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My reflection below is influenced by 30-plus years of classroom and reading specialist events. Kidwatching and language study from Yetta Goodman and the inquiry process by Kathy Short influence my work in classrooms. At the moment, I volunteer in public schools and work with another music educator creating operas with children. I am in the final stages of a Ph.D. in Language, Reading and Culture at the University of Arizona. My dissertation is a comparison of processes and strategies utilized by singers in initial reading of music with the Goodman Model of Reading. I'm having a great time!

The biggest boon to my teaching career is a continual growth in kidwatching, from listening and learning from kids, and in interacting with them. In this way I see larger possibilities for learning. The best vehicle for me to carry out this style of education is in adapting the inquiry cycle concept as a base for planning and action.

I had an experience in a classroom recently that overwhelmingly supported this view of teaching/learning. I entered a fourth-fifth grade classroom well-heeled with picture books and musical instruments as tools for learning, using kidwatching as my assessment and inquiry as the process. Planned experiences with music and art were well-received and the books well-used. My planned questions, however, took a back seat. Through dialogue with the children in a whole group to discuss new ideas they could share from their literature discussion groups, my predictable learning concepts were vastly improved when the children came up with much better group and individual inquiries for learning than I every could conjure.

The children had control over their learning. I supplied the materials for the curriculum. Soon after we started the lesson, it became very clear that the question I had for inquiry was not theirs. Over the weekend, the whole plan was changed so that they could come up with their own questions. Each child had a unique question - some related to music - others to social issues, etc., Their questions guided their inquiry as they used the books in the class to inform their answers.

The shared conversation produced more learning in my classrooms than I could imagine. Dialogic conversation involving the teacher and the children is a much better way to learn than the teacher informing the children. Greater learning and tremendous insight into big issues overshadowed my planned curriculum. The materials I shared provided the base for learning when the children were allowed to explore and dialogue.

I have found that by being part of their dialogue, encouraging children take the lead, and interacting when the need was there, they know amazing things and have tremendous insight into very big issues.