>: Requests for the reader to synthesize textual information in order to determine character affect, motivation, and intention.</li> </ul>
Connection	Does that remind you ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Text-to-life</i>: Connections between the book being read and a real life theme, character, or event.</li> </ul>
	Yes, it reminds me of ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Life-to-text</i>: A real life theme, character, or event in the present is connected to a text that has been read in the past.</li> <li>• <i>Text-to-text</i>: Connections between books – comparing authors, genres, or interpretations made in different written texts or repeated readings. Connections could also be made to TV or film text.</li> </ul>
Conditional	What if ...?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Predictive conditional</i>: "What if ...?" queries that ask for a prediction in text-altered circumstances.</li> </ul>
	What would you do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Self-reflective conditional</i>: Questions that ask the child what he or she would do if faced with the same textual circumstances.</li> </ul>
	If ... then ...; I would ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Character-reflective conditional</i>: A question that asks the child to think like the character, not as themselves, to determine how the character will react to textual circumstances.</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup>"I don't know" is an answer that could be applied to any or all of the question types.

response relationship with a particular emphasis on what the preservice teachers thought about this relationship and how it affected their own questioning styles over time.

In addition, we analyzed the first and last single sessions to determine the number of questions, responses, and initiating comments made by both the preservice teacher and the child. Initiating comments (IC) were statements that shifted the conversation into a new direction and often provided the impetus for preservice teachers' follow-up questions. For example, one preservice teacher was reading a version of *Little Red Riding Hood* (Grimm Brothers, 1983) in her final session when she came to the point where the protagonist speaks to the wolf on the path. The preservice teacher began the following textual discussion which is marked by our coding scheme in bold brackets:

“Did Little Red Riding Hood do something that she should not have done?”  
I asked [QKI].

“She talked to the wolf,” replied [the child] [AKI]. “You’re not supposed to talk to strangers” [IC].

“Why not?” I continued [QOP – follow-up question to child’s comment].

“They might hurt you,” [the child] replied [AOP].

“Was Little Red Riding Hood good or bad?” I questioned [QOP – character analysis].

“Good,” answered [the child] [AOP]. “But the wolf is bad” [IC]. (RSE, 4/17/93, age 4)

Based on the explicit instructions given to Little Red Riding Hood by her mother, the preservice teacher began with a known-information question (QKI) about the protagonist’s actions. The child answered with known information (AKI) from the text, but then initiated a comment which more likely came from her own life experience (and perhaps her own mother’s admonitions) than explicit information in the text. In response to the child’s comment, the preservice teacher asked her a follow-up question (QOP) which requested an explanation of the child’s opinion (“Why not?”). The child provided her opinion (AOP) which centered on possible harm. Then the preservice teacher asked another opinion question (QOP) concerning Red Riding Hood’s character. The child responded with her opinion (AOP), but then initiated yet another comment (IC) on the character of the wolf.

The initiating comments in this passage are only slight variations on a conversational theme begun by the preservice teacher. However, this was not always the case. Many times, the children initiated a comment that began a new line of conversation. They commented on the illustrations, made unrequested predictions (“Oh! I know what she’s going to do!”), remarked on intertextual links between the characters lives and their own (“My dad teases me about my hair too.”), or made conditional statements about what they would do if they were in the character’s shoes (“Oh man! What a dork. I would never do that.”). To discover the potential differences between children’s comments that were slight variations

in an ongoing discussion and those that started a new line of conversation, we randomly selected a quarter of the case studies (11 of 43 cases) and coded the children's comments according to whether they emerged in a preservice teacher-initiated conversation (ICT) or in a child-initiated conversation (ICC). Although the central focus in this article is on the changes in preservice teachers' questions, we found that in thinking about the overall picture of the literary conversations it was helpful to look at children's questions and comments as well.

In analyzing our data, several patterns emerged that all marked shifts in questioning strategies as the preservice teachers grew in their understandings of literary interaction over the course of the case study. We then assembled representative passages to highlight the kinds of insights the preservice teachers had at different points in the study. We also paid particular attention to the instructional context of the class to look for points of comparison between what the preservice teachers were learning in the case-study assignment and what they were learning in the university class itself or from Shelby's written commentary on fieldnotes and final papers.

### Unveiling Possibilities Through the Instructional Context

O'Loughlin (1995) talked about the relatively useless nature of university teacher education courses that "unveil possibilities" without an emphasis on praxis. However, the instructional context of lectures, assigned readings, and university class activities can effectively set the stage for practical application with children. In this case, the growth of the preservice teachers' understandings of literary questions was supported by a strong class focus on questioning.

In thinking carefully about the instructional context of the class, Angela took primary responsibility in analyzing lesson plans, lecture notes, and handouts for the university class, as well as the commentary Shelby wrote for students' fieldnotes, largely because Shelby felt she might be too close to these materials to provide a more objective view of the data. Still, we met often to discuss the purposes of various activities and the reasoning behind particular responses. During the second semester of the study, Shelby was able to make brief notes on comments that students made in class, which served to provide us with even more background information. In addition, the team discussed these comments to compare them to the kinds of remarks and reactions we all remembered from the first semester's preservice teachers.

Throughout the project, Shelby asked the preservice teachers to consider the kinds of questions they asked their case-study children and the kinds of responses and questions they received in turn. She explained that she was very interested in "upping the intellectual ante" in literary discussions, and that she wanted them to be reflective and critical about the kinds of questions that could promote more substantive talk about text with children. She further explained

that, although the theoretical concepts surrounding literary response would help to enlighten them, only authentic interaction with children would make the concepts come alive. Thus, the reason for the case-study work was to try out, individualize, and revise theory in the context of actual practice. A class session early in the semester emphasized the congruence of type of question with type of answer (Roser & Martinez, 1985). The class lecture and associated activities essentially concentrated on the phrase: “What you ask is what you get.”

Within this session, the preservice teachers were asked to look at data segments from four studies that showed interactions between parents and children (Snow, 1983; Wolf & Heath, 1992), and teachers and children (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Paley, 1981). In small groups, they discussed the data, trying to understand the nature of the interactions. One of the most interesting discussions revolved around a very lively classroom conversation between a teacher and her preschool children on the text *There’s a Nightmare in My Closet* (Mayer, 1968). An excerpt from the transcript the preservice teachers studied follows:

- Teacher: (Reading,) “There’s a nightmare in my closet!”  
 Children: Nightmares! Nightmares!  
 Andrew: I always hear a strange noise when I go to bed.  
 Teacher: You do?  
 Curt: Yikes! A nightmare’s comin’!  
 Andrew: Bangin’ on the window.  
 Teacher: Is ... someone’s banging on your window at night, too?  
 Andrew: Ye-ah, and I can’t see it.  
 Teacher: Is it when your room is very dark that that happens?  
 Andrew: Yes ...  
 Curt: A robber!  
 Andrew: Yeah, it must be a robber.  
 Teacher: What would he want to take out of your room, Andrew?  
 Andrew: I think my teddy. (Cochran-Smith, 1984, pp. 239–240)

The preservice teachers responsible for analyzing this transcript strongly disagreed with one another. Some felt the classroom scene sounded like “pandemonium” and asked, “Shouldn’t the children be quieter when the teacher is reading a story?” Others felt that the segment represented very skillful teaching – allowing ample room to discuss issues that were of central importance to small children. In the ensuing class discussion, we talked about the fine line between providing sufficient room for children’s talk and the chaos that might occur if everyone talked at once. Shelby suggested that what might seem chaotic to some might be perfectly suited to certain communities and specifically described the research findings on the overlapping nature of “talk story” in the Kamehameha Early Education Project (Au & Mason, 1983).

In addition, we discussed the initiation-reply-evaluation pattern commonly found in school (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1978), as well as different types of questions (e.g., opinion questions or questions that asked children to make intertextual connections or both) that might help to balance the known-infor-

mation (or "What's that?") question. We spent considerable time on the topic of conditional questions that ask "What would you do if ...?" One of the handouts Shelby gave the preservice teachers on questioning contained Figure 1.

In class, we discussed how the teacher in the first model controls a unidirectional flow, asking the questions and evaluating the responses based on whether or not the answers are "correct." The second model still holds a central place for the teacher, but multidirectionality of response occurs when children ask and answer each other's questions. The response is not held in the mind of the teacher or in the teacher's manual, but is instead held in the minds of individual children as they work with their teacher to construct a "group text" (Pearson & Fielding, 1991). The possibilities for response are not limited by set expectations; rather, conditional questions encourage creative and critical thinking as students think about how they would act if placed in the textual circumstances.

The preservice teachers were also asked to respond to opinion, connection, and conditional questions as they discussed the assigned literature. For example, in a class that centered on *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbit, 1975), the story of a young girl who has the chance to drink from a magical spring and live life eternal, Shelby asked the preservice teachers, "Pretend you are Winnie [the main character], holding the vial of spring water, with the toad before you. What would you do?" Essentially, this conditional question allowed the preservice teachers to place themselves in the protagonist's shoes and decide if they would drink the water or pour it on the toad as Winnie did. This question served as a springboard to a wide-ranging discussion which included comments such as "That'd mean I'd be in university classes forever! No way!" and "Well, maybe I would drink it if I could share the water with those I love." A key emphasis in this discussion was that well-crafted interpretive questions (McGee, 1992) often develop into

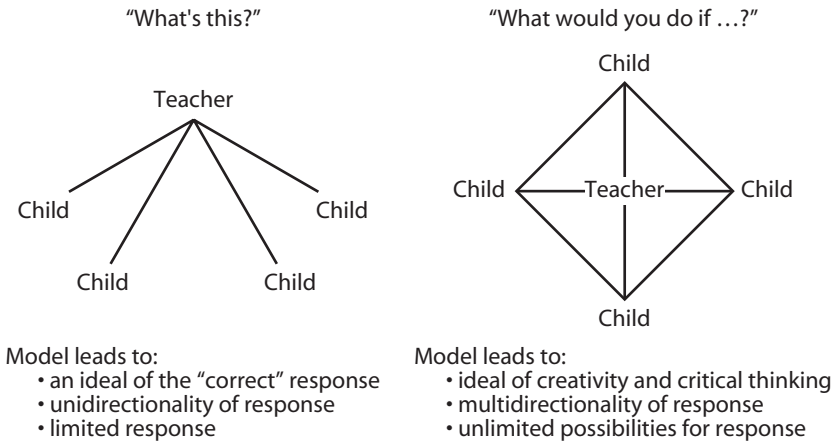


FIGURE 1. Two models of question and response.

responses that take on grander dimensions (Eeds & Wells, 1989). The teacher provides a structure for the conversation with one or more critical questions, and the resulting discussion explores the central issues surrounding these questions as well as other questions, topics, and themes. Although the teacher plans some of these questions in advance (as Shelby did in constructing the question about the vial of water), there is also much flexibility in the process as teachers learn to listen carefully to children's responses and follow their leads.

There was also a strong focus on question-response relationship in the commentary Shelby wrote for the preservice teachers' fieldnotes. A partial example of commentary to one preservice teacher follows:

You continue to ask good questions and keep careful notes. Have you decided to focus on questions in your paper? If so, you might want to talk to [CVQ – another preservice teacher who participated in the first semester of the study]. She wrote a marvelous paper last semester on her questions with her daughter, and she would be a good resource for you about references, etc.

If you decide to track the questions, think about whether the kinds of answers you get match the questions you ask. In other words, if you ask a “known-information” question, will you get a set and predictable answer? If you ask a question that attempts to connect the child and the text, will you get an intertextual answer? How has the shape of your questions changed over time? Does [the child] ask questions as well as answer them? And so on. (RPQ, 11/6/93)

In this example, Shelby attempted to shift the sense of expertise from herself to one of the preservice teacher's fellow colleagues by asking the preservice teacher to discuss her project with an individual who had worked on a similar topic. Rather than have the preservice teachers look only to her as a source for answering their questions, she asked them to listen to and learn from their colleagues as well.

Shelby's suggestions for her paper also came in the form of four questions that asked her to think about the patterns she might discover in her research. Instead of *telling* her what she saw, Shelby *asked* her to look for possibilities and provided a number of options. The first two questions were conditionals – essentially “if ... then” constructions – that asked her to think about the relationship between question and answer types. Although the third and fourth questions were not conditionals, they also asked for answers that she could discover by analyzing her fieldnotes.

Finally, Shelby tried to help preservice teachers understand the constructed and nonliteral nature of literary interpretation, and the ambiguity involved in exploring meaning in places where “meanings are often unstated and words are often not meant” as in the case of metaphor and irony (Winner, 1988, p. viii). Because children are typically asked to retrace well-worn paths of comprehension (exemplified by known-information questions), she warned the

preservice teachers that initially children may be suspicious of questions that ask them to explore the unknown territory of interpretation. In response to one preservice teacher's field-note comments that despite her efforts to ask critical questions her case-study child persisted in responding with "I don't know!", Shelby wrote:

The whole notion of children being unwilling to take chances with their thoughts for fear of being "wrong" is an important thing for you to think about before you begin your teaching. Many researchers suggest that an important concept in literacy learning is the ability to take risks (e.g., Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). The "I don't know" response is a tough one to run into, and an equally tough habit to break. I think one way to think about it is to model a style of answering your own questions that shows your own uncertainty. For example, you could say "I'm not sure, but maybe it means ..." or "It could mean this ... or on the other hand it might mean ..." This nebulous quality (though we're still talking about reasonable answers here) could help convince [your case-study child] that you are sincerely looking for his opinion rather than the single "correct" answer. (SKE, 11/7/93)

Thus, her comments centered on creating a balance between reasonable answers and ambiguity, with a constant emphasis on the social construction of meaning through engaged conversation, not interrogation. Nevertheless, for all of the different strategies and advice she gave her preservice teachers through lecture, university class activity, and commentary, nothing could supplant the power of children to drive home the central points. It is this issue that we will now discuss.

### Results: Reinventing Teaching Philosophies Through Praxis

O'Loughlin (1995) suggested that the practical application of ideas allows teachers to reconsider and reinvent their teaching philosophies. Our own data revealed intriguing transformations in the questioning strategies used by the preservice teachers over time, and these are represented in the following critical themes. First, preservice teachers' question types shifted in number and content, essentially moving from teacher dominance to child-teacher dialogue. Second, within the dialogue, the preservice teachers learned to create or at least reflect on a balance between comfort and challenge. As the preservice teachers changed, the children changed as well, moving from hesitancy to confidence, even to the point of contradicting the preservice teachers. Third, the course emphasis on questioning, as well as on detailed fieldnotes, heightened preservice teachers' attention to the results of their own questioning strategies, causing them to be more reflective about the content and consequences of their queries. In the

following sections, we provide an elaboration of the three themes for the preservice teachers' shifts in questioning strategies.

*Moving from Dominance to Dialogue*

In the first session set, 28% of the questions asked by the preservice teachers were known-information queries – “What’s that?” and “How many ...?” – questions that are often referred to as “interrogations” or “gentle inquisitions” in the research literature (Durkin, 1987; Eeds & Wells, 1989). In the second session set, these question types dropped to 22% of the total questions asked, and by the third session set, these questions continued to drop to 15% of the total. In lieu of “drilling” children with a march-step focus on comprehension, the preservice teachers presented a more balanced array of questions that turned the conversation toward interpretive possibilities (See Figure 2).

In addition, known-information questions were much more common when preservice teachers were working with younger children. For example, the preservice teacher with the highest average of known-information questions in the first session set (15.7 per session) worked with the youngest child in the study. One of her typical exchanges follows: “What color is this? I point to the red. [The child] looks at me. ‘Red,’ I say. ‘Red’ and point. ‘Can you say red?’ ‘Red,’ [the child] says it” (EST, 9/16/93, age 20 months). Of the three preservice teachers who asked

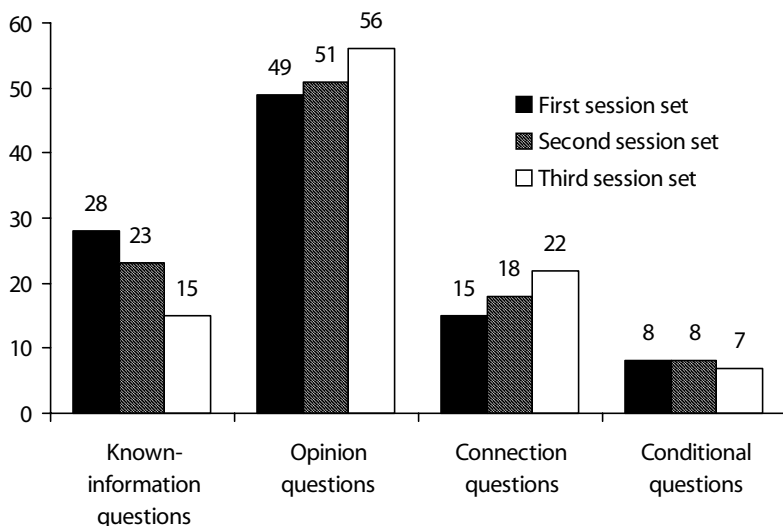


FIGURE 2. Shifts in preservice teachers' question types over time.

an average of 10 or more known-information questions in the first session set, all worked with children who were 5 years old or younger.

Known-information questions were also more common when the preservice teachers were working with expository rather than narrative texts. For example, in her first four sessions, one preservice teacher asked only one known-information question. However, in her fifth session, she read a science trade book and asked 10 known-information questions during that reading alone. Langer (1995) explained that although current literary theorists "question the separation between literature and nonliterature ... literature classes are the one place where [subjective experiences] can be systematically nurtured" (p. 7). Recent work by Beck, McKeown, and Worthy (1995) suggested that textbook and trade-book treatments of exposition can be differentiated by "voice." When a text has voice, it is marked by dynamic verbs, conversational dialogue, and deeper connections among text ideas and emotional responses. Exposition written without voice creates "a greater distance between the reader and the information in a text, a distance that may inhibit a reader's construction of knowledge for the text" (p. 224). It could be the case that certain nonliterary texts equally inhibited the preservice teachers' abilities to ask more engaging questions, although this statement is tentative, because, of the 394 texts the preservice teachers read, 97% were narrative, not exposition.

Opinion questions, often marked by "Why?" or "What do you think?" dominated almost half (49%) of the first session's questions, and that figure rose to 51% in the middle session set, and finally, 56% in the last session set. More important than the rise in percentage, however, was the move from more generalized requests for opinion ("Did you like the story? What did you think of the pictures?") to more specific requests for predictions and analyses of character motivation and intention ("Why do you think [the character] did that?"). For example, one preservice teacher read *Little House in the Big Woods* (Wilder, 1932) to her own daughter. Although she consistently modeled imaginative and critical questions, after the second session, she wrote: "I decided afterwards that I had focused too heavily on the 'Do you like ...?' type of question. For our next session, I plan to vary my questions more" (CVQ, 2/1/93, age 8). In response to her plan, Shelby wrote, "I'm glad you decided to vary [your questions] a bit more, and I was on the brink of suggesting it when you came to the revelation yourself"

In following sessions, she asked opinion questions with a stronger focus on prediction and character analysis. For example, in her fifth session, the following exchange took place:

- Mother: In what ways is Ma's life different since she married Pa? Do you think she likes her life as it is now?
- Child: A dress-maker doesn't make her clothes now. She has her husband and children. She has more to do. She likes her life, but probably wishes she could combine the best parts of both times. (CVQ, 2/22/93, age 8)

Connection questions rose from 15% to 18% to 22% of the questions asked between the first, middle, and third session sets. Text-to-life questions (connections that moved from the story on the page to questions about the “story” of the child’s life) rose steadily: “I noticed that he responded to me when I related the story to him. More specifically, I asked him questions about himself that related directly to the given story, and then he started talking” (MCQ, 4/21/93, age 6). Life-to-text questions (in which present experience is connected to a previously read text) were extremely rare and only occurred in the case studies where the preservice teachers were parents, relatives, or long-time baby sitters of the children. In fact, most life-to-text connections came in the shape of comments completely initiated by the child, rather than questions posed by the preservice teachers. For example, one preservice teacher was walking outdoors with her young niece when they stopped to admire a garden:

[The child commented:] “I hope that this extraordinary garden never gets growed over by briars!” This sentence struck me as very atypical for a four year old to say. I questioned her about her statement, and she replied, “You know, Auntie, that storybook we read where the old lady had a visitor over and then weird stuff started to happen. Well, you know the part – the one where her posies died.” [Later the preservice teacher found the book – *Mrs. Beggs and the Wizard* (Mayer, 1973) and wrote:] [The child] was able to pull the words “garden,” “briars,” and “overgrown” (with a slight alteration to “grewed over”) from the text and make them her own.... This is just one of the incidents that helped me to realize that literature can be a tremendous power in helping a child grow as a learner, by increasing the child’s vocabulary in their everyday life. (MDT, 4/21/93, age 4)

Thus life-to-text questions emerged as preservice teachers tried to sort out the literary source of the connection comment by directly asking the child to name the text or explicate the connection. As with this example, preservice teachers often returned to the original written texts to explore specific words or images that might have sparked the connection.

Opposed to the rarity of life-to-text questions and comments, text-to-text connections among written texts became increasingly common over time as preservice teachers and their children built up a shared library of textual experience. Preservice teachers began their questions with “Does that remind you of ...?”, searching for possible connections between present and past texts. These kinds of questions were particularly common when preservice teachers and children read multiple texts by the same author or illustrator and texts in the same genre. For example, Erikka and her case-study child read multiple fairy tales over the course of their case study, which allowed for numerous connections and comparisons: “I asked, ‘What book does that sound like?’ and the child responded, ‘Hansel and Gretel!’ (3/13/94, age 6).

Conditional questions remained stable in the first and middle session sets, ultimately taking a small dip (from 8% to 7%) in the last session set. Although there had been a strong emphasis on conditional questions in the university

class, many preservice teachers felt that these questions were the most cognitively demanding. Although they understood the value of these questions, they often ended their case studies with less of an experience in asking these kinds of questions than an expressed desire to try them out in the future:

While I did ask him many types of questions – opinion, definition, explanation – I did not ask many conditional questions. In trying to get [the child] to stretch his thinking skills and “figure things out,” I neglected to ask him what *he* would do if he were in a similar position to the character’s. We did relate events to occurrences in his own life, but we really did not discuss putting ourselves into the story. Given the opportunity, I would like to explore that element of story interpretation more. (HEQ, 4/21/93, age 9)

However, when preservice teachers tried these questions out on children, they met with good results:

Throughout our sessions together, I used prediction questions to engage my reader in discussion. My first attempts routinely prompted her stock answer of “I don’t know,” but as time progressed, she began to be drawn into the stories, and she began to respond to them with more depth. I must confess that my questioning strategy evolved considerably during our time together. I began by asking short-answer questions that did little more than check her comprehension. I knew that I wanted to engage her more, but I didn’t know exactly how to do this. It wasn’t until I was introduced to the idea of using what Shelby terms “conditional questions” to encourage literary discussion that our own discussions really took off. I was amazed at how asking children to “cast themselves into different roles” and encouraging them to share their own feelings could be accomplished by simple questions such as, “What would you do, think, say ...,” “Would you ...?,” “If you were a ... , which one would you be?” From the very first time I employed this strategy, what a major difference it made! I drew her into the story with a fervor! And it really turned her into a conversational partner. I was amazed at the difference in her, and where we usually read two or three stories/books, we spent so much time on the one that before you knew it our session was over! (STS, 4/21/93, age 7)

More dramatic than shifts in question type, however, were shifts in the total number of preservice teachers’ questions over time. Figure 3 shows an analysis of the dialogue between the first single sessions the teachers conducted with their children and their last sessions.

Preservice teachers’ questions heavily dominated the first sessions, occupying 63% of the questions asked and initiating comments made about the story. This domination, however, was reduced in the final sessions, when preservice teachers’ questions occupied only 41% of the text conversation. Notwithstanding this reduction in dominance, preservice teachers continually saw themselves in the role of questioners, rarely making straightforward comments on the stories. Children, on the other hand, took on commentator roles, and their comments on the stories rose from 29% in the first sessions to 50% in the final sessions.

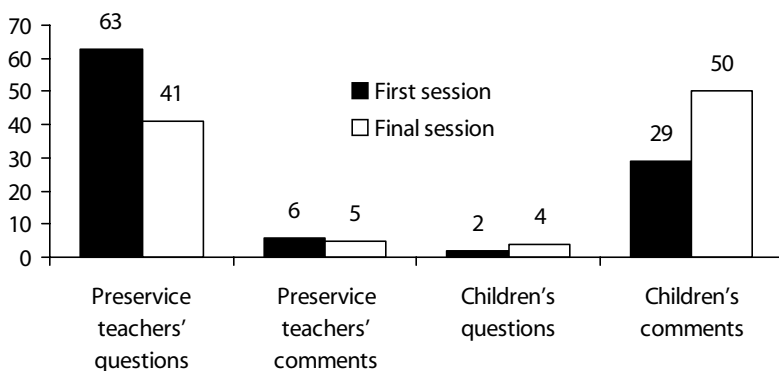


FIGURE 3. Shifts in preservice teachers' and children's questions and comments over time.

Although their questions doubled between the first and last sessions (from 2% to 4% of the dialogue), the very low percentages still indicate that children did not see themselves as questioners. Figure 4 shows the combined questions and initiating comments made by the preservice teachers compared with those made by children in the first and final sessions. Whereas preservice teachers dominated the talk in the first sessions (69%), the final sessions showed a more equitable dialogue, with the children taking on a more active role in the conversation (54%).

The idea of more equitable dialogue is supported not only by the growing number of comments, but also by the fact that the children's initiating comments demonstrated increasing influence on the purpose, form, and duration of the conversations over time. In closely analyzing the comments made in a random selection of 11 of the 43 case-study children, we found that the children made a total of 23 comments in the first sessions and 69 comments in the last sessions, essentially tripling the number of comments they made. More importantly, in the first sessions, 79% of their remarks began a completely new line of conversation, rather than made a slight variation in an ongoing conversation initiated by the preservice teacher. In the last session, 93% were original conversation starters. Moreover, the initiating comments in the first session were often remarks about the illustrations in the text or emotional reactions to the plot (e.g., "That's terrible!"), whereas last session comments were more strongly focused on creating intertextual ties and making predictions. For example, one child made only two comments on the beginning chapters of *Charlotte's Web* (White, 1952), and both were centered on illustration. By the last session, however, the child made multiple comments that focused on her desire to make predictions about the text:

[The child] really was into prediction today, and she even developed a hand signal to let me know she had a prediction about the story without inter-

rupting me mid-sentence. She wanted to predict about what words Charlotte was going to weave into the web and all the reasons why she would weave something like "terrific" and "some pig." Charlotte chose these words because Wilbur was kind and nice and "a sight to look at." According to [the child], Charlotte is going to save Wilbur's life. (RLS, 11/1/93, age 8)

Flashing her hand to halt the flow of the reading not only demonstrated the child's active participation in the text, but also showed her willingness to take control of and shift the direction of the conversation. Her assertive speculation about the text appears to be a mark of her increasing role in the reading relationship and dialogue.

The shift to dialogue was often times a conscious choice on the part of the preservice teachers. Typical examples from the preservice teachers' fieldnotes follow:

- I asked [the child] if she thought these books were the same in any way besides both characters having the same name. She seemed so frustrated at this point and laid her head down and didn't answer me.... I feel that I am asking [the child] too many questions, because she became really frustrated tonight and did not want to answer them any more. She just wanted me to read to her. I think I have overdone the questioning, so I plan to ask less questions next time. (ALE, 2/26/93, age 5)
- I've been feeling like he's getting bored with all of my questions about everything relating to the stories, so I decided to let him ask any questions on the last two stories. (CAE, 3/10/93, age 7)
- I didn't feel comfortable asking him any more questions, as I started to wonder if he felt like he had to come up with a wordier answer. Did he feel like he *had* to make up a reply? I didn't want too many questions from me to ruin the reading experience, so I held back from questioning and went with [the child's] lead. (DDE, 10/12/93, age 8)

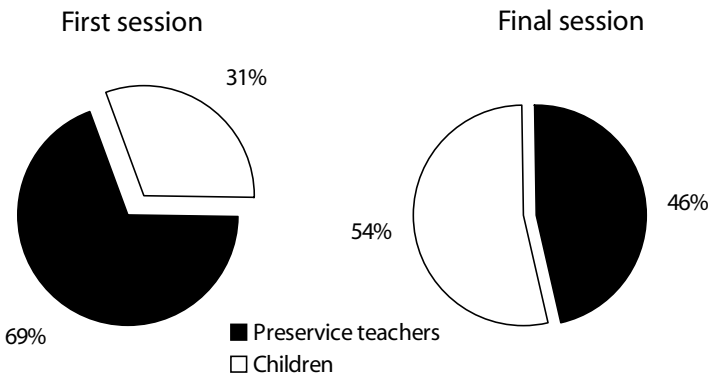


FIGURE 4. Preservice teachers' and children's combined questions and comments in the first and final sessions.

The preservice teachers began to take note of the relationship between the children's engagement with the story and number and type of questions asked. Numerous questions overwhelmed and silenced the children, whereas questions that focused too strongly on the text implied a command performance on the part of the children, rather than a natural conversation.

As preservice teachers worked to construct their questions to engage their children in literature rather than distance them from the process, the conversations were more elaborate and involved a blend of multiple question types. For example, while reading *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963), one preservice teacher asked:

- RSE: Do you think that you might want to go there?  
 Child: No.  
 RSE: Why not?  
 Child: Because they might eat me up.  
 RSE: But what if they liked you?  
 Child: But what if they don't? I don't want to go there 'cause they have sharp nails and they might scratch me. Do you know what? One time when we were at [my neighbor's] house, when I was going up their stairs, their cat bit me!  
 RSE: Did it scare you?  
 Child: I cried. She hurt me. She pulled my tights. (RSE, 1/26/93, age 4)

From a relatively straightforward answer – "No" – the preservice teacher moved to a follow-up question and then challenged the child to justify her opinion through a conditional question. In her response, the child reversed the conditions and then told a story of personal experience, which served to validate her point of view.

Perhaps one reason for the changes from dominance to dialogue was that the preservice teachers and children had had time to build a more comfortable reading relationship. Over the weeks of the semester's work, the preservice teacher's fieldnotes made fewer and fewer comments on the awkwardness of the reading sessions and spoke of the increasing level of comfort in the reading relationship. Even the 11 preservice teachers who were mothers, fathers, relatives, or long-term baby sitters (and thus had a previously established reading relationship with their children) commented that over time their sessions were less like stereotypical school roles of "teacher" and "student" and more like two people engaged in authentic literary discussions. Because the preservice teachers asked fewer and more substantive questions often based on the child's lead, the children were given ample space to make their own comments and tell their own stories.

### *Balancing Comfort and Challenge*

Thinking in critical and creative ways often emerges in a context that combines

comfort and challenge. Over the course of the case study, preservice teachers learned to invite and accept children's comments. But they also came to understand that creating an encouraging atmosphere did not necessarily overshadow their right as conversational partners to disagree or to push for further explanation and evidence. Thus, they learned to become advocates for children's questions and comments without abdicating their own point of view or need to further understand their case-study children's perspectives.

Encouraging children means creating an atmosphere of trust. Children who may have been used to the drill of known-information questions often reacted with some suspicion when the questions asked them to express their own opinions. As one preservice teacher wrote: "I asked her, 'Why do you think he did that?' to get her to tie his behavior in with what she knows about other animals. She was unused to being asked to think and replied 'I don't know'" (STS, 1/31/93, age 7). As a result, the preservice teachers had to persist in asking more thoughtful questions, even to the point of returning to previously asked questions and providing more options for response. For example, one preservice teacher read *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbit, 1975) and asked her case-study child to compare himself with the characters of two brothers, Jesse and Miles, in the story:

Earlier in our readings I had asked [the child] which character he could identify with most, and without a moment's hesitation, he replied, "Miles!" I pressed him further to find out why. He had no answers. I thought about it after our session, and I can see many similarities between [the child] and Miles so I decided to talk more about it with him. This time, I asked him again who from the book was most like him. Again, he quickly said "Miles" but had no explanation for it. I directed him to describe Miles to me. He answered, "Miles is nice. He is very helpful and he loves his family." I asked him how Miles was different from Jesse. Without hesitation he answered, "Jesse is wilder than Miles. He's not as responsible." The characteristics [the child] had used to describe Miles were all traits that [the child] possesses. I wanted him to make the connection for himself, so I asked him to describe himself. At first, he just said, "I don't know," but when I reminded him to think about the ways in which he described Miles and Jesse he became enthusiastic: "Oh! I love my family and I always help my mom with jobs. I think I'm nice. Yes! I'm like Miles. I like Jesse, but I'm more like Miles." (ACT, 10/24/93, age 8)

In many ways, this preservice teacher's persistence moved the child toward a response that she felt was there all along, yet her techniques still shifted the child away from the "I don't know" response into articulating possible connections between his life and the characters in the story. She also resisted directly making the connections for him. Instead, she "wanted him to make the connection for himself" and encouraged him to think about possibilities rather than simply confirm her assumptions.

Although the preservice teachers could be quite purposeful in structuring their children's responses, they also learned to model ambiguity in their own responses, reiterating a context for conversation that allowed room for the children

to try on and test out ideas without apprehension about “right” and “wrong” answers:

I tried to use more “What do you think?” questions today after our [university] class this last week on questioning strategies. [The child] seemed to respond a bit better. Before, she often answered with “I don’t know.” Today, I was prepared to say, “Well, I don’t know either, but tell me what you *think* will happen,” etc. This helped the “I don’t know” problem. (MDT, 1/31/93, age 4)

By emphasizing the uncertainty of their literary interpretations, the preservice teachers provided more space for their case-study children to take risks in articulating their own opinions. The preservice teachers’ questions came to be increasingly marked by qualifiers, such as “*What in the world* does [this vocabulary word] mean?” or “*What on earth* is [the character] up to now?”, which served to eliminate the supposition that the preservice teachers were looking for a single answer.

When the preservice teachers worked to increase the number of qualifiers in their talk, the children’s subsequent use of qualifiers decreased. In other words, as preservice teachers learned to hedge their literary comments, the children learned to take more risks, boldly stating their ideas and opinions:

At first uncertain about my sincerity in asking him to tell me what he thought, [the child] did not offer comments on his own. Frequently, he qualified his answers with words or phrases like, “maybe,” “I think,” or “might.” After several sessions, he continued to use qualifiers, but they were interspersed with more confident statements. In fact, at times he used no qualifiers at all. The change seemed to be linked to his understanding that he did not have to know a “right” answer all the time, and his suggestions were only “informed guesses.” If his prediction didn’t come true, he was disappointed, but it was okay, because his guess was something that *could have* reasonably happened in the story. I tried to reinforce this attitude by remaining noncommittal to whether his predictions were correct and responding with encouraging remarks. (HEQ, 4/21/93, age 9)

It is important to note that this preservice teacher’s “noncommittal” attitude set up an encouraging context for responses that “*could have* reasonably happened in the story.” This was not a school of anything goes; rather, it was an atmosphere for insights into possible scenarios.

Providing an encouraging atmosphere for children’s questions and comments was something that most preservice teachers accomplished during the course of the case study. What ultimately proved to be more difficult was the notion of challenging children about their ideas and asking them to provide evidence to substantiate their claims. For example, one preservice teacher worked with a child who consistently responded with “I don’t know.” Although she wanted to “create a challenging, yet not threatening atmosphere,” she ultimately asked simpler questions in order to get the child to talk: “I think I focused so much on wanting [the child] to feel comfortable, I felt myself doing what I didn’t

want to do – asking low-level, yes-no questions” (CAQ, 11/24/93, age 6). Creating a balance between comfort and challenge was an artful construction and somewhat fragile in nature, yet those preservice teachers who persisted were able to build solid conversations:

We discussed today for a long time what the pros and cons were for drinking from the magic spring. At first, [the child] said “Well, I’d do it so I could live forever.” I said, “What if you took it then everyone around you grew old and died.” He hadn’t thought about this. Then he said, “Well, I don’t think I’d take it because I’d be so sad because I’d see everyone die.” Then he said, “What if everyone took it and so everyone could live forever.” I said, “But then there might be too many people on the earth, no one would die. Where would we have room to grow food? This might lead to a war.” [The child] responded, “But then people wouldn’t go to war because no one would die because they can’t die and so they wouldn’t fight because it’s pointless.” I hadn’t thought of that. I pictured if there were too many people, there’d be a war and dying, etc., but he made a fantastic point that there probably wouldn’t be a war because [killing] wouldn’t really work. Then we discussed a little about war and how horrible and stupid it is anyway. (LLE, 4/5/93, age 8)

As this example indicates, authentic literary discussion means give and take, argument and counter argument. One conversational partner raises an idea which may be challenged or confirmed by the other. Challenge is not unidirectional from teacher to child. Instead, children are allowed and even encouraged to disagree with their teachers, present contradictory evidence, and shift the conversational direction to new questions and issues. When conversations take on these dimensions, there are few set answers, and the talk is often marked by challenges like “But then ...” and “What if ...,” as well as mental-state verbs like “I think ...” and “I feel ...,” which demonstrate both cognitive and affective engagement in the literature.

At times, engagement in text means distancing yourself from it, challenging the very premises of the text itself even to the point of mocking central characters’ decisions. For example, Erikka, who felt that fairy tales were “too passive and demeaning,” encouraged her case-study child to resist Cinderella’s (Perrault, 1954) unquestioning obedience of her fairy Godmother’s request:

- Erikka: Would you think that was silly, if you were Cinderella and you were told to go get a pumpkin, but you didn’t know yet what it was for?  
 Child: I think that would be very silly.  
 Erikka: What would you think it was for?  
 Child: What? Are you going to roll yourself on the pumpkin to the ball? (2/20/93, age 6)

Through Erikka’s questioning, the child positioned herself in the role of Cinderella. Yet, rather than accept the traditional interpretation of the character, the word “silly” triggered a more modern, skeptical, and humorous maid. Just as

the children were encouraged to challenge their preservice teachers, they were equally encouraged to question the motivations, intentions, and actions of those in the text.

Other times, however, the preservice teachers' and children's challenges stemmed from belief in rather than skepticism of the text. In accepting the situations and characteristics of individuals in text, they learned to question their own beliefs and values. One preservice teacher, for example, read *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Taylor, 1976) to her son and daughter. In one scene in the book, the Logan children, members of a proud African American family and chief protagonists in the story, are drenched by the muddy spray of a passing school bus for White children. The driver and his passengers seem to exult in splashing the Logans with red Mississippi mud as they pass them by each day. The children reading the passage reacted with dismay:

- Son: God, that was so mean!  
 Daughter: Why did the bus driver do that?  
 Mom: There was a real hatred of Black people by Whites. The Whites didn't really think of Blacks as people. If you were on that bus, would you laugh?  
 Daughter: No, I'd want off.  
 Mom: [Later.] How do you feel about this book?  
 Daughter: I don't know. It's sad.  
 Son: I like it, but I don't like the way the Blacks are treated.  
 Mom: Is this an important book to read?  
 Son: Yes, more people should read it so they would know how hurt Black people are (GCD, 2/16/93, age 6 for daughter, age 10 for son).

The Logan children, however, take events into their own hands, digging a huge hole in the road, which is easily disguised by the constant rain and mud. When the bus careens into the pothole, the axle of the bus breaks, and the White children are forced to walk to school until the bus is repaired, just as the Logans do everyday. The children reading the story cheered the Logans retaliation, and later their mother wrote:

The kids felt jubilation when the Logan kids wrecked the bus. I asked them if revenge was the right way to handle a problem. [My son] said that, as he has been taught, that it's better to use words; BUT since they're Black in a place where Blacks are hated, they couldn't use words. So we allowed ourselves to feel good about the revenge. (GCD, 2/16/93, ages 6 and 10)

By taking on the point of view of the protagonists, the children came directly in conflict with what they had "been taught" in their own family value system. Yet, they could justify their jubilation by casting themselves into circumstances and times that were not a part of their day-to-day lives. In their own lives, using "words" was the way to solve problems, but words were less available to the Logan children. Through the experience of literature, the children came to un-

derstand that from the Logans' point of view there was a time for words and a time to fight action with action.

The majority of the preservice teachers in the study ultimately felt that their own words and actions created ample space for children's talk, and the resulting literary conversations increased both in length and substance. As one preservice teacher wrote, "Allowing [the child] to talk about what he wanted made him more comfortable in sharing his thoughts" (VG1, 4/21/93, age 5). In creating this comfort zone, the preservice teachers learned to wait to voice their own opinions and to model ambiguity. However, in their excitement in getting the children to talk, some preservice teachers became reticent to insert their own opinions or contradict the children. They feared losing the conversational momentum they had established. Others, however, were able to challenge children's comments carefully, and the resulting discussions were linguistically marked by direct statements of opinion ("I think ...") and hypothetical alternatives ("But what if ...?") on the part of both the preservice teachers and the children.

Finding the balance between comfort and challenge was not an easy accomplishment and seemed directly linked to the preservice teachers' expectations for children (see Wolf, Carey, & Mieras, 1996b). Preservice teachers who began the study with relatively low expectations for children often tipped the balance in favor of comfort. This was especially true for children who came with specific labels such as "learning disabled" or "English as a second language." Warnings from these children's classroom teachers often set the stage, as they suggested that the preservice teachers not expect too much from their children. At times, this was further complicated by the preservice teacher's relatively tenuous understandings of children's development – for some felt strongly attached to stage models of development that encouraged them to wait for a child to be "ready" for further instruction.

For example, one preservice teacher worked with a first-grade boy who was designated as needing the most help in reading by his classroom teachers. When the preservice teacher tried to ask questions that challenged the child to think in interpretive ways, she met with minimal response: "Have you ever felt that you couldn't do something that you thought everyone else could?" "Yes," [he] replied. I thought of asking him to explain, but as he didn't say so himself, I felt uncomfortable in asking" (DDE, 10/10/93, age 6). Later the preservice teacher wrote:

Today, I became more aware than ever of the developmental cognitive stage [the child] has reached.... I have worked with him on reading into the words; however, [he] doesn't give me any sign of understanding. I don't want to push this concept onto him. As I continue to read to him throughout the rest of the semester, I will be watching for the click of enlightenment. Until this time, stories such as "The Greentail Mouse" (Lionni, 1985) will not be understood. I approached the message regarding being oneself versus wearing a mask from several different angles. They didn't work. [He] did not gain anything from this story. I, on the other hand, gained an understanding for his level of perspective. (DDE, 10/19/93, age 6)

In response to the preservice teacher's relatively reticent attitude, Shelby encouraged her to be more proactive in her response – both in her upping the ante on the conversation as well as in reading academic literature that might push her to rethink some of her stage-model thinking:

I think you have hit on a viable paper topic with your focus on development. Knowing that this is a child who has not had much experience in reading, is it any wonder that some of the subtle hints, metaphors, and analogies would pass him by? The thing is – he *is* going to grow in this understanding through your reading and discussion. When children come into our classes who have not had the 1,000 hours plus of bedtime stories and magnetic letters on the refrigerator door and Sesame Street, *we still need to provide it*. You may not see the “click of enlightenment” this semester, but be assured that your work is critical in moving him closer to this click. . . . You might want to rethink your role in trying to introduce [the child] to new and more subtle concepts without pushing him. I'm attaching a book by Barbara Rogoff (1990) called *Apprenticeship in Thinking* which addresses these issues. The first chapter should be particularly helpful. (DDE, 11/6/93)

Thus, just as Shelby asked the preservice teachers to have their children justify their comments and insights, she challenged them to substantiate, question, or reinvent their teaching philosophies. In this case, she pushed on the relationship between expectations for children's development and a teacher's instructional responsibilities. In all cases, however, she encouraged the preservice teachers to create a balance between comfort and challenge in their literary conversations. Whether the preservice teachers felt they had achieved that balance or not, all were reflective about the process and products of their questioning strategies, a point that we turn to in the final section.

### *Reflecting on Content and Consequences*

In making the shift from dominance to dialogue and attempting the balance between comfort and challenge, the preservice teachers came to reflect on the content and consequences of their literary conversations. A key feature in the case-study assignment was the request for highly detailed and reflective fieldnotes – a feature that upped the ante on the attention the preservice teachers paid to the interactive relationship between question and response. As they reflected in writing on the dynamics of their literary discussions, they came to understand the merit of particular kinds of questions. One preservice teacher, for example, was particularly persuaded by the value of questions that connected the text to her own child's life. In her fieldnotes, she numbered each of her questions and later analyzed the effects of questions on the child's response:

After working on this project with [my daughter], and keeping a record of my questions and her responses, I have become more aware of the impor-

tance of encouraging children to respond thoughtfully to what they read, and I have seen the impact that discussion and different types of questions asked can have on this process....

Question #46, which concerned moving, reminded [her] of the very vivid feelings she recalls from when we moved. I asked her, "How would you feel, being on the wagon, moving away with just your family?"

She said, "I know how that feels. It's sort of scary, and you feel like you're never going to see your friends again, or your house, or anything."

These questions helped [her] see the connections that we all have as humans; they brought out the similarities and differences between our family and Laura's family [from the story]; and, finally, they clarified the distinct differences between the Ingalls' lifestyle [from the story] in that particular time period and our lifestyle today. (CVQ, 4/21/93, age 8)

Thus, the preservice teacher's questions asked the child not only to connect textual to life events across time and lifestyle, but to connect emotionally to the feelings that emerge from such events – in other words, to connect both head and heart.

The power of particular questions came through most prominently in the preservice teachers' realizations that "what you ask is what you get." Of the 1,954 questions asked by the preservice teachers over the course of the study, only 18 questions (less than 1% of the total) represented a mismatch between question type and answer type – for example, when a child responded to an opinion question with a conditional answer. Of the total questions asked, however, 7% received "I don't know" answers, with the bulk of these in response to known-information queries and opinion questions. Figure 5 shows the patterns of the "I don't know" response for these two question types over time.

Although the "I don't know" response for known-information queries remains stable, this same kind of response to opinion questions shifts. We attribute these shifts to changes within the subcategories of opinion questions. In the beginning sessions, the preservice teachers' opinion questions usually centered on generalized issues ("Did you like the story?") and predictions ("What do you think will happen next?"), and the children appeared somewhat skeptical that teachers were asking their true opinions. By the middle sessions, however, the children seemed to realize that the preservice teachers were honestly looking for their opinions, and their "I don't know" responses dropped from 52% in the first session set to 18% in the second. However, the nature of the opinion questions changed in the third session set, as preservice teachers asked children their ideas on character motivation. The increasing difficulty of such questions caused the children's "I don't know" responses to rise to 30%. It is important to realize, however, that although the challenge of the questions had risen considerably the children were still willing to take risks and offer their opinions more than two-thirds of the time.

In examining their questions, the preservice teachers could see the result of narrow, repetitious, text-explicit questions as children responded with non-committal answers ("Who knows?"), begged for release ("Let's just read."), or put

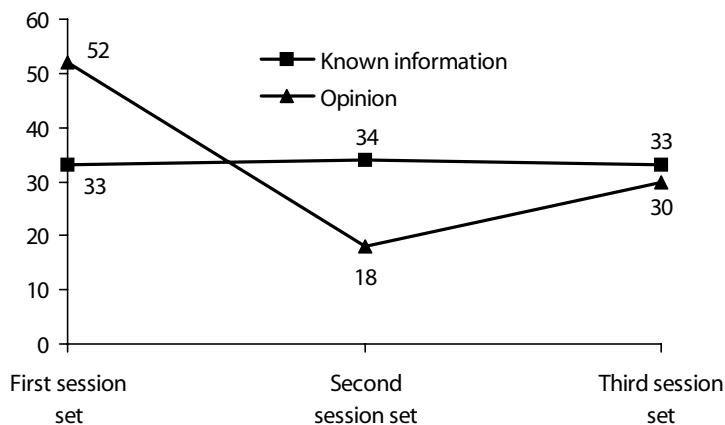


FIGURE 5. Percentage of children's "I don't know" answers in response to preservice teachers' known information and opinion questions.

their heads down in frustration. They could see that their choices were directly played out in the children's subsequent behavior:

I must admit, when I first started reading to [the child], I had a sinking feeling I was doing something terribly wrong. I thought we would sit down together and I would have [his] undivided attention. He would give wonderful responses without any prompting, but that is not what happened . . . I tried desperately to involve him in the book, asking him questions, and only getting shrugs and "I don't know" answers from him. . . . The last thing I wanted to do was torture this child by having him sit there with no desire whatsoever to be there. I certainly didn't want to bore him and turn him off to books forever. I needed to change my approach. (VGI, 4/21/93, age 5)

Changing their approach often meant changing the number and kinds of questions they asked. When they saw the very real possibility of "torture" involved in certain kinds of questioning strategies, they began to think more deeply about how to make the needed changes.

At times, they turned to the modeling of questions offered in the university class lectures and activities. As one teacher wrote, "I feel weird asking questions. Some are okay, some aren't. Thank goodness I have you all modeling for me [referring to Shelby, as well as other instructors in the certification program] or else I'd really be at a loss" (SKE, 10/11/93, age 7). But more often, the fact that children offered new points for consideration helped the teachers realize that there needed to be a balance between planning and flexibility. As Erikka wrote in her fieldnotes, "When I prepare questions to ask her during the story or after, I usually do not get much of a response from her. However, when she makes comments on her

own, or when I ask her follow-up questions to her comments, I am amazed at the results" (2/20/93, age 6). Although Shelby had emphasized the need to plan for their sessions – to read the books in advance, to think about possible questions and follow-up activities – she also encouraged them to go with the child's lead. Again, however, the preservice teachers' understandings of these issues were made much more vivid when interacting with children over time.

Angela, for example, wrote the following in her second session: "He still answered several times with 'I dunno,' so I really hope that we get past this answer in the weeks to come. I'm learning to try to reword some of my questions to get a better response" (1/26/93, age 5). Over the course of the next 2 months, she tried a range of questions, which allowed her child to open up and demonstrate what parts of the text were of particular interest. In her 10<sup>th</sup> and final session with the child, she wrote: "I was surprised that he was so focused on the curse of the diamond which was briefly discussed before the crime took place. It made me realize once again that there are a lot of ways to look at a question, even though I thought my way was the most obvious" (3/30/93, age 5). Her comments represent an important shift in the child's response. Initially, and because of her more limited strategies, he was forced to reveal his response through resistant behaviors ("I dunno"). But over time, and as the interaction moved from dominance on Angela's part to interactive dialogue, he was able to express his own interests and insightful comments.

The fact that Angela was still learning from her child in their final session was a common event among preservice teachers. Across the 43 sets of fieldnotes and final papers, there was not a single comment that assumed that the preservice teachers' learning was over. Not once did they say, "Okay. I'm a skilled questioner now. That part of my teacher training is finished." Instead, their reflections focused on what they had learned and, more importantly, what they still had to learn from children. As one preservice teacher in our study wrote in her final paper:

According to Bruner (1986), asking questions that are not open-ended may lead to limited responses from a child, or lead to an idea that there is only one "correct" answer.... It is my duty, as a teacher, to establish an environment where children will feel comfortable enough to give their opinions and ideas, even if they do not think they are correct. It is, therefore, imperative for teachers to develop their questioning strategies in order to induce higher levels of thinking. (CAQ, 4/21/93, age 6)

## Educational Importance

Cognitive research (Lave, 1988; Rogoff, 1990) suggests that there are major differences between school learning and learning that takes place in everyday life. School learning is often characterized as didactic, with the teacher in the role of

deliverer and the children as passive recipients. Everyday learning, on the other hand, carries a sense of a “learning community” (Heath, 1991), in which children state their opinions, question logic and affect, connect to past events, and predict future ones, as well as analyze hypothetical episodes in conditional questions and statements. Adults involved in book clubs in everyday life are not required to list main characters, describe settings, outline plots, and state explicit themes. Yet, children in school settings are typically asked to do just this.

Lave and Wenger (1992) carried this dichotomy even further, making a distinction between a *learning curriculum*, which situates learning in everyday practice, and a *teaching curriculum*, which is designed for the explicit instruction of newcomers. They strongly favored the learning curriculum and suggested:

Learning activity appears to have a characteristic pattern. There are strong goals for learning because learners, as peripheral participants, can develop a view of what the whole enterprise is about, and what there is to be learned. Learning itself is an improvised practice: A learning curriculum unfolds in opportunities for engagement in practice. It is not specified as a set of dictates for proper practice. (Lave & Wenger, 1992, p. 93)

In the presentation of examples of legitimate peripheral participation, Lave and Wenger (1992) argued that “researchers insist that there is very little observable teaching; the more basic phenomenon is learning” (p. 92).

In this study, however, we have a complex combination of teaching and learning rather than a dichotomy. Explicit teaching is, we would argue, often less didactic than clear. Thus, the careful analysis of questioning styles in university class lectures, activities, and discussions set up a teaching curriculum designed to unveil possibilities in literary conversations, rather than present a given set of guaranteed teaching techniques for use with any and every child. The learning curriculum emerged in the preservice teachers’ ongoing praxis with children, which they documented in their fieldnotes. These self-reflective notes resulted in continued teaching and learning on all our parts as we considered patterns in children’s response and in preservice teachers’ emerging instructional choices. The improvisational nature of real-life practice came to the fore as individual children, situations, texts, and preservice teachers served to help us reinvent our teaching philosophies, particularly with regard to questioning. Lave and Wenger (1992) suggested that “abstract representations are meaningless unless they can be made specific to the situation at hand” (p. 33). Thus, we believe that a distanced discussion of questioning styles would lead to little change without the concomitant opportunity to see how theory plays out in practice.

Although preservice teachers may begin reading stories with the “What’s that?” known-information query, they cannot rely on this question forever. They have to “up the ante” (Ninio & Bruner, 1976) and ask other questions to get to more developmentally demanding areas of interpretation. More importantly, they must learn to “honor the voices” of children by “[posing] questions in open-ended ways that communicate that students’ opinions are important and valid”

(Oldfather, 1993, p. 680). Undoubtedly, questions come in many configurations, but from our work, we begin to see intriguing possibilities for opinion, connection, and conditional questions. Although "What's that?" leads to necessarily limited answers (Snow, 1983), questions like "Why?", "What would you do?", and "What connections can you make?" (Martinez & Teale, 1993; Paley, 1981; Saul, 1989; Wells & Wells, 1984) lead children to express their opinions, explore possibilities, and weave together intertextual connections. Furthermore, if the preservice teacher moves from notions of the correct answer to creative and critical thinking, the children will return in kind.

Research tells us that "asking good questions . . . is not an easy task, but it is one that can be improved through training, modeling, and realistic, meaningful practice" (Alexander et al., 1994, p.40). The structure of the university class, with explicit lectures on question types and question-response relationships as well as question-inspired activities in which the preservice teachers responded to assigned literature, helped to provide the training and modeling necessary to put them on the road to good questioning. More importantly, however, the case-study assignment, with opportunities to see the results of varied questions on children as well as the demand for thoughtful analysis through fieldnotes and final papers, offered preservice teachers the realistic, meaningful, and reflective practice necessary to move them further down that road. Assignments that are heavily situated in the act of real teaching, like the long-term case study, have the potential to help preservice teachers develop better understandings of the art of teaching – and in this case in particular, the art of asking literary questions.

A limitation of our study, however, is that the potential we see for preservice teacher growth is based on self-report. The data from the preservice teacher's fieldnotes and final papers are their own interpretations of their current practices and their hopes for future practice. We have no observational data that could serve to substantiate what our preservice teachers told us about their practice, nor have we followed any of these preservice teachers into their own classrooms to see whether their reported shifts in questioning are sustained in real classrooms with larger groups of children. There is a need for future studies which will closely follow preservice teachers from the rather idealistic circumstances of a highly supported single child case study into the more independent and complex life of the classroom. Although this is often advocated in the research literature (Craig, Bright, & Smith, 1994; Herrmann & Sarracino, 1993; Roskos & Walker, 1994), long-term studies that shadow teachers from their preservice university practices to their student teaching or in-service teaching practices are rare (Borko et al., 1992; Grossman, 1990).

An even more critical limitation of the study is our focus on preservice teachers' questions and comments over those of the children. In their richly detailed study of transferring the responsibility of asking questions from the teacher to the children in a second-grade class, Commeyras and Sumner (1995) stated, "The paucity of questioning by students in schools has more to do with teachers' lack of regard for students' questioning ability than it does with

students' needing to be taught questioning" (p. 33). Is it possible that an emphasis on teacher questioning will ultimately perpetuate preservice teachers' views that they are the "question askers" rather than the "comment makers," and that children should be allowed to make comments but rarely ask questions?

Certainly this was not our intention, but the issue does give us pause and makes us think that perhaps the nature of the assignment helped to accentuate rather than blur what Heshusius (1995) called the "self-other, adult-child distance." Heshusius argued that "listening without a specific purpose, that is, listening *without wanting anything from it* ... opens up fuller access to the totality of the other" (p. 121). Yet in thinking about the reinvention of our own teaching philosophies, we believe we would be more prone to advocate the careful inclusion of children's questions as a specific purpose in future case-study assignments as well as in our own teaching of children, rather than emphasize an essentially purposeless conversation. We would also stress the need for preservice teachers to make thoughtful comments about the text, rather than always assume the role of questioner. Preservice teachers' comments on the stories we read in the university class were common, but rare with children, which again raises worries that perhaps the class concentrated too heavily on teachers as questioners. In fact, a future research focus on preservice teachers' literature-related comments might be even more revealing as we work to address Bruner's (1986) call for teachers as "human events not transmission devices." Still, we would continue to advocate preservice teachers' heightened familiarity with diverse kinds of questions and the theoretical notions behind them, for as we discussed these issues in a team meeting, Erika argued, "You can't ask children to do something unless you know how to do it yourself" (10/8/95).

As we turn from the limitations of the study to its strengths, we believe that the three critical themes of our work – moving from dominance to dialogue, creating a balance between comfort and challenge, and reflecting on content and consequences – extend current theory on literary questions as well as help us understand how preservice teachers learn to put theory into practice. That this practice-oriented contribution is necessary is exemplified by the following excerpt from one preservice teacher's fieldnotes and final paper. The teacher was reading *Little House on the Prairie* (Wilder, 1935) to her case-study child and came upon the expression, "Children should be seen and not heard." The preservice teacher asked, "What do you think of that rule?" The child responded that she "didn't think it was fair." She said, "Children should be allowed to talk just as much as grown-ups are, and that they can show respect for grown-ups in other ways" (CVQ, 1/25/93, age 8). In her final paper, the preservice teacher wrote, "The types of questions that we ask will greatly influence the type of discussion that will follow. Mere factual questions don't encourage higher level thinking. If we don't want rote responses from children, we shouldn't ask rote questions" (CVQ, 4/21/93). A key issue in this research is that children should not only be seen, but *heard*, and preservice teachers cannot develop ears to listen if they limit children's opportunities to talk through rote questions. The preservice teachers

in this study demonstrated that, as they explored questions that focused on interpretation rather than imitation, they learned that children have much to say about text and its relationship to their lives.

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Manuscript received: April 28, 1995

First revision requested: August 18, 1995

Final revision received: February 15, 1996

Accepted for publication: March 15, 1996

**J L R**

Journal of Literacy Research  
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