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## Commons components of literature-based reading programs

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## Commons components of literature-based reading programs

### Abstract

Literature-based reading instruction is replacing traditional basal programs in many classrooms. This instructional concept focuses on providing quality literature from the different genres to develop a print-rich environment in which children can find meaningful reading experiences. These literature experiences provide structures, or whole units, in which readers can create their own meaning. In such a print-rich environment, readers can be energized to extend the reading experience by engaging in related expressive action, a connection between the comprehension and composition processes, and by interacting with others concerning the ideas and feelings generated in the reading process. These experiences can lead to in-depth understandings that can nurture thinking-language abilities.

Common Components of Literature-Based  
Reading Programs

A Graduate Project  
Submitted to the  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
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Master of Arts in Education  
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by

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Literature-based reading instruction is replacing traditional basal programs in many classrooms. This instructional concept focuses on providing quality literature from the different genres to develop a print-rich environment in which children can find meaningful reading experiences. These literature experiences provide structures, or whole units, in which readers can create their own meaning. In such a print-rich environment, readers can be energized to extend the reading experience by engaging in related expressive action, a connection between the comprehension and composition processes, and by interacting with others concerning the ideas and feelings generated in the reading process. These experiences can lead to in-depth understandings that can nurture thinking-language abilities.

A literature-based instructional program integrates the teaching of reading, writing, speaking and listening while focusing on topics or themes. Reading and writing are taught in much the same way that early oral language was acquired. Children are immersed in a print-rich environment with literature providing a quality model of language. The children are encouraged to be active participants rather than passive recipients with opportunities to engage in authentic reading, writing, speaking, and listening situations.

### Purpose of the Paper

In developing a literature-based reading program, many components need to be considered. The purpose of this paper is to identify these components through reviewing the professional literature. The findings of this search will be applied in the writer's first grade classroom.

### Review of Professional Literature

Many authorities in the field of literacy concur that learning to process written forms of language is accomplished in much the same way as learning to speak. Cambourne (1988) believes that when teachers understand the conditions under which children learn to talk and arrange their classrooms to simulate these conditions for written language learning, children's emerging literacy will be fostered. He states that language learners need to have multiple reading, writing, speaking and listening encounters so they can work out the interconnections of these different forms of language. Smith (1983) states that reading, writing, speaking and listening should never be separated in the learner's mind. Language and the world must be connected for literacy to develop naturally in the same way that oral language is acquired.

Tunnell and Jacobs (1989) summarized studies of literature-based reading programs involving many types of students: students in New York City with low socio-economic

backgrounds, second graders in Utah, first graders in New Zealand, kindergartners in New York City, third graders in Boston, and inmates at a boy's training school in Michigan. All the studies concluded that students made positive gains in reading achievement as measured by standardized tests as well as developing better self-esteem and reading attitudes. The research also indicated that literature-based programs increased the self-initiated time spent reading and interacting with literature in addition to increasing the volume and richness of vocabulary.

After observing literature-based reading programs in twenty-three elementary classrooms in Los Angeles County, Zarrillo (1989) states, "The question was no longer if their classrooms should be literature-based, but how to develop the best literature-based program possible" (p. 24). Many of the components of a successful literature-based reading program will be discussed in the rest of this section.

#### Quality Literature Experiences

Quality literature can provide models of language that will enhance children's understanding of language as well as opportunities for their exploration of the conditions of humankind (Smith, 1983; Goodman, 1986). To provide literature for the instructional program, schools need libraries with well developed collections of quality works that will meet the needs

of the students in that particular school. Librarians who know the best available resources need to work together with the teachers who understand the interests and unique needs of each student (Kulleseid & Strickland, 1989).

### Read Aloud Experiences

Children of all ages benefit from read aloud experiences. Tunnell and Jacobs (1989) reviewed numerous studies of the value of reading aloud to children and concluded that these experiences were a basic element in the successful literature-based programs. Carliss' study (1990) also suggests that reading aloud to students is a vital component of a literature-based reading program. Such experiences need to be offered daily at home and at school along with opportunities to respond to these experiences in expressive activity and interactions with others. Read aloud experiences foster a sense of story that supports young children as they begin to read (Huck, 1982). Also these sessions can assist students in self-selection of books (Strickland, Dillon, Funkhouser, Glick, & Rogers, 1989) and can introduce students to authors and different genres and themes (Cornett & Blankenship, 1990).

In selecting books for read aloud sessions, the children's developmental level and interests should be considered. Heald-Taylor (1987) suggests that teachers should always select



books that they regard highly for their enthusiasm will be contagious.

### Independent Reading Experiences

Children need many opportunities to be involved in the process of reading and to practice reading with works of their choice. Tunnell and Jacobs (1989) found that opportunities to choose one's own reading material motivated students to read and improved their attitudes toward reading. Harms and Lettow (1986) suggest that student self-selection of literature encourages responsibility and independence thus fostering ownership of the reading process. Huck, Hepler, and Hickman (1993) and Zarrillo (1989) agree that although some quality literature is almost too good to miss none should be required reading. Zarrillo (1989) believes that a successful literature program is one in which the teacher finds a balance of teacher and student-selected activities. According to Hiebert and Colt (1989) the selection of literature should be a cooperative endeavor. The classroom teacher can serve as a facilitator by making available quality literary works that are of interest to students and time to read these selections.

Routman (1991) suggests that while students are given freedom of choice, they should be given opportunities to read a wide variety of literature at their independent reading level. On this level, children recognize 95% of the words and comprehend

90% of the content. Such easy reading promotes comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency.

Children need much time during the school day and at home to read silently. Routman (1991) states that even ten minutes of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) a day can increase student reading achievement. She notes that SSR at school may be the only quiet time available for children to read and their only chance to see an adult modeling reading. Trelease (1985) promotes SSR as a chance to practice reading tasks and to experience reading as a form of recreation. Wiseman (1992) believes that periods of silent reading should be a part of the classroom's regular schedule and can be lengthened as students' abilities and interests increase. Included in sustained silent reading periods should be time for students to discuss their reading and to comment on it in their journals. These written records of children's responses to their reading experiences give teachers information about their students' activities, interests, preferences, and thinking-language abilities.

Harms and Lettow (1986) recommend giving children opportunities to explore and discover reading through sustaining centers that can be kept in place throughout the school year and are stocked with literature that reflects the study in the different curricular areas. The sustaining centers can include a listening/reading center with books and teacher-made tapes, a

poetry center, an author/illustrator center, and reference centers, such as bookmaking and suggestions for sharing a book.

### Opportunities to Respond to Literature Experiences

Children need many different opportunities to respond to their literature experiences. Huck et al. (1993) offers many response activities, such as art experiences that explore the illustrator's medium; construction of displays and games; and retelling, drama, movement music, writing and cooking experiences.

Carliss (1990) states, "Responding to literature through extension activities brings literature to life for students" (p. 26). Routman (1991) reflects that through discussions and conferences, students can react to characters and other elements of literature thus extending their comprehension of the story.

### Instructional Organization

A literature-based reading program is based on the responses of children. Flexible grouping can foster children's interests in literature and related activity and can provide more effectively for instruction in comprehension tasks.

Heterogeneous grouping. In classrooms where literature-based units worked well, Zarrillo (1989) found that flexible grouping of students was used. Heterogeneous grouping can provide opportunities for students to work in social and interest groups without being limited by their ability; thus,

heterogeneous grouping can increase self-esteem and can curb negative social and academic outcomes. Flexible grouping of students allows teachers to more readily respond to the need of students. Sometimes, whole class sessions need to occur; at other times, small groups of children may work toward a common goal or receive specific instruction from the teacher. Occasionally, individual activity and instruction will take place (Yopp & Yopp, 1992; Carliss, 1990; Routman, 1991; Hiebert & Colt, 1989).

From their study, Eldredge and Butterfield (1986) conclude that heterogeneous grouping has a positive effect on student achievement and the attitude of the students and teachers. The teachers believed that heterogeneous groups required less work on their part, made the teaching of reading more enjoyable, and eliminated the humiliation for students in the low group.

Meaningful teaching of comprehension tasks. Comprehension tasks need to be presented in a meaningful context. Children benefit from instruction in comprehension tasks such as predicting, recalling, sequencing, comparing and contrasting, finding main ideas, and building vocabulary. Literature experiences can serve as a base for such instruction. In their study, Tunnell and Jacobs (1989) found that most of the comprehension tasks in literature-based classrooms were taught within the context of children's reading and writing experiences.

### Teacher as a Facilitator

Routman (1991) emphasizes that teachers cannot foster children's literacy unless they are involved as readers in creating meaning. As models of readers, teachers need to enthusiastically present new books and share the different ways literature enriches their lives (Tunnell & Jacobs, (1989). Strickland et al. (1989) suggest that teachers and media specialists share their reading and writing with students.

### Parent Involvement

Families play an important role in nurturing children's literacy. Studies of children who began to read at an early age conclude that their parents read to them regularly, promoted print awareness in the environment, made regular visits to the library, modeled reading and writing, and made writing materials available (Strickland & Morrow, 1989).

When children enter school, their families need to be encouraged to be a part of their children's language learning. Routman (1991) states, "We need to create opportunities for parents to see themselves as a vital, continuing part of their children's education" (p. 485). Goodman (1986) suggests that schools need to keep parents enlightened about instructional goals and methods and their children's responses to the program. He encourages teachers to invite parents to visit the school and

to share information about their children's home activity and growth.

Cornett and Blankenship (1990) relate that parent participation can be encouraged by giving them examples of how to support learning at home. Routman (1991) suggests many ways to nurture a positive home-school relationship such as suggestions for book selection and related activity; many opportunities to communicate, such as open houses, conferences, newsletters, and notes concerning children's successes; a parent corner in the library that contains read aloud suggestions and follow-up activities; a volunteer program; and information about assessment.

### Assessment

Assessment in a literature-based reading program relies more on informal techniques that are descriptive rather than on standardized tests that are quantitative. Children's emerging literacy can be described from children's journal writing and by teacher observations recorded on checklists and in anecdotal records; conferences involving combinations of the student, peers, and the teacher; and portfolio development. Children's independent reading along with their reactions to the works can be recorded in journals. Journals can also provide the teacher with information that will help in extending children's reading interests and tastes and with points of discussion about their

reading during conferences. Dialogues in journals between the student and teacher can provide an exchange about the student's learning experiences (Fuhler, 1990). Checklists of reading and writing behaviors can be kept by the teacher and students to measure achievement and to suggest instructional needs (Cornett & Blankenship, 1990).

Portfolios can contain representative samples of children's responses to the instructional program that are jointly selected by students and teachers. Examples of samples are reading and writing projects in various stages of completion, journals, audio tapes of their reading, and checklists indicating progress in comprehension tasks (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991).

#### Implementation of a Literature-Based Reading Program in Grade One

The components discussed in the review of literature have been implemented in the writer's classroom of 26 first graders. The children are immersed in a print-rich environment and engage in authentic reading and writing experiences. The following experiences document the author's efforts to implement a literature base into her instructional program.

#### Quality Literature Experiences

The themes of the language arts program are supported by works from the different genres. Each month the librarian of the town's public library and librarians from two nearby community

libraries are asked to pull books for the upcoming month's theme and author. These literature resources, in addition to the school media center and the teacher's collection, provide an abundance of quality literature for the classroom.

The literature works are presented in sustaining centers--listening/reading, poetry, and author/illustrator. To support first graders' emerging reading, the picture books included in the listening/reading center are taped. Each picture book and accompanying tape is placed in a plastic bag which can also be checked out for home experiences. Flannelboard pieces and puppets are sometimes included in the packets to encourage children's retelling of the story. The poetry center contains teacher-made posters of poems, compilations of poems related to specific themes, and tapes of poems. An author/illustrator whose work extends a specific theme is featured in the author/illustrator center. Posters, enlarged images from the works, and biographical sketches are displayed along with the author/illustrator's works. Other activities such as flannelboard pieces, puppets, and materials to experiment with the illustrator's medium may be included.

### Read Aloud Experiences

Read aloud sessions are scheduled three times a day in addition to the spontaneous ones that are sparked by classroom events. These story periods are the favorite time of day for the



children and the teacher. The books are selected to provide pleasure for the children as well as to support the study of authors, themes, holidays, and literary elements. The selections include works from the different genres (fiction, poetry, folklore, and nonfiction) and different multicultural perspectives. Choral reading and chanting of works from the poetry charts are frequently a part of the literature period. Following the lunch period each day, three children read orally the first ten pages of a book to the class that they think their classmates would enjoy reading.

#### Independent Reading Experiences

The first graders have a scheduled time each day to view and read picture books as well as listen to tapes that accompany stories that are presented in the sustaining centers. Two elderly volunteers come for a couple of hours two days a week to listen to the first graders read aloud.

#### Opportunities to Respond to Literature Experiences

The students are given many opportunities to respond to literature experiences. The first graders' responses to literature experiences are frequently extended through art, drama, writing, and cooking activities. For example, Eric Carle is an undisputed favorite author in this first grade classroom. During a recent unit on sea animals, his book A House for Hermit Crab (1987) was read aloud to the children. Following the second

reading, the students dictated a list of the changes in Hermit Crab's home during each month of the year which was made into a chart. Also, lists of the names of different sea animals and the months of the year with their abbreviations were placed on chart sheets. The students chose a partner and a month of the year from the story and illustrated their part of the story on a mural which had the months of the year listed across the top. The mural was displayed in the lunch room. The teacher modeled three prompts that could be used in responding to Eric Carle's books as they were shared orally and were extended to art and writing experiences: What did you notice about this story? What were your feelings about the story characters? Could or has anything like this ever happened to you?

Following the reading of The Little Red Hen, as retold by Parkes and Smith (1985), the children made headbands for each character and presented the story as a reader's theater to another class. The story ideas were extended through a cooking experience. The county extension home economist demonstrated to the class how wheat is ground into flour, then helped them bake bread, and discussed its nutritional value.

After reading and discussing, Planting a Rainbow, by Lois Ehlert (1988), the class planted flower seeds. Flowers from these plants will be gifts for their mothers on Mother's Day. Pilgrim stew was made after reading Growing Vegetable Soup, by

Lois Ehlert (1987). To observe sprouting, bean seeds were planted in zip-lock bags filled with soil and taped to the windows after rereading the story in the spring.

### Instructional Organization

The endorsement of literature-based reading and flexible grouping which included heterogeneous grouping was met with skepticism by some of the writer's colleagues. In her classroom, children are not arranged in three reading groups and assigned reading texts as in the traditional reading program. Instead they are grouped according to their interests and their need for instruction on a specific comprehension task. The teacher uses the criteria of leadership, thinking-language ability, gender, and social compatibility in assigning children to the small heterogeneous interest groups. If the children's written work or conferences indicates a need for additional help in an area, that need is addressed in a small group format unless the entire class is having the same problem.

It has been this writer's experience that first graders are not concerned with fragments of language until they want to use a word in a letter, message, or story. With this in mind, we have short "Did you notice?" lessons at the appropriate time. Also, comprehension instruction occurs individually when it satisfies a need. Instruction is only meaningful if it satisfies a child's need or builds upon his/her previous knowledge. Many of the

comprehension tasks are learned through the construction of projects and during writer's workshop and learning center activity.

### Teacher as a Facilitator

First graders learn much about language from the modeling of the teacher. For example, the teacher conveys the value of reading when she reads during the Sustained Silent Reading period. The students soon learn to focus on their books and not to disturb the teacher or the other students.

Journal writing is modeled on the chalkboard at the beginning of the school year and continues until the students are comfortable in making entries on their own. The teacher makes a written response at least once a week to their entries in the journals. The event journals are collected at the end of each month along with their calendars. At the end of the year, each child has a bound, written record of his/her year in first grade. The parent response to this practice has been very positive.

### Parent Involvement

A newsletter from the teacher is sent to the parents at the beginning of each month informing them about what is going to happen in the classroom in the coming month. Another newsletter authored by the students detailing the activities and events follows at the end of each month.

Parents and volunteers are invited to read aloud to the class during their noon hour and near the end of the school day. Each month the class plans a relevant parent-child activity to be completed at home. This idea was first used one month during a school-wide participation in Read-A-Million-Minutes. When families responded enthusiastically to this activity, it was presented on a monthly basis. Recently each family constructed a sea-life diorama for display in the lunch room at school.

As a culminating activity for many of the units of study, the class composes a group story which is compiled into a book to which each child contributes illustrations. A different child takes the book home each night to share with his/her parents. There are comment pages at the end so parents can make written responses. The students are anxious to see what the parents write about the work.

The teddy bears in the classroom take turns spending the weekends at the homes of the students. The bears take along a journal and writing materials for the students and parents to record the books read and the weekend activities.

### Assessment

Several informal assessment techniques are used to describe students' emerging literacy. Dated checklists and anecdotal records of teacher observations are kept on each child. The teacher notes student behaviors, successes, and needs on dated

post-it notes that are transferred at the end of the day to a folder designated for each child. Students respond to their reading experiences in journals and keep examples of their language activity in folders. Through teacher-student conferences, student accomplishments are reviewed, and goals for further activity and instruction are established. During these conferences, the teacher supports the students in engaging in self-evaluation as they choose exhibits for their portfolios that are an ongoing assessment activity during the school year. Results of the teacher's assessment of the students' progress and students' self-evaluations as shown in their portfolio exhibits are shared with parents during conferences. These conferences are scheduled at the end of the first- and third-nine week periods. Some of the work samples in their portfolios are chosen by the students, and some which are representative of daily work are selected by the teacher.

#### Conclusions

The teacher in this instructional program is a facilitator who tries to provide a meaningful, authentic learning environment in which children can become independent thinkers. If these first grade children through involvement in a literature-based program have extended their literacy, have come to realize that literature is for lifetime enjoyment, have become acquainted with their literary heritage, have acquired an understanding of the

elements of literature, and have developed a preference for the best quality literary works, the goals of the program have been fulfilled. Hopefully, through literature experiences, these students also will have furthered their understanding of themselves, others, and the world around them.

The first graders in this program do as well or better than other first graders on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. They appear to have a high level of self-esteem and have opportunities to engage in goal-setting and self-evaluation. They are developing socially with the support of peer and teacher interactions.

Parental support for this program has been positive; and the participation in conferences is one hundred percent. Many parents have expressed surprise about how quickly their child learned to read and the level on which they function.

Research indicates that literature-based reading increases the amount of time spent reading and interacting with literature. Performance on standardized tests is improved, although the format is often not compatible. Vocabulary acquisition escalates in a literature-based program because the children are immersed in print. Self-esteem and interest are elevated and a positive attitude toward reading is noted.

The language program in this first grade classroom contains many of the components noted in the review of professional

literature. The development of a successful literature-based reading program is ongoing. The teacher continually searches for works and related activity to extend the base.



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