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Taylor, Janet. B.; Branscombe, Nancy Amanda; Burcham, Jan Gunnels, & Land, Lilli. (2010). *Beyond Early Literacy: A Balanced Approach to Developing the Whole Child*. NY: Taylor & Francis.

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Reviewed by Elisa Waingort
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Beyond Early Literacy offers teachers a unique way to build community and address standards across a variety of disciplines through the activity of journal writing in their classrooms. The team of authors has done a very thorough job of describing the research behind their approach, and the connections to content area demands; shared journal offers teachers a multidisciplinary approach to addressing the general objectives of various content areas beyond the communicative arts (speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing, designing, creating, and producing). The book is divided into two parts. Part one is about “the child as learner” and part two is about “the teacher as facilitator.” There are case studies and many examples from the

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classroom in teachers' own voices, which adds to the appeal of this very readable book.

I read *Beyond Early Literacy* from my perspective as a grade 2 teacher. As I read, I began to wonder how I could apply the ideas in this book to my classroom. What would that look like? What would I need to give up in order to make room for shared journal? Would shared journal be duplicating something that I typically do with my grade 2 students or is it different enough that it would have a positive impact on my students? And, how will these ideas impact learning and teaching? Although I don't have definitive answers to these questions, I have seen some of the positive effects that are discussed in *Beyond Early Literacy* that make me want to keep experimenting to determine its value to my students.

Shared journal is a process that involves children in sharing stories from their lives as one way to build community in the classroom. As children share stories that are important to them they are sharing a piece of themselves with their classmates who, in turn, ask questions and make comments to get more details and make connections to their classmates' stories. In this way, children also learn how to ask questions (an important skill for children to develop), and to tell and elaborate on a story. The next step in shared journal is for the class to select one of the three stories shared (many modifications are given in this book for diverse classroom situations that may impact on time constraints, special populations, etc.) to write about in their shared journal notebook. This is the most difficult step in the shared journal process as only one story gets to be selected by the class because the teller offered the most details to make it interesting. In this way, the authors claim, the children learn how to develop and identify engaging and interesting stories, and how to empathize with their classmates as their stories get selected or not, as the case may be. The final step, of course, is for the children to write their version of the selected story in their shared journal.

I have done shared journal twice in my classroom thus far; we have completed five full days of school. As predicted and discussed extensively in *Beyond Early Literacy*, both the children whose stories didn't get picked and the children who voted for a story that wasn't the choice of the

majority of the classroom were not happy. I have dealt with this situation in a few different ways. First, I told the children that the story that was selected by the majority of the class has to be written about in their shared journal; that is not negotiable. However, once they finished that then they could write about the story of their choice. Secondly, I reminded the children that they could always write about the story that was not selected during Writing Workshop. Finally, I plan to incorporate, into our read aloud discussions, talk about what makes a story so interesting that you want to read it over and over again. I will make references to the shared journal stories the children tell as a way to emphasize the reasons why one story may be selected over another story. I have also tried to focus the selection process on the story and not the child, as suggested in *Beyond Early Literacy*.

The authors of this book recommend that shared journal take place every day and that all of its components happen sequentially. However, I have decided to do shared journal twice a week with the sharing and voting happening during our Morning Meeting time, and the writing taking place later in the day. What has been interesting is that except for a story told by one child, all of the stories thus far have been about events in a child's life and not about toys, which is quite typical in grade 2. I'm hoping this has set a precedent for the kind of stories children will choose to share with their classmates.

I highly recommend this book to classroom teachers and teacher educators as a refreshing way to (1) have children enhance their story telling and writing abilities, (2) develop community, (3) learn to be empathetic by asking questions and making connections, and (4) develop a sense of the components of a good story.

About the Reviewer

Elisa Waingort, Dalhousie Elementary School, Calgary, Alberta, Canada. She currently teaches second grade bilingual students and is a doctoral student at the University of South Australia, Adelaide.

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