Emergent literacy: reading and writing development in young children

Constance J. Vandre

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EMERGENT LITERACY: READING AND WRITING
DEVELOPMENT IN YOUNG CHILDREN

by
Constance J. Vandre

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

There is growing concern and continuing debate in the United States, about the lack of literacy development and reading failure of America's school children. "Parents, teachers and researchers have begun to notice a neglect of the real basics in school—time engaged in actual reading and writing" (Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1988, p. 406). "The United States, according to a recent study, ranks 49th in literacy among the 159 countries of the world" (Cutting & Milligan, 1990, p. 62). This failure has forced American educators to rethink their views of how children learn to read and write.

During the past decade a new philosophy and belief system about early language and literacy development has sprung into being. It is called the whole language approach, and is based on the idea that reading is a process, and must be taught from the whole to its parts in a real and natural manner. This approach is in stark contrast to the word centered skills approach that continues to be taught in many American classrooms today.

Purpose of the Study

This paper examined the history and philosophy of the whole language approach in an effort to determine its appropriateness to what is known about the stages of children's early language and literacy development. The author looked at the ways a whole language environment is organized to promote literacy and language skills in
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very young children. The study addressed how reading instruction is begun with very young children based on what they already know, and how a teacher can facilitate the teaching of emerging reading and writing skills within the context of the whole language approach.

Methods of charting progress and assessing growth in whole language were examined by the author as part of this paper. Evaluation in a whole language approach differs sharply from testing used in a skills based approach, which often centers on standardized testing.

Scope and Limitations

The author of this paper concentrated on articles and books published within the last ten years. However, history of this language and learning philosophy, and definition of terms, may reach beyond that time limitation. This paper was limited to studies of the emergent literacy skills of children in kindergarten or preschool, which are the ages and stages prior to what is generally considered the period of formal reading instruction in this country. Most American children are not taught to read "formally" until first grade.

Definitions

For ease of understanding, the following definitions were included:

- "Big books are oversized copies of picture story books with patterned language and repetitive phrases" (Strickland & Morrow, Eds., 1989, p. 49).
Emergent literacy is the reading and writing behaviors of young children that precede conventional literacy.

Invented spelling is the phonetic spelling used by young children who have begun to explore the graphophonemic system. This system progresses systematically and predictably.

Mock letters/mock writing is a stage of writing in which children make letter-like forms in imitation of letters.

Shared book experience is the transferring of the routines of the bedtime story to the classroom since it is known that many children learn to read from hearing the words and following along with the print.

"Whole language is a philosophy which refers to meaningful, real, and relevant teaching and learning. Whole language respects the idea that all the language processes (listening, speaking, reading, and writing, including spelling and handwriting) are learned naturally and in meaningful context as a whole, not in little parts" (Routman, 1988, p. 26).

Summary

The quandry of reading failure and a lowered literacy rate in this country has forced educators to revise or renew their beliefs in how children learn to read and write best. Growing concern over the lack of time spent in actually reading and writing in American classrooms today has caused educators to refocus their energies towards incorporating reading and writing into all aspects of the curriculum.
This author looked at the development, evolution, and history of the whole language philosophy, which promotes the teaching of reading in a holistic manner as opposed to a skill centered, part to whole approach. The study focused on the organization of the classroom environment needed to foster early literacy skills. Examples of evaluative procedures used by whole language teachers to measure growth in literacy were included. This study was limited to the most current information on the whole language approach, and focused on the developmental stages of reading, writing, and language skills of young children of preschool and kindergarten age. Definitions were provided for clarification. In summary, this author wanted to evaluate how the whole language approach promotes literacy development in young children by aiding them to incorporate all forms of communication: speaking, listening, reading, and writing, into everyday experiences in the classroom.
CHAPTER TWO
Whole Language: What Is It?

There has been, and still rages today, debate and controversy about the most authentic way to teach children to read. Ranging from the look-say method of the 40's and 50's, to the phonics centered approach which followed and which is still encountered in many American classrooms today, to the most recent view of beginning reading instruction, that of the whole language approach, many educators have been trying to determine what method is the most efficient and works best for children (Fountas & Hannigan, 1989; Hillerich, 1991).

Researchers in the past decade have taken a whole new perspective on the ways children learn to read and write. Rather than looking at children as being “ready” to begin formal reading, usually around first grade, and waiting for a child to be “ready” to learn formally, researchers have observed children's literacy behavior from infancy through 6 years of age, and found that reading and writing develops in stages just as children go through stages in learning how to talk.

“Old notions that separate prereading and prewriting from formal instruction have given way to theories that do not demarcate development, but view it as one long continuum of growth” (Strickland & Morrow, Eds., 1989, p. vii). Early literacy is seen to begin in infancy when the child is exposed to oral and written language as well as to stories and books.
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Educators and researchers in New Zealand and Australia such as Butler, Cambourne, Clay, Holdaway, and Turbill as well as their American counterparts, Goodman, Harste, Morrow, Schickedanz, and Strickland, have been the leaders in the whole language movement in their respective countries. All of these educators have recognized the value of a naturalistic approach to early reading and writing skills, or what is known as emergent literacy.

According to Goodman, (1986), whole language is based on a learning theory that encompasses the following tenets:

- Language learning is easy when it's whole, real and relevant.
- Language is both personal and social. It is driven from inside by the need to communicate and shaped from the outside toward the norms of society.
- Language is learned as pupils learn through language and about language.
- Language development is empowering. The learner is in control of what's done with it.
- Language learning is learning how to mean; how to make sense of the world (p. 26).

Whole language also takes note of the fact that “language is inclusive and it is indivisible” (Goodman, 1986, p. 27). By this, Goodman means that parts of speech, sounds, letters, and words can be examined, but always within the larger framework of the language unit that makes sense to the child. Whole language instruction begins with stories, poems, and whole units of meaningful language, rather than
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with letters and sounds (Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1988). Whole
language advocates believe that breaking reading into little steps makes
reading more difficult to understand, rather than simplifying it.

In whole language classrooms, the child and his needs are the
basis and emphasis of instruction, instead of the teacher and the
curriculum being the central components.

The role of the teacher in a whole language classroom therefore
differs from the traditional view of teaching reading and writing. In
whole language the “teachers guide, support, monitor, encourage and
facilitate learning, but do not control it” (Goodman, 1986, p. 29).

Teachers of whole language view learning to write, read, speak
and listen as the heart of the curriculum, and integrate these processes
into all aspects of the classroom. They also look at each child’s
individual growth and plan to expand each child’s knowledge based on
what he already knows (Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1988).

“Authenticity is essential. Kids need to feel that what they are
doing through language they have chosen to do because it is useful, or
interesting, or fun for them” (Goodman, 1986, p. 31). In whole
language, “language is naturally learned from exposure and use rather
than from instruction” (Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1988, p. 409).

In determining their philosophy of whole language, educators
studied the oral language acquisition of small children all over the
world. The results of these studies showed that children of every
culture acquired the basic elements of their native tongue without
formal instruction, or without knowledge of phonics or grammar. Proponents of whole language feel that reading and writing skills can be developed naturally, just as oral language is fostered in a natural manner by parents and family members. This same way of looking at reading and writing development is the keystone for whole language instruction.

Oral Language Development

Linguists, researchers, and teachers have studied the development of oral language in young children for years. It has been strongly debated how children learn to talk, whether the ability is innate, learned by imitation, or by an interaction of the two.

Goodman (1986) stated, "Children are literally driven to learn language by their need to communicate. It is the means by which they come to share the sense that others have made of the world" (p. 15).

What is most remarkable about oral language development is that very young children generalize the rules of sentence formation, and use language for social interactions without any formal language instruction. They learn oral language in a natural manner by interaction with people in their environment, who most often applaud and respond positively to every language attempt and change.

In order to understand the continuum of development in early reading and writing, educators have looked at how children acquire oral language without formal instruction in speech sound production, correct grammar, or word endings. Learning oral language is a complex task and yet most children have an adultlike grasp of their

Brian Cambourne, who studied language acquisition in young children in his native New Zealand, believes there are seven conditions that are relevant to all language learning which includes reading, writing and spelling acquisition:

- Immersion. From infancy on, children are flooded with meaningful language that is whole and purposeful.

- Demonstration. Children, when acquiring oral language, are provided with thousands of models or examples of spoken language forms.

- Expectation. It is expected by all parents that their children will learn to talk. They do not view learning to speak as something beyond the scope of a young child to learn, even though it is a very complex task.

- Responsibility. In learning to talk, children are responsible for which conventions of language they will master. Children are in control of their language learning.

- Approximation. Young children are not expected to speak perfectly when they are attempting to learn language. They are often rewarded and applauded for just being close.

- Employment. Children are given the opportunity to use the language they have learned and given encouragement to talk freely.

- Feedback. Caring adults in young language learners lives provide feedback by modeling, expansion, and demonstration, without threatening the child's self esteem. (Butler & Turbill, 1984).
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If you look at Cambourne's seven conditions and believe you can apply the same conditions to early acquisition of reading and writing skills, then you will be starting to understand that whole language is a philosophy, a belief about how children learn to read and write, and not as a cut and dried approach to teaching reading to young children.

Stages of Reading Development

The stages of early reading and writing that develop prior to formal instruction are what is known as emergent literacy. Researchers have been studying and observing children's developing literacy skills in the home and preschool settings for the past several years in order to identify those stages.

It has been noted from their studies that many children are learning to read and write early in life, even before school entrance or before formal literacy instruction has begun. By being read to at early ages, babies and toddlers are exposed to written language, and begin to develop competence with print in response to literary events. Young children also experiment with writing, and even children as young as age three can differentiate writing from drawing (Schickedanz, 1986, Harste 1990).

Those children who develop early awareness of reading and writing usually see it as a function of real life, rather than as a set of isolated skills. They are able to observe adults using reading and writing for real purposes.

It is among the belief of researchers that young children develop
reading and writing concurrently, and both are connected with their oral language development. Each one supports the other (Strickland & Morrow, Eds., 1989).

Researchers have discovered that children learn best when they are actively involved in the processes of reading and writing. If they find purpose and meaning in their literacy activities, then these activities can become functional for them. At this point, the parent or teacher can be an important facilitator to emergent literacy by using literacy activities on a daily basis, by demonstrating writing, by reading to and with children, and by encouraging reading and writing for real purposes.

The whole language philosophy believes that young children can and will learn to read and write effectively if the proper environment is provided; if the children are actively involved in their own learning development; if each bit of growth is celebrated; if children are encouraged to take risks in language learning; if errors and mistakes are allowed; and if proper feedback is provided by adults within the learning environment.

"Piaget began the tradition of watching and listening to children to find out how they learn and it is this approach that has been used to study how children become literate" (Fields & Hillstead, 1986, p. 24).

Observers of young children have noted several aspects of early reading acquisition. Just as they go through stages in learning to talk at their own pace and own choosing, so too, do children go through stages in reading and writing skill development.
Book Conventions

One of the earliest stages of book conventions is the handling of books, knowing front from back, turning the pages and righting the book if it is upside down. Later, book conventions include knowing that books begin and end in certain places, and they are scanned in a certain direction. Children learn that books printed in English are read from front to back, left to right, and top to bottom. Other conventions that children become aware of are that books have an author, an illustrator, a title, and a title page. The knowledge of these conventions are important and basic in learning how to read (Schickedanz, 1986).

Print Awareness

Young children may assume that a reader is looking at the pictures in a book to tell a story. But as the children gain experience, they begin to make the connection that it is the print and not the pictures which tell the story. Once children have begun to have print awareness, the next step is to match the spoken words to print. This step often takes a long time to master and the preschool child requires many experiences in order to discover for themselves how print works. On the road to this discovery, children may make inquiries as to what certain words say and ask about the print itself. This may include questions about letters, words, sentences, punctuation, and letter directionality (Schickedanz, 1986).

Another aspect of print awareness is responding to environmental print such, as names of stores, restaurants, and products or logos with which the child has much contact.
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**Storybook Reading**

An important stage of early development is storybook reading, and, with very young children, it is begun in the home. The parent-child shared book experience is natural, unforced exposure to literature and language. Early storybook reading behaviors include picture reading such as looking, pointing, naming, making sounds, and asking the parents for labels of pictures.

Story reading behaviors may include pretend reading, filling in words, reading to dolls, indicating an awareness of book print, saying parts of a text when a page is turned, retelling a story without the book, reciting whole phrases from favorite stories, asking to take turns reading to the adult, correcting adult's reading errors, following along the text with a finger or hand, and reading familiar books to self with accurate renditions of the text (Schickedanz, 1986).

**Oral Language Experiences**

Educators have long known that a strong oral language background enhances a child's skill development in learning how to read and write. However, it is also important to note that reading and writing mutually support each other, as well as enrich a child's oral language development (Strickland & Morrow, Eds., 1989).

Children who have problems in school often have language difficulties, whether due to different language backgrounds, different dialects or a slowness to acquire language. These differences must not be viewed as deficiencies. Each child must be respected as a learner and
capable of using his or her own language. A whole language teacher accepts the child's uniqueness and uses the child's own experiences as a base for further learning (Strickland & Morrow, Eds., 1989, Harste, 1990).

The interrelatedness of oral language and reading and writing development is apparent and each does support the other. Children who have had experiences with books will develop concepts about print, and have had a range of activities connected with stories and books. The early reading experiences of these young children are pleasing, and books provide rich language for the children to hear. In turn, the oral language that children have learned naturally, in and out of school, enhances early reading and writing activities. Children apply what they know about oral language to listen, to respond, and to derive meaning in new learning situations (Strickland & Morrow, Eds., 1989).

Content Meaning

"Comprehension of meaning is always the goal of readers" (Goodman, 1986, p. 39). "Readers construct meaning during reading. They use their prior learning and experience to make sense of the text. Readers predict, select, confirm, and self correct as they seek to make sense of print (Goodman, 1986, p. 38)." McGee and Richgels (1990) identified five meaning-making strategies children use to make sense of stories they have shared with parents or adults. The first is that they learn things in pictures have names and can be labeled. The second strategy is that children can draw upon their own experiences as a means for deriving meaning. A third strategy is that children use
information provided by parents or adults as they describe pictures and talk about text. Fourth, children soon learn to ask questions to seek the information they need to understand pictures and stories. A fifth meaning-making strategy is that children focus on particular components of stories which they have learned are important to understanding a story's meaning.

Preschoolers demonstrate meaning derived from print by being able to retell stories first with the help of the book, and using reading-like intonations. Later development includes retelling the story without the help of the book.

Responses to stories may include higher level questioning and comments, predicting outcomes, making inferences, understanding cause and effect, discussion of plot, character, theme and resolution, as well as filling in the words of a story and reading along with a teacher or parent.

Stages of Writing Development

Just as oral language and early reading develops on a continuum, so does writing emerge in stages in young children. Researchers have noted that children's writing takes a long time to emerge, and early playing with writing is important.

"Three language systems interact in written language, the graphophonic (sound and letter patterns), the syntactic (sentence patterns), and the semantic (meanings). All three systems operate in a pragmatic context, the practical situation in which the reading and
writing is taking place" (Goodman, 1986, p. 38-39).

"Expression of meaning is always what writers are trying to achieve" (Goodman, 1986, p. 39). It is seen as a vehicle for thought (Harste, 1990).

"Constructive writing for oneself is a useful and meaningful activity for young children" (Bakst & Essa, 1990, p. 146). Young children are encouraged to experiment and explore written forms of expression to convey their thoughts and for practical purposes.

**Early Forms of Writing**

Young children's experiments in writing have certain similarities among them. When young children put markings on paper, they are aware of, and can differentiate between, drawing and writing. Children learn that letters form lines on paper as opposed to drawing. They notice that some forms are repeated over and over, and their scribbling soon begins to take on the characteristics of print. Children's scribble writing can also mimic adult cursive writing (Schickedanz, 1986, Clay, 1987, Harste, 1990).

When experimenting with writing, children use their scribbles to convey messages and at first they hope that what they have written corresponds to what has been said.

As children become more aware of print in their environment, their scribble will become more letter like in form. They may copy letters they see around them and experiment with making their own forms (mock letters). They will repeat forms over and over again. They may put letter strings together, which are non-phonetic, but carry
the child's message.

Often the first real word a child writes is his own name. Out of this writing experience comes an awareness of letters and the ability to differentiate between letters and words.

Clay (1987) has identified 13 principles that children learn through experimentation and exploration of written language. In Clay's studies of young children's writing behaviors, she found that most children achieved these principles by their sixth year of age or after one year of instruction.

- Sign concept. This is an early concept for children. They learn that signs carry messages.
- Message concept. Children learn that messages can be written down. Usually there is little correspondence between the written and oral message in their first writing attempts.
- Copying principle. Children will copy some words to establish early printing behaviors. Copy is often dropped in favor of inventing new forms and making their own discoveries.
- Flexibility principle. This is an important stage, because it is here that children experiment with letter forms by additions or rotations. They test the limits of the forms that are set by printing conventions.
- Inventory principle. Children will take stock of what they have learned by making lists, ordering or arranging what they know.
• Recurring principle. Children will repeat actions which in turn establish habitual response. It also helps children discover that elements of written language can recur in variable patterns.

• Generating principle. Children apply rules for combining elements of written language, and thereby invent novel statements of their own.

• Directional principle. The two dimensional aspect of writing on paper must be mastered. Writing conventions include left to right, return left, and top to bottom progression.

• Reversing the directional pattern. Mirror writing is common to young children who have not established a regular starting point for writing on a page. Children in this stage will often self-correct.

• Contrastive principle. Children who have attained some skill in oral and written language will “play” contrasts between sounds and word patterns.

• Space concept. Children who begin to write more than one word at a time come to understand the function of space in print. This concept is difficult and some children take a long time to learn it.

• Page and book arrangement. An extension of directionality occurs here. Children need to learn what to do when they run out of page to write on and need extra space.

• Abbreviation principle. This is a high level concept and represents a more abstract way of looking at letter and word relationships.
Invented Spelling

Children will eventually come to see a relationship between the letters they know and the sounds they hear in certain words. They will usually ascribe a letter to the beginning sound or ending sound of a familiar word. Most of the time their spelling will be quite phonetic in nature and the child will write down words as he “hears” them. With invented spelling, the child may assign only one letter per word or syllable. This may make it difficult for the adult to discern the child’s message, but it is crucial to realize that the child has reached an important stage in writing development. Before a child arrives at this point, it must be noted that a tremendous amount of effort, interaction with print, and experimenting with writing has occurred. It is the child’s way of deriving meaning through print and represents his way of making sense of the graphophonemic system. He has discovered some of the phonics rules that govern writing (Schickedanz, 1986, Clay, 1987).

To come to this level of writing ability, a child must have had extensive exposure to literature, writing activities, environmental print, and observation of adults using writing for real purposes.

Standard Spelling

Just as five and six year old children have an adult-like grasp of oral language, by the time a student finishes the primary grades, he will have mastered adult-like spelling and the rules that govern it. By experimenting freely with words, letters, and writing about what they know, children will discover the rules for spelling and grammar, just
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as they discovered rules for speaking when they learned how to talk.

Invented spelling phases itself out as the child uncovers rules for standard English spelling and memorizes more correctly spelled words.

Reasoning out spelling patterns through naturalistic writing activities helps students learn far more than any drill on phonics rules (Fields & Hillstead, 1986).

Classroom Environment for Early Literacy

"Research in early literacy builds on observation of homes where children learned to read without direct instruction before coming to school" (Strickland & Morrow, Eds., 1989, p. 156).

To enhance learning, it is important to create a school environment that supports children’s literacy events (Schickedanz, 1986, Strickland & Morrow, Eds., 1989). Educators have found that many preschoolers can already read signs, labels of boxes, and logos before coming to school. (Strickland & Morrow, 1988). Providing environmental print in the classroom is one way to provide functional print experiences for children (Schickedanz, 1986).

Environmental print can include the labeling of classroom centers, cubbies, and shelves of materials. Posting of daily routines, attendance charts, helper charts, calendar and weather boards, and daily news can help organize the environment of the classroom as well as enhance literacy learning.

A second way to provide literacy materials for young children is to supply writing and reading materials in the house corner or block corner of the classroom. The children can incorporate these materials
into dramatic play on a daily basis. Rotation of materials or introducing new themes for play keeps interest high. Themes for play could include a grocery store, doctor's office, restaurant, bakery, museum, library, fire/police station, post office or zoo. Literacy materials to support these themes could be cookbooks, food containers, telephone books, telephones, notepads and pencils, posters, charts, signs, labels, lists, magazines, index cards, file folders, order forms, envelopes, cash register and play money, menus, adding machine and tape, and other items connected to the dramatic themes (Schickedanz, 1986). In a study done by Morrow and Rand (1991), it was found that “preschool and kindergarten children are likely to engage in more voluntary literacy behaviors during free-play periods when literacy materials are introduced and teachers guide children to use those materials” (p. 399).

Specific areas of the classroom used to promote early literacy are the book corner and the writing center.

Book Corner


Children must have access to highly interesting reading material, at their developmental level, within the classroom. A portion of the classroom must be set aside for a comfortable reading area, which is properly furnished, attractive, and inviting to early readers. The books
contained in the classroom book corner should contain good quality children's literature. Several choices of books should be available, including predictable books, familiar books, as well as new books that cross a range of reading levels. Books can be rotated and of several varieties to cover the children's interests. Types of books to be included are Mother Goose and nursery rhymes, ABC and counting books, concept and informational books, wordless books, easy to read books, predictable books, picture story books, poetry, fantasy, fables and folktales, humor, and biographies. Books made by the children themselves are also an integral part of the book corner (Strickland & Morrow, Eds., 1989).

Writing Center

A writing table or center needs to be incorporated into the setting of a whole language classroom (Schickedanz, 1986, Strickland & Morrow, Eds., 1989, Bakst & Essa, 1990).

The writing center provides the preschooler with opportunities to produce writing or drawing on paper. Children enjoy exploring with print and will readily produce pictures, stories, messages, letters and cards.

Materials suggested for a writing center include pencils, markers, crayons, magic slates, rubber stamps and ink, and paper in various sizes, shapes, and colors. Children also enjoy using glue, tape, staplers, punches, typewriters, stencils, scissors, cards, stationery, and envelopes in writing centers, often to author their own books. Materials need to be rotated and changed periodically to maintain interest and appeal.
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**Classroom Activities for Early Literacy**

In a whole language approach, reading is regarded as a skill and not a subject like math or science. Students are expected to apply the skill of reading to all areas of content in the classroom. (Cutting & Milligan, 1990).

Whole language educators develop the skill of reading by utilizing the following methods with young students:

- **Reading to children.** Teachers introduce children to reading by the use of highly interesting and motivating picture and story books. This rich literature not only delights children, but introduces them to story structure and written language.

- **Shared reading.** Teachers and students read books out loud together. By doing it together, the children’s confidence in being able to read is improved and enthusiasm for reading is created.

- **Guided reading.** This technique aims not just for simple word recognition, but as a way of constructing meaning from print and predicting one’s way through print.

- **Independent reading.** The ultimate goal is for all students to read independently. The concept of reading for pleasure is also reinforced (Cutting & Milligan, 1990).
Big Books

Big books offer a way to duplicate, as closely as possible, the family story book experience in the classroom.

Big books are oversized picture books that offer sufficient view for a group of children. It is recommended that the group contain about six to eight students (Strickland & Morrow, 1990). Big books contain rich language that is often predictable, patterned, and humorous. The stories are easy for children to remember and comprehend. Big books invite children to respond to them in some way.

Strickland & Morrow (1990), recommend several activities for use with big books:

• Tracking print. The print in big books is large enough for students to see as the teacher reads and tracks with her hand. Children connect words with print and learn directionality by watching and reading along.

• Think along. At points in the reading or re-reading of a big book, the teacher can model higher level thinking or inquiry for the children. Predicting outcomes, making observations, and deriving meaning from text can all be demonstrated.

• Closure activities. Children can be encouraged to provide appropriate language to open ended closure activities. They can fill in blanks or finish sentences of parts of big books that are covered up by the teacher. Children learn much about language as they decide which words or phrases make the most sense semantically and syntactically.
Emergent Literacy

- Examining text. Big books allow children to look at parts of texts such as word repetitions, punctuation marks, and word beginnings and endings. Children can analyze these parts which are contained within a meaningful unit of language.

- Literature extension. Class big books can be authored and published based on themes or topics inspired by already published big books.

Shared Reading

Daily storybook reading is recommended in preschool and kindergarten classrooms to teach children about reading (Strickland & Morrow, Eds., 1989). A variety of children's literature, including fairy tales, fables, informational books, contemporary pieces, poetry books, and wordless books can all be used successfully as read aloud books.

Shared reading with children has several recommended strategies: "preview the book, establish a receptive story listening context, briefly introduce the book, and read with expression" (Strickland & Morrow, Eds., 1989, p. 7).

Strickland & Morrow, Eds., (1989) add two further suggestions. The first is to engage the children in discussion about the book as it is being read. “Talk about the characters and their motivations and responses, make predictions and then listen to confirm or disconfirm them, draw inferences, discuss the themes of the books, link information in books to real life experiences, examine the author’s use of language, and draw connections among various books” (p. 7).

A second suggestion is to “read the children’s favorite books again and again, just as parents who read to their children do” (Strickland &
Morrow, Eds., 1989, p. 7). By reading the stories over and over, children will be drawn to “read” them independently and explore them more in depth on their own (Strickland & Morrow, Eds., 1989).

When choosing storybooks for shared reading, the following criteria may be helpful:

- Books with rhythmic language and interesting vocabulary. It is important to find books that have natural sounding language.
- Books within the conceptual level of the child. The stories should have a connection to the child’s experiences in life.
- Books of durable construction. This allows children to handle the books themselves, which is important and necessary.
- Books the teacher likes herself. If a teacher really enjoys a story herself, that enthusiasm will spread to the children.

In a whole language classroom, children are invited to respond to shared reading in a variety of ways. Art, drama, cooking, eating, science experiments, and writing can be used to further enhance group storybook readings.

Many of these extensions are unforced or natural responses, initiated by the children themselves, or they can be modeled and guided by the teacher (Strickland & Morrow, Eds., 1989). These activities are more meaningful and motivating than meaningless drill or fill in the blank workbook pages.
Journal Writing

Preschoolers should have regular opportunities to write, illustrate, and dictate stories of their choice and be encouraged, but not forced to do so (Bakst & Essa, 1990). Young children will often write readily, easily, and willingly by invitation alone.

With emergent writers, the teacher can write the story as the child dictates it, but also encourages the child to write in his own way as well.

Simple journals can be made for each child in the class, and a special time is set aside for writing each day. Children can write or draw anything they choose to in their journals.

Journal writing is an open ended activity that allows children who are at different levels of literacy knowledge to participate in a successful manner (McGee & Richgels, 1990).

Authorship

"One important facet of whole language instruction is authorship. Children learn this concept through reading and rereading favorite authors and through becoming authors themselves" (Lamme, 1989, p. 83). One way children come to view themselves as authors and writers is to share their written work with peers. Many whole language classrooms designate a special chair as the author's chair for children to read their work to classmates (Strickland & Morrow, 1988, Lamme, 1989).

"Author's chair encompasses two primary purposes for young children. It gives them a chance to both share their drawings and writing and to receive feedback on their work" (Lamme, 1989, p. 85).
After reading or sharing his work, the audience tells the author what they liked about his work. The children then get to ask questions of the author about his work. This feedback helps children become better writers and readers (Lamme, 1989).

Another aspect of authorship is the display of the childrens' written work for others to see. According to Lamme (1989), the display of children's work is the "real payoff" (p. 85). "Displaying the children's work encourages them to do more writing" (Jacobs, 1990, p. 117). Children's work should be shown at eye level, as attractively as possible, with the use of quality materials. "If we want children to value their work, we give them valuable paper on which to write and draw" (Lamme, 1989, p. 85).

Children's written work can be published in the form of books. This is also valuable and reinforcing to them as authors and artists. Publishing of their work needs to be done as easily and as regularly as possible (Lamme, 1989).

Assessment

Assessment in whole language differs from testing and evaluation of reading and writing development in phonics oriented classrooms.

Because teaching and learning are recognized as shared responsibilities in whole language, children are also involved in evaluation, since they are responsible for learning the task.

Assessment in whole language reflects and guides learning. It is on-going rather than a one shot spot test. It is representative of a variety of observations and samples of work over a period of time.
“Whole language is not text or test driven. Instead it is driven by what teachers know about the developmental nature of literacy and the development of children” (Harp, Ed., 1991, p. 3).

“Whole language teachers are concerned with helping learners build underlying competence” (Goodman, 1986, p. 41). Therefore, evaluation in a whole language classroom is primarily for the student, who uses it to come to an understanding of his own progress. Evaluation is used by teachers, parents, and administrators to gain knowledge of the child’s literacy needs and to chart progress.

Harp, Ed. (1991), developed the following principles to guide evaluation strategies in whole language:

• Assessment and evaluation strategies must honor the wholeness of language. Teachers assess the children’s knowledge about language as they use language in real situations of reading and writing.

• Reading and writing are viewed as processes. Instead of looking at and testing for discrete subskill knowledge, the teacher looks at children as moving through the stages of reading and writing development, always in response to meaningful language units. Teachers may use checklists and work samples to determine progress in the processes of reading and writing.

• Teacher intuition is a valuable assessment and evaluation tool. Accountability does not always have to exist through testing. Teachers are constant decision makers, often deciding what comes next is determined by a teacher’s intuition based on careful
observation and knowledge about children's learning.

- Teacher observation is at the center of assessment and evaluation. Whole language teachers are knowledgeable about children's literacy development, and couple that knowledge with careful and frequent observations of children as they are engaged in literacy events.

- Assessment and evaluation in reading must reflect what we know about the reading process. The interactive nature of reading which involves the author, text, and reader must be acknowledged. The teacher must be aware of the child's prior knowledge, the structure of the text, the reading strategies used by the child, and the interests and attitudes the child brings to the text.

- Assessment and evaluation in writing must reflect what we know about the writing process. Feedback is given and self-evaluation procedures are used for each stage of the writing process. The stages include prewriting, rough draft, revision or response, editing, and final draft or publication.

- Norm referenced achievement testing is of no help to the whole language teacher. Test items on these tests do not look like the real reading experiences children have in whole language classrooms. It is important to use measures which recognize the developmental nature of literacy.

- Assessment and evaluation instruments are varied and literacy is assessed in a variety of contexts. Testing is only one form of assessment. Whole language teacher use work samples,
observations, checklists, and conferences to provide a comprehensive overview of the various kinds of literacy activities.

- Assessment and evaluation are integral parts of instruction. Careful observation can inform a teacher of what a child needs next. Because teachers are open to signs of need, assessment can lead to instruction based on the children's interests, strengths, and desires.

- Assessment and evaluation strategies are developmentally and culturally appropriate. Teachers recognize the developmental aspect of beginning reading and writing. They respect each child's unique experiences and offer many opportunities to practice literacy. Cultural diversity must be respected and considered in today's classroom.

- Assessment and evaluation occur continuously. Teachers are constant kidwatchers. The teacher can make use of frequent observations to detect patterns, to listen carefully, to promote self-evaluation, to be timely and immediately influence instruction, to be a child advocate rather than an adversary, and to emphasize process and what the child can do.

- Assessment and evaluation must reveal children's strengths. Whole language teachers are rejecting the medical model of educational assessment, which looks at what's wrong with the child. Rather, the whole language teacher looks at what each child can do and how they can use it to learn. They also believe children are natural learners who do not have to be forced to learn.
Observation

As noted by Harp, Ed., (1991), one of the primary strategies in whole language assessment is the use of observation to learn more about children.

Observation can be informal, such as watching children in the classroom or playground, listening to them, conversing with them, or planning with them.

Observation can also be formal. One on one conferencing with a student about his reading or writing, using developmental checklists, or keeping anecdotal records are some examples of formal observations.

Observation, both informal and formal, can help the child and the teacher in many ways. Because it is frequent, a picture of the child develops over time, and the child's strengths are emphasized. It is also less stressful for the child and the teacher because of its continuous nature and positive focus. It allows for self-evaluation on the part of the child. It gives the student the opportunity to explain his work and tell the teacher what he is trying to do. The teacher can learn more about each child's developing literacy skills and provide the best opportunities for missing skills to be developed.

"The most powerful aspect of using observation as the basis of evaluation is that it can reflect the real world" (Harp, Ed., 1991, p. 75). "What children do in their own reading and writing in school is a more accurate reflection of what they will do in their reading and writing out of school" (Harp, Ed., 1991, p. 75).
Assessment Tools

Ways of keeping track of student growth and development is markedly different in the whole language approach.

Evaluation involves collecting data and making judgments based on that data to improve both teaching and learning.

Routman (1988), suggests the following alternatives to standardized testing and skills evaluation. Those that are the most useful for emergent readers and writers are the following:

- Oral responses. The teacher can observe and record a child’s responses in shared reading, retelling a story, and in group discussions.

- Reading records and response logs. Reading records can be kept of library books, take home books, or free choice books read to the child by parents or teacher. Reactions to the books may be told to and recorded by the parent or teacher in a response log.

- Writing journals. The journals can be examined for thought organization, knowledge of print conventions, handwriting, and spelling development. Patterns that have emerged over time can be analyzed and documented.

- Conferencing. Teachers conference one on one with students to focus on strategies used by the child, to analyze errors, and to indicate needs for specific instruction.

- Responding in writing for real purposes. This can take the form of invitations to parents, thank you notes, announcements, or any real life situation that requires a written response.
• Extension activities. Children's responses to literature points to a knowledge of their understanding, appreciation, and original thought about stories.

• Self-evaluation. Children predict, confirm, and self-correct when they are in charge of their own reading and writing.

Written record keeping of student progress can involve both teacher records and student produced work. Teacher records can include the following:

• Developmental checklists. These are a list of reading, writing, or language behaviors that are being observed. A simple marking system is used to indicate occurrence of, or quality of, the behaviors as noted by the teacher. Checklists can be developed by the teacher for any literacy event. They are used to provide consistency of observations over time, to keep writing at a minimum, and to provide a method for recording what is being observed.

• Interviews or conferences. These meetings take place one on one, usually between teacher and student, but can also take place between students. The conference is held to discuss a student's response to literature, or to examine progress in writing projects. Interview sheets which contain questions about responses to literature, or self-evaluation in writing and reading, can again be easily developed by the teacher.

• Anecdotal records. Teachers use notebooks, file cards, post-it notes, or a clipboard to jot down observations as they move about the
classroom, noting children's interactions with literacy events. The notations are generally descriptive, and view literacy learning from the child's perspective. The teacher is looking for knowledge about the child's control of oral and printed language, use of problem solving abilities, question asking abilities, use of language in reading, writing, and speaking, as well as planning and organization skills (Harp, Ed., 1991).

Collecting student produced work over time is another way of keeping track of student progress:

- Journals lend themselves to both instruction and evaluation. With beginning writers, journal entries can indicate where the child is regarding stages of writing development. The journal can be a source of dialogue between student and teacher when the teacher responds in writing in the child’s journal. By stamping or dating the written work, the journal becomes a record of the child's development as he moves through the early stages of writing. It can also be used for self-evaluation. The child can use the teacher's feedback and written responses to make changes in his own writing development.

- Portfolios. The writing portfolio is a folder or log which is used to save samples of a student's writing. It should contain the student's best work, much of it self-selected examples. The portfolio, once it is begun, can follow the child from year to year and become his property when high school is completed. The samples in the portfolio can be utilized to measure growth and change in writing.
style, for error detection, and for growth in thought development and overall organization of writing (Harp, Ed., 1991).

Assessment in a whole language classroom is comprehensive, responsive, and naturalistic. It is qualitative, not quantitative. It is useful, rich, and valuable in determining student progress. It is scientific, rigorous, and trustworthy (Cambourne & Turbill, 1990).
CHAPTER THREE

Summary

Whole language is not an approach to the teaching of reading and writing. It is not a method that can be spelled out in a teacher's guide with a defined set of instructional strategies. Instead, whole language is a mindset about instruction.

Whole language instruction is a total literacy immersion program. Children read and write constantly throughout the day, using real language in real situations. Whole language empowers both the teacher and the learner.

There are several parallels between the learning of oral language and literacy learning.

Language and literacy learning is self-generated. The best motivation for learning oral language is the same for reading and writing—to communicate with others. Children want to communicate by speaking and writing, and their efforts in these areas will grow in environments where adults respond favorably to those efforts.

Language and literacy learning is informal. Parents do not have language lessons for their children. Language is learned in meaningful contexts, not through talking about it or analyzing it. Reading and writing is learned best by actually doing it for real purposes and receiving encouragement and positive feedback from others.

Language and literacy learning is active. Children learn language as they actively engage in language with others. Children learn literacy
best in situations where they are using reading and writing continually across the curriculum.

Language and literacy learning is a holistic process. Children learn about the forms and functions of language at the same time. It is also true for the development of reading and writing.

Language and literacy learning is variable. Each child has a unique set of experiences and a personal environment that differs from others. Each child develops at his or her own pace.

Reading and writing are complex processes that need to develop over time in stages. Children learn best in low risk environments where exploration is encouraged and accepted.

Literacy learning is not relegated to a specific time of day. Rather, it is integrated into everything that occurs throughout the day. Content of interest and importance to children is the basis for language learning.

Conclusions

This review of research has shown that whole language must be viewed as a philosophy of learning with the belief that children are avid learners, where process, not product, is emphasized, and language is studied and taught holistically.

Researchers in whole language base their knowledge on the study of language development in young children, looking first at oral language acquisition and its stages, and then applying those same principles to early reading and writing development.
Qualitative measures, including observation and description of literacy events from the child's perspective, are the basic research methods used in whole language.

Whole language researchers view language learning as starting from the whole, and studying parts contained within the whole. Early learners begin with the concrete before moving to the abstract. Instruction in whole language emphasizes and builds upon the child's experiences and background. The students use reading and writing for real purposes across the curriculum.

Whole language classrooms attempt to duplicate the home literacy environment. Environmental print surrounds the children, and centers for reading and writing are important hubs of learning and activity. Children work together and foster each other's learning. Flexibility and high interest are key factors to a successful learning environment.

The teacher's role in whole language is one of facilitator rather than director of learning. Children are not labeled as deficient, but are accepted as unique individuals with strengths and abilities in language usage. Learning is based on discovery, and children are given choices in how they wish to respond or interact with literature and literacy events. Risk taking is paramount, trial and error is encouraged and accepted. Language meaning and predicting one's way through print is emphasized as well. Instruction is begun with whole stories, poems, and books. Analysis of phonics principles and other instruction takes
place within the context of these meaningful units.

Teachers in whole language classrooms are demonstrating, modeling, and teaching by example for their students. Teachers also read and write for real purposes along with their students.

Students in a whole language classroom are given much responsibility for learning of their own choosing. They are encouraged to explore and develop topics on their own. Children often work on projects together and learn from each other. They learn about language by the use of language. Oral discussion, feedback, and questioning is a major part of their growth in language development.

Evaluation in whole language is not based on formal standardized one time testing. Rather, evaluation and assessment in whole language is varied and comprehensive. Testing is based on observation, description, and collections of work samples over time. Checklists, anecdotal records, and self-evaluation by students are some of the evaluative processes used in whole language classrooms.

Whole language is growing in acceptance and use in classrooms across the United States. American educators, after studying, reading, and observing whole language classrooms in action, are embracing this philosophy in increasing numbers. Teachers of whole language are supporting and encouraging each other to effectively bring holistic reading and writing strategies into their classrooms. They are preparing today's students for tomorrow's challenges.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Emergent Literacy


