

# Total Literacy™ 1999-2000

## The First Year of Implementation

-- by Sue Snyder

*Thanks to Allison Abucewicz for analysis.*

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### Introduction

Total Literacy is a program developed through the collaboration of teachers and consultant Dr. Sue Snyder, infusing music, movement, visual arts, and language arts to develop literacy in emergent readers. Although initially a pull-out program for struggling first graders (called HOT Readers™), the program provided powerful learning across aptitude levels, and has developed into a multifaceted program serving multiple populations including regular classrooms, special education (including gifted/talented), bilingual, pull-out reading, after-school programs, and camps. Taught in a class setting, Total Literacy is a cost efficient, joyful approach to literacy in, about, and through the arts.

Total Literacy 1999-2000 was the first year of implementation for Total Literacy. The textbook, developed through the previous year's work with the John Lyman School staff, was completed in early September, and training began for school teams at two sites, CCSU and Pawcatuck. The plan was to meet for 15 three-hour sessions over the course of the year, to provide continuous new learning and support. There was one conference day in January where everyone gathered on a Saturday. Extra class days were offered to accommodate vacations and individual pressures. Although graduate credit was available, only four participants took advantage, and others took the course for CEUs only.

Evaluation was done through weekly logs and participant journals. One principal did a research study as part of the course. The following data has been collected through these written documents, and additionally through participants' in-class oral reports.

One finding can be considered hard data, and offers a glimpse into the real power of Total Literacy to effect change:

- The first graders at Bingham School in Bristol came in with lower reading readiness than groups in the past. Ann and Meredith, the two first grade teachers, used a combination of guided reading

and Total Literacy. Ann from Bristol reported that in her Grade 1 class the average DRA scores went up 16 levels, to an average of late 2nd, early 3rd grade. This included a child who only went up 1 level. In Meredith's class the average gain was even higher. Writing scores also went up. The music teacher reported to Ann and Meredith that these students picked up songs, words, and movement really quickly, because it was a pattern of behavior that was practiced every day.

In support of the above data, the following less specific findings are also powerful:

- At Edgewood School, Laurie Larue and Melissa reported that in both first grades their averages had gone up, and they only had 2 students still below the state level. They felt they had not really been organized this year, but were looking forward to next year. These two teachers worked together, and also did some lessons with the Kindergarten classes to show that teacher what they were learning. They had such enthusiasm for Total Literacy that it truly changed their teaching.

Although hard data can be collected about reading through tests, the anecdotal data provided in writing and oral presentations throughout the year tells a story of change that transcends test scores. Stories of teacher and student successes abound, and help us remember that teaching and learning require the head, heart, and soul. Only certain successes can be measured through tests. Others require narrative, and sequence over time. The following syntheses provide a glimpse into the sequences and processes by which teachers and schools grew into arts-infused curriculum. Many thanks must be given to the participants who took time to document their work and the process through which they were going. This documentation and reflection gives us information that allows us to continue powerful learning strategies, anticipate needs, and modify strategies that are less effective.

*The following segments provide detailed analysis:*

- Summary of Total Literacy Course Findings, June 2000
- CCSU Course Findings from Class Logs and Journals, June 2000
- Pawcatuck Course Findings from Class Logs and Journals, June 2000
- Additional Total Literacy Course Reflections from Sue Snyder, June 2000
- Some questions for future action research.

## **Summary of Total Literacy Course Findings, June 2000**

After extensive review of all of the journal entries and activity logs for both the CCSU and Pawcatuck Total Literacy courses, one thing was evident. Teachers who may have begun this course as skeptics, in themselves and the effect that this would have on children, left with a true excitement for teaching and a strong understanding of how powerful integration of music, movement, visual art, and drama is for students. Through their writing, both groups of teachers had a remarkable way of articulating what was occurring in their classrooms on a daily basis. It was almost as if they took snapshots for us, showing the activity and the powerful affect it had on the children.

After reviewing the journal entries from the CCSU teachers, there was a pattern of teacher learning and development that was quite interesting. I was curious if this same pattern would emerge in the Pawcatuck entries, and it was indeed there. This pattern showed the learning curve of the teachers involved through the cycle from *imitation* to *processing* to *creation*. In both courses, September and October were almost completely devoted to the teachers attending a class and participating in the

activities, then going back to their classrooms and trying the same activities with their children, imitating the model provided by the instructor. Also during these first few months of journal entries, the teachers in both courses noted many insecurities and frustrations. These ranged from discomfort with music and movement exploration both for themselves and in the classroom, to curriculum pressures, and daily time constraints in the classroom. As instruction continued through the December holidays, there were teachers in both courses who began to venture out on their own, using the model of teaching and the tools gained in classes, to engage in some creative lessons and activities with their children. There was still imitation occurring during these months, but they were now beginning to process the information and use it as their own. From January to the end of the course, there was increasing evidence of teachers using their creative skills and relying less on strict imitation. This pattern of growth was consistent in both the CCSU and Pawcatuck courses. In the journals and logs there were, however, tremendous differences in the type and depth of the creative endeavors occurring, as well as a striking contrast in the dedication, understanding and overall effect of the Total Literacy course.

The written evidence shows that while the teachers at CCSU attempted about the same number of creative activities as Pawcatuck, they were mainly one-dimensional, in that they used only one mode of learning and integration (music/movement/visual arts/drama) to develop a literacy concept or skill. The teachers generally took one idea and applied it to a classroom concept.

Some of the creative endeavors in Pawcatuck were on a different level. Many of their reported activities were mini-units or in-depth studies of a literacy concept, poem, or book. These mini-units were two or three dimensional in nature, with at least two artists disciplines integrated. As many CCSU teachers created single, unrelated activities, the Pawcatuck teachers' writing showed that they began to build one lesson on another, spanning over a week's time or more, to achieve an ending goal of that unit of study.

Another difference between the feedback from the two courses was the actual make-up of the teachers in each reporting group. The CCSU course respondents were mostly classroom and music teachers, while the Pawcatuck course makeup was more multi-faceted, including an administrator, special education teachers, music teachers, and classroom teachers as well. This may have been one possible cause of the richness of the Pawcatuck written entries; the expansiveness of backgrounds was revealed in different and varied outlooks in their journals.

A third major difference was the actual amount of feedback received from the two courses. On the average, CCSU had anywhere from six to eight teachers submitting journals every two weeks, while Pawcatuck had an average of eight to thirteen journal submissions at any given time.

Regardless of these similarities and differences seen in both courses, the growth of all of the teachers was evident. The excitement that was generated from the Total Literacy course will no doubt change their focus and their attitudes about teaching, while making life-long learners of them all.

### **CCSU Course Findings from Class Logs and Journals, June 2000**

The following is a list of the most common activities the teachers used throughout the course and their students' reactions to the activities. The activities that were most common among the teachers will be noted with an asterisk (\*) for each teacher who used the activity. Any activity highlighted in yellow indicates an original activity by the teacher.

Activity	Impact and reaction from students
<p style="text-align: center;">Sep./Oct.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circle/scatter formation</li> <li>• "Hello Song"</li> <li>• Clapping names ****</li> <li>• Experience "W"/walk &amp; stop</li> <li>• Using instruments to accompany a story****</li> <li>• Composed patterns using hands and feet</li> <li>• Scarf dancing to express descriptive vocabulary words</li> <li>• Halloween Ball****</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some boys acted silly, not used to these types of activities.</li> <li>• All students on task/ teacher surprised 90% could do it/one student able to clap and say entire class' names</li> <li>• "Amazing"- all students responded with "W" words. class asks to repeat activity often/ teacher noticing more correct responses of "W" in journals</li> <li>• Children loved this activity/focused for long periods of time.</li> <li>• Students able to keep a steady beat &amp; cross the midline</li> <li>• After using scarves, most students could define the words and use them correctly in context</li> <li>• Difficult at first, but when they got it, it was their favorite song, often heard around the room during the day</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Oct./Nov.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Echo-clapping</li> <li>• Wishy Washy**</li> <li>• Using the drum to write letters</li> <li>• A Hunting we Will Go****</li> <li>• One teacher: wrote a goodbye song with her class</li> <li>• Magic Sound March</li> <li>• One teacher: made patterns with letters learned, then had children choose instruments for each letter</li> <li>• Wiiloughby Wallaby Woo****</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children very good at imitating patterns</li> <li>• A favorite of many children</li> <li>• Kids really enjoyed this/teacher saw wonderful transfer to written work in journals.</li> <li>• Enjoyed the challenge of predicting rhyming words</li> <li>• Students enjoyed making up words and putting music to it/ now used for a closing activity every day.</li> <li>• Children tuned in quickly to "magic sound"/ asked for this activity over and over again</li> <li>• Children truly creative in choosing instruments/ then played their patterns for the class with a partner/ teacher was excited for how engaged the students were</li> <li>• A favorite of all students/ able to pick up on the rule of The game rather quickly/ many times used for transition</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Nov./Dec.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bach "Air" pointing to sets of 8</li> <li>• Bach "Air"- movement</li> <li>• One teacher: original poems and songs to review letters/found own materials to review different pathways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amazing how focused they were/ not all got it the first time, but more and more with continued practice</li> <li>• Some children needed to be slowed down/same children having trouble with 1:1 matching</li> <li>• Children generated jump, hop, skip, walk, jog, crawl, gallop. The P&gt;E teacher also using these terms, which added to the learning process for the kids.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">January</p> <p>Cobbler, Cobbler (Building unit)</p>	<p>Separate pieces had been done with music teacher (Cobbler, "Peer Gynt," without connections between the two. When the connections were made by the children, their eyes lit up!!</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">February</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scarves</li> <li>• "Good Friends" **</li> <li>• Building unit</li> <li>• One teacher: create simple movement patterns and label them according to Weikart's book</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are focused and captivated/one shy and Withdrawn girl "lights up" as leader in Echoes</li> <li>• Difficult at first, but children loved the collaboration</li> <li>• Kids loved adding details to their artwork/able to Discuss qualities of artwork/ proud of final results</li> <li>• Teacher saw improvements in their organization of their writing skills</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">March</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mortimer unit</li> <li>• Spring is Coming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some difficulty knowing when to play, but with practice Students got it/ truly enjoyed by all students</li> <li>• Used to look at Spring artwork, create art, use the music and language/Music and Art teachers involved/ kids say "Wow- this is cool," "I love you Mrs. Mills-this is so much fun!"</li> </ul>

## CCSU: Overall Learning Curve and Emotions of Teachers

As I poured through the teacher reflections of this year at CCSU, the growth of all of the teachers from the beginning of the year to the end was significant. Not only were they becoming more comfortable with the activities, they were venturing out on their own and absorbing a true understanding of the process behind the activities.

In late September and early October, the teachers were very excited about starting this venture. They took away from class the activities that were done, and many imitated the process and tried them out with their classes. Their reactions were positive for the most part, with one teacher stating their boys in the class were having a hard time with these activities. After these reflections she stated that she felt it was because they have not participated in these types of activities before. As the months went on, these problems became less and less for her, until the problems with behaviors eventually disappeared.

A common problem among some teachers in these beginning months was well stated by Leslie Letendre:

I am having difficulty finding a place for these activities in my overcrowded day... I am feeling frustrated because there is literally no time left for me to do the activities which I would prefer to do with my children.

This feeling of frustration seemed to come from a feeling of conflict between what she wanted to do for her children and what she had to do. Carolyn Klepacki shared Leslie's sentiments:

Overall, I am frustrated with my teaching third grade. There are innumerable demands put upon us to carry out the curriculum.

In these beginning months they found time to squeeze in as many activities as they could, while seeing the positive effect on their children. I think that is where the frustration comes from.

For those teachers who were trying the activities many positive changes were occurring in their classrooms. The children were more attentive and were having fun! Teachers were also seeing a positive effect on their students' work. Laurie LaRue states:

In reading students' written responses in class, I am noticing more and more correct uses of the letter "W." By the way, not only has the learning process become more meaningful and enjoyable, the teaching process is lot's more fun too!

As was stated earlier, many of the activities the teachers were doing were imitated directly from the beginning classes. In October, however, was the first evidence of a teacher taking a leap out on her own, with an activity using unpitched instruments (which were demonstrated in the class previously.) Mary McCormick writes:

I asked the kids to take some or all of the letters worked on in today's lesson and put them in a pattern in the bottom of their handwriting books. Then I asked them to choose an instrument for each letter. They chose friends to help them play their musical patterns. What fun we had!

In November, it was very clear through many of the teacher's writings, that they were beginning to really see the importance of this approach of teaching. Leslie Letendre:

I had a stroke of good luck. The person, who was scheduled to teach my class Games From Around The World forgot to come, which left me with the gift of an hour which I hadn't planned!

She used that hour for music and movement and it turned out to be a wonderful day. Teachers were also seeing correlations they had never seen before; Sheri Monk states:

I've really noticed a correlation between the children who can read and the children who can keep the steady beat. I could pick my "flex" groups after seeing their beat abilities.

As with most teachers, the holidays are a hectic time in school, as well as home. Many demands of the school day were showing through the teacher's writings and not much by the way of new or extensive amounts of activities were being explored in the classrooms. This pattern really changed as the start of the New Year approached. It seemed like the fun and enjoyment of doing the activities was replaced by a deeper understanding of the process and how the different disciplines fit together to make this approach work. Laurie Larue had an interesting observation of an activity from a unit of Interactive Arts for Total Literacy at the end of January:

Cobbler, Cobbler was a great building activity. Our Music teacher had done it with them and even played Peer Gynt, but had not associated the musical pattern of the two. The eyes lit up when they [the children] caught on.

This is the time of the year when the teachers' writings truly reflected the connections being made by themselves, and more importantly, their students. Melanie Mills excitedly wrote:

I am beginning to understand how everything fits together!

As February and March approached, the reflections of the teachers became very powerful. Their understanding of the process and its importance was seen in almost every journal entry. It was also beginning to get difficult to just pick out small quotes from these entries, because their writings as a whole showed the learning and discovery process in action. On February 17, 2000, Laurie Larue wrote:

I have to admit it. I resisted using the scarves with my class. I felt ridiculous and self-conscious when you showed us how to use them. Then, this week, I distributed the scarves (called colors by our music teacher) and let the kids experiment with them. Next, we did the "Popcorn Song," they loved it! I loved it! It was fun! We followed that with the Echo Song. Wow! The whole class was focused, captivated and were great at this activity! We practiced scarf movements three days in a row and not one student tired of it. We're taking turns being leaders and the kids' creativity is inspiring. I love scarves!

Feeling comfortable and confident in doing these activities is a big step for most teachers. In Laurie's reflections after her scarf adventure, she seemed more willing to take a chance and even step away from the written lessons to go on her own, while showing an eagerness for more. This entry is from March 9, 2000:

We sang the "Spring is Coming" song which the class had already learned in music class! They were ready with their contributions. Then we looked at two fine art prints: The Deer in the Forest and Sunflowers. What wonderful observations the class made! I was amazed how they interpreted the artwork! We followed this with our own spring drawings in pastels. These we've hung in our hallway and when they come down, I'll put them in book format. The art teacher (who is not the most cooperative teacher in our school) was thrilled I had asked his advice about pastels. A great activity that really comes full circle with music, art, and language. Can we do more with the fine art prints?

Another aspect seen in these reflections is again, that frustration of knowing this way of teaching is so important, but their district or school has a prescribed teaching method that doesn't foster it. The teachers from Hartford seem the most frustrated, even at the end of the class year. Julia Palaia writes:

The Total Literacy course builds upon my belief that the school curriculum should reflect "real life" in its arrangement. In "real life" situations, problems and challenges are rarely compartmentalized into academic subjects. Therefore the school day should reflect the constant overlapping of skills that people experience/require. Back to Total Literacy! It seems negligent to teach music, movement and literacy only as isolated subjects when they obviously overlap in so many areas. By restricting student learning through "traditional" literacy teaching, we are surely failing to reach many students who would have a greater success with learning through musical and bodily kinesthetic intelligences. While most of the rest of the educational world is realizing the benefits of such complete teaching methods - Hartford is moving in the opposite direction!

Even though there were still frustrations, many teachers during April and May were looking at their own units they wanted to develop in their schools. Most of the reflections from this time were focused on the materials they were finding and where they were found. It was great to see how many ideas the teachers had and the success they felt in finding them. Melanie Mills wrote:

I looked for resources for our unit... I also talked to the principal about ordering a new set of instruments and a set of scarves. He said *yes!*

A very exciting finding in these reflection pages was the growing excitement on behalf of the teachers. By the end of this year, their thoughts were overflowing with ideas, questions and confidence to try new things. Out of all the quotes this one by Laurie Larue is my favorite:

I will definitely repeat this unit [trees] next year and I will be searching and thinking of ways to expand on it. A song perhaps? There must be several out there. Maybe we could listen to bird songs... or the song of rustling leaves in the wind... What instruments could we use?...

This kind of "stream of consciousness" is thrilling. It's all about the questions we teachers ask ourselves... taking an idea and seeing how many ways you could expand upon it. This was overall a very successful and thought provoking year for the teachers.

## Pawcatuck Course Findings from Class Logs and Journals, June 2000

The following is a list of the most common activities the teachers used throughout the course and their students' reactions to the activities. The activities that were most common among the teachers will be noted with an asterisk (\*) for each teacher who used the activity. Any activity highlighted in yellow indicates an original activity by the teacher.

Activity	Impact and reaction from students
<p style="text-align: center;">Sep./Oct.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circle/scatter formation***</li> <li>• "Hello Song"*****</li> <li>• Clapping names *****</li> <li>• Experience "W"/walk &amp; stop***</li> <li>• Using unpitched instruments (conductor/punctuation) *****</li> <li>• Halloween Ball****</li> <li>• "ABC" - with expression**</li> <li>• One teacher: created movement and shape patterns AB, ABA...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kids loved it! Smiles everywhere!</li> <li>• Children enjoyed it/loved using word cards</li> <li>• Children loved this activity/focused for long periods of time. Helped with restlessness.</li> <li>• Able to truly identify self space without bumping into others</li> <li>• Children all smiles/naturally drawn to instruments/ everyone wanted to be the conductor</li> <li>• Difficult at first, but when they got it, it was their favorite song, often heard around the room during the day/loved to make baggy book</li> <li>• Children beginning to improve with each session</li> <li>• Kids loved being creative!</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Oct./Nov.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Echo-clapping</li> <li>• Wishy Washy***</li> <li>• Using the drum to write letters</li> <li>• A Hunting we Will Go**</li> <li>• Used shapes to follow and play unpitched instruments</li> <li>• Bach "Air"</li> <li>• Wiiloughby Wallaby Woo****</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children very good at imitating patterns</li> <li>• Loved it/asked for it everyday!</li> <li>• Very successful/"W" showing up in writings</li> <li>• Excelled at predicting rhyming words</li> <li>• Good concentration and focus/ loved reading the shapes</li> <li>• Everyone could do it and loved it!</li> <li>• A favorite of all students/ able to pick up on the rule of The game rather quickly/ many times used for transition</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Nov./Dec.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scarves</li> <li>• Galloping</li> <li>• One Teacher: Apple Tree (find words they know/acted out poem/put on sentence cards)</li> <li>• Turkey Ran Away**</li> <li>• One teacher: Children read original Autumn poem and put unpitched instruments to it</li> <li>• One teacher: saying doubles in Math to a steady beat</li> <li>• Make up new words to Halloween Ball (Winter Snow- Man Ball/ Town Hall Bat Cave Ball)**</li> <li>• A Time for Love</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loved to see them flowing/great excitement</li> <li>• Loved it/ one horse had to go to the barn!</li> <li>• Kids enjoyed finding words/children who couldn't read many words shined when suggesting movements</li> <li>• Students thought it was fun-so did I!</li> <li>• It was thrilling for the kids!</li> <li>• Kids wanted to do it for the class on their own/ I can see the motivation!</li> <li>• Kids loved the challenge/ actively engaged an motivated to work on their own song</li> <li>• Some of the most reluctant singers were the best verse writers!</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">January</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created scarf dance to "The World is a Rainbow"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The children were very motivated to dance and perform for each other/felt like floating with the scarves</li> </ul>

<p style="text-align: center;">February</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Magic Sound March</li> <li>• The Mitten: used instruments movement and music to interpret the poem</li> <li>• "Fooba Wooba John"- exploring poem with music/movement/art</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children loved marching and moving/able to really hear signal</li> <li>• Wonderful for the kids/ able to move and understand how it is integrated into the characters</li> <li>• The children are much more comfortable using music and movement as skills to explore poems</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">March</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wind Bear's Unit: then creating original wind poems.</li> <li>• Spring is Coming</li> <li>• "Tree with Crows" poems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students did their best work ever!</li> <li>• Students came up with original responses</li> <li>• Children truly focused on the artwork and used very descriptive language</li> </ul>

## Pawcatuck: Overall Learning Curve and Emotions of Teachers

As I poured through the teacher reflections of this year at Pawcatuck, just like the teachers from CCSU, the growth of all of the teachers from the beginning of the year to the end was significant. Not only did they become more comfortable with the activities, they began venturing out on their own and absorbing a true understanding of the process behind the activities. The teachers in Pawcatuck were commencing the CMTs at the start of this class. Many of them were wondering how these activities would fit into the daily routine of the test. A few teachers used the movement activities learned in class as an opener or transition for the tests. Patricia Downes stated:

The kids loved moving, especially before the test. They settled right in and did the DRP for an hour. I think it helped focus them. It got the "wiggles" out. When I went in again on Thursday, the kids asked to do it again before the writing prompt!

One significant fact that did strike me was the varied backgrounds/teaching situations these teachers were in. I feel these beginning months were important for them to feel out where they fit in the scheme of things. Denise Dugas writes:

Since my role in the school as a tutor keeps me going from one class to another (K-5) throughout the day, I feel my meaning of movement may be different than just the one included in the discipline of movement. By the readings and observation of the classes, I'm hoping to be able to bring some of the activities of Total Literacy to the various classes in small doses. Also to use some of the lessons in my small tutorial groups throughout the day is one of my goals for this year.

Rebecca Bocian has a different situation. She teaches special Ed. in the morning and a kindergarten class in the afternoon. She has been trying to use these activities in both situations, but has found the most significance with one of her Down Syndrome children.

[Referring to the "Hello Song"] Eric now matches the words to the picture cards. Then we sing "Hello, Mrs. Bocian" and "we Know, Mrs. Bocian." He is responsible for flipping the card and pointing to the words. I am so happy with his progress! He got a smile on his face today after reading "We know, Mrs. Price" ... that can only be described

as ecstatic. It was like seeing a light bulb light up behind his eyes and shine right through. He finally understood what these words were all about!

Another situation that presented itself in class, was the inclusion of the school's principal (Arlene Militello) in the Total Literacy classes. This was an extremely powerful voice among the writings in the journals. Arlene, since the beginning of class, followed her teachers, went into classrooms, and showed a great connection and a sincere belief in the process. One of her earliest writings truly demonstrates this:

... Children respond naturally to music and moving their bodies, their faces take on a glow when they can just sing, creating their own words, patterns and movements. I want to see this connection developed into a more (for lack of a better word) "formal," validated part of what we are trying to teach our children. How would it help me be a better administrator? By learning myself, I can provide a richer environment for students, teachers and parents to learn and teach. I can articulate what is happening, why it is happening, validate what we are doing in our school, and encourage parents to do the same. I can also participate in active learning that is going on in these classes – become a part be engaged with children – the best part of my job!

Along with this excitement, also came a little frustration and self-conscious feeling that is normal when we try new things. Some of the teacher reflections portrayed their honesty about feeling unsure and questions they had. Patricia Downes said:

I had great discussions regarding keeping the beat and being able to read. I feel a little ignorant of why this is true, but it's an interesting hypothesis to prove.

L. Juras gave us some insight into her own insecurities:

I have some difficulty with steady beat myself. I have to concentrate very hard to clap a pattern and speak at the same time. I have difficulty watching the children who are having difficulty and still keep the steady beat myself.

These insecurities only seemed to surface in the beginning entries of September and October. After that, none of the writings submitted contained these types of feelings from the teachers.

In late October and early November, the entries began to be filled with countless activities they had tried out in their classrooms and the children's joyous reactions to them. The excitement of this type of teaching was starting to come through in their journals and the teachers in Pawcatuck had a truly wonderful way of letting us in on glimpses of their classrooms and the excitement that occurred. Joann Bonang writes:

In an activity in my classroom, I introduced unpitched instruments. These instruments are exciting motivators! I have a Down Syndrome child in my room that has never raised her hand, or verbalized a sentence all by herself, without prompting. She raised her hand on her own! When I went over to her and listened carefully, she asked, "Can I have a drum?" That moment was quite exciting for me.

Teachers were also starting to see the impact that Total Literacy was having on their children's comprehension skills and their ability to transfer what they had learned through their bodies and song to written work. Rebecca Bocian writes:

I am just amazed at the way everything we do in relation to this class totally motivates my students. This week, I gave them a traditional "W" worksheet. One part was highlighting all the W's with a highlighter. The next page was writing capital and lower case "W." I have handed out similar/same types of worksheets for other letters and have done direct instruction on them. After all this work with songs and our bodies on "W," I decided to pass it out and see what happened. Every single student did the worksheets correctly. (This really hit home the importance of what we are doing- modes of input) When I have done this in the past, many students needed reassurance or direct help. This time, everyone finished in no time -- max six minutes -- with no help. Tucker [a student] finished first and then went on to write a book that included the letter "W." I can't wait to start "X!"

The end of November was the first time one teacher ventured out on her own and did a creative activity related to the unit of study they were working on: Apples. Sherry Eldridge used the process discussed in class to develop lessons around the poem "Apple Tree." She had her students searching for words they knew, used non-locomotor movement to act out the poem, sang the poem to a familiar tune, made green and white cards with the words of the poem on them, then had students reconstruct the poem word for word. Here is her reaction to the project:

We've had a wonderful experience learning, acting out, and building sentences with the poem "Apple Tree." The children really enjoyed looking for patterns, so the green and white cards were a real attention getter. Even a child who rarely engages in following along during our lessons was focused and reading...

Also, during November and early December, some journal entries were reflecting some of the frustrations associated with developing and implementing a new program. These frustrations ranged from not having enough time/curriculum restrictions and not having time to collaborate with other teachers, to concerns about how this program fits in to the remedial programs in the school. Again, the teachers say it best. Denise Dugas:

Sometimes I feel like I am on overload, much the way it's described in chapter 5 [of Total Literacy]. There are so many "demands" whether from curriculum demands or just the stress of modern life- that we don't take the time to process and end up having to redo much of what we do. I see a lot of the movement and reflective time being used in my school- because of my movement from one class to another. It will be interesting to see how much these practices affect the children's learning experiences.

Unnamed entry:

Our readings have stressed the importance of language arts, music and movement teachers planning together. With no movement teacher and Pam [music teacher] being here 1 ½ days per week, I am finding it difficult for collaboration to be happening. Our individual schedules do not coincide. This week's readings have suggested that our music

teacher work with us to learn how to read music. I don't see this happening... not because of lack of interest, but rather lack of time. I don't consider myself musically literate. How can I best help the students here at West Vine?

Jackie Calchrie:

... I'm still not clear on how the remedial piece fits in. It is reported that students do better, and if it works... fine. I just would like to see the remedial and learn how other districts have the time to make it all happen.

After the holidays, several teachers were seeing the Total Literacy program affecting the school and all of the teachers and children in it. One of the most powerful observations was from Arlene [the principal]. In her role as the principal, she was able to see all of the children in many different situations. One day she observed:

One of the nice things happening for me as an administrator is sensing how the Total Literacy program is permeating our school atmosphere. Traditionally, the signal for group "quiet" was the two fingers raised "peace symbol." One day, I clapped a pattern in the lunchroom to get the grade level's attention (approx. 85 students.) I wasn't sure what would happen. Well, as usual, they knocked my socks off - they repeated the pattern back to me. What surprised me most was that even though they had been talking, chatting, and noise generated... when they heard the clapping, their ears/brains tuned in and they were right with me.

Just as much as Total Literacy affected the school, it also made an impact on how the teachers were thinking about their own teaching. Perhaps the process behind all of the activities learned was finally sinking in and causing these teachers to start to think "outside of the box." Tricia Delapp made a profound discovery in January:

The past few weeks seemed to fly by. I have had some thoughts about the way I have been choosing activities. I have been picking and choosing in a scattered fashion. As a result, I think the kids have had fun, but I have also confused some children, because I am not working in a logical sequence... What I have decided to do is to work on short vowels in a more organized fashion for several weeks with the whole class, as it is a concept all of my children need to work with... I feel like I was stuck in a haphazard approach with W and X. For me, it makes sense to start fresh with the vowels.

As spring approached, the teacher reflections all had an element of creativity beginning to emerge. They were taking risks and venturing off on their own with their children. The teachers were using the models given in class, and then searching for and using their own materials, incorporating music, movement and often times visual arts to them. Joann Bonang gives us a wonderful example of her creativity with her students:

In reflecting on activities we've done in our classroom, I can say the children are very actively involved. The children explored using pitched instruments. They explored the sounds and each child created and performed their own "song" for the rest of the class. We integrated pitched and unpitched instrument sounds into our retelling of The Mitten

by Jan Brett. The instrument sounds represented the various animals in the story. We began our retelling with a whole class movement activity, pretending to be animals of the story moving through the forest. The class listened to some songs, and voted on them to use as our animal movement music. The class voted on "The Blue Danube." The children put it all together to do a wonderful retelling of The Mitten with movement and music.

L. Juras:

We read The Wind Bears Go Dancing and did many wind activities. I was very amazed by the poetry my class wrote. Everyone was very motivated to write their poems. The discussions and focus on the "Word List" was interesting to watch. Emergent readers who had difficulty with the writing process had many ideas about the words that they wanted in their poems. Those emergent readers were very independent in the kite form poem. They could find the words they wanted, they also could use rhyming words. As we read books and poetry, the children were very excited to add new words to our "Wind List." They acted out words like drifting, howling, twisting, rustling, fluttering, flinging, and crashing. There was also a discussion about good and bad winds and words that showed these feelings. All this happened while the children were writing, choosing their words, and painting their windy pictures.

As the end of the course approached, teachers began to reflect on their own units to teach and how to use the tools they had learned throughout this year to enrich their teaching. The unit of "Feelings & Emotions" was one the teachers in Pawcatuck felt strongly about. After a class of brainstorming ideas for the unit, Jackie Calchrie and Joann Bonang worked together and came up with a creative way to explore the emotions of story characters.

I felt it was helpful for us all to brainstorm ideas on "Feelings & Emotions." It was also helpful to discuss different literature titles that would lend themselves to arts integration on this unit. Joann and I had the children read The Hill of Fire and used music/movement activities to express the characters' feelings. By the end of the book, students were able to compare/contrast the emotions of the characters at the beginning and end of the story.

A teacher wrote one of the most telling entries thus far after the classes were concluded in the spring. You never really know how teachers and children have been affected until you are able to see how it "infects" the school atmosphere and culture as a whole. The teachers were tremendously affected by Total Literacy; the difference it has made in their teaching and the learning of their children is immeasurable. Rebecca Bocian:

You would have been so proud of the influence this course has had on our school. We recently had a learning expo, which focused on the ways in which we infuse arts into our curriculum. Parents were invited and students showed off what we work on every day. As I walked through the hall, the artwork and music that was apparent at every turn astounded me. For example, our fourth grade is studying weather and they used Tree with Crows to do a blow painting lesson. Then they used a Kandinsky painting to symbolize a storm and created their own representational dance, which included tornadoes, lightning and water spouts. They performed it to a musical piece that they had selected. Wow! Our kindergarten class also did blow painting and we concentrated on horizon lines, land, and

sky. Our backgrounds were astounding! We used "building" as our premise. Our parents were incredibly impressed by our students following the musical maps. We also had the students "building" tissue paper pictures and making hand-clapping games with four parts. We decided to use the "Magic Sound March" for our music because the students really began to recognize the patterns in it. Thank you for being the catalyst which allowed us to move forward in our arts infusion process!!

## **Additional Total Literacy Course Reflections from Sue Snyder, June 2000**

As the instructor for the Total Literacy courses, there is additional information I can add to that provided through teacher journals and logs.

Comparisons between the two classes:

- One extraordinary difference between the two courses was the number of schools represented. CCSU had six schools represented, and Pawcatuck only two. Therefore a large percentage of each school's population was represented in Pawcatuck. This is not better or worse, just different. The richness in CCSU came from the diversity between schools, while at Pawcatuck it came from the richness within schools.
- Both groups created model thematic units that can be used next year. They are developed through the first lesson, and are designed to guide planning next year, and as models of the planning process. This experience was rich for all involved, and moved the teachers from the imitative stage toward independence with arts-infused curriculum.

CCSU:

- The first graders at Bingham School in Bristol came in with lower reading readiness than groups in the past. Ann and Meredith, the two first grade teachers, used a combination of guided reading and Total Literacy. Ann from Bristol reported that in her Grade 1 class the average DRA scores went up 16 levels, to an average of late 2nd, early 3rd grade. This included a child who only went up 1 level. In Meredith's class the average gain was even higher. Writing scores also went up. The music teacher reported to Ann and Meredith that these students picked up songs, words, and movement really quickly, because it was a pattern of behavior that was practiced every day.
- At Edgewood School, Laurie Larue and Melissa reported that in both first grades their averages had gone up, and they only had 2 students still below the state level. They felt they had not really been organized this year, but were looking forward to next year. These two teachers worked together, and also did some lessons with the Kindergarten classes to show that teacher what they were learning. They had such enthusiasm for Total Literacy that it truly changed their teaching.
- The teachers from Kinsella and Metacomet Schools were in the first year of implementing the Success for All program, a scripted reading program that allows no flexibility, and has no arts components. Their math program was also very rigid. Reading and math took up most of the instructional time each day. Because they were monitored constantly, the stress and tension between the Total Literacy content and their requirements was a frequent topic of discussion. The Hartford "Teacher of the Year" stopped coming to the class because she was too depressed by the potential of this program in contrast to her constraints.
- The special education teachers in the SFA schools, who did not submit logs or journals, were the ones who were most able to implement the Total Literacy ideas. Carol at Metacomet was most

excited about the impact of Total Literacy activities on her special education students. At the end of the year we had a class at Metacomet, and her room was filled with the artwork resulting from her explorations.

- Metacomet was also involved in the Success for All program, and the teachers felt they couldn't separate out the effect of Total Literacy. The classroom teachers who continued coming to the class enjoyed sharing ways that they were able to subversively sneak the arts into their student's school lives now and again, and the successes they had. However, they felt the children tended to be more attentive and actively involved when they used activities and strategies learned in Total Literacy. They indicated that the children loved the analysis of the art prints, and that the artist residency with songwriter Ann Shapiro had gone very well.
- Donna Fitzgerald, principal of Martin School in Manchester, attended nearly every class, and participated throughout. She did not, however, complete any journals or logs, so her voice is not reflected in the synthesis of written information. Her constant energy and vision helped keep the course on track, and she was very interested in being sure her teachers understood the process beyond collecting fun activities for their students. Teachers at Martin used many of the Total Literacy activities in the after school programs, as well as during their own classroom time. Each seemed to develop ideas alone, with little discussion or collaboration between teachers other than the car rides to and from class.
- There were no arts specialists attending the CCSU course. That had advantages and disadvantages. The classroom teachers were less intimidated than they might have been in the presence of "experts," however there were no models of fluent, artistic responses emerging from the group. Therefore it took longer to get from the superficial to emerging artistic responses. Additionally, in the schools teams were not forming between discipline-based and classroom teachers.

#### Pawcatuck:

- Arlene Militello, the principal of West Vine School, did an independent study action research project with her teachers. The findings are both interesting and extensive.
- The art teacher at West Vine School in Pawcatuck did not attend the classes, but we visited before nearly every class. She showed what she had done with the students, I told her what we were working on in class, she made suggestions, and we both tried out ideas resulting in our interactions. This very rich piece is not reflected in the journals at all, but influenced our classes tremendously.
- The participation of the music teacher at West Vine was interesting in that the most creative use of the Total Literacy program came from the classroom teachers. The music teacher's journals and logs were rather perfunctory, and gave little insight into any effort to change her teaching or relationship with the school faculty as a result.

#### Details to remember for future implementation:

- The meetings at CCSU were always an adventure, since we had no idea where class would be held each time. We devised a system of FAXes the morning of class to inform each school group where we would meet. Then sometimes the space would not be available when we arrived, leading to yet more confusion. We finally decided to round-robin to everyone's school, and found this accommodation a great success. Teachers loved sharing their classrooms and schools, we had materials readily available, and every 6th class one group didn't travel.

- Teachers needed something to take back from each class for their Town Meeting, or to do with their classes. The beginning activity each class served this purpose, as well as being linked philosophically to the theoretical underpinning of the day.
- Teaching with the Brain in Mind continues to be a powerful tool in this class, providing a research base in brain compatible learning from which everything grows.

Final thoughts and reflections:

- The participants in these courses were exhausted most of the time. They came in spite of their frustrations, pressures, and energy level. We all became energized by the presence and interaction of one another, and nearly always left inspired. In the end, the participants are heroes in my eyes. They overcame the sheer down pull of the system to rise above it and work for change. Whether or not we have journals and logs from each participant, they all grew from the experience, and will become part of this process in the future.

### **Some Questions for Action Research**

The data presented here is mostly anecdotal, yet we can surely look at it to determine some hypotheses for action research next year. Beyond the increase in reading scores, there are opportunities for exploring the following questions:

- What is the difference when teams include discipline-based teachers and when they don't?
- What role(s) can arts specialists play in helping to move the process forward?
- Would the progress of the teachers be faster if they read the data from this year, and were aware of the expected progression?
- What impact does this program have on attendance, motivation, liking of school; for both teachers and students?
- What role does an administrator play, and how important is that role, in the development of Total Literacy in a school?
- Would it make a difference if parents were involved in the training?
- What is considered success for Total Literacy, and how can it be measured?
- What types of activities are best at different stages of the training process?

## Postscript

Over the course of a year, participants who meet on a regular basis become a family. We shared with one another by taking turns with snacks, and bringing our stories to class. We lost loved ones, celebrated family triumphs and small joys, commiserated with one another, and became a community of learners who will continue to be linked in spirit, even though our formal classes have ended. At the last class, tired from a year of good and hard work, we were all reluctant to leave. But on we go! Some will continue to study, some will repeat this learning again and again more deeply each time, and some are beginning to write the next chapters of Total Literacy.

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