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Literature-based reading program for grade one

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Abstract

The study of reading as a process conducted in the last twenty-five years has furthered the understanding of emerging literacy and, as a result, has influenced instructional programs for children. One theoretical base created from this exploration has come to be known as the "whole language concept" (Goodman, 1986). Many instructional features are related to the implementation of the whole language concept in a school program. One of the major features is the development of a literature base. Children's involvement in the reading process through works from the different genres offers many opportunities for children to relate to their reading experiences and to create their own ideas.

Literature-Based Reading Program
for Grade One

A Graduate Project
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The study of reading as a process conducted in the last twenty-five years has furthered the understanding of emerging literacy and, as a result, has influenced instructional programs for children. One theoretical base created from this exploration has come to be known as the "whole language concept" (Goodman, 1986).

Many instructional features are related to the implementation of the whole language concept in a school program. One of the major features is the development of a literature base. Children's involvement in the reading process through works from the different genres offers many opportunities for children to relate to their reading experiences and to create their own ideas.

In reflecting on the theoretical formulations supporting a literature-based reading program, Cullinan (1989) relates that children learn to read by engaging in the process. Reading is a part of emerging literacy and learning in any one area of language nurtures learning in other areas. When children are surrounded with literature, literacy emerges naturally. Thus learning to read becomes part of growing up in a culture that stresses literacy.

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to present the value of a literature-based reading program in nurturing children's

emerging literacy and then to consider ways such a program can be implemented in grade one. The discussion will be supported by conclusions from research studies and the writing of respected authorities in the area.

Value of a Literature-Based Reading Program

A literature-based reading program provides many opportunities for children to develop thinking-language and personal-social abilities. Literature experiences can promote interest in literature and appreciation of reading, can foster reading and writing abilities along with higher-level thinking abilities, can support personal-social growth, and can expand an awareness of one's own culture and one's place in the global culture.

Interest in Literature and Appreciation of Reading

A literature-based reading program provides children with listening and reading experiences from the different genres of literature and opportunities to create meaning and to interpret feelings that foster interest in learning to read and appreciation of reading. Children demonstrate their emerging interest in and appreciation of reading by expressing a positive attitude toward involvement in the process, by displaying ownership of the reading experience, and by choosing reading as a pastime and as a means of learning (Harms & Lettow, 1986).

Studies suggest that literature experiences support the development of children's positive attitudes toward reading. Rasinski and DeFord (1985) from their research of several approaches to reading conclude that the children in the literature-based program viewed reading to be more meaning related than the children in the mastery-learning and basal programs. The children in the literature-based program thought of reading in a holistic context, that is, related to the meaning of the story or the information. Many children in the mastery-learning and basal programs thought of reading in terms of the structure of the words or a sound-symbol relationship.

A major goal of a literature-based program is to encourage the children to read as a pastime. A reading center in the classroom can nurture interest in reading. Coody (1983) and Huck (1976) found that children's enjoyment of reading was improved by classroom reading centers.

In a literature-based program, reading aloud periods provide children with occasions to enjoy literature and to become aware of the purposes of reading. Hearing quality literature read aloud allows children to learn to read naturally, much the same way children learn to speak. By listening to repeated readings of familiar stories, children derive meaning from the text (Forester, 1977 & Hoskisson, 1979).

Sustained silent reading aids in developing positive attitudes and in forming habits that contribute toward a lifetime of reading for pleasure (Moore, Jones, & Miller, 1980). Ownership of the literature experience is encouraged when children are allowed individual choice of works during sustained silent reading. Allowing children to choose books that suit their interests and abilities motivates them to read as well as promotes their success as readers (Hornsby, Sukarna, & Parry, 1986 and Harms & Lettow, 1986).

Reading Ability

Advocates to extending the whole language concept into the instructional program point out that assessing reading ability must focus on process rather than skills, or fragments of the whole (Johnston, 1987 and Goodman, 1986). They recommend using qualitative measures rather than quantitative ones, such as achievement tests, because children's responses while they are involved in the language processes need to be described. Descriptive techniques include records of teacher observations and parent-teacher conferences, reading interest inventories, and analysis of portfolios (collections of children's responses kept throughout students' school careers). Such techniques provide an ongoing view of students' emerging literacy.

Some research studies of children's emerging reading abilities in literature-based programs have been conducted using

traditional evaluation measures. Even in these cases, literature-based programs have fared well. In studying different approaches to reading with second-grade children, Eldredge and Butterfield (1986) conclude that a literature-based program which included special phonics lessons had higher reading results than the four other instructional methods (a heterogeneous basal group with special phonics, a heterogeneous basal group without special phonics, a homogeneous basal group with special phonics, and a literature-based group without special phonics) as measured on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test and a Pictorial Self Concept Scale.

Cohen (1968) studied the effects on reading achievement of reading aloud picture books to second-grade children and then providing meaningful related expressive activities. At the end of the instructional period, the experimental group scored significantly higher in word knowledge, reading comprehension, and vocabulary on the Metropolitan Achievement Test and a Free Association Vocabulary Test than the control group who had not had the reading aloud and related expressive experiences. Cohen's study has since been replicated by Cullinan, Jaggard, and Strickland (1974) with similar results.

The research results of reading achievement among a group of at-risk first graders enrolled in the Ohio Reading Recovery Program, a literature-based program, indicate that these

children's responses were equal or better on a variety of measures including Marie Clays' Diagnostic Survey (1985) than the control group who had had a traditional program. Part of the program involved shared-book experiences which included book handling experiences, exposure to literature with structured or patterned language, and self-selection (Boehnlein, 1987).

The results of Trachtenburg and Ferrugia's study (1989) of at-risk beginning readers collaborating as authors of shared big books indicate that these children made gains in reading ability as measured by the comprehension subtests on the Iowa Basic Skills Test and in self-concept as observed by the teachers. These three successful approaches in reading instruction were incorporated into their strategy: the use of children's oral language supported by the study of Lee & Allen (1963) cited in Trachtenburg & Ferrugia (1989); the value of repeated readings suggested by Samuels (1979); and the importance of sharing a whole unit recommended by Holdaway (1982).

From the study, it was concluded that interactive whole class techniques, positive self concept, and rapid skills attainment appear to be linked together.

Reading-Writing Connection

A literature-based reading program can promote a reading and writing connection. Reading experiences can be related to the writing process, therefore nurturing reading-writing

abilities. Thus children's writing is encouraged and developed through literature-based activities.

Children's reading and writing can be influenced by the literature that the teacher reads aloud and by the students' own reading. In these experiences, whole units serve as models of story structure, genre, and literary elements. Children are then able to incorporate these literary elements into their own writing (Calkins, 1983).

The recursive nature of the language processes, moving back and forth between the comprehension and composition processes, can be experienced as children's writing is viewed as literature and is considered along with stories and poetry in quality tradebooks. This sharing of pieces allows children to apply the elements of quality literature in creating their own meaning through writing (Graves, 1983).

Thinking Ability

As children create meaning for themselves through the process of reading quality literature works, they generate and develop thinking abilities. For example, they engage in recalling story details, make sense of information in relationship to their background, predict the next events in the story, and create mental images to help them illustrate and write about their favorite part of the story. Retelling a story nurtures organizational abilities and helps the student to

evaluate the most important events in a story (D. Moore, S. Moore, P. Cunningham, & J. Cunningham, 1986).

Experiences with literature help children form a base from which they can expand their knowledge and level of application. A literature base enables children to evaluate other works, to recognize the author's intent and style, and to broaden their horizons which assist them in identifying and forming possible solutions to problems (Harms, 1982).

Literature experiences can enhance the critical reading abilities of beginning readers. They can compare cultures by analyzing settings, characters' feelings, and the plots of different versions of a fairy tale. As children listen to and read many books, they develop an awareness of more than one style and are able to compare different authors and their messages. In comparison, basals have had a tendency to use excerpts of literature pieces in their texts. If the basal text is the sole instructional material, children do not have an opportunity to read several stories by the same author or more than one version of a fairy tale (McClain, 1985).

Also Tunnell and Jacobs (1989) report that the pieces in primary-grade basals have been shown to have less plot and character development. There is less conflict among and within characters.

Commeyras (1989) also relates that quality literature provides children with more opportunities to explore character motives and personalities than provided by basal readers; therefore, children are more able to discover the author's intent and purpose and to validate their viewpoint with evidence in works of quality literature. Basals also lack the variation in vocabulary, sentence structure, and literary style found in quality children's literature.

Because higher-level thinking abilities can be encouraged naturally in a literature-based classroom, children are able to view their own reading and writing with authority, listen with comprehension, and question others for clarification (Seaver & Botel, 1983).

Personal-Social Growth

A literature-based reading program can promote opportunities for children to discover their own identity and their relationship to the world. Graves (1983) states that "children's literature covers virtually the entire span of human experience and knowledge" (p. 67). By listening to and reading literature, children become aware that the problems they encounter may be universal and they are not alone. Experiences found in literature can help children solve some of their problems and can give them a deeper insight into human problems.

Literature can enable families to communicate with each other by relating and sharing the ideas that authors convey in their works. As parents and children share literature, children learn about themselves as individuals, their relationships with others, and the social world around them (Strickland, 1989).

Awareness of One's Own Culture and of Global Culture

Literature is an essential ingredient in expanding children's knowledge of their own culture and of the global culture. Diakiw (1990) relates that stories can transport children to the past and across the waters to distant lands. Through literature experiences, children can experience traditions and cultures far removed from their own.

Through the many literature genres, children can experience life in the past, as it is today, in the fantasy of the future, and in every culture of the world. Literature provides models of human experiences, helping children make connections with literature characters and their own experiences. Literature experiences offer opportunities for children to develop new perspectives and to understand the values and customs of others (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1987).

Implementation of a Literature-Based Program for Grade One

Extending the whole language concept in an instructional program focuses on the developmental needs of the students and

their involvement in the language processes within a rich learning environment, supported by a literature base. Although a literature-based program can be implemented in many ways, several elements are essential in extending the whole language concept. Crucial to the program are quality literature experiences, many opportunities to engage in the reading process, and a supportive learning environment.

Experiences with Quality Literature

Access to whole units of quality literature. Children's reading abilities are nurtured through reading whole units of quality literature. Whole units of language allow children to make sense of what is being communicated. Whole units of literature are relevant to the children's natural purpose in reading and writing (Goodman, 1986).

One means of involving first graders in reading whole units is repeated oral reading of books with predictable patterns (Samuels, 1979). Predictable books can provide a model of natural rhythmical language for children to listen to and later read (Heald-Taylor, 1987). Chomsky (1976) reports that predictable books can assist in developing concepts about print and an understanding of the reading process. Experiences with this type of story can also facilitate fluency, vocabulary development, and an understanding of language patterns. Through

experiences with predictable books, the decoding process can be incorporated within a meaningful context.

Strickland (1988) suggests using oversized predictable books to help children learn to track print, match speech with print, build vocabulary recognition, and achieve meaning through closure activities. Oversized books allow the whole class or a small group to view the print and the illustrations. Newman (1985) suggests that through discussion while involved in reading oversized predictable books, the teacher can help children use their background knowledge and the illustrations accompanying the text to make predictions of what will come next in these volumes. The content and sentence structure of the story can help children to determine what would make sense.

Uncontrolled vocabulary. Quality literature allows children to hear and read natural rhythmical patterns of language. The natural uncontrolled vocabulary of quality literature provides children with a language-rich environment. This rich environment enables children to extend their vocabulary and to develop meaning through language (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1987). As children develop a language base it enables them to use sentence structure and context, thus extending their emerging literacy. Controlled vocabulary that is often used in beginning basal readers provides short choppy sentences that are not natural language patterns. They do not

allow children to use their natural language ability while engaging in the reading process. Children remember vocabulary that has relevance to them. Quality literature provides opportunities for children to identify and to remember the vocabulary that enhances the reading process for them (Goodman, 1986).

Experiences with the Reading Process

Reading aloud. Teachers' reading aloud quality literature during storytime provides a basis for early literacy experiences. Children need to hear quality literature that is rich in vocabulary and has rhythmical language patterns. From infancy on, children can order and construct their lives from literature experiences by predicting story patterns, developing language structures, and creating meaning from the stories they hear repeatedly (Newman, 1985).

Children need access to a variety of books so special interests can be accommodated and many vehicles for creating meaning can be experienced. Within story hours and all areas of the curriculum, stories of all kinds, poems, and information books can be read aloud to provide enjoyment and understanding of concepts throughout the curricular areas.

Self-selection of reading experiences. Opportunities for children to select their own literature experiences encourage positive attitudes and reading abilities. Jane Hansen (1987)

relates that if children are able to select their own reading experiences, they willingly engage in the reading process as a pastime and gain information. A wide variety of literature representing many genres including fantasy, realism, folk literature, poetry, and informational books is essential in captivating and holding children's interests. By familiarizing children with many genres, authors, and topics, children are able to make wise selections for their reading experiences (Harms & Lettow, 1986). To facilitate children's self-selection, teachers need to read whole books and sometimes parts of books because children will often choose books they have heard read aloud. Children's sharing of their experiences with books also acquaints other children with works and, as a result, encourages reading. As children develop as independent readers, they learn to choose books that suit their interests and abilities (Hansen, 1987).

Teachers can offer many opportunities for children's self-selection of literature experiences. Individual selection, opportunities to share responses to literature works, and literature-based centers can be incorporated into the daily routine. Teachers can continually monitor children's responses and interests in order to plan future centers and to lengthen the time children are participating in the self-selection process.

Sustained silent reading. By incorporating sustained silent reading into the daily routine, teachers are encouraging self-selection of literature experiences and are fostering the enjoyment of the reading process. Butler and Turbill (1984) advocate the use of DEAR (Drop Everything and Read), also known as USSR (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading), as an essential component of a literature-based reading program. In this period, the children and their teacher can read silently anything they wish with no interruptions. At first, the time period is short and then is gradually increased to twenty to thirty minutes. Children are not asked to respond in any way to the books they have read. If children choose to discuss their books, it is in an informal setting. Children may want to read a page of a favorite book or tell other children what they liked best about a book. A few children can share at the end of sustained silent reading each day.

Guided and shared book experiences. Guided and shared reading experiences can take place in a literature-based program. These literature experiences offer opportunities for children to explore vocabulary, phonetic awareness, literary elements, and the meaning that can be created in the reading process. The literature experiences can be centered around whole class and small group activities. Guided and shared book experiences enable teachers to gain insight into children's development.

This assessment helps teachers to plan small and total group instruction based on the developmental growth of the children.

During guided reading, the teacher often models a specific reading task. For example, by utilizing a folk tale in a big book form or by having multiple copies of a folk tale available for the whole class, a teacher can assist children in becoming aware of the elements of this type of story--plot, language, motifs, and theme. After completing the guided lesson with the whole class, children can select folk tales to read in small groups, pairs, or individually. With the selected folk tales, children can complete an activity that reinforces identifying the characteristics of a folk tale.

Shared reading can utilize a big book or multiple copies of a regular-sized book with the whole class. After introducing the story, the teacher can invite the children to read the book aloud together. This literature experience enables children to be active participants, thus allowing children to succeed in the reading process. Children can then view themselves as readers (Butler & Turbill, 1984).

Teacher as a model. Teacher modeling of reading and writing behaviors helps children to understand that the functions of language occur in everyday experiences. On a daily basis, teachers can model reading and writing behaviors by reading aloud and presenting guided and shared book experiences as well as

sharing their own involvement in reading and writing processes (Holdaway, 1982). With young children, making grocery lists, compiling a chart of the children's names in the class, or writing a group story allow children to apply language knowledge gained from literature experiences (Seaver & Botel, 1983 and Mavrogenes, 1986). Teachers can observe the responses of the children to determine what language behaviors need to be modeled (Holdaway, 1982).

Writing. Daily writing can be encouraged in a literature-based program (Graves, 1983). Butler and Turbill (1984) suggest offering literature experiences as models of good writing. Children are encouraged to explore interesting phrases and words that have significant meaning to them. The language of literature pieces is often repeated in children's writing. Calkins (1983) relates that literature fosters and develops the reading-writing connection. DeGroff (1989) states as children hear or read literature, they make connections between the topic of the book and their own personal experiences. As children view literature, they may question how the author chose the information included in the story. Thus children begin to understand the process of choosing their own information to be included in the pieces they write.

Robbins (1990) relates that by sharing literature works, children begin to understand how authors convey their own

messages through written language and illustrations. Teachers can present literature works to demonstrate how authors engage in the composition process.

Other Support from the Learning Environment

As teachers implement a literature-based reading program into their classroom, they may need to restructure the school day so that literature becomes the basis for daily activities. Teachers will need to move away from the traditional ability grouping and incorporate a variety of group structures. Whole class, cooperative learning groups, small groups for specific needs, and conference groups are examples of grouping utilized in a literature-based program (Hiebert & Fisher, 1990).

Another aspect of implementing a literature-based reading program that may need attention is the role of the teacher. Teachers may need to relinquish some of the control in the selection of materials and activities. By observing the children's responses, the teacher will continue to be a guiding influence on instructional techniques and materials. Thus a balance of teacher selection, teacher and student selection, and individual selection of literature and activities needs to be maintained (Hiebert & Colt, 1989).

The process of implementing a literature-based reading program can be overwhelming to some teachers. Teachers may need to implement the elements of a literature-based program one by

one. As they become more secure, another element can be incorporated into their reading program.

Conclusion

As we look at the future of education, quality literature experiences that support the implementation of the whole language concept provide an environment in which children can create their own meaning through the language processes and through interacting with teachers and peers. Quality literature as the base for the school program not only supports emerging literacy but allows children to use language to achieve their goals and to engage in a wholesome, fulfilling pastime.

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