Phonics or whole language: choosing the most effective approach to teach reading

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Phonics or whole language: choosing the most effective approach to teach reading

Abstract
This study examined the literature concerning the phonics reading approach and the whole language reading approach at the primary grade level. Benefits, as well as problems, associated with phonics and whole language were discussed. Guidelines were presented for teachers to use with the best reading approaches for children in the primary grades. Conclusions were drawn from the literature and recommendations were made for teaching reading successfully to primary-age children.
Phonics or Whole Language:
Choosing the Most Effective Approach to Teach Reading

A Graduate Research Paper
Submitted to the
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
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By
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          Choosing the Most Effective Approach to Teach Reading

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

Reading is a complex developmental challenge that we know to be intertwined with a lot of other developmental processes: attention, memory, language, and motivation. Reading is not only a cognitive psycholinguistic activity, but also a social activity (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Being a good reader in English means that a child has gained knowledge of the principles of the English alphabetic writing system. Young children gain knowledge of the parts, products, and uses of the writing system from their ability to analyze the external sound structure of spoken words (Snow et al., 1998).

Reading is essential to success in our society. Having the ability to read is highly valued and important for social and economic advancement. Most children learn to read fairly well and a small number learn to read at home, with no formal instruction, before they begin school (Anbar, 1986; Backman, 1983; Jackson, 1988). A larger percentage of children learn to read easily, quickly, and efficiently once they have been exposed to formal reading instruction.

Phonics instruction focuses on teaching the part-to-whole approach. We teach the smaller parts and then the larger parts of a discipline. Reading instruction might begin with a focus on letters and sounds, then on words. A part-to-whole phonics approach involves skills for identifying words, then moving on to the more advanced skills for comprehension. A lot of the phonics research focuses on the teaching of phonics: letter/sound relationships, patterns, and rules. Some authorities argue that if children
break the code of our language they get off to a better start because they can begin to sound out unfamiliar words (Weaver, Stephens, & Vance, 1990). As Jeanne Chall (1967) expressed it in her book, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*, proponents of a code emphasis approach stated, “... that the initial stage in reading instruction should emphasize teaching children to master a code—the alphabetic code” (p. 75). This means an early emphasis, which stresses phonics, is very important. In the primary grades, researchers may assess reading achievement by determining students’ ability to recognize letters and make letter/sound correlations, to choose one of four words that best fits in the blank in a given sentence, or to find a sentence or phrase in a brief paragraph that provides the best answer to a question about content (Weaver et al., 1990).

Frank Smith (1994), in the fifth edition of his reading text *Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read*, observed that-

the difficulty many children experience in learning phonics rules, or indeed in making sense of them, has led to the notion that such children lack “phonological awareness,” that is, the ability to deconstruct the sounds of spoken words. It is taken for granted that the tenuous relationship between letters and sounds must be of central importance to readers of alphabetic writing systems (compared with readers of nonalphabetic systems like Chinese)—why else have an alphabet? The alternative point of view, which may be slowly gaining ground, is that the alphabet primarily serves writing and should make no substantial difference to reading. (p. 148)

A whole language approach moves in an opposite direction from the phonics approach. It moves from meaningful wholes toward the parts. Some examples would include the following: enjoying and memorizing or reconstructing a repetitive and predictable story, song, or poem to gaining increased control over words and letter/sound associations. The whole language approach is based on the observation that mastery of written language, like oral language, develops gradually toward adult conventionality
through frequent engagement in reading and writing. Whole language educators are among those who realize that reading achievement scores on standardized tests are not appropriate measures of literacy. These scores are not appropriate measures of basic skills because other kinds of abilities, attitudes, and habits are far more basic to the development of literacy (Weaver et al., 1990). The teacher in a whole language classroom is considered a facilitator rather than the director of learning. Authentic performance-based assessments, such as portfolio entries, are preferred to skill-based assessments to show the progress of each student (Snow et al., 1998).

Children need to understand that they can use all of the knowledge they have developed as readers and as writers, and all available sources of information, to get at the meaning of texts, and they should be encouraged to do so. It is important for children to see that reading is a pleasurable and involved activity and not just an assignment where the right answer is reading every word correctly. The ultimate goal is to have children wanting to read long after they have learned how to do it (Dombey & Moustafa, 1998).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the literature concerning the phonics reading approach and the whole language reading approach at the primary grade level. To accomplish this purpose, this paper will address the following questions:

1. What are the advantages of the phonics and whole language reading approaches?
2. What are the problems associated with the phonics and whole language reading approaches in the primary reading program?
3. What guidelines should be followed by teachers in teaching reading at the primary level?
Need for the study

The battle between the whole language proponents and those who favor phonics has been intense for over a hundred years. The conflict still seems to be the question of how children best learn to read (McEwan, 1998).

The goal of phonics and whole language teachers is for students to learn to read and write easily and accurately. Teachers of both reading approaches want children to enjoy reading. Educators are getting caught up in the on-going debate over the teaching of reading and writing, which has led to confrontations and extreme decisions. Whether children learn to read and write is going to have a huge impact on the future of our country. The recent pressures of this debate have forced many administrators and teachers to choose either phonics or a whole language reading approach (Vail, 1991).

The discussion about phonics instruction in the primary grades has been conducted as if whole language and phonics are on opposite sides. Realizing that not every child learns in the same way, this paper will take a closer look at the phonics and whole language reading approaches. By reviewing the literature of both approaches, the goal is to choose a method of instruction that is successful in teaching every child to become a successful reader.

Limitations

I found several studies dealing with the phonics and whole language issues in the primary grades. Some of these studies focused primarily on the phonics issue and some of them focused only on whole language. I also found some studies comparing the two reading approaches. These studies gave me access to valuable information; however, I found that many of the studies were listed as secondary sources, not primary sources.
This made it difficult for me to locate the primary source so that I could use the information in my paper. Also, some sources were not available.

Definitions

For the purposes of clarity and understanding, the following terms will be defined in the following ways:

**Decoding:** Decoding is the ability to look at the printed page and translate it into language; an important prerequisite to the ability to decode is phonemic awareness (Stanovich, 1993).

**Phoneme:** Phonemes are the basic sound units of speech or the smallest elements of sound that make a difference to the meaning of a word (Dombey & Moustafa, 1998).

**Phonemic Awareness:** Phonemic awareness is the ability to recognize the individual sounds in words and it is a critical prerequisite to being able to learn to read (Grossen, 1996).

**Phonics:** Phonics is an instructional method for teaching students to sound out words rather than reading them as a whole or guessing what they might be on the basis of context (Smith, 1994). Phonics is a term that is used among educators to refer to the instruction in how the sounds of speech are represented by letters and spellings (Snow et al., 1998).

**Whole Language:** Whole language is language learning that takes place when learners are engaged collaboratively in meaningful and purposeful uses of language, as opposed to exercises, drills, and tests (Smith, 1994).
Advantages of the Phonics Reading Approach

Phonics has become a symbol of traditional methods in education. These methods usually rely on direct and explicit instruction by the teacher. Phonics programs emphasize that phonics lessons are necessary for learning to read and write. Phonics is described as an important part of reading and writing, and it is a necessary cueing system that children use with many kinds of information (Goodman, 1986, 1993).

A stronger phonics approach for beginning reading tends to result in higher word recognition scores early in the first grade than does the whole language look-say approach. Reading comprehension may be the same, or lower, early in first grade but research reveals that by second grade, phonics programs produce better results in both word recognition and comprehension. Also, phonics has the advantage when teaching beginning reading because it facilitates word recognition and fluency. Once children have an understanding of these two elements of reading, comprehension begins to develop (Chall, 1989). Charles Perfetti (1985), who has studied reading as a cognitive process, stated in Reading Ability that the foundation of comprehension is accurate word recognition, which is attained through careful decoding and much practice over time.

The teaching of phonics and using basal readers to teach children to read increases vocabulary development. The introduction of vocabulary words throughout a phonics program should begin before or at the same time the children learn a sight vocabulary. According to Chall (1996), this instruction will help them learn their sight vocabulary easier and faster. Children who have many opportunities to develop and
expand their language and linguistic skills are more likely to recognize unknown words and make sense of what they are reading (Strickland, 1998).

Writing is another area that tends to develop better by using a phonics reading approach. Children involved in a phonics program know letters of the alphabet and usually begin to write earlier. Early readers who use phonics employ those skills for writing and reading (Chall, 1989). It is also important for a child to understand the nature of stories and how they are constructed. This knowledge is important because a lot of the material that is used to teach reading to children is written in story form (Strickland, 1998).

English is an alphabetic language in which letters and groups of letters represent the sounds of spoken language. It is assumed that teaching spelling is best achieved by teaching phonics in the sound/symbol relationships. Children should be helped in making analogies with words they know in order to construct new ones. Good spellers use a variety of strategies to develop spelling (Dombey & Moustafa, 1998).

Writers use phonics to help them with the spelling of words they use to communicate ideas. Young writers find correct spelling to be one of the most challenging aspects of writing. For a long time, many educators thought teachers needed to teach children to read before they were taught to write and spell. We are now giving more attention to young children's writing. Children are beginning to write independently and they begin to develop strategies for spelling based on their knowledge of the phonological system and their knowledge of letter names. As spellers become more experienced with written language, they learn to combine their knowledge of sound-letter relationships, their visual memories of how words look, and their knowledge
of words and word parts to meaning in written language. Children’s early independent spelling during the writing process is sometimes referred to as *invented spelling*. At first, early spellings are the result of a child’s natural encounters with print. Later spellings become more conventional as children are exposed to written language and as they apply what they learn through instruction (Strickland, 1998).

Good writers use phonics by utilizing their knowledge of letters and sounds and by selecting different strategies for word identification. Because our writing system is alphabetic, the use of sound-letter knowledge is a logical strategy for gaining independence as a reader and writer (Strickland, 1998).

**Advantages of the Whole Language Reading Approach**

Instruction using the whole language framework is to give priority in reading and writing activities to the child’s construction of meaning. The teacher is conceived as the facilitator rather than the director of learning. Authentic performance-based assessments, such as portfolio entries, are preferred to formal or skill-focused assessments of progress. Research shows that students who participate in whole-language reading programs tend to have a more positive attitude toward reading. These students may show lower reading performance in the primary grades; however, by maintaining a positive attitude toward reading, students continue an interest in reading through the upper grades (Snow et al., 1998).

Whole language is not only a child-centered and literature-based approach to teaching language, but it also immerses students, whenever it is presented, in realistic language situations. Whole language instruction shows continuous respect for language, learners, and teachers. It begins with everyday, useful, relevant, functional language, and
moves through a full range of written language, including a variety of literature. One
major advantage that the whole language approach has over others is that it does not
require special instructional materials. Children read familiar, meaningful wholes first,
which are predictable materials that draw on concepts and experiences they already have:
signs, cereal boxes, T-shirts, and books. Students begin to recognize these words and
phrases in new wholes, and then build new strategies with unfamiliar words and phrases.
The whole language curriculum is organized through shared planning between teachers
and students around realistic problem solving, real ideas, and related issues (Goodman,
1986). The whole language classroom allows children to collaborate regularly as they
work on reading and writing projects, which is followed with an exchange of
information. Cooperative interactions among students are valued as crucial to language
learning and development (Dahl & Scharer, 2000).

Problems with the Phonics Reading Approach

When teaching the phonics reading approach, we teach students letter-sound
correspondences. Phonics lessons focus on decoding individual letter sounds and then
move to blending the sounds together to make words. Some students are not successful
with this method of teaching, for they have a difficult time remembering phonics rules
and have a hard time making sense of the rules when trying to apply them to their
reading. Skills and strategies taught only through drill and practice do not easily transfer
to meaningful reading and writing situations. Many phonics lessons are worksheet-based
and emphasize their use in isolation. Phonics lessons should not focus on teaching skills
directly, but should focus on modeling strategies. Phonics teachers tend to spend a lot of
time presenting information and giving directions (Wagstaff, 1994).
When the phonics method was first introduced, children were taught individual sound-letter relations and how to blend them to decipher words. Teachers became unhappy with this method because too much attention was being placed on word analysis and too little attention was given to comprehension. Teachers then replaced the phonics method with the *look-say* method. With this method children were expected to learn every word as a sight word. Children made very slow progress and teachers found this method unsatisfactory. Consequently, many schools began using basal reading programs. The *Dick and Jane* readers became the most popular way to teach reading in the United States for several decades. Teachers eventually became displeased with basal readers also. Educators wanted more organized skill-development programs and more attention paid to reading in content subjects. All of these strategies led teachers to specialized phonics programs that were introduced into the schools to supplement the basal programs. Phonics is often referred to as a method or program of teaching reading; however, it is really a set of instructional strategies that help learners to connect sounds with written symbols (Strickland, 1998).

**Problems with the Whole Language Reading Approach**

Jeanne Chall (1996) stated that discussing whole language can be difficult because the meaning may differ from person to person. Many whole language advocates argue that their use of quality literature is a unique and original feature of their program; however, literature has been a part of reading instruction since the 1700s. Whole language can also discourage teaching. Whole language teachers tend to spend a lot of time in literature and writing instruction. Reading is viewed as *meaning-gathering* right from the beginning and whole language places little emphasis on phonological aspects of
reading. Whole language advocates discourage this practice even for beginners and for those with reading and learning disabilities. Learning how to recognize print should come naturally hearing text read and from the reading of connected texts; consequently, phonics and reading do not need to be taught. Some people believe that if phonics and reading are taught it may interfere with reading comprehension (Chall, 1996). Lower achievement scores in whole language classrooms have resulted in a greater interest in teaching phonics, which has introduced more controversy to the topic. An increasing number of phonics programs are being published for use at home and in schools, which tells educators a change may be needed (Chall, 1996).

In the journal article, *Is Whole Language Really Warm and Fuzzy?*, Susan Church (1994), shared her experiences about whole language. She observed that when her school district decided to implement the whole language reading approach, each elementary teacher was involved in four training days over a two-year span. As a result, teachers had vague ideas about what the change involved. The school district also replaced skills-based commercial reading programs with literature-based, integrated language arts materials. An outcome of this change was that training days focused on preparing the teachers to use the new materials. Teacher education institutions began offering a range of courses for whole language teachers to pursue learning beyond what was offered by their district; however, many teachers could not, or did not, take advantage of this opportunity for professional development. This left few teachers understanding that the whole language philosophy was just a different way of thinking and learning. Presenters, who were trying to help educators understand the change, began comparing
the new with the old, which led to misconceptions about whole language and created
more problems with understanding this reading strategy (Church, 1994).
CHAPTER 3

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING READING AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL

Developing Guidelines

The discussion of phonics and whole language continues to be an ongoing debate. Basic issues to teach beginning reading are the following: how to begin, when to begin, what instructional materials to use, and how to organize classes for instruction. This has been debated over and over. Many people have published answers and completed studies on the issues of phonics and whole language; however, each side takes their claim at being the best in reading instruction (Chall, 1996). A set of guidelines for teachers is necessary because they need to use the best reading approaches that are available for children in the primary grades. Teachers can ensure the success of children with reading in the primary grades by utilizing the following guidelines.

1. Teachers should provide a balanced reading approach.

A balanced reading approach seems to be logical in teaching reading in the primary grades. Whole language should include phonics instruction along with an emphasis on other cueing systems. It is important to make sure that phonics is integrated into classroom programs. Phonics instruction should not be a separate curriculum; instead, it should be woven into the daily whole language activities (Dahl & Scharer, 2000). Phonics instruction in a whole language classroom should be child centered, intensive, strategic, and often taught at the point of use (McEwan, 1998).

There are three important components that should be present in any reading program a) phonemic awareness, b) quality reading materials, and c) cognitive strategies
for reading comprehension. Children must be given the tools to enable them to read. One should start with phonemic awareness and then move to decoding. After mastering those skills, children can be immersed in many types of reading material. It is important that children become aware of the many different types of reading material. Examples of literature to which they should be exposed are the following: fiction, nonfiction, poetry, biographies, periodicals, and newspapers. While students are reading, they are discussing, summarizing, and evaluating challenging and interesting material. During this time they should also be receiving direct instruction in cognitive strategies, which enable children to find solutions and answers (McEwan, 1998). These three components of reading have different instructional emphases. It is important for the teacher to move carefully from one to the other. Phonics instruction will be taught directly and systematically with very little opportunity for interpretation. This approach will look the same no matter who is teaching the lesson. Other types of instruction may be creative. The goal with this type of teaching is to inspire a love of reading. There are many ways to achieve this goal. The third kind of instruction will be a combination of both structure and creativity. Teaching individual cognitive strategies requires the teacher to determine which strategies are needed for reading assignments as well as the needs of the children. Cognitive strategies tend to be step-by-step and it helps if they are taught and applied in the context of reading situations. In order to do this correctly, you need to be knowledgeable of how children learn, have an understanding of the thinking process, and the ability to match the strategy to the situation (McEwan, 1998).

Educators need to recognize the importance of using a balanced approach to teach beginning reading. This approach needs to provide children with a balanced, eclectic
program involving both reading skill instruction and immersion in enriched literacy experiences. How to teach children to read has become a political issue rather than an educational issue. We need to realize that a balanced approach when teaching reading to young children is the best. All children learn differently and by using a variety of approaches, educators are sure to find a technique that will make reading a positive and enjoyable experience for all children.

Teachers need ongoing opportunities to explore both the whole language theory and its implications for classroom practice. Curriculum leaders need to create many different kinds of learning situations so that everyone is supported in a long-term exploration of learning and teaching. Everyone involved must recognize the complexity of the process and consider realistic time expectations (Newman & Church, 1990).

2. Teachers should use Appropriate Materials to Teach Children to Read

Effective teachers are able to use a variety of materials to meet the needs of each child with whom they work. There are a large number of materials, strategies, and environments from which effective teachers make choices. A very important challenge is to make sure that teachers have access to these tools and the knowledge required to use them well (Snow et al., 1998).

Many schools treat published materials as if they themselves are the curriculum; however, a change to using more holistic materials will effect a change in teachers’ thinking and practice. There are programs available that provide a greater degree of structure for teachers and students, as well as programs that allow more flexibility and teacher/student decision-making (Weaver et al., 1990).
Teachers developing a whole language philosophy may tend to use more high quality literature and environmental print as reading material in their classrooms. This encourages flexibility and individual choice on the part of teachers and students. There are programs available to help teachers feel more secure as they are developing a new program. Many of the existing programs are being expanded into other grades; publishing companies keep adding new materials, programs, and titles to their lists, and new companies offering more holistic materials are entering the market. It is important that materials offering teachers resources and support and also available. These would include: professional books and videos, and professional development seminars (Weaver et al., 1990).

When choosing materials to teach reading it is important to let the teachers be a part of the decision making process; they should have the option of choosing not to use certain materials. Teachers should have the right to choose alternatives (Hydrick & Wildermuth, 1991). It is important to remember that selecting new materials is not all that is involved when changing a reading practice.

3. Teachers should be aware of the Children’s Developmental Levels

In the home and in the classroom, reading development is fostered in many of the same ways. Most children see a rich variety of print in their homes and neighborhoods. Children are exposed to print at home by observing the print on boxes, cans of food, phone books, television guides, lists, memos, letters, cards, and on television. Within the neighborhood they see print on signs on stores and within stores, and print on merchandise, such as candy wrappers and T-shirts. Children also see print on road signs and billboards. We have labeled this type of print environmental. Children develop an
understanding that print is meaningful, simply by seeing some of the purposes it serves. Being exposed to environmental print helps children enter school as emergent readers, because they already have an understanding for the uses of some kinds of print and can construct an appropriate meaning for many words and phrases (Weaver et al., 1990).

Constance Weaver (1990) stated that emergent readers learn that a strategy that is important in making sense of oral language is just as important in making sense of print. Children begin to act like readers, even though they cannot yet read new texts independently. Young readers begin by attempting to reconstruct the meaning of picture books, based upon what they remember of the text, pictures, and their own language patterns and experiences.

The transition to real reading involves changes, not only in the composition of skills, but also in concepts about the nature of literacy (Chall, 1983). With the exception of home schooling, the purposes and practices of literacy and language in classrooms differ from those in homes, and all children entering school must adjust to the culture of the school if they are to become successful achievers in that setting (Heath, 1983). Gradually, the curriculum emphasis changes, and students find they are occupied in a wide range of literacy activities and they are responsible for doing them well. Consequently reading becomes the primary focus in the early grades (Snow et al., 1998).

4. Teachers need to recognize that some children already have the knowledge of phonics instruction and teachers should consider this in teaching them.

It is important to realize that some children understand the sound-letter relationships with little phonics instruction; therefore it is impractical to waste their time on something that is intended to help them do what they already have figured out. Some
children do need the extra help with learning phonics, but it is important to incorporate other word recognition strategies in addition to the phonics method. Some children may have been taught phonics without teaching other reading strategies. This can leave children with an over-reliance on one method and they may end up having difficulties when the phonics strategy alone will not work. These children need a better balance of word identification strategies (Strickland, 1998).
CHAPTER 4
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The intent of this study was to explore the literature concerning the phonics reading approach and the whole language reading approach at the primary grade level and to present guidelines for teachers to ensure the success of children with reading in the primary grades. The paper addressed three questions to accomplish this purpose:

1. What are the advantages of the phonics and whole language reading approaches?

Phonics has become a symbol of traditional methods in education. Phonics is an instructional method for teaching students to sound out words. It is a term used among educators to refer to the instruction in how the sounds of speech are represented by letters and spellings (Snow et al., 1998). Phonics is described as an important part of reading and writing and it is a necessary cueing system that children use with many kinds of information (Goodman, 1986, 1993). Phonics has the advantage when teaching beginning reading because it facilitates word recognition and fluency. Once children have an understanding of these two elements of reading, comprehension begins to develop (Chall, 1989).

The whole language reading approach has learners engaged collaboratively in meaningful and purposeful uses of language, as opposed to exercises, drills, and tests (Smith, 1994). This approach is child-centered, literature based, and it immerses students in real communication situations. The teacher is conceived as the facilitator rather than
the director of learning and students participating in whole language tend to maintain a positive attitude toward reading through the upper grades (Snow et al., 1998).

2. What are the problems associated with the phonics and whole language reading approaches in the primary reading program?

The phonics reading approach focuses on teaching students letter-sound relationships. Teachers using the phonics method to teach reading spend a lot of time teaching students to decode individual letter sounds; which eventually leads the student to blending the sounds together to make words. This reading approach is not successful for all students, some children have trouble remembering phonics rules and some have a difficult time applying the phonics rules to their reading (Wagstaff, 1994). Teachers became unhappy with this method of teaching reading, because too much attention was placed on word analysis and too little attention was given to comprehension.

Teachers replaced this method with the look-say method and teaching phonics through *Dick and Jane* readers. Teachers eventually became unhappy with these approaches. They then combined many different strategies and used specialized phonics programs to supplement the basal reading programs (Strickland, 1998).

The whole language reading approach is difficult to discuss because its meaning may differ from person to person. This reading approach tends to discourage teaching and these teachers spend a lot of their time with literature and writing instruction. It is believed that learning to recognize print should come naturally from hearing text read and from the reading of connected texts; therefore, phonics and reading do not need to be taught (Chall, 1996). Another problem associated with the whole language approach to teaching reading is that many teachers do not have a good understanding of this reading
approach. Teachers are often given limited training days and many districts are trying to use these programs without the proper training or research. This reading approach has misconceptions and the whole language term tends to mean something different to each person.

3. What are the guidelines for teachers in teaching reading at the primary level?

This study determined that teachers need a set of guidelines to follow to achieve success in using the best reading approaches for children in primary grades. The first step is to provide a balanced approach when teaching reading to children in the primary grades. A whole language classroom should include phonics instruction. It is important to make sure that phonics are integrated into classroom programs. Phonics instruction should not be a separate curriculum (McEwan, 1998). There are three important components that need to be present in a reading program: (a) phonemic awareness, (b) quality reading materials, and (c) cognitive strategies for reading comprehension. Children need to be given these tools to allow them to read. A balanced reading approach provides children with an eclectic program that involves both reading skill instruction and immersion in enriched literacy experiences. Second, teachers should use appropriate materials to teach children to read. It is important for teachers to use a variety of materials to meet the needs of the children. A large number of materials and strategies are available for teachers to use and it is important for teachers to have access to them and to receive the appropriate training (Snow et al., 1998). Next, teachers should be aware of the children’s developmental levels. Children develop an understanding that print is meaningful. They are first exposed to environmental print before entering school and then become emergent readers and begin to construct meaning from words and
phrases (Wcaver et al., 1990). The transition is eventually made to real reading, which involves a change in curriculum. Students are then involved in a range of literacy activities and reading becomes the primary focus (Snow et al., 1998). Finally, teachers need to recognize that some children already have the knowledge of phonics instruction and teachers should consider this in teaching them. It is important for educators to realize that some children understand the sound-letter relationships with little phonics instruction; therefore, it is impractical to waste their time on something they have already figured out (Strickland, 1998).

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from this study:

1. The phonics reading approach is an important component of reading and writing.
2. Teaching phonics to beginning readers facilitates word recognition and fluency.
3. Students involved in the whole language reading approach tend to have positive attitudes toward reading.
4. The whole language reading approach is child-centered and literature-based.
5. A balanced reading program involves positive aspects of phonics and whole language approaches.

Recommendations

Based on a review of the literature, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Early childhood educators should provide a balanced reading approach including both phonics and whole language activities.
2. Early childhood educators should use a variety of materials and strategies when teaching young children to read.

3. Early childhood educators should have a solid understanding of the developmental levels of young children with reading as the main focus.

4. Additional research is needed to understand the reading process better.
References


