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# The Significance of Early Language and Literacy Development

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EARLY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

The Significance of Early Language and Literacy Development

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EDCI 589 Applied Research

University of Mary Washington

Summer 2013

I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized help on this work.

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### **Introduction**

A shockingly large number of students are unable to read at a level necessary for their academic success (Rodriguez, 2003). Research has repeatedly indicated that reading acquisition begins before entering elementary school; it begins early in preschool (Scarborough, 2009). However, not all children have access to a qualified preschool program (or any preschool program at all), which results in children arriving at school with significantly different degrees of literacy skills. The ultimate goal of reading is comprehension, which requires word recognition, effortless decoding skills, phonological awareness, letter knowledge and verbal skills (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). Differences in reading achievement continue steadily over time, in fact 65-75% of children with reading disabilities early on continue to read poorly not only through their school careers, but in their lives beyond school (Scarborough, 2009). Becoming a fluent reader is influenced by several factors including continued literacy development, understanding of literacy concepts and the efforts of caregivers and teachers to promote literacy. Children's parents, caregivers, and early childhood educators play a crucial role in influencing the child's literacy development by the degree to which they interact socially and expose them to a literacy rich environment.

### **Problem Statement**

Language and literacy skills form the foundation for all other subject areas of learning. Hence it is crucial to the development of children to acquire these basic skills early before they enter kindergarten. However, this is not reality. Many of the children entering kindergarten lack basic literacy and language skills for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons may include lack of a print rich home environment, lack of parental involvement in reading to their child, different home language than English or lack of access to preschool education. These children

are most at risk of developing reading problems (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999) and potentially struggle not only in reading but also in all other academic areas. Furthermore, this varying degree in skill level helps perpetuate the existing achievement gap that exists between social class and race/ethnicity. If teachers can begin to effectively implement balanced language and literacy instruction in a print rich classroom and involve caregivers, then we will be able to see better reading achievement, less children will struggle with reading, and we will be able to decrease the gap in achievement.

### **Rationale**

As a preschool teacher, I have found a significant difference in language and literacy skills based on a child's home environment. Some children come from backgrounds where English is not the main language spoken at home, or parents have very little time to spend reading with their child. Despite their background, those children who master phonological awareness before they enter kindergarten, from my personal experience, achieve reading mastery much more efficiently than those who do not. I am passionate about teaching language and literacy to early elementary students because it is so critical to their success not only in school, but also in life. Children love to sit down and have stories read to them. As teachers, we cannot control where our students come from, but we can provide opportunities to compensate for children who do not have literacy rich backgrounds before entering school.

### **Research Questions**

In this paper, I will focus my study on the following questions as they pertain to the necessity of instructing and fostering early language and literacy skills both at home and in a preschool classroom using developmentally appropriate, effective instruction to improve reading achievement for all students. The questions are listed below:

How are children currently performing in reading assessments?

What is the role of the preschool teacher in helping improve language and literacy acquisition?

What are the components of early literacy acquisition?

What are the current issues facing early childhood education and the new focus on literacy instruction?

What role do parents/caregivers play in a child's language and literacy development?

What are the long-term benefits of preschool literacy instruction?

### **Literature Review**

Research shows that early learning experiences directly link with future school achievement, emotional well-being and overall adult productivity (Barnett, 2002; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Heckman, 2006; Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005; National Institute for Child Health & Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2005; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The current issues facing achievement in school and early childhood educators revolve around the achievement gap, standards, focus, accountability and teacher education. What this calls for in the classroom is a balanced literacy curriculum that includes all the components of early literacy acquisition. When a literacy-rich environment at home supports literacy instruction in preschool, children will be able to experience a rapid growth of literacy skills (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). This implies preschool teachers will need to receive the appropriate training to be able to implement developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction.

### **Current Conditions**

Results from several standardized tests (including one conducted by The National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP]) raises cause for concern about current practices.

As an increasingly diverse nation, it is becoming more apparent that there is a great disparity in performance level between different backgrounds (i.e. ethnic, racial, linguistic and those in poverty). According to the NAEP 2009 Executive Report in Reading, there have been no significant reductions in the racial/ethnic, gender, or social class gaps at either grade 4 or 8 compared with 2007. In the 2002 NAEP report (Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003), [scores](#) [by](#) 12<sup>th</sup> grade students from diverse backgrounds have fallen four years behind their mainstream counterparts. The average 12<sup>th</sup>-grade black student score is at the same level as the average eighth-grade Asian student and slightly below the average eighth-grade white student. Such a large disparity suggests that a variety of instructional techniques will be necessary to meet students' needs.

**Connection to the achievement gap.** According to the NAEP 2009 Executive Report in Reading, there have been no significant reductions in the racial/ethnic, gender, or social class gaps at either grade 4 or 8 compared with 2007. The gap in achievement can be explained by different factors including economic disparity, experiential background, mobility, etc. – factors beyond the control of a classroom teacher. Research has shown that students from diverse backgrounds have limited exposure to high-quality instruction. Compared with “mainstream peers,” low-income/minority students receive instruction in lower-level skills, but not in reading comprehension and higher-level thinking (Amendum & Fitzgerald, 2010; Amendum, Li, Hall, Fitzgerald, Creamer, Head-Reeves, et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond, 1995, 2004).

Research shows, that there are important factors that teachers can control within the classrooms that influence student achievement such as what to teach and the quality of teaching (aka how it is taught). A review of research led to the National Reading Panel Report (National Reading Panel, 2000) suggests that a complete reading program includes instruction in

comprehension and fluency with a basic understanding of phonics and phonemic awareness. The report suggests that phonics instruction is important, but must be taught within a broader context in which it is surrounded by meaning-making activities. Taylor, Pearson, Peterson and Rodriguez (2003, 2005) described classroom practices that support higher levels of achievement which includes teacher coaching, high levels of questioning, active student participation in activities that require high level thinking (i.e. book discussion clubs) and time for sustained engagement in reading and writing.

### **Issues for Early Childhood Education**

**Early literacy standards** The trend to create standards for early childhood education indicates the need to specify curriculum content and learning goals/outcomes for early education programs. Kendall and Marzano (2004) suggest three reasons why we should develop and use standards: to establish clarified content of the curriculum, to raise expectations for the achievement of all children and to ensure accountability for public education. One of the national efforts to establish language and literacy standards is the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation Performance Criteria for early childhood programs. Not only has the nation been developing standards, but individual states as well have been creating their own standards. In 2005, 43 states had early childhood standards, a substantial increase over the past several years (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). The specific standards include oral language, phonological awareness, print knowledge and use and writing. Many states have also included criteria for teaching and program structure. The NAEYC and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in the State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) (2002) warn of the risks and benefits of creating early learning standards. They also warn that culturally and linguistically diverse children (as well as children with disabilities)



may be at a heightened risk. However, they do say that research-based expectations for content and goals of learning experiences can help focus curriculum and increase the likelihood of later achievement.

**Focus and effective curriculum.** Most educators agree that a strong early literacy curriculum is important, however fewer agree about how this is to be accomplished. A crucial concern regarding the curriculum addresses the overall learning and growth of young children by continuing to stress the physical, social, emotional and overall cognitive development of children while simultaneously strengthening academic curriculum (Smith, 2001). This is a very heavy burden to place on teachers as well as children. Some educators express concern about what they perceive to be an over-emphasis on early literacy and a potential curriculum imbalance. Early childhood educators warn about literacy curricula that are too narrowly focused on literacy skills and neglect other domains of development.

About a century ago, educators debated over the focus of early childhood language and literacy instruction, one side was for a focus on ABCs (synthetic phonics) and the other supported analytic phonics (words first, then letters) (Matthews, 1966). After WWII the focus of early language and literacy instruction was on “look-say” (i.e. the Dick and Jane readers) versus phonics (Chall, 1967). The debate is always around which reading skill to emphasize at the earliest stages of formal reading instruction – should the focus be on cracking the code or on reading comprehension (code vs. meaning) (Chall, 1967).

The code focused side takes a “simple view of reading,” ~~that~~ that is they see reading comprehension as the product of decoding and listening comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoffman, 2009; Tunmer & Nicholson, 2011). They argue that listening comprehension is what students already do know how to do, without much formal instruction, whereas decoding is

something they do not know, so the sooner they learn it, the better. From their perspective, meaning making begins with phonics and decoding early on so students can engage in regular reading by translating letters into sounds then use the same cognitive processes that facilitate listening comprehension to understand what they have read (Cain, 2010).

Meaning-emphasis promoters argue that because making meaning is the ultimate goal of reading, it is best to start with that as the goal (Matthews, 1966). Teachers can use scaffolding to help students understand meanings and the learners will naturally acquire the cipher for mapping sounds onto letters. They argue for simultaneous instruction that uses oral reading activities, shared reading and writing through pictures and temporary spellings.

**Evidence-based practices.** Whether growth of each individual child or the curriculum should dominate the teachers' decision-making process. One side argued that each child experience the uniquely optimal curriculum for their own development. Harste, Woodward and Burkey (1984) take the approach that makes the child the primary source of information in curriculum planning. This is referred to as the "individual-child" view. They argued that there are many paths to reading acquisition. The "curricular-sanctity" group says that there are many variations in the way the single path is traversed. The key is to balance curricular driven instruction (all students must learn) with child-driven instruction (the student will learn when they are ready). To have a balanced approach, it is a complex process that requires flexibility and arrangement of literacy's various aspects (Seedfeldt, 2005).

The national and state expectations emphasize evidence-based practice to guide curriculum and the evaluation of its effectiveness (Center on Education Policy, 2003; National Reading Panel, 2000). The evidence should be grounded in scientifically based research. It requires the application of systematic and objective procedures to obtain information in a

particular field. The purpose of evidence-based practices is to ensure that those who use the research can be confident that it is valid and reliable (Kendall & Marzano, 2004). The key components of an evidence-based practice include: oral language development (including vocabulary and listening), understanding of the alphabetic code (including phonological/phonemic awareness and knowledge of the alphabet) and knowledge/understanding about print and its use.

**Accountability and assessment.** Measuring early literacy development is a crucial part of a comprehensive early childhood program. Assessment is a tool to measure the development and learning of students. It is used to guide the teacher by helping to plan programs, make decisions, identify children who might need special services and to report to and communicate with others (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1988). Assessment includes daily observation and assessments for program accountability. The latter reflect an increasingly high-stakes climate which requires programs to show their effectiveness in improving school readiness. This however raises concerns about this trend. Some of the issues raised include the use of assessments that focus on a limited range of skills and the nature of the assessments that are being used (Seedfeldt, 2005). This may cause teachers to have to narrow their curriculum. Although children may be able to name letters in a rote memorization manner, they may fail to acquire the ultimate, long-term goal, which is an understanding of how it is that letters function for reading and writing and the ability to use what they know to make sense of the print in their environment. Currently, the ability to name letters is assessed in a decontextualized manner, one at a time (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). This could lead teachers to teach letters in this manner, which is not going to help them reach that long-term goal of making sense of the print in their environment.

**Teacher education.** The need for qualified teachers is a major issue in early childhood education. This stands especially true in the area of early literacy. Government mandates have raised expectations for the training of early childhood teachers, especially in Head Start and state funded prekindergarten programs (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003; National Research Council, 2001). In response to a crisis in preschool program staffing issues in terms of teacher quality, several states have established PreK-3 certification programs and incentives to such businesses to upgrade and expand their skills. What these teachers need to know in general is the importance of oral language competency, early literacy experiences and family literacy in learning how to read. Early childhood educators must promote a range of language and literacy dispositions and capabilities including a love of literacy and development of vocabulary, oral language abilities, phonological awareness and print-relate knowledge (Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004). They need to use diverse instructional methods, which are developmentally appropriate and be capable of adjusting methods to meet the specific needs of the individual children. It is also critical that these teachers be able to use multiple techniques to monitor and assess children's literacy development and be capable of interpreting the assessments to make instructional decisions (Roskos & Vukelich, 2006). Such skills for a teacher require education programs to provide pre-service teachers a program that is based on the most up to date scientific knowledge about how children learn to read and write, as well as the most effective instructional practices. Many schools have literacy specialists, who can work alongside pre-service teachers, or even the general education teacher to provide them support and guidance to improve their instruction (Neuman & Roskos, 2005).

**Components of Early Literacy Acquisition**

**Oral language.** Oral language develops alongside literacy development and includes listening comprehension, verbal expression and vocabulary development (Sprira, Bracken & Fischel, 2005). Oral language development is fostered when children have the opportunity to use language in interactions with adults and their peers when they listen and respond to stories. Children build their vocabulary by engaging in cognitively and linguistically stimulating activities that encourage them to describe events and build background knowledge (National Center for Education and the Economy, 2001).

Evidence found by Hart & Risley (1995) shows that children from families where parents provide their children with language and literacy support do better in school than those who do not. Families who do not provide support are likely to use less variety in word choice in everyday conversations and the language environment tends to be controlling and punitive (Hart & Risley, 1995). The fact that these children have less exposure to a wide vocabulary with sophisticated (rare) words at home directly relates to the child's vocabulary acquisition (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). This matters because understanding the meaning of words is critical to reading comprehension, understanding what the child reads. Even if the child has extensive knowledge of the alphabetic code, there are many times that the child will encounter a word, which is difficult to decode phonetically.

By the time children enter kindergarten, most will know an average of 3000 to 5000 words (Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, 1998). Children who lag in oral language and development in years prior to formal schooling are less likely to be successful beginning readers, and tend to persist through primary grades and beyond (Juel, 1988; Sprira,

Bracken & Fischel, 2005). Combining a strong vocabulary and using what they know about phonics, children are able to make sense of what an unfamiliar word might be.

**Vocabulary.** Large vocabularies have been linked to reading success (Anderson & Freebody 1981). Vocabularies signify that children are building content knowledge about the world, which is crucial to their reading development later on (Neuman, 2001). At home, adults use definitions and synonyms, inference and comparison, prior experience or semantic, social or physical context to help children understand what new words mean. Children whose families use more new words understand more words and have better emergent literacy skills later in kindergarten (Tabors, Beals, & Weizman 2001). Teachers who use interesting and varied words help create a vocabulary rich environment where children are exposed to and encouraged to use a wide variety of words. What is most important is not just the variety of words the teacher uses, but the variety of words the children use as they speak with teachers. A classroom where language development is supported has preschoolers engaged in well-planned active pretend play. The effects of dramatic play and these types of learning experiences, contribute to vocabulary of children throughout life.

**Exposure to literacy.** Reading with adults, looking at books independently and sharing reading experiences with their peers, are some of the ways that children can experience books (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). Knowledge about print is formed from children's experiences with books (and other written materials). Sharing reading experiences builds background knowledge about the world as well as concepts about books and print. To make sense of print, it requires an awareness and understanding of environmental print and an understanding of the concepts of print (meaning where to begin a book, what page direction to read, etc.) (Tabors, Snow & Dickinson, 2001). Each of these skills is learned from interactions with others. Some good ways

to include these skills into a curriculum include visiting a grocery store, daily read-aloud, having a writing center, and labels/signs/charts in the classroom. In addition, the teachers play a huge role in modeling the reading and writing processes during any form of shared reading and writing by explicitly making comments about what they are thinking as they read and write (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2000). This helps children understand the process while watching the teacher carry it out.

**Alphabetic code.** In English the letters are written to represent sounds of the language that is spoken, hence it is an alphabetic language. Knowledge of the alphabet and phonological awareness (ability to distinguish the sounds within words) shape the basis of early decoding and spelling skills (Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004). Decoding and spelling skills are correlated with later reading and spelling abilities. Children can learn to name letters and distinguish them from each other very early on. They can also begin to identify the constituent sounds within words (i.e. syllables, rhymes and phonemes).

It is important that children be immersed in a language-rich environment to develop phonological awareness. By exposing children to the alphabet in many forms is a great way to help them master the ABCs. Some of the forms include books, blocks, magnets, cereal, attempts to write, etc.). Typically, phonological awareness and knowledge of the ABCs does not just happen from mere exposure, it takes parents, teachers and older siblings who intentionally teach children the alphabet. Studies show that it is possible to teach phonological awareness to preschoolers and kindergarten children and can improve later literacy (National Reading Panel, 2000).

**Print-rich environment.** Overall, the evidence that shows the influence of a print-rich environment at home and at school has been firmly established (Burns, et al., 1999; Johnson,

1999; Sulzby, 1999). Children learn that print comes in many different forms (i.e. books, letters, labels) and that print is used for different things (information, tell a story, etc.). When the teacher labels signs around the classroom, the child becomes more familiar with the word. Being surrounded by print leads the child to understand that print itself carries meaning that we use in our daily life.

In the classroom, teachers can use children's home cultures and languages as literacy resources to create a literacy-rich classroom environment. With the support of caregivers, early childhood educators and teachers alongside exposure to a literacy-rich environment, children can easily progress from emergent to conventional reading (Johnson, 1999). Literacy-rich environments and experiences have a deep effect on children's literacy development by offering opportunities and encouragement for children to become successful readers. This environment sets the stage for early literacy instruction.

A literacy-rich environment has a designated area set aside for books in an orderly and inviting manner, like a classroom library. The books should be in a variety of genres including fiction, non-fiction, alphabet books and big books (Strickland & Shanahan, 2004). Books should be related to the current themes or topics that are being studied and changed with change in the curriculum. In addition to a reading area, there should be a writing area with a variety of writing materials and tools. The books and writing materials should not be simply limited to the designated areas, but should be available throughout the classroom (Roskos & Vukelich, 2006). The alphabet should be displayed at the children's eye level and have access to alphabet toys and manipulatives i.e. puzzles and magnet letters. Functional signs are also great to hang up around the classroom; this includes signs for the class schedule, labels and names on cubbies (Hart & Risley, 1995).



### **Components of a Balanced Language and Literacy Curriculum**

Language and literacy development are inextricably connected and any quality curriculum must focus on the connection between providing meaningful language and literacy experiences for children during every part of their daily routine (Hart & Risley, 1995). A balanced literacy program must include interactive read alouds, shared reading, guided reading, interactive and shared writing, modeled writing, word study, reading workshop/independent reading, writing workshop/independent writing as well as ongoing formative and summative assessments.

In grades K-2, literacy instruction is typically centered on helping students learn to read and write, as well as develop a lifelong love of reading. An effective program must have content that includes oral language development, word identification, vocabulary and comprehension instruction using print and non-print text, fluency and authentic writing (Neuman & Dickinson, 2001). Teachers are responsible for creating a literate environment rich in language and student centered to support and encourage active, engaged learning. Literacy instruction should be integrated with all content areas (National Reading Panel, 2000).

The Running Start (RS) program, grounded in Cambourne's (1988) model of literacy learning, found that motivation and reading development are fostered when children are immersed in a book-rich environment, exposed to demonstrations of how to use books, engaged in interactions with others about books, given responsibility for making decisions about what when and how they read, provided with opportunities to approximate literacy activities and supported by interaction with adults who have high expectations for their success (National Reading Panel, 2000).

**Opportunities for choice.** The role of choice in motivation is well known (Spaulding, 1992). Research related to self-selection supports the idea that the books and stories children find most interesting are those they have selected for themselves. Shiefele (1991) found that students who were allowed to and encouraged to choose their own reading material spent more effort in learning and understanding. Allowing students to choose what they read, promotes their sense of independence and versatility as readers. Studies show that there is a strong correlation between choice and the development of intrinsic motivation (Paris & Oka, 1986; Rodin, Rennert, & Solomon, 1980; Turner, 1992). In turn, this intrinsic motivation will encourage students to have an interest in reading.

**Opportunities to interact socially.** Theories of motivation recognize learning is facilitated by social interaction (McCombs, 1989; Oldfather, 1993). Typically it is their friends who have the biggest influence, but teachers and parents are also strong influences. Those who we interact with when we read, tend to influence our reading choices. This shows the social nature of reading. One way that teachers can support social development is by having students participate in book sharing opportunities, book clubs, and discussion groups (Wood, 1990). Studies show that social collaboration promotes achievement, higher-level cognition, and an intrinsic desire to read (Almasi, 1995; Slavin, 1990; Wood, 1990). Results from the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress (Mullis, Campbell, & Farstrup, 1993) indicate that students who engage in frequent discussion about reading with friends and family are more motivated and have higher reading achievement scores than those who did not. What their findings suggest, is that opportunities for sharing and talking with others about books is an important factor in developing an engaged, motivated reader, and that social interactions have a positive influence on reading achievement.

**Opportunities to become familiar a variety of books.** Studies have documented that interest in reading fosters the depth of processing and enhances learning (Alexander, Kilikowich, & Hetton, 1994; Hidi, 1990). Similar to interest, is a child's curiosity. Children are curious about books that are somewhat familiar to them; they like to read something they already know something about. Their interest and curiosity is often sparked by conversations they may have had with friends about the book or familiarity with the characters in the books. The more books we expose children to, the more books they will be likely to explore (Hart & Risley, 2001).

Comment [LA1]: Period after books

**Appropriate reading-related incentives.** Cameron and Pierce (1994) found that rewards do not negatively impact intrinsic motivation with respect to performance. However, when the book itself is the reward for reading, children tend to learn to value books and reading in and of themselves. Extrinsic rewards that are related to reading behaviors (i.e. books, book marks, teacher praise) can effectively increase intrinsic motivation for those children who do not have a literacy-rich background (Cameron & Pierce, 1994). What is important is for the teacher to create a classroom environment where books and reading are viewed as rewarding. Instead of giving candy, pencils, pizza parties, etc., the teacher can create opportunities for books to be prized possessions.

Comment [LA2]: Need period after incentives

### **Home-School Connection.**

There is no question that there is a crucial link between supportive parents and children's literacy development. Many researchers have shown that children who have parents that model uses of literacy and engage their children in activities that involve literacy, are better prepared for school (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Hart & Risley, 1995; Snow, Barnes, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991). The national government has taken efforts to get books to parents and children to encourage parent-child shared reading through programs such as "Reading is Fundamental" and

“Reach Out and Read.” National surveys have shown an increase over the years in parent-child literacy activities (Tabors, Snow & Dickinson, 2001). However, as this occurs, it leaves the children who do not have this parent-child relationship to lag farther behind.

The current literature suggests that efforts need to go beyond simply giving books to families. Efforts need to be geared towards offering parents suggestions for how they can engage in these activities to promote conversation with their children. It is not the number of books read that is related to language and literacy abilities, but rather the repetition of parent-child interactions that support the child’s language and literacy development. The challenge is to get this message to all parents, in particular, those whose parents are low-income and low-education. These parents need to know that everyday activities and interesting conversation with new words can play a huge part in helping their child’s language and literacy development (Tabors et al., 2001).

Parents and caregivers can do simple things at home like rhyming or songs help children develop a degree of phonemic awareness (Johnson, 1999). Research continues to show that the most important thing a caregiver can do for their child, is to do a read aloud that allows for discussion (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) said that this is the most important activity that can build the knowledge necessary for future success as readers. Reading aloud helps children develop important skills necessary for reading instruction: which includes oral language, cognitive skills, concepts of prints and phonemic awareness. These skills make up the foundation of literacy development during the early school years (Allington & Cunningham, 1996; Hall & Moats, 1999; Holdaway, 1979).

There are several strategies to promote home-based involvement. Some of these strategies include providing parent-friendly information on child development and parenting,

offering individualized feedback, helping parents tailor learning experiences for their children's interests and abilities, offering opportunities for discussion and providing comfortable and convenient meeting times. It is beneficial for children to have continuity of support between home and school (Reutzal, 2013).

**Home-school models.** Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill (1991) focus on the question of home versus school influences. Their study focuses on literacy achievement of elementary school children from low-income families. They came up with three models to explain how family influences child's success.

#### **1. Family as Educator Model.**

This model says that if adults in the home read to the child and model for the child their own reading and writing, then the child will come to school with a good sense of literacy and a better chance for success. Adults reading to their children at home, did not seem to help with reading comprehension or writing, but did help word recognition and vocabulary. Research shows that reading skills, like vocabulary development, can be enhanced by the family, but more complex skills like comprehension requires teaching in the classroom (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001).

#### **2. Resilient Family**

This model holds that if parents are able to provide a stable, orderly home, spend time with their children, be free of stress and supervise television watching, the child will develop an internal locus of control and be able to focus on learning tasks in the classroom. This is based upon the idea that low-income families differ from middle-income families in the amount of stress they experience (Barnett,

2002). It is the level of stress that hurts literacy achievement for children from low-income families. Neither parental stress nor income was strong factors when it came to literacy achievement. Research shows that a positive, organized home contributes to writing fluency (Barnett, 2002).

### **3. Parent-School Partnership Model**

This model states that if parents have frequent contact with the school, are involved, and help their child with homework, the child will have a greater sense of continuity between home and school and hence perform better in school. The components of this model include parent-school involvement, contact with teachers, homework help, parent-child interaction and school attendance. The most important of all of these components most strongly related to literacy achievement was formal parent-school involvement. Contact with the teacher and parent assistance with homework did not show any relationship to reading and writing success.

### **Purpose of Preschool**

The current primary purpose of preschool is to provide children with educational and social opportunities to ensure that they enter school fully capable to learn (Justice & Vukelich, 2008). Preschool has been shown to have a lifelong effect not only on academic success but also on adult earnings, job opportunity, criminal activity and the likelihood of graduation (Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield & Nores, 2005). Schweinhart, et al. (2005) reports on the data discovered by a study conducted by HighScope and found that the intellectual performance of children in preschool programs was significantly better than those who did not enter a preschool program.

It is important to point out, that it is only high-quality programs that have lasting effects (Schweinhart, et al., 2005). Programs that empower young children, parents and teachers are key indicators of a high-quality preschool program. Children are empowered by being encouraged to initiate their own learning. This aligns with the belief held by teachers, that children are not merely passive recipients of information, but rather active learners. Parents can be empowered by being partners with teachers. Teachers can be empowered by receiving in-service curriculum training with supervision. The most successful training is when teachers are provided with hands-on workshops, observation and feedback (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2003; Roskos & Vulkelich, 2006; Schweinhart, et al., 2005).

Through the history of the U.S. preschool programs have been created for a variety of reasons, including an attempt to counter the effects of poverty on children and to provide children with opportunities to learn the skills they need to be successful in school (Roskos & Vulkelich). Research provides strong evidence that high-quality preschool programs benefit children (Barnett, 2002). In regards to public preschool, some studies suggest it is better to use resources to provide public preschool to those at risk, while others say universal programs result in classrooms with children from diverse backgrounds, which may benefit children's development.

**Universal preschool.** There are currently many state sponsored preschool programs that have decided to remove economic risks as a requirement for enrollment in their preschool programs. This is a reflection of the trend towards universal preschool for all four-year-old children. Georgia was the first state to offer such a program (Justice & Vulkelich, 2008). In 2006, voters in California on the other hand, rejected a state amendment that would create universal preschool. The central focus of this debate revolves around the idea of certain

“requirements” for entry into a state funded preschool program. One side argues that there should be requirements based on economic risk. The other side argues that every four-year-old should be offered access to preschool.

Those who advocate for a program that requires certain criteria is meant to target children who are considered to be from an “at risk” background. Evidence shows that high-quality preschool programs have a stronger effect on children who experience risks of underachievement (Bayder & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Bryant, Burchinal, Lau & Sparling, 1994; Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997). It is believed that the state should only provide public preschool to these children, that it is a better investment of public resources. Those who support universal public preschool cite evidence that just because children may not be at risk, they still may benefit from a high-quality preschool experience (Barnett, et al., 2004). Additionally, universal programs allow a more diverse group of children to interact with each other in the same classroom. This would provide children with the opportunity to interact with peers from different backgrounds and have a potentially positive impact on their attitudes, behaviors and educational outcomes (Henry & Rickman, 2007; Odom, 2000; Schechter, 2002).

**Long-term benefits of oral language/literacy support at home and school.** What studies have shown is that excellent preschools can compensate for homes that have well-below-average language and literacy support (Dickinson & Tabors 2001). Based on the large amount of research, it is clear that early childhood period is the key to getting children off to a strong start in language and literacy. Attention must be paid to foundations in rich oral language at home and at school. Everyday activities can develop varied vocabulary; engage children in complex uses of language and surround children with environments that support language and literacy development. Teachers must continue to deepen oral language and encourage phonemic



awareness alongside writing skills. Lastly, teachers need to actively reach out to families by building on their strengths and guiding them towards the kinds of home language and literacy activities that will help their child achieve educational success. With these early language experience, children will be more likely to acquire reading and writing skills they need for academic success.

### **Role of the Teacher & Instruction.**

In the early elementary years, it is important that teachers engage their students by creating situations where they can make meaningful connections. Teachers can use literature and storytelling to activate prior knowledge to stimulate their students' curiosity (Rodriguez, 2003). It is important to make these connections, because it makes reading enjoyable and creates a positive experience. The activation of prior knowledge is accomplished by using a pre-reading activity (Rodriguez, 2003). Without doing a pre-reading activity, the children will not know the purpose of the reading and lose interest; in essence creating a negative experience. It is these early experiences that can make students hate or love to read (Burns, et al, 1999; Cullinan 1992). Positive experiences require constant engagement, keeping them moving from one task to another (Rodriguez, 2003).

It is essential that teachers who work with young children are provided opportunities to learn how child development relates to literacy acquisition (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). By increasing their knowledge, these teachers will be better able to utilize appropriate instructional strategies to best meet the needs of their students (Johnson, 1999). Professional development is important in allowing teachers to know how to use appropriate reading and writing skills should be taught to children at the appropriate times.

Instructional technique for preschool teachers must include opportunities that promote and extend children's language and literacy developments (Justice and Vulkelich, 2008). Research shows that children in high-quality preschool programs have greater academic benefits (Gormley & Phillips, 2003; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002). There is also evidence that these programs have more positive effects for children who experience economic risks, suggesting that attending these preschools may have a compensatory effect (Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997).

Teachers need to let children read more, read their own books and talk about them, do not interrupt, read to the class, use Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), make lots of books available, let children read to their teacher. Teachers support children by creating class opportunities for reading and book sharing. For example, pair first graders with older students to read to them or listen to them read. The teacher plays a critical role in creating a classroom culture that fosters reading motivation. The main purpose of teaching reading early on, is to develop a love of reading. In a survey conducted by the National Reading Research Center, it was found that out of 84 reading topics, teachers said that fostering an interest in reading was their top priority (O'Flahavan, Gambrell, Guthrie, Stahl, & Alvermann, 1992).

The teacher needs to be someone who is enthusiastic and values reading. Research shows that if teachers read often, their students perform better (Lundberg & Linnakyla, 1993). Teachers can use modeling during sustained silent reading, by reading quietly on their own and being a passive model. Teachers can be explicit models when they share their own experiences and emphasize how reading enhances their own lives. Teachers should demonstrate to students the ways that reading helps us learn more about the world we live in, gives pleasure, develops

vocabulary and helps them to become better speakers and writers. Students need to be encouraged to become voluntary lifelong readers.

**Professional Development.**

Professional development for preschool teachers should include school-based literacy coaching, with reading-certified coaches and content that predicts K-3 student reading gains (Reutzal, 2013). The coaching should be differentiated and include conferences, assessments, lesson modeling and observation to meet the specific needs of each teacher (Reutzal, 2013). The teacher should be engaged in active learning that allows them to make sense of what they learn in meaningful ways. Professional development should be linked to an analysis of teaching and student learning. New teachers need to be supported by coaching, modeling, observation and feedback. They need collaborative work in school-based learning communities and learning teams (Reutzal, 2013).

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the teachers for their own professional development. They need to participate in in-service training, continue formal education, seek involvement in professional organizations, and engage in action research (Reutzal, 2013). It is essential that teachers have knowledge about the current literature in the early childhood education field (Reutzal, 2013). Requirements for a quality professional development design include a program that is based on scientifically based reading research knowledge of early language and reading development, assist in developing preschool age children's early literacy schools and provide teacher mentoring (National Research Council, 2001; Reutzal, 2013). Any quality professional development design must include training in instructional techniques to teach alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary, oral comprehension and print knowledge (Hart & Risley, 1995; Reutzal, 2013).

The typical professional development in the past involves teacher training through workshops that tend to be ineffective because of the passive nature of the learning and lack of follow-up (Haymore-Sandholtz, 2002). No Child Left Behind creates a professional development technique, which includes intensive, sustained, classroom focused training. Two specific techniques that have proven to be most effective and popular are mentoring and consultee-centered consultation. Consultee-centered consultation involves outside professionals coming in and using problem-solving techniques to address challenges that teachers face (Knotek & Sandoval, 2003). Through mentoring, experienced teachers provide support and guidance to less experienced teachers. Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) found that mentoring programs for new teachers had a positive effect on teacher satisfaction.

### **Conclusions**

The current state of achievement in language and literacy and research findings on the impacts of preschool, suggest that it is time to integrate quality language and literacy instruction in preschool classrooms. The connection between early literacy, preschool attendance and reading/academic/life success has been proven by research and should not be ignored. The key to success is a preschool program that offers children a balanced literacy program that is taught by highly qualified preschool teachers. As the literature suggests, the issue of qualified teachers must be addressed so that they can carry out the most effective instruction. High quality preschool programs should offer engaging professional development opportunities continuously for their teachers. Through professional development teachers will learn how to implement a balanced literacy curriculum, establish home-school connections and motivate their students to become lifelong lovers of literacy and achieve success in their future.

### Application

After completing a thorough review of the existing literature on the current situation and issues of preschool language and literacy, I discovered that one of the most essential issues is the knowledge and qualification of preschool teachers. For some time now, preschool has been considered to be more of a “babysitting service” but with recent research and studies suggesting the benefits of quality language and literature instruction in preschool classrooms, there has been a shift towards a more focused curriculum that requires trained and highly knowledgeable teachers. As a result, I compiled all of the suggestions from the research and put it all together into one handbook for a beginning teacher.

The teacher who will get the best use out of this handbook is one that has received adequate schooling and training in language and literacy instruction and is already familiar with the basic terminology used in language and literacy curriculums. I chose the nine most essential components that are ~~embodied~~ inembodied in a balanced language and literacy curriculum. Preschool teachers can use this handbook as a reference for understanding how to implement what they have learned about these concepts. I include tips, warnings and suggestions under each of the component sections. Included in the handbook is a list of several useful activities that are evidence-based for each of the nine components.

An additional issue with current preschool programs is the competency and ability to create, implement and use a variety of assessments. This being the case, I decided to include a section on assessments. In this section, there is a description of the purpose of assessments and how they are to be used as well as some formal and informal assessments that the teacher can put to use in their classroom. This handbook should serve as an aide for new teachers when they begin their first year teaching, or as a refresher for experienced teachers as well.

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**Appendix**

**Components of an Effective and Balanced Preschool  
Literacy Curriculum**



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### **Component 1: Phonemic and Phonological Awareness**

As a teacher, it is important not to use these two words interchangeably. Reading involves the process of recognizing patterns of words and making new words from words children already know. Phonemic and phonetic lessons teach students the very basics of words (phonemes and graphemes) so that they can use these skills to decode words with more and more combinations of word patterns. Your goal is to allow students to move from awareness of sounds to association of that sound with a letter symbol. It's important to focus on one or two sounds at a time and no more. Working with too many sounds simultaneously can easily confuse the early learner. Sound manipulation needs to be introduced from easy to more difficult manipulations, and the easier manipulations should be mastered before moving on to a new one.

#### **Tips:**

- ✓ The easiest phonological awareness task is working with rhyming words. There are three stages of difficulty with rhyme: hearing, discriminating and producing rhyme.
- ✓ First, focus on continuous consonant sounds i.e. /nnnn/ or /mmmm/. Continuous sounds are /f,l,m,n,r,s,z,sh/. Stop sounds are /b,k,d,g,h,p,t,v,w/, which are more difficult because they cannot be extended.
- ✓ Be careful when adding a vowel sound to not distort the stop sounds (do not say /buh/ for the sound of the letter b). Always say the sound of the letter, not it's name (say /mmm/ not "em" for M).
- ✓ To begin segmenting, start with the sentences into words, and words into syllables. Then move to segmenting into onset and rhyme. To highlight the sounds as you segment the



words, extend all sounds except the stop sounds for example “pan” make it /p/ /aaa/ /nnn/.

- ✓ Manipulating sounds is a very difficult task, and usually doesn’t begin until mid-grade one, but you can begin to have children manipulate sounds by adding and taking away letters at the beginning to make “nonsense words,” for example with the word “man,” take away the letter “m” and replace it with the letter “z” and it makes “zam.”

### Resources

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### **Component 2: Alphabetic Recognition**

The English language has 26 letters in its alphabet but a much greater variety of sounds. These rules cannot be taught in entirety students are able to recognize that a letter, a symbol, makes a particular sound and that certain combinations of letters can change the sound of that same letter. This is the first decoding tool students use for spelling and reading new words. Alphabetic recognition can be taught simultaneously with phonemic awareness, but more focus should be given to phonemic awareness. This is not to say that phonemic and phonological awareness should be taught first then alphabetic recognition second; they need to be taught simultaneously.

#### **Tips:**

- ✓ Teach letter names before teaching the sounds they are associated with. Teach the alphabet song and sing it daily as you point to the letters.
- ✓ Provide different materials for children to work with letters i.e. printed on cards, on fabric, fuzzy material, sand paper, etc. Have the children trace the letter with his/her finger as he/she says the name
- ✓ May the letter out of their body or with clay.
- ✓ Teach the child the letters of his/her name.
- ✓ Select a letter for the day, at random not alphabetical order, and include it in the theme i.e. make an Alligator out of the letter A (A for Alligator).

#### **Resources**

Bradley, B., & Stahl, S. (2001). *Learning the alphabet*. Presented at the National Reading Conference. San Antonio, TX.

Carroll, J.M. (2004). Letter knowledge precipitates phoneme segmentation, but not phoneme invariance. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 27(3), 212-225.

Strickland, D.S., & Schickedanz, J.A. (2004). *Learning about print in preschool: Working with letters, words, and beginning links with phonemic awareness*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

### Component 3: Oral Language

Early readers learn best from hearing themselves and others read words and communicate. When reading aloud, students are able to sound out words to read and spell phonetically. Again, the oral language component includes phonetic (spelling and reading) and phonemic awareness. Oral language exercises are critical for English Language Learners. The best way to learn a lesson is through immersion; they learn the nuances and practice the physical differences that the mouth makes with different languages. Oral language practice can be included in any lesson. Some examples include show and share, presenting work, participating in group discussion or small group book discussions, reading a book aloud and simple day-to-day communications with other students and adults.

#### Tips:

- ✓ In conversations, model how to use descriptive words. Repeat back to the child what he/she said, but add more descriptive words.
- ✓ When a child uses a common word, repeat the sentence using a different word.
- ✓ Have a “Question of the Day” that is an open-ended question and relates to what will be taught that day. Allow children to share their responses orally while you write their responses for everyone to see.

#### Resources

- Snow, C.E. (1991). The theoretical basis for relationships between language and literacy in development. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 6(1), 5-10. doi: 10.1080/02568549109594817.
- Snow, C.E., Tabors, P.O., Nicholson, P.A., & Kurland, B.F. (1995). Oral language and early literacy skills in kindergarten and first-grade children. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 10(1), 37-48. doi: 10.1080/02568549509594686.

Storch, S.A., & Whitehurst, G.J. (2002). Oral language and code-related precursors to reading: Evidence from a longitudinal structural model. *Developmental Psychology*, 38(6), 934-947. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.38.6.934.

#### Component 4: Vocabulary

Vocabulary is a major component of reading comprehension. The more vocabulary skills a student has, the better they will be at comprehending a text, without having to constantly stop and decode. As students begin reading, they create schematic maps in their memory of written words with oral vocabulary as they read. If the reader has a limited oral language vocabulary, i.e. an English Language Learner, he or she will have difficulty making meaning from different words, even if they can sound it out. The easiest way to increase vocabulary is through constant exposure to new words through reading, writing and oral language practice. Students can pick up words indirectly as well when reading on their own. Teaching specific words before reading a particular text can also help with vocabulary acquisition (and reading comprehension as well). There are many ways to help students learn new words by using engaging word activities and word play.

#### Tips:

- ✓ Use interactive book reading to teach children new words in context.
  - ✓ Guide conversations about vocabulary across the curriculum.
  - ✓ The more words children hear on a daily basis, the more they will learn, absorb and eventually use themselves.
- ✓ Build comprehension of well-known words by labeling commonly-used items

#### Resources

Baumann, J.F., Edwards, E.C., Bolan, E.J., Olejnik, S., & Kame'enui, E.J. (2003). Vocabulary tricks: Effects on instruction in morphology and context on fifth-grade students' ability to derive and infer word meanings. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(2), 447-494. doi: 10.3102/00028312040002447

Coyne, M.D., Simmons, D.C., Kame'enui, E.J., & Stoolmiller, M. (2004). Teaching vocabulary during shared storybook readings: An examination of differential effects. *Exceptionality: A Special Education Journal*, 12(3), 145-162. doi: 10.1207/s15327035ex1203\_3.

Dickinson, D.K. (1993). Learning vocabulary in preschool: Social and discourse contexts affecting vocabulary growth. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 1993(61), 67-78. doi:10.1002/cd.23219936106

### Component 5: Spelling

Spelling instruction should teach children how words are combined to make patterns so that they will be able to recognize these words when reading, which will enhance their comprehension ability by reducing time spent decoding. If spelling knowledge is limited, it not only hinders reading comprehension, but writing and fluency as well. The typical approach to teaching spelling, is to give students temporary lists of words to memorize and then spell on a test. While this is an important component, it is more effective to combine this with systematic, formal spelling instruction in meaningful ways. Spelling words should be chosen in a purposeful manner that will support reading and writing skills.

#### Tips:

- ✓ Begin with basic two-letter words i.e. “at” and “me.”
- ✓ As students progress, expand the list by working with “word families” i.e. the –at family; “bat,” “sat,” “cat.”
- ✓ Use letter blocks to manipulate the letters to spell different words. When it comes to early spelling, the more hands on, the better.
- ✓ You can use letter and word tiles as well to delete/add letters and different beginning/end sounds.

#### Resources

- Apel, K., Masterson, J.J., & Niessen, N.L. (2004). Spelling assessment frameworks. In C.A. Stone, E.R. Silliman, B.J. Ehren, & K. Apel (Eds.). *Handbook of language and literacy: Development and disorders* (pp. 644-660). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Bailet, L. (2004). Spelling instructional and intervention frameworks. In C.A. Stone, E.R. Silliman, B.J. Ehren & K. Apel (Eds.), *Handbook of language and literacy: Development and disorders* (pp.661-678). New York, NY: Guilford.

Carreker, S. (2005). Teaching spelling. In J. Birsh (Ed.), *Multisensory teaching of basic language skills* (pp. 257-295). Baltimore, MD: Paul Brookes.

Ehri, L. (2000). Learning to read and learning to spell: Two sides of a coin. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 20(3), 19-49.



### Component 6: Reading Skills and Strategies

Effective reading instruction allows the child's reading skills to become strategy by fostering the ability to use it independently and reflect upon and understand how it works. The final piece to the puzzle is to apply it to reading material. Ultimately, the goal is for students to become strategic readers so that they will be able to comprehend what they are reading. Reading skills need to be taught in context of reading strategies. These strategies become the toolbox students will use to comprehend reading. Reading strategy instruction should be an interactive, meaningful process based in a related literature-based text. Reading skills will vary in a diverse classroom, so instruction must vary as well. Some students may need intervention with one-on-one instruction.

#### Tips:

- ✓ Continue to talk about picture books and using the images to help make sense of the text.
- ✓ Read with expression, use a variety of voices and pitches.
- ✓ Discuss things like different forms of punctuation.
- ✓ If a child is stuck on a word have the child practice blending. If the child can't sound it out, have them move on if it won't affect the comprehension of the story.

#### Resources

- Afflerbach, P., Pearson, P.D., & Paris, S.G. (2008). Clarifying differences between reading skills and reading strategies. *The Reading Teacher*, 61(5), 364-373. doi: 10.1598/RT.61.5.1.
- Brabham, E.G. \* Lynch-Brown, C. (2002). Effects of teachers' reading-aloud styles on vocabulary acquisition comprehension of students in the early elementary grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94(3), 465-473.

### **Component 7: Writing Skills and Strategies**

Writing instruction should explicitly teach strategies for planning and revising.

Instruction should be literature-based so that students can model the strategies of good writers. Students need to be taught how to set their own goals, how to deal with difficulties and evaluate their own writings. Writing instruction should be meaningful and in context. The instruction should be direct and modeled as well. When writing things, like a morning message, practice using the strategies as well. Instead of teaching strategies all at once, teach a few strategies, but teach them intensively. Writing can be effectively practice in combination with content-area instruction and in line with literature-based instruction. It is difficult for skills to develop into strategies, it can be demanding for teachers. Keep group instruction to a minimum and allow for more independent, one-on-one instruction.

#### **Tips:**

- ✓ When first teaching writing, begin with using their fingers and hands to trace letters in a hands on approach, i.e. in pudding or shaving cream.
- ✓ Print words as an outline with dots. Learning to write short words also teaches spelling and writing.
- ✓ Have children write in pen and then go back and edit, remind them that it is okay to make mistakes.
- ✓ Modeling is most important for young writers. Practice showing them how to write and identify how different authors organize their stories by doing an outline of literature.

**Resources**

- Cabell, S.Q., Tortorelli, L.S., & Hope, K.G. (2013). How do I write...? Scaffolding preschoolers' early writing skills. *The Reading Teacher*, 66(8), 650-659.  
doi: 10.1002/trtr.1173.
- Haney, M.R. (2002). Name writing: A window into the emergent literacy skills of young children. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 30(2), 101-105.
- Teale, W.H., & Sulzby, E. (1986). *Emergent literacy: Writing and reading*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

### **Component 8: Comprehension**

Reading comprehension can, and should be taught directly and explicitly. It is an active process that requires the reader to reflect. The best way to help children improve their reading comprehension, is to make it relevant, connect what they are reading to prior knowledge or what is of interest to them. The ability to understand what is read, is the key to reading well in elementary years. Young readers often get so caught up in the process of sounding out letters, they forget what they are reading about. The sounding out of words is as equally as important as comprehending what is read. Rereading books and reviewing what was read are important teaching strategies in teaching comprehension. Good readers know they have a purpose for reading and are active, engaged readers.

#### **Tips:**

- ✓ You can model skills to beginning readers such as pausing to generate questions for yourself as you read, or asking questions during and after reading during a read-aloud, students will practice the ability to create and answer questions when reading on their own.
- ✓ Explicit and formal instruction of visualization using graphic organizers, concept maps and diagrams (i.e. Venn diagrams) helps students to comprehend the text by summarizing ideas and understanding that stories have structure.
- ✓ When reading, ask the question “I wonder why...” to predict why a character may have done something.

- ✓ Notice new words as you come across them reading. Explain the words and re-read the sentence. This also helps to build a larger vocabulary
- ✓ Create sequencing cards after you read stories, they should be three cards for the beginning, middle and end of the story.

**Resources**

- Adams, M. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Clay, M. (1985). *The early detection of reading difficulties*. Auckland, New Zealand: Heinemann.
- Pardo, L.S. (2004). What every teacher needs to know about comprehension. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(3), 272-280.
- RAND Reading Study Group (2002). *Reading for understanding toward an r & d program in reading comprehension*. Santa Monica, CA: Snow.

### **Component 9: Literature**

Literacy acquisition takes place in context where there is purposeful communication and meaningful. Literary works come in a wide array such as picture books, big books, folklore, fables, myths, fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and biographies. A balanced literacy program should expose children to all the varieties. Studying literature helps early learners make connections and is a great place for discussion, which aids in reading comprehension. Literature instruction provides authentic learning experiences and activities by utilizing literature to teach and foster literacy. Using literature-based instruction should use literary works as the core for instruction. Teaching with literature-based instructions is especially useful for students' home language is not English. The best way for them to learn English is through meaningful experiences. In such purposeful contexts, literature-based instruction facilitates communication and social interaction to promote language acquisition.

#### **Tips:**

- ✓ Use these books to teach concepts about good books, learn within content areas and develop reading comprehension
- ✓ After reading, have children act out stories
- ✓ Provides opportunities for children to identify the author, illustrator and parts of the book.
- ✓ Children are often very familiar with nursery rhymes which helps make a connection to home and allows for echo and choral reading which facilitates oral fluency and reading comprehension
- ✓ Plan to conduct shared and repeated readings in whole-group and small-group settings.

**Resources**

- Allington, R.L., Guice, S., Michelson, N., Baker, K., & Li, S. (1996). Literature-based curricula in high-poverty schools. In M.F. Graves, P. van den Brock, & B.M. Taylor (Eds.), *The first "r": Every child's right to read*. (pp. 73-96). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Morrow, L.M., & Gambrell, L.B. (2004). *Using children's literature in preschool: Comprehending and enjoying books*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Morrow, L.M., Freitag, E., & Gambrell, L.B. (2009). *Using children's literature in preschool to develop comprehension: Understanding and enjoying books*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

### **Component 10: Content-area Study**

Content-area study is the best way to integrate new information with prior information in order to comprehend text. This provides the perfect opportunity to foster reading and writing strategies in a meaningful way. Teaching in this manner helps children make sense of what they are being taught. Explicit instruction will promote the acquisition of reading strategies. Reading strategy is applicable across all content-areas allowing for meaningful experiences that will allow students to become effective readers. The main content areas in a comprehensive preschool curriculum include approaches to learning, social/emotional development, physical health, language/literacy/communication, math, creative arts, science and technology and social studies. Content-area study allows children to be able to retain more information as opposed to when it is presented as isolated facts. In this sense, children are learning that each of the subject areas are related to each other and make a whole.

#### **Tips:**

- ✓ Take a thematic approach to lesson planning that can integrate all areas of development
- ✓ Organize subject matter around a unifying theme
- ✓ Students can practice word identification, vocabulary and comprehension skills related to the given topic

#### **Resources**

Hanline, M.F. (1999). Developing a preschool play-based curriculum. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 46(3), 289-305. doi: 10.1080/103491299100515.

Schweinhart, L.J., & Weikart, D.P. (1997). The high/scope preschool curriculum comparison study through age 23. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12(2), 117-143.

Weikart, D.P. (1972). Relationship of curriculum, teaching and learning in preschool education.



In J.C. Stanley (Ed.), *Preschool programs for the disadvantaged* (pp. 22-66). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

### **Conclusion**

Each of these components is essential because without one you cannot effectively teach another. It is the combination of all of these components that creates a successful reader. The components do not necessarily need to be taught one before the other, however they each need to be independently and simultaneously taught. When implementing these components, a new teacher can expect to find connections amongst all the components. The diversity of the classroom will require the teacher to scaffold instruction and be astutely aware of where each child stands in relation to each component so that instruction can be modified as needed.

A few words of caution about implementation are necessary. Keep in mind that some of your students come from homes that do not speak English or from homes where parents are not literate. These students may have had very little exposure to print and books. This will affect the amount of prior knowledge they have. This needs to be taken into consideration when implementing explicit lessons. Be careful not to overload students with too much at once, quality is better than quantity. Try to avoid too much of one component or too much direct instruction; there always needs to be balance.

Teaching language and literacy is a balancing act that requires you to know where your students are. You have to balance instruction to include all components as well as balance the type of instruction that you offer to your students. In addition to balance, you must also make the learning meaningful. The best way to do this is to teach these components in context, through content-area and literature-based instruction, so that children can make lasting connections. Remember to keep in mind the ultimate goal is; is it really important that your student memorize

a bunch of random isolated skills or is it that they make meaningful connections that will serve them for the rest of their lives as readers? Needless to say, the goal of language and literacy instruction is the latter. Keep this in mind at all times, and you will foster a learning environment that promotes early language and literacy development.

### Assessment

The primary purpose of assessment of preschoolers is to help educators determine developmentally appropriate activities for children. Assessment is an ongoing process of identifying, collecting, describing, interpreting and applying evidence-based learning to make informed instructional decisions. Evidence includes records of conversations, drawings, and photographs of and anecdotal notes describing behavior. Take time to identify learning goals, collect records of samples and describe/review with colleagues. Careful assessment can increase the teacher's understanding of child development, assist in understanding the needs of the children and enhance the teacher's ability to reflect on instruction.

#### *Assessments Should:*

- Build on multiple forms of evidence of learning
- Take place over a period of time
- Reflect the understanding of the group and the individuals
- Be sensitive to each child's needs, language, learning style and developmental age
- Include formal and informal assessments

#### *How to Use Assessments:*

- Connect to developmentally appropriate learning goals
- Add to understanding of each child's development
- Provide information that can be applied directly to instructional planning
- Communicate to family and child (appropriately)

Assessments can provide a reliable and valid measurement of early literacy skills for monitoring individual children's progress and for guiding instruction. The selection of a particular assessment tool should be intentional. Assessments should be administered at various times throughout the year. Formal assessments can be used to measure the language and literacy skills of three- to five-year-old children in the areas of oral language, print awareness, phonological awareness, and early writing. Examples of formal assessments include the Denver Developmental Screening Test II, Preschool Language Scale-Fourth Edition (PLS-4) Screening Test, Pre-Language Assessment Scale (Pre-LAS), Individual Growth and Development Indicators for Preschool-Aged Children (IGDI:3-5).

In addition to formal assessments, you can informally monitor progress of children's language and literacy skill development by recording specific observations of the children's use of language and literacy skills in meaningful interactions. Collecting and examining children's language and literacy work samples can be a useful way to see their progress throughout the year. Using curriculum-based assessments will link the goals and objectives with what is being assessed. Using language- and literacy-based checklists or rating scales can be an easy way to quickly evaluate children in large groups.

**Resources**

Airasian, P. (2002). *Assessment in the classroom*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Bredenkamp, S., & Rosegrant, T. (1992). *Reaching potentials: Appropriate curriculum and assessment for young children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Schweinhart, L.J., & Weikart, D.P. (1997). The high/scope preschool curriculum comparison study through age 23. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12(2), 117-143.

### **Evidence-Based Literacy Activities**

#### **Explicit vocabulary instruction:**

- Multiple exposures to words allow children to develop an understanding of their meaning and usage. Make a point of introducing new words into each activity
- Present vocabulary thematically to allow students to make associations between words and scaffold
- During read-alouds, include an explanation of specific vocabulary to support word learning
- Dramatic play organized around a specific theme can support word learning

#### **English Language Learners:**

- During group activities, pair ELL with children who have strong English language skills and make sure that all children who speak the same home language are not grouped together
- Provide opportunities for self-directed activities so ELLs can choose activities that match their interest and language abilities
- Provide prompts when children need help expressing themselves (i.e. “Tell Susie, ‘May I use the pencil now?’”).
- Use open-ended questions to help ELLs expand their own utterances (i.e. “Why do you like this animal best?” as opposed to “What is this animal called?”)

#### **Reading Aloud**

- Read aloud to the whole class at least twice a day.
- Choose a variety of stories including fiction, nonfiction, poems, magazines, etc.
- Provide conversations and activities before, during and after reading.
- Use repeated reading of favorite books to build familiarity, and increase the likelihood the child would attempt to read the book on their own.

### **Oral Language Building**

- Large group, small group and one-on-one conversations
- Use rare words
- Extend comments into descriptive, grammatically mature statements
- Discuss cognitively challenging content – topics that involve knowledge about the world, or encourage children to reflect on language as an object.
- Listen and respond to what children have to say

### **Alphabet Awareness**

- An ABC Mat
- Singing the ABCs
- Make letters from pipe cleaners or play-doh
- Musical alphabet like musical chairs, identify the letter you stop on when the music stops
- Magnetic letters
- Sponge letters
- Alphabet bingo

### **Emergent Reading**

- Library center
- Repeated readings of favorite books
- Functional print linked to classroom activities, i.e. daily schedule, helper charts, shelf labels, etc.
- Play-related print (i.e. signs, name tags, menus, etc.)

**Emergent Writing**

- Have a writing center with pens, pencils, markers, paper and book-making materials
- Use shared writing demonstrations in which the teacher writes down text dictated by children
- Functional writing opportunities connected to class activities (i.e. sign up for centers, library book check-out slips, etc.)
- Play-related writing materials (i.e. pencils and notepads for taking orders in restaurant play center)

**Shared book experiences**

- Read Big Books and point as you read
- Draw attention to distinction between picture and print, left-to-right, top-to-bottom sequence
- Explain book concepts such as cover, title, page, etc.
- Encourage children to read along on the parts they remember.

**Integrated, content-focused activities**

- Read topic-related information books

- Gather data using observation, experiments and interviews
- Use emergent writing to record observations
- Engage in dramatic play to express what they have learned

### **Spelling**

- “Hiding and Seeking” – hide ten words in the classroom and direct using “hot and cold” when they find the words dictate them for the child to write.
- “Words on your back” – children write words on their backs by spelling out each letter.
- “Picture Words” – some words like jump, walk, and eat are good for this. Ask the child to draw in and around the words to make them look like what they are spelling.
- “Inventive spelling” – this allows children to attempt to spell a word based on their knowledge of how spelling works

### **Reading Strategies**

- Best practice is to do read alouds and discuss the book as you read it. Ask questions about the story and allow children to make predictions (this will help with reading comprehension).
- Use poetry as a way for preschoolers to learn phonemic awareness.
- Storytelling is a great way for children to learn about story structure and helps children learn to predict outcomes. This strategy as opposed to read aloud, is that you can change the story depending on the response of the children.

### **Writing Strategies**

- “Daily News” this is a shared writing activity where the students and the teachers write together about a meaningful life experience. Students also illustrate the story.



- “Interactive Writing” is a cooperative activity in which teacher and student jointly compose and write a text.
- “Morning Message” – this is a message the teacher writes in front of the class by modeling writing and the thought processes involved in writing.
- “Predictable Charts” - this activity also helps with reading strategy instruction, it involves shared writing of a predictable text created by the teacher and the students.

### Comprehension Activities

- “Pre-reading Activities” – this encourages children to make sense of what they read before they begin to read. It activates prior knowledge so that they can relate to the topic.
  - Have children make predictions and ask them questions about the text.
  - Show the cover of the book and go on a picture walk.
  - Create a book box – filled with items that relate to the story – show the items and ask if they can guess how it relates to the book.
- “During Reading”
  - Ask questions during the reading that relate to the book
  - While reading, stop and ask if they can predict what happens next
  - While reading, ask children how they feel about what is happening or if they’ve ever experienced anything like what is happening
- “Post-reading”
  - Ask questions pertaining to the text: if they like the text? Favorite part? How they feel about the book?

- Engage in sequencing activities of the story using pictures
- Use puppets to retell the story
- Crafts - Use crafts as follow up activities to create an illustration of what happened in the story

### **Literature-Based Activities**

- Create a “Goodnight Moon” Sensory Bin – use therapeutic green rice, with different characters in the story
- “We’re Going on a Bear Hunt” – Teddy Graham numbers and counters
- After reading “Monster Manners” cut out triangles, squares, blobs and circles, then use colored cotton balls, pipe cleaners, buttons and tongue depressors and have children form a monster however they want to create it.

### **Content-area study**

- Use literacy experiences tied to topics in math, science, social studies and the arts
- Use Read aloud texts to teach math, for example “Inch by Inch by Leo Lionni (measurement), “The Legend of Spookley the Square Pumpkin by Joe Troiana (shapes), Five Creatures by Emily Jenkins (sorting and categorization).
- Demonstrate reading to look up an answer to a specific question rather than reading the book from beginning to end (integrate science)

### **Resources**

Connor, C.M., Morrison, F.J., & Slominski, L. (2006). Preschool instruction and children’s emergent literacy growth. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(4), 665-689. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.98.4.665.

Justice, L.M., & Pullen, P.C. (2003). Promising interventions for promoting emergent literacy

skills: Three evidence-based approaches. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 23(3), 99-113.

Justice, L.M., Kaderavek, J.N., Fan, X., Sofka, A., & Hunt, A. (2009). Accelerating preschoolers' early literacy development through classroom-based teacher-child storybook reading and explicit print referencing. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 40(1), 67-85. doi: 10.1044/0161-1461(2008/07-0098)