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Principles associated with the theory of whole language and barriers which affect its use

Sara Elizabeth Hegg
University of Northern Iowa

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Principles associated with the theory of whole language and barriers which affect its use

Abstract

There is a great need for teachers to be up-to-date in regard to theory and research in education. The exposure teachers have to new theories and practices enables them to reflect on their present teaching beliefs and methods. However, reports on research show that change in educational philosophies or procedures has not always fared well in the past and as a result new ideas are not always well received (Altwenger, Edelsky, and Flores, 1987). Indeed, change is hard, and educators often hold on to the way things are because of a fear that the change may not be positive. Educators and researchers argue that change can be a positive process and there will always be a need for change because of our ever changing society and the demands made on our educational system (Csikszentmihalyi and McCormack, 1986; Shanker, 1986). In addition, advocates of change cannot make people do what they want them to do; they can only establish the conditions which encourage certain behaviors (Clark, 1987). Change may occur in education if teachers understand the new theories and views they find in research and are allowed to pursue these theories in their classrooms.

PRINCIPLES ASSOCIATED WITH THE THEORY OF WHOLE LANGUAGE
AND BARRIERS WHICH AFFECT ITS USE

A Research Paper
Submitted to
The Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts in Education

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
Sara Elizabeth Hegg
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Ned Ratekin

July 15, 1988
Date Approved

Director of Research Paper

Ned Ratekin

July 15, 1988
Date Approved

Graduate Faculty Advisor

Sharon Arthur Moore

July 15, 1988
Date Approved

Graduate Faculty Reader

Greg Stefanich

July 18, 1988
Date Approved

Head, Department of
Curriculum & Instruction

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Principles of Whole Language	2
	Barriers of Whole Language	6
	Purpose	8
II.	DESCRIPTION OF PRINCIPLES & BARRIERS	10
	Principle #1: Language is for making meaning	10
	Barriers to Principle #1	12
	Principle #2: The Cuing Systems	17
	Barriers to Principle #2	19
	Principle #3: Key factors of reading lie in the child and his interaction with information-providing adults	22
	Barriers to Principle #3	24
	Principle #4: Assessment is based on naturalistic observation and on documenting growth	26
	Barriers to Principle #4	27
III.	RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	29
	Reommendations	29
	Conclusion	30
	REFERENCES	33

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is a great need for teachers to be up-to-date in regard to theory and research in education. The exposure teachers have to new theories and practices enables them to reflect on their present teaching beliefs and methods. However, reports on research show that change in educational philosophies or procedures has not always fared well in the past and as a result new ideas are not always well received (Altwerger, Edelsky, and Flores, 1987). Indeed, change is hard, and educators often hold on to the way things are because of a fear that the change may not be positive. Educators and researchers argue that change can be a positive process and there will always be a need for change because of our ever changing society and the demands made on our educational system (Csikszentmihalyi and McCormack, 1986; Shanker, 1986). In addition, advocates of change cannot make people do what they want them to do; they can only establish the conditions which encourage certain behaviors (Clark, 1987). Change may occur in education if teachers understand the new theories and views they find in research and are allowed to pursue these theories in their classrooms.

In the area of reading education, a new theory commanding considerable attention is labeled by the term whole language. This theory to teaching in the language

arts is making gains in respect to its contribution to the reading process. Whole language, when understood and applied, will provoke change in the reading classroom, a change that could promote success and excitement for both teachers and students. Despite its promise, application of this view is subject to a characteristic resistance to change, the purpose of this paper is to identify some of the barriers to changes required by the whole language approach and to indicate means to overcome those barriers.

Principles of Whole Language

Whole language is a perspective or set of beliefs concerning language acquisition and the reading process. It maintains that we acquire language by using it and not by separating elements of language until they are assembled into a totality and then finally used. To establish a basis for understanding the theory, the following four principles involved with whole language will be analyzed: (1) language is for making meanings and for accomplishing purposes; (2) the cuing systems of language (specifically semantics, syntax, and graphophonics) are used simultaneously (Altwerger, Edelsky and Flores, 1987); (3) key factors of reading lie in the child's interactions with information-providing adults as well as with meaningful literature (Smith and Goodman, 1971); (4) assessment is focused on naturalistic observations (Goodman, 1987) and on documenting

growth in children's actual work rather than on comparing scores.

The preceding principles are not separate units in the understanding of the whole language theory. They work together to form a system that uses language and makes meaning in the reading process. Descriptions of these principles can aid in the understanding of what is involved in the whole language theory.

The first principle, language is for making meanings and accomplishing purposes, means that language is a tool we use to make meaning of those things that surround us (Smith, 1983). By enriching the climate of the classroom students can and will develop their use of language. Providing meaningful and purposeful literature, discussions, and examples will allow children to use what rules they know about language and to develop these rules accordingly. Meaning is not a concept which we can teach children, but something which they can construct by using pre-existing knowledge of a situation with the new information provided. With respect to reading, students use what they know about language, and set a purpose from which meaning is constructed.

As implied, reading is not so much a word or decoding activity as it is a search for meaning. Furthermore, to discover the meaning authors are attempting to convey, effective readers appropriately and simultaneously integrate

information from three major sources: semantics, syntactics, and graphophonics (Smith and Goodman, 1971).

A description of these systems provides further insight into the second principle, the cuing systems of language (specifically semantics, syntactics, and graphophonics). The semantic system involves the learner and the knowledge he/she has acquired about the world. That is, the student can verbally communicate about information he already possesses and can use this information to make reading possible. The print which a reader confronts often activates the information the reader already knows and the pre-existing knowledge gives several clues to the reader (Smith, 1973). The syntactic system acknowledges that the readers possess considerable syntactic or grammatical information and they use the available information to aid in their attempts to gain meaning from print. Readers may not be able to talk about language using grammatical terminology, but they know the rules (Tadlock, 1986). The graphemic or letter sound system is heavily emphasized with early readers. It is a difficult system to learn when taught exclusively. For effective use of this system, the reader must integrate it with the use of syntax and semantics. Knowing when and how to draw cues from each of the available cue systems is the key essential reading system (Tadlock, 1986).

The whole language theory stresses the importance of integrating these cuing systems. To help children accomplish this, teachers must engage children with authentic texts and in authentic reading and writing. The structure of the whole language theory insists that students become skilled language users and not just learn language skills (Altwerger, Edelsky and Flores, 1987). Attention can now be given to the third principle, key factors of reading lie in the child's interactions with information-providing adults as well as with meaningful literature. This principle recognizes the whole language teacher as a facilitator and guide to helping students construct meaning. Assistance is made by providing meaningful information and high-interest literature. Smith and Goodman, (1971), contend that the information or literature should offer the student the opportunity to examine a large sample of language, to generate hypotheses about the regularities underlying it, and to test and modify these hypotheses on the basis of feedback that is appropriate to the unspoken rules that he/she happens to be testing. Smith and Goodman, (1971), also suggest that before entering school, a child is already programmed to learn to read and needs written material that is both interesting and comprehensible. Use of the materials can be effective if teachers view the reading process as one which develops a reader as a user of language and guides the child through this experience of language.

The whole language theory perceives the role of the teacher as a guide or facilitator and this view is highly associated with the fourth principle, assessment is focused on naturalistic observations (Goodman, 1987) and on documenting growth in children's actual work rather than on comparing scores. Goodman (1987) points out that although textbook publishers may know children in general- teachers know their students' likes and dislikes, where they are in skill development, and their strengths and weaknesses. He extends this issue further by insisting that teachers organize a classroom in which they are the professionals in charge, and are directed only by the strengths, needs, and abilities of their students. In other words, discretion and judgment are essential elements of teaching and professionalism, and these elements do not appear to be present in modern classrooms.

Barriers to Whole Language

The major portion of this paper focuses on identifying and describing four principles associated with the whole language theory. Implementing this theory and its principles will produce some change in a classroom and barriers will surface during change. Research indicates that those barriers most evident in restricting the employment of the whole language theory appear to be: (1) the dominance of the basal reading programs; (2) expectations of school administrators; and (3) competency

levels of teachers. Concern for these barriers among teachers appears to greatly influence their role in our present classroom.

Although these barriers can be described individually, it is important to note that they can interact and affect one another. The first barrier, basal reading programs, has dominated classroom instruction for many years. The role of the teacher has become more like that of a manager of preset lessons, questions and activities. Materials are based on the theory of reading that emphasizes the sequential acquisition of hundreds of skills within the framework of a management system that determines pupil placement and assignments (Woodward, 1986). This system often conveys an image that teachers are incapable of being creative and unable to use judgement to make decisions concerning the procedures and practices in their classrooms. The excessive use of basals in our curriculums restricts teachers from teaching and reduces them to feeders of information.

The use of basal readers by teachers appears to be highly encouraged by administrators, and often schedules are made to fully implement each step and stage of the reading series (Woodward, 1986). This expectation supports another barrier which teachers may encounter when pursuing the use of the whole language theory, the expectations of school administrators. In a 1982 study by Shannon, 77% of the teachers participating reported that they would not be

allowed to teach reading without basal readers and worksheets. By using the basal text as basis for instruction, teachers feel they meet the expectations of administrators. Accountability in reading usually involves setting specific goals and then progressing toward them; however, these goals are often reduced to scores on standardized tests. Concern is more often given to identifying the level of reading competency of a student rather than developing the students love and pleasure of reading.

While attention is more often and easily given to the influence of basal reading programs and expectations of school administrators and districts, the competency level of teachers can not be overlooked as a barrier to the whole language theory. Insight into the educational preparation and the history influencing the competency level of teachers will be examined in more detail in order to understand how this barrier affects the whole language theory.

Purpose

This paper will explore the relationship between the whole language theory and those barriers which prevail in the pursuit for its understanding and freedom to practice. It will focus on the understanding of the whole language theory and those principles upon which it is based. Further examination of three barriers which tend to deter the

practice of whole language and consideration of factors which will aid in overcoming these barriers will be pursued.

CHAPTER II

DESCRIPTIONS OF PRINCIPLES AND BARRIERS

In order to recognize a relationship among the principles of whole language and the existing barriers, it is necessary to establish a foundation for what constitutes these principles and their opposing barriers. Each principle will be described so that a distinct understanding of its role in whole language can be determined. In addition, each description will be followed by the barrier(s) which interfere with a particular principle.

Principle #1: Language is for making meaning

An analysis of the first principle, language is for making meaning, involves the process by which children learn to read. It is assumed that almost all children learn to speak before they learn to read, therefore demonstrating that they have the ability to learn language skills (Smith, 1982). Spoken language is not developed by children based on rules that adults feed to the readers. The way spoken and printed language is comprehended is by having meaning brought to it. Therefore, the reading situation is similar to the language situation in that what readers bring to their reading in terms of experience, knowledge, skills, and motivation is essential to the reading development and performance.

In order to understand how language is comprehended, Smith (1982) explores two levels of language. The first

level is the surface structure and refers to all observable characteristics of language that are in the world around us. Surface structure is the visual information of written language, that is the part of language accessible to the brain through the ears and eyes. In contrast to surface structure, the meaning of language, whether written or spoken can be referred to as deep structure. The meanings which are inferred lie in the minds of the users of language, whether it be the speaker, writer, listener, or reader.

This meaning, provided by the users of language, is brought to language through prediction, which means the prior elimination of unlikely alternatives (Smith, 1982). Readers or listeners are able to limit the uncertainties they confront to a few probable alternatives, thus predicting what information is necessary in order to grasp the meaning being conveyed. When deciding how letters go together in words, and how words go together in meaningful and grammatical sequence, the reader or listener will use his/her prior knowledge to eliminate unlikely alternatives, and thus reduce his/her dependence upon visual information. The ability to predict and use the needed surface structure or the visual information, with the deep structure or nonvisual information, allows the reader or listener to make sense of the information, provided the information is relevant to the situation. Therefore, the reader or

listener has constructed a set of rules which enable him/her to translate the surface structure into meaning. Proficient readers learn that by establishing relationships between what they already know and the new information they encounter in their environment, they can successfully make predictions and grasp a clearer understanding of the language (Tadlock, 1986).

Realizing that prior knowledge or existing background, is essential in gaining meaning from written or spoken language should provoke teachers to create a climate in their classrooms that stimulates prior knowledge and provides background for encountering new experiences. A climate which reflects a premise of the whole language theory that language is for making meaning and accomplishing purposes would be one in which a variety of literature and information is available to the reader in order to confirm background knowledge and stimulate new experiences, teachers who encourage the use of prior knowledge by students to generate predictions and test new information, and teachers who understand the process and are willing to take this understanding into their classrooms.

Barriers to Principle #1

In the attempt to integrate into the classroom the principle that language is for making meanings and accomplishing purposes, barriers such as teacher competency and basal reading programs exist. With regard to teacher

competency, consideration is given to the educational preparation and historical influence which prevail within this barrier.

Teacher Competency Levels

According to Wassermann (1987), the educational preparation of teachers affects the quality of teaching that filters into our classrooms and therefore it requires constant examination. Wassermann contends that preservice teachers need to be exposed to experiences which enable them to practice and develop what they have learned in their educational studies. The concern has stimulated a training program at her university which enables the college student to make the connections between ideas or theories and their classroom application. One specific observation she has made in this training program, and appears to be more relevant in regard to the principle discussed in this section, is the need for interface of theory and practice. Here emphasis in the program provides students with the understanding of educational theories as well as the practice in translating theory into teaching strategies. This observation demands many hours of practice, monitoring and reflecting between the teacher-to-be and the college instructor. These practices are monitored until student performance meets competent standards established by the program.

Teacher education more traditionally has provided student application of theory through student-teacher apprenticeship. This practice teaching enables the student to be actively involved in the teaching duties, however risks do appear in the process. These risks may include working with one teacher and thus receiving a limited view of teaching techniques and being matched with a teacher possessing a different conception of the teaching and learning process. In addition to these risks, preservice teachers are often limited to decision-making processes which could deny them the need to compare, analyze, and select from possibilities involved in the teaching process (Lortie, 1975), as well as feeling the pressures to sink or swim in order to survive the student teaching experience and as a result restricting their ideas or strategies to those of the supervising teacher. This one-shot, very short experience into the teaching profession often does not enable the preservice teacher to reflect on the theories they were taught in education classes and adequately apply them to the teaching situation. Limited time discourages needed feedback from supervisors as to the understanding of what is being taught and why it is important in a particular situation.

Teacher competency is affected by historical influences as well as educational preparation. Lortie (1975) has identified three dominant characteristics of teaching:

presentism, conservatism, and autonomy. These characteristics are similar in that they reflect the resistance to change among many teachers.

Presentism implies that the work and responsibility of teaching essentially remains the same throughout a teaching career (Lortie, 1975). Patterns have developed over many years where men in the teaching field have not looked at teaching as a career and where women have felt limited in other professional options. The cycle of this pattern could broaden further by stipulating that by the late 1980's or 1990's women will be looking at teaching not as a career, but as a step for future career developments. Implications for these assumptions reflect that attitudes and efforts made by some teachers will fall short of the expectations demanded in the area of education.

Conservatism refers to the remarkably unchanging patterns of teaching behavior and classroom strategies that describe the profession over time and geography (Lortie, 1975). Lortie maintains that responsibility for this conservatism lies in the very limited body of shared knowledge regarding effective teaching practices. As implied earlier in this paper, the student teaching experience quickly assimilates the norms and behaviors associated with survival in the classroom. The very narrow role that student teaching plays is reinforced when new teachers, having received limited models of teaching, are

cast into an isolated structured classroom. Behaviors and classroom strategies of the new teachers are influenced by the social contact of those "tenure" teachers in the school structure.

Autonomy refers to the structure and environment of schools as having isolated classrooms with little expected interaction among teachers (Lortie, 1975). The classroom teacher is the one in authority behind closed doors. Little effort and time is made to exchange ideas and theories regarding classroom procedures and practices resulting in isolation among teaching and teachers.

Basal Reading Program

Another barrier found in the classrooms and influencing the employment of the principle that language is for making meaning and accomplishing purposes is the very dominant use of the basal reader. With respect to this principle and the basal reader, attention is directed to the irrelevant information available in a basal text. The information provided is presented as a separate unit and is rarely preceded by any attempt to generate the students background experiences.

Pearson (1985) examined comprehension in relation to the questions presented in teachers manuals. His observations showed that the questions found in manuals represented a barrage of questions that did not cohere. They did not form a line of questions to children through the

main crises and events of a story enabling them to build their own coherent representation of its meaning. Pearson suggests that guided reading questions need to focus on the flow of the story, that is, problems, rather than limiting the response to literal, detailed questions.

The concern given for appropriate questioning in basal text enables teachers to regard the text with caution. No longer can we think of comprehension as passive, receptive, and text-based. No longer can we think of meaning as residing "in the text" (p. 734). Instead we must regard each and every text students read as a blue-print to guide them in building their own model of what the text means (Pearson, 1985).

Principle #2: Cuing Systems of Language

The second principle involved with the whole language theory focuses on the use and integration of three cuing systems: semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic. Proficient readers continuously integrate information from these cuing systems. They draw primarily from semantic and syntactic systems in order to predict what the next word will be. Fluent readers use the graphophonic system to confirm or reject those predictions. When semantic and syntactic information available to the reader is insufficient for predictive behavior, a fluent reader can call upon the graphophonic system for additional help (Tadlock, 1986). Non-fluent readers struggle to match letters and sounds

which results in making little sense of what they read. Teachers need to help students realize that reading requires not so much skill, as it does strategies that make it possible to select the most productive cues.

The cuing system of semantics focuses on how much background the reader brings to the specific reading. In order to derive meaning from language, the language user must be able to provide semantic input (Goodman, 1970), that is, readers use the experiences and background they have for the meaning of the word(s) and integrate them during the reading process so that sense can be made from what they are reading. It is impossible to identify the sounds of language without syntactic or semantics when readers are expected to identify isolated words and without their use it makes the task difficult. With respect to the whole language theory, the most basic reason why the reading process cannot be fragmented is that the reader does not use all the information available. The reader picks and chooses from the available information only enough to select and predict a language structure which is decodable (Smith, 1983).

As indicated in this paper, the syntactic cuing system along with the semantic cuing system are the basis for predicting new words. Since readers already possess syntactic or grammatical information before they read, much of the meaning is already established. The deep structure

of written or oral language is essentially the same and the reader seeks to infer the deep structure as he reads so that he may arrive at meaning. Smith (1982) suggests that in language and reading, grammar depends on the meaning, that it does not reveal the meaning, but that meaning must precede grammatical analysis.

The whole language theory argues the relevance and effectiveness of teaching graphophonics independently, but maintains its justification depending on how much syntactic and semantic information is available. Goodman (1970) recognizes that readers respond to graphic sequences and may utilize the correspondences between the graphic and phonological systems in his/her English dialect. This operation is not based on a phoneme-grapheme relationships but more on the morpho-phonemic level, spelling patterns related to sound sequence. Within specific reading situations, specifically highly contextual, an initial consonant may be all that is needed to identify a word and make prediction possible.

Barriers to Principle #2

Basal Reading Programs

Incorporating the use of these cuing systems in the classroom remains difficult because of barriers such as the basal reading program and school administrators expectations. The influence of basal readers limits the effectiveness of these cuing systems. The basal readers in

their attempt to identify aspects of the reading process consequently stress that skills be introduced and learned as separate identifiable units. Minimal effort is given to identify students abilities to use semantic, syntactic or graphophonic cuing systems. The overemphasis on skill instruction limits the use of these reading strategies and can often distract successful use of these strategies.

Implications have been made concerning the primary use of syntactic and semantic cuing systems for successful reading performances. However, the content in reading basals are heavily skill oriented and in the lower grades they are especially phonics based. This method of presenting phonics through a bottom-up process encourages the translation of graphic information to form words (Harris and Sipay, 1980). Analytic students who master the bottom-up process of attacking new words will find that they are overburdened with the amount of decoding required. Students who have developed a learning style which centers around using semantic and syntactic cuing strategies will struggle and become frustrated in the phonics approach. Their needs for success in reading are unfulfilled. Carbo (1987) recognizes that most students benefit from a limited amount of "useful" and "sensible" phonics instruction - provided that the focus of the reading program is on meaning and comprehension. If basal reading programs continue in our classrooms, more effort will have to be made by teachers to

integrate the semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic systems into lessons which assist in the development of the students reading strategies.

Expectations of School Administrators

The use of basal readers constitutes as much as 75% of classroom time (Goldstein, 1978), and basal reading textbooks are used for instruction in more than 90% of all elementary classrooms (Durkin, 1984). The dominant use of basal readers may be presented by teachers, but is encouraged and expected by school administrators. This barrier in regards to the principle of integrating the cuing systems focuses on the attitude of the school administrators pressures to account for mastery of skills in the basal textbooks.

Red and Shainline (1987) conducted a staff development program which included discussions of current research on reading theory with teachers from school districts in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Teachers were asked to record in journals their reactions to articles and any feelings they had about using the theories in the classrooms. Reactions were similar in regard to pressures by administrators. One teacher's response supported these feelings, "the district is putting on the pressure to raise those test scores - to isolate skills, to drill our children, to prepare them for standardized test - and then turns around and puts out curriculum guides and implements programs that promote

holistic education" (p. 39). This conflict appears to be inevitable, teachers feel the need to implement instruction that is more meaningful and relevant to developing reading performance, but feel restricted to direct instruction and practice to isolated skills for purposes of recognizing them on standardized tests. Attempts to digress from administrative expectations are suppressed.

The attitude that standardized test scores are the only legitimate measure of a successful reading program plays an important part in setting the climate surrounding reading instruction (Winograd and Smith, 1987). This attitude keeps teachers from incorporating new theories and exploring more important aspects of reading. It is one of the attitudes that must be changed if there is to be improvement in reading instruction.

Principle #3: Key Factors of Reading Lie in the Child and His Interaction With Information-Providing Adults

Further analysis of the teachers role in the theory of whole language is found in the third principle, key factors of reading lie in the child's interactions with information-providing adults as well as with meaningful literature. Whole language highlights how teachers can intervene and fine-tune the interaction. Whole-language teachers are likely to actively participate as co-learners and to construct meaning together with students rather than to simply facilitate (Altwerger, Edelsky, and Flores, 1987).

These teachers often act like coaches, demonstrating and explaining so children can more effectively develop their own writing, drama, or science projects. Practice includes participating in a community of readers during small group literature study, peer writing workshops, group social studies projects with built-in plans for collaborative learning.

Whole language acknowledges the skill and intuition of teachers as critical. Students read best when they can choose what they read and when teachers help them match stories, articles, novels, and other print to their interests and experiences (Goodman, 1987). Whole language focuses on high-interest children's literature and uses holistic instruction. Carbo (1987) contends that young children tend to be strongly global in reading style and thus would learn well with holistic methods that are reinforced by many visuals. She also suggests that by third grade many children may become more analytic, but before this children with analytic reading styles are likely to be in the minority.

In as much as whole language acknowledges the critical role played by teachers, this theory maintains that children have instinctive skills that enable them to organize and acquire new information (Smith, 1982). What is important to realize is that the teachers' understanding of this process and their willingness to be facilitators of relevant and

appropriate materials is essential in the continued development of the students learning. Tadlock (1986) recognizes that teachers cannot know exactly what a student already knows, nor can they know the exact nature of the relationships a beginning reader will establish between and among the available cuing systems. Fortunately, the teacher doesn't need to know. According to Tadlock (1986) "the learner is totally capable of using his/her marvelous brain to do whatever needs to be done to learn" (p. 187). The teacher's role becomes one of creating an environment which integrates useful, available information simultaneously in the reading process. Providing partial information, one skill or concept at a time, does not facilitate learning.

Barriers to Principle #3

Whole language stresses that instruction should be relevant to the child and based on the child's needs. Teachers often find this difficult due to the demands of directed basal reading programs and lack of confidence in their competency to base instruction on their own skills and intuition. These two barriers prohibit the application of the principle that key factors of reading lie in the child's interactions with information-providing adults. The overemphasis on skills instruction represented in the basal reader limits the kind of reading that students could and should be encountering in school, that is reading performed for the sheer pleasure of the experience itself.

Basal Reading Programs

Basals supply teachers with a manual, student books, workbooks, and a collection of tests, assuming that these elements will be adequate for the requirements in reading instruction. Sequence of skills, prepared sets of questions and statements are provided in order to assure for fail proof and fool proof reading instruction. Observations of teachers both experienced and less experienced were made by Woodward (1986). He found that many teachers followed the textbooks word for word, that most lessons followed the lesson plan prescribed in the teacher's guide, and few activities or supplementary materials were suggested in the guide. Unfortunately, these characteristics are too often implemented into reading instruction, rarely allowing for spontaneous activities or ideas from the teacher's own knowledge or skills.

Teacher Competency Levels

Why would teachers allow the materials to be the managers of their teaching? For many a lack of confidence in their own competency of knowledge and skills has developed in many teachers. They are assigned a basal reader which clearly informs them that the success in reading will take place if they follow the system of lesson plans, skills, and testing procedures. An image is created by teachers that they are incapable of creating lessons, inferring the answers to student questions or of knowing

what to say in class (Woodward, 1986). It appears that discretion and judgment of teachers have lost their value in the professionalism of teaching and have found little place in teaching lessons. From these assumptions and observations, teacher satisfaction cannot be positive and confidence to practice new theories and approaches may only be frustrating. Teachers and administrators need to recognize that it is the teacher who generates knowledge and provides guidance in learning and not the materials.

Principle #4: Assessment is Based on Naturalistic
Observation and Documenting Growth

According to Smith (1982) teachers should be familiar with instructional methods, programs, and techniques, but they should not rely on any method. Instruction and assessment comes from the experiences and skills of the classroom teachers. Deciding how and when to use particular materials and techniques with particular children at particular times, requires the knowledge and understanding of the teacher (Smith, 1982). This perspective of the whole language theory is reflected in the fourth principle, assessment is focused on naturalistic observation and on documenting growth in childrens actual work rather than on comparing scores.

The teachers role is again a critical one when assessing the growth of a child's reading. The judgement and discretion of the teacher is the basis for documenting

the understanding or confusion in a child's learning. Smith, (1982), recognizes that no one is in a better position than a teacher to identify a particular child's needs or interests or difficulties at a particular time. Teachers should be able to tell if a child has made progress in reading or if they are experiencing difficulty.

Through discussions, retelling of stories, and listening to children read, teachers can monitor the utilization of reading strategies and learning styles of their students. Tadlock, (1986), recommends that teachers assess childrens reading by listening to and analyzing their miscues while oral reading. This allows teachers to note what cuing systems readers are using and how they are integrating them in the reading process. Smith, (1982), insists that children will discover on their own which mistakes make a difference in their understanding and will make adjustments for the mistakes. The teacher does not need to be there to point out errors, but rather to guide students in recognizing that meaning is not taking place and helping the reader search for more effective alternatives.

Barriers to Principle #4

Expectations of School Administrators

While the whole language theory encourages naturalistic observation and on documenting growth in childrens actual work, school administrators' expectations may interfere with assessment in these terms. School administrators

expectations become a barrier as accountability of test scores are used to indicate students abilities and teaching objectives. As Smith (1982) contends, tests are primarily an administrative convenience. They are derived and administered for a variety of bureaucratic and political reasons to classify children and to evaluate teachers. Instruction becomes based on the standards and objectives to be presented in the test. Whole-language educators argue that standardized tests fail to test what the test themselves are claiming to be testing, that is, they are invalid (Altwerger, Edelsky, and Flores, 1987). This implication leads to inconsistencies among what teachers believe they are using to base the assessment of the students progress in reading and what actually is being measured. These tests tend to measure how well students have been able to make sense of the formal reading instruction they received and little indication as to what factors are influencing their success in learning.

CHAPTER III
RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Recommendations

There are factors which aid in overcoming barriers such as the basal reading program, teacher competency level, and administrative expectations. Through the understanding of the whole language theory and those barriers which deter its development, there are implications which add hope to this theory playing a more active role in the field of education.

According to Goodman (1987), teachers are encouraged to set the basal readers aside and utilize high-interest literature; find as many ways as possible to get students involved in reading all sorts of books and other print; keep students focused on the meaning of what they read; and support risk-taking. Smith (1985), maintains that teachers can make learning to read easier by supplying meaningful, enjoyable, and useful materials. Encourage students to bring in their own books from home; share their favorite authors or topics through skits or bulletin board displays; develop conference time to keep track of independent readers. Help them experience opportunities which produce success in their learning.

Although the role of an administrator features many characteristics, the whole language theory encourages that they establish a more active role in knowing what teachers

are doing, by providing assistance and encouragement, and feedback to teachers. Principals especially need to give feedback and support for effort and risk-taking. It is essential that administrators trust the judgement and discretion of teachers in their school districts, in contrast to the standardized tests they traditionally rely on to evaluate progress in their curriculum.

In addition to the preceding recommendations, teachers will need to accept more responsibility for being facilitators who serve as guides in assisting their students in developing pre-existing and new knowledge. They should create a climate in their classroom that reflects an attitude of risk-free opportunities. Teachers will need to take charge of their teaching, using the basal reader as a guide for ideas, and supplying materials which are motivating and generate interest. Finally, teachers are encouraged to keep up-to-date on current research that introduces them to new theories and practices in their field.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explore the whole language theory and the barriers which interfere with its development in the classroom. The study of four principles and the barriers which exist in each, has attempted to consider the possibilities available to teachers in

understanding the principles and factors which they will need to consider in pursuing the theory of whole language.

Teachers should realize that they play a critical role in the learning process of their students, but that they are not the sole providers in their students' success. The whole language theory recognizes the ability within children to acquire instinctively much of the information surrounding them. Through accessible, meaningful information they will organize and find meaning in the new experiences.

If the whole language theory is to make significant gains inside the classroom, teachers will need to have a clear understanding of what whole language is, a belief that language is for making meaning; the cuing system of semantics, syntactics, and graphonics are used simultaneously; the key factors of reading lie in children and their interactions with information-providing adults as well as with meaningful literature. Assessment is based on naturalistic observation and documenting growth in childrens' actual work rather than on comparing scores on standardized tests. Newman (1985) recognizes the importance of understanding the whole language theory. She contends that the more we learn about language, about how children learn and function as language users, the better able we will be to develop and implement a curriculum which supports the children's learning efforts. Teachers will need confidence in their knowledge to employ this theory, along

with the support and professional freedom from their administrators.

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