

## Lecture Transcript

### Session 1: Creating a Literate Community

**Dr. Jeanne R. Paratore:** We're going to base our conversation on the three principles that you see on the posters here today. There are two initial principles that form the foundation of the literacy context we create in our classrooms. The first one is this: Effective teachers provide easy access to high quality books that are diverse in levels of difficulty, genre, topic, and cultural representation. And the second: Effective teachers also provide purposeful and strategic room and wall displays. We'll come back and talk about what this means. What does it mean to have these in your classrooms?

What I hoped to accomplish today, is to have teachers really think more deeply, more carefully, about the decisions they make in creating that classroom climate. What does it matter what books they put in a book corner? And how they put them? What does it matter what wall displays they put up? All of those seemingly easy decisions have consequences in children's opportunities to read and write.

I visit a lot of classrooms. It used to be the case that I'd walk into classrooms that had few books. But rarely does that happen now. As I move in and out of classrooms now, I see lots and lots of books. What I don't always see is those classrooms organized in ways that really give children access to those books. And give children access to those books readily and speedily. In our classrooms, there are no expendable minutes. There are no throw-away minutes. I've never talked to a teacher who said to me, "I have more time than I need." Right? That's not something any of us ever say. We don't say, "Oh, I have plenty of time." We always say, "I need more time; I need more time." Well, when we look at the research on children who are struggling as readers, one of the things we find over and over and over again, is that the children who struggle spend less time reading. If our books are not carefully organized, the struggling reader has to take time to find a book that might otherwise be used on reading the book.

So, what do we need to think about? Well, organizing by levels of difficulty makes it easy for a child who is struggling to find the books that are, in fact, readable by that child. Can I find a book that I can really read? And can I find it in an instant? For children whom you observe really struggle to find books, taking the time on Friday afternoon or Monday morning to put two or three books that you know are readable by that child, somewhere in the range -- I like to say, in the range of a single arm movement. You can do that by putting them

in book bags that hang on the back of the child's chair. You can put them in the child's desk. You know, there are lots of ways to do it, and there's no one right way to do it. But doing it is important. Putting multiple copies of a single book that you know is popular -- that will cause two or three children to sit together and read and talk about the same book. It's an important practice.

Choosing books that represent every child's culture is an important practice. Children need to learn that there are books about them. By the same token, children learn from books that are not about them.

I've spoken a little bit about the struggling reader, but making sure that I have books that challenge my very capable children is also important. Their school days shouldn't be spent in review. They should have opportunities to stretch as well.

So, thoughtful selection of books and then thoughtful display of books. Do they have covers out so when they look at a display, they can actually find a book they care about? Are the books at a level where the children can actually reach them? I like to use the word strategic when I think about how our classrooms are set up. Strategic teachers think about what to display. That relates to these ideas: level of difficulty, genre, topic, and cultural representation. Strategic teachers concentrate on what to display. They also think about where to display them.

Most of the classrooms I walk into these days have some form of a word wall. It's fairly uncommon for me to go into an early grade classroom and not see a word wall. But are those word walls placed where children need to use them as they read and as they write? I was in a first grade classroom earlier in the fall when during writing, children would get up from their desks, walk across the room, walk up to the word wall to copy a word down, return to their desks and continue writing. If we're worried about squandering minutes, we lost a lot of minutes in that classroom. So, where we position things matters. The writing center needs to be positioned in such a way that children can access it and where the utensils for writing are readily available. The decisions teachers make about their classroom context are consequential decisions and they have a consequence in children's motivation to read, and they have a consequence ultimately in children's time to read. And those are things we need to think about.

Now, the third principle shifts our attention from what we display and where did we display it and changes it to the classroom routines and tasks that we give. Effective teachers provide classroom routines that require purposeful reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and maximize the amount of time children need to write extended text. When I think about the things I ask children to read and write, I try to think about it from my own perspective as a fluent reader and writer. When I read something, I read it because in some way, it's going to make a difference in my life. Either it's going to teach me something, or it's going to entertain me in some way, or it's going to help me to get something done. The

extent to which the tasks we give children simply help them practice the skill of reading, will teach them nothing about motivation to read, and purpose for reading. So somehow we have to manage to find tasks that help children to become more skillful readers, at the same time that they teach children that reading and writing can make a difference in their lives.

Reading and writing can make a difference in their lives. They can use reading and writing to get things done. Read so that you can have a conversation with someone. Write, so you can create a message so that you can tell someone something. Important concepts, and important concepts for us to abide by as a matter of routine. Those concepts need to frame our day.