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**The major developmental skills necessary for emergent reading :
a review of literature**

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The major developmental skills necessary for emergent reading : a review of literature

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine important factors that influence early literacy development. Findings indicate, reading aloud to children helps them develop in four areas that are important to formal reading instruction: oral language, cognitive skills, concepts of print, and phonemic awareness. Development of these skills provides a strong foundation to support literacy development during the early school years.

Early behaviors such as "reading" from picture books and "writing" with scribbles are examples of emergent literacy and are an important part of children's literacy development. Finally, a rich literacy environment for children with developmentally appropriate literacy instruction will have a profound effect on children's literacy development by providing opportunities and encouragement for children to become successful readers. While culture also plays an important role in the development of literacy, it is not the focus of this paper.

THE MAJOR DEVELOPMENTAL SKILLS NECESSARY FOR
EMERGENT READING
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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In Partial Fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

Children with early experiences with reading are more likely to develop a desire for reading that is more consistent over time and have a more extensive grasp of reading in their future years. Reading aloud to children plays an important role in promoting good reading skills, and promotes an easier transition from emergent reading to conventional reading. The purpose of this paper is to examine important factors that influence early literacy development. Findings indicate, reading aloud to children helps them develop in four areas that are important to formal reading instruction: oral language, cognitive skills, concepts of print, and phonemic awareness. Development of these skills provides a strong foundation to support literacy development during the early school years (Hall & Moats, 1999).

Early behaviors such as “reading” from picture books and “writing” with scribbles are examples of emergent literacy and are an important part of children’s literacy development. Finally, a rich literacy environment for children with developmentally appropriate literacy instruction will have a profound effect on children’s literacy development by providing opportunities and encouragement for children to become successful readers. While culture also plays an important role in the development of literacy, it is not the focus of this paper.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Children's success as learners rests on their ability to read well. Learning to read is a process that takes time and effort. At first children hear stories and poems, learn the alphabet, understand how speech and print go together, and learn that printed words have meaning. After much practice, children learn to read and understand many books and stories. In their growth as readers, children move from "learning to read" in the early grades to "reading to learn" in the upper elementary grades and beyond (Texas Education Agency, 1997b).

Literacy development begins in the very early stages of childhood, even though the activities of young children may not seem related to reading and writing. Early behaviors such as "reading" from pictures and "writing" with scribbles are examples of emergent literacy and are an important part of children's literacy development. Emergent literacy refers to the reading and writing behaviors that precede and develop into conventional literacy notes Sulzby (1989). Sulzby and Teale (1996) state, emergent literacy is concerned with the earliest phases of literacy development, the period between birth and the time when children read and write conventionally. The term emergent literacy signals a belief that, in a literate society, young children--even 1- and 2-year-olds--are in the process of becoming literate.

Children's parents, caregivers, and early childhood educators play an important role in ensuring children successfully progress in their literacy development. Children's literacy efforts are best supported by adults' interactions with them through reading aloud and conversation and by children's social interactions with each other. It is imperative

that caregivers and educators in all settings are knowledgeable about emergent literacy and make a concerted effort to ensure that children experience literacy-rich environments to support their development into conventional literacy (Texas Educational Agency, 1997b).

Of utmost importance is reading aloud to children and providing opportunities for them to discuss the stories that they hear, (Burns, Griffith & Snow, 1999). The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children. This is especially so during the preschool years (Johnson, 1999). Children who are read to develop background knowledge about a range of topics and build a large vocabulary, which assists in later reading comprehension and development of reading strategies. They become familiar with rich language patterns and gain an understanding of what written language sounds like. Reading aloud to children helps them associate reading with pleasure and encourages them to seek out opportunities to read on their own. Children also become familiar with the reading process by watching how others read, and they develop an understanding of story structure. Repeated readings of favorite stories allow children an informal opportunity to gradually develop a more elaborate understanding of these concepts. By revisiting stories many times, children focus on unique features of a story or text and reinforce previous understandings. In addition, rereadings enable children to read emergently (Johnson, 1999).

Reading should be encouraged as a parent-child activity that instills a love of literature in every family member, no matter what age (Trelease, 1995). Experiences children have at home and in school set the stage for positive attitudes toward reading and early literacy development. Children who have early encounters with early literacy are

more likely to develop a predisposition to read more frequently and broadly in subsequent years (Baker, 1997).

Reading aloud to children helps them develop in four areas that are important to formal reading instruction: oral language, cognitive skills, concepts of print and phonemic awareness. Development of these skills provides a strong foundation to support literacy development during the early school years (Allington & Cunningham, 1996).

Their continuing literacy development, their understanding of literacy concepts, and the efforts of parents, caregivers, and teachers to promote literacy influences children's growth from emergent to conventional literacy.

In this paper, I will focus on the early literacy developmental skills that are important in learning to read. Secondly, I will discuss how parents, caregivers and teachers play an important role in assisting a child in learning these literacy concepts.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter will offer a review of the related literature on the skills that children should have before learning to read. The chapter includes a review of literature in the following areas: (A) oral language, (B) cognitive skills, (C) concepts of print, (D) phonemic awareness, and (E) how can parents, caregivers and teachers can help children accomplish these goals.

Early research dating back to the 1930s suggested that there was little use in teaching children how to read until they had already conquered specific readiness skills, such as certain fine motor skills and the ability to tell right from left. Today, researchers know more. They know that growing up to be a reader depends primarily on the child's knowledge about language and print. A wide range of experiences with printed and spoken language, from infancy through early childhood, strongly influences a child's future success in reading (Burns, Griffin, Snow 1999).

In recent years, major studies have found that the seeds of literacy are planted before children enter school. There are four major areas in which development must occur prior to the start of formal literacy instruction (Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning [MCREL], 1998). These areas are: oral language, general cognitive skills, concepts of print and phonemic awareness.

Oral Language

Language is defined as “the words, their pronunciation, and the methods of combining them used and understood by a community”, (Owens, R, 1996). What a child learns about language at an early age can determine how successful he will be as a reader in the future. Learning oral language is the most marvelous accomplishment of young children. Most learn to speak their native tongue with ease and effectiveness; and they do this without formal instruction (Strickland & Morrow, 1988).

Stages in Language Development

Morrow, (1997), characterizes the stages of language development with a concentration in oral language:

From Birth to One Year

In the first few months of infancy, oral language consists of a child's experimenting or playing with sounds. Infants cry when they are uncomfortable and babble, gurgle, or coo when they are happy. Parents are able to distinguish cries. One cry is for hunger and another is for pain, for instance. Infants learn to communicate specific needs by producing different cries. They communicate nonverbally as well as by moving their arms and legs to express pleasure or pain.

When a baby is about six months old, its babbling becomes more sophisticated. Children at that age are usually capable of combining a variety of consonant sounds with vowel sounds. They tend to repeat these combinations over and over. As mentioned earlier, it is at this stage that parents sometimes think they are hearing their child's first words. The repeated consonant and vowel sounds, such as da, da, da, or ma, ma, ma, do sound like real words, ones that the parents are delighted to hear. Most

parents tend to reinforce the child's behavior positively at this stage. Repetition of specific sounds and continued reinforcement lead the child to associate the physical mechanics of making a particular sound with the meaning of the word the sound represents.

From eight to twelve months, children increase their comprehension of language dramatically; their understanding of language far exceeds their ability to produce it. They do, however, tend to speak their first words, usually those most familiar and meaningful to them in their daily lives: Mommy, Daddy, ~e-bye, baby, cookie, milk, juice, and no, for instance. As they become experienced with their first words, children use holophrastic speech—one-word utterances that express an entire sentence. For example, a baby might say "cookie," but mean "I want a cookie," "My cookie is on the floor," or "I'm done with this cookie."

From One to Two

A child's oral language grows a great deal between one and two. Along with one-word utterances, the child utters many sounds with adult intonation as if speaking in sentences. These utterances are not understandable to adults, however. Children begin to use telegraphic speech from twelve months on—the first evidence of their knowledge of syntax. Telegraphic speech uses content words, such as nouns and verbs, but omits function words, such as conjunctions and articles. In spite of the omissions, words are delivered in correct order, or syntax: "Daddy home" for "Daddy is coming home soon," or "Toy fall" for "My toy fell off the table."

Language grows by leaps and bounds once the child begins to combine words. By eighteen months most children can pronounce four-fifths of the English phonemes and use twenty to fifty words.

From Two to Three

This year is probably the most dramatic in terms of language development. Typically, a child's oral vocabulary grows from 300 words to 1000. The child can comprehend, but cannot yet use, 2000 to 3000 additional words. Telegraphic sentences of two or three words continue to be most frequent, but syntactic complexity continues to develop, and the child occasionally uses such functional words as pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, articles, and possessives. As their language ability grows, children gain confidence. They actively play with language by repeating new words and phrases and making up nonsense words. They enjoy rhyme, patterns of language, and repetition. Consider the following transcription of Jennifer's dialogue with her dog. Jennifer was two years ten months at the time. "Nice doggie, my doggie, white doggie, whitey, nicey doggie. Good doggie, my doggie, boggle, poggie. Kiss doggie, kiss me, doggie, good doggie." Jennifer's language is repetitive, playful, silly, and creative, demonstrating some of the characteristics of language production typical for a child her age.

From Three to Four

A child's vocabulary and knowledge of sentence structure continue to develop rapidly during the fourth year. Syntactic structures added to the child's repertoire

include plurals and regular verbs. Indeed, children of this age are prone to overgeneralization in using these two structures, mainly because both plural formation and verb inflection are highly irregular in our language. A four-year-old illustrated both problems when he had an accident in class and came running over very upset. He said, "Mrs. Morrow, hurry over, I knocked over the fishbowl and it broked and all the fishes are swimming on the floor. Jonathan knew how to form the past tense of a verb by adding ed, but he didn't know about irregular verbs such as broke. He also knew about adding an s to form a plural but again was unaware of irregular plural forms such as fish.

As they approach age four, children seem to have acquired all the elements of adult language. They can generate language and apply the basic rules that govern it. However, although their ability with language has grown enormously and they sound almost as if they are using adult speech, they have really acquired only the basic foundations. Language continues to grow throughout our lives as we gain new experiences, acquire new vocabulary, and find new ways of putting words together to form sentences. At the age of three to four, children talk about what they do as they are doing it. They often talk to themselves or by themselves as they play. It seems as if they are trying to articulate their actions. While painting at an easel, four-year-old Christopher said to himself, "I'm making a nice picture. I'm making colors all over. I'm painting, pit, pat, pit, pat. I'm going back and forth and up and down. Now I'm jumping as I paint." He carried out this monologue while painting this picture. As he talked and painted, he did exactly what he said, words and actions coinciding.

From Five to Six

Five- and six-year-olds sound very much like adults when they speak. However, their vocabularies are always increasing, and so is the syntactic complexity of their language. They have vocabularies of approximately 2500 words, and they are extremely articulate. Many, however, still have difficulty pronouncing some sounds, especially l, r, and sh at the ends of words. They become aware that a word can have more than one meaning. When they are embarrassed or frustrated at misunderstanding things, they say something silly or try to be humorous. They also tend to be creative in using language. When they do not have a word for a particular situation, they supply their own. Adults often find the language used by children of this age to be amusing as well as delightful and interesting.

Benjamin ran into school very excited one morning. "Mrs. Morrow, " he said, 'you'll never believe it. My dog grew puppies last night!"(p. 97)

Escorted by her mother, Allison was on her way to her first day of kindergarten. She seemed a little nervous. When her mother asked her if she was okay, Allison replied, "Oh, I'm fine, Mommy. It's just that my stomach is very worried."(p. 97)

There are other characteristics of kindergartners' language. Kindergartners have discovered bathroom talk and curse words, and they enjoy shocking others by using them. They talk a lot and begin to use language to control situations. Their language reflects their movement from a world of fantasy to that of reality.

Oral language development begins before literacy and then parallels it. It supports literacy, but it need not be fully developed for reading and writing to begin. Children's natural curiosity causes them to move back and forth between the interpretation of oral and written. They love to tell and retell stories. They render their own versions of adults' oral reading of favorite picture books. Oral language is a part of nearly everything they do. It helps them to create and transform their ideas and experiences (Strickland & Morrow, 1988).

While many researchers and practitioners recognize a relationship between oral language development and literacy development, there has been little research that ties the two together directly. Nonetheless, children with weak oral language development do not seem to do well during reading and writing instruction. Having a large vocabulary, being able to choose the correct grammatical form for the specific message being communicated, understanding the oral speech of others, sustaining a conversation, discussing events in a sequence, and being motivated to use language in various problem solving contexts (social and cognitive) are important components of oral language development (MCREL,1998).

According to Hall & Moats, 1999, children learn to speak by being surrounded by speech. They naturally absorb it. These natural experiences with oral language development and literacy begin to build a foundation for later reading success (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). Infants make sounds that imitate the tones and rhythms of adult talk. They "read" gestures and facial expressions and begin to associate words and meanings (Johnson,1999). Children's literacy development also can be observed through their use of literacy materials. After babies can purposefully grasp and manipulate objects,

books and writing tools become a part of their exploration. Infants between 8 and 12 months who are read to regularly progress from mouthing books to playing with the covers to turning pages. This book handling is usually accompanied by babbling, which is thought to imitate an adult's vocalizations during reading (Snow, Burns, Griffin, 1998).

From, 2 to 3 years of age children begin to produce understandable speech in response to books and the written marks they create. In their pretend reading, young children will point to and verbally label parts of the pictures; they also will name actions they see in a book (McGee & Richgels, 2000). These children also begin to recognize environmental print, such as signs, logos and labels they frequently see in their homes and communities (Emergent Literacy Project, International Reading Association, 1998; McGee & Richgels, 2000). At this stage, children often begin scribble writing--making simple straight lines or marks on paper. When the scribbling is done with the intention that it conveys a message (e.g. "Look at what I wrote Mommy"!).

From, 3 to 4 years of age children show rapid growth in literacy. They begin to "read" their favorite books by themselves, focusing mostly on reenacting the story from the pictures. Eventually, they progress from telling about each picture individually to weaving a story from picture to picture using language that sounds like reading or written language (Holdaway, 1979). At this time, children also experiment with writing by forming scribbles, letter-like forms, and random strings of letters. They also begin to use "mock handwriting", or wavy scribbles to imitate adult cursive writing. Letter-like forms or "mock letters", are the young child's attempt to form alphabetic letters; these forms of writing eventually will develop into standard letters (Snow, Burns, Griffin, 1998; McGee & Richgels, 2000). When using various forms of writing, children maintain their intention

to create meaning and will often "read" their printed messages using language that sounds like reading (Johnson, 1999).

At approximately around age 5, children enter school and begin receiving formal literacy instruction. Most children at the kindergarten level are considered to be emergent readers. They continue to make rapid growth in literacy skills if they are exposed to literacy-rich environments (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). Children at this age continue to "read" from books they've heard repeatedly. Gradually, these readings demonstrate the intonation patterns of the adult reader and language used in the book.

As children continue to develop as language users, they learn the grammatical structure of their language, expand their vocabulary, and they learn to play with language, think about it, analyze it, talk about it and make judgements about the correct forms (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1999)

Cognitive Skills

Cognitive Skills are any mental skills that are used in the process of acquiring knowledge; According to MCREL, (1998), reading relies on a specific set of cognitive skills, including attention, memory; symbolic thinking, and self-regulation. As children learn to read, they continue to improve these skills, making them more purposeful and deliberate. For example, deliberate attention is required to differentiate between letters, even if they look alike, and to isolate specific portions of a word for decoding. Decoding is the readers ability to translate print into speech (identify the word) without respect to whether the word's meaning is understood. A child who has trouble looking at printed letters in text and pronouncing a word is said to have trouble decoding, (Hall & Moats, 1999). Secondly, children must remember previous words as they decode subsequent words in a sentence. If they do not make a purposeful attempt to remember, they cannot extract the meaning from the sentence. Third, reading requires an understanding of symbols: If children cannot think symbolically, they cannot learn to manipulate letters and words. Symbolic thinking allows us to grasp the significance and value of intangibles such as emotional, spiritual, or intellectual experiences. Symbolic thinking allows us to make words more meaningful to us (insight into meanings and relationships), (Owens, 1996). According to Piaget this cannot happen until after age two. Finally, children must be able to self regulate so that they can monitor their own understanding of print, abandoning ineffective reading strategies and moving on to more effective ones.

The theories of both Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky are relevant to the discussion of emergent literacy and help explain the cognitive concepts formed by young learners. Both

psychologists examined how children acquire language, and both were interested in the relationship of thinking and language learning (Johnson, 1999; McGee & Richgels, 2000).

Piaget's idea was that children learn through action. He believed that children are born with and acquire schemas or concepts for how to act and respond to the world. As children explore their world, they form and reform ideas in their minds. The more actively involved children are, the more knowledge is gained (Magee & Richgels, 2000). Piaget believed, children's concepts of reading and writing are shaped more by what they accomplished in preceding developmental stages than by their simply imitating adults' behavior or following adults' directions (McGee & Richgels, 2000). For instance, a child learns about a book by manipulating it, looking at the pictures and words, and mouthing it, than by an adult interacting with them and telling them about the book.

A schema is "a mental structure in which we store all the information we know about people, places, objects, or activities," note McGee & Richgels, (2000, p.7). Schemas are highly organized and are used to associate all the related information about a particular topic in an interrelated way. Personal experiences and knowledge about features and related concepts are integrated into schemas. Both thinking and learning depend on schemas. McGee & Richgels state, "Thinking involves calling to mind information from schemas and using that information to make inferences, predict, draw conclusions, or generalize. ... Similarly, learning involves adding to or changing schemas."(p.7) When children read books, they have new experiences with those books, and therefore, those experiences add to their knowledge about what books can do.

The Vygotskian perspective of literacy acquisition emphasizes social interaction but places less emphasis on stages of development. From this perspective, language and

cognition emerge in development at about the same time and are intertwined. Children build new concepts by interacting with others who either provide feedback for their hypotheses or help them accomplish a task (McGee & Richgels, 2000). For example, Vygotsky believed when a child reads a book, they will learn more about the book and its contents when someone talks to her about it. This interaction helps her to understand this new concept in order to use it later. As the child discusses a problem or task with an adult, the adult supplies language to assist the child in solving the problem, (an example of what Vygotsky called “ scaffolding ”); the child gradually internalizes the language until the task can be completed independently (McGee & Richgels, 2000).

Concepts of Print

Children from birth to three years learn at least five important literacy-related concepts about books and printed materials as a result of enjoyable book experiences (McGee & Richgels, 2000).

1. Books are Pleasurable

Perhaps one of the most important concepts that children can learn at the beginning of their literacy experiences is that reading is a pleasurable activity. When children are read to beginning early in their lives, they play with books as a preferred and frequent activity. Book reading is one of the closest activities parents and children share. Children nestle in Dad's lap or lean over Mom's arm while they take part in this activity. The special feelings generated from this closeness of parents and children are associated with books. It is no wonder that some children will sit alone and look at books far longer than they will sit with their other toys.

2. Books Are Handled in Particular Ways

In this beginning period, children also learn book-handling skills, ways of handling and looking at books. There are many aspects of book-handling. Children learn how to hold books right-side-up and how to turn pages. They also discover that books are for viewing and reading and not just for turning pages.

3. Book sharing Involves Familiar Roles and Language

Toddlers and their parents learn ways of interacting with each other while reading books. They develop book sharing routines, familiar, expected actions and language that

accompany their book reading. Book sharing routines make it possible for children to show parents what they are learning. Parents respond by giving children opportunities to use their new abilities and encouraging children to use them. This results in an increase in children's roles and a routine known as the naming game. Naming-game refers to the mother pointing to, and naming pictured animals, people, and objects. For instance, "Where's the kitten?" questions; and it ended with the child pointing to and labeling pictures on her own.

4. Pictures in Books Are Symbols

Another aspect of literacy learning involves discovering that the shapes and colors in pictures represent things. Pictures are symbols for objects and actions. For example, a child showed that she had discovered this when she found her crayons after she saw a picture of crayons in a favorite book. She was discovering not only that pictures are interesting to look at, but also that they are representations of real things.

5. Books and Print Communicate Meaning

A crucial outcome of children's early experience with books and other kinds of print are that they learn that books and other print materials communicate meaning---they tell a message. A child learns to look through books so that she could talk with her mother about familiar animals or objects. She learned that her storybooks showed pictures of familiar objects and events.

Learning to "mean", to understand what others say and do, is involved in nearly every activity, not only in literacy activities. It is the great undertaking of life, we constantly try to understand the messages that bombard us and to send messages to others. We use many cues to help us understand others and to help others understand us. We use the situation

we are in and its clues to meaning (characteristics of the location or people's clothing), as well as spoken language and its clues to meaning (words, stress, and intonation). Because our society is a literate one, another powerful set of clues to meaning is written language. Written language, is also used along with situations, such as, (getting out a checkbook at the grocery store), with spoken language, for example, ("That will be \$81.47"), and with written symbols, (i.e. 81.47 printed on the computer display of the cash register). Children learn to use these cues including the written language cues to make meaning. This is not to imply that infants look at print and try to read it like an adult does. However, when an adult reads print aloud, tells a story, or talk about pictures in a magazine, infants and toddlers try to make sense of what is going on. They attempt to understand the situation, the talk they hear, and the visual symbols they see.

From the ages of three to five years, Johnson (1999), notes there is , another kind of awareness that is crucial to learning to read. This is the awareness of how texts work. For example, that they have lines of print that are read from left to right, top to bottom, and that books are read from front to back. This concept is called directionality. Directionality refers to the way print is tracked during reading and laid down during writing. Children must know to begin at the top of the page and work toward the bottom, starting on the left-hand side and moving to the right. Young children must also learn how to move from the end of one line of print to the beginning of the next using a "return sweep." This movement essentially means that when going on to a new line of text, the child returns to the left-hand side of the paper and works across the page again (Johnson, 1999).

Another literacy skill that should be reached is word-by-word matching is the ability to match words printed on a page to spoken words. This concept applies to both reading and writing tasks as children gradually learn to relate spoken words to written words. Word-by-word matching is not the same as recognizing words on sight. Sight-word recognition is the ability to see a word and know automatically what the word is. A child who perform word-by-word matching while writing creates (through either invented or conventional spelling) complete messages on paper with proper spacing between words. The child understands that what is spoken also can be written down (Johnson, 1999).

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is a conscious understanding of the structure of spoken language (Johnson, 1999, Griffin & Olson, 1992). It is the ability to hear and manipulate the separate speech sounds in words (Hall & Moats, 1999). In alphabetic languages, phonemes are the basic sound units that are represented by letters (Johnson, 1999)

With little or no direct instruction almost all young children develop the ability to understand spoken language. While most kindergarten children have mastered the complexities of speech, they do not know that spoken language is made up of discrete words, which are made up of syllables. These syllables are made up of the smallest units of sound called "phonemes." This awareness that spoken language is made up of discrete sounds appears to be a crucial factor in children learning to read (Sensenbaugh, 1996).

Phonemic awareness has been measured using a variety of tasks that appear to tap into an individual's ability to manipulate the sounds of oral language. However some tasks may require a more sophisticated understanding of sound structures than others. For example, rhyming appears much earlier than segmentation abilities for most children. Also, it seems to matter that most children can hear the sounds of a spoken word in order. It is not clear how early or late this ability does or should develop. It appears that acquisition of phonemic awareness occurs over time and develops gradually into more and more sophisticated levels of control (International Reading Association, 1998).

Children begin to develop their language skills in infancy. Even their babbles and coos and the ways their families speak to them before they really understand can help them to become speakers of their native tongue. When infants show excitement over pictures in a storybook, and when their parents read to them nursery rhymes and poetry,

these activities we do with our children help them to understand that words have meanings and later set the stage for alphabet structure.

It is important for children to know the alphabet as accurately as possible before they enter school. They need to instantly and effortlessly recognize all the letters so that they are prepared to dedicate all their attention to other tasks such as learning the sound associated with each letter or how to write it correctly. Although they may know the alphabet that you have read to them, they may not have the precursor skills to be able to read easily. These are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions to learn to read. Also, important is phonemic awareness, which is the ability to recognize and manipulate the separate speech sounds in words, (Hall & Moats, 1999).

Even though there are several skills a child needs to master in order to learn to read, knowing the alphabet is certainly one of those skills. One of the most important things your child needs to accomplish during kindergarten is to learn the sounds associated with letters. Knowing the alphabet can help make learning the sounds easier for your child. Imagine how difficult it would be to try to remember the sound of the letter Z if you are trying to remember what that letter symbol is called. It is much easier to associate a sound with a letter if you already know the name of the letter---knowing the alphabet is almost like having an anchor for each sound. Additionally, since many of the letter names closely relate to their sounds, learning this sound-symbol relationship is easier for a child who already knows her letter before receiving instruction in the sounds (Hall & Moats, 1999).

During the preschool years, most children gradually become sensitive to the sounds, as well as the meanings, of spoken words. They demonstrate this phonological awareness in

many ways; for instance: they notice rhymes and enjoy poems and rhyming songs; they make up silly names for things by substituting one sound for another (e.g., bubblegum, bubblebum, gugglebum, bumbleyum); they break long words into syllables or clap along with each syllable in a phrase; they notice that the pronunciations of several words (like "dog" and "dark" and "dusty") all begin the same way.

Although younger preschoolers rarely pay attention to the smallest meaningful segments (phonemes) of words, gaining an awareness of these phonemes is a more advanced aspect of phonological awareness that becomes increasingly important as school approaches, because these segments are what letters usually stand for. That's the alphabetic principle. A child who has attained phonemic awareness, for example, understands that there are three phonemes in the spoken word "mud" m/u/d.

Phonological awareness is not only correlated with learning to read, but research indicates a stronger statement is true: phonological awareness appears to play a causal role in reading acquisition. Phonological awareness is a foundational ability underlying the learning of spelling-sound correspondences. Although phonological awareness appears to be a necessary condition for learning to read (children who do not develop phonological awareness do not go on to learn how to read), it is not a sufficient condition (Sensenbaugh, 1996).

For most children, an awareness of the phonological structure of speech generally develops gradually over the preschool years. Among the first signs of awareness that spoken words contain smaller components are monitoring and correcting speech errors and "playing" with sounds (e.g., "pancakes, cancakes, canpakes"), both of which even 2- to 3-year-olds have been observed to do occasionally in naturalistic conversational

settings. Appreciating rhymes (for instance, that light rhymes with kite) has also been noted in young preschoolers. The entry to phonemic awareness typically begins with an appreciation of alliteration, for instance, that boy and butterfly begin with /b/. Even so, many children initially find it difficult to separate the component phonemes of a complex onset, reporting for example that the first sound of play is /pl/ rather than /p/ or failing to represent both sounds of such initial blends in their independent spelling. Many books geared toward this age group appropriately include rhyming and alliterative texts, and this may be one avenue by which children's attention is drawn to the sounds of speech.

Ninety one percent of 3 and 4 year-old children could judge correctly whether a "Martian" puppet said English words correctly, 37 percent could be induced by the examiner to engage in sound play, and 26 percent could reliably identify rhyming words. Identifying words that began with a particular phoneme, however, was accomplished only by 14 percent of the children, and we know from other studies that not until age 5 or 6 are such segmentation skills exhibited by a majority of children. Hence, phonological awareness is correlated with age (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

The importance of phonemic awareness to the transition from emergent to conventional literacy cannot be ignored. Phonemic awareness also has been shown to be a significant correlate with later reading achievement scores (Sensenbaugh, 1996; Griffin & Olson, 1992). It is not the only variable, however. Rich and varied literacy experiences for children also must accompany phonemic awareness.

Once beginning readers have some awareness of phonemes and their corresponding graphic representations, research has indicated that further reading instruction heightens their awareness of language, assisting them in developing the later

stages of phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is both a prerequisite for and a consequence of learning to read (Sensenbaugh, 1996).

What can parents and caregivers do to assist children to become readers?

This chapter will offer suggestions from literature that will assist parents, caregivers and teachers to help children become conventional readers. The chapter includes suggestions from literature in the following areas: (A) oral language, (B) cognitive skills, (C) concepts of print, (D) phonemic awareness.

SUGGESTIONS to PARENTS, CAREGIVERS, and CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Oral Language

First, listening begins before speaking. Children learn oral language by listening to people talk. As children learn to talk with others, they ask questions, learn the meanings of words, and find out interesting and important things about the world around them (Texas Educational Agency 1996b).

It is important for parents', caregivers and early childhood educators to understand, that children who are exposed to sophisticated vocabulary in the course of interesting conversations learn the words they will later need to recognize and understand when reading. Vocalization in the crib gives way to play with rhyming language and nonsense words. Toddlers find that the words they use in conversation and the objects they represent are depicted in books--that the picture is a symbol for the real object and that the writing represents spoken language. In addition to listening to stories, children label the objects in books, comment on the characters, and request that an adult read to them. In their third and fourth years, children use new vocabulary and grammatical constructions in their own speech. Talking to adults is children's best source of exposure to new vocabulary and ideas. Many experiences of listening and talking prepare children to read (Burns, Griffin, Snow, 1999).

Labeling games are just right for little ones, for example, "Where is your nose?" Verbally label objects and events in your child's world, for example, "Nina is on the swing." Encourage children to label objects and events, helping them with vocabulary and pronunciation. Do these types of labeling games with pictures in magazines, books, etc (Burns, Griffin, Snow, 1999).

During necessary routines like baths, reading, and eating, be sure to make time to talk with children. Turn off the car radio and talk while you drive together. Watch children's TV programs together and talk about them. Instead of channel surfing, turn off the TV and use the time to talk (Hall & Moats, 1999).

Pick books that connect to a child's life and talk about those connections. For example, when you read Caillou's Potty Time, you might ask your child, "What did you do on the potty today?" (Texas Educational Agency, 1996b).

Try turning the tables during reading time. When most adults share a book with young children, they do the reading and the child does the listening. But once children reach preschool age, parents can encourage them to become the reader or teller of the story instead. Start by prompting the child to say something about the book. (You can get the ball rolling by asking a question or making a comment yourself.) After the child responds, rephrase his or her answer and expand it by adding information. Continue along in this manner, each time, encouraging the child to expand further on the narration (Burns, Griffin, Snow, 1999).

Through interesting conversations with parents, children learn vocabulary and language structures that will later help with reading. The key is to prepare for content that

is rich and important to the children (Burns, Griffin, Snow, 1999, Texas Educational Agency, 1996b).

Activities

Make time each day for individual conversations with children. Give each child your full attention during the discussion and be sure to spend enough time listening to what he or she has to say. Give the child the chance to take the conversational lead. Add your own brief responses and comments to draw him or her out. Although they may not always be factually accurate in their responses, it is important for children to learn how to use language to express and describe their impressions and ideas.

Encourage conversation when children are in a comfortable setting. They're more likely to open up and talk when they are in a nonthreatening situation, such as a one-to-one reading session, a walk outside, and during snack time. Perhaps the most effective way to converse with children is to take time to join in their play (Burns, Griffin, Snow, 1999).

Cognitive Skills

As children move from toddlerhood to school age, they should increasingly be able to grasp the meaning of language they hear spoken in everyday conversation, as well as in narrative forms, such as books. They show this understanding through their questions and comments. Parents', caregivers, and childhood educators, when reading a story, they should freely relate information and events in the book to real-life experiences. As they get older, they should become comfortable with following who said or did what in a story (Burns, Griffin, Snow, 1999)

Children have opportunities to learn and apply strategies as they reflect upon and think critically about what they read. Written language is not just speech written down. Instead, written language offers new vocabulary, new language patterns, new thoughts, and new ways of thinking. Comprehension depends on the ability to identify familiar words quickly and automatically, which includes fluent reading, as well as the ability to figure out new words. But this is not enough.

Comprehension also depends upon the understanding of word meanings, on the development of meaningful ideas from groups of words (phrases, clauses, and sentences) and the drawing of inferences. It also depends upon the demands of the text (its concepts, its density), and the knowledge the reader brings to the text. The discussion of good books with their parents is one avenue for making these connections. Such discussions will help children to appreciate and reflect on new aspects of written language and on the wide, wonderful world of print. For children to receive the greatest benefit and enjoyment from their reading, they must receive comprehension strategy instruction that builds on their knowledge of the world and of language. Comprehension strategy instruction can include the following: (Burns, Griffin, Snow, 1999)

- Activities that help children learn to preview selections, anticipate content, and make connections between what they will read and what they already know
- Instruction that provides options when understanding breaks down (for example, rereading, asking for expert help, and looking up words)
- Guidance in helping children compare characters, events, and themes of different stories

- Activities that encourage discussion about what is being read and how ideas can be linked (for example, to draw conclusions and make predictions)
- Activities that help children extend their reading experiences through the reading of more difficult texts with the teacher

Concepts of Print

A child's sensitivity to print is a major first step toward reading. Young children can begin to understand that print is everywhere in the world around them, and that reading and writing are ways for them to get ideas, information, and knowledge. Children quickly settle into book-sharing routines with primary caregivers. Infants often kick their feet, make eye contact, smile in response to your talking, and look where you point, as you read the book and share the pictures. Toddlers start recognizing favorite books by their cover, pretend to read books, and understand that books are handled in certain ways. As they reach their fourth year, children increasingly come to understand that it is the print that is read in stories, and that this print contains alphabet letters that are a special category of visual items, different even from numbers. They recognize print in their home, their neighborhood, and other local environments (Burns, Griffins & Snow, 1999).

Activities

At home, at group care, and at school, provide print-rich environments, including access to high-quality books, writing materials, and toys like alphabet blocks and alphabet refrigerator magnets. High-quality books are different for young children of different ages. For example, it is best to use cloth or cardboard books for babies because they will chew on the ones they like (Burns, Griffin, Snow, 1999).

In the daily routine of life, point out and read print in the environment such as words on a restaurant menu, labels on food containers, posters on a bus, and signs out on the street. Remember that, at early ages, children may not notice that what you are reading is the letters, not the entire sign or label. Help them notice how important small differences in the letters and words are, even when the general label or sign is the same. For example, when they pay attention to a product like ice cream with a favorite logo, help them notice the differences in flavors indicated by words on the label (Hall & Moats, 1999, Texas Educational Agency, 1996b, Burns, Griffin, Snow, 1999).

During regular reading and writing sessions, adults can explain how print works. For example, before reading a book, look at the cover and read the title and author's name. While reading the book itself, occasionally run your finger along the text so children can discover that text is read from left to right (Burns, Griffin, Snow, 1999).

Adults sometimes forget that children have to learn the most basic conventions that govern written language, such as the spaces that separate the words. The words of English text run from left to right and from top to bottom. That means that a sentence starts at the upper left of a page and continues from left to right. At the end of the line, the sentence continues until the punctuation indicates the end of one sentence and the beginning of the next (Burn, Griffin, Snow, 1999).

Phonemic Awareness

Phonological awareness involves an appreciation of the sounds, as well as the meanings, of spoken words. Children who have a greater degree of phonological awareness when they enter school are better equipped to learn to read.

Parents,' caregivers and early childhood educators can use many appropriate activities to help build phonological awareness in young preschoolers and phonemic awareness in older children. Rhyming songs, syllable-clapping, and grouping objects according to how their names begin can all be used to draw children's attention to the sounds of speech. Later, to promote phonemic awareness, the activities can include: (TEA, 1996b, Burns, Griffin, Snow, 1999)

- isolating the first segment of a word (Say the first little bit of "snake");
- finding all the objects on a poster that begin with the "nnn" sound;
- discovering what is left when a particular segment is removed from a word (e.g., Say "smile" without the "sss." Say "team" without the "mmm");
- breaking one-syllable words into their phonemes; and
- blending phonemes to make a word (What word does "mmm...ooo...nnn" make?).

Activities

Songs, rhyming games, language play, and nursery rhymes--are all excellent ways to spark children's awareness of language and sounds.

At home, take advantage of everyday activities to talk about words and sounds. For example, when buying fruit at the market, you might ask the child which sound is the same in the words peach and pineapple, or in peach and tea.

At home and at school/group care, choose some books that focus on sounds. For example, the Dr. Seuss books can lead to lots of chanting and fun with sounds--but don't let the author do all the work. Invite the child to supply the last word of each rhyme. Follow the model the book provides and make some silly rhymes that are special for each child.

As these components are translated into home and group care experiences, children will have opportunities to talk, read, and write in the many ways they use language. Because the language arts (reading, writing, listening and speaking) are so interrelated, children must be given the opportunity to practice the strands of language arts in connected and purposeful ways (Texas Educational Agency, 1996b).

Children who arrive at school ready to learn have typically had the opportunity to acquire a good deal of knowledge about language and literacy during their preschool years. Well before formal reading instruction is appropriate, many informal opportunities for learning about literacy are available, in varying degrees in most American homes and child care settings. Ideally, these opportunities mean that children have acquired some level of awareness of print and of the utility of literacy. They may have some specific knowledge of letters or frequently encountered words. They may have developed some capacity to play with and analyze the sound system of their native language, and may be more motivated to use literacy. Language development during the preschool years, in particular the development of a rich vocabulary and of some familiarity with the language forms used for communication and books, constitutes another equally important domain of preparation for formal reading instruction (Snow, Burns, Griffin, 1998).

Chapter Three

SUMMARY

Literacy development begins in the very early stages of childhood, even though the activities of young children may not seem related to reading and writing. Early behaviors such as "reading" from pictures and "writing" with scribbles are examples of emergent literacy and are an important part of children's literacy development (Johnson, 1999).

There are four major milestones that children must master before reading can occur. These developmental stages include, oral language, general cognitive skills, concepts of print and phonemic awareness. First, oral language stage, children develop this naturally, but it enhanced when the amount of language directed towards the child is increased (Hall & Moats, 1999). Second, cognitive skills are developmental skills children should learn before they learn to read. Children learn about written language in much the same way they learn anything else including spoken language. They acquire and modify schemas or concepts for various aspects of spoken language knowledge. They use inborn abilities, and they depend on interactions with others (McGee & Richgels, 2000). Third, when a child is aware of how text works, for example, he understand that the lines on the page are read from left to right, top to bottom, and books are read from front to back, he has learned the concepts of print (McGee Richgels, 2000). Last, phonemic awareness, shows a child is ready for reading when he understands that speech can be broken down into smaller units (phonemes) (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999).

With the support of parents, caregivers, early childhood educators, and teachers, as well as exposure to a literacy-rich environment, children can successfully progress from emergent to conventional reading.

CONCLUSION

The amount of spoken language directed towards a child is vital to the development of literacy development. Television, radio, and things of that nature do not do the job. It is the interaction with the child that stimulates him. When a child looks into the eyes of another and tries to understand what's being communicated to him, that's what stimulates the brain more than any other activity. (Trelease, 1995). Spoken language is defined as talking, reading aloud and explaining things to your child. Talking to them, reading to them and teaching them about things in their environments are the key elements in turning the brain on, and absences of that element can cause the brain not to function as well. The child decodes what we are saying and that process gets him into the world of symbols and verbalization. That's why spoken language is so important, it gets the child ready for later literacy development (Trelease, 1995).

Too often we underestimate a child's capacity for language and imagination during his first six years. Appropriate fiction can provide rich soil for the growth of his intellectual, emotion, and social development. Reading enables a child to understand his world, find courage when frightened by the unknown, and experience hope and confidence as he looks to the future.

Experiences children have at home and at school may set the stage for positive attitudes toward reading and early literacy development. Children with early encounters with literacy are more likely to develop a predisposition to read more frequently and broadly in subsequent years (Baker 1997).

Motivation is clearly an important factor in children's early emergence with literacy. To limit or not influence children to read and be read to, can limit children's

opportunities to use emergent literacy, they may also undermine their motivation to do so. Parental encouragement of their children's reading is related to the child's attitude toward reading.

A rich-literacy environment is equally important to the emergent reader. All children need to have high quality children's books as a part of their daily experiences. Children benefit from having access to a wide range of literacy materials such as books, magazines, newspapers, and a variety of writing materials.

Finally, reading aloud plays a special role in the literacy development of the young child. Reading aloud with your child on a daily basis is one of the greatest things you can give your children. It is never too early to start. After years of reading aloud they develop positive attitudes towards reading which is a powerful motivation for when the child reaches school.

PLAN OF ACTION

Families and other community members are clearly important in the effort to teach children to read. But to reach the important goal of developing the skills to teach children to read, the parents and professionals who have daily interactions with children in day care centers, preschools, and at home, need knowledge about early literacy development. Also, there's need for a commitment to acquire an understanding of early literacy development in order to develop and implement practices that will help children read emergently.

Johnson, (1999), Snow, Burns, Griffin, (1998), Provide the following steps to parents, caregivers, and early childhood educators to help develop reading skills that can provide opportunities for children's literacy learning.

Parents and Caregivers:

- Read aloud to children. Share and explore books and other reading materials with children.
- Provide a literacy-rich environment by promoting home literacy activities for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.
- Realize the value of helping children learn about reading.
- Encourage children's literacy development at home through resources such as Helping Your Child Become a Reader.
- Talk with and listen to your children to promote their oral language development.
- Encourage children to retell stories that have been read to them.
- Encourage children to draw pictures or "write" about the stories they have listened to and to emergently "read" these stories.
- Provide children with a positive role model by taking time to read and write.
- Visit the library regularly with children. Children may enjoy having their own library card.

- Take children to “story hours” at the libraries, children’s plays, and other community activities.
- Develop an understanding of phonological terms.
- Take advantage of opportunities to learn and read about children’s development and literacy acquisition.

Early Childhood Educators:

- Use developmentally appropriate literacy practices that acknowledge children’s development, interests, and literacy knowledge.
- Read to children daily and allow them to take turns “reading” the materials to each other.
- Use a wide range of literacy materials in class Allow children to experience a variety of children’s books, magazines, and newspapers.
- Take time to listen to children to determine their interests, language skills and areas of need.
- Use children’s home cultures and languages as literacy resources.
- Provide multiple rereadings of stories for pleasure and exploration. Invite children to join in the readings, honoring their emergent reading behaviors.
- Ensure that the school your child attends provides appropriate writing materials for children.
- Provide opportunities for children to read, share, and display writing.
- Use appropriate stages for teaching beginning reading.
- Participate in professional development activities to increase understanding of emergent literacy.

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