EMERGING LITERACY -

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

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DEDICATION

This culminating project is dedicated to the special people in my life who have supported and encouraged me, enabling my dream to become a reality.

To my children, Kerry and Ciarra, who endured the intensity of approaching deadlines with sensitivity and understanding, cheerfully tolerating Mom at the computer or off to classes again. They continue to be my most influential teachers and an inspiration for lifelong learning.

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ABSTRACT

The fascinating study of <u>Emerging Literacy</u>, encompasses the learning process from birth to approximately eight years of age. The significance of this period of early childhood development is becoming increasingly more evident to educators. As children engage in a continuum of learning from birth, they are developing skills, knowledge and attitudes about all aspects of the world, including reading and writing. Research reveals the nature and manifestations of emerging literacy, endeavours which may little resemble independent literacy activities. Cognizance of these processes enable educators to accept and build upon each individual's diverse background, developmental ability and motivation to learn. Programs which invite children to access prior knowledge as the basis for individual development and growth, while providing differentiated activities and opportunities to learn which are consistent with a variety of developmental abilities, will encourage the emergence of early literacy skills. Learning must be accomplished through an intrinsically social and successful context, which accepts and celebrates the levels of diversity represented by the learners and their families. Current research findings and exemplary practices which promote emerging literacy development are provided for the reflection of educators.

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Emerging Literacy - From Research to Practice

Introduction

Bloom (1987) stated that "a new language always reflects a new point of view, and the gradual, unconscious popularization of new words, or of old words used in new ways, is a sure sign of a profound change in people's articulation of the world" (Cited in Reutzel and Cooter (1992) p. 306). The term "emergent literacy" reflects just such a shift in our view of early reading and writing development. Emergent, refers to the continual transformational learning that occurs on a continuum which begins at birth. The term literacy encompasses the magnitude of events which contribute to the acquisition of understandings necessary to comprehend the mysteries of print plus the "symbiotic" relationship between reading and writing. As the shift occurs in the perception of what constitutes emergent literacy in young children, research has revealed many supportive practices and strategies for nurturing emerging literacy development.

Although research has illuminated many intricacies of emerging literacy, the classroom teacher often does not have the time to delve into the latest research findings which could help to inform practices to a more influential degree. One of

the purposes of this project was to identify essential learnings which foster emerging literacy. Since much of the craft of teaching often relies on myths and tradition rather than reflecting significant findings from research, I attempted to determine if there was evidence of beneficial classroom practices and beliefs, both traditional and new, which would enhance emerging literacy skills. While it is imperative to realign practices periodically, based upon repeated research findings, it is also prudent to preserve beneficial practices which have served children well on their journey to becoming independent readers and writers. I hope to be able to present information for teachers which will enable them to reflect on their established practices, the research findings and suggested exemplary practices and strike a balance which will effectively foster emerging literacy.

Rationale

While teaching is an imprecise art, inherently dependent upon the individuals involved, there are certain beliefs and practices which can positively influence the emerging literacy development of children in early childhood programs. The foundational knowledge, skills and attitudes towards literacy and learning that are being developed will impact upon the child's literacy skills for life. It is imperative that teachers in the early childhood years, birth to eight years of age, engage in reflective practices which will enhance each child's potential. The significance of informed teaching practices in fostering emerging literacy is described by Clay (1991) in the following passage "... the first two years of instruction may be critical for learning to read ... because this is the formative stage of efficient or inefficient processing strategies- the means by which the child picks up and uses information in print" (p. 313). The significance of the early years to education, and in fact, total child development, point to the necessity to have the most exceptional, well-informed teachers guiding the learning processes which will fashion the foundation for all later learning. These exemplary teachers will need to incorporate comprehensive instructional programs, based upon sound research and practices, which focus on enhancing children's independent learning strategies to help meet the myriad needs of today's diverse student populations.

"Florio (1978) stated that "the whole class is now seen as a functional context which provides some opportunities and imposes certain restrictions on what children can discover" (Clay, p.229). Since the classroom sets the parameters and defines the essential elements to be learned, it is paramount that teachers engage in beneficial practices which allow children to come to reading and writing naturally and effectively. Providing children with a wide variety of successful literacy experiences while enabling them to functionally develop their learning strategies them will empower them to challenge themselves while developing deeper understandings of literacy.

The remainder of this paper will review a selection of literature about Emerging Literacy, define major implications for practice and conclude with classroom connections which teachers of emergent literacy might adapt to suit the context of their working reality.

The Process of Emerging Literacy

Emerging literacy development is a process which the child engages in from birth as they learn to make sense of the world around them. In a literate society, children are exposed to the wonder of print through books and observations of the adults and older children engaging in reading and writing activities. The process of becoming literate does not happen as naturally as learning to walk, but the desire to gain the independence accessed by becoming literate does reflect the pattern of first steps. Initially, the child does not even comprehend that there is a process, which he/she can engage in. As skills and comprehension deepen, the child participates with increasing confidence and independence, allowing supports to be withdrawn gradually, just as guiding hands are lovingly withdrawn as a child is encouraged to take their first tentative steps towards independence. As in learning to walk, the environment plays a major role in the child's literacy development. The more rich, varied and encouraging the environment, the more the child will engage in learning, to walk or literacy skills. The more authentic the need for the child to master these skills, (eg. to access toys, catch the family pet, or to communicate needs), the more internal motivation the child brings to the process. The child who envisions a purpose in learning the new skill, takes the necessary risks, begins to enjoy the freedom and exerts additional effort to gain independence. The child must also be given the opportunity to practice the newly

acquired skill, both with and without assistance. An infant who spends the day confined to a child seat or jumper, may have insufficient opportunity to develop the necessary motor coordination and strength, just as a child who is only infrequently responded to regarding his curiosity about print. A child who spends the majority of his/her time with the support of a "walker", pattern sentences or predictable books only, often reacts adversely to the loss of independence when performing the new skills becomes their sole responsibility. Significant adults continually play an influential role in determining and maintaining the balance between the provision of adequate support and nurturing and encouraging independence. Most children naturally develop strategies of relying on supports in the environment, eg. the couch and coffee tables or environmental print and predictable books, when they are available. As children learn new skills they fluctuate between stages of mastery and dependence. An unfamiliar setting or family upheaval may create a need for increased support. All learning also reflects a social process, in which the child reacts and adjusts behaviours according to the positive, negative or neutral responses of the significant people in their environment. The social interaction factor is evident when a child strives to keep up with an older sibling or is raised in a family which values early walking, mobility or literacy and independence. There is also an intensely personal determinant to the acquisition of learning any new skill. Internal motivation, attitudes and values, affect all learning and determines whether a child will be compelled to improve or placidly develop the necessary skills. It is often said that when the child is "ready," they will learn to

walk or read. While this postulate is based upon a seminal truth, there are many practices engaged in, in supportive home environments, which encourage the development of these skills.

An environment, at home and in school, which provides adequate support, balance, opportunities and encouragement of literacy development, will promote the "natural" acquisition of independent literacy skills. Recognition of the process of learning; building on prior knowledge and ability, acceptance of approximations and truly valuing literacy in the child's daily life will assist the learning process.

Past Practices

Past practices, understandings and misconceptions often saw beginning reading and writing activities as "readiness activities." A set of isolated skills were required to be mastered before formal instruction in the literacy process would begin. A deluge of research into successful emerging literacy skills demonstrated that this focus was too restrictive and could in fact limit a child's potential by concentrating on trivial components which the child then deemed significant.

The prevailing belief of the past, was that reading and writing instruction should be withheld from young children until they were "ready" to benefit from formal instruction. Physical readiness included concerns regarding visual and auditory development and fine motor control. A poor quality, high impact study conducted by Morphett and Washburne (1931), misled many educators to believe that reading instruction should be withheld from most children until they reached a chronological age of six years and six months (Cited in Cooter and Reutzel, p. 299). There is no documented evidence of harm from exposing children to reading instruction before this age, although most researchers support flexible, informal instruction rather than a more structured approach with young children.

There have not been any substantial research findings to support the "readiness"

concept of teaching "pre-reading" skills in isolation until a child is able to benefit from reading and writing instruction. The research actually documents that skills taught in isolation often do not transfer to reading and writing activities in context, therefore most authors recommend that all teaching should be linked to connected text after any examination in isolation.

As we move from the established practices of expecting children to master a specific set of contrived skills, to nurturing their literacy development by building on their existing knowledge, we must also be aware of which practices, traditionally labelled "readiness" activities are beneficial for children. Research shows that "..children who are taught letter-sound relationships have been found to get off to a better start in learning to read than other children. What needs to be stressed is that the teaching and learning of the alphabet, letter-sound relationships, and decoding skills are only a very small part of reading instruction. The time spent on them should be minimal, and the strategies selected for instruction appropriate for young children" (Morrow, p. 80). The majority of the time should be spent purposefully engaged with language and literature.

It is vital to identify the essential concepts and learnings which contribute to successful emerging literacy development to ensure that all children are exposed to those influential teachings.

Contemporary Beliefs

Since children engage in literacy events from birth they informally begin acquisition of knowledge of the process. Not all children will acquire the ability to understand the concepts of print, without intervention, teaching or the support of responsive adults. The difficulty remains in agreeing on what interventions are beneficial. The traditional type of interactions involve learning meaningless names and sounds as a prerequisite. Contemporary beliefs challenge teachers to draw upon the skills the child has already acquired, then provide a variety of purposeful literacy events and successful interactions, as a meaningful way to engage a child in the learning processes involved with emerging literacy. "It is certainly not true that children do not begin reading and writing until they have mastered directional behaviours, phonemic segmentation and all the letter knowledge. With a little knowledge the process can get under way, and using this small amount of knowledge children discover many new ways to work on printed language, and expand their control as they do this." (Reutzel and Cooter, p. 281). Just as a parent must struggle to maintain the balance between appropriate levels of support and encouragement, so teachers must address the issue of how to challenge appropriately while encouraging emerging literacy.

The Learning Process

The changing face of literacy development, reflects the knowledge and information we are garnering from research about the learning process. All learning is dependent upon past experiences and prior knowledge as the brain struggles to organize new information using existing schema. When new information does not fit the existing constructs, a state which Piaget called "cognitive disequilibrium" results. In the process of acquiring new knowledge, the child may construct temporary hypotheses or use strategies which may need to be discarded later as more sophisticated information becomes understood. Just as a child overgeneralizes that all four legged animals are "dogs" until their maturity allows them to categorize more specifically, many temporary beliefs are modified or altered as learning continues. In supportive home environments, parents and children are frequently engaged in interactive dialogue and activities where behaviours are informally observed, allowing parents to understand the child's thoughts and perceptions, and respond appropriately. It is imperative to discern the child's beliefs, so that new information can build upon currently held views, taking care not to confirm any misunderstandings or flaws in their current hypotheses. Children are encouraged to actively engage in the learning process, asking questions as they seek to clarify their understandings. These questions are fostered through attentive, accepting responses in a non-critical environment. As

the adult discovers misunderstandings, they are able to accept the child's response, and utilise the child's known information to scaffold to a higher level of understanding.

As brain research continues to elucidate the learning process, it is imperative that teachers keep abreast of this information. Most early childhood classes have been based upon the postulates of scholars like Dearden (1984) who described "views of child development which referred to the importance of; learning from activity, self-directed learning and learning by discovery " as essential for young children. Although these influential premises continue to be valid they do not account for two recent discoveries:

"- that the child is affected by what follows what he does

- that the child is a constructor of his own experience."

(Cited in Clay, (1991) p. 319).

Programs must ensure that their practices reflect this new information. The construction of personal knowledge, based upon individual experiences, points to the necessity of providing an interactive environment, where communicative monitoring, feedback and evaluation become imbedded into the activities. The extension of literacy events into the child's reality through "playing" the literature, incorporating formalized language and engaging in extension activities are a natural occurrence in supportive home environments which should be emulated in the classroom. For example, there are few families who after sharing the

experiences of "Alexander", would not understand the reference to having a "terrible, horrible, no good very bad day," as it becomes part of the shared experience that is revisited throughout the child's real world. (from Judith Viorst (1972) <u>Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day</u>). As the child internalizes the benefits of utilizing the familiar language pattern to diffuse tension and add levity to new contexts, a deeper understanding of the power of literature emerges. The ability to extend other facets of literature into their reality becomes more plausible.

The current trend in education to engage children in reflection and explanations of their metacognitive processes, manifests both contemporary learning theories research and the supportive communication which occurs in home environments. As children articulate their thought processes and reveal their true perceptions and levels of understanding, adults are able to identify what further encounters should be planned. Providing learners with experiences to learn from rather than explanations which they can't comprehend, allows for individualized enlightenment. "When young children learn....they engage in active problem-solving, extracting information from their experiences, forming hypotheses and constructing rules. These rules are tried out, revised and reconstructed, gradually coming closer to conventional forms and mature adult usage." (McLane and McNamee (1990) p. 39).

To accept and encourage approximations during the child's development we must

ensure we are providing opportunities for children to "articulate their ideas in progress as part of the teaching task" (Gibson (1989) p. 79). This benefits all children as they develop an ability to reason from the vicarious experience of others and expand their information base by assimilating strategies and thoughts which their peers have found successful. As children are encouraged to become active investigators and processors of text materials, they share strategies, expanding or discarding their temporary postulates as necessary. The more connections the child is able to make between the real world and the classroom (the physical world and the symbolic world), the more ready he/she will be to strive to decode necessary symbolic representations of language, because of the impact on his/her real world.

Educational Implications

Morrow (1989) suggests that much of the research advocates for incorporation of early childhood reading instruction, "but not instruction that emulates first-grade practice. Rather they suggest more informal strategies similar to those discovered in homes where children learned to read without direct instruction" (p.13). It is important to remember that most children will need instruction, guidance and support to become independently literate. Simply immersing them in print at an early age will not magically result in skill development.

As the shift in education moves from "preparing" children for formal instruction to encouraging individualized development on a continuum which starts at birth, teachers will need to be aware of the nature and manifestations of early literacy development to enable them to accept and encourage each child's attempts and approximations. Identification and implementation of practices similar to those engaged in supportive home environments, will allow children to actively participate in the reading and writing process as a natural part of their development. The importance attached to literacy and the functional use of print modelled in the child's everyday life will impact upon the child's desire to engage in literacy events.

Early literacy experiences are such an integral part of supportive family environments, that parents are often unaware of the powerful learnings that are taking place (Taylor (1983), Gundlach (1985) Cited in Morrow (1989)). Educators, although recognizing the importance of background experiences, have also been unaware of the extent of the knowledge base or the manifestations of emerging "reading and writing" behaviours, since they often little resemble independent literacy activities.

Differentiated Instruction

Just as sensitive parents are empathetic to each child's unique need for differentiated support, so early literacy instruction must focus on individual needs. All children can learn, not in the same way on the same day, but they will acquire knowledge at their individual level and pace. Expectations for all children to engage in tasks which require the same degree of functioning and understanding, creates a climate which places some children seriously "at-risk." Recognition of the diversity of past experiences, interests, abilities and understandings that young children bring to early childhood classes, will necessitate the development of programs sensitive to the needs of each child. Programs which invite each child to access prior knowledge and understanding as the basis for individual development and growth, while providing differentiated activities and opportunities to learn which are consistent with the child's developmental ability, will encourage the emergence of early literacy skills in an intrinsically social and successful context. As children use their prior information to construct new understandings regarding literacy many temporary or approximate beliefs are formed, which are reinforced or discarded during future literacy experiences. While high achievers self-correct their misunderstandings as they learn, low achievers especially, benefit from multiple interactions with others, to reinforce correct responses and understandings while helping correct individual mis-interpretations. Frequent

and the encouragement of child-driven questions, will allow for appropriate feedback, support and metacognitive development as children move closer to becoming independent literate individuals. Acceptance of each individual's level of development, ability and demonstrations of growth will form the basis for success built upon the child's belief in their own competence.

Just as supportive parents provide differential treatment and support for each of their children individually, so classrooms must reflect the diverse levels of need. Clay (1991) aptly presents the issue, "...a starting programme should be so designed that it provides for engagement of different children in different ways on different levels from the beginning" (p. 203). The importance of differentiated instruction to meet individual needs, is an issue which will warrant greater acceptance as the diversity of students and inclusion of special needs children continues to expand the levels of ability in the classroom. Currently many teachers modify performance expectations, while still expecting all children to engage in identical activities regardless of background experiences, interests and developmental ability. Differentiated treatment, based on need, allows for opportunities to engage in print and meaning making activities at a variety of levels from the earliest instruction. The success that children experience from this approach allows for all children to envision themselves as successful learners, which impacts on their motivation and desire to continue to develop their competencies.

Parental Acceptance and Involvement

Early childhood educators have long recognized the value of creating an environment where parents and teachers work cooperatively toward a shared goal. Acceptance and encouragement of each child and their family supports will prove more beneficial than an attitude which assumes a deficit and encourages compensatory programming. Often, our prevailing attitude has been one of identifying "at-risk" students, and attempting to ameliorate their deficits, and those of their families, so that all children will begin formal reading instruction on an equal footing, and thus perform successfully when engaged in identical activities with modified, but similar, expectations. The depth and scope of pre-literacy events that families will have engaged in will vary greatly, reflecting each culture's and families' value of literacy. The sensitive treatment of culturally diverse children and their families by an accepting, nurturing adult is imperative. A methodology which insists that all families engage in non-differentiated "home support" activities based upon assumed similar levels of background knowledge, interest and understanding will further isolate some disenfranchised parents who, for a variety of reasons, are not able to participate successfully in these types of literacy activities. It is imperative that teachers recognize diversity as a difference not a deficit, and seek to engage and appropriately support all learners especially those who have not been culturally acclimated into the predominant culture.

Homes in which literacy is an essential, functional component of the daily lives of the family are supportive of early literacy development. While mainstream culture esteems homes where children are surrounded with and repeatedly exposed to quality children's literature, diverse literacy events can also establish the importance of becoming literate. Children from lower socio-economic or culturally diverse backgrounds have been exposed to a variety of literacy events in the home. It is the type of events that vary, not the importance. Children may have been exposed to models of adults reading the Bible, newspaper, directions, shopping flyers, environmental print, etc. They become further aware of the importance of print through grocery lists, letters to loved ones, mail, coupons, cheques, reminder notes and similar functional necessities which they have observed modelled in the home, to varying degrees. The amount of importance the family places on literacy events (not their socio-economic status) will determine the child's potential for literacy development.

Alternate literacy events have often been unappreciated by educators as the development of formal vocabulary, and sense of story are not fostered as effectively as mainstream cultural exposure to stories. Expectations that all children will be able to engage successfully in the same literacy activities, at the same level of development and capability will further reinforce the misconception that certain children are not "ready" for instruction. The inclusion of alternate literacy events in the classroom will enhance each child's ability to access and

utilize their prior knowledge and experiences to feel successful while attaching an intrinsic importance to the development of literacy skills.

The teacher plays a pivotal role in involving parents in the process of developing a child's emerging literacy skills. Teachers of young children establish the foundation for the transition from home to school and set the tone of the relationship for future years. Gordon (1975) found that during a child's early education "parents' interest is especially high and their involvement in the education of their young children can have greater benefits" (Cited in Raines and Isbell (1994) p. 366). Families will continue to play the key role in broadening a child's experiential background while providing a supportive environment which encourages a child's total development while influencing their ability to function well in the school environment. Watson, Brown and Swick (1983) found a "significant positive relationship between the support the parent received from the environment and the support the family gave their children" (Cited in Raines and Isbell (1994) p. 336). Establishing a positive relationship with parents will enhance the goal of nurturing emerging literacy development, as parents continue to be their child's first and most influential teacher.

The following quote identifies the most influential characteristics that an early childhood teacher should cultivate to positively affect intrapersonal relationships with families.

"Swick (1991), identified four personal attributes of teachers that seem to enhance their interactions with parents of young children. Teachers are:
1. sensitive to the personal dynamics of the family and have the ability to respond to them in a concerned manner
2. flexible in adapting to the individual child and parent needs;
3. reliable and consistent on issues related to the family and school
4. accessible to parents ideas related to their children's development and learning."
(Cited in Raines and Isbell (1994) p. 367).

Teachers must be accepting and appreciative of the parents diversity, while encouraging the involvement of the child's most important teacher, the parents. Parents may need gentle encouragement and nurturing to adapt some of the successful strategies for supporting their child's emerging literacy. Teachers must also be sensitive to the parent suggestions and limitations. As parents develop more confidence in their abilities, they will feel more capable of providing the necessary support and will be willing to take the risks involved in trying to incorporate suggestions. Teachers must consciously tailor recommendations to match individual family contexts, recognizing and respecting the families efforts and abilities, thereby providing choices and a variety of levels of possible engagement. Just as all learning occurs, scaffolding new strategies from already established parental skills will increase the likelihood of success.

Experiences which foster emerging literacy development have less to do with exposure to book experiences or family economics and more to do with the attitudes and values of the child's meaningful social group, mainly his family and other important people in their lives (Gibson (1989) p. 29). It is imperative that

collaborative partnerships develop between the home and school, so that each can complement the efforts of the other. Establishing the shared goal that each child will become literate conveys an influential message to the child that literacy is valued in all environments. "Parents play a crucial role in children's early literacy development by providing materials, communicating assumptions and expectations and giving help and instruction - all in the context of the most significant relationships children have" (McLane and McNamee (1990) p. 112). In families and classrooms where the functional use of print and text enhances daily life, children become aware of its importance, and develop an interest in acquiring competence.

Meaningful Involvement with Print

As early childhood classrooms strive to emulate supportive home environments, we must consider incorporating beneficial practices which have a positive impact on total child development. Rutter (1985) identified several parent behaviours that nurture children's intellectual development. These include providing a variety of experiences, allowing children to explore, encouraging their developing abilities, and playing and participating in their conversations (Cited in Raines and Isbell (1994) p. 365). Early childhood classrooms should reflect the knowledge that young children learn through active involvement with a variety of interrelated activities and concrete materials which they are allowed to explore and discuss with peers and adults.

Durkin's (1966) study of Children Who Read Early, found home environments which were filled with print, reading models and adults who responded to and encouraged the child's interest in books, reading and writing. Maintaining a relaxed informality and flexibility while tapping into the child's interests and abilities were also identified as significant factors (Cited in Teale (1980)). Classrooms which are child-centered, responsive environments which capitalize on children's natural curiosity and interest in learning about the reading and writing process, will expose children to a variety of opportunities to observe and explore the functions of print.

Just as parents encourage their children to use all available environmental supports, Hiebert and Ham (1981) documented that children who were taught with environmental print learned significantly more letter names and sounds than did children who learned alphabet letters in isolation (Cited in Reutzel and Cooter (1992) p. 352). Increasing children's awareness of their developing ability to decode environmental print, enables them to move into reading with more confidence, while also making the connection between real-life and school expectations. Stimulating and enriched environments expand upon the opportunities available for children, who learn best when reading and writing are embedded in the daily classroom activities (McLane and McNamee (1990) p. 115).

Research by Reutzel, Oda and Moore (1989) revealed that "kindergartners learned as much about print concept and word reading in a print-rich environment as they did with the addition of direct instruction on specific print concepts" (Cited in Reutzel and Cooter (1992) p. 334). This knowledge is not acquired through osmosis simply by being immersed in a print-rich environment. Meaningful interactions, combined with multiple repetitions, demonstrations and engagement will afford children with the opportunity to understand print concepts in a natural way. Rather than isolated skill lessons, children should be provided with opportunities to play with written and oral language, while developing their own deeper understanding. This meaningful manipulation of language and print must be encouraged and responded to by the significant adults in the child's life.

The physical design of a classroom has been found to affect the choices children make among activities (Morrow (1989) p. 172). An environment that is filled with interesting reading and writing materials will encourage the child's engagement in these activities. Confirmation of the importance of meaningful interaction in a print-rich environment was documented by Heibert and Ham (1981) and Reutzel, Oda and Moore (1989) (Cited in Reutzel and Cooter (1992) p. 334). Children were found to have learned as much or more about print concepts through the use of meaningful environmental print as they did with the addition of direct instruction. The print concepts studied included letter names and sounds, directionality, punctuation, voice print match, and understandings of the mechanics of books and print. This information seems to support Morrow's (1989) recommendation that specifically advises against teaching of the alphabet, one letter per week, "Systematic teaching of the alphabet, one letter per week is not as successful as teaching children letters that are meaningful to them" (p. 131). Many authors suggest using the letters of children's names as the starting point, encouraging children to examine the forms and shapes while gradually establishing the idea of the symbolic representation of letters, sounds and words. As children become adept at recognizing and "reading" each others names, they are developing the necessary skills to make meaning from print. Teachers should be encouraged to use teachable moments integrated throughout the day to discuss the essential learnings necessary for emerging literacy acquisition. A carefully constructed environment, which provides children access to quality reading and writing

materials will enhance this "incidental" teaching which will benefit young children.

Morrow (1990) concludes "thematic centres stimulated the largest increase in the reading and literacy activities" of young children (p. 173). Literacy activities which are focused on broad themes, and based on meaning increase children's voluntary involvement with books, as they seek to acquire additional meaningful information and experiences. Thematically based instruction helps children to organize and store information as they internalize multisensory experiences on a related theme. This supports the successful learning techniques springing from brain research, which indicate that the more areas of the brain that are accessed for storage of information, the more easily information can be retrieved.

Many researchers have found that children learn the use before the form of language, therefore it is important to expose the child to meaningful literacy events which have an impact on their daily lives (Gundlach, et al (1985), Taylor (1983) Cited in Morrow (1989)). Many practices, which supportive parents intuitively incorporate, enhance children's ability to benefit from exposure to literacy events. Children who experience difficulty becoming literate will benefit from engagement in highly interactive activities with print to help them develop the strategies and understandings of their more literate peers. They require frequent feedback to reinforce correct responses and understandings and re-direct misunderstandings. When inaccuracies in their learning are detected, they need to be led, often through

a "think-aloud" process to correct their own mis-interpretations. This technique employed by supportive parents is often referred to in the literature as scaffolding, where the parent provides the appropriate amount of support to link the information with previous learnings while gently guiding the child through a series of approximations until a deeper understanding is established.

On a cautionary note, there is a danger in zealously adopting an emerging literacy program that becomes so narrowly focused on literacy, that the importance of total child development may be neglected. Development of all domains of young children are equally important and inter-related. Encouraging physical, social, emotional, creative, cultural as well as intellectual development requires a well designed, integrated program. The capability to maintain a balance between child-directed and teacher-directed activities becomes crucial. While the most successful learners naturally incorporate language, print and dramatization of literature into their play, teachers can foster these types of play by planning for and modelling literature-based extensions, which allow children to respond in a variety of ways. Enriching a child's play-based experiences, through the provision of props, materials, suggestions and vicarious experiences related to literature, will enhance their ability to make the connection between their real-life and the importance of literacy. Providing a variety of inter-related experiences which foster total child development will encourage children to extend literacy events as well as enhancing their ability to read and write by providing internal motivation.

Play remains an intrinsic component of all effective early childhood programs as it affords children the opportunity to experiment with their personal beliefs in non-threatening situations. As they strive to make sense of new information, they test their hypotheses in unfamiliar contexts while engaged in a supportive social setting. This enables them to adjust their personal beliefs as they gain a deeper understanding of ideas and concepts, and internalize the new learning. McLane and McNamee (1990) describe this process succinctly:

> "Play appears to have at least two potential links to the development of literacy: (1) As a symbolic activity, pretend play allows children to develop and refine their capacities to use symbols, to represent experience, and to construct imaginary worlds, capacities they will draw on when they begin to write and read. (2) As an orientation or approach to experience, play can make the various roles and activities of people who read and write more meaningful and hence more accessible to young children" (p. 15).

The inclusion of time for play remains an essential component in any early childhood class. Through engagement in self-directed activities, the child crystallizes, clarifies and constructs personal meaning. Early childhood teachers must ensure that parents and administrators understand the importance and value of a child's work, play.

This examination of the literature and research has led me to envision the following principles which must be considered when designing successful early childhood programs which promote early literacy development:

a) Children arrive in early childhood classes with diverse backgrounds of information, developmental ability and motivation to learn. A wide range of

acceptable behaviours reflect the normal range of development at every level. Generally, the younger the children the more diverse their range will be, attributable in a large part to the differences in their background skills and experiences which have been both maturationally and culturally driven. These differences should be viewed as desirable, not as deficits. Children will require a variety of literacy events, so that they can engage successfully at a level that is conducive to their developing ability. Recognition of the child's prior knowledge and experiences should be capitalized upon to establish new learning and information.

b) Children need to be taught in a warm, safe, caring environment, surrounded by positive, responsive adults who will unconditionally accept each child and their approximations. Forming sensitive partnerships by accepting, respecting and honouring each family will benefit children by involving their first and most influential teachers, their parents.

c) Learning occurs most naturally when children are engaged in meaningful, functional literacy events. Purposeful, socially interactive activities, which involve both reading and writing at a variety of levels, should be provided for children to choose from, on a daily basis.

Exemplary Practices

While teaching is a complex activity which marries both craft and science, tempered strongly by the teacher's personality, common elements which support emerging literacy development and mirror the practices of supportive home environments should be included in early childhood classrooms. This section will examine many exemplary practices, while providing evidence for inclusion. Each teacher should scrutinize their practices to ensure inclusion of the essential components which increase teacher efficacy and individual child development.

Immersing children in a print-rich environment, with access and exposure to quality reading and writing materials, is a critical element. In a classroom, this should include multiple daily reading experiences with stories, informational texts, songs and poems as well as a class library, writing center and a comfortable inviting reading area. Children need the opportunity to revisit favourite books and interact with literature, writing materials, peers and adults. The most elaborate reading and writing centers will not facilitate growth if children are given only minimal opportunities to explore, discover, reflect and learn. A well-equipped center for drawing and writing will help children play with the concept of print while they establish functional uses for writing. Daily modelling of both the reading and writing process, through flexible informal presentations, in a variety of situations

is paramount to establishing a desire to engage in these activities.

The provision of a multitude of real-life experiences, associated with responsive, interactive conversation will provide the bridge which enables children to build upon their personal knowledge base. Children must have a variety of opportunities to interact with the concrete world before they will develop competence utilizing or understanding the symbolic representations of print. Multiple opportunities for fantasy play are imperative for young children. Attempts to extend literature through play are enhanced through open-ended conversations with adults and peers. These social interactions fulfill a vital role in the development of emerging literacy skills, as children learn through association with others who provide more competent models for emulation.

The inclusion of daily read-aloud activities as an integral component in all early childhood programs is paramount. Most research findings overwhelmingly support the importance of reading to children on a regular basis. Evidence of the multitude of benefits associated with reading to young children is indisputable. Shared book experiences encourage the development of rituals and reading habits which extend to later life. Positive correlations have been reported regarding reading success and previous shared book experiences. As young children become independent readers, the "good feelings gained in story readings transfer to the act of reading itself" providing an intrinsic source of motivation (Morrow (1989) p. 79).

Unfortunately not all read aloud experiences provide equivalent benefits therefore the literacy development will differ in both quality and quantity, reflecting several factors. The quality of any literacy encounters will depend upon a number of determinants, including the child's awareness of symbolism, oral language development and conscious awareness about literacy (Goodman (1982) p. 103). Not all families, or teachers, are aware of the strategies which will produce the most benefits for children. Raising this level of awareness through modelling and discussion will help parents provide appropriate support for their children. "Particularly helpful behaviour includes prompting children to respond, scaffolding responses for children to model when they are unable to respond themselves, relating responses to real-life experiences, answering questions and offering positive reinforcement for children's responses" (Morrow (1989) p. 79). Discussing stories before, during and after being read can be enhanced with the addition of literal, inferential and critical questions. Linking the reading to the child's prior and future experiences, while encouraging the child to engage in thoughtful reflection will strengthen their comprehension. Heath (1980) found that the "significant degree to which the content and habits of the book reading were extended beyond the event itself and the degree to which the children were asked for `why' explanations and affective commentaries" proved to be significant factors in enhancing the quality and effects of the shared reading experience (Cited in Teale (1982) p. 113). Children who had been provided with opportunities to evaluate and apply higher level thinking skills during shared reading were more able to cope

with advanced reading tasks. Shared daily read-aloud activities should provide opportunities for children to reflect upon their previous experiences while expanding their knowledge base, and integrating this new information into their personal cognizance.

Although encouraging daily reading at home enhances the child's experiences, the benefits of daily reading will have a significant effect on emerging literacy development even if only in the classroom setting, as demonstrated in the following study.

> "Kindergarten children in Israel whose teachers read to them in school three times a week for four months were better able to understand stories and to make inferences about causal relationships; were more attentive to picture cues, and could construct better narratives than a matched control group who were not read to. First-grade children whose teachers read to them daily for twenty minutes over a six-month period had higher comprehension scores, used more complex language in storytelling and made fewer errors in their own oral reading than a matched control group who were not read to."
>
> (McLane and McNamee (1990) p. 19).

Therefore, even if parents are unable or unwilling to provide additional reading experiences for children, teachers must engage in daily interactive shared reading experiences. A study by Mason (1980) found that reading to children "not only contributes to their awareness of the functions, forms and conventions of print, but that children develop metacognitve knowledge about how to approach reading tasks and how to interact with teachers and parents" (Morrow (1989) p. 78).

extremely beneficial practice which is often neglected in the classroom because of the plethora of excellent books to share with children. Morrow (1987) compared the benefits of reading nine different stories to those accrued when three stories were repeated three times. "The repeated reading group increased the number and kind of their responses, and their responses differed significantly....[They] were more interpretive, ..began to predict outcomes and make associations, judgements, and elaborative comments...began to narrate stories as the teacher read, and to focus on elements of print, asking names of letters and words. Even children of low ability seem to make more responses with repeated readings than with a single reading" (p. 112-113). Although educators have long reassured parents of the benefits of "memory reading" which results from repeated exposures to a familiar text, many have not incorporated repeated readings into classroom routines. The inclusion of an old favourite at the beginning of shared reading sessions is one suggestion for consideration to ensure that all children are exposed to repeated readings.

While children deemed "at-risk" have often been presented with supplementary drill in isolated skills to compensate for their lower levels of literacy development, research reveals that additional exposure to print is much more beneficial, especially in conjunction with scaffolding support from a significant adult. Many children, especially the children deemed "at-risk" require repeated readings to allow for information processing. Providing repeated reading experiences to

supplement the levels of exposures for these children will enhance their emerging literacy, by providing for increased interactive opportunities. Utilizing a variety of volunteers to read with young children can be very beneficial, especially if these mentors are coached regarding enhancing interactions. All children, will benefit from additional supported exposure to print. Rhythm, rhyme and strong auditorily stimulating texts can help support comprehension, especially when combined with predictability. The child is able to focus on the new learning when already familiar with the pattern, style or structure. Repeated exposure to familiar texts will allow the child to develop a deeper understanding of story structure and formalized language.

Irving (1980) stated "One of the clear points to emerge from research into reading failure is that there was no association between reading and pleasure..." (Cited in Morrow (1989) p. 91). The most appropriate way to establish this association is through the shared reading experience. As children are exposed to a variety of shared book experiences, they develop an internal motivation to gain control over the exciting world of reading.

In fact, Wells (1981, 1982) during the Children Learning to Read Project; found that listening to stories had the most advantageous effect on reading achievement when compared to other factors such as level of "oral language development, and parental interest in and help with school work" (Cited in Teale (1982) p. 120).

Sharing stories with children " ...provides experience with decontextualized language and the opportunity to learn some of the essential characteristics of written language, facilitates the acquisition of literacy and helps the child to cope with the reflective, disembedded thinking that is so necessary for success in school" (Teale (1982) p. 120).

Holdaway's (1979) observations that a child benefits most when early experiences with storybooks "are mediated by an interactive adult who provides problem-solving situations" should be replicated in the classroom (Cited in Morrow (1989) p. 101). The child is invited to respond in various ways with adults and peers providing supportive information at the appropriate level or scaffolding thinking strategies when necessary. Heath (1982) reported that when comparing

> "the ability to read connected discourse,...there are differences in responses among social classes. Although economically poor children develop ideas about connected discourse and know a good deal about how to handle books, middle-class children seem to develop greater flexibility and adult conventional knowledge about this type of reading. Mainstream children ...because of the way in which their book-reading episodes and other preschool literacy experiences were structured, were much more adept at applying knowledge gained in one context to another context, answering questions...and at giving personal comments...." (Cited in Teale (1982) p.114).

This significant difference was attributed to the format of the interactions, which included supportive questioning techniques and resulted in a greater productive vocabulary among higher socio-economic system children. Classrooms must emulate the most beneficial formats, if they are to assist all children in developing the ability to make personal connections between text and life.

While sharing stories enables children to be more successful emergent readers and writers, it is not a necessary prerequisite, a concept that educators often lose sight of during the zealousness to promote the benefits of shared reading. Some children will become successful early readers without a wealth of shared reading experiences. Effective work with diverse parents must include "accepting and appreciating differences and similarities of people while avoiding stereotyping" (Raines and Isbell (1994) p. 367). Since early literacy can develop in many ways, an encouraging teacher will help parents access support for their children while providing a variety of alternatives regarding how to enhance a child's total development. Identifying and promoting alternate ways of supporting children's emerging literacy will enhance all parents and teachers ability to nurture this development. Family differences regarding the quality and quantity of exchanges and interactions will inevitably vary. The perceptive teacher will help to develop awareness of various ways that emerging literacy can be supported, to enable families to customize their own solution.

Two alternatives include the use of environmental print to lead children into the reading process or utilizing writing activities to hook children into literacy. "In learning to read environmental print, there seems to be little difference among social class groups" so its inclusion can help narrow the gap between "at-risk" learners and their more competent peers (Goodman (1982) p. 103). By viewing themselves as just as successful in learning to read this medium, due to similar

past exposures, children believe in their ability to decode print. Some children will display an interest in writing before they develop an interest in reading, due to the enhanced social interaction that can occur through writing. A child's interest in writing will lead to the understanding of the importance of reading to decode the messages of others.

Bailey (1990) also identified three factors which will affect reading success as; reading to children, talking and listening to them, and helping to broaden their experiential background (Cited in Raines and Isbell, (1994) p. 365). Parents who are unable to read consistently to their children, can still enrich their environments by providing a variety of experiences and supportive discussion about these events. Each of these factors should be reflected in a supportive early childhood classrooms, where teachers construct a multitude of engaging experiences while soliciting children to make personal connections through discussions and questions to which adults sensitively respond.

Literacy rich environments, provided in the home and school setting, can greatly enhance the child's awareness of and affinity for reading and writing. Children should have access to a variety of quality reading materials and writing implements. Classrooms should include both reading and writing centers where children have the opportunity to choose to engage in a variety of self-directed activities which will extend the literacy experiences designed by the teacher.

"Studies by Morrow and Weinstein (1982, 1986) and Morrow (1987b) showed that well-designed classroom library corners significantly increased the number of children who chose to participate in literature activities during free-choice period" (Cited in Morrow (1989) p. 86). Plato's ancient wisdom should be reflected in designing a superior early childhood program; "What is honoured in a country will be cultivated there." Surrounding children with quality children's literature, exposing them to the functional uses of reading and writing and encouraging their approximations and explorations will enhance their desire to become literate. Well designed classrooms should include, rotating collections of thematically based books representative of a variety of genres, and reading levels. True opportunities for children to explore solitarily or share books with peers must be provided. Enticing literature and literacy events should be included in all learning centres as self-directed activities which will enhance, enrich and extend the literature experiences while providing the child with the opportunity to practice and become more proficient with literacy in a variety of ways.

Extended periods of time for children to practice reading must be incorporated into early childhood classes on a regular basis. While book experiences often provide for a quiet transition between activities, purposeful time must be scheduled on a regular basis to ensure that all children reap the benefits of book exposures. The inclusion of Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading, (USSR), has often been replaced by the Drop Everything And Read, (DEAR) model which allows young

children the flexibility to read aloud, while providing adult reading models as well. (This reflects research by Luria (1970), which found that children made "six times as many mistakes when they immobilized their mouths" (Cited in Clay (1991) p. 72). Morrow (1989) proposes an even more flexible approach, which incorporates more options and choice, referred to as the Recreational Reading Period. Providing children with fifteen to thirty minute time slots, three to five times a week to engage in self-directed literacy events which include sharing book experiences or literacy extension activities with a partner or small groups enhances the element of choice for literacy development. This proposal allows the "variety, free choice, social interactions and flexibility children need if they are to be enticed into voluntary reading" (Morrow (1989) p. 95). It is hoped that the cultivation of early independent reading habits will combat the problem of the alliterate, people who can read but choose not to as they have not established a desire to do so on a regular basis.

In supportive home environments and classrooms, teachers and parents use a variety of techniques to bring literature to life for children. Activities which enhance the child's understanding of the story by helping them access their prior background knowledge, focus and interact during the story session or presentation, and extend the story or information into the child's world will foster emerging literacy development. The importance of providing a variety of differentiated literacy experiences in response to literature will allow children to engage successfully at appropriate levels.

Story retelling is one extension activity which improves a child's comprehension and understanding of story structure. Guided practice which models the appropriate strategies for retelling will be beneficial, before expecting children to perform independently. As a child retells stories they are internalizing the story structures and forms which will enhance their ability to write, and to comprehend print more effectively. Sharing helpful strategies for story retelling will assist children in managing and improving their ability. Organizational strategies should include instruction regarding: selection, sequencing and recall of important events, as well as paraphrasing and linking the significant incidents. Props, such as character puppets or backgrounds, can be used to help enhance pre and post discussions. Helping children utilize multisensory cues or active listening strategies such as; acting out the story or touching their fingers, while whispering, "first, second, third," will aid in the storage and retrieval process. Teaching children how to use graphic organizers and story maps or webs, will help them internalize schema for understanding increasingly complex stories and retelling them more effectively. Setting the objectives clearly before the story will help children focus on the story, organize their thoughts and ensure more likelihood of success. All strategies that are taught are transferable and will enhance the child's ability store and retrieve information in other contexts.

Comprehensive Programs

While there are a multitude of ways to achieve a goal, assisting children with emerging literacy development may best be accomplished through a comprehensive or eclectic type of program which incorporates the best teaching strategies from a variety of philosophical backgrounds. Just as a nurturing parent tailors their approach to help each child develop individually, so too the teacher must seek to incorporate a diversity of instructional styles and strategies, which will allow each individual to learn more successfully. A narrow focus can restrict a child's acquisition of the skills, knowledge and understandings necessary.

Emerging readers and writers are very vulnerable to misinterpreting the experiences provided for them. As they struggle to understand the reading process, Clay (1991) cautions that "most important of all is the stress that the teacher places on component skills (ie. what she gives her attention to) because some children come to believe that for them what the teacher stresses is what reading is!" (p.238) Research indicates that programs which maintain a rigid focus on particular elements of literacy, limit the child's emerging literacy development. While each of the following styles of teaching include beneficial practices, each has its own negative effects on a child's learning if focused on exclusively. Effective programs will include elements of instruction from all.

Programs which concentrate only on the enjoyment of quality children's literature may not provide children the opportunity to learn how to take words apart to discover patterns and components which will aid in their reading and writing development. (Often in classrooms where whole language is the preferred teaching style, educators have unjustly been accused of committing this teaching offense. Fortunately, most whole language teachers do incorporate an excellent study of the elements of language, including spelling and phonics, within a contexualized base, and are striving to clear up the public misperceptions.)

In classrooms with a strictly phonics emphasis, children often have difficulty learning that reading is an interactive process, with the reader actively questioning and making meaning as they decode the print. A "code-cracking mind-set" often excludes the subtleties of language, and neglects the importance of the thought processes of prediction and confirmation. Children who rely too heavily on phonics as their only way into reading, often exhibit the tendency to become "word-callers," who can "sound-out" words very efficiently, but are not engaged with the text enough to comprehend the meaning of what has been decoded.

The language experience approach uses the child's own production of language as the basis for instruction. Chomsky (1972), found that a total reliance on the language that children use prevents them from enriching their vocabulary and sentence structure through reading. Exposure to the formal syntax and grammar

of written language is imperative to the development of the ability to predict and confirm when decoding unfamiliar print (Adapted from Clay (1991) p. 236).

Early childhood classrooms must include the richness of whole language, as well as examining the elemental issues of literacy while maintaining the child's interest and ensuring the developmental appropriateness of activities.

Effective early childhood classes incorporate a balance between teacher-directed large group activities and child-directed individual or small-group activities which facilitates the social interaction process which is an integral part of the learning process. Small-group activities enhance the opportunities for individualized feedback. To encourage children to become responsible self-directed learners, who are willing to identify what they would like to know, what they must accomplish during the day, and accept the consequences of their choices, there are a multitude of ways for teachers to manage the daily language arts instruction and work time. Many classrooms incorporate learning centers which allow children to engage in a variety of activities at appropriate developmental levels. By having the children involved in small group activities adults are able to provide more intense responses and feedback, assessing each child's needs in the context of actual engagement. Another alternative is to cooperatively develop an agenda which incorporates activities which will demonstrate learning in a variety of curricular areas while providing children with the choice of activities to engage in at a variety

of levels. Very young children are capable of managing their time effectively, once they have been taught the routines. This practice also mirrors a supportive home environment where children are more able to focus on a task until completion.

Essential Elements

Classrooms which provide experiences which capitalize on the child's interests, while maintaining a flexible and informal approach to helping children develop their emerging literacy skills should look to research for identification of critical elements for inclusion. While it is not imperative for children to have command of all of these behaviours and abilities before reading instruction will be beneficial, as the traditional readiness model implied, the more aware that children and teachers become of these pivotal understandings, the more likely they will become the enabling focus of shared reading, mini-lessons and when possible, individualized activities and discussions. Identifying the individual's understanding of these concepts allows the teacher to build upon the child's strengths while providing experiences to help each child establish the necessary constructs.

Clay (1991) has identified four behaviours which children need to control when they attempt to read a text, which are detailed below.

1. Facility with language- The process of predicting and confirming what would make sense due to the understanding of language and how it works. A child's exposure to a variety of previous experiences and the formal language of literature will correlate with more success using their knowledge of language as a strategy for gaining meaning from print.

2. Understanding concepts about print- The ability to comprehend the mechanics of print, eg. directionality, spacing, formats, punctuation cues and the general features will enable a child to focus on the process of meaning making.

3. Attending to visual information- The ability to recognize visual patterns or clusters, will enhance the ability to decode. Children should be taught to systematically scan to enable them to identify distinguishing elements, shapes, forms or patterns. The child's understanding will be clearly evident in their early writing.

4. Hearing sounds in sequence- The ability to segment or blend sounds can be very difficult for emerging readers and writers. Breaking oral language into specific words provides the first challenge. Children slowly develop the awareness that words are made up of sounds which can be represented by letters. Activities which help children develop their phonemic awareness, such as rime and onset, {word families}, rhyme, rhythm and repetition are necessary for inclusion, as they enable children to decode and encode words more easily. (Adapted from Clay (1991) p.234).

Supportive classrooms which incorporate this information, would benefit from the information gained in the study by Reutzel, Oda and Moore (1989) which found that children engaged in meaningful interactions with a print-rich environment, acquire much of this knowledge without the inclusion of direct instruction (Cited in Reutzel and Cooter (1992) p. 334). The use of environmental print, children's names and shared story experiences are exemplary starting points for establishing these

understandings.

Many researchers, including Clay (1991), Taylor (1986) and Holdaway (1979), have identified the importance of helping children acquire an understanding of the mechanical aspects of Print Concepts, which include:

"1. Directionality (left to right, top to bottom)

2. The difference between a word and a letter

3. The meaning and use of punctuation marks

4. The match between speech and print on the page

5. Many other technical understandings about how print and

books work."

(Cited in Reutzel and Cooter (1992) p. 334).

When teachers and parents are aware of these concepts, they can easily be incorporated into interactions with children and good quality literature.

Gray (1948) also identified four mental steps which must occur to derive meaning from print. Cognizance of the processes involved, enables adults gently guide children to greater independence. The child must engage in:

" 1) perceiving- being able to recognize and identify individual words
2) comprehending- finding meaning in individual words and in the ideas they convey in a particular context
3) reacting- responding to and judging an author's message in a personal way
4) integrating- assimilating the author's ideas into one's personal background

and experience."
(Cited in McLane and McNamee (1990) pp. 64-65).

Responding to the story and linking its relevance to ones' own life dominate as a child strives to build connections with currently held beliefs or understandings, adjusting, constructing and building upon personal knowledge.

Holdaway (1986) identified four crucial provisions which enable a child to successfully enter the world of readers. The child benefits from environments which provide opportunities for:

1) observation
2) collaboration
3) practice
4) performance

As all literacy learning represents a social interaction process, children benefit from the opportunity to observe reading behaviours of adults and peers. Both being read to and observing adults model the functional uses of reading will enhance their understanding of print. Collaboration occurs when significant adults interact responsively with the child, discussing and answering questions while providing encouragement, motivation and support for the learner. Provision of opportunities for the child to practice what has been learned in a non-threatening, self-directed manner allows the child to develop personal understanding. As the child experiments or plays, he/she self-evaluates, makes adjustments to his/her temporary hypotheses and gradually internalizes new knowledge. The child then attempts to utilize new knowledge in unfamiliar contexts, seeking adult

Allowing children to demonstrate their personal understandings provides the opportunity for responsive adults to clarify, verify and gently guide children to acquire deeper knowledge. The ability of supportive, interested and encouraging adults to provide this type of environment both in early childhood classes and at home will nurture emerging literacy development.

(Adapted from Morrow (1989) pp. 73-74).

Implications for Emerging Reading

While the theory of emerging literacy promotes reading and writing as simultaneously developing skills, much of the research has focused on enhancing these behaviours in isolation. Although the following two sections will focus on findings related to reading and writing as separate entities, it is imperative to temper this information with the knowledge that the two process are intricately inter-related.

Emergent reading has been described by Bissex (1980) as the "passage from language heard to language seen" (p.119). Children's early reading behaviours only sightly resemble those of the mature reader. Often, because of the natural progression into reading environmental print, parents and children will not even be aware of the process unfolding. Very early in life, young children are able to attach meaning to environmental print, using various strategies. Early reading of environmental print is usually connected to a visual memory clue like context, location, form of print, graphics or logos eg, food, household products, or signs. If the print is taken from its context, the child still "reads" the contextual situation, eg. The word "milk" on a cereal box would still say "Cheerios." As educators become more aware of the strategies used by emerging readers, they will be able to enhance reading acquisition by utilizing these already established

understandings.

Emergent reading follows general developmental patterns which have been documented by many researchers through observations of the behaviour of young children. Developing an awareness of these patterns helps determine what past and future experiences will be meaningful for each individual on the journey to independence. In supportive home environments literacy interactions are interwoven with daily life. Reading development begins at birth, with parents interacting responsively with their offspring. The inclusion of rhyme, song and descriptive patter enhance the daily routines of dressing, bathing, diapering and soothing. Following the child's interests, books may also be introduced which enhance both the bonding and language acquisition process. When sharing books has been an integral part of life from birth children imitate this process. Many toddlers delight in "reading" to their dolls and toys, and will adopt the more formalized language of books as they experiment with oral story structure. Supportive home environments encourage engagement with books, delightedly observing and celebrating the child's developing competence with language and story structure. Understanding that all children enter early childhood classes with some prior knowledge of both the reading and writing process allows teachers to build experiences scaffolding on already established behaviours.

As the child gains more confidence in their ability to interact with books, they will

independently read the pictures, or make up a story, which may or may not follow a general story structure. Engagement in this type of activity allows the child to play with the formal structures of written language, while reflecting the child's level of understanding and exposure to literature.

Next the child will be able to "read" stories from memory following the same general story line as the text. This stage reflects the child's deepening understanding of story structure and meaning. The child may incorporate more of the literal story language such as tones or expression. Repeated readings are beneficial as the child internalizes the complexities of story structure and written language.

As children move into "real reading" they may choose to discontinue early reading behaviours as they become more aware of print conveying meaning. Their reading may become very choppy as they concentrate on phonics and letter-sound correspondence to try to "break the code." Emerging readers are more successful if they utilize multiple strategies for word decoding and are presented with interesting and supportive texts to practise these strategies. An instructional reading level should allow the child to read with few errors. Often children are frustrated by materials which are too challenging for them to decode while still maintaining meaning. Reading strategies include self-monitoring skills such as rereading, predicting, confirming, reading on and self-correcting as well as learning

how to approach various types of text. Supportive teaching practices include helping children develop the ability to use; graphic clues (cues from print and pictures) syntactic cues (internalized knowledge of language patterns and structure) and semantic cues (ensuring the message is meaningful).

Competent readers take cues from all of these sources and adjust the meaning as more information becomes known. Much of the latest brain research indicates that introducing strategies while helping children understand their thinking and learning processes, strengthens their abilities to self-direct learning and comprehend the reading process. "Metacognition is one's own awareness of how learning is taking place; it thus nurtures one's own learning" (Morrow (1989) p. 78). Having children share, discuss and develop their awareness of the use of all cueing systems and reading strategies will strengthen their ability to choose appropriate strategies independently.

Emerging readers have an insatiable desire to read materials at an appropriate level, therefore the acquisition of a variety of emerging level books is a necessity for early childhood classrooms. As children move towards independence it is imperative to ensure that their experiences with reading continue to be enjoyable and successful with minimal effort. The use of predictable texts helps support children as they practice their reading strategies and gain confidence in their abilities. Such gratifying success encourages the child to continue to persevere

with their efforts at reading. Learning any new skill involves continued risk-taking and exertion of effort for improvement. Children will be more comfortable taking the necessary risks and challenging themselves when they feel that their approximations will be accepted and they are more confident of success.

Observation and authentic assessment must be imbedded into the early childhood program, so that each child's progress and understandings are monitored frequently. The longer that a child struggles with partial understandings or misunderstandings of concepts, the more difficult it is to remediate. An authentic assessment tool to use when evaluating a young child's emerging literacy development is the individual story book reading. As a child "reads" their favourite book, evidence of their understandings and beliefs are observable. The following types of questions may help focus the assessment.

Is the child:

- looking at the pictures and telling a story?

- remembering part of the deep structure of this story?

- using formalized language? (Once upon a time, etc.)

- attending to the print?

- understanding print concepts?

- demonstrating enjoyment and enthusiasm?

The importance of exposing children to meaningful print experiences as an integral part of emerging literacy programs is well documented. Clay (1982) found "nothing

in the research that suggests that contact with print should be withheld from any five year old on the grounds that he is immature....The visual perception of print, the directional constraints on movement, the special types of sentences used in books and the synchronized matching of spoken word units with written word units will only be learned in contact with printed language.." (pp. 22-23). Exposures to chants, poems, songs and stories in big print format can assist children in developing the strategies for decoding print.

"For children who enter school with solid literacy preparation and with the desire to read, the drawbacks of postponing reading too long in favour of drill are clear. For children who enter school without such readiness, the drawbacks are potentially even greater. ....These children need to be exposed to meaningful, written text as soon as possible so that they will begin to notice and have an interest in reading all of the things around them that there are to be read" (Jager Adams (1990) p. 108). To this end, Gibson (1989) recommends "placing storytimes and an examination of children's literature at the centre of the curriculum," to meet the needs of those who have a lack of early literacy experiences, and to ensure the provision of consistent, pleasurable experiences for all (p. 30). It is necessary to immerse all children in the richness of literature, story structure and formalized language, establishing the functions first, then developing an awareness of the forms (letters and sounds).

Collaborative teaching and learning methods, which follow the child's lead while promoting independence reflect the supportive environment of the home. Even children who have had little previous exposure to story experiences benefit greatly from shared reading activities which follow the principles of setting a focus and encouraging interaction and engagement by all.

When setting the focus, the supportive adult seeks to;

a) access each child's prior knowledge through discussion,

b) present any pertinent information that will assist with story comprehension, eg, vocabulary or concept links,

c) maintain topicality through the redirection of irrelevant comments.

Encouraging interaction and engagement by all is sometimes difficult to achieve in large group settings but studies by Morrow have shown that "compared with one-on-one readings, reading with small-groups of children seems to encourage more and earlier responses" (Morrow (1989) p. 107). On a cautionary note, it was observed that during whole group reading the "dialogue is managed by the teacher who often says more than the children" (Morrow (1989) p.110). Children should be encouraged to initiate much of the dialogue; ask relevant questions and make pertinent comments, with the teacher responding with positive reinforcement and supportive answers which scaffold on the child's prior knowledge.

"Reading events are socially interactive, in which the actual reading of the text and the meaning produced in the reading are constructed through a cooperative negotiation between adult and child" (Teale (1982) p. 118). The adult should refocus attention to the topic, encourage sharing of strategies, provide models for children to scaffold from, ask open ended questions which promote problem-solving, prediction and empathy with the character(s), relate to real-life, especially shared experiences, and respond with enthusiasm and appreciation of diversity. Genuine acceptance and response to children's ideas, predictions, questions and comments will ensure better understanding and comprehension as they actively engage in an interactive process of meaning making with support.

Several authors, have identified a similar three-part interactive process to enhance the presentation of literature and improve story comprehension including Clay (1982), Gibson (1989), Morrow (1984) and Bissett (1970). The number and complexity of the children's responses will also increase, reflecting their deeper understanding of the new information. This method of presentation, often referred to as a "Directed Listening-Thinking Activity" emulates supportive home interactions and follows these general guidelines.

1. Preparation for Listening:

Ample time is provided for discussion before reading. The adult attempts to access each child's background information, while

encouraging children to ask questions and predict. The adult will introduce any pertinent information, including vocabulary and concepts while helping children make connections with prior learning or helpful strategies.

2. Guided reading:

The teacher directs an interactive investigation of text, focusing on both content and form. During this shared reading experience metalinguistic discussion of the conventions of print, functional use of phonics, and insights into strategies in action are shared through a "Think-Aloud" process. Students are provided with both visual and auditory clues as they co-operatively decode the text and assimilate new language. Linking this shared context to writing by having students learn to "feel the sounds of words" and co-operatively write selected significant words from the text will enable children to strengthen the reading/writing connection.

A brief, directed teaching lesson, as described by Holdaway (1984) and Calkins (1986) may be beneficial at this time if it focuses on knowledge and information the child finds personally relevant. The lesson should grow from the need to know and be no more than five to ten minutes long. The skill should enhance the child's ability to read or write better, and should be demonstrated with real texts, not studied as skills in isolation.

3. Independent reading:

> Opportunities and ample time are provided to explore, review and read
>
> text materials of the student's choice. While enhancing the child's
>
> understanding of stories and story structures is a goal of independent
>
> reading time, the paramount implication of this allotted time is for
>
> children to discover the pleasures of reading and develop positive
>
> reading habits. Since Bloom (1964) found that "children's reading
>
> habits develop early in life," it is important to allot time for
>
> encouraging the habit of independent book reading from an early age.
>
> (Cited in Morrow (1989) p.84).

Story presentations which follow the above described format, allow children to

become actively engaged with the text before, during and after reading. The

thinking strategies which are modelled to enhance children's comprehension with

support should then be practiced independently in a new context.

The following fundamental guide to exploring literature through discussion and

responsive dialogue provides a framework for fostering important connections. It

is not intended that each piece of literature will undergo such extensive treatment,

but these essential understandings should guide teaching practices. Incorporating

these concepts informally and repeatedly, will benefit student learning.

1. <u>Comprehension</u> is most often the focus of questioning techniques. Encouraging

children to look through the text and establish their own questions before reading

sets a focus which will aid in individual comprehension as the child seeks answers

to their own questions. Predicting the progress of the narrative in the context of

previous understandings also helps aid in comprehension. Monitoring the child's

recall of the facts or understanding of literal meanings after reading represents the

least challenging questioning technique, unfortunately the easiest and most often

utilized. Encouraging the understanding of implied meanings through logical

inferences and "reading between the lines" will develop an awareness of the

subtleties of language that requires total engagement of the reader.

2. Life to text comparisons (Cochran-Smith (1984)) depend to a large extent upon

the child's background experiences or prior knowledge. Each child will make

sense of the text in terms of their personal knowledge of the real world and how

they perceive what is happening. Classrooms which seek to provide a broad range

of experiences for children have a richer shared context to draw upon when making

life to text comparisons.

3. Narrative forms and techniques (Moss (1984)) The process of drawing attention

to the distinguishing features of specific story genres enables a child to

understand the process of fiction writing. Understanding story patterns or

structures enables a child to more successfully synthesize meaning from unfamiliar

texts as they utilize their prior knowledge to enhance comprehension. The use of

story maps, webs and graphic organizers can assist children in understanding the similarities and differences in the various story structures and enhance their ability to write.

4. <u>Text to text comparisons</u> (Moss (1984)) Children should be encouraged to become aware of similarities and differences between texts while developing an appreciation for particular styles and/or authors through repeated exposures and discussions.

5. <u>Text to life comparisons</u> (Cochran-Smith (1984)) As children compare fictionalized experiences with their own experiences, they examine the perspectives and values represented by the text, comparing these with their own experiences, perceptions and beliefs.

(Adapted from Gibson (1989) pp. 141-2).

Implications for Emerging Writing

Although many researchers speak of reading and writing as skills that build upon each other, the understanding of emerging writing is still in its infancy in education, especially in North America. When Clay (1982) asked some New York teachers to collect writing samples from five year olds, "they suggested politely, that although New Zealand children of that age might write, they would not expect to find American children producing writing." When she insisted, "pointing out that American children of that age know far more letters than New Zealand children" they found:

- writing was not too difficult for five year olds

- children did enjoy writing when encouraged to try

- writing was occurring before and alongside early reading and did not wait for a reading vocabulary to be learned.

- motor co-ordination did not limit the young child's attempts to write if one was not too demanding about the shape and form of the script."

(p. 227).

The teacher, therefore, continues to be a major influencing factor in the development and encouragement of writing skills. Sensitivity to each child's prior knowledge, experiences and developmental ability necessitates the provision of

additional support when necessary, acceptance of approximations, and gentle encouragement of any attempts to express themselves in print. Small group activities or individualized conferencing allows for the supportive type of interaction necessary, where the adult is confirming or redirecting the child's personal understandings.

The role of emergent writing skills as a symbiotic relationship with emerging reading skills reflects a dramatically different view of emerging literacy.

> "Of all the new ideas, theories and strategies concerning emergent literacy, the way in which we think about writing represents the most obvious break with tradition. We have allowed children to use crayons and paper to encourage development of motor coordination in preparation for writing, but we never thought of writing to convey meaning as being an integral part of an early literacy program for children as young as two."
> (Morrow (1989) p. 153).

While children must learn features, forms and how to produce meaningful writing, they must also "recognize writing as an activity worth imitating and experimenting with"...(McLane and McNamee (1990) p. 26). Supportive adults play a key role in modelling, demonstrating and providing opportunities for engagement in purposeful writing.

In a literate society, play often involves experimenting with making marks on paper. By making writing a functional part of play, extending fantasy and pretend, and enhancing social relationships, children develop confidence in their competence and strengthen their personal sense of identity while developing an intrinsic

motivation to improve their writing skills. Writing develops "through the constant invention and re-invention of the forms of written language" as children manipulate the elements of print that are familiar to them (Morrow (1989) p. 144). Morrow (1989) reported that "practise is most helpful when self-initiated" as children work independently through trial and error, to develop their proficiency with writing (p. 146). Caring, responsive adults who provide active models, supportive guidance and recognition of effort and growth in a safe, secure environment will contribute to emerging literacy development.

The complexity of learning to write is detailed by Goodman (1984) as three major principles about written language that children must come to understand:

1.   Relational or Semiotic Principle

These are understandings about the ways that meaning can be symbolically represented in written language. The relationship between oral language, written language and meaning is a complex principle. To acquire this understanding, children must be able to abstractly reason that what they say can be represented by print, which can be read by others to extract meaning.

2.   Functional principles

These are the understandings that children have about the reasons and purposes for written language. The degree to which writing is meaningful, purposeful, and valuable to the child will depend on the impact of print on the child's daily life. Print that demonstrates "ownership and labelling, extensions of memory, sharing

information about self and others, invitations and expressions of gratitude, representation of real and imagined events, (such as narratives) and control of behaviour and information" will establish the power of print in a meaningful way, as children seek to establish their personal identity (Goodman (1984) p. 107).

3. Linguistic principles

These are understandings about how language is organized and presented. Often referred to as the mechanics of language, these principles include two types of systems, one already established, the other being newly acquired. The orthographic system, which includes; understanding of directionality, spelling, punctuation, form variations and graphophonics represent new learnings as the child discovers print. Phonology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics all reflect the child's oral language development or prior knowledge. As the child experiences repeated exposures to print and metacognitive discussions, understandings begin to develop regarding:

> "1) how written language is organized,
> 2) how the organization changes, depending on function and relationship
> 3) what the units of written language are
> 4) which features are most significant in which setting
> 5) the stability of organizational system "
>
> (Goodman (1984) p.107).

The child will experiment with these features in their writing as they establish the importance of each. As children endeavour to establish these principles, many researchers have identified common levels or stages of development. Supportive teachers and parents who have a basic awareness of the natural stages will be able to recognize and encourage children's writing development.

Appreciation of the natural development of writing will facilitate acceptance of behaviours which may not resemble later stages of writing development. "Movement from playing with writing and drawing to communicating through written messages is a continuum that reflects the basic theories of emergent literacy" (Morrow (1989) p. 142). From birth to approximately three years of age, children often experiment with the media of writing and drawing through scribbles which gradually take more form as the child enters the meaning making process. "When children first begin making marks on paper, most do so with no knowledge of the alphabetic nature of the written language's symbol system" (Morrow (1989) p. 149) From the ages of three to six, a child experiments with separating drawing from print. As children experiment with written language, they begin to realize that they are encoding messages. In fact, they begin to believe that symbols or letters refer to actual objects. They may literally incorporate drawings of objects into their writing, as they struggle to understand the abstraction of symbolism. Children will experiment with "size, shape and number as written language" until they establish the alphabetic principle; a basic understanding that words are made up of sounds, which can be represented by symbolic letters (Goodman (1982) p.106). They will also experiment with placement and patterning of known print symbols, experimenting horizontally, vertically and backwards as they seek to establish the notion of print. As children functionally use "bits and pieces of writing ....to communicate with family members and friends: to mark holidays and special occasions, to make requests, to set limits, to express affection or anger, to amuse

or provoke, or to get attention" they gradually discover the power of written language (McLane and McNamee (1989) p. 30). Children creatively seek uses for writing and enjoy sending notes or making labels and signs which direct others behaviours and allow them to establish their territory. As they experiment with written communication, they enjoy a heightened sense of competence regarding their literacy development. This intrinsic motivation drives them to find ways to support their own writing development. Cambourne (1991) describes these as coping strategies, which will be used to varying degrees by individuals on their journey towards independence. The following strategies will be used temporarily by learners, then discarded when no longer useful:

" - Use of related activities/ Clayton strategy
- Use of environmental print
- Use of repetition
- Assistance from and interaction with other children
- Assistance from and interaction with the teacher
- Use of `temporary' spelling" (p. 9).

The use of related activities usually occurs when individual children are performing independent activities. The most commonly used alternate activity for writing is drawing. Children "rehearse meaning and discover how to develop and sequence a story for an intended audience" through the medium of drawing (Cambourne (1991) p. 10). As children develop their ability to convey meaning through text, illustrations are frequently used to complement the text. Often the child will mentally rehearse the writing while "drawing the story." When the child feels overwhelmed by the task at hand they may resort to alternate activities where they

are more confident of success. When related to independent reading, children will choose texts which provide support through pictures, repetition and familiarity so that they can engage in a similar experience constructing a story from text.

The use of environmental print also passes through distinct stages. The child first begins to randomly copy letters in the environment. There is often no meaning attached to the print although the child is aware that this activity differs from drawing. As a child gains more control, they advance from copying print while attaching an alternate meaning to copying print which is readable, but conveys no story or meaning related to the drawing. The child may then progress to manipulating known environmental print into a story. The highest level of this strategy occurs when a child is able to functionally utilize environmental print, which includes books and dictionaries as well as wall charts, posters, labels etc.

The strategy of repetition may occur in drawing or writing with a variety of manifestations. Many children seem to need these multiple repetitions, before they feel secure enough to move forward. A sensitive teacher is able to recognize the child's need and gently encourage their further risk taking. Repetitions may include: drawings, letter groupings (possibly rearranged, usually from the letters of the child's name or those of his/her family), sentences or sentence patterns, or themes.

Children learn to cope with assistance from peers, in two different ways. They may precipitate the exchange with a request for help or it may result from contact with peers engaged in literacy events. As children become older and more competent, they rely on each others varying levels of skill to assist each other. From the earliest stages of emerging literacy, children should be encouraged to seek help from each other, as this interactions enriches the social fabric upon which all learning is based.

Seeking help from an adult is usually self-initiated, either through a request for help or through initiating an interaction. This also allows the teacher to monitor and evaluate performance. Cambourne's (1991) research showed that English as a Second Language learners were more reluctant than their counterparts to ask for assistance, therefore sensitive teachers may wish to offer assistance more regularly to E.S.L. children (p. 24).

The use of 'temporary' spelling as a strategy which enables children to write more creatively, has long been a controversial issue. Cambourne's (1991) use of the term 'temporary' relates this form of spelling to baby-talk where the approximations are discarded as the child gains more competence.

Cambourne (1991) states that, we must be "aware that although these ...coping strategies are temporary scaffolds, they are highly functional in the written

language learning of the child," and as such should be encouraged and utilized to assist all children with their emerging literacy development (p. 28). Gundlach (1989) describes the writing process as one of gaining control over firstly the functions, uses, and purposes of writing, then the forms and features of written language, and finally the process of writing (McLane and McNamee (1990) p. 23). It is clearly imperative that children must be given the opportunity to write for a variety of meaningful purposes with their approximations and experimentations accepted as evidence of learning in progress which will be used to assess the need for further necessary learnings.

Through the examination of multiple writing samples many researchers support the following findings regarding the continuum of writing development. During the scribbling and drawing stage, recognizable shapes and patterns begin to emerge from the randomness. Scribble writing differs from culture to culture as it mirrors the cultural print which children see modelled. The response of supportive significant adults often determines repetition. Children are encouraged by the interest, enthusiasm and their ability to affect others through "print." As children experiment and play with print, directionality, linearity and repetition emerge gradually reflecting their developing understandings.

Sulzby (1985) identified six categories of writing which can be observed, although not necessarily as sequential stages. Understanding that each of these categories

may represent the developmental stage of an individual student, will help teachers be more accepting of each child's approximations.

1. Writing via drawing

2. Writing via scribbling

3. Writing via making letterlike forms.

4. Writing via reproducing well-learned units

5. Writing via invented spelling

6. Writing via conventional spelling

(Cited in Morrow (1989) pp. 150-152).

Children will demonstrate abilities at a variety of different levels depending on extraneous factors such as comfort level and need for additional support.

A comparable Writing Development Continuum was established by Temple et al (1988) which identified the following similar stages in the natural development of writing skills.

"Scribbling and Drawing - A child explores their ability to produce writing.

Prephonemic - Random letters are incorporated into the writing with no sound attached to the letter. Each letter may represent an object or label.

Early Phonemic - Letters begin to represent words, with some sound-letter correspondence established. Words are usually

represented by the initial consonant only with the possible inclusion

of the final consonant.

Letter-naming - More letters are used to represent words, as children begin

to incorporate medial vowels and consonants.

Transitional Stage - A mix of conventional and invented spelling is used with

overgeneralization common"

(Adapted from Reutzel and Cooter (1992) pp. 318-330).

While most children progress through these stages of development, the provision

of time and opportunity for self-initiated practice of writing behaviours will be more

beneficial than trying to "teach" children to promote them to the next stage of

development.

Clay (1981) identified several concepts and principles following detailed

examinations of children's writing samples. Awareness of the following principles

allows adults to assess writing development and provide children with the

experiences which will enable them to make the necessary connections to develop

a fuller understanding of the writing process.

The Recurring Principle- is evident when a child is repeating the same symbol,

which may be a shape or letter. This process is often self-initiated as the child

strives to develop competence.

<u>Directional Progress Principle</u>- Reading and writing activities reinforce the establishment of this understanding as the child internalizes the left to right return sweep. The starting position in writing is paramount, as false starts often result in perfect mirror images of the intended print.

<u>The Generating Principle</u>- Is demonstrated as a child becomes aware that print often repeats in variable patterns. The child experiments with arranging and rearranging known symbols, generating lengthy statements from a limited base.

<u>The Flexibility Principle</u>- A child will turn symbols upside down or around as they experiment with how much flexibility is acceptable while still maintaining meaning. The need for consistency in form, orientation and directionality is an abstraction which is difficult for young children to grasp. After all, the other objects in their world remain constant regardless of these surface features. Until print acquires a deeper meaning, children will expect print to reflect the greater flexibility demonstrated by the concrete world.

<u>Sign Concept</u>- A child slowly acquires an understanding that there is a letter-sound principle which allows what is written to be read.

<u>The Inventory Principle</u>- is evident in much of children's spontaneous early writing as they seek to arrange or order information which helps them to understand their world. Words or lists may be invented, created or copied from environmental print. Clay (1979) identified the following as typical inventory productions: information about themselves, letter cards, alphabet, lists of family names, words I know, words that start with `b', booklists, tapes, stories, poems (p. 31).

Contrastive Principle- The contrastive principle is evident when children explore, the differences in visual forms, letters, meanings and sounds.

Abbreviation Principle- This principle is utilized by few young writers when they "deliberately attempt to use one symbol which may or may not be a letter to imply a full word" (p. 38).

Problems of page arrangement- Solving the problem of where to fit leftover words is very much dependant upon the child's starting point on the page. As children experiment with left-right progression and return sweep, they develop an understanding of page orientation.

Punctuation marks- As children become aware of punctuation the use is typically overgeneralized. Often periods are the first punctuation that is overused, at the end of each word, then the end of each line, until the appropriate placement emerges.

Signatures as Signs- The special letters of each child's name provide the best starting point to learn about print. The opportunity for repetition of the sound/symbol relationships helps to reinforce the principles of the writing process.

Messages and meanings- The child develops the awareness that there is a message which contains meaning, although he/she does not realize that the meaning can be decoded.

Message Unknown- The child at this stage produces a "writing" without forming an intent to convey a message, which he/she hopes someone else will be able to decode for him/her. This magical concept often manifests itself as the child asks

eagerly "What does it say?", expectantly hoping that you will be able to decode meaning.

The Recurring Principle Resurfaces Again- as a child gains more control over written language production through repetition of familiar sentences patterns, which may be teacher or child driven.

Space Concept Between Words- Although this is often evident in copied work it does not spontaneously transfer to self generated writing. The concept of words is very abstract when a child is concentrating on generating meaning. They may exaggerate spacing when it becomes a focus.

The Generating Principle Recurs Again- As the child experiments with rewriting statements they can become very proficient at generating writing from a limited number of words.

Constructing sentences- Independent construction after relying on the support of patterns will lead to more errors, but this must be celebrated as progress for the child.

(Adapted from Clay (1975) pp. 63-5).

Clay (1975) suggests that understanding these principles can be utilized to influence children's emerging writing.

"Perhaps the child can be encouraged to reason like this:

       I know some words. (Copying principle)
       I can try to write new ones. (Flexibility principle)
       I can repeat them. (Recurring principle)

They go one after the other across a line
(Directional principle),
separated by spaces (the Space Concept),
to make new messages (Generating principle)."

(Clay (1975) p. 56).

As a child experiments with these principles it is important to accept their approximations and output while gently encouraging them to the next level. Sensitive teachers who accept a variety of levels of development as within the range of normal, will also stimulate children to develop their proficiency. However, adults with unrealistically high expectations will quickly persuade children that writing is too difficult for them. Teachers and parents must remain sensitive to each child's individual development, provide meaningful opportunities to write, accept their approximations and respond to their attempts, allowing for repetition and reinforcement of concepts until internalization has occurred.

There are conflicting opinions as to overwriting, the process of an adult re-writing the child's work. There is no clear definitive research regarding the effects as overwriting can be viewed either as positive modelling or negative undermining of the child's approximations. As with most educational decisions, teachers need to examine the purpose for the activity and then seek a balance between child-directed and teacher-directed learning. Some teachers feel strongly that the positive model provided for children allows them to make personal connections with standardized spelling more quickly than occasional exposure to the child's

unique choice of words in literature. Teachers who view over-writing as necessary only occasionally for evaluative purposes can accomplish this without devaluing the child's efforts. Suggestions would include the use of post-it notes attached to selected pieces for assessment, folding the bottom of the page where the teacher can demonstrate "dictionary spelling," if the child chooses, or keeping separate dated records which can be collated later. Whether a child is exposed to overwriting daily or only occasionally, it will be the sensitivity to and celebration of the connections the child is making to standardized print which will affect his/her continued growth.

The attempt to provide meaningful opportunities for writing, has led to a commonly accepted classroom practise of daily Journal writing. While ideally designed to provide primary children with an opportunity to respond to their world individually it has proven be a very difficult and tedious activity for many children. The act of writing requires a monumental effort, as described below by Clay (1979):

> "Creative writing demands that the child pay attention to the details of print. To put his message down in print, he is forced to construct words, letter by letter, so he becomes aware of letter features and letter sequences, particularly for the vocabulary which he uses in writing again and again "
>
> (p. 2).

Journal writing should be discontinued or modified when it becomes an unpleasant

task for either teachers or students. Meaningful opportunities abound which intrinsically motivate children to express themselves in writing. The provision of daily writing experiences must be developmentally appropriate and self-motivating for the child.

The significance of treating writing as a process, with appropriate support is very important. Young children need to observe the writing process modelled on a daily basis. Providing opportunities to practice tracing, copying and generating their own words and letters are beneficial supports for some children, which are most effectual when children choose to engage in these activities. The provision of frames and patterns for those children who need additional support, can encourage the development of writing. A wide variety of writing experiences are valuable on the child's journey to independent writing, provided they reflect opportunities for differentiated engagement which is appropriate for each child's current level of development. Some type of prewriting experience, where the child defines the structure, plans what he/she will "say" and knows how to access the appropriate level of support, will ensure the success necessary to encourage children to continue to exert effort. Providing a real purpose for writing allows for more intrinsic motivation as the child struggles to express himself in print. Writing projects, literature responses, celebrations or displays may be more beneficial and motivating for some children than daily journals.

The writing process approach, widely touted by many educators must be used sensitively with emerging writers. The writing process for young children could include prewriting, first draft and reading one's own writing, drafting and revising, then sharing one's own writing. Pre-writing is a crucial element in the writing process, which is frequently neglected because it is assumed that all children have ideas to share, and strategies to bring to the writing process. Pre-writing activities for emerging readers, could be held during large group introductory activities, through discussions or extensions of the presented literature or brainstorming individually or with a small group. Encouraging children to access their knowledge of reading and story structure builds upon their ability to write. The use of graphic organizers, like story webs or maps help students, organize and visualize a complete story, which will provide a framework for their own writing. Some children will still require the additional support of small group or individual conference time with the teacher before writing. Interactions through conferencing, formally or informally, will provide children with necessary feedback. Student interactions can help children develop their ability to express themselves more clearly, as peers ask questions, seek clarification and work cooperatively. During teacher conferences, as the child reads, the adult observes and assesses the child's understanding of writing concepts then responds positively, expecting and encouraging progress. Errors provide insight into how the child is learning about print. Very young children may only revise their writing orally, or by adding to the

ending. A child should retain the choice to revise, and then concentrate on only one aspect so that he is not overwhelmed. Most emerging writers will choose not to revise, a decision which should be respected. Not all pieces of writing need to be polished for publication, but opportunities for sharing are intrinsically motivating. Sharing writing in a variety of ways such as posting, using an author's chair, or including writing with art displays allows children to celebrate their efforts. Discussing children's work, highlighting strategies and encouraging thoughtful reflection raises the awareness of the variety of approaches. Publishing selected pieces is extremely motivating and can be accomplished by recruiting parent volunteers to type or print an edited version, then having the child illustrate.

The following practices, summarize the strategies which will increase teacher efficacy in promoting emerging writing.

1. Establish the expectation that everyone can and will write in their own unique way. From the first day of school, institute a routine which includes daily writing. Display, model or demonstrate the complete range of emerging writing, from scribbling to standardized print, as acceptable variations. Children need to feel safe enough to take risks, therefore their approximations must be accepted, while encouraging attempts at the next level.

2. Since writing is a composing process as described by Graves (1983), it is

important to provide appropriate support and teaching related to the process of pre-writing, drafting, editing and publishing. The writing process must be introduced to young children with the same sensitivity that their attempts will be accepted.

3. Children should have numerous opportunities to read their writing to a variety of audiences. Establishing that what they think can be written down and shared with others, is a monumental understanding. Supportive, responsive interactions will encourage the learning necessary to improve their writing.

4. Classrooms should provide multiple models of writing for a variety of purposes. Utilizing many functional writing purposes as a part of the classroom routines, eg. composing signs, labels, messages, directions, notes, reminders and daily or weekly news establishes the importance of writing. Co-operative group composing, employing a "think-aloud" strategy, allows children to develop a deeper understanding of the process and enhances their ability both to encode and decode.

5. Writing to communicate with others inside and outside of the classroom establishes a true purpose for learning to read and write while connecting learning with real-life.

6. Have the children write individual responses to children's literature. Extending the literature to make connections with the child's own life helps to personalize the meaning they take from the literature, and allows the teacher to understand the child's point of view.

7. Help children to associate writing and reading in a variety of ways as the parallels between reading and writing are greater for younger children. As Morrow (1989) states "Writers reconstruct meanings by constructing texts; readers reconstruct texts by constructing anticipated meanings" (p. 142).

(Adapted from Raines and Isbell (1992) p. 98).

Many researchers have identified the dynamic connection between reading and writing. Calkins (1986) stated that "writing helps children become insiders on the reading process" (Cited in Reutzel and Cooter (1992) p.381). Clay (1975) describes writing as a "complementary synthetic experience" to learning to read (p.70). Remedial programs have often stressed writing for the delayed reader, as the necessary encoding skills needed for writing transfer to decoding skills for reading. Story writing is also facilitated by story reading which provides a sense of "framework." Promoting the development of reading, writing and language simultaneously is most beneficial for young children.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe the most important factor in any classroom espousing to foster emerging literacy will be the efficacy of the teacher to emulate supportive home environments for children.   The teacher's ability to respond to each individual child's needs will depend to an inordinate degree on their understanding of the emerging literacy process and their ability to create an environment which will immerse children in print and developmentally appropriate activities. Caring, responsive teachers who enrich and extend the child's experiential base, utilize the child's past experiences and prior knowledge, accept and extend children's approximations will nurture emerging literacy.   Fostering home and school collaborations, where each stakeholder feels respected, valued and able to contribute to the child's literacy development will be beneficial to all involved.

Classroom environments must reflect safe havens where each child is accepted regardless of levels of development or background experiences. Children's belief in themselves as competent learners, must be constantly reaffirmed, to enable them to continue to take the risks necessary for learning.   Capitalizing on children's natural curiosity and desire to learn, the classroom will be filled with engaging, interesting literature, print and literacy events at a variety of levels, which will be employed to promote continued individual growth and development. As children are provided with appropriate levels of support, ensuring success while

meeting the challenges of acquiring independent literacy skills, they will develop a confident attitude in their ability to learn and a love of literacy which will ensure successful lifelong learning.

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