

1993

Promoting emergent literacy skills in developmental preschool

Angela Lickhart
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1993 Angela Lickhart

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lickhart, Angela, "Promoting emergent literacy skills in developmental preschool" (1993). *Graduate Research Papers*. 2804.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/2804>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

Promoting emergent literacy skills in developmental preschool

Abstract

The perception of what it means to be literate has long defined the type of reading instruction presented to children. Our society has valued the ability to read and write, although different eras have had emphasis placed on different aspects of these skills. As a result, we have followed different methodologies in teaching literacy throughout [sic] our history (Shannon, 1989).

**PROMOTING EMERGENT LITERACY SKILLS IN
DEVELOPMENTAL PRESCHOOL**

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Angela Lickhart

July, 1993

This Research Paper by: Angela Lickhart
Entitled: Promoting emergent literacy skills
in developmental preschool
has been approved as meeting the research
requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in
Education.

Charles R. May

July 10, 1993
Date Approved

Director of Research Paper

Charles R. May

July 10, 1993
Date Approved

Graduate Faculty Advisor

Marvin Heller

July 14, 1993
Date Approved

Graduate Faculty Reader

Peggy Ishler

July 14, 1993
Date Approved

Head, Department of
Curriculum and Instruction

Table of Contents

| Title | Page |
|---|------|
| Introduction..... | 3 |
| Purpose of the Study..... | 8 |
| Need for the Study..... | 9 |
| Definitions..... | 10 |
| Review of Literature..... | 12 |
| The Environment..... | 14 |
| Teacher Directed Activities..... | 19 |
| Promoting Literacy Development in Developmental Preschool..... | 24 |
| Obstacles to Change..... | 28 |
| Summary and Conclusions..... | 33 |
| References..... | 36 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The perception of what it means to be literate has long defined the type of reading instruction presented to children. Our society has valued the ability to read and write, although different eras have had emphasis placed on different aspects of these skills. As a result, we have followed different methodologies in teaching literacy throughout our history (Shannon, 1989).

In Colonial America the primary purpose in becoming literate was to enable people to read the Bible. The Bible was considered the only legitimate source of both knowledge and morality, so reading was the only skill required for a person to be considered literate. According to Spodek (1988) children were expected to begin formal reading instruction by the age of three or four, with instruction initially given by the father at home.

Kintgen (1988) referred to this as the recitation stage of literacy. Upon entering school, Colonial children read and memorized verses from the Bible. This involved either choral response or independent practice followed by recitation in front of the head master.

The first half of the 19th century saw a shift away from a recitation

method to the spelling method. Spelling was viewed as the necessary prerequisite to reading.

. . . students learned the names of letters (lower case, capital, and italic), spelled and pronounced lists of two- and three-letter nonsense syllables, and then spelled and pronounced lists of words of various lengths before they began to read orally. In Webster's American Spelling Book, the most popular spelling method textbook of this time, reading of sentences did not begin until page 101. (Shannon, 1989, p. 6).

By the second half of the 19th century, the spelling method was replaced by the study of pronunciation, or phonics. The phonics method stressed that children were taught the recognition of the alphabet, pronunciation of words, and then the utilization of words in simple sentences. These sentences were gradually made more complex. This instructional format was to remain essentially unchanged for the next 100 years. What did change through the years was the delivery model.

At the beginning of the 20th century, several social movements came together which created a climate for the development of basal reading materials. First, Americans were enamoured with products that were becoming available to them as a result of industrialization (Shannon, 1989). Industrial tycoons were venerated for their "sound business principles" and ways were sought to apply these principles to other

arenas. Secondly, scientific technology was considered to be one of the underpinnings of industrial production. If business could become more profitable using scientific advances, then, it was reasoned, that education could surely be improved by redesigning instruction using scientific methods. A third factor was the rise of the new academic discipline of psychology. "American educational psychology found its most influential and proactive voice in Edward L. Thorndike. Thorndike accepted the views of Frank Ward and William James, arguing that 'schools ought to intervene in the natural development of individuals to avoid past problems and to make learning more efficient.'" (Shannon, 1989 p. 18). Thorndike's experiments led to many accepted notions of education, among them the concept of "readiness" and the necessity for specific training for desired goals.

Although it was envisioned as making a difference in student accomplishment, scientific reading instruction was found difficult to implement in the typical classroom in the 1920's (Shannon, 1989). Many elementary teachers were poorly educated and relied heavily on textbooks for instruction. To enable these teachers to use the new scientific methods, teacher guidebooks were designed. These manuals provided specific information for each lesson, a means for assessing

student comprehension, and information for each teacher about reading instruction. "Promoted as the results of scientific study, basal materials promised that all children would learn to read well if teachers and students would simply follow the directions supplied in teacher's guidebooks (Shannon, 1989, p. 27).

Writing too, although seen as a separate and distinct category from reading, followed an evolutionary course. During the Colonial period, writing, for all but the most educated, consisted of being able to write one's name. In the 19th century, writing instruction consisted of exercises in utilizing the pen and copying words and passages. Even now the use of writing tools in early childhood programs has typically been limited to copying letter and number forms, and writing one's name. "Literature reveals that the basic approach of educators toward the teaching of writing has been on the wrong thing. Teachers have historically stressed handwriting, the formation of letters, spelling (correctly), and the position of words (on a straight line, words not running together). Content has been neglected" (Deshazo-Hyde, 1990, p. 13).

Although this evolution of educational practices in teaching reading and writing appeared to find favor with both school systems and the

public, there have been some dissenting opinions. As early as 1875, Colonel Francis Parker, in an attempt to re-organize the Quincy, Massachusetts school district, proposed that language arts should be integrated into activities that reflected children's daily experiences (Shannon, 1989). In 1938 and 1939 Claude Boney, superintendent of schools in New Jersey, expressed dissatisfaction with basal readers and criticized their continued use (Shannon, 1990). William D. Sheldon, in his book Influences Upon Reading Instruction in the United States (1961) opposed teaching kindergarten children to read via a formal instruction program. Rather, he felt that five-year-olds should be engaged in the following types of activities:

1. Listening while teachers read or tell exciting stories.
2. Browsing through picture books found on the library table.
3. Telling newly learned stories to other children, stimulated perhaps by picture-story sequences or through listening to stories told or read by the teacher.
4. Working with finger paints or at the easel and then relating with great gusto the story of the painting.
5. Tape recording a favorite song, rhyme, or story that will be played when Mother visits the room.
6. Dramatizing one of the wonderful stories learned during this period.
7. Making a boat with a hammer and saw at the work bench and then describing it to the class. (Sheldon, 1961, p. 37).

Sheldon's suggestions foreshadowed the types of activities that are deemed appropriate for helping young children to become literate today.

Currently much interest has been given to activities of this nature to foster the development of skills that the child brings with him or her to a school setting, skills that have come to be termed emergent literacy.

As concepts have changed regarding methodology in helping young children to become literate, so too, have practices changed regarding teaching young children with handicaps. Once early childhood special educators engaged in practice and drill on isolated skills in which the child had demonstrated some type of deficit. Educators now know, however, that in order for skills to be generalized, handicapped children need to be taught in a meaningful context (Bailey and Wolery, 1984). It would appear that this philosophy of teaching handicapped children functional skills in a meaningful environment is the same philosophy underlying emergent literacy.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to review and analyze the literature that describes instructional environments and methods which promote emergent literacy. To achieve this purpose, the following questions will be asked:

1. What types of activities and environments are currently considered best in promoting emergent literacy skills in early childhood classrooms?

2. How can these same activities and environments be used to promote emergent literacy in a developmental preschool setting?

Need for the Study

There has been a renewed interest in the last 15 years in finding methods that will enhance children's abilities in reading and writing. Indeed, becoming literate is one of the most important accomplishments of the early childhood years. A child's sophistication in both the understanding and use of print has far-reaching implications for later academic success. As educators it is our responsibility to provide young children with an environment that is conducive to promoting literacy skills. In order to design the best environment one needs to review the literature to determine what is currently considered best practice.

Young children with handicaps also need to develop the ability to understand and use print as much as possible. Obviously a handicapped child who is able to read and write will be far more successful academically than a handicapped child who cannot. The literature must be reviewed to determine if current best practice in fostering emergent literacy skills in a regular early childhood classroom can be applied to handicapped children in a developmental preschool setting.

Definitions of Terms

Terms used in this study will be defined to mean the following:

Developmental preschool - A multi-categorical preschool setting that typically serves children ages three to seven who have been labeled with some type of identifiable handicap.

Emergent literacy - The early stages of learning to read and write that precedes conventional literacy.

Functional - Skills that children can use in their immediate environment and are relevant to their daily activities.

Generalize - The ability to take a skill learned in one environment and use it in a similar situation in a different environment.

Inventive spelling - Also referred to as developmental spelling. This is a stage in writing development in which the young child is beginning to become aware of the necessity for using particular letters to encode words.

Literate - The ability to read and write.

Predictable books - Books containing a repetitive pattern that is easily memorized by children.

Print awareness - Children's ability to determine why people read and what people do when they read.

Reading readiness - The theory that states that there is the existence of a set of skills that is a necessary prerequisite to formal reading instruction.

Scaffolding - The vertical interactional support that adults and more skillful peers offer learners engaged in literacy experiences.

Weaving - A horizontal support system that helps children develop literacy skills from a wide variety of resources.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the document America 2000: An Education Strategy, one of the goals adopted by President George Bush and the governors in 1990 concerned literacy. This is goal number 5, which states that "Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship." (U.S. Department of Education, 1991, p. 19). It is apparent that the ability to read and to express oneself in written communication impacts not only on school performance but also on an individual's ability to participate fully in our society. Given the increased complexity of the world we live in, illiterate people, are in effect, consigned to the bottom rung of our economic system.

In order to give all children the best environment to develop literacy skills, it is essential that we reconceptualize what it means to teach young children reading and writing. Although there has been a long tradition of belief in the concept of "readiness", recent research belies many of these assumptions. There is now a large body of knowledge that gives new

insight into how children develop skills of reading and writing.

Recent research has indicated that, contrary to previous thought, children come to school with a lot of information about reading and writing. Children "are not passive vessels that remain empty until they go to school, they have already thought about the written squiggles they see on boxes, signs, the television screen, and elsewhere" (Manning, Manning, and Kamii, 1988, p. 7). The very term "emergent literacy" reflects the belief that children should be assisted in constructing and refining their ideas about print from an internal, child-centered perspective, using knowledge that they possess (Freeman and Hatch, 1989; Manning et al. 1988). This perspective moves children away from the role of recipient of adult knowledge to a much more active role in building their knowledge based on previous and current experiences (Hyde, 1990; Franklin, 1992).

Given this view of children as participants in the process of developing literacy, what should teachers do to ensure that this participation is successful? There appears to be two areas in which educators can use their skills to maximize children's development. Those areas are the following: (a) the environment the teacher creates, and (b) the specific activities used in direct teaching.

The Environment

In the past an early childhood classroom was largely devoid of visible print, with the possible exceptions of a job chart and/or calendar. The rationale behind this seemed to be that as the children were unable to read, there was no need to have print displayed (Robinson, 1991). However, the literature now suggests that one of the most critical things a teacher can do is to set up an environment that is enriched with different forms of print (Maehr, 1991; Robinson, 1991; Smith, 1989).

Environmental print takes on many forms. One of the most basic is labeling. Materials, toys, and activity centers should all be labeled. In addition to the name of the object or center, functional information can be conveyed by using print. This practice is illustrated by writing: "This center is open", or "Three children in the tent." Although initially the children will not be able to read the message, they will be gaining important knowledge about the function of print which is that print has meaning.

Children exposed to print in their daily lives will eventually begin to read, but at first this reading will be environmentally dependent (Kontos, 1986). That means it is necessary for the child to have the contextual cue in order to read words. For example, many children are able to read the

word "Stop" when they see it on a red octagonal shape, but if they are shown the same configuration of letters in a different context many students would be unable to read the word. The importance of environmental print lies in the fact that the repetition will eventually allow the assemblage of letters to take on life and meaning of their own.

According to Kontos, (1986)

"...repeated exposure to print in the environment is said to lead to the ability to recognize the print out of context. Through repetition, children reportedly lose their dependence on the environmental context surrounding the print, and instead learn to associate the meaning with the letter cues alone" (p. 61).

Another critical aspect of the environment in an early childhood classroom is the status of the book center, or library. All too often classroom libraries are located in an isolated corner of the room under the mistaken impression that children need quiet and solitude to look at books. Rather, the library should be transformed into a literacy center and be one of the main interest areas in the classroom (Akers, 1990; Fisher, 1991; Robinson, 1991; Teale and Sulzby, 1986).

The major component of the literacy center is the collection of books. A wide variety of books should be available including: fiction, informational books, poetry, nursery rhymes, books without print, magazines, predictable books, and books authored by the children. The

literacy center should also incorporate a writing table with different kinds of paper, labels, index cards, and posters. Children should have access to a wide variety of writing tools and other props, including stamps, envelopes, and typewriters.

The third area of the environment that the educator can design to enhance literacy development is play centers. "Recent research on emergent literacy has revealed dramatic play can also make important contributions to children's early reading and writing development" (Christie, 1990, p. 542). When children are given the opportunity to use literacy props in their dramatizations they often imitate literate activities that are a part of their every day experiences.

Neuman and Roskos (1990) determined that carefully defined, intimate environments seem to encourage more play involvement with preschoolers. They suggested that book shelves, screens, and tables could be used to define more sharply individual dramatic play spaces. All items within the play spaces should be labeled.

Secondly, it is essential to choose themes for the play areas that have meaning for children (Christie, 1990; Neuman and Roskos, 1990; Robinson, 1991; Teale and Sulzby, 1986). All preschool and kindergarten programs should have a housekeeping area, as domestic

play themes give children the opportunity to select roles with which they are familiar. Complimentary play themes should be located in close proximity to the housekeeping area to allow for the integration of various activities. These areas should also involve community roles that the children are familiar with, for example: post office, doctor's office, grocery store, and library.

The final step is to stock the environment with literacy props that are as authentic as possible (real telephones and telephone books rather than toys). The props should be functional, which means they are related to activities that the children would be likely to encounter in their daily lives. A running list of possible literacy props should be developed for each play area.

Once the environment is set up, the teacher needs to give consideration to her level of involvement with the play. There has been a tradition of seeing the teacher's role as merely that of facilitator. The teacher typically has set up the play situations and then intervened only when necessary. Christie (1990) has suggested that play can be enhanced by teacher involvement. "Teacher involvement has been found to assist 'nonplayers' to begin engaging in dramatic play, to help more proficient players enrich and extend their dramatizations, and to

encourage children to incorporate literacy into their play episodes" (p. 544). Christie identified three levels of teacher involvement: (a) observation, which is demonstrating to the children that the teacher sees play as a valuable part of the curriculum, (b) outside intervention, which is offering suggestions to move the activity along, introduce new ideas, and encourage reluctant children to participate while still remaining outside the play activity, and (c) inside intervention, in which the teacher actively participates by taking on a role and modeling appropriate behavior.

The three environmental modifications that can be made in the classroom are: (a) provide a print-rich environment, (b) develop a literacy center, and (c) set up dramatic play areas using literacy props. All of these modifications provide a safe environment for children to experiment with and to develop their understanding about print. Educators need to support children as the children formulate new hypothesis concerning literacy. "... developing concepts, grasping relationships, and mastering complex processes like speaking, reading, and writing depend heavily on the continued formation and refinement of hypothesis, which in turn entail taking risks and making errors" (Weaver, 1991, p. 30). It is only with continual exposure to print-rich situations that

children will feel free to take such risks and grow in their understanding of literacy.

Teacher Directed Activities

The environment a teacher creates in the classroom should provide countless opportunities throughout the course of the day for children to engage in literacy experiences. The classroom environment is a relatively stable part of the curriculum, but teachers must make decisions regarding the activities they will present on a much more frequent basis. Not only should these activities be developmentally appropriate, they should also take into account the necessity for literacy activities to be social in nature "... recognition and acceptance of literacy as a social process should change us as teachers. This view of literacy should lead to fresh insights and different teaching methods, methods that recognize the part social context plays in meaning making" (Cairney and Langbien, 1989, p. 561).

Confirming the importance of social interaction, a study published in 1990 by Thomas and Rinehart compared the literacy development of students with different levels of oral language skills. Students with higher language ability showed more development in reading/print awareness and writing activities. Language was often the impetus and driving force

behind these activities. "When our subjects wrote, their talk served to sustain their writing. That is, when they stopped talking, they stopped writing" (Thomas and Rinehart, 1990, p. 22). Children will be much more likely to engage in language interactions when they are in a relaxed, social atmosphere.

Providing appropriate activities in a social context, however, does not mean merely putting children in close proximity and allowing them to converse with each other. Children must be made aware of a common purpose to their activity (Haas Dyson, 1990). That is, there should be stated goals or objectives that the children are working toward. Social interaction and a common purpose enable scaffolding to occur, allowing all children to engage in a higher level of literacy awareness than if they were isolated from each other.

Given the necessity for basing experiences in a social setting, the instructor needs to find new methods for direct instruction. The literature suggested that one of the most important instructional methods is reading aloud to children (Maehr, 1991; McIntyre, 1989; Robinson, 1990; Teale and Sulzby, 1986; Weaver, 1991). Reading aloud involves more than simply narrating the contents of the book. Ideally the teacher should:

1. introduce a story with its title and some background knowledge to activate prior knowledge
2. invite children to comment and ask questions during the reading (redirecting their comments when necessary)
3. support and inform children by explaining parts of the story when asked, relating remarks to real-life experiences of children
4. after the story is read, go back to the beginning of the book and turn each page while children share comments and questions about the story (Robinson, 1991, p. 5)

Children should also be encouraged to read to each other, (Fisher, 1991; Robinson, 1991) either to one friend or a small group. A child's engagement in pretend reading marks a significant milestone, which is that the child has shifted from being a listener to a reader of stories.

Children are much more likely to engage in pretend reading if the teacher has done repeat reading of favorite books.

Children can be directed in a variety of activities that are derived from literature. Cooking, art and drama, and writing in response to books are very engaging experiences for young children. For example, after reading The Gingerbread Boy, the instructor could have brown paint available at the easel, make gingerbread boy cookies, act out different parts of the story, or develop a new ending. All these activities serve to make more meaning for children from the literature.

Akers (1990) has suggested using the term "writers workshop," allowing children to write, or illustrate and give dictation to the teacher in

response to stories. DeShazo-Hyde (1990) suggests a different approach to dictating stories. According to her observations, "... teaching writing must become more like coaching a sport and less like presenting information. Children come to school wanting to write but needing guidance. ." (p. 21). Students need to become aware that writing is "thinking on paper" (p. 22). She suggested the use of an author's chair and hat. The chair and hat should be used only after the children have written a story and are ready to share. Doyle (1989) described the process as book writing, encouraging children to relate stories that they have made up to the teacher, who makes them into a book. After being asked how to begin the story, the adult should take down any dictation on construction paper folded to resemble a book. Whatever a child dictates is accepted as a story. These books can then go home with the children to share with parents. The parents should also be made aware of the purpose of the activity.

Writing stories, even by dictation, can be threatening to children who have not had much experience writing. An initial step to encourage the children's use of writing tools is to have all children sign in upon arrival (Robinson, 1991). According to their developmental level, children might be printing their name, drawing a picture, or merely making a mark. An

extension of this idea is to set up a postal system in the classroom which allows children to send written messages to each other.

Finally, a daily message from the teacher to the children can be an invaluable method for promoting literacy development (Stewart et al., 1990). The teacher serves as a model. She demonstrates thinking about and then writing the message in front of the group. Next, clues are given to help the children analyze the structure of the message to get its meaning. This is followed by discussion to relate the message to prior and current experience.

The link between all of these different experiences in reading and writing is that they are all functional, meaningful activities for young children. "Situation or content is a powerful influence on the extent to which literacy is functional to the language user" (Neuman and Roskos, 1990, p. 219). These activities all occur in contexts that allow the children to generalize their experiences to other settings.

These activities have also been shown to be beneficial for children who are struggling in an academic setting. "Time and time again, students who are judged deficient according to standardized tasks and traditional assumptions appear competent when regularly invited to use oral and written language to engage in activities that are interesting and

personally meaningful" (Weaver, 1991, p. 28). This perspective has a significant impact on instruction for early childhood special education teachers.

Promoting Literacy Development in Developmental Preschool

Historically, instruction in an early childhood special education classroom has been based on a deficit model. That is, the children are assessed to determine where their areas of need exist. Objectives are then designed to help a child to meet goals in these areas. The danger inherent in this model is that it is easy to become "stuck" at a certain level, believing that the child should not move forward until certain prerequisites are met. Strict adherence to this model virtually assures that some handicapped children will never be taught certain skills as they will consistently fail to master the prerequisite steps (Bailey and Wolery, 1984).

Rather than basing instruction on a deficit model, early childhood special education classrooms are now focusing more on an outcome model. This type of instruction is designed to help the child master functional skills that can be generalized to a variety of different environments. Instead of looking at small steps that the child cannot do, special educators design instruction to build on the knowledge the child

has to help the child reach a desired goal.

This type of instructional design echoes the current philosophy in helping young children become literate. "Children do not necessarily master one set of knowledge or skills before they begin learning another set. Therefore it is difficult to assume that full understanding of the purposes and processes of using print is necessary before children learn to read, though some understanding is surely necessary" (Kontos, 1986, p. 60).

Given this common philosophy, is it correct to assume that exposure to the same types of literacy experiences as discussed in the previous sections will allow young children with handicaps to develop emergent literacy skills? The research has indicated that yes, this is a realistic expectation. "Given comparable environments, young children with handicaps behave in ways similar to nonhandicapped youngsters" (Katims, 1991, p. 79).

Setting up the classroom environment then, is a critical first step in fostering emergent literacy in an early childhood special education program. Children with handicaps can learn in a print-rich environment with many opportunities for reading and writing. This allows them to develop meaningful concepts about print and to experiment with the use

of print. The same types of literacy enhancements that are effective in other school settings would be effective in a developmental preschool. It is essential to provide a wide variety of books, writing materials, and equipment displayed in a prominent location. There should be environmental print used throughout the classroom, and literacy props in use in dramatic play areas (Franklin, 1992; Katims, 1991; Malicky and Norman, 1988; Sanacore, 1990; Sandel, 1991).

Teacher-directed activities to promote literacy are also essential in special education classrooms. The research has indicated that the types of activities teachers are encouraged to provide in other early childhood programs are very appropriate for the developmental preschool.

Reading aloud is one of the mainstays of the curriculum in a developmental preschool. Reading predictable books is extremely valuable for developing handicapped children's competency in language and for developing the idea of themselves as "readers" (Franklin, 1992). In a study conducted in 1991, Katims discovered that handicapped children interacted independently with predictable books 67% more often than with non-predictable books.

Utilizing nursery rhymes also provides additional experiences with predictability and rhythmicity. Rudolph, Wood and Wood (1990)

compared handicapped children who had been exposed to a variety of nursery rhyme activities to handicapped children who did not have this experience. They found that the children who had nursery rhyme exposure had richer language experience stories and higher sight word recognition.

Sanacore (1990) advocated weaving literacy throughout a wide variety of experiences. Reading and writing activities drawing upon a common theme allow children with handicaps to derive meaning by linking information from knowledge they already possess. "A map or web helps children to better visualize the relationship of their responses to important categories and thus to better understand, retain, and apply pertinent prior knowledge" (Sanacore, 1991, p. 9).

Writing centers are also important for children with handicaps to consolidate their knowledge and explore new avenues of expression. In Katim's study (1991) children were invited to the writing center several times a week. The objectives for visiting the writing center were to have the children engage in meaningful writing activities such as messages, birthday cards, and writing about books that had been read to them. Children with physical handicaps who had poor fine motor control were able to dictate. "The 'writing' behaviors of 78% of the children in the

experimental group progressed from one type of 'writing' to a more sophisticated format some time during the period of study" (Katims, 1991, p. 20).

It is apparent that current research has supported the inclusion of emergent literacy activities into the developmental preschool curriculum. These activities and techniques help set the stage for both direct instruction and incidental learning. Belief in emergent literacy and in the potential for children with handicaps to become readers and writers dictates the use of a success-oriented whole language program in the developmental preschool.

Obstacles to Change

There is little doubt that developmentally appropriate, meaningful literacy activities provided in a literate environment help children to blossom as users of print. Unfortunately, many early childhood programs have not embraced these new techniques. Many programs are based on misconceptions that actually serve to hinder children's literacy development. This is a critical failure for both handicapped and nonhandicapped children.

Although there are multiple reasons for this hesitancy to adopt a literacy-enriched curriculum, they seem to fall into three main categories.

Pressure from parents is one category. The reluctance of administration to abandon standardized testing in an early childhood setting constitutes a second. The third category is teachers who have been unwilling to accept changes in their curriculum.

Parents are, for the most part, genuinely concerned about their child's education. There is a natural tendency to assume that the more quickly a child masters something, the further ahead that child will be. What some parents fail to understand is that being able to parrot information does not necessarily ensure understanding.

If a parent adopts the "quicker is better" philosophy, there will also be the fear of making mistakes. Parents often feel that allowing their child to experiment with print will result in the formation of bad habits which will impede their progress (Weaver, 1991). In fact, the opposite is true.

"Parents readily accept 'ba' for ball in oral language when the child is just beginning to talk, and praise him/her for it; they should do the same for the child when he/she scribbles in a beginning attempt to write" (DeShazo-Hyde, 1990, p. 24).

This researcher feels that it is our job as educators to provide parents with the correct information regarding their child's growth as a literate individual. Parents will need support for allowing their child to

experience reading and writing as a natural process. It will be necessary for educators to de-mystify literacy and refrain from implying that learning to read and write are skills best accomplished through the use of formal, text-book oriented instruction in the classroom.

A second impediment to the use of an emergent literacy curriculum is the reliance on standardized testing. There has been pressure applied to school administrators to be accountable for instruction. A relatively easy method for accountability is to look at standardized test scores. Unfortunately, gains made via a whole language program are not easily measured by this method. "Activities consistent with a holistic program tend not to be amenable to evaluation" (Weir, 1989, p. 456).

Progress made in literacy development is better measured by sampling the child's work through various activities. It is also necessary to rely on the observation skills of the professional educator, something which administration is often reluctant to do. Teachers too, are sometimes uncomfortable with this procedure, termed "kidwatching" by Sanacore.

Kidwatching involves observation, interacting with, and analyzing children's behavior during writing, reading, listening, speaking, art, drama, and other language-oriented activities. The important

consideration here is that kidwatching is a continuous process of evaluating children's growth while teaching and learning are occurring; it is different from standardized testing that takes place once a year (Sanacore, 1991, p. 10).

It will be important to remember that these achievements will not be able to be measured numerically, but rather qualitatively. Restructuring the assessment process will again require education for both parents and professionals. This will bring a demand for teachers to sharpen their observation skills and will require others to develop trust for the teacher's judgment.

Becoming an accomplished observer is not the only change teachers will need to make. Teachers too, will need to let go of erroneous conceptions. One of these misconceptions is that providing children with teacher-directed literacy experiences is not consistent with developmentally appropriate practice. "Findings suggest that early childhood educators, fearful of creating a 'developmentally inappropriate' academic program are reluctant to provide children with meaningful experiences with print" (Robinson, 1991, p. 4). Providing child-centered, supportive activities as suggested in the previous chapter is very appropriate. These activities allow children to grow at individual rates and are respectful of the children's different levels of ability.

Another area of pressure for early childhood educators is the

insistence on formal instruction of phonics. An understanding of phonics is certainly important in later years, but should not be formally incorporated into an early childhood classroom. Children need to develop an understanding of the meaning of print before they master letter/sound recognition. "As classroom teachers many years ago, the two of us were made to feel guilty if we didn't teach phonics skills included in the basal readers we were using. Yet the direct teaching of phonics skills, which often resulted in 'mastery', did not necessarily lead to children's ability to read a text" (Manning, Manning, and Kamii, 1988, p. 4).

Teachers are pressured to include phonics instruction by both the public and administration. While parents are often misinformed about the necessity for phonics in early childhood programs, the administration often has to be accountable for using purchased textbook material. Publishing companies are quite skilled in marketing materials that, although easy to use, are not relevant to young learners (Freeman and Hatch, 1989).

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY and CONCLUSIONS

Teaching reading to young children has been a continually evolving process from our country's inception (Shannon, 1989). Religious, political, and cultural beliefs have all had an impact on the way educators instruct in the classroom. Current views regarding the necessity for developmentally appropriate practice and the belief that children are competent have provided impetus for interest in using techniques to help children develop emergent literacy.

Careful review of the literature suggests that there are a variety of methods educators can employ to change the structure of the classroom environment. Creating print-rich dramatic play areas, providing an abundance of environmental print, and allowing children access to a variety of writing tools can all help to engage children in meaningful uses of print.

Viewing children as competent and capable of developing their own uses for print also necessitates providing new activities that might not have been previously considered for an early childhood classroom. Opportunities for writing and reading can be provided without utilizing inappropriate paper/pencil activities or phonics instruction. Writing

centers, dictating and writing stories that are of interest to children, and reading children's literature in a new way will all help to increase children's sense of themselves as literate persons.

Making changes in the curriculum will require a three-part effort. First, educators must make the commitment to incorporate emergent literacy activities in their daily curriculum. Second, administrators must be convinced of the viability of using different assessment methods to determine children's progress. Third, parents must be informed of the reasons for this change, as they will be encountering educational experiences for their children that typically will be vastly different from their own.

Special education teachers do not usually face the same constraints as regular classroom teachers regarding the use of published material. Special education teachers are much more free to develop the curriculum to best suit the needs of the children being served. It is just as important however, for special education to adopt new practices that will help keep special classrooms as close as possible to the educational mainstream (Sindelar, Watanabe, McCray, and Hornsby, 1992). Developing an understanding of the techniques useful for promoting emergent literacy in the developmental preschool will help ensure that

handicapped children are given as much opportunity to become literate as their nonhandicapped peers.

In conclusion, special education teachers can use the same experiences in a developmental preschool as teachers in a regular education program. Setting up an environment conducive to enhancing literacy experiences and emphasizing developmentally appropriate direct teaching activities can assist children with handicaps to advance to a higher level along the literacy continuum. Early childhood special education teachers must become competent in using these techniques. Operating from a professional knowledge base will enable teachers to demonstrate to both parents and administration that developing emergent literacy is a viable part of the curriculum in an early childhood special education classroom.

REFERENCES

- Akers, B. L. (1990). Velveteen rabbit "gaets scke": Fostering emergent literacy (Report No. PS-018--8470). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 319 538)
- Bailey, D. B., & Wolery, M. (1984). Teaching Infants and Preschoolers with Handicaps Columbus: Charles E. Merrill.
- Cairney, T. & Langbien, S. (1989). Building communities of readers and writers. The Reading Teacher, April, 560-567.
- Christie, J. F. (1990). Dramatic play: A context for meaningful engagements. The Reading Teacher, April, 542-545.
- Doyle, C. L. (1989, August). Young children as authors: The creative process in first stories. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, New Orleans, LA. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. Ed 321 255).
- DeShazo-Hyde, D. (1990). Supporting first graders growth as writers through whole-language strategies. Nova University, Fort Walton Beach, FLA. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 322 507).
- Fisher, B. (1991). Reading and writing in a kindergarten classroom. (Report No. EDO-CS-91-06). Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 331 030).
- Franklin, E. A. (1992). Learning to read and write the natural way. Teaching Exceptional Children, April, 45-48
- Freeman, E. B. & Hatch, J. A. (1989). Emergent literacy: Reconceptualizing kindergarten practice. Childhood Education, Fall, 21-24.

- Haas Dyson, A. (1990). Weaving possibilities: Rethinking metaphors for early literacy development. (Paper No. 19). Washington DC Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 325 847).
- Katims, D. S. (1991). Emergent literacy in early childhood special education: Curriculum and instruction. Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 11(1), 69-84.
- Kintgen, E. (1988). Literacy literacy. Visible Language, 22(2/3), 149-168.
- Kontos, S. (1986). What preschool children know about reading and how they learn it. Young Children, November, 58-66.
- Maehr, J. (1991). Encouraging young children's writing. (Report No. EDO-PS-91-1). Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Development. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 327-312).
- Malicky, G. & Norman, C. (1988). Whole language: Applications to special education. Canadian Journal of English Language Arts, 11(3), 19-25.
- Manning, M., Manning, G. & Kamii, C. (1988). Early phonics instruction: Its effect on literacy development. Young Children, November, 4-8.
- McIntyre, E. (1990). Young children's reading strategies as they read self-selected books in school. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 5, 265-277.
- Morrow, L. M. & Rand, M. K. (1991). Promoting literacy during play by designing early childhood classroom environments. The Reading Teacher, 44(6), 397-402.
- Neuman, S. & Roskos, K. (1990). Play, print, and purpose: Enriching play environments for literacy development. The Reading Teacher, 44(3), 214-221.

- Robinson, S. S. (March 1991). Promoting Literacy Development. Paper presented at the Iowa Special Education State Conference, Cedar Rapids, IA.
- Rudolph, C., Wood, T. A., & Wood, D. J. (1990). Teaching basic sight words through nursery rhymes to mildly handicapped kindergarten students. Reading Improvement, 27(1), 72-76.
- Sanacore, J. (1990). Success in Literacy Through Early Intervention (Report No. CS-009-884). (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 314 713).
- Sandel, L. (1991, June). Head Start to Full Start: A Progression of Gains in Fulfilling Children's Preschool Needs. Paper presented at the National Working Conference on New Directions in Child and Family Research: Shaping Head Start in the 90's, Alexandria, VA (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 338 342).
- Shannon, P. (1989). Broken Promises: Reading Instruction in Twentieth-Century America New York: Bergin & Garvey.
- Shannon, P. (1990). The Struggle to Continue, Progressive Reading Instruction in the United States Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Sheldon, W. D. (1961). Influences Upon Reading Instruction in the United States Syracuse: University Press.
- Sindelar, P. T., Watanabe, A. K., McCray, A. D., Hornsby, P. J. (1992). Special education's role in literacy and reform. Teaching Exceptional Children, Spring, 38-40.
- Smith, C. B. (1989). Emergent literacy-an environmental concept. The Reading Teacher, March, 528.
- Spodek, B. (1988, April). Early childhood curriculum and the definition of knowledge. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

- Stewart, J. P., Mason, J. M. & Benjamin, L. W. (1990). Promising success for a kindergarten children New York: Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 324 651).
- Teale, W. H. & Sulzby E. (1986) Emergent literacy: New perspectives. In W. H. Teale & E. Sulzby (Eds.), Emergent Literacy: Reading and Writing (pp 1-13). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Thomas, K. F. & Rinehart, S. D. (1990). Young children's oral language, reading and writing. Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 6(1), 5-23.
- U.S. Department of Education. (1991). America 2000: An Education Strategy Sourcebook. Washington, D.C.
- Weaver, C. (1991). Whole language and its potential for developing readers. Topics in Lanugage Disorders, 11(3), 28-44.