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# INTEGRATING THE LANGUAGE ARTS FOR PRIMARY-AGE DISABLED READERS

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Children who attended the University of Missouri Child Study Clinic had an opportunity to participate in a program of reading instruction based upon a theory of the reading process developed by Kenneth S. Goodman. Goodman viewed reading as a meaning seeking process which has two characteristics. One is that the reader is attempting to get at meaning. The second is that he or she is using whole language to do so (Brenner, 1976). This whole-language comprehension-centered approach to the teaching of reading is rooted in the belief that children learn to read in as natural a way as they learn to speak.

Studies in language acquisition clearly indicate that children are endowed with an innate ability to learn language (Brown, 1973; Brown & Bellugi, 1964; Slobin, 1971) and that, based upon the speech they hear, they are able to construct the phonological, syntactic, and semantic rule systems of their language. Hoskisson (1979) points out that this process is not automatic but extends over a long period of time and takes the form of a series of grammars which have their own phonological, syntactic, and semantic components which gradually approximate the language of the adults in their environment. Adults reinforce language learning in children. Goodman stated, when parents respond to what their children are saying, language is being facilitated. Children soon realize that language is worthwhile because it gets them what they want and what they need. As children learn to speak in a natural way, they also learn to read naturally (Brenner, 1976).

Thus learning to read is an extension of natural language learning. It is Goodman's contention that reading, like language learning, becomes self-motivating if it is meaningful and functional. Therefore, reading must be presented to children as a productive and worthwhile experience.

Using the children's natural language abilities as a starting point, instruction in reading at the Child Study Clinic was integrated within a total language arts curriculum. Instructional strategies emphasized the interrelationship of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It was felt that if children were to expand their language learning, numerous opportunities would have to be provided so they could use their own natural language,

both oral and written, to communicate. Thus expansion became a key component to the program. Teachers developed activities which served to enrich and broaden children's language concepts and experiences. These activities, in turn, generated many natural reading and writing experiences. For example, the oral language that the children used and heard daily was utilized as material for instruction rather than fragmenting language into bits and pieces, such as syllables or sounds. As a result no artificial exercises in recitation or drill were used.

To assist children in gaining meaning from print, instruction incorporated the three systems of language: the graphophonemic (sound-symbol relationships) system, the syntactic (grammatical structure) system, and the the semantic (meaning) system. Children were encouraged to use information from the integration of all three language systems and the isolated use of any one system was avoided. Since children read, wrote, and talked about the activities they participated in, reading became immediately meaningful and purposeful for them.

The following four components formed the bases for the language arts curricula. Each component was utilized daily.

Teaching Component One: Opportunities for discussion and spontaneous conversation.

Rationale: When a child has something to say, it is at that point that he or she is motivated to use language (Smith, Goodman and Meredith, 1976).

Although children were encouraged to freely express themselves at all times, the beginning minutes of each session were identified as an especially appropriate time to discuss personal news, such as: family activities, events that had occurred since the previous day, television programs, and individual interests. Children were also encouraged to ask questions, share experiences, and to listen as others talked. Teachers asked openended questions rather than questions calling for specific answers. Such questions allowed children to express their ideas, opinions and feelings. In addition, teachers served as models for language behaviors by:

- using language that was natural and situationally appropriate
- expanding and restating child utterances when appropriate
- listening attentively and showing interest when the children spoke

Teaching Component Two: Daily reading to the children.

Rationale: A child's ability to learn to read print will depend on his or her prior familiarity with written language, which can only be gained by being read to (Smith, 1979). Learning to raead naturally begins when children are read to at an early age and are allowed to handle books. Children who hear prose and poetry written in a variety of moods and styles are being prepared to encounter and enjoy the writings and styles of many different authors and to become authors themselves (Goodman and Watson, 1976).

Teachers read daily to students. They selected materials

from a variety of sources: short stories, poetry, the children's section from a local newspaper, and chapters from books. Selection was made on the basis of stylistic merit and interest rather than on traditional readability factors, such as word frequency or sentence length. Once reading was established as a comfortable part of the morning routine, teachers encouraged the children to predict what might happen next in the story. In some instances, at the conclusion of the story, the children were asked to create a different ending for the story. The previous day's reading was frequently discussed, particularly when a long selection was read. Favorite stories were re-read. The teacher's reading frequently resulted in follow-up group activities such as: art project, cooking experiences, and writing.

Teaching Component Three: Daily reading by both the children and their teachers.

Rationale: Reading is learned through reading. Children need adults as models: they will try to learn and understand what adults do, provided they see adults enjoying the activity (Smith, 1979).

For children to learn to read they must have an opportunity to interact with books (Brenner, 1976). Daily reading was accomplished through a Sustained Silent Reading Program (SSR). Guidelines for SSR were developed by McCracken (1971):

1. Each student must read silently
2. The teacher reads, and permits no interruption of his reading
3. Each student selects a single book (or magazine or newspaper)
4. A timer is used
5. There are absolutely no reports or records of any kind
6. Begin with whole classes or larger groups of students

A reading corner was designated and everyone gathered there to read during the silent reading time. A time was set initially for five minutes and gradually increased to fifteen minutes. Additional opportunities for reading were also available during the individual activities time (free time).

A system called Mine, Yours, and Ours (Goodman & Watson, 1976) was used for selecting the daily reading materials. The student's choice, without adult interference, was the Mine selection, while the Yours selection was made by the teacher. The Ours selection was one mutually agreed upon by the student and the teacher. This selection process was also used when the group made its weekly trips to the library to check out books. Rather than using traditional book reports, a simple bookkeeping system was used. On a 3 x 5 card each student wrote his or her name and the title of the book read. On the reverse side of the card the student answered two questions. The following is an example of the bookkeeping system used (next page):

Front	Back
Your Name -----	Did you finish the book? yes            no
Book Title -----	Did you like the book? yes            no

This system enabled teachers to keep abreast of the students' daily reading. Children engaged in both oral and silent reading. During oral reading no attempt was made to correct children. Oral reading was used for pleasure and for communicating meaning to the listener.

Teaching Component Four: Daily writing by both the children and their teachers.

Rationale: As long as writing is a natural and purposeful activity which poses no threat, children will write and consequently will learn. Children will strive to make sense of writing in the same way they strive to make sense of any activity through the manner in which it satisfies purposes and achieves intentions (Smith, 1979).

The content of the writings was generally student initiated. No writing assignments were made by the teachers, although suggestions were given when appropriate. As in reading, the teachers served as models and they actively engaged in meaningful and purposeful writing themselves.

The writings were not graded or corrected and the children's spellings no matter how poorly executed were accepted and encouraged. The focus of the writings was on communication of these ideas and meanings, not on the mechanics of writing and correct spelling. Writings were always read. Teachers read the writings of children and encouraged children to read their own and each other's writings.

Language experience activities were utilized in various forms. The children dictated and wrote about field trips, cooking experiences, school activities, family events, week-end trips, and parties. The teacher wrote these dictations on charts that were placed on the walls. The children read, reread, and referred to them often.

Patterned after SSR, Sustained Silent Writing was also initiated. The writing was carried on by both teacher and student during the individual activities time. Discussion preceded the writing as boys and girls were helped to verbalize an idea that might become the topic of the writing. Writing about themselves was particularly encouraged.

Close communication between students, teachers, and parents was maintained throughout the duration of the program. Strategies were presented to parents to assist them in incorporating man of the daily teaching components into family activities. Parents were encouraged to:

- read daily to their children
- write notes to their children
- involve their child in family discussion  
and
- make weekly trips to the local public library

The following are examples of some of the activities used in the program:

Establish a class post office. Encourage children to send notes to each other. Teachers write a special note to each child weekly.

Bring the child's real world to the classroom by having children bring food and household products to set up a play grocery store. Students can make shopping lists, commercials, and stories about their store.

Provide cartoon strips without words so students can write their own dialogue.

Provide direct learning experience such as cooking, science experiments, nature walks, caring for plants and animals, etc. The activities can be incorporated into daily activities for talking, writing, and reading.

Include in the classroom many predictable books. Books are predictable if the child can predict what the author is going to say and how s/he will say it. Following is a sample listing of such books: The Three Billy Goats Gruff by Marcia Brown, Harcourt Brace and World, 1957.

Goodnight Moon by Margaret W. Brown, Harper and Row, 1947.

Drummer Hoff by Barbara & Ed Emberly, Prentice-Hall, 1967.

I Love You, Mouse by John Graham, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.

The Fat Cat by Jack Kent, Scholastic Book Services, 1971.

One Sunday Morning by Uri Shulevitz, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967.

Encourage children to write daily. Ideas for daily writing would include: charts, poems, short stories, captions, posters, books, journals, etc.

Have children select a partner for reading. They may take turns reading to each other using either the same selection or a different one.

Individuals from the community are invited to speak to the class on various topics. Student interests determine the guest and the topic.

As stated earlier, the emphasis of the program was to integrate the language arts curriculum for primary-age learning disabled children. The areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing were never considered as isolated skills but as interrelated variables to language and learning.

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