Whole language: A delivery system for facilitating literacy behaviors in kindergarten

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Whole language: A delivery system for facilitating literacy behaviors in kindergarten

Abstract
The move to all-day every-day kindergarten programs has given rise to concerns about the nature of developmentally appropriate curricula and instruction in these programs. It is feared by some early childhood specialists that all-day every-day kindergarten classrooms will become, and are becoming, inundated with paper and pencil worksheets which are dictated by academic skill curricula. In addition, it has been determined that children are entering school with a substantial understanding of reading and writing which has created a call for an examination of the literacy experiences being offered to kindergarten children (Schickendanz, 1986; Strickland, 1990). As a result, kindergarten programs are being examined by educators to determine what is the most beneficial curriculum to use with young children (Cambourne, 1988; Elkind, 1986; Goodman, 1986; Harste, 1990). This paper will examine the whole language approach to determine if this approach is developmentally appropriate for facilitating literacy behaviors in the kindergarten program.
Whole Language: A Delivery System for Facilitating Literacy Behaviors in Kindergarten

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Department of Curriculum and Instruction
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Master of Arts in Education

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION**

- Background of the Study ................................................................. 4
- Purpose of the Study ....................................................................... 11
- Need for the Study ............................................................................ 12
- Limitations of the Study.................................................................. 13
- Definition of Terms....................................................................... 13

**CHAPTER 2  REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

- A Whole Language Approach ......................................................... 16
- Components of a Whole Language Approach................................. 25
- Guidelines of a Whole Language Approach.................................... 33
- Benefits of a Whole Language Approach........................................ 35
- Problems of Teaching a Whole Language Approach....................... 36
- Implementation Needs of a Whole Language Approach.................. 39

**CHAPTER 3  SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

- REFERENCES.......................................................................................... 47
The move to all-day every-day kindergarten programs has given rise to concerns about the nature of developmentally appropriate curricula and instruction in these programs. It is feared by some early childhood specialists that all-day every-day kindergarten classrooms will become, and are becoming, inundated with paper and pencil worksheets which are dictated by academic skill curricula. In addition, it has been determined that children are entering school with a substantial understanding of reading and writing which has created a call for an examination of the literacy experiences being offered to kindergarten children (Schickendanz, 1986; Strickland, 1990). As a result, kindergarten programs are being examined by educators to determine what is the most beneficial curriculum to use with young children (Cambourne, 1988; Elkind, 1986; Goodman, 1986; Harste, 1990). This paper will examine the whole language approach to determine if this approach is developmentally appropriate for facilitating literacy behaviors in the kindergarten program.
Background of the Study

Decker and Decker (1992) define the kindergarten of today as “the unit of school which enrolls five-year-olds prior to entrance into the first grade” (p. 15). In order to understand current kindergarten practices, it is helpful to be aware of the influences great educators and their beliefs have played in the development of such practices.

Frederich Froebel established the first kindergarten in Blankenburg, Germany in 1837. Froebel developed a systematic, planned curriculum which was based on respect and freedom of movement for the child. His program used activities involving gifts (i.e., small blocks for building, developing mathematical concepts, and making designs), occupations (i.e., craft work that related to real world jobs), as well as books containing plays, songs, poems, and stories. The teacher’s role was to share these materials, to observe the natural unfolding of children’s inherent qualities for learning, and to provide activities that would enable children to learn what they were ready to learn. Play was seen as a way of fostering the natural development of children. Froebel felt there was a
necessity to educate mothers, nurses, and prospective kindergarten teachers about his program. He also expressed the notion that kindergarten should become a state-supported institution (Decker & Decker, 1992; Morrison, 1991; Spodek, Saracho, & Davis, 1991).

Margarethe Schurz, a trainee of Froebel, founded the first American kindergarten in Watertown, Wisconsin, in 1856. This was a German speaking kindergarten composed of relatives and neighbors. Schurz introduced Elizabeth Peabody to the ideas of Froebel. Elizabeth Peabody is credited with the establishment of the first English speaking kindergarten in Boston in 1860. Through Peabody’s endeavors, the American kindergartens established during this era were grounded in Froebelian philosophy (Decker & Decker, 1992; Morrison, 1991; Spodek et al., 1991).

Through the efforts of Susan Blow, in 1873, the first public kindergarten was established in St. Louis, Missouri. “Endorsement of the kindergarten program by a public school system did much to increase its popularity and spread the Froebelian influence within early childhood education” (Morrison, 1991, p. 248).
The turn of the century found kindergarten programs becoming rigid, and methods and teacher-centered rather than child-centered. John Dewey’s influence on American education had introduced educators to progressivism which emphasized child-centered curriculum rather than emphasizing subject matter. Patty Smith Hill, influenced by Dewey, was a kindergarten leader who believed kindergarten programs and training should be open to experimentation and innovation, rather than rigidly following Froebel’s ideas. She continued to support Froebel’s ideas but instituted reform which modernized and Americanized kindergartens. Froebelian curriculum was replaced with a more nonstructured curriculum containing arts, crafts, building blocks and dramatic play areas. Rather than using the materials as the teacher dictated, children were allowed to use materials as they wished during free, creative play. American songs and games were included in the program (Decker & Decker, 1992; Morrison, 1991; Spodek, et al., 1991).

Patty Smith Hill’s influence on kindergarten programs was instrumental in changing them, and her influence is still seen today in many kindergarten classrooms. More recently, change has occurred again. Three significant events
focused public interest on early childhood education and paved the way for a change towards more academic kindergarten programs. First, in the late 1950s, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik and moved ahead of the United States in the space race. This caused public opinion to turn towards the idea that children were not learning, and consequently, they needed more academically-oriented early childhood programs. Next, at approximately the same time, civil rights of minorities had become important. Inferior quality education in segregated schools created needed changes in early childhood education. The changes were designed to produce an equalization between minority children and their middle-class peers. Also, at this time, there were many articles and books written by those criticizing schools' curricula and methods used to teach reading and other basic skills. These influences caused parents to demand programs designed to meet academic needs. Play-oriented kindergarten programs emphasizing socialization were considered by parents to be inadequate in their preparation of activities for young children's learning. As a result, kindergartens focusing on cognitive learning became the desired programs (Decker & Decker, 1992; Elkind, 1986; Morrison, 1991; Spodek, et al., 1991).
Because of the previously mentioned three events, the traditional early childhood program with its focus on the child and on learning through play orientation had developed into an academic program. The primary aim of education became to help children achieve facts and skills. Learning was accomplished by direct teaching of isolated skills (Decker & Decker, 1992; Morrison, 1991; Spodek, et al., 1991). Decker and Decker (1992) described the following practices of programs which influenced and changed the nature of kindergarten programs:

1. Curricular control is often adult prescribed; curriculum is divided into separate subjects, with each subject taught for a prescribed number of minutes.

2. Activities are all conducted via paper-and-pencil tasks in workbooks and worksheets, referred to as “seatwork” in the elementary grades, and aptly named because the tasks require a “sit still” attention span.

3. There is a focus on the academic product, the achievement of prescribed objectives, as evaluated by standardized tests. (p. 43)
The academically oriented curriculum fostered learning through the use of workbooks and worksheets geared to promote the phonetic approach to reading. The kindergarten reading readiness system was and is based on children learning that letters represent sounds. Skills such as learning initial consonant sounds, blends, medial consonant sounds, and final consonant sounds are taught in isolation in order to enable children to sound out words needed to read. This program requires young children to sit still for long periods of time, to regularly participate in skill drills, and to fill in workbook pages and reproducible pages. This academic program is currently used in many kindergarten programs (Decker & Decker, 1991; Morrison, 1991; Spodek et al., 1991).

Kindergarten programs have again come under scrutiny. Elkind (1986) wrote that the formal academic early childhood program is based on misconceptions about how children learn. Young children are, too often, taught the same way as older students, but in reality, young children learn differently from older children, and, therefore need a different type of curriculum. Early childhood professionals are questioning the appropriateness of academically oriented kinder-
garten practices. Attention is being focused on what are developmentally appro-
priate programs and practices for the kindergarten child (Bredekamp, 1987;
International Reading Association, 1986). Developmentally appropriate pro-
grams are those that are age appropriate and individual appropriate. Kindergar-
tens need to take into account how children learn at each stage of their develop-
mental growth and be sensitive to individual differences (Bredekamp, 1987).

A joint statement (International Reading Association, 1986) by several
concerned educational organizations which discussed concerns about present
practices in early childhood programs including kindergarten, puts forth a de-
scription of developmentally appropriate programs. It stated that school reading
and writing experiences should allow children to build upon their already existing
knowledge of oral and written language that they bring to school with them.
Learning should take place in a risk-free environment where children are encour-
aged and supported in their attempts to explore and construct meaning of their
world. Positive attitudes towards themselves and towards learning should be
fostered within children. Children should be actively involved in meaningful,
functional language experiences which include speaking, listening, writing, and reading in an integrated type of program. Teachers should be trained to acknowledge and provide for differences in language and cultural backgrounds of children.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this paper is to determine if the whole language approach is a developmentally appropriate approach for facilitating literacy behaviors in the kindergarten program. To accomplish this purpose, this paper will address the following questions:

1. What is a whole language approach?

2. What are the components of a whole language approach?

3. Does the whole language approach meet The National Association for the Education of Young Children's guidelines for developmentally appropriate programs? These guidelines call for programs which are age appropriate, individually appropriate, and are based on the knowledge of how young children learn (Bredekamp, 1987).
4. What are the benefits of a whole language approach that make it appropriate for the kindergarten program?

5. What are the problems involved in teaching a whole language approach?

6. What are the implementation needs for a whole language approach in the kindergarten program?

**Need for the Study**

Proponents of the academic-phonetic-basal oriented kindergarten approach and the total socialization-play oriented kindergarten approach are in conflict as to which method produces desired outcomes for the education of young children. The idea that either one of these programs is exclusively the best answer to this situation is highly questionable (Aaron, Chall, Durkin, Goodman, & Strickland, 1990). It is imperative programs in the best interest of young children be discovered and implemented. Currently, whole language is drawing much attention in the educational community. There is a need to investigate the worth of the whole language approach as a developmentally appropriate approach for use in facilitating literacy behaviors in kindergarten (Carbo, 1987; Durkin,
Limitations of the Study

The literature examined for this study was mainly limited to materials presently available from the University of Northern Iowa library. Limited access to professional materials was accommodated by the Estherville Public Library, Inter-Library Loan System of Iowa, materials in the professional library at Lakeland Area Education Agency, and materials in the writer’s professional library.

Definitions of Terms

For purposes of use in this paper, the following terms will be defined in the following way:

**Academic-centered curriculum**: Curriculum which emphasizes the learning of subject matter with emphasis on learning facts and information.

**Basal phonetic program**: A textbook company’s program involving workbooks and worksheets which emphasizes that learning occurs through a series of
skills acquired in sequential developmental stages presented primarily through teacher-directed activities. Learning occurs from the parts to the whole.

**Big book:** A large sized book (approximately two feet by one and one-half feet) with large illustrations and print which is easily seen by children when used in a group situation.

**Child-centered curriculum:** Curriculum which emphasizes children and their interests at various stages of development.

**Code emphasis:** Another term for phonics.

**Developmentally appropriate programs:** Curriculum programs that take into account the nature of young children, the developmental stages of young children and their needs, and how young children learn best.

**Early childhood program:** "Any part-day or full-day group program in a center, school, or other facility that serves children from birth through age 8" (Bredekamp, 1987, p. 1).

**Emergent literacy:** The acquisition of notions and concepts about print resulting from a child’s first experiences with printed material.
**Phonics:** A method of teaching beginners to read and pronounce words by emphasizing the phonetic value of letters and letter groups.

**Predictable books:** Books which are easy to read because they have a receptive language pattern, cumulative story events, or a rhyming pattern.

**Reading readiness:** Curriculum in reading designed to prepare children to begin formal reading.

**Shared big book reading:** A group experience by children and teacher in which the students participate in reading along with the story.

**Whole language program:** A program consisting of literacy activities involving stories being read to children, shared reading using big books, children handling and browsing through books, children being encouraged to write in their current developmental style, teachers modeling the reading and writing processes, the fostering of language experiences in all types of play and interest centers, and the process of children and teachers actively planning curricula based on the children’s interests and needs. Learning occurs from the whole to the pieces.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A Whole Language Approach

The report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading* prepared by Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson (1985), stated that literacy emerges for children from experiences with significant adults at home involving talking and learning about the world and talking and learning about written language. From these interactions, notions develop pertaining to reading. "Reading is a basic life skill. It is a cornerstone for a child’s success in school and, indeed, throughout life. Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success inevitably will be lost" (p. 1).

As discussed earlier, until the 1960's, kindergartens were typically oriented for play and socialization. Today's kindergartens still foster these goals, but in addition, there are increasing academic expectations. Systematic reading instruction is being given emphasis in many kindergartens (Steinberg, 1990). Studies by Hatch and Freeman (1988) and Walsh (1989) analyzing present
kindergarten philosophies and practices have found kindergarten programs to be increasingly academic and skills oriented. Findings of a classroom observation study by Durkin (1987) suggested that "commercial materials emphasizing phonics have a major and encompassing impact on what kindergarten teachers do with reading...the commercial materials directly affect what is graded" (p. 286).

Frank Smith (1992) wrote that there are two prevalent views of learning today in the educational community. The formal view is one in which learning is considered to be "difficult and takes place sporadically, in small amounts, as a result of solitary individual effort, and when properly organized and rewarded" (p. 432). This view requires the student’s full attention to material at a proper level. Learning is looked upon as memorization and facilitated through the use of basal textbooks and accompanying materials. In contrast, Smith observed that the informal view of learning emphasizes that "learning is continuous, spontaneous, and effortless, requiring no particular attention, conscious motivation, or specific reinforcement; learning occurs in all kinds of situations and is not subject to forgetting....Learning is social rather than solitary" (p. 432). Learning is
facilitated through an approach called whole language (Smith, 1992).

In respect to literacy acquisition, the debate between proponents of a basal (phonics first) program (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990) and proponents of a whole language (meaning first) program (Cambourne, 1988; Carbo, 1987; Goodman, 1986; Harste, 1990; Holdaway, 1979) is one of particular importance to teachers, and ultimately also to kindergarten children. Do these two types of programs produce similar reading readiness results, or does one type of program show better results than the other?

The traditional approach for teaching literacy has been a basal phonetic program. This program makes use of workbooks and worksheets to teach a systematic hierarchy of skills beginning with letter recognition, and proceeding through letter-sound recognition, letter blend recognition, and word recognition to the eventual understanding of the basal text. This procedure is generally known as learning to read from the parts to the whole. The program is teacher-centered, involving considerable drill on the single skills in isolation from actual reading material (Allington, Blachowicz, Cramer, & et al., 1987; Anderson et al., 1985).
Basal phonetic programs have been the primary curricula for many kindergarten classrooms for several years. Dissatisfaction with this method of presenting reading materials to young children has led many teachers to investigate other curricula such as the whole language program. Whole language is a philosophy of learning and teaching with a broad and multidisciplinary research base; its base is drawn from research in linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociology, anthropology, child development, curriculum, composition, literary theory, semiotics and other fields of study (Cambourne, 1988; Goodman, 1986; Holdaway, 1979; Newman & Church, 1990). According to this view, learning is social, requiring risk-taking and experimentation. Learning occurs when learners are actively engaged in experiences involving real purposes, and allowing children to make choices and share in decision-making (Cambourne, 1988; Goodman, 1986; Holdaway, 1979; Newman & Church, 1990).

A whole language program is a child-centered and integrated curriculum which presents reading as a holistic activity. This approach theorizes that language processes—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—develop in an
interdependent manner through literacy experiences which are meaningful to the children. This approach allows children to learn reading strategies from the whole to the parts in order to make better sense. Through the use of a shared big book reading experience, children are presented skills such as letter recognition, letter sound recognition, letter blend recognition, and word recognition as the skills become meaningful in the whole of the text. Whole language takes into account the literacy awareness that children already have when they come to school and builds upon this in an environment rich with printed materials such as trade books, big books, teacher and student made signs, charts, experience stories, poems, and lists on display (Cambourne, 1988; Goodman, 1986; Harste, 1990; Holdaway, 1979; Newman & Church, 1990).

Ken Goodman (1986) has given the following whole language objectives as they apply to kindergarten:

1. support the children’s developing awareness of print and its function;
2. support the transition into productive reading;
3. build strategies, not specific skills (meaning-seeking, predicting, inferencing, sampling, confirming, self-correcting in reading, inventing spellings, and experimenting with forms to serve their functions in writing);
4. cultivate the alphabetic principle (relationships between letter patterns and sound patterns), not
specific phonics; and (5) develop risk-taking in a penalty free environment. In a whole language beginning literacy program, the teacher is monitor, cheerleader, co-reader, and facilitator. (p. 45)

These objectives by Goodman stress that children are learning to read and write by being immersed in reading and writing literacy experiences.

The need to know how student participation in the basal phonics program and in the whole language program influences the acquisition of reading skills has led several researchers to compare the programs. Although the traditional basal phonics program writers (Allington, et al., 1987) and phonics advocates (Chall, et al., 1990), wrote in favor of this formal approach, proponents of whole language programs (Cambourne, 1988; Carbo, 1987; Goodman, 1986; Holdaway, 1979) have supported the whole language structure because it facilitates literacy acquisition by kindergarten children. Several research studies (Akers, 1988; Kasten & Clarke, 1989; Miller & Milligan, 1989; Ribowsky, 1985) have had results which were favorable to the whole language program.

Ribowsky (1985) investigated the effects of a whole language program upon the emergent literacy of kindergarten children. The control group, a classroom with 26 children, was assigned a code emphasis approach, and received
instruction using Lippincott’s Beginning to Read, Write and Listen program. The experimental group, a classroom with 27 children, was assigned a whole language approach and received instruction using a whole language program based on Holdaway’s shared book experience model.

Ribowsky’s findings indicated that the whole language classroom demonstrated statistically significant results in emergent literacy acquisition without direct instruction concerning phonetic principles. The experimental group which was never formally instructed in phonics did significantly better on formal measures of phonetic knowledge on the Metropolitan Achievement Tests than did the code emphasis group. Ribowsky also reported that the whole language children displayed sophisticated language about books and book handling skills as well as an appreciation of literature on the Book Handling Knowledge Task when compared to the code emphasis group.

Another study, Akers (1988), investigated the use of a whole language program on the children’s acquisition of kindergarten literacy skills. Akers’ intent was to determine if participation in a whole language program supported
early literacy development in kindergarten children. The progress of the participating students was monitored throughout the school year by the researcher using observations, anecdotal records, checklists and student writing samples. Akers' findings showed the children progressing along a continuum on the development of letter recognition and printing, initial consonant sound recognition, word recognition and writing. Akers' results indicated that whole language could be used effectively as a program of instruction in developing early literacy skills at the kindergarten level.

Similar findings have been reported by Miller and Milligan (1989) which tend to support a whole language approach. A matched-pair design study involving an experimental treatment of children being taught through a whole language program and a control treatment of children being taught by a basal phonics program was conducted. The study intended to determine whether children do learn phonic decoding skills by reading without direct phonics instruction. No significant difference between the mean scores attained by the experimental (whole language) subjects and the control (basal phonics) subjects on a
Nonsense Word Test to assess decoding ability was recorded. Because the whole language group and the basal phonics group compared similarly, this study supported the whole language view of those who believe decoding skills which are actually used in reading are learned by reading (Cambourne, 1988; Goodman, 1986; Holdaway, 1979).

Kasten and Clarke (1989) have submitted findings that show results supporting a whole language approach for fostering emerging literacy acquisition of preschoolers and kindergarteners. Their study follows two preschool classes and two kindergarten classes implementing a whole language philosophy using daily shared reading experiences and weekly writing opportunities. Use was made of the natural language books of The Wright Group as well as other publishers. Matched comparison groups used strategies focusing on direct presentation of letter knowledge and letter/sound relationships. Findings from qualitative and quantitative measures including the Goodman Book Handling Task, a story retelling inventory, the Metropolitan Early School Inventory, and the Metropolitan Readiness Test found the whole language classes performing as well, and in
most cases better, on most measures. The whole language groups also exhibited enthusiasm for books and stories that was not present in the comparison group.

A secondary area of interest reported in Akers’ (1988) study on the effectiveness of a whole language program was children’s development of a sight word vocabulary. It was noticed that kindergarten children involved in the whole language program were developing a sight word vocabulary without direct vocabulary instruction. The whole language experimental subjects were developing a sight word vocabulary simply from being involved in shared big book experiences. Akers’ (1988) study showed a significant gain in the whole language program students’ ability to identify the Dolch Ten Most Useful Words list. Although Akers (1988) only evaluated a whole language group on their acquisition of sight words, findings indicated that a whole language program can be used effectively as instruction in sight word development.

Components of a Whole Language Approach

Components of whole language programs for kindergarten incorporate a theory and perspective about language and language development. Along with
this, the practice of parents reading to their children at home provides additional insight regarding types of activities which are beneficial when included as components of a language program.

Most children learn to speak without direct teaching of language skills and rules. Mothers and fathers accept and enjoy their baby’s attempts at speaking. They reward their baby with hugs, cuddles and joyous responses for utterances they suppose to mean something. Baby is performing in a risk free environment and continues to produce and build on utterances as no threat is felt in this activity. As a result, language gets better each day as baby builds learning of language by practicing, making mistakes, rethinking, building upon learning from mistakes in a risk free environment filled with encouragement and praise for the attempts being made (Cambourne, 1988; Goodman, 1986; Holdaway, 1979). Holdaway (1979) describes parental interactions that foster natural learning in the following way:

Rather than providing verbal instructions about how a skill should be carried out, the parent sets up an emulative model of the skill in operation and induces activity in the child which approximates towards use of the skill. The final attempts of the child are to do something that is like the
skills he wishes to emulate. This activity is then ‘shaped’ or redefined by immediate rewards, both intrinsic and extrinsic, for targeting approximation. The shaping is supported by ready assistance provided on demand, and by good-natured tolerance and almost inexhaustible patience for inappropriate responses. From this point of view, so-called ‘natural’ learning is in fact supported by higher quality teaching intervention than is normally the case in the school setting. (p. 22)

This scenario showed how teacher/student interactions within the classroom can be enhanced.

There are implications that can be drawn from practices of parents and children before entering school that could well be used as models for school programs. One such practice is that of parents engaging in reading books to their children. Parents do the reading with a willing, pleasurable and satisfying attitude. As the children participate in these reading experiences, they sit in a manner where they are privy to the book print and can interact with the parents about the book as the story proceeds. There is no demand on the child and thus the child develops a positive attitude concerning reading. Knowledge about book handling and print are developed naturally in such a setting. “For these children, introduction to books and book language begins at a very early stage of infancy, long before the tasks of oracy are mastered....Literacy orientation does not wait
on accomplished oracy" (Holdaway, 1979, p.40).

The components of a whole language program include activities which go together to represent a balanced program in which the belief is that children should learn to read and write in the same natural way they learn to speak. It is the immersion of students in these activities which produces natural and meaningful learning. In such a program, children hear the written word many times during the day. Children also will have opportunities to read to each other, with the teacher, with the whole class, and independently. A balanced program includes the following activities:

1. Shared reading experiences: In this activity, the teacher reads a predictable big book to the whole class. Big book enlarged texts make it easy for all to see the text as the teacher reads, much as a child observes the text when parents read to them. On subsequent rereadings of the same predictable big book, the children participate by reading more and more of the text until they are able to read the story independently. Big books contain natural spoken language, predictable story lines, repetition of phrases, rhythm and/or rhyme, and stories of
interest that create the desire in children to want to read and reread them. During these shared reading experiences, the teacher can take the opportunity to talk about books, print concepts, authors, and the strategies authors use in writing. Observation of letters, letter/sounds, punctuation as well as sight words can be noticed and discussed in the structure of the meaningful whole text.

2. Guided reading experiences: In this experience, children are guided by the teacher to read through a child size model of the big book story together and then independently. This story is then placed in the library for use by the children.

3. Literature experiences: In this activity, the teacher reads a story to the children, at least once a day and possibly more often. Reading to children builds experiences in language. It provides a rich context in which children can experience more complex language structures, descriptions, storylines, characters, and plot developments.

4. Independent reading activities: This activity gives children the needed time to browse and interact with books on their own. Opportunities to do so
should be provided and encouraged.

5. Daily writing experiences: This activity should provide time allocated for children to write using whatever developmental stage of writing they may choose. While involved in the writing process, the children are participating in the processes of reading, rereading, applying knowledge of print concepts and reading strategies (Cambourne, 1988; Fountas & Hannigan, 1989; Goodman, 1986; Holdaway, 1979; Newman, 1985).

The objective of two pertinent research studies (Leung & Pikulski, 1989; Phillips, Norris, Mason & Kerr, 1989) was to determine whether there were beneficial effects on children’s literacy development from the use of shared book reading experiences with kindergarten children. The studies focused on shared book reading experiences as a vehicle for facilitating letter/sound acquisition, phonics acquisition, book handling concept acquisition, and concepts of print acquisition. In both cases, researchers felt the shared reading experiences showed better or equal results on measures when compared to a reading readiness phonics-oriented curricula. It was observed that the shared book reading experience
intervention was a more natural and meaningful situation for young children than the reading readiness phonics oriented approach.

The whole language program environment is inundated with print of all types. Charts, poems, lists, messages, labels, trade books, child produced writing and books, to name a few, are included. This print-rich environment contains literacy materials for children’s use within interest areas such as the housekeeping corner, block corner, or writing center. Literacy materials consist of anything that might encourage reading and writing such as books, magazines, newspapers, notepaper, pencils, markers, catalogs, recipe books, telephone books, and a typewriter. Research studies (Morrow, 1990; Schrader, 1990) have supported the conviction that symbolic play fosters literacy. Morrow (1990) went one step further with the research and determined that teacher guided thematic play with literacy materials produced the greatest gains of literacy behaviors in young children. Themes for play centers (office, bakery, firestation, hospital, and such) produced an interaction of literacy events using reading and writing that were not apparent in non-themed settings (Morrow, 1990; Schrader, 1990).
Integration of curricula becomes an important aspect of a whole language approach program. Teachers develop lessons based on topics or themes which include science units, social science units, literature units, physical education or arts units, or units composed of a combination (Cambourne, 1988; Goodman, 1986; Holdaway, 1979; Newman, 1985). “A unit provides a focal point for inquiry, for use of language, for cognitive development. It involves pupils in planning, and gives them choices of authentic, relevant activities within productive studies” (Goodman, 1986, p. 31).

Whole language assessment is authentic and ongoing. According to Goodman (1986), teachers can learn much more about student’s progress in learning by carefully watching them than they can from testing situations. Teachers make use of anecdotal records, checklists of literacy behaviors observed, one-to-one conferences, and portfolios of children’s writings and learning activities for assessment purposes. The important thing is what the child is actually doing on a day to day basis during the ongoing classroom activities.
Guidelines of a Whole Language Approach

The report, Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Age 8 (Bredekamp, 1987), stated, "the concept of developmental appropriateness has two dimensions: age appropriateness and individual appropriateness" (p. 2). Along with these two dimensions, it is understood that programs for young children are based on the knowledge of how young children learn. In order to meet these guidelines, attention must be given to designing curriculum that emphasizes and develops children's positive feelings towards literacy, learning as an interactive process, integrated curriculum, and sees the role of teachers as that of a facilitator of learning (Bredekamp, 1987).

As related earlier in this paper, the whole language base is drawn from research in many areas, including child development and language development. The whole language approach takes into account each child's needs at every stage of development. Whole language is child-centered. Whole language experiences allow children to participate actively in exploration and interaction with materials

The whole language approach is based on scientific knowledge and theories about language. It recognizes the natural way young children develop language and how this is interrelated and goes hand in hand with the theory of learning. Curriculum is integrated, and speaking, listening, writing, and reading are all happening concurrently within meaningful experiences derived from and built upon the interests of children. Whole language programs organize integrated curriculum around topics or themes which involve students in planning and decision making (Cambourne, 1988; Goodman, 1986; Harste, 1990; Holdaway, 1979).

Concerning the whole language approach, Goodman (1986) stated:

Whole language teachers understand that learning ultimately takes place one child at a time. They seek to create appropriate social settings and interactions, and to influence the rate and direction of personal learning. They are utterly convinced that teachers guide, support, monitor, encourage, and facilitate learning, but do not control it. They are aware of the universals of human learning, of language and cognitive processes, but they understand the different paths each learner must take. They expect and plan for growth and do not impose arbitrary standards of performance. (p. 29)
Benefits of a Whole Language Approach

The use of the whole language approach has many benefits which foster the emerging literacy in kindergarten. This approach allows the language processes to develop in an integrated manner through meaningful literacy experiences. It allows children to learn from the whole to parts in order to make better sense of their world. Whole language takes into account the literacy awareness that children already have when they come to school and builds upon this awareness. It encourages children to become risk takers in a risk free environment and to take responsibility for their own learning. The whole language approach fosters social interaction within meaningful activities originated from children’s interests that encourage growth and learning to occur. Interaction with peers and adults is encouraged. Children work together to help each other learn. Children are actively engaged in learning. Possibly the biggest benefit derived from the whole language approach is the positive attitude towards reading that is developed. The joy of reading becomes apparent in children and the excitement of learning is released. The effective whole language program empowers both teachers and
problems of teaching a whole language approach

Problems with the teaching of whole language appear to be mostly relative to individuals rather than the program itself. First, in order to teach effectively in a whole language program, the teacher needs to understand the philosophy and the principles upon which it is based. This involves reading and learning on the teacher's part. It is necessary for teachers to become knowledgeable in order to make intelligent decisions concerning the acceptance of the whole language philosophy. Teachers must examine their own beliefs about how children learn and about their own teaching (Ridley, 1990). "If regarded simply as another method of instruction to be applied in a contrived environment, the whole-language alternative and its variants do not succeed in teaching children to read" (Smith, 1992, p. 440). Teachers must be prepared to accept a new set of assumptions which include: (a) all children can learn; (b) instruction must move from teacher-centered to student-centered learnings; (c) rather than the teacher being...
the authority and disseminator of knowledge, the teacher facilitates the learning
process; (d) the child comes to school with various amounts of literacy knowl-
dge already established; (e) learning is a social experience; (f) learning experi-
ences should have an integration of curriculum; (g) learning is a cooperative
venture; (h) children should be actively engaged in authentic purposeful learning
experiences; and (i) children share in the responsibility of their own learning

Second, accountability can be a problem, teachers and administrators are
overly concerned about the performance outcomes on required tests of children
involved in whole language programs (Farris & Kaczmarski, 1988). To build
confidence and alleviate some fears, teachers should become familiar with some
of the current research findings pertaining to the comparison of types of kinder-
garten programs and their effects on children’s learning and achievement. Teach-
ers need to be prepared and feel comfortable with authentic proof of learning
including, but not limited to, anecdotal records, checklists, portfolios of chil-
dren’s meaningful products, tape-recorded samples, and journal writings (Ridley,
Smith (1992) stated, "Tests are not required to find out whether children are learning. We need only observe what they are doing" (p. 440).

Third, the problem of parents being uncomfortable and uninformed about the whole language program can arise. Parents feel comfortable in the knowledge they know exactly what their child is or is not learning at school when they can physically handle and see the daily worksheets sent home in basal phonics oriented kindergarten programs. Parents feel secure in the knowledge their child's school program is just the same as what they experienced. Teachers need to be prepared to provide parents with the necessary information to establish understanding of the whole language approach. Establishing on-going lines of communication with parents through informational meetings, educational programs and personal contracts will provide a basis for understanding as school and home work together for the benefit of the child (Holdaway, 1979; Manning, Manning, Long, & Wolfson, 1987).

Finally, there is the issue of resources. Many schools do not have funding to obtain big books, multiple copies of books, and continued accumulation of
quality literature as past purchases of basal series materials have depleted available monies. This is an issue teachers must be willing to surmount with ingenuity and resourcefulness. Sharing materials among teachers, school systems, public libraries, area education agencies, and the like can provide quality resource availability. Lists of materials can be composed and circulated so materials can be put to their best use (Ridley, 1990).

Teachers need to take time to think out and confront possible problems they may personally meet when using the whole language approach in a kindergarten program. Planning ahead for solutions and resources to help find answers to possible problems will aid in providing smooth implementation and teaching experiences.

Implementation Needs of a Whole Language Approach

In order for implementation of the whole language approach to take place, a teacher needs to become a risk taker willing to experiment. There seems to be no one method of implementation. Cambourne (1988) suggests teachers work out a plan which incorporates and synthesizes the principles of language and learning,
and establishes objectives. He indicates the following can then be worked out:

- the way time is organized;
- the way classroom space is organized;
- the range of resources which are needed;
- the nature of demonstrations which might be used;
- the activities which learners will engage in;
- the teacher’s ways of talking and interacting with learners;
- ways of monitoring and evaluating literacy development. (p. 82)

Implementing whole language takes time. It takes commitment on the teacher’s part to continue to upgrade knowledge and expertise. Whole language implementation needs support from others who share their knowledge, share their experiences, and show support for the ideas and attempts of others. Visiting another teacher’s classroom to gain ideas and see how experiences are handled by another person is of great value. School systems can support whole language implementation by funding in-service programs, classes, lectures by authorities in the field, discussion groups, conference attendance, and arranging visitations by teachers to other classrooms and schools (Cambourne, 1988; Goodman, 1986; Newman, 1990).
CHAPTER 3

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this review of the literature was to determine if the whole language approach is a developmentally appropriate approach for facilitating literacy behaviors in the kindergarten program. The review of the literature addresses six questions to accomplish this purpose:

1. What is a whole language approach?

2. What are the components of a whole language approach?

3. Does the whole language approach meet The National Association for the Education of Young Children’s guidelines for developmentally appropriate programs?

4. What are the benefits of a whole language approach that make it appropriate for the kindergarten program?

5. What are the problems involved in teaching a whole language approach?

6. What are the implementation needs for a whole language approach in the kindergarten program?
Chapter 2 begins with a review of the literature which compares the traditional formal basal phonics program approach of teaching literacy skills to the informal whole language approach of teaching literacy skills. Results of studies cited suggest the whole language program produces as good or better results on measures of achievement of literacy skills. The review of literature discusses the whole language approach which is a philosophy of learning and teaching with a broad and multidisciplinary research base. Learning is social, requiring risk-taking and experimentation of learners who are actively engaged in experiences involving real purposes. A whole language program is a child-centered, and integrated curriculum which presents reading as a holistic activity building upon literacy awareness that children already have when they come to school.

Addressed in the review of the literature are the components of the whole language approach. Parent involvement was determined to be important. The whole language program which incorporates a theory about language and language development recognizes ways parents can read to their children at home. Activities include shared reading experiences, guided reading experiences,
literature experiences, independent reading activities, and daily writing experiences. Results of cited research studies indicate the use of shared reading experiences as a vehicle for facilitating letter/sound acquisition, phonics acquisition, book handling concept acquisition, and concepts of print acquisition is beneficial. The components of the whole language program include attention to an environment rich with print and materials used to foster attainment of literacy. Important to this approach is the integration of curriculum and ongoing authentic assessment of students.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children’s guidelines for developmentally appropriate programs (age appropriate, individually appropriate, based on the knowledge of how young children learn) are used to determine whether the whole language program contains appropriate criteria. Related literature indicates the whole language approach research base includes theories from the areas of child development and language development. The whole language approach expects its program to evolve from how children learn best and how children develop and learn language. Its prime consideration is for
the development of speaking, listening, reading, and writing to be experienced concurrently in an integrated and natural manner with respect for each child's stage of development.

The benefits of a whole language program are discussed in relation to the fostering of emerging literacy. The review of the literature presents the following benefits. Whole language:

1. allows language to develop in an integrated manner through meaningful literacy experiences;

2. allows children to learn from the whole to parts for the development of meaning;

3. takes into account accumulated literacy awareness;

4. encourages risk-taking;

5. encourages student taking responsibility for learning;

6. fosters social interaction; and

7. fosters positive attitudes towards reading.
The review of the literature points out that problems involved with teaching a whole language approach program mainly relate to people rather than components of the program. Problems are:

1. the need for teacher understanding of the whole language approach, teacher self-evaluation of educational beliefs, and teacher acceptance of basic whole language approach assumptions;

2. the need for teacher and administrator acceptance of a new form of accountability based on authentic ongoing observation and assessment;

3. the need for parents to be informed and knowledgeable about the whole language program to provide support for their child's education; and

4. the need for teachers to be resourceful in the attainment of whole language materials.

Implementation needs for the whole language approach in the kindergarten program call for teachers to become risk takers and establish personal objectives for the program based on principles of language and learning. Attention needs to be paid to the organization of program time, classroom space, needed
resources, nature of literacy demonstrations, types of student activities, teacher’s interactions with students, and ways of monitoring and assessing literacy development.

Concerns for appropriate curricula for the all-day every-day kindergarten have led educators to question the effectiveness of available programs. Early childhood authorities have put forth developmentally appropriate guidelines for evaluation of current programs. Taking into account the description of developmentally appropriate considerations found in this paper, the review of literature leads to the conclusion that the whole language approach meets the criteria.

Based on the evidence presented in the preceding chapter, implementation of a whole language approach for all-day every-day kindergarten programs constitutes a developmentally appropriate program. Because of this, the whole language program can be considered a developmentally appropriate delivery system for facilitating literacy behaviors in the all-day every-day kindergarten situation.
REFERENCES


