

Bronfenbrenner Discussion Forum Posting 6/15/10

Wells, Rosemary. *Timothy Goes to School*. Illustrated by Rosemary Wells. Penguin Group USA, 2000. 28 pages. Tr. \$5.99, ISBN 978-0-14-056742-7; PLB \$15.99, ISBN 978-0-670-89182-5

Everyone knows a Claude—always popular and successful; always making sure no one ever forgets it. Gentle raccoon Timothy is excited to begin school in the sunsuit sewn for him by his loving mother, until he endures Claude’s unkind fashion commentary. Supported by his patient mother, diffident Timothy makes unsuccessful efforts to meet Claude’s standards, growing increasingly hostile and unhappy as he compares himself to his standout classmate. School changes for Timothy when he meets Violet, another quirky child who is suffering by comparison.

Strong dialogue makes each word count in the few lines of text per page; the soft illustrations expand the text with new levels of information about characters and the contrasting worlds of school and home. One of several books about Timothy by the award winning author/illustrator, *Timothy Goes to School* works well as a read-aloud for children 4-6 and also as an independent reading book for advanced beginners 6-8.

Timothy Goes to School illustrates Bronfenbrenner’s internal asset of Positive Identity as described in “40 Developmental Assets of Early Childhood (Ages 3-5)” (2005) and “40 Development Assets of Children for Grades K-3 (Ages 5-9)” (2009). Timothy expands his personal power as he learns that he can choose friends who offer positive support and share his interests and values. Making a friend outside the family circle increases Timothy’s self-esteem and gives him a more positive view of his future life in school. With its benevolent vision of dependable family support and the healing effects of humor and camaraderie, *Timothy Goes to School* provides needed reassurance for children as they move from their small home or day-care group into the wider competitive world of school.

Search Institute (2005). 40 Developmental Assets® for Early Childhood (ages 3 to 5). Retrieved from https://liffey.sjsu.edu/section/default.asp?id=SUMMER_2010-SJSU-SLIS_73

Search Institute (2009) 40 Developmental Assets® for Children Grades K–3 (ages 5-9) Retrieved from https://liffey.sjsu.edu/section/default.asp?id=SUMMER_2010-SJSU-SLIS_73

Allard, Harry. *Miss Nelson has a Field Day*. Illustrated by James Marshall. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Trade and Reference Publishers, 1985. 32 pages. Tr. \$6.99, ISBN 978-0-395-48654-2; PLB \$16.00, ISBN 978-0-395-36690-5

In the third volume of the Miss Nelson series, Viola Swamp, the ‘worst substitute ever,’ returns to the Horace B. Medley School, this time as a substitute for regular Coach Armstrong, who has cracked under pressure of the Smedley Tornadoes’ continued incompetence. The witchy Miss Swamp has her usual tonic effect on the **undisciplined** students, and the mystery surrounding Miss Swamp’s relationship to Miss Nelson grows more complicated.

Miss Nelson has a Field Day works well as a read-aloud for children 4-6 and also as an independent reading book for advanced beginners 6-8. Mr. Allard skewers school authority with great enjoyment which will be shared by young readers. The principal is a pin-eyed goofball and the variegated flock of shifty-eyed children has lessons to learn about trust and respect, but the busy cheerfulness of Marshall’s illustrations underscores the energy, optimism, and love of Allard’s Miss Nelson/Miss Swamp.

Miss Nelson has a Field Day illustrates Bronfenbrenner’s external asset for child development of Boundaries and Expectations, as described in “40 Developmental Assets of Early Childhood (Ages 3-5)” (2005) and “40 Development Assets of Children for Grades K-3 (Ages 5-9)” (2009) Although Miss Swamp is blunt and direct, her actual discipline method relies on natural consequences, listed as a developmental asset in a school setting—goofing off leads to no improvement; hard work offers a strong possibility of success. Miss Swamp herself models expertise, engagement in learning and a healthy, active life-style, and despite her brusque expression, clearly has high expectations and a strong belief that by increasing their disciplined efforts the students can excel. When the ongoing secret of Miss Swamp’s identity is solved to the self-satisfaction of each young reader, Miss Nelson’s traits are also presented as school assets. Miss Nelson cares about the emotional condition of the students, sees the school as a connected community, and goes far out of her way to support student success.

Search Institute (2005). 40 Developmental Assets® for Early Childhood (ages 3 to 5). Retrieved from https://liffey.sjsu.edu/section/default.asp?id=SUMMER_2010-SJSU-SLIS_73

Search Institute (2009) 40 Developmental Assets® for Children Grades K–3 (ages 5-9) Retrieved from https://liffey.sjsu.edu/section/default.asp?id=SUMMER_2010-SJSU-SLIS_73

Paquette and Ryan (2001) highlight Dr. Bronfenbrenner's recognition that social institutions can not replace, but must support that one person who is 'crazy about that kid' for life (Weisner, 2008, p. 261). With story-times, after-school activities, and summer reading programs, libraries can supplement the work of schools and community groups to support the embattled family in raising children well. Like any teacher, minister, or counselor, however, even the most committed librarian will seldom spend enough uninterrupted hours with a child to do more than supplement—libraries will usually remain part of the mesosystem. A book, however, is there in the middle of the night. A dependable refuge, a book is never tired or repeating the same advice and has the potential to be as influential as a close friend or family member. Clearly, it is a vital task to choose a diverse collection of books which encourage healthy personal growth and foster skill in and love for reading.

The library collection should support the 'ecology' of the child by providing materials that encourage growth, remediate deficiencies, and provide models for future development. For example, a child who has difficulty with conflict resolution and self-control can have a reading experience which allows him to develop his empathetic imagination by focusing on the experience of a victimized child. This will be possible if adults at the library have recognized this need in children and chosen accessible and engaging material dealing with this theme. Often, children who first turn to force when resolving conflicts are practicing what they most commonly observe in life. This same book can illustrate an effective alternative option, and often also provide vivid role models who demonstrate the new behavior.

By choosing books based on carefully observed interests and clearly demonstrated needs, the library's effect can grow beyond the mesosystem into the bidirectional microsystem and assume a greater importance in the life of a child (Boemmel and Briscoe, 2001)

Boemmel, J. & Briscoe, J. (2001). Web quest project theory fact sheet of Urie Bronfenbrenner. Retrieved from https://liffey.sjsu.edu/section/default.asp?id=SUMMER_2010-SJSU-SLIS_73

Paquette, D. & Ryan, J. (2001) Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Retrieved from https://liffey.sjsu.edu/section/default.asp?id=SUMMER_2010-SJSU-SLIS_73

Weisner, T.S. (2008). The Urie Bronfenbrenner top 19: Looking back

at his bioecological perspective [Review of the book Making Human Beings Human. Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development]. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 15: 258–262. Retrieved from https://liffey.sjsu.edu/section/default.asp?id=SUMMER_2010-SJSU-SLIS_73

Kohlberg Moral Development Discussion Forum Posting 6/23/10

Willems, Mo. *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* Illustrated by the Author. Hyperion Books for Children, 2003. 36 pages. Trade Cloth. \$14.99, ISBN 978-0-7868-1988-1

Reader, we're depending on you--please heed the bus driver's warning and don't let this insanely determined pigeon realize his dream of driving the bus! Though the pigeon is drawn with the most simple arrangement of crayon line and color, his expressive resources are astonishing, and during the driver's break this bird will use every stratagem from bribery to emotional blackmail to weaken your resolve—can you hold out against him?

This hilarious Caldecott Honor Book will work equally well as a read-aloud for age 4 and up or as independent reading for advanced beginners on. The character-driven humor conveyed equally in text and illustrations will delight readers of all ages and stand up to many reading repetitions, as we all recognize the familiar tactics of this obsessed and resourceful pigeon. Willem's ingenious decision to have the bus driver address the audience allows each reader to respond to the pigeon in a personal way.

Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus reflects the reality of Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development. The pigeon himself is the poster child for Preconventional Morality (Stage 2). The youngest child can see that the pigeon thinks only of himself, and that success for him would mean inevitable catastrophe for everyone on or near the bus. It is also clear that the pigeon offers friendship only as a way of getting what he wants, evincing Stage 2 understanding of relationships as a trade for personal good (Weber.n.d.).

Standing fast against the blandishments of the pigeon, children in the Conventional stages described by Kohlberg as “good girls” and “nice boys” who seek adult approval (Weber.n.d.), will enjoy the praise of the returning bus driver, confident that they have helped to preserve the rule of law, an important consideration in Stage 2 Conventional Morality. While being completely free of any didactic quality, the book also encourages children's movement toward the Postconventional stage of morality, as the pigeon clearly shows how the goal of one individual can threaten the social contract and undermine our common ethical principals.

Weber State University (.n.d.) Kohlberg: Moral development. WSU Child and Family Studies. Retrieved June 22, 2010 from <http://departments.weber.edu/chfam/Resources/Kohlberg.html>

Adler, David A. *The Babe and I*. Illustrated by Terry Widener. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Trade & Reference Publishers, 1999. 29 pages. Trade Cloth. \$17.00, ISBN 978-0-15-201378-3

It's a sad fact that many children today who may not know of the legendary Babe Ruth know plenty about living with a dad who can't find a job. In this story set in a busy Depression era Bronx neighborhood, Dad's secret job loss and a chance to contribute to the family coin jar lead the narrator to a job selling newspapers and a visit to Yankee Stadium courtesy of the Great Bambino.

Winner of many awards, including a 2003 California Young Reader medal, *The Babe and I* will not immediately appeal to all children, but will repay attention, especially with adult support. It teaches about the past through the familiar—family relationships, sports heroes, a boy's growing independence. It will serve best as independent reading for 7-9 year olds who can pace themselves through the brief but dense text and the detailed pictures, or for reading aloud to a few children at a time. The simplified figures and shadowed, blocky compositions, reminiscent of 1930's murals, will communicate a sense of past times to younger readers, and at the same time clarify the situation described in the text. Children know it's worrying when a jobless man has to sell apples on the street—when the pictures show an apple seller on every corner, a national crisis is conveyed.

The Babe and I exemplifies Alberto Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which states that people learn through "observation, imitation, and modeling", and which finds personality to be a product of the interaction among environment, individual behavior, and "psychological processes" (Learning, 2010). The text and illustrations show clearly the richly interactive environment of the narrator's Bronx neighborhood, where he has the independence to apply his own powers of observation to a broad range of examples. Not only does he learn about stoicism, responsibility, and trust from his father; he learns marketing from a peer, business acumen from a neighboring young mother, and indefatigable generosity from Babe Ruth. As the story progresses we observe the boy's future persona coming into being as he absorbs these multiple lessons and examples. Bandura's theory adds to both our concern for children and the value of this book—many children today have limited opportunities for social learning in their broader communities

and are not exposed to the wide collection of examples and behaviors which will produce the fully developed adult.

Learning Theories (2010). Social learning theories (Bandura). *Learning-Theories.com Knowledge Base and Webliography*. Retrieved from <http://www.learning-theories.com/social-learning-theory-bandura.html>

Multi-Cultural Children's Literature Discussion Board Posting 7/28/10

The NCTE editor Carol Jago often discusses students' need for both mirror books, where we recognize ourselves, increasing our self-awareness and creating a feeling of empathy and union with others, and also for window books, which give us a view of a different world, showing us the way forward into connection with that world. Arsenault and Brown also recognize the importance in a diverse society of both these roles for literature. The article's authors are right-- "Few people would argue against the need for inclusion of books with multicultural topics in a school library's collection", but it's important that the collection provide both the welcome of the familiar, as the Vietnamese boy found in *Shirley's Story*, and a wider worldview for students of all backgrounds.

The *Shirley's Story* video argues so passionately for the use of bilingual and multicultural material; no decent person could disagree with such heartfelt advocacy. But doing a good job at that kind of collection building requires more than just a big heart. A teacher like Shirley needs wide knowledge, good connections, special expertise, and some money! In my community the population is not diverse; it's divided—almost all students are either Anglo or Latino. Finding recreational or curricular support material for these students is difficult. Many of our Latinos are subtractive bilinguals, struggling readers in both languages—more high-interest independent reading texts that are bilingual could provide increased support and also encourage literacy development in the home language, something that has not been a priority in the current educational atmosphere. I am very happy to find the two lists from the Barahona Center at Cal State San Marcos; the sorting searches may offer more help in locating such resources for struggling (in my case high school) readers. The *Shirley* video reminds me of the need to go out into the community and find money for these materials.

Currently I have one student from Nepal. She is well-educated and literate in her home language, and I have experienced first-hand the difficulties described by Henczel in the Australian article on selecting and acquiring library materials in languages other than English. Texts or fiction from Nepal were almost impossible to locate and, when found, took months to get here. Even Spanish, especially Spanish/English texts are hard to get. If only California schools had access to a service such as provided by CAVAL and the bookshops! Oh well, at least I didn't have to worry about my budget estimates being off as the article discussed—the only way I could acquire such material was to buy it myself.

Demi. *One Grain of Rice: A Mathematical Folktale*. Illustrated by the Author. Scholastic, 1997, 40 pages. Tr. \$21.99 ISBN: 978-0-590-93998-0

The value of compounded interest could be forever cemented into the minds of young investors through this Indian legend. Usually heard as a story about the brilliance of the inventor of chess, in this version the young genius is Rani, a brave and clever girl from a village ruled by a rich raja. Every year the raja takes the majority of the villager's rice crop to store against famine, but when famine comes he refuses to risk his own wealth and comfort by releasing the rice to the starving villagers. When Rani recovers some grains of rice which fall from the delivery to the palace, she makes a clever plan, returning the rice to the raja. To reward her for her honesty the raja promises Rani whatever she wants. She chooses a single grain of rice that day, to be doubled each day for thirty days. The raja thinks this is a modest reward, but by the thirtieth day Rani had all the rice in the kingdom—more than one billion grains! Rani gives all the rice away to the poor, and in exchange for a portion of the rice the raja keeps a promise to change his ways.

The tiny illustrations with gold accents and backgrounds modeled on Indian miniatures are beautiful, and also, as the rice moves from baskets to oxen to fold-out pages of camels and elephants, help young readers understand the exponential increase of the rice. Each illustration has a small block of text so that students can always see the image for unfamiliar words. The story is told in simple traditional folk-tale language, making the book a good choice for younger listeners and advanced beginning readers.

One value encouraged by this tale is actually from our contemporary culture—the protagonist of this story is usually a young man. It's especially valuable to have a book which shows a female math genius, and one which also encourages interest and respect for the ancient traditions of India. Cultural values supported by this story are the value of the intellect in solving problems, perhaps especially a value for calculation and exactitude, and for grasping the larger picture before acting. Rani's behavior also shows a value for the good of the community group over self-enrichment. In the reform of the Raja, respect for authority and its continuation is evident, but also high standards for ethical behavior and empathy on the part of the rulers.