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Beverly L. McCartney
University of Northern Iowa

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Abstract

Reading begins in the home. Parents who involve children in meaningful oral and written language experiences build a foundation for literacy. Early development of reading comes from experience talking and learning about the world and talking and learning about written language (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, Wilkinson, 1985, p. 21- 22). Parents model a commitment to education and learning by making reading and language an important part of their life and their children's lives.

SUPPORTIVE LITERATURE-BASED ORAL LANGUAGE EXPERIENCES
FOR YOUNG CHILDREN IN A CHAPTER I PROGRAM

A Research Paper
Submitted to
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Date Approved

Jeanne McLain Harms

Director of Research Paper

7/13/87
Date Approved

Jeanne McLain Harms

Graduate Faculty Adviser

7/16/87
Date Approved

Ned Ratekin

Graduate Faculty Reader

7/19/87
Date Approved

Greg Stefanich

Head, Department of
Curriculum and Instruction

Reading begins in the home. Parents who involve children in meaningful oral and written language experiences build a foundation for literacy. "Early development of reading comes from experience talking and learning about the world and talking and learning about written language" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, Wilkinson, 1985, p. 21-22). Parents model a commitment to education and learning by making reading and language an important part of their life and their children's lives.

Some children come to school with inadequate language experiences and have had few opportunities to observe the functions of language. These children are at a disadvantage when encountering school situations which rely strongly on verbal abilities. Frequently such children are recommended for compensatory assistance from the Chapter I program to help them gain the knowledge they need to function successfully in the school environment. One of the ways this problem can be addressed is to provide an atmosphere in which children can observe language modeled, can use language to create meaning, and can develop a sense of competence about their ability to use language.

This paper will focus on the relationship of listening ability to success in beginning reading experiences, the transfer of listening instruction to reading, instructional procedures which foster oral language and reading ability, and the implementation of a listening program to support young children's reading instruction in a Chapter I program.

RELATIONSHIP OF LISTENING AND READING

"Reading must be seen as part of a child's general language development and not as a discrete skill isolated from listening, speaking, and writing" (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 30). Much research has been conducted to determine the relationships among the aspects of the language arts--listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Sticht and James (1984) relate that oral language abilities are fundamental to learning to read. Reading instruction builds on oral language ability. Children's knowledge of the world and related vocabulary and the ability to talk about their knowledge supports learning to read (Anderson, et al., 1985). If children's oral language is weak, their progress in reading will be slow and uncertain.

Children begin to acquire literacy in the home. They learn the concepts for understanding themselves and others, experiences, and feelings and the oral language vocabulary for expressing these concepts. Children who have had extended conversations in homes about various topics learn to use these experiences to create meaning from listening and then reading. Children who have gone on trips, walked in parks, and have gone to museums, libraries, and zoos will have a better background knowledge relevant to school reading than children who have not had these experiences (Sticht and James, 1984).

Snow and Ferguson (1977) conclude though that wide experience was not enough: The way in which parents interact with their children about an experience influences the knowledge their children will gain from the experience. Questions which are thought-provoking stimulate the intellectual growth needed for success in reading. Children who have had extended conversations at home which encourage them to reflect upon experiences learn to create meaning from events. Wells (1981) found that the content and style of the language parents used with their children was related to the children's achievement in reading.

Instructional programs need to reflect the relationships between ausing (listening with comprehension) and reading. Frank Smith (1971) acknowledges that most children have a good deal of verbal fluency before they begin to read. This fluency provides a basis for learning to read since written and oral language are basically the same even if there are syntactic and communicational differences. Goodman and Goodman (1979) state that written language development builds on competence in oral language, since both share underlying structures which were first learned through involvement with oral language experiences. As children become literate, they use their knowledge of oral language to support their knowledge of written language.

Loban (1964) presents data which demonstrates that a positive correlation exists between preschool or early school oral language

abilities and subsequent achievement in reading. Listening comprehension proficiency in kindergarten and first is shown to be a moderately good predictor of the level of reading comprehension attained by the third grade (Bagford, 1968). Pearson and Fielding (1982) cited studies which concluded that the younger children appear to favor the listening mode. As children mature, the advantage to reading comprehension seems to increase.

TRANSFER OF INSTRUCTION FROM LISTENING TO READING

If learning to read builds upon the foundation of earlier acquired oral language, then developing the oral language base should elevate reading ability. This premise is used as a basis for preschool and primary-grade enrichment programs. Studies cited by Duker (1962) show that instruction in listening leads to improved reading. Taba (1962) says that positive transfer of learning depends on both how and what the individual learns: The approach which emphasizes pupil-discovered generalizations gives greater promise of transfer.

Devine (1978) relates that reading and listening have a common thinking base. Tuman (1980) after surveying the research concerning the relationship between listening comprehension and reading instruction, concludes that teachers should focus on cognitive development in language programs. Some common links between reading and listening are: analogous features (i.e., a drop in pitch and a definite pause in oral language can be associated with punctuation

in written language), vocabulary, the act of receiving, and the language to facilitate thinking (Lundsteen, CS 204 762).

LISTENING EXPERIENCES TO FACILITATE READING ABILITY

Children's comprehension abilities are extended through the teacher and older students reading aloud to them, and through listening to recorded stories. These listening experiences are greatly extended by opportunities to participate in expressive activities (Y. Goodman, 1982).

Listening to Stories Read Aloud

Listening to stories read aloud provides background experiences for success in reading. Listening to stories read aloud significantly improves children's vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension as well as children's oral language ability (McCormick, 1977). Chomsky (1972) indicates that prereaders with higher-level oral vocabularies heard more books each week, were read to by more people, and experienced more complex books than children with lower vocabulary levels. McCormick concludes that reading aloud to children from low income homes and to children who are low achievers aids vocabulary and reading achievement.

Conclusions from a study by Delores Durkin (1961) indicate that children who learn to read before grade one had been read to at an early age and came from families whose members respected education. Margaret Clark's study of young readers in Scotland concludes that all of the subjects had been read to at an early age and had access to books (1978).

Cohen (1968) found that second graders who had daily read aloud sessions were significantly ahead of their control groups in reading vocabulary and reading comprehension. These students through read aloud experiences had had opportunities to learn more about the structure and purpose of stories. McKenzie (1977) relates that listening to literature read aloud fosters children's acquisition of concepts and abilities to become autonomous readers: Children can focus on understanding and enjoying the story, but at the same time they can acquire the abilities associated with learning to read written language. In listening to stories, reading stories, discussing, and retelling stories, children begin to sort out important features of stories. From the beginning they engage in receptive language--listening and speaking--which involves reconstructing and responding to the message in the text (McKenzie, 1977).

By hearing books read aloud, children develop a sense of story. Garth Brown (1977) states that the concept of story is crucial to children's lives as they try to make sense of their world. As children listen to stories, they may modify their perception of the world and their experiences. Children tell and compose stories to give structure to their experiences and to make generalizations about the world as they know it.

Early exposure to stories also provides experiences with quality language. Frank Smith (1982) maintains that children need to hear the language used in books because it is not the same as

the language they hear spoken in their homes. He suggests that it is not realistic to expect children to learn to read and learn a new language style at the same time.

Harms and Lettow (1986) suggest other purposes for reading aloud. When reading aloud to children of any age, the foremost goal should be experiencing the pleasure of language. However, read aloud periods can be used to offer quality literature as a model of language through which children can experience imagery, the association of ideas made through figurative language, the flow of the plot, and the development of characters. Children can use these elements to recreate the story in their minds.

Frank Smith (1983) states that reading is impossible without prediction. Children who have had few experiences need something to draw on when predicting how some event or happening may change their lives or what may occur in a story. The child's background of experiences aids in comprehending listening and reading experiences and allows the child to make predictions about possible meaning. The child's sense of story can help the child predict not only what is said (comprehension) but how it might be said in a particular situation (composition).

Applebee (1977) elaborates on the use of prediction by young children. As children read a story, they use their knowledge of story structure as well as syntax and word meanings. From their sense of story, they can predict what may happen, and as the plot emerges, it confirms that their reading has been successful.

Children's sense of story affects their comprehension, fluency in reading, and pleasure while listening to stories and influences their ability to retell or create stories of their own. Through story retelling, children begin to take on the literary conventions related to the various genres. As they discuss books, they begin to see how an author defines a character, details a setting, or evokes an emotion. Reading good literature aloud can give children a platform from which they can launch their own efforts at retelling, writing, or dramatizing their stories (Fox & Allen, 1983).

Older students may read to younger children as well as teachers. Huck (1987) suggests a buddy system in which older children can read to one or two younger ones, or children can read aloud in pairs. An older student reading aloud to a less experienced one provides a model of language and opportunities to interact about the work: All of which can extend the young child's sense of story (Forester, 1977).

Experiences with listening to stories can also be provided through records and tapes in a sustaining center, one that is constantly maintained in the classroom (Harms & Lettow, unpublished a). Cassette tapes of works can easily and inexpensively be made by teachers. The books can also accompany the records and tapes in the Listening/Reading Center so children can follow along as they listen. Reading stories while listening to tape recordings of the same stories have been shown to strengthen the comprehension

experience (Fearn, 1971). Also simple puppets and pieces for a flannelboard experience can be manipulated by children as they listen to the recorded stories and can focus their attention on the stories' characters and the plot sequences. Poetry can be recorded for listening with booklets of collected poems to follow along. These collections can be related to the events in children's lives--the concepts of weather such as rain and snow, the seasons, and holidays. A collection of author's works can be recorded so children can become acquainted with a writer's contribution and style.

Opportunities to Respond to Listening Experiences

To enhance the comprehension of what has been heard, teachers may choose various follow-up activities in which children can respond. A summary of studies associated with listening found that comprehension may be enhanced by various kinds of active verbal responses on the part of students during and after listening. Teachers should read aloud to young students daily with pauses for students to summarize what has happened so far, to predict what might occur next in the story, or to share why they think this incident happened as it did. They may be asked to share how they think the character felt, giving reasons to support their thoughts. Teachers may want to ask students to finish a story by writing an ending. Teachers will want to allow time for students to discuss things in the story that are not clear (Pearson & Fielding, 1982).

Children become independent learners when they direct their own learning by making choices. In the case of listening, the choices can involve what they listen to and what and how they want to share with others (Fox & Allen, 1983). Graves (1984) calls this decision-making by the learner in the composition process ownership of the process. This decision-making can be extrapolated to involvement with the listening process. Deciding what kind of literature to listen to, what topic to explore, what to listen to, and for what purpose, when to stop or complete the listening, and what to do with the ideas they have gained from the listening experience are a part of the listening process. When children move from the listening experience to explore ideas, they can listen again to a part or all of a selection, listen to a related selection, or they can retell, discuss, or participate in narrative pantomime, dramatization, composition of poems or stories, and art activities.

Brown (1977) encourages teachers to use follow-up activities which center on what the child remembers of the content. Opportunities should be given to explore meaning, to ask questions, to allay concerns, to make relationships, and to try out heard phrases and new vocabulary. Dictating and writing stories focuses the child's attention on structure.

Charlotte Huck (1987) states that teachers know it is important for children who are learning basic math concepts to manipulate concrete materials. Similarly, children may extend their

understanding of literature when they have opportunities to manipulate the elements of literature in some concrete form. This might be done by making a story of their own which incorporates the original author's style or theme, by recreating characters using some art form, reviewing the plot by reenacting the play with puppets or drama, or just talking about the story with other readers. Huck says: "These activities may be fun, but they constitute a serious kind of play in which children learn how a story is put together and achieve a fuller grasp of its meaning. Properly planned and guided such activities are a natural and childlike alternative to formal literary analysis, which is essentially an adult pursuit." (p. 678)

Young children can be assisted in the retelling of stories by arranging illustrated picture pieces, objects, or other aspects of the story on a flannelboard. While using these pieces, the child can focus on the elements of the story such as characterization, the sequencing of events, and the plot structure such as pattern of three or cumulative plot (Harms & Lettow, unpublished b).

Children lose themselves in the characterization of a puppet when hidden behind a table or puppet stage, although they might hesitate to express these feelings in front of a class (Huck, 1987). Through puppetry, children learn to portray different characters with varying voice qualities. This retelling of the story can assist children in understanding the theme of the story and

different plot structures (Harms, unpublished b). Children can tape the sound effects for the story to play with their retelling or they can tape the whole story to use while they manipulate the puppets.

IMPLEMENTATION OF A LISTENING PROGRAM TO SUPPORT YOUNG CHILDREN'S READING INSTRUCTION IN A CHAPTER I PROGRAM

The writer of this paper devised a literature-based oral language component for young Chapter I students to facilitate their language development. Based upon research which has been cited in this paper, the writer guided the children to own their listening experiences as they moved through the comprehension process. These example read aloud activities supported the listening program. Because the listening experiences were closely associated with different types of expressive activities, they are combined in the following discussion.

Reading aloud daily was the most consistently presented activity because of the short periods--thirty minutes. (Many of these activities could have been presented in centers if a longer period would have been available.) Quality literature was selected from suggested titles in Comprehension and Literature (Harms, 1982) and Children's Literature in the Elementary School (Huck, 1979). Among the selections shared aloud were simple folktales which provided well structured stories to foster these young children's sense of story. Examples of the traditional

stories which were shared aloud were: The Three Little Pigs, The Three Billy Goats Gruff, The Little Red Hen, The Gingerbread Boy, and The Three Bears. Then children were given an opportunity to create their own construct by retelling the stories using flannelboard pieces as concrete representations of the stories/elements. Children were able to see the characterization as it related to the plot organization such as pattern of three and cumulative, for example, One Fine Day, retold by Nonny Hogrogian. After listening to The Gingerbread Boy (Galdone) and Journey Cake Ho! by Ruth Sawyer, different versions of the same folk tale, were compared and contrasted. One child responded, "In the Gingerbread Man he led all the animals away, and in Journey Cake Ho! he led them all back!"

Some literature was introduced by telling children the title of the story and having them predict what might be included in the book. The Most Wonderful Egg in the World, by Helme Heine, was such a book. Responses included these remarks: "It'll be the biggest egg ever seen!" "I know; it will be a different color!" "A baby chick will come out of the egg." After listening to the story, the children were eager to compare their predictions to what actually occurred in the story. They expressed surprise at the square egg and wondered if this could really happen. A discussion of realism and fantasy then developed. Also they discussed the king's decision about the most beautiful chicken and decided that he had made a good decision.

In the study of the author, Steven Kroll, who was coming to visit the schools, children listened and read his books. The work Toot! Toot! was a favorite. In this story a young boy takes an imaginary trip as he plays with his train. After listening to the story, it was decided that Steven Kroll would enjoy reading about an imaginary trip that the Chapter I students as authors/illustrators had composed. Each child dictated a story to the teacher, who wrote them on large charts. The students then copied their stories on tagboard train cars. The cars were then glued on a large sheet of bulletin board paper which was divided into sections. Each student illustrated his/her section of the large paper to go along with their part. The stories involved descriptions of a park in Ames, Iowa, a shopping center, trips to a grandparent's farm, Oleson Park where the child swam in the new pool, and a ride in a train over a long bridge which was accompanied by an elaborate illustration of a train. After reading the stories and discussing the illustrations, the illustrated train was shared by posting it in a prominent place in the hall.

Poetry was also a part of the read aloud experience. Poems were related closely to the immediate experiences of the children such as weather, seasons, and holidays. During the winter, the children were often late coming to the Chapter I room: They explained that it took them a long time to take off all their

heavy outer clothing and boots. Two poems by Karla Kuskin were related to their experiences with winter clothing. The poem "Winter Clothes" tells of the many layers of clothes a child wears. The children identified with Kuskin's humorous last line which says, "And when I walk/I must not fall/Because I can't get up at all." The poem "Joe's Snow Clothes" gives a vivid description of a child who is so "hatted" and "coated" that the cold wind can touch nothing but his rosy nose. During February, children enjoyed "Ground Hog Day," by Lilian Moore, and Valentine poetry from Jack Prelutsky's It's Valentine's Day and Eloise Greenfield's Honey I Love.

Some of these poems were written on large sheets of paper and placed on the classroom walls so that all could be read aloud and listened to. The children enjoyed hearing the poems read and reread, and as a result they learned the lines and recited them as a part of the group. Also when they came into the room, they would frequently go to the poetry center, point to a poem, and say, "Let's read this again!" or "I want to read it by myself today."

Poetry with strong rhythms offered invitations to participate on the part of children. For example, the poem "The Pickety Fence" by David McCord was enjoyed not only for its rhythmic quality but also for the rhyming words--"pickety," "lickety," "clickety," "rickety." Children clapped to the rhythm in Eloise

Greenfield's "Rope Rhyme", which speaks of getting ready to jump in, laughing and giggling, listening to the slap of the rope as it hits the ground, and jumping out. They also enacted the jumping rhythm as the poem was recited. Blackberry Ink by Eve Merriam contains other poetry which invites children to participate. The children enjoyed trying to guess what was in the pocket in "Something in My Pocket." The poem "Cat's Tongue" encouraged the children to dramatize the cat cleaning its fur. The rhythm and repetition in "Latch, Catch, Come in Free" invited the children to chime in each time the phrase occurred. Selections from Tomie de Paola's Mother Goose were listened to and dramatized.

CONCLUSIONS

Chapter I teachers are recognizing that literature-based oral language experiences are valuable in helping children acquire the background language they need for developing a sense of story and thus learning to read. They understand the need for building a foundation for success in reading by helping children acquire knowledge about written language. Chapter I personnel are beginning to see a place in their curriculum for literature and related expressive activities to allow the child to create his/her own meaning.

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