Books

**The Reading/Writing Connection: Strategies for Teaching and Learning in the Secondary Classroom**


Imagine attending a banquet with over a hundred of the most dynamic reading and writing teachers in the country and having the opportunity to move from table to table to hear these outstanding teachers share their most effective teaching strategies.

At one table Bill Strong, director of the Utah Writing Project, presents “Tucker the Trucker,” a sentence-combining lesson that has delighted teachers at NCTE workshops. Sitting next to Bill, Barry Lane describes the “Snapshot,” a classic writing strategy that asks students to write like photographers, zooming in on specific details and pulling back for sweeping generalizations. At another table we are invited into Sharon Schiefel’s classroom to discover how she helps students improve their comprehension by getting into the minds of characters with a graphic organizing technique called the “Double Open Mind.”

At a third table, Sheridan Blau, director of the South Coast Writing Project, explains how revision requires two opposite modes of thinking—commitment and detachment, and Catherine D’Aoust, co-director of the UC Irvine Writing Project shares “Sentence Sorting,” a teaching technique she created using examples from “From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler.”

Imagine that before you leave you’ve visited forty different tables and received enough lessons to last you for an entire year. Then, as you exit, someone comments, “Incidentally, there are more teaching materials available for you online at our website.”

This is the feeling generated when reading Carol Olson’s new book *The Reading and Writing Connection*, one of the most comprehensive and teacher-friendly texts on reading and writing available.

**Linking General Theory to Specific Classroom Practices.** The power of *The Reading and Writing Connection* is that Carol Olson not only describes important theoretical concepts, but also takes you beyond the theory and into the classroom, sharing tested practices that excellent teachers have found successful. For example, with the concept of scaffolding, Olson reviews the Langer and Applebee model (1986), outlining the critical components of “ownership, appropriateness, structure, collaboration, and internalization.” But then she follows this with a detailed demonstration lesson adapted from one created by teacher Meredith Ritter and based on Ray Bradbury’s short story, “All Summer in a Day.”

The lesson includes enough activities to be used over a two-week period with hands-on teaching tools such as (1) thirty-six “Reader Response Starters” for initiating discussion, (2) a “Beat the Author” game where students compete to predict the ending of a story and attempt to identify a Bradbury passage from among several bogus imitations, (3) a guide for creating a Sun-Shadow Mandala, a graphic strategy popularized by Fran Claggett in her book *Drawing Your Own Conclusions*, and (4) a writing plan that includes a model paper written by student Mary Carol Ferguson. With its 418 pages packed with similar combinations of classroom strategies and theoretical models, *The Reading and Writing Connection* effectively blends theory and practice.

**Exploring Best Practices and Current Research.** As a methods text for teachers or as a resource for scholars, *The Reading and Writing Connection* provides a compendium of current research and best practices. Its fourteen chapters include topics such as exploring domains, using a multiple intelligence approach, incorporating multicultural literature, designing effective assessment, conducting reading/writing workshops, and using peer response—to mention just a few.

In addition, the references listed at the conclusion of the book contain over 300 significant sources and serve as a research guide to the reading-writing connection. For the growing number of teachers who are becoming teacher-researchers, this list identifies all the critical studies that support the strategies included in the book. One can see why an eminent scholar like George Hillocks would comment, “This is a first-rate book that every English teacher should have.”

**The Reading-Writing Connection.** One of the most compelling features of Olson’s book is the consistent and thorough explication of the reading-writing connection. The first chapter, entitled “What is the Reading/Writing Connection?” and the last chapter, “Reflecting on the Reading/Writing Connection,” function like bookends unifying the twelve central chapters, which illustrate how both readers and writers engage in similar strategies to construct meaning.

As Olson explains in the first chapter, readers and writers draw from
"a common tool kit of cognitive strategies." The central chapters elaborate on this tool kit concept with both theoretical explanations and classroom lessons.

Typical of this consistently unifying theme is chapter 10, "Sharing Our Responses to Texts and Revising Meaning." The chapter begins with a variety of teaching tools to enhance literature discussions. Strategies including "Socratic Seminar," the "Grand Conversation," and "Dialoguing with a Text" are introduced for small-group and whole-class discussion. Then, in the second half of the chapter, Olson shows how these methods work equally well for discussions of student writing. As she explains, "The strategies used in reading groups to discuss the great works heighten and refine the abilities of students to talk about one another's writing." The chapter concludes with methods for turning reading groups into writing groups.

Olson illustrates this reading-writing connection in each of the twelve central chapters and concludes in the last chapter by reflecting on the categories of cognitive strategies in the reading-writing toolbox. These categories include (1) planning and goal setting, (2) tapping prior knowledge, (3) asking questions and making predictions, (4) constructing the gist (visualizing, making connections, forming preliminary interpretations, identifying main ideas, organizing information, expanding schemata, and adopting an alignment), (5) monitoring, (6) revising meaning, (7) reflecting and relating, and (8) evaluating.

Supplementary Materials on the Internet. An added feature of this book is the companion Web page. Throughout the text, icons of a computer mouse in the margins point to a wealth of additional "ready-to-use" classroom materials available online. The resources available online create the impression that Olson has come close to creating a virtual teacher's aide, available night and day to save teachers preparation time.

Prepared for the teacher, ready to print for students in letter-size format, are scores of handouts. Do you need a rubric for tomorrow's lesson? You can find a wide variety of rubrics at the website. Do you need a sample I-search paper for that research lesson? You can find one on Olson's website. How about a guide to distribute to students for a reader-response activity? It's there too. Also, you'll find timesaving items such as a six-key-trait scale weighted for scoring student writing, Bill Burn's mini lesson on "Punctuation Mythology," a "Human Cultural Bingo Game," and many more.

In addition to handout materials for teachers and students, the site includes an excellent collection of links. At the click of a mouse, teachers can explore other relevant websites, bibliographic resources, teaching resources for specific texts, and links to educational software, videos, and videodiscs. Considering how many hours teachers spend searching for, photocopying, and typing classroom materials, this resource is a wonderful supplement—one that will no doubt set the standard for textbook websites in the future. To preview the companion website, log on to http://www.ablongman.com/olson.

Comments from students using Olson's book in an Inquiry IV class for secondary integrated language arts majors were typical of that by Dana Cobb, a Kent State University senior. She explained, "There are enough ideas here to carry out your entire first year of teaching. If there is something new I want to try, all I have to do is look through the text to find great examples."

No other book on the market contains as many dynamic, teacher-tested lessons—lessons supported by research and based on today's best practices. The Reading/Writing Connection by Carol Booth Olson should prove to enrich the reading and writing skills of thousands of middle school and high school students as it becomes a standard resource for both beginning and veteran teachers.

Harry Noden teaches at Kent State University, Ohio, where he works with the National Writing Project. In his thirty-year career as an English teacher, Noden has taught every grade from seventh through college, with the bulk of his teaching experience at the middle school. He is the author of the current best-selling book Image Grammar from Heinemann and recently completed a young adult novel entitled The Immortal Game.