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Emergent literacy learning

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Emergent literacy learning

Abstract

The purpose of this review of literature was to look at research in the area of early literacy acquisition. A brief background on emergent literacy and how emergent literacy has impacted educational reform was discussed. The review of literature discussed research on emergent literacy development, in particular the skills that are appropriate for young children to acquire in preparation for entrance into formal schooling. A look at research about the influences on emergent literacy learning and the conditions that foster early literacy development was also discussed. The home factors influencing emergent literacy development and the conditions that foster early literacy learning were highlighted. Recommendations regarding national and local support and implementation were offered to further the development of emergent literacy learning.

EMERGENT LITERACY LEARNING

A Graduate Research Paper

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By

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ABSTRACT

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Being a reader is essential for school success and one's later success in life. How a child becomes a successful reader has been debated heavily over the last century, and now it is known that the experiences in the beginning years of a child's life have a great impact. To ensure success, there needs to be knowledge or understanding of emergent literacy skills, family and cultural influences, and what conditions foster early literacy learning. Before discussing these issues, it is important to know the origin of emergent literacy learning and its effects on educational reform.

Background

Until the 1980's it was thought first grade was the time to begin reading instruction, and the preschool years were primarily a time for socialization. Since the origin of the term *emergent literacy*, it had been increasingly known that reading instruction should begin in the preschool years. Discussion on the origin of emergent literacy and also a look its effects on educational reform will follow.

Origin of emergent literacy

During the 20th century literacy instruction primarily focused on basic reading and writing abilities with formal instruction starting at age six (New, 2002; Teale & Yokota, 2000). This focus began to shift from equating a child's age to beginning literacy instruction to what teaching strategies would be more appropriate in preparing a child's readiness for learning literacy skills (New, 2002). Researchers began to look seriously at

the relationship between children's oral language development and the environmental factors influencing literacy development, including parents' beliefs about literacy and the role they played on literacy development (New, 2002). Two predominate views of how children developed readiness were debated. One idea was that children come to learn literacy as a result of natural maturation, and the other was that reading readiness was a product of experiences that fostered literacy learning (Teale & Yokota, 2000). These two ideas of how children acquire reading readiness were rejected in the late 1980's when the concept of emergent literacy surfaced. *Emergent literacy* is a term coined by Marie Clay (1966), who studied the acquisition of literacy. Marie Clay looked at emergent literacy as "the stage at which children begin to receive formal reading and writing instruction in a school setting, the point at which children are expected to begin to demonstrate an understanding of print" (Combs, 2006, p. 26). Today the term, which proposed a new way of looking at how children's literacy development occurs, refers to children acquiring literacy knowledge and developing their skills from birth to preschool age. This has led to a change in the way children are viewed as learners hence changing the approach society has toward emergent literacy learning.

Educational reform

The ongoing debate among educators and researchers concerning literacy learning continues to be of significant interest in our nation. Literacy education, particularly for children ages birth through age eight, remains under the spotlight. Numerous pieces of legislation have been mandated to ensure reading proficiency for all American students. The Reading Excellence Act (REA) of 1998 was signed into effect to improve literacy

skills in pre-kindergarten through third-grade for at-risk students (Reading Excellence Act, 1998). This act amended the Title II component of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 1965 by adding a reading component (Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS) Policy and Legislation, n.d.). The purpose of this amendment was to help students at-risk in the area of literacy development advance to grade level by providing additional literacy instruction, supporting teachers' professional development in literacy, and funding family literacy programs.

With the election of the Bush Administration in 2000, a national shift towards more accountability in literacy learning as well as an increased emphasis on the importance of early childhood education took place. Perhaps the most well known shift in emphasis occurred because of the signing into law of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 on January 8, 2002. (*Good Start, Grow Smart*). This law replaced the ESEA of 1965 (LINCS Policy and Legislation, n.d.). Title I, Part B of this Act discussed reading initiatives such as *Reading First* and *Early Reading First*, both of which supported the goal of having all children reading by third-grade.

The *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative, put in place by the Bush Administration, was to ensure that children acquired the skills necessary for them to start formal schooling ready to learn. Areas this initiative strive for include: (a) strengthening Head Start, (b) partnering with states to improve early childhood education, and (c) providing information about effective pre-reading and language curricula and teaching strategies to teachers, care givers, and parents (*Good Start, Grow Smart*, p.1-2).

With the emphasis on *leaving no child behind* and *getting all children reading* by

third-grade, a closer look at the role of early childhood literacy learning has occurred.

Researchers, such as those discussed later, have examined when children are cognitively ready to learn literacy skills and have also examined when such skill development begins, such as pre-reading, language, and vocabulary development.

Purpose

The purpose of this review of literature was to look at research in the area of early literacy acquisition. This paper will discuss emergent literacy development, in particular the skills that are appropriate for young children to acquire in preparation for entrance into formal schooling. This paper will also look at influences on emergent literacy learning and the conditions which foster early literacy development.

In order to achieve this purpose, this paper will address the following questions:

1. What is the current knowledge or understanding about emergent literacy skills?
2. What home factors influence emergent literacy development?
3. What conditions foster early literacy development in early childhood programs?

Need

There is a need to teach emergent literacy skills at an early age to assure all children reach their fullest potential in literacy learning. To achieve this, a triangulation needs to occur between the foundational skills of emergent literacy learning, home factors that influence a child's literacy learning, and how early childhood programs foster early literacy acquisition.

Early childhood experiences provide the foundation for later success in school

and life (NAEYC Position Statement, 1997; NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, 1998; PreK Standards, 2003). Therefore, children need to be exposed to a variety of literacy experiences to build this foundation. Research contributed by Dickenson and Sprague (2002) has supported the belief that the years before formal school are critical to a child's long-term success in literacy. Children are active learners developing cognitive skills and attitudes towards literacy long before formal schooling (Burgess, 2002; Scarborough, 2002; Strickland, 2002; Teale & Yokota, 2000). Because the experiences children have on the road to becoming proficient readers and writers starts early in life (Cecil, 2003; Morrow, 2005; New, 2002) and does not just begin at age five or six as previously thought (Teale & Yokota, 2000), waiting until formal schooling to expose children to literacy is no longer an acceptable option. Organizations such as the NAEYC and IRA support instruction for children from birth through pre-school age because research reveals teaching emergent literacy skills is critical for young children (NAEYC & IRA Position Statement, 1998).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has brought more accountability within the schools of the United States. However, little is said about the role of parents in their children's literacy success prior to formal schooling. Although educational programs for young children are in place at the national, state, and local level, more needs to be done to ensure that parents are involved in children's emergent literacy learning so all children entering school are ready to learn and will have the literacy skills they need to help them succeed in formal schooling. This can be achieved by sharing the knowledge about developing emergent literacy skills. This would mean educating and working with

parents about what is appropriate when working on their children's literacy acquisition to build a foundation of literacy skills. New (2002) has suggested that more needs to be done to make early literacy learning more "relevant," "necessary," and "meaningful" to parents and other family members (p. 257). By making parents aware of what should be taught, when it should be taught, and why it is so essential to address literacy learning at a young age, the first step will be taken in making literacy learning more relevant, necessary, and meaningful for all involved.

Another need is understanding home factors that influence emergent literacy development. Because of the increased diversity of American families, there is a gap between what literacy interactions or experiences look like at school and how they are perceived at home, as well as what literacy expectations are held by each group. If no child is to be left behind, then families must know how to facilitate learning and development in the home. This requires taking into account the environmental and sociocultural influences in the home. Since more children in the 21st century are not being raised primarily in the home environment, there also needs to be knowledge shared about conditions that foster emergent literacy learning in early childhood programs.

Importance

It is important that children are taught emergent literacy skills in the preschool years of life. Scarborough (2002) stated "...results of kindergarten prediction studies suggest that the important cognitive-linguistic strands that must be coordinated in learning to read are rather securely in place before formal school instruction begins" (p. 100). If the child has not had the opportunity to construct these strands, they will then

enter formal schooling behind that of their peers. Goal One of the national goals is to have children reading by age seven (NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, 1998) because it has been found that the pattern of school failure begins at an early age (Strickland, 2002). The preschool years are the years children begin to construct their knowledge through interactive processes in order to acquire an understanding of literacy concepts and their functions (Celenk, 2003; NAEYC Position Statement, 1997; NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, 1998; PreK Standards, 2003; Teale & Yokota, 2000). With a lack of literacy rich experiences, students will have fewer opportunities to construct their knowledge. NAEYC and IRA (1998) agree that failure to expose children to literacy experiences early on in life or waiting until a child is school age to teach him/her about literacy can severely limit a child's reading and writing attainment levels. They further suggested that a lack of early literacy experiences in the early years of life will likely lead to a child who needs more support with literacy learning when entering formal schooling (NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, 1998). So delayed opportunities can potentially lead to failure early in life, hence increasing the possibility of more children being *left behind*.

Vellutino and Scanlon (2002) further supported the importance of starting literacy acquisition at an early age as they stated, "...most reading difficulties are caused by limitations in a child's early literacy experiences and/or less than adequate literacy instruction" (p. 296). It is evident then that parents and child care providers play a major role in a young child's failure or success since they are the main caretakers of children from birth to the age they enter formal schooling. The amount of time parents or adults caring for children spend on literacy activities has an impact on a child's success or

failure.

The drawbacks of not facilitating early literacy development can be grim, but they can also be avoided if parents, and those working with children in the preschool years, are educated on how to work with children in developing their emergent literacy skills. As Senechal and LeFevre (2001) observed that, "...good emergent literacy skills are likely to enhance children's school experience and help them get started on the path to reading success" (p. 49).

Limitations

Limitations for the overall review of research include the inability to analyze all research on emergent literacy, effects of early intervention, and benefits of family involvement in literacy learning. A lack in the amount of primary resources available, lack of time to be more thorough, lack of money to purchase books and some research articles, limited access through internet, and lack of access to some Rod Library databases also limited this research. Therefore, this review is a culmination of the research presented and not a complete overview of all research available in the topic of emergent literacy learning.

Definitions

Alphabetic (letter) knowledge – knowing the names and shapes of the letters of the alphabet (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003, p. 58).

Comprehension - appropriating meaning from text (Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002, p. 320).

Decoding – figuring out the pronunciation of a printed word (Scarborough, 2002, p. 98).

Early literacy skills - those skills that are thought to be relevant for the acquisition of conventional reading skills (Snow et al., 1998 as found in Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002, p. 319).

Emergent literacy – the view that literacy learning begins at birth and is encouraged through participation with adults in meaningful reading and writing activities (Armbruster et al., 2003, p. 58) or the developmental precursors of formal reading that have their origins early in the life of a child (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002, p. 12).

Fluency - the ability to read a text accurately and quickly, along with having expression (Armbruster et al., 2003, p. 59).

Invented spelling - phonic spelling or use of symbols associated with the sounds heard in words a child wishes to write (NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, p. 5).

Literacy – all the activities involved in speaking, listening, reading, writing, and appreciating both spoken and written language (Armbruster et al., 2003, p. 59).

Phonemes – smallest parts of spoken language that combine to form words (Armbruster et al., 2003, p.59).

Phonemic awareness - a child's understanding and conscious awareness that speech is composed of identifiable units such as spoken words, syllables, and sounds (NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, p. 4) or the ability to hear and identify the individual sounds in spoken words (Armbruster et al., 2003, p.59)

Phonics - relationship between letters and sounds in written words (Stahl, 1992, p. 132) and the approaches designed to teach children about the orthographic code of the language and the relationships of spelling patterns to sound patterns (Stahl, 1992, p. 129)

Phonological awareness - sensitivity to the component sounds in words (Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002, p. 320) and the sensitivity and ability to manipulate the sound structure of oral language (Burgess, 2002, p. 3) which can involve work with rhymes, words, sentences, syllables, and phonemes (Armbruster et al., 2003, p. 59).

Shared reading – a group reading experience that simulates the best aspects of a bedtime reading experience and provides whole-class or small-group instruction in reading skills and strategies (Combs, 2006, p. 178).

Vocabulary - words we must know in order to communicate effectively (Armbruster et al., 2003, p. 60).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Emergent literacy learning starts at birth and not at first grade as previously thought. Because the preschool age years are critical to literacy learning, this review covered the knowledge and understanding of emergent literacy skills, home factors that influence emergent literacy learning, and conditions that foster early literacy learning in early childhood programs.

Understanding emergent literacy skills

It is important to begin any review of literature on *emerging literacy* by mentioning the seminal work of Marie Clay. After Marie Clay (1966) coined the term *emergent literacy*, the views of when literacy learning or literacy development occurred changed. Since the term was first introduced, it has evolved into what Whitehurst and Lonigan (2002), for example, now define as "...the developmental precursors of formal reading that have their origins early in the life of a child" (p. 12). Therefore, emergent literacy skills are those skills that foster literacy development before a child enters formal schooling. These include formal and informal activities and experiences that occur in a child's day to day living. Through these activities, children develop various literacy skills in the areas of reading, writing, and language development. It is appropriate for preschool aged children to learn about the alphabet (Combs, 2006; NAEYC & IRA Position Statement, 1998), learn the sounds of letters (Combs, 2006; NAEYC & IRA Position Statement, 1998), connect information from stories to their real life (NAEYC & IRA

Position Statement, 1998), listen to stories be read aloud (NAEYC & IRA Position Statement, 1998), be asked questions and discuss a book (NAEYC & IRA Position Statement, 1998), discuss concepts about print (Combs, 2006; NAEYC & IRA Position Statement, 1998), learn new vocabulary (NAEYC & IRA Position Statement, 1998), practice writing (NAEYC & IRA Position Statement, 1998), and develop phonological awareness (Combs, 2006; NAEYC & IRA Position Statement, 1998). Combs (2006) also suggested that children in the emergent stage begin to develop a knowledge and understanding of print, concepts of words, the content in simple text, how letters can be in different places in words, and the function of writing.

Reading, writing, and oral language development are all interrelated (Morrow, 2005; Teale & Yokota, 2000) - meaning all reading, writing, and language activities help the development of one another. Various components within the three main areas of literacy are important predictors of a child's later literacy achievement. More specifically these components include phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, print concepts, oral language development (IRA, 2005; Roskos, Christie, & Richgels, 2003; Scarborough, 2002; Strickland, 2002) as well as vocabulary development (Dickenson & Sprague, 2002; Senechal & LeFevre, 2001). The following discussion will briefly explain the importance of each of these components.

Phonemic awareness. One critical piece in the development of a child's emergent literacy skills is phonemic awareness (Ukrainetz, Cooney, Dyer, Kysar, & Harris, 2000). Phonemic awareness refers to "a child's understanding and conscious awareness that speech is composed of identifiable units such as spoken words, syllables, and sounds"

(NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, 1998, 4) or “the ability to hear and identify the individual sounds in spoken words” (Armbruster et al, 2003, 59).

In a review of available evidence from longitudinal research, Scarborough (2002) examined preschool differences in language to reveal indicators of later literacy development, with specific attention to reading (dis)abilities with at-risk populations. Correlations between kindergarten variables and later reading scores based on meta-analysis of findings from 61 research samples were discussed. Based upon the multiple correlation, the results computed ($R = .75$) suggested that “the predictability of future reading ability is about as strong from kindergarten onward as it is from grade to grade” once formal reading instruction has begun (p. 100). Findings have indicated that phonemic awareness skills are to be a strong predictor of a child’s later reading achievement. Additional findings from Scarborough’s (2002) research will be discussed under the literacy component of oral language.

Another study done by Ukrainetz et al. (2000) examined teaching phonemic awareness by embedding talk within meaningful literacy experiences of shared reading and writing. The participants included 36 five and six year old children randomly placed in small groups (either a treatment condition group or no-treatment group) to be worked with three times a week for seven weeks. Four phonemic awareness tasks were targeted during each session. Findings suggested that when phonemic awareness instruction is embedded in conversation during meaningful literacy activities, significantly greater gains in the child’s phonemic awareness were made. More specifically, a repeated measures ANOVA revealed significant interaction $F(1,34)$ between condition and test (p

< .0001) with an effect size eta of 0.74 for phonemic awareness gains. Furthermore, the treatment condition group made greater gains than the no-treatment group (13.0 compared to 2.2 points). The repeated measures ANOVA also showed significant interaction for conditions and test ($p = .001$) with an effect size of 0.91. Lastly, the five and six year-old children showed gains in all four areas examined (including first and last sound identification, sound segmentation, and sound deletion). Significant gains were found in the first three areas: first sound identification ($p < .01$); last sound identification ($p < .0001$); and sound segmentation ($p < .0001$). Sound deletion results showed no significance but did reveal slightly better scores than the no-treatment group.

Letter knowledge. It has been suggested that alphabetic knowledge is one of the best predictors of early reading success along with phonemic awareness (Gunn, Simmons, & Kameenui, n.d.; Strickland, 2002). The NAEYC/IRA Position Statement (1998) also supported the idea that the emergent literacy skill of letter naming is a predictor of achievement, specifically in Kindergarten.

Gunn et al., (n.d.) reviewed 24 primary sources, ten secondary sources, and one quantitative synthesis on emergent literacy with participants ranging in age from preschool to seven-years old, with a majority being in preschool and kindergarten. The focus was to find converging themes in emergent literacy research and examine what was known in five areas of emergent literacy: awareness of print, relationship of print to speech, text structure, phonological awareness, and letter naming and writing. A review of the sources suggested that letter recognition helps children develop word-recognition strategies, provides a foundation for making connections between letters and spelling,

and positively relates with linguistic performance.

Dodd, and Carr (2003) compared letter-sound recognition, letter-sound recall, and letter reproduction in a study with 83 normally developing children ages 4 to 6 years old. Findings suggested that letter-sound recall was statistically different to sound recognition ($p < .001$) and also statistically different to letter reproduction ($p < .001$). Letter-sound recognition was also significantly different from letter reproduction ($p < .001$). This suggests “that children’s ability to recognize, recall, and reproduce letters sounds of the alphabet varied significantly” as the students got older. Letter-sound recognition was the most well-developed skill with letter-sound recall and letter reproduction to follow suggesting recognition occurs prior to recall and reproduction.

Concepts about print. The NAEYC and IRA Position Statement (1998) states, “children need regular and active interactions with print” (p. 3). This is because active engagement with the world fosters a child’s written language development (Teale & Yokota, 2000). Having a variety of print and literature present in the environment that is at the child’s eye level and of meaning to the child is also very important (Dickenson & Sprague, 2002).

Gunn et al. (2006) further suggested that experiences with print help children have an understanding of the conventions, purpose, and function of print. Children learn about print through a variety of experiences that lead them to understand that print is different than speech, carries a message, and tells the story rather than pictures telling the story. They also learn the directionality of print when they listen to stories. Furthermore, children begin writing before they can conventionally spell or write letters/words which

reveals emergent literacy learning occurs before formal instruction.

Oral language. Oral language skills are developed by interactions with written print and many opportunities with oral communication. Gunn et al. (2006) stated that, “through interactions with others who model language functions, children learn to attend to language and to apply this knowledge to literacy situations” (p. 7). The quality of oral dialogue and interactions when reading, were found to be important in fostering literacy learning in a study done by Sonnenschein and Munsterman (2002). Their study (which was part of a larger longitudinal study) looked at the types of comments made between five year-olds and their family member while reading and the effective quality of reading interactions. The thirty families studied were from inner-city preschools in Baltimore, Maryland and varied in their socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Inter-rater reliability was used for coding and a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .81$ indicated consistency with coding. A four point scale was also used to score the frequency in which children engaged in storybook reading. Research findings indicated that immediate content utterances occurred significantly more frequently than story structure utterances ($p = .003$), story structure utterances occurred significantly more frequently than non-immediate utterances ($p = .05$) and print/skills utterances ($p = .001$). Findings also demonstrated that reading frequency strongly correlated with children’s early literacy-related oral skills. The affective quality of the interactions was also a significant predictor of the children’s motivations for reading with $p = .02$.

Dickenson and Sprague (2002) examined the nature and care of children in the preschool years focusing more closely on the quality of care provided and its impact on a

child's development from three related studies they had been involved in since the late 1980s. The first study was a longitudinal study of 85 children three years of age and was called the Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development (HSLLD). Data were collected on the children's home and classroom language experiences. The second longitudinal study was similar to HSLLD's methods of data collection. Data were gathered about the homes, classrooms, and growth in language and literacy over two years for three and four year old children from English- and Spanish-speaking homes ($n = 393$). The third study was to develop and evaluate a professional development program for preschool teachers, called the Literacy Environment Enrichment Program (LEEP), so they could more effectively support children's language and literacy development.

Data findings from Dickenson and Sprague's (2002) examination of these three studies suggested a link between classroom experiences and children's language and literacy development in the preschool years. More specifically, the amount of time the child spent conversing with other children and during play related to their literacy, vocabulary, and storytelling skills at the end of kindergarten. The amount of time children participated in conversations was also positively associated with future literacy outcomes. All three studies supported the idea that high-quality preschool classrooms contribute highly to children's later literacy success and more specifically that these studies consistently demonstrated associations between oral language skills and print-based knowledge.

Scarborough (2002), as discussed previously under phonemic awareness, also found a relationship between a child's early language and later literacy achievement.

These findings concluded that verbal skills are better predictors of future language and literacy skills than nonverbal skills, both long-term and short-term benefits of early language experiences occur in children's later language abilities; emergent verbal skills are possible predictors of children's differences in kindergarten in the emergent skills of "phonological awareness, letter knowledge, print concepts, and other relevant skills" (p. 101). It was also found that although syntactic and speech abilities were more deficient at the younger age levels (compared to the comparison group), as the children got older they differed in vocabulary and phonological awareness. Therefore, areas of deficit in early language skills were seen to improve, but even when these deficits narrowed in their severity, those children with a family history of language and literacy impairments still remained at high risk for later reading problems.

Vocabulary knowledge. Developing vocabulary is another critical piece in a child's literacy growth that ties into oral dialogue (Cecil, 2003; Dickenson & Sprague, 2002). Dickenson and Sprague (2002) found the intentional teaching of vocabulary was rare in preschool classrooms. In fact, intentional vocabulary teaching appeared less than 1% at mealtime intervals and 1% during free-play time intervals when using data from the Teacher-Child Verbal Interaction Profile. Data from receptive vocabulary scores at the end of kindergarten strongly related to vocabulary scores at the end of seventh grade ($r = .64, n = 51$) which raised a question about the possible long term effects of vocabulary knowledge. Language experiences, as well as the direct instruction children have early on, can impact the amount of vocabulary children acquire.

Senechal and LeFevre (2001) agreed with Dickenson and Sprague (2002), who

suggested that the use of dialogue can influence the amount of vocabulary learned depending on the interaction level between the adult and child. Senechal and LeFevre's (2001) five-year longitudinal study examined the relations among home literacy experiences, language, and literacy development. Three cohorts of children were involved in the study ($N = 111$) using vocabulary and emergent literacy skills data at grades 1 and 3. Findings suggested that parent teaching and storybook reading were important factors in developing emergent literacy skills. While parent teaching facilitates early learning skills, these skills must be maintained through additional support with shared reading. Senechal and LeFevre's (2001) research also supported the idea that vocabulary skills are related to exposure to language rich experiences and that storybook reading may have long-term implications on reading because of the exposure to vocabulary. If there is meaningful dialogue that keeps children engaged, they can be introduced to new words and have them explained by their parents or other adults in familiar terms. Specifically, children can learn, on average, "...two new words from a single storybook session" (p. 42). Cecil (2003) also stated that, "the more numerous the reading, writing, listening, and speaking experiences young children have, the more they will come into contact with intriguing new words" (p.136).

Baker, Sonnenschein, and Serpell (1999) did a five-year longitudinal study, also known as The Early Childhood Project, that focused on the development of literacy of urban children from a variety of sociocultural groups. Their study provided information about literacy-related activities in the home and children's early competencies. A final sample of 54 families was involved in the study. The data from interviews, observations,

parent diaries, and yearly testing of children on literacy tasks indicated that having experiences with ABC books, having knowledge of nursery rhymes, and frequently visiting the library before formal schooling were strong predictors of word recognition in grades first through third. (Further information about this study will be discussed under the sociocultural influences of children's emergent literacy learning).

As mentioned earlier, emergent reading, writing, and language skills are interrelated. Various research has revealed the interconnectedness of these emergent literacy skills. Steinhaus (2000) did a qualitative study exploring the role that dialogue plays in instructing phonemic and alphabetic knowledge in a pre-kindergarten classroom. This study examined phonemic awareness behaviors found in four and five year-olds. These behaviors included knowledge of alphabetic skills such as: naming some letters, recognizing letters in print, distinguishing initial letters in words, talking about letters, and phonemic awareness skills such as knowing some letter-sound relationships, attempting to reread what is written by paraphrasing or decoding sounds, and producing a rhyme. Other behaviors may also include recognizing rhymes, recognizing graphic characteristics of letters and words, general dialogue about letters (name or physical features of letters), discussion on writing in general (process, purpose, etc.), and dialogue about the reading process. Steinhaus' (2000) findings supported the use of dialogue as a tool to increase phonemic and alphabetic knowledge and found the greatest amount of dialogue occurs when a child is working in their zone of proximal development.

Vellutino & Scanlon (2002) did a longitudinal study evaluating "...the contribution of emergent literacy skills, early literacy instruction, and individual

differences in reading-related cognitive abilities as determinants of early reading achievement” (p. 296). They evaluated 1,407 kindergarteners upon entrance to assess their emergent literacy skills and cognitive abilities. Data assessment continued through periodic observation in kindergarten, mid-first grade identification of those having substantial difficulty reading along with a comparison group, and one-to-one daily reading tutoring for a randomly selected subgroup of poor readers. An evaluation of all participants at the end of first grade, an evaluation of the poor and normal readers in first and third grades, and periodic evaluation of reading achievement for poor and normal readers at the end of fourth grade were also conducted.

Findings from Vellutino and Scanlon (2002) suggested several things. First, impaired students could be remediated to a level of their peers if intervention occurs early in their reading development. Secondly, intelligence scores did not predict reading achievement in a reliable way. Lastly Vellutino and Scanlon (2002) found the following:

...the children who proved to be the most difficult to remediate performed significantly below both the normal readers and the children who were readily remediated on measures of language-based skills, especially those measures evaluating phonological skills such as letter and number naming, phonological decoding, phoneme awareness, rapid naming, confrontational naming, and verbal memory (p. 319).

Therefore, their research findings suggested that early instruction is important and is beneficial to children in learning emergent literacy skills. In a small percentage of cases, they found remediation may not help a child who truly has a reading disability

because there may be other psychological implications. Children who are considered at-risk for reading failure or disability may include those with language impairments, a family history of reading problems, and those that show signs of early disabilities or trouble with literacy learning (Scarborough, 2002).

Lastly, Whitehurst and Lonigan (2002) examined longitudinal data on print principles, phonological awareness, emergent writing, receptive vocabulary, and expressive vocabulary from several hundred children ages four to seven-years old from low-income families. Findings suggested that children's individual differences in these emergent skills were set by age four and remain fairly stable after. Furthermore, the data suggested that phonological awareness and letter recognition in kindergarten "...are as important or more important than the child's actual reading success in first grade in predicting later reading outcomes" and that a child's reading success at the end of second grade was related strongly to the development of print, phonological awareness, and emergent writing skills (p. 21). Data also suggested that a child's vocabulary is indirectly influenced by their acquisition of print, phonological awareness, and emergent writing skills.

These are just a few examples of how reading, writing, and oral language are interrelated and the importance of emergent literacy learning. Phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, concepts about print, oral language, and vocabulary are all important components of a child's emergent literacy and impact their long term literacy development.

Home Factors Influencing Emergent Literacy Learning

Having a rich educational environment (Prek Standards, 2003) and a positive and supportive relationship early on (NAEYC, 1997) is influential to a child's long-term gains and cognitive development. Family involvement is also necessary (Prek Standards, 2003) because a child's home experience influences their emergent literacy development (Heath, 1982; Senechal & LeFevre, 2001). Differences in the family involvement at home, as well as sociocultural factors, contribute to the literacy achievement gap. Heath's (1982) seminal work revealed the impact of sociocultural factors towards a child's literacy development, specifically language development. Because of these factors, not all students come to formal schooling ready for the same learning experiences. The following section will further discuss the impact of environmental and sociocultural factors on a child's emergent literacy learning.

Environmental factors influencing children's emergent literacy learning

In order to close the gap of initial differences in literacy knowledge when children start formal schooling, knowledge of environmental factors need to be shared with parents and adults working with preschool students so there is a greater understanding of how they can influence children's emergent literacy learning. Senechal and LeFevre (2001) stated that, "...different activities that occur at home can have different consequences for the development of children's language and literacy skills" (p. 39). The activities done in the home are partially influenced by environmental factors. These will be discussed in terms of the quality and quantity of literacy rich experiences children are exposed to and the effects they have on children's emergent literacy acquisition.

Burgess (2002) observed that, “When asked about the origins of these initial differences, parents, educators, and researchers most commonly cite some aspect of the home literacy environment (HLE) that parents provide for their preschool children” (p. 2). In a study extended from previous work on the relationship between HLE during preschool years and the developmental outcomes related to emergent literacy acquisition, Burgess (2002) examined the relationship between shared reading and the development of phonological sensitivity and oral language skills in 115 pre-school children ages four and five from middle income homes. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which difference in HLE impacted phonological sensitivity and oral language development. The number of children’s books in the home significantly affected a child’s oral language and expressive vocabulary ($p < .05$) and the age the child was at the onset of shared reading significantly affected a child’s oral language and phonological sensitivity development ($p < .05$). This data suggested that early and sustained reading experiences in the home are important to a child’s oral language and phonological sensitivity development and also relates to a child’s vocabulary development.

Being read to consistently early on also helps children develop concepts about print (Cecil, 2003; Ufferman, 1996) and relates to reading proficiency later on (Ufferman, 1996). In a study analyzing a kindergarten program in order to reveal how to improve emergent literacy instruction, Ufferman (1996) found parental interest influenced a child’s confidence and interest in reading, and that a child’s interest in books was related to being read to when they were younger. Simply having exposure to materials in the

home was also found to relate to reading proficiency later on. Data also suggested that targeted children had an increased understanding of concepts of print and improved in the areas of listening and interacting behaviors in both one-on-one and larger group settings.

Celenk (2003) investigated the effect of reading and writing experiences of 223 pre-school students. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated and indicated a sufficiently high inner consistency of reliability measuring among the three groups ($\alpha = .83$). Findings indicated that pre-school education had a significant effect on reading comprehension during emergent literacy learning ($p < .001$), reading tradition in the family significantly effected reading comprehension scores ($p < .001$), reading illustrated books significantly effected comprehension scores ($p < .001$), and listening activities also showed significant effects on reading comprehension ($p < .001$). The findings suggested that family reading traditions and modeling are very important as they made significant contributions to a child's comprehension and understanding of reading and writing skills.

Senechal and LeFevre (2001) also discussed two research findings about how home experiences related to young children's language and literacy development from their longitudinal research described previously. They found that young children learn vocabulary by listening to storybooks being read aloud. The authors conclude that it is important to use children's prior knowledge when teaching new words. This is because a child's language skills are related to the experiences the child had with books, and the frequency of parents teaching about reading influences a child's emergent literacy development.

Sociocultural factors influencing children's emergent literacy learning

Celenk (2003) stated that, "...all social relationships that a child lives in have influence on the success of reading writing" (117). Social and cultural factors such as language, culture, and class are also influential to a child's literacy success (Paratore, 2002; Prek Standards, 2003). Children come to formal schooling with initial differences and parents play an important role in the literacy learning that occurs before formal schooling (Nord, Lennon, Liu, & Chandler, 2000). Nord et al. (2000) reviewed longitudinal data from the National Household Education Surveys collected in the years of 1993 to 1999 and examined the association between home literacy activities and signs of emerging literacy in children age three to five years of age. The sociocultural risk factors associated with emerging literacy from the National Household Education Survey included: having a mother with less than a high school education, having a family below the official poverty line, having a mother that speaks a primary language other than English, having a race or ethnicity other than white, non-Hispanic, and having only one parent in the home.

Findings from the National Household Education Survey suggested the following: First of all, children with one or more risk factors were less likely to take part in literacy activities at home with their families with the exception of being taught songs or music (Nord et al., 2000). Secondly, children with less risk factors had the most statistically significant changes between 1993-1999 in their emergent literacy skills while children living below the poverty level were less likely to show signs of emergent literacy. Thirdly, data analyzed suggested that students who were of an ethnicity other than white,

non-Hispanic, were less likely to have been read to, have been told stories, or have done arts and crafts with their families three or more times a week. Furthermore, Hispanic children were less likely to recognize all the letters of the alphabet and be able to count to 20 or higher compared to non-Hispanic students (Nord et al., 2000). Further findings discussed the categories of children being read to; being told a story; being taught letters, words or numbers; being taught songs or music, doing arts or crafts; and visiting the library. For example, children who were read to three or more times a week were more likely to know all the letters of the alphabet, count to 20 or higher, write their own names, and be almost twice as likely to show skills associated with emerging literacy. Telling stories rather than being read to three or more times a week also suggested that children were more likely to recognize all letters, count to 20 or higher, read or pretend to read, write their own names, and were more likely to show signs of emergent literacy.

Other research data has also been conducted relating to the sociocultural factors that influence a child's emergent literacy learning. Baker, Sonnenschein, and Serpell (1999) reported on details of a study comparing family literacy practices of families from preschool to grade three. Their findings concluded that, overall, parents from diverse backgrounds do follow practices promoting early literacy development.

Baker et al. (1999), as discussed earlier, found that children experiencing reading by age five in a nurturing context were more likely to recognize the value of reading, show interest in reading, and have a more positive self-concept as a reader in the future. Their findings also indicated that parent's beliefs about literacy contributed heavily to their child's attitude toward literacy. Two parental perspectives on literacy were

discussed. The first perspective was that of parents who view literacy as a "...source of entertainment" and the second was that parents who view literacy as consisting of "a set of skills that should be deliberately cultivated" (p. 7). The first view was found to be that of mainly middle-income homes and the second view was that of mainly low-income homes. These perspectives were shown to affect the literacy outcomes of children with those parents viewing literacy as a source of entertainment and fun having children reflecting higher literacy outcomes. It was also indicated by Sonnenschein & Munsterman (2002) that maternal beliefs about the development of literacy predicted children's reading practice and interest in reading.

Shapiro's (1994) research supported the idea that school success is related to the environment provided in the home in a longitudinal study. This study analyzed the relationships between 60 preschool students' home literacy and preschool literacy knowledge and abilities with a child's future reading achievement over five years. The more literacy exposure children had, the more literacy knowledge they showed compared to that of children the same age from low literacy homes. Furthermore, Shapiro (1994) looked at the development of preschool children's literacy and language development and found younger student's HLE was related to their emerging concepts of print while older student's HLE was related more to their abilities to identify environmental print and map spoken words to their orthographic representation. There were also implications that the HLE may have affects on first grade reading achievement scores.

Lyytinen, Laakso, and Poikkeus (1998) conducted a longitudinal study of 108 children examining the relationship between parent's age, education, literacy activities,

and shared reading experiences and also examined children's language and interest in books. There was a significant association between the mother's educational background and the literacy activities that took place in the home between the ages of 14 to 24 months ($p < .05$) as well as a strong link between the education of the father and the child's early reading interest ($p < .001$).

Lyytinen et al (1998) also found that maternal factors contributed more to children's early language skill development; for example, a mother's literacy activities and education positively contributed to the sentence length children produced. They also found that children with parents who took part in shared reading experiences frequently were more linguistically advanced, how much a parent took part in shared reading experiences also impacted the onset of a child's sustained attention to books, and being read to by both parents increased the likelihood of a child taking their own initiative toward reading. Furthermore, the length of reading interactions between the parent and child was related to their language skill development and their ability to interact linguistically for a longer period of time. Lyytinen et al. (1998) also found children who were read to more frequently had a greater interest in reading and develop better language skills at 14 and 24 months of age.

Interactions between adults and children also need to be meaningful and build upon the child's prior knowledge (Baker et al., 1999; NAEYC, 1997; NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, 1998). Dodici, Draper, and Peterson (2003) examined the relationship between parent-child interactions and early literacy skills for 27 families living in low-income households as part of a larger longitudinal study. Findings indicated that the

quality of parent-child interactions was related to early literacy skill development in the areas of receptive vocabulary, symbolic representation, and phonemic analysis beginning at a very early age.

Regardless of the environmental or sociocultural factors effecting families, it is important that parents are aware of the activities promoting language and literacy development in the home (IRA, 2005) because the pre-formal school experiences their children have may affect their progress when they start formal schooling (Celenk, 2003; Burgess, 2002; Ufferman, 1996). Having a variety of family experiences expands the knowledge base of a child, which will help them when learning to read (Baker, Sonnenschein, & Serpell, 1999).

Neuman & Bredekamp (2000) suggested effective things parents can do when reading with their child including: getting their child's attention, giving meaning when appropriate, connecting what they are reading to real life, asking and answering questions, and allowing the child to take some responsibility. When parents read aloud effectively with their child, they are building a sense of community, helping their child increase their vocabulary, increasing their child's attention span, teaching their child print concepts, providing literacy instruction in a non-threatening environment, allowing their child to experiment with sounds, building their child's understanding of story structure, and showing that reading can be an enjoyable past time. The child can also begin to label words or pictures while reading as the responsibility slowly transfers from the adult to the child.

Cecil (2003) and Paratore (2002) agreed that regardless of income or background,

parents generally value their child's education, although the family perceptions of what it means to be literate and how to foster that literacy may differ. Therefore, the goal is to try to get parent's perceptions about literacy and the activities they do to foster literacy on a developmentally appropriate path conducive to emergent literacy learning. It is suggested by Baker, Sonnenschein, and Serpell (1999) that parents working with their children on emergent literacy skills should engage in shared book reading experiences, provide for multiple oral language experiences, encourage interactions with print, visit the library on a regular basis, value literacy in regards to everyday living, try increasing children's motivation to read, foster the enjoyment and independence of reading, and be actively involved once the child enters formal schooling in communicating with teachers.

Conditions Fostering Emergent Literacy Learning in Preschool Programs

Two conditions fostering emergent literacy learning in preschool programs will be discussed. These conditions are 1) the experiences and activities children are exposed to and 2) the quality of meaningful and engaging interactions a child has with peers and adults.

Experiences and activities

Dickenson and Smith (1992) examined the effects of specific literacy-related activities in preschool to later language and literacy knowledge as part of a larger longitudinal study, The Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development, involving approximately 80 low-income families. Data analysis indicated that cognitively challenging environments provided exposure to richer vocabulary and helped children reflect and analyze language. Findings also indicated that child-child interactions related

to later literacy abilities; and teacher-child interactions, teacher's attitudes, and the structure of the day were important to the child's later literacy abilities as well.

As stated previously, Burgess (2002) found that shared reading experiences significantly related to the development of oral language skills, expressive vocabulary, and phonological sensitivity in preschool age children. Sonnenschein and Munsterman (2002) also supported the idea that reading experiences may help children become phonologically sensitive if attention is brought to the sounds letters make while reading. These findings revealed that shared reading is associated with many language outcomes and not just environmental print and letter knowledge (Burgess, 2002). Baker et al. (1999) also recommended shared book reading as an activity that fosters emergent literacy skills such as text comprehension.

Simply reading aloud to a child contributes to their early literacy learning (Paratore, 2002). More specifically, the earlier children have experiences with books relates to their comprehension and vocabulary development before two years of age (Lyytinen et al., 1998). Furthermore, shared reading, reading aloud, and storytelling are activities that impact emergent literacy skill development. Simply reading stories allows adults to teach vocabulary knowledge, teach knowledge about the world, familiarize children with the structure of the story, demonstrate comprehension strategies, enjoy text and interactions with children, foster knowledge about print, and build children's phonological awareness (Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002).

Crain-Thoreson, Dahlin, and Powell (2001) conducted a longitudinal study, involving 30 children, contrasting story reading with two other conversational contexts.

Repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted offering data to support the idea that book readings allow for more exposure to rich vocabulary and complex language. Furthermore, data from Senechal and LeFevre (2001) suggested “that emergent literacy skills are closely related to the frequency with which parents report providing formal experiences with print, that is, teaching to read and print words” (p. 48). Rich early literacy experiences have also been found to affect the neurological development in the brain and have long-term implications for children regarding their ability to learn (Prek Standards, 2003). Therefore, if these rich literacy experiences are not occurring in a child’s pre-school experiences, it may affect their neurological development.

Meaningful and engaging interactions

Adults’ interactions with children in the early years of life should be individualized because children have their own unique rate and way in which they develop literacy (NAEYC Position Statement, 1997; Prek Standards, 2003; Teale & Yokota, 2000) due to their individual pattern of growth, personality, temperament, learning style, background experiences, and family background. Therefore, no sequential order best fits all children in the process of literacy development (NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, 1998; Teale & Yokota, 2000). Rather each child is on a continuum of learning literacy skills at a time unique to their understanding of reading and writing (Celenk, 2003; NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, 1998).

A child’s background experience is key to the success in reading and writing (Cecil, 2003) because the interactions adults have with young children can help children develop an understanding of the meaning and function of literacy (NAEYC/IRA Position

Statement, 1998; Teale & Yokota, 2000). Therefore, it is important that children in the pre-school years have effective formal or informal literacy interactions to benefit them as they enter formal schooling.

CHAPTER 3

GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING EMERGENT LITERACY LEARNING

Early literacy success depends a lot on the experiences that occur from the birth of a child until they enter formal schooling in the previously mentioned skill areas.

Dickenson and Sprague (2002) found a lack of appropriate literacy learning activities to be a problem with helping teach young children, even in early childhood programs.

Therefore, how parents and adults work with children during these years can help in improving the literacy achievement. If specific literacy experiences and interactions should occur at an early age, what can be done to make this happen? There needs to be a focus on what literacy activities parents and adults taking care of young children can do to enhance children's literacy development before formal schooling, and what schools and other entities can do to educate and help families in providing for their child's literacy development.

Several suggestions have been made by researchers and early childhood specialists that range from programs to activities. It has been suggested that most disabilities with reading are associated with difficulties in phonemic awareness, decoding, sight word recognition, and comprehension (Scarborough, 2002). Therefore, interventions to prevent these deficiencies and disabilities from occurring include developing the following literacy skills: vocabulary, print knowledge (Dickenson & Sprague, 2002), phonological awareness (Dickenson & Sprague, 2002; Scarborough, 2002), letter knowledge, print concepts, oral language, and comprehension (Scarborough, 2002).

Activities promoting emergent literacy include: opportunities for rich talk (Cecil, 2003; Roskos et al., 2003), storybook reading (Cecil, 2003; Celenk, 2003; IRA, 2005; Roskos et al., 2003; Strickland, 2002), phonological awareness activities (Cecil, 2003; IRA, 2005; Roskos et al., 2003; Scarborough, 2002; Strickland, 2002), alphabet or letter activities (IRA, 2005; Roskos et al., 2003; Scarborough, 2002; Strickland, 2002), and reading and writing practice (IRA, 2005; Roskos et al., 2003; Strickland, 2002). Cecil (2003) and Celenk (2003) also suggests that using dramatic play to develop the child's imagination and express their ideas and feelings along with other meaningful experiences helps promote emergent literacy development. Other activities that promote literacy learning include listening to stories, writing messages, retelling, and language experiences (Cecil, 2003; Celenk, 2003).

These activities should encourage enjoyment and a positive attitude about literacy to be most effective (Strickland, 2002). Positive reading interactions may also increase a child's motivation for reading, which could lead to increased engagement in reading activities, therefore, possibly leading to improvement in early literacy skills (Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002). Stahl (1992) further implied that the following activities benefit a child's early literacy experience: reading at home, having opportunities to play with letters, discussing print with parents, discussing patterns in words, having shared book experiences, writing or dictating stories which may include invented spelling, having authentic reading and writing experiences relevant and meaningful to the child's experiences, reading predictable books, teaching phonics in context of words, provide instruction in meaningful context, using rime-based instruction,

and having book handling experiences. All of these activities can get the child involved and add to the child's enjoyment about literacy activities which is an important part of building emergent literacy skills.

Word games and nursery rhymes activities are also important in fostering emergent literacy skills. Playing word games influences the development of phonological awareness and early reading abilities (Baker et al., 1999). Playing word games and having knowledge of nursery rhymes both influence rhyme sensitivity (Baker et al., 1999). Furthermore, having knowledge of nursery rhymes was also found to be a strong predictor of later word recognition in grades first through third (Baker et al., 1999) and exposure to nursery rhymes may also help children become aware of phonological patterns (Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002).

Access to books is also a vital part of bringing literacy into the home. For families, both that may or may not have access to books within their home, visiting the library with their children is important. Visiting the library frequently before formal schooling was a strong predictor of word recognition in grades first through third because it exposed children to the importance of books, reflected the parent's value of literacy, gave the child more diversity in the choices of books they read or had read to them, and brought more books into the home (Baker et al., 1999).

Overall, adults working with preschool age children need to provide developmentally appropriate instruction and experiences to foster children's emergent literacy skills. This includes adults understanding the skills that are developmentally appropriate and the activities that support instruction of those skills. Having children

work with familiar and relevant topics and texts that are challenging in some way is also important (Neuman & Bredekamp, 2000). There will be environmental and sociocultural factors that impact each family situation, but as long as interactions remain meaningful, engaging, and developmentally appropriate, adults will be fostering children's emergent literacy development.

In terms of what schools and other entities can do to educate and help families in providing for their child's literacy development, they need to assist in providing the opportunities and resources available that will assist adults in giving children they work with appropriate learning experiences. This may mean putting on workshops, seminars, fun nights, etc. that allow adults to learn hands-on what is developmentally appropriate practice and instruction. It may also mean having schools send home suggested activities to do with both older and younger children so adults can understand the various developmental levels and continue to challenge kids of all ages. Schools and other entities need to also work with the national, state, and local groups that support emergent literacy learning in order to bring the knowledge and expertise into homes and childcare centers where and when children can benefit from the early emergent literacy experiences.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This review of literature covered three areas of *emergent literacy* learning including the knowledge and understanding of: emergent literacy skills, home factors influencing emergent literacy, and conditions that foster emergent literacy learning. The term *emergent literacy* was coined by Marie Clay (1966) and has since evolved into what we now consider as the meaningful literacy activities that start at birth and are precursors to children's later literacy skill development and achievement.

Literacy skills discussed in this review fostering emergent literacy development include; phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, knowledge of print concepts, oral language development, and vocabulary development. These are a few broad components of literacy that include development in the interrelated areas of reading, writing, and oral language.

Home factors also influence children's literacy learning. Having a rich educational environment and positive and supportive relationships are influential to children's long-term successes. Because of the environmental and sociocultural factors effecting children's literacy learning, children come to formal schooling at various levels of literacy abilities. Adults working with preschool age children need to understand that they have an important role in closing the initial gap of differences in literacy knowledge when students enter formal schooling. This can be done in all family or child care settings by providing literacy rich experiences including: regular shared reading; exposing

children to a variety of books; listening, speaking, and interacting with children; modeling correct reading behaviors; as well as expanding on children's prior knowledge and relating new knowledge to their experiences.

Although it is hard to control for the sociocultural influences or risk factors in children's lives, adults can still foster the development of children's emergent literacy skills. Along with providing the literacy rich experiences discussed above, they can also provide a nurturing environment, recognize the value of reading, show interest in reading, and think of literacy as a source of entertainment and enjoyment.

Lastly, what fosters emergent literacy learning throughout the preschool years comes down to two conditions. The first condition is that children need to be exposed to activities and experiences so they have the opportunity to engage in language experiences and build upon prior knowledge. Secondly, these activities and experiences need to be meaningful and engaging so students can build a positive attitude about literacy and learning overall. Shared reading and reading aloud are two of many experiences that can be cognitively challenging, expose children to new language, and build emergent literacy skills.

Overall, children need rich and diverse materials and experiences presented to them early on so parents can promote participation in literacy experiences through explaining, encouraging, and helping a child to build connections early in life (Neuman & Bredekamp, 2000). Adults working with children need to get the message that early literacy intervention helps the child and helps the teacher once the child enters formal schooling (Cecil, 2003). If schools and parents, or adults working with children, work

together, more rich and diverse materials and experiences can be introduced allowing students to build their emergent literacy skills and be more prepared for formal schooling.

Conclusions

Emergent literacy learning is highly beneficial when implemented in a developmentally appropriate, engaging, and meaningful way. Having the knowledge and understanding of appropriate emergent literacy skills is important for all adults working with children ages birth to five years-old because what occurs in the home before formal schooling, as well as in preschool programs, influences the later literacy success of children. Because of the inconsistencies with instruction and exposure to literacy between the ages of birth to pre-school, due to environmental and sociocultural factors, the level of literacy knowledge children enter formal schooling with widely varies. Therefore, it is important all adults working with children in the early childhood years are aware of the implications emergent literacy learning has on a child's future literacy success. Further work needs to be done though, so all adults working with children have perceptions about literacy and do activities that foster developmentally appropriate literacy learning.

Recommendations

As Burgess (2002) stated, there needs to be more "emphasis on educating parents on the specific methods they can use in the home to better prepare children to benefit from the formal education environment" and parents should be provided with "...the knowledge and resources which will increase the effectiveness of parental practice" (p. 10). Therefore, two recommendations are made which include, (1) getting support nationally and locally, and (2) implementation at the national and local level.

Getting Support

Organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the International Reading Association (IRA), the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), along with the United States Department of Education have supported early childhood literacy learning (ages 0-5) and the role of family involvement during the early years. More specifically, programs aiming to serve families in supporting their children's literacy learning include *Partnership for Reading, Equipped for the Future*, (Partnership for Reading: Family Literacy, n.d.) and the *Even Start Family Literacy Program* (National Even Start Association, 2005). *Even Start, Head Start, and Early Even Start* implement a family literacy model as a structure for delivering instructional services (Partnership for Reading: Family Literacy, n.d.).

Although the national support is there, more needs to be done on a local level with family literacy programs. This means having more family literacy programs available so parents and adults working with preschool children can be further educated on how to foster their children's emergent literacy. Family literacy programs can also be used as a support system for parents giving them a motivational piece to keep them involved in their child's learning on a long-term basis.

Implementation

In order to implement the national and local support systems already in place, efforts need to be made at the local level. This means getting a team or group together that is willing to put in the time and effort it takes to implement family literacy programs.

Various models of programs are out there but it is important to keep the needs of the students and families in your area in mind. Materials published at the national and state level are available for distribution to parents and caregivers that offer great advice on how to work with preschool age children. Workshops and seminars that are interactive, getting parents involved first hand in educating their children in an engaging manner, are two other possibilities. Providing a variety of literacy materials and suggestions for their use, through schools or local entities, to families encourages more interactions with literacy is also a possibility that could foster the development of emergent literacy skills. Overall, when thinking about implementation, one would have to agree with Baker et al. (1999) who recommended that there is a need to go "...beyond telling parents what they should do to helping them understand how to do it" (p. 10).

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