Handbook for parents of first grade children learning to read and write

Linda Marie Brown

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HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS OF FIRST GRADE CHILDREN

LEARNING TO READ AND WRITE

A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

Interdisciplinary Studies

by

Linda Marie Brown

December 1998
HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS OF FIRST GRADE CHILDREN  
LEARNING TO READ AND WRITE

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Presented to the
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Parents are a child's first teacher, and language is their mode of communication. Many studies have documented the language interactions that take place between parents and children. These interactions can be described as naturally occurring in the social context of daily activities, meaningful and developmentally appropriate. Parental instincts guide children in their literacy development prior to the child entering school.

Upon the commencement of formal education in reading and writing, generally considered to be first grade, parental involvement often diminishes. Yet, there is a preponderance of evidence that indicates parental involvement in a child's education promotes academic success. Factors that inhibit parent participation include lack of time or knowledge. The current debate between phonics and whole language instruction promotes confusion as one misconception is supplanted by another.

Literacy is a developmental process and it is ongoing. It is a part of everyday life. This handbook is an attempt to help parents realize the integral part they play in their child's education by providing information about the
reading and writing process and describing activities parents can do at home to support their child’s acquisition of literacy.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank all the children and parents I have had the opportunity to work with over the years as an elementary school teacher. They inspired me to learn more about how children learn to read and write. Even though the names and faces change, children will always be the inspiration for teachers everywhere.
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project is to provide a handbook for parents of first grade children who are learning to read and write in a school setting. This handbook will be a resource that describes the process of literacy acquisition and classroom practices that promote literacy learning. Activities will be included which parents and caregivers can do with their children to support and motivate their child's literacy development. An appendix will supply parents with materials to use with some of the described activities, and a glossary will be included to help parents understand current terminology.

This project is presented from an emergent literacy perspective. Literacy learning begins in infancy and is a gradual and continuous process of integrating new information and constructing new meaning. Reading and writing are interrelated and occur prior to formal education, as do listening and speaking. Literacy begins in the home in a natural and social context. Interactions are child-centered and purposeful.

Formal instruction in reading and writing is generally considered to begin in first grade. The transition from
kindergarten to first grade puts children in a position of having to be responsible for their learning. School is not just playing learning games. Teachers often have higher expectations and they expect children to learn, remember and apply new skills. For many, this is a big change, especially for those who have not been exposed to a print-rich, literate environment. This may occur because literacy is not valued in the home, or because of the philosophy of some teachers that kindergarten children are not ready to learn to read and write. Children enter first grade expecting to learn how to read, but this does not always come easily.

Interventions early in a child's education are more effective than remediation in later years when a child is further behind. Pikulski's (1994) review of the effectiveness of reading programs for at-risk children found little evidence to support remedial reading programs beyond second grade, and efforts after third grade are usually ineffectual. It is imperative, then, that all children receive the support necessary to be successful early on in the literacy program.

Schools are not able to provide all children with as
much extra help as they may need. In first grade, children
who are having difficulty are exposed to a variety of
interventions, usually initiated by the teacher. One of
the most common is to have the parent provide extra help at
home. Parents are told to read to their child or have the
child read to them. Some teachers give parents a list of
whole language activities they can do to promote literacy
learning. These activities often incorporate literacy into
the daily activities of family life. Conversely, there are
teachers who send home extra skills worksheets devoid of
meaningful application. The important thing is that the
parent becomes involved in the child’s learning. Every
little bit helps to some degree, although some activities
are more beneficial than others.

The State of California, confronted with national and
state reports indicating most of California’s children are
not reading at grade level, created a Reading Task Force
(California Reading Task Force, 1995). This Task Force
concluded that many language arts programs have provided
insufficient skills instruction, and recommended that a
balanced reading program include “an organized, explicit
skills program that includes phonemic awareness (sounds in
words), phonics, and decoding skills to address the needs of the emergent reader" (California Reading Task Force, 1995, p. 2).

The recent interest and publicity regarding phonics and reading skills may lead parents to attempt to help their children learn to read and write by drilling, fragmenting language and teaching isolated bits of knowledge out of context and without regard to meaning or the interests and abilities of the child. This may be especially true for first grade children who are entering a more structured language arts program and those children whose parents do not value whole language instruction. Conversely, children whose parents and teachers favor holistic approaches may not be receiving instruction in specific skills that will enable them to be successful readers and writers. I believe whole language classrooms and homes are the best environment for children to learn to read and write. I also believe it is acceptable, and necessary, to teach skills explicitly. This can and should be done within a whole language framework. The deciding factor is whether or not the children in question need the skills instruction. The decision to teach a skill should
not be driven by the demands of the curriculum; it should be based on the needs of individual children.

Current research summarized by Gaddy, Hall and Marzano (1996, p. 85) "...indicates that the most effective way to teach reading is to emphasize the holistic process of reading as suggested by the whole language advocates, but also to ensure that students have a strong grounding in phonics as emphasized by the skills proponents." The State of California Reading Task Force came to the same conclusion, asserting that a balanced reading program must have a strong literature and comprehension base and an organized skills component (California Department of Education, 1995). This project will draw from the most effective attributes of both philosophies to provide parents with practical and meaningful activities to remediate, reinforce, supplement and enrich their child's literacy acquisition.
Emergent Literacy

The concept of emerging literacy describes the developmental process of learning to read and write, beginning in early childhood and evolving throughout one's life. Much of the research has focused on pre-school children and interactions with their parents. Learning oral and written language is a natural process that occurs through involvement in everyday activities. Children observe adults using meaningful language in purposeful ways and begin to develop theories about the functions of language. As children interact with adults and their environment, they continue to "...formulate hypotheses, search for regularities and test their predictions" (Ferriero & Teberosky, 1982, p. 8). Butler & Clay (1987, p. 5) explained the way children learn to speak:

No one actually 'teaches' their child, and yet, by three or four years of age, that child will have learned to produce the right sounds, organized in an extremely complex way, to express an almost infinite number of ideas.

Most children in a literate society come in contact
with print during infancy as parents read to them or decorate their surroundings with the alphabet (Teale & Sulzby, 1989). Young children have many opportunities to interact with print in their environment before entering school. At two and three years of age children can identify stop signs, logos that stand for their favorite drive-in restaurants and product labels in the cupboard or at the supermarket. Young children begin to understand that it is the print that carries the meaning (Goodman, 1993). Children who attend to environmental print begin to experiment with writing. They test their hypotheses and theories against written text they encounter and information they acquire from others (Ferriero & Teberosky, 1985). Their writing at this stage looks like scribble writing, then gradually begins to resemble the print they see around them. They want to know how to write their name, and are often able to identify letters that belong to members of their family. Writing may incorporate drawing, and the child knows the difference. They begin to generate strings of symbols that may or may not contain a message (Clay, 1987). The message in subsequent readings often changes from the first reading. Children who have books of
their own and have someone who reads to them, begin play reading. They sit down with a familiar book and approximate the text, reconstruction meaning, which Sulzby (1985, as cited in Teale & Sulzby, 1989) emphasizes is not "mere memorization."

Prior to entering school and receiving formal instruction, children have learned quite a lot about reading and writing. They know language interactions are meaningful and goal oriented. As they see adults reading and writing they learn these activities also are directed toward some goal. At this stage, reading and writing are not viewed as a set of skills to be learned.

Fountas & Pinnell (1996) have described a developmental continuum consisting of four very broad and overlapping stages. These stages and approximate ages for each are: emergent readers, ages 2-7; early readers, ages 5-7; transitional readers, ages 5-7; and, self-extending readers, ages 6-9. The following descriptions of readers and writers at these stages are adapted from Fountas & Pinnell (1996), Clay (1993), Mooney (1988), Griffiths, Duncan, Ward, Hood, Hervey & Bonallock (1992), and Williams (1996):
Characteristics of the emergent stage are typical of preschool to beginning first grade children. Emergent readers understand that text, in addition to the illustration, carries the message, although they tend to rely mostly on information from the pictures. They use their background knowledge to make meaning and respond to stories. They are beginning to attend to some conventions of print such as directionality, periods and capital letters. They may know some letters and sounds, and may be able to read a few words. Children at this stage enjoy the rhythm of language and are able to use their memory and the introduced (modeled) structure of a text to help them read. They begin to understand the link between oral language and print and make attempts at writing messages. In writing, they can print their name and write some letters of the alphabet using correct letter formation. Environmental print, pictures, random marks, and groups of letters may be part of a written message. If they can hear and record some sounds in words, they may also be using inventive, or temporary, spelling.

Early readers, kindergarten to first grade, depend less on the picture and are getting more information from
the print. They have greater control of early reading strategies, left-to-right, return sweep, top-to-bottom and one-to-one matching. Familiar text can be read fluently and with phrasing. More than one cueing system (meaning, structure or visual) may be used. Early readers are beginning to monitor their reading and make self-corrections. They may search for cues and cross-check one cue with another. Several high-frequency words can be located and read automatically and written fluently. Knowledge of letter-sound associations is used in both reading and writing, with attention being given to the initial consonant. They are beginning to use punctuation, upper and lower case letters and word boundaries. They can read their own writing, though they are still using inventive or temporary spelling.

Transitional readers, kindergarten to second grade, control early strategies, attend to and integrate multiple cue sources. They read with phrasing and are fluent on longer and less predictable text. Transitional readers read for meaning and begin to make inferences from the story, as well as the illustrations. In both reading and writing they have a large cadre of known high-frequency
words, and are attending to initial, medial and final sounds, and chunks in words. They are using more conventional spelling and are developing in their use of standard capitalization, punctuation and grammar usage. Understanding of the writing process, organization, and concept of audience is growing.

Self-extending, or fluent, readers, first grade to third grade, are flexible in their use of all cueing systems. They monitor and problem solve independently, cross-checking and taking the initiative for making cues match. They solve new words by searching for cues in language structure, meaning and visual information. The texts are longer and more complex, and in a variety of genre. At this stage, they are reading to learn, as well as reading for pleasure. Writers at this stage use conventional spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, organization and structure most of the time. They are able to use the writing process, including pre-writing activities, editing and revising with confidence. Writing is purposeful, using a variety of topics and genres. They can emulate styles and paraphrase other author’s writing.

These stages of literacy learning are not rigid. As
Morrow (1993) noted, children differ in their rates of literacy achievement and they will not all pass through all stages, nor will they pass through stages in a fixed order on their way to becoming independent readers. For example, children may be able to write their name, but may not be able to recognize it when written in another location, or when magnetic letters are used instead of paper and pencil. Stages are useful when observing children to determine the course of instruction.

Whole Language

Whole language is not a methodology, it is a philosophy about how children learn based on a natural learning model. Observations of processes that take place when young children learn spoken language has provided a theory for language learning. Holdaway (1979, p. 23) described the characteristics of developmental learning based on this natural learning model:

The learning begins with immersion in an environment in which the skill is being used in purposeful ways. Readiness is timed by the internal ‘clock’ of the learner.

The environment is an emulative rather than an instructional one, providing lively examples of the skill in action, and inducing targeting activity which is persistently shaped by modelling and by reinforcement.
Reinforcement contingencies, both intrinsic and extrinsic, approach the ideal of immediate rewards for almost every approximation regardless of the distance of the initial response from the perfect 'correct' response.

Bad approximations—those moving away from the desired response—are not reinforced.

What aspect of the task will be practiced, at what pace, and for how long is determined largely by the learner. Practice occurs whether or not the adult is attending, and tends to continue until essential aspects of the task are under comfortable, automatic control.

The environment is secure and supportive, providing help on call and being absolutely free from any threat associated with the learning of the task.

Development tends to proceed continuously in an orderly sequence marked by considerable differences from individual to individual.

In applying this model to an educational setting, Holdaway (1989) noted four conditions of natural learning: One, begin with the whole, study the parts in relation to the whole, always return to the whole. Two, natural language learning through emulation requires cooperation, not competition. Three, natural learning acknowledges small approximations that progress toward competence over time. Four, children actively construct meaning.

Cambourne (Cambourne & Turbill, 1987) described seven
conditions of learning present in process-oriented classrooms. The characteristics of these whole-language classrooms are: Children are immersed in print, with displays of stories, charts and books around the room. The teacher demonstrates reading and writing and how they are used. Expectations are high and clearly stated. Children have responsibility for their own learning by making decisions on what will be written or which skill to learn. Approximation is valued, as mistakes are necessary for learning to occur. Time is made for children to practice reading and writing, and engage in demonstrations according to their need. Children get a response or feedback from others that is meaning-centered and non-threatening.

Goodman (1996), p. 105) stated, "...it's useful to think of reading (and all language processes in use) as psycholinguistic—that is, involving both thought and language." Goodman (1993) also explained language processes as sociolinguistic, because communities have their own dialects, idioms and grammar. Weaver (1988) described a socio-psycholinguistic, transactional model of language acquisition as mostly "whole-to-part, top-to-bottom, deep-to-surface, inside-out processing," but also
recognizes "...there is some part-to-whole, bottom-up, surface-deep, outside-in processing involved in reading."

The reading process described by Goodman (1996) is cyclical, involving visual, perceptual, syntactic and semantic information. The visual cycle is when the eyes scan print, make predictions based on orthography and meaning, and adjust predictions when meaning is disrupted. The perceptual cycle allows us to construct perceptual images based on text meaning, syntax, semantics and knowledge of the world. The syntactic cycle involves the reader assigning surface structure in accordance with their schemas. In the semantic cycle the reader monitors to ensure the constructed meaning is consistent with the text and expectations.

The heart of a whole language curriculum is meaning and comprehension. Smith (1985) explained comprehension as coming from the meaning a reader brings to language, and is not contained in the print, or even speech. Wells (1990) explained it this way, "...the creation and interpretation of texts never occurs in a social vacuum. Every text exists in the context of all the other texts in the writer’s or reader’s cultural tradition that he or she draws upon..."
Whole Language versus Skills Based Instruction

In whole language classrooms children learn to read by reading and they learn to write by writing. Skills are taught within the context of reading and writing according to the needs of individual children. They are encouraged to interact with printed language during shared and independent reading activities. In whole language classrooms children engage in writing meaningful messages during interactive and independent writing. They may be given unlined paper to write their own stories with little emphasis on letter formation. Teachers may feel that accuracy in spelling and reading is of less importance than the message.

The traditional kindergarten or first grade classroom model is quite different. Children are taught reading readiness skills before they are taught to read. They learn to identify and name the letters of the alphabet because it is thought this is a prerequisite to learning to read. Some traditional classrooms may not let kindergarten children write until midyear when they have more control over their fine motor skills. Instead of writing stories, they practice writing letters on lined paper. First grade
children often copy short stories or sentences from a correct model. Students in traditional classrooms are taught skills as if the entire class were at the same developmental level and had the same background knowledge. They do drills and worksheets in preparation to read and write. When they begin to read, teachers encourage children to sound out words, assuming meaning is implicit if the words are produced.

In whole language classrooms teachers are seen as facilitators. In traditional classrooms, they are purveyors of knowledge which children need to learn and remember. Many of the things teachers ask parents to do at home are a reflection of the teacher's philosophy of learning. Whole language activities may be sent home without specific skill reinforcement or, conversely, skills and drills reinforcement, devoid of any meaning may be used, in part, because they can be done without parental assistance, therefore, without social interaction.

**Balanced Literacy**

The Reading Task Force (California Reading Task Force, 1995, p. 2) perceived a need for a balanced approach to reading, rather than relying on a single philosophy. They
defined a balanced approach as:

(1) a strong literature, language, and comprehension program that includes a balance of oral and written language;

(2) an organized, explicit skills program that includes phonemic awareness (sounds in words), phonics, and decoding skills to address the needs of the emergent reader;

(3) ongoing diagnosis that informs teaching and assessment that ensures accountability; and

(4) a powerful early intervention program that provides individual tutoring for children at risk of reading failure.”

A collaborative effort by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, California State Board of Education, and California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (1996) described in detail the components of a balanced, comprehensive reading program. The instructional components include phonemic awareness, letter names and shapes, systematic, explicit phonics, spelling, vocabulary development, comprehension and higher-order thinking, and appropriate instructional materials. The list of appropriate instructional materials encompasses a variety of reading materials, including environmental print, student compositions, trade books, chapter books, fiction and nonfiction, magazines and newspapers, reference
materials and technology. The variety of genre includes stories, books and poems, math, science, history, biographies, jokes and brain teasers.

Routman, (1991) described the components of a balanced literacy program in the classroom as including reading and writing aloud, shared reading and writing, guided reading and writing, and independent reading and writing.

Reading and writing aloud are modeling techniques done by the teacher for the students. Reading aloud to children demonstrates fluency and expression and improves listening skills and comprehension. In writing aloud the teacher verbalizes thought processes used in various types of writing.

During shared reading everyone has access to the text, usually a big book or overhead copy. The teacher may model at first, but invites the children to join in the reading. After several readings the text may be used for explicit instruction or independent reading.

In shared writing the students and teacher negotiate the text and the teacher acts as scribe, writing on a large sheet of paper visible to all students. Another form of shared writing is called interactive writing. This is
often used with emergent readers in kindergarten and first grade. The students and the teacher negotiate the text, and also share the pen.

In guided reading the child does the reading with a high level of teacher support. Similarly, in guided writing, the child does the writing while the teacher acts as facilitator.

Independent reading gives children the opportunity to self-select books and problem solve on their own. Independent writing allows children to practice what they know about language and to make personal connections. Collaborative reading and writing, in which pairs or small groups of children work together, would come under this heading as there is no direct teacher intervention.

The balances thus far were concerned with the educational program and its implementation. The learning styles of children must also be considered in a balanced program. Gardner's (1985) Theory of Multiple Intelligences explores the many potential capabilities of children and the role of genetics and environment. A learning environment that accommodates all intelligences has the potential of teaching children based on the foundation of
their individual strengths, and is, therefore, more likely
to engage the child and access personal meaning by taking
advantage of what they already know.

New knowledge needs to be personally relevant and the learner must have the opportunity to organize and create meaningful patterns. Caine and Caine (1991, p. 100) concluded "...that the search for meaning is at the heart of intrinsic motivation..."

Strickland (1994-1995, p. 21) referred to balance as "...the search for bridges between the conventional wisdom of the past and the need to take advantage of new research and wisdom of the past..." There are many dimensions to the concept of balanced literacy including a variety of teaching techniques and materials extracted from past and current practices shown to be most effective in addressing the needs of a population diverse in abilities, learning styles, backgrounds and interests.

Parental Perceptions and Practices

Just as teachers teach from a traditional or whole language philosophy, parents also have beliefs about the nature of formal education. Children may have learned language in a whole language, natural
environment prior to entering school, but once they are in a formal educational program there is no guarantee this will continue, either at home or at school.

Hoffman and Kantner (1992) surveyed parents of preschool children to determine their orientation towards literacy learning. A whole language philosophy about emergent writing shifted to a skills orientation when parents were asked how they help their children write. Frequent responses were that they help children form letters correctly and have them copy words. A similar result occurred in response to questions about reading. Many parents believed meaning was more important than decoding, however, there was a focus on skills when children began to read. They mentioned using flash cards and sounding out as strategies they would use to help a child who was struggling. Parents held a whole language philosophy toward literacy learning prior to formal instruction. At that point their views tended to be skills oriented.

Anderson (1995) investigated the relationships between parents' beliefs about literacy learning and their
children's knowledge and perceptions about reading and writing. He concluded that children did develop perceptions of literacy consistent with their parents prior to entering school. Other research indicates children "...develop beliefs about literacy learning which are congruent with those of their teachers" (Rasinski & DeFord, 1988, as cited in Anderson, 1995).

DeFord (1991, p. 78) stated the natural literacy events experienced in the home are important for a successful beginning. If children do not have a rich social language background, the school must provide those experiences. She further indicates that disparity between home and school language socialization patterns may put children at risk of failure. Other researchers studying lower-income inner-city children found that most of the children in their study were able to make the shift between home and school literacy experiences, and were able to learn to read and write (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). The key factor was parent support of the educational system and a strong desire for their children to succeed.

Traditional research has investigated other factors that influence children's literacy learning, including SES
and the educational level of mothers. Numerous studies have noted social class differences in reading achievement with children from low-income families performing consistently lower than children from middle-income families (Snow & Tabors, 1996). This could lead to the conclusion that children from low-income families have limited literacy experiences. Teale (1986) studied low-income families of differing ethnicities and found a great range of frequency in amount of literacy events within each group. A study conducted by the National Reading Research Center (as cited in Mikulecky, 1996) found low-income families reported fewer print-related events, and those reported were educational (as well as skills based), such as reciting the alphabet or using flash cards. Middle-income families reported more activities involving literacy as entertainment. The mother’s level of education has been found to have a positive impact on children’s success in school (Benjamin, 1993). More recent research supports White’s (as cited in Teale & Sulzby, 1986) conclusion that parents’ occupation, income and educational level are less important than how parents raise their children (Teale, 1986; Taylor-Gaines, 1988).
Teale (1986) found ethnicity did not account for the literacy backgrounds of the families he studied. The home background includes economic, social, cultural and personal factors, all of which can have a significant effect on a child's attitude toward literacy. Several commonalties emerged in the families studied. Reading and writing were social activities and occurred as part of daily living routines. Literacy events involving parents' employment was almost nil and there was little storybook reading.

Nespeca's (1995) study to determine what parents do to help their children acquire emergent literacy skills also found differences in the amount of parental involvement in the group studied, as well as differences in type of literacy activities. These mothers read to their children, but rarely discussed the story during reading or later in the day. Only two mothers pointed to the words while reading and several drilled their children on letters of the alphabet. There was little encouragement to write or draw.

Fitzgerald, Spiegal, and Cunningham (1991) surveyed parents of kindergarten entrants and found parents with lower literacy levels believed literacy events and
artifacts were more important than did those parent with higher literacy levels. Both groups thought artifacts, such as newspapers, magazines, children's books, pens and paper were important, however, the low-literacy group ranked alphabet blocks and flash cards, which could be considered instructional materials, higher than the other artifacts. The low-literacy group placed more importance on events like watching educational television and playing school, which are also instructionally oriented activities. The low-literacy parents combined a natural learning model with a skills-based orientation. The high-literacy parents took a nurturing, natural view of literacy learning and rejected the skills-based approach. Low-literacy parents felt role modeling was important, although less important than child-centered activities, but did not mention any adult role modeling events. It was inferred that they may not know how to be role models or their inability to read well deters them from being role models (Fitzgerald, et al. 1991).

A study on parental involvement in migrant students education found that "...many migrant families believe it is the school's responsibility to educate their children..."
(Chavkin, 1991, p. 4). This study further noted that although the parents want the best for their children, they believe their involvement may be detrimental or that the school may think they are interfering in the children’s education. A literature review by Baumann and Thomas (1997, p. 110-111) concluded that “…parents of minority children have an intense concern for their children’s education and learning.” They disputed myths that culturally, ethnically or linguistically diverse families do not receive support at home for their children’s education.

**Vygotsky**

Vygotskian Theory, although incomplete, has provided a framework for understanding learning and teaching that is significant in much past and present research. Bedrova and Leong (1996) have presented this research from the perspective of classroom application. Some of the major ideas of Vygotsky, as they relate to tutoring or individualized instruction, follow.

Children are not passive receptors of knowledge, but actively construct their own meaning. Things a child attends to influence the course of cognitive construction.
Teachers can direct a child’s attention, but do not directly determine the resultant construct.

Social context, meaning everything in the environment that has a cultural basis or influence, profoundly affects learning. The social aspect includes the immediate level, the person with whom the child is currently interacting, the structural level, including more immediate social influences like family and school, and the general cultural level, such as language, numbering systems and technology. These social structures affect what we know and how we know it. The mind is formed not just by individual history, but also by human history.

The acquisition of mental processes takes place first in a social context or shared experience. Vygotsky believed in the sharing of higher mental processes and shared memory. Children learn by interacting with others. After this period of shared experience the child can internalize, then use the mental process independently.

Vygotsky believed learning and development are different processes that impact each other. He concurred with Piaget that there are developmental prerequisites that limit the ability to learn some new information, however,
information can be presented that will lead the child into development. He called this the Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD, an area limited to behaviors that are closest to emergence at a given time. There are varying degrees within the ZPD, from independent performance to maximally assisted performance, with degrees of partially assisted performance in between. The ZPD itself and the size vary among children and within children, depending on their level or stage of performance. The interactions in the ZPD include not only expert-novice interactions, but all social interactions, including those with peers, children at other developmental levels and even imaginary partners. Vygotsky suggested that limiting assessment of children’s abilities based on independent performance gives us an incomplete view of a child’s understanding because children understand more than they can produce.

Vygotsky saw language as essential to mental development and as the primary mechanism of cognitive processing. Language allows individuals the ability to think logically, solve complex problems, imagine and create. When children gain a measure of control over language they can think in abstract terms using symbols and
concepts to think about things not in their present environment. Language is a tool of learning new information, skills, and strategies. It is a necessary part of shared experiences that build cognitive processes.

Language is used in speaking, thinking, drawing and writing. The semantics of language develops in shared experiences as the child constructs and reconstructs meaning. In the context of repeated social interactions personal meaning becomes similar to conventional cultural meaning. Written speech is a higher level of oral speech. Thoughts must be sequenced and contain more detail. The writer learns to attend to elements of language, syntax and voice.

Implications for Intervention

Research shows that "When families are involved in their children's education, children earn higher grades and receive higher scores on tests, attend school more regularly, complete more homework, demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviors, graduate from high school at higher rates, and are more likely to enroll in higher education..." (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Promoting family involvement is an important goal,
especially for families of children who are at risk of failure. Traditional research has identified target populations of children who are considered at-risk. There are also many other children considered at-risk because of circumstances such as divorce rates, single-parent families and working parents. Studies have shown that involved families also benefit. When parents participate in meaningful programs, their self-respect and confidence in their abilities increases (Burns, 1993). In the report of New Jersey's Council on Adult Education and Literacy, Florio and Strickland (1993, cited in Strickland, 1996) concluded that promotion of family literacy was important for all families.

Parents, caregivers and other surrogates, hereafter referred to as parents, are sometimes reluctant to become involved. Parents who were unsuccessful in school often have unpleasant memories. Others are uncomfortable because of limited English or a low level of literacy (Cunningham and Allington, 1994). Others who were schooled in another culture, believe in the transmission model where the teacher is the source of knowledge (Anderson and Gunderson, 1997).
Gadsden (1996) recommended family literacy interventions should be culturally sensitive and recognize the assets and limitations of participants. Cultural identity should be part of the process of literacy learning. Gadsden (1996) suggested an integrative program connecting reading, writing and culture. Morrow and Neuman (1995, as cited in Strickland, 1996) added that "...many low-income, minority, and immigrant families cultivate rich contexts for literacy development and that they support family literacy with effort and imagination."

Strickland (1996) suggested that when participants are able to contribute ideas and efforts, they will have a greater sense of ownership in the program. This is an important concept when school and teachers have a theoretically sound basis for teaching reading and writing that may differ greatly from parental practices. Many of the studies cited that surveyed parent beliefs and practices were pre-intervention, that is, the parents expressed their beliefs prior to specific instruction. A program grounded in the principles of literacy acquisition could allow parents to make decisions about how they implement strategies based on their cultural context. All
participants must focus on the goal of teaching literacy skills.

Edwards (cited in Mikulecky, 1996) reported many parents want to know explicit strategies for reading with their children and how to help them in specific ways. Parents are also concerned about literacy activities and reading instruction in the classroom (Routman, 1996).

Many of the activities suggested to help parents work with their children grew out of the whole language movement. Whole language theory developed from observations of parents and children interacting in literate families. Parents have been advised to read to their children regularly, model meaningful, literate activities in daily life, and encourage children’s inventive literacy play (Shockley, Michalove, and Allen, 1995). These behaviors have been shown to promote literacy acquisition. This handbook, presented from a balanced literacy perspective, will introduce parents to explicit teaching activities congruent with classroom practices and reading/writing goals.

Summary

Teaching children to read is a high priority in the
State of California. However, many children are considered to be at-risk of failing to learn to read and write, either on a personal level or a standardized test. In order to prevent failure, it is important to intervene early. Interventions are used when it is first discovered a child is having trouble. If we wait, the child may fall further behind, self-concept and motivation suffer. Learning becomes a chore instead of an enjoyable experience. Some of these children may be labeled learning disabled and put in special remediation classes which often emphasize skills instead of meaning.

Research has shown that the most successful students have families who are involved in their education. There are, however, many parents who want to help their children, but are reluctant to become involved because of their own insecurities or lack of knowing what to do or how to do it. Research indicates these parents would be receptive to some guidance and would benefit by having more knowledge of the reading process.

When presenting information to parents it is important to value their more intimate knowledge of their children, their personal and cultural beliefs about education,
reading and writing, and to acknowledge and laud the efforts they have made to support their children's literacy acquisition. Telling parents they are doing it wrong will not elicit continued support. Showing parents alternative methods to accomplish a particular goal is less threatening and gives them a choice of activities suitable to their talents and comfort zone. It is better to have some support at home, than not to have any at all.

Preferred activities for parents helping children at home should always be purposeful and meaningful. They should take place in a social context so the parent can provide support and do for the child what the child can not yet do. Ideally, activities should be open-ended, flexible, and children should have choice.

Many family literacy programs that have documented success are comprehensive, that is, providing multiple services, and are driven by the needs of adult family members (Mikulecky, 1996). Programs of this magnitude must be funded by government agencies or private resources. Due to funding limitations, this project will target one goal, family literacy support for first grade children learning to read and write.
Because of the complexity of modern life, many parents find it difficult to attend regularly scheduled school meetings. In addition to time constraints, there are transportation and child care problems. In lieu of attempting to schedule school-wide first grade parent meetings, several alternatives are suggested:

Teachers can schedule meetings with parents of their class to keep them informed of literacy activities and progress specific to their classroom. This smaller group size will help establish a community of learners with more opportunity for discussion. An added advantage is that the people who know the children best are involved, not outside authority figures. For most parents, their child’s teacher is the person they talk to about their child’s progress.

The handbook can provide the basis for parent-teacher conferences. Teachers can suggest strategies for parents of children with specific needs. A brief explanation would suffice for most parents, and they are able to refer to the handbook for details. At follow-up conferences
parents can share their progress, problems, triumphs and adaptations. The direction of discussions would be based on parent concerns and the needs and progress of the children.
APPRAOCHE TO THE PROJECT

In working with children participating in the Reading Recovery program, and contacts with parents, there appeared to be differences in the amount and type of support provided by families. Close contact with teachers regarding the progress of individual children, especially struggling readers and writers, also indicated inconsistent support at home. Although parents of first grade students at my school are invited to an orientation and informational meeting on reading and writing at the beginning of first grade, the focus is on emergent readers and writers. Many children are still at this level during parent conference week. Follow-up meetings with parents is on an individual basis according to the needs of children and concerns of the teacher or the parent. Parent support should be ongoing for all children, however, the type of support should vary according to the growth of each individual child as a reader and writer.

It is especially important, in the case of struggling students and those who seem to have reached a plateau in their learning, to examine the instruction a child is receiving at school and at home. This handbook provides a
basis to intervene and, perhaps, modify parent involvement to ensure their contributions will enhance student progress.

A review of the literature indicated parents want to know how to help their children, family intervention should be culturally sensitive, and there should be a consistency between home and school practices. This indicates a need for parent education that would explain the latest in educational theory and research as practiced in the classroom and provide open-ended support activities for parents to implement at home. The technical literature relating to these objectives has been translated into terms parents can understand.
GOALS

The goal of this project is to provide parents with information that will help them realize the importance of family support for emerging readers and writers. The project handbook will serve as a reference that will help parents understand the process of literacy acquisition. It will also be a resource for parents, containing a variety of activities to promote active parent involvement and to address the needs of individual children.
OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this project are:

1. To let parents know their support is valuable and necessary.

2. To help parents understand the process of emerging literacy.

3. To help parents understand the strategies children use in learning to read and write.

4. To provide guidelines and activities for parent involvement.

5. To outline school activities commonly implemented in a balanced literacy program.

6. To help parents feel comfortable with the language of literacy and encourage dialogue with their children's teacher.
LIMITATIONS

1. This handbook is presented in a text-only format. The published form will include illustrations and/or diagrams, page breaks, and some variety in print and presentation. This will increase the readability level, as well as overall appeal.

2. This handbook is written at approximately the fifth grade level. Parents reading below this level may need extra support. Non-English speaking parents will require translation into their native language.

3. The handbook will be given to first grade teachers to share with parents at the first parent meeting or conference. The interest of the parent will be influenced by the enthusiasm of the teacher.

4. It is hoped that by presenting the information in a handbook that parents can keep at home, they will be able to read it at their convenience. Parents may need more prompting than has currently been planned for disseminating this information.

5. This handbook will be most beneficial for schools that have adopted a Balanced Literacy approach to teaching. Before we can enlist the help of parents for a higher
level of support for their children, teachers must have the training, materials and resources needed to implement a comprehensive program.

6. The handbook will be made generally available to the target group, parents of first grade children. Parents of children whose literacy level is not in this range will not receive a copy of the handbook unless a recommendation is made by the child's teacher.
EVALUATION

Evaluation of this handbook was based on three criteria: substance, coherence and comprehensibility. A draft of the handbook, along with a questionnaire, was given to two reading teachers, two first grade teachers and two parents of children in first grade. The reading teachers evaluated substance and concurrence with theory and research. First grade teachers evaluated coherence and how it interfaces with first grade curriculum and learning outcomes. Parents evaluated comprehensibility and applicability of activities for home support of emerging readers. (See Appendix B for questionnaires.)

Likert Scale responses are summarized as follows:

Item 1: All respondents strongly agreed this handbook addresses current theories of literacy acquisition, teaching practices and education issues.

Item 2: All respondents strongly agreed this handbook accurately describes the most beneficial instructional strategies and customary teaching practices in balanced literacy classrooms.

Item 3: All respondents strongly agreed this handbook provides a description of parent/child activities teachers...
would recommend and parents would understand.

Item 4: One first grade teacher agreed and the other respondents strongly agreed that this handbook presents theories of literacy acquisition in a manner parents can understand.

Item 5: One first grade teacher agreed and the other respondents strongly agreed this handbook will help parents understand how to work with their children.

The first grade teacher who agreed on Items 4 and 5 expressed a concern regarding parents' educational level and their ability to understand the contents of the handbook. This teacher noted that parents' knowledge of their children's reading strengths and weaknesses would also be a factor.

Free-response Items: There was a consensus that this handbook is comprehensive and all respondents stated the section on parent/child activities would be the most useful. One reading teacher suggested a revision in the glossary which has now been incorporated.

The opinions of the teachers and parents surveyed are considered to be representative of those of a random sample population. Based on their evaluation, the content of this
handbook is accurate, useful and communicates information to most parents in a comprehensible manner.

The teacher jargon that is still present will be modified in future revisions. The first publication will include page breaks, illustrations and a format that will make this handbook more user-friendly. Any future modifications will be made upon feedback from parents who receive copies of the first publication.
SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

The purpose of this handbook is to help first grade teachers involve parents in their child’s education. As such, there is no predetermined criteria for use. Teachers are in the best position to know the needs of their students and parents, and should adapt the following suggestions to provide the greatest benefit.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Teachers may pass the handbook out to parents at the first grade orientation meeting and use it as a guide for a general presentation, with particular emphasis on how to use the handbook.

- Teachers who have regularly scheduled, ongoing, parent meetings throughout the year may want to select particular sections to hand out for a specific presentation.

- The handbook could be made available to all parents who have concerns about their child and want to know how to help.

- During parent conferences teachers often have occasion to prescribe extra help at home for children. The particular areas of need can be highlighted in the
handbook for parents to refer to when working with their child.

- The handbook can be sent home to parents who are unable to make it to conferences. Their concern about their child's progress should not be underestimated.
APPENDIX A

HANDBOOK FOR
PARENTS OF FIRST GRADE CHILDREN
LEARNING TO READ AND WRITE

by
Linda Brown
California State University
San Bernardino
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Dear Parents,

This handbook is for parents, grandparents, baby-sitters and all caregivers of first grade children who are learning to read and write. Your support is one of the most valuable gifts you can give a child.

Education has changed since we were in first grade. For some of us, it has changed several times. Teachers are always trying to find new and better ways to help children learn. Parents are concerned about their child’s progress and want to help. Education has become a political issue, and everyone seems to have an idea about what to do to improve it.

New research on how children learn to read and write has affected what teachers do in the classroom. Teachers are continually being trained in the latest and most effective methods. This handbook will give you an overview of some of the theories, and how teachers plan classroom activities to support beginning readers and writers.

There is a section that describes the stages of reading development which can help you understand where your child is now, and where he needs to go. The section on parent activities will give you ideas on how to address the specific needs of your child. A glossary at the end will define some of the current buzzwords in education.
Learning to read and write can be a challenge for children. It is our job, as parents and teachers, to provide the support and encouragement they need to be successful. Learning should be fun. I hope you and your child enjoy reading and writing together.

Sincerely,

Linda Brown
Reading Recovery Teacher

PS: For ease in writing, all caregivers have been referred to as parents. Children are referred to as he or him and teachers are she or her.
PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

There have been three major trends in education in recent years. First, there was the traditional model, in which many of us were educated. More recently, the whole language movement has guided teaching, although some teachers and schools continued to be traditional. The new philosophical approach is called Balanced Literacy. As its name implies, there is a balance in teaching approaches.

Traditional Model

The traditional model, also called skills-based instruction, has gained popularity again. It is now called back-to-basics. In this model children are taught skills and facts that have to be learned before they go on to the next set of skills. For example, before children are taught to read or write, they must be ready. Reading readiness means that children have to know the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they make before can read. They also have to be able to form letters correctly and be able to spell a few words correctly before they can write. Being correct is very important.

In traditional classrooms all the children are taught the same skill at the same time, and they all do the same
worksheets for practice. There is a lot of copying from a correct model before children create their own stories. In reading, children are encouraged to sound out words. Reading all the words correctly is what makes a good reader.

Traditional classrooms tend to be quieter, with all the children working alone at their desks. Teachers assess, or grade, children based on what they can do alone, without help.

Whole Language

In whole language classrooms children learn to read by reading and they learn to write by writing. They do not have to know all their letters and letter sounds before they can read and write. They learn them in the process of reading and writing meaningful messages. Children do not get worksheets. When they write stories, they are given unlined paper, so they can concentrate on meaning and not have to worry about letter formation and keeping letters within the lines. Teachers value inventive spelling because it tells them whether a child is using letter/sound correspondence. In reading, getting to the meaning is more important than getting every word correct.
Whole language classrooms tend to be noisier than traditional classrooms. All the children are not working on the same thing. They have more choice in activities, and often work together. Teachers have centers where children can work independently while she works with small groups or one child at a time. There are many times during the day when the entire class comes together for shared reading or instruction. At other times children are working at their own level.

In general, whole language approaches have the best student outcomes. Children are more independent, rely less on the teacher, and are more flexible in their use of strategies.

Balanced Literacy

There is a big difference between traditional and whole languages approaches to teaching. In the traditional model teachers start with the smallest bits of knowledge and build from there. When children learn all the little bits, they put them together to get the big picture. In other words, to be able to read, children first have to learn the letters and sounds. After that, they can read words, and when they learn a few words, then they can read
In the whole language approach, the teacher starts with the story. She may read a big book to the children, then have the children help with the reading while she provides support. The story the teacher chooses will probably have some letters and words she wants the children to know. In the whole language model the teacher starts with the big picture, the story, then teaches the bits that make up the whole.

Both approaches make sense, but opinions are divided on how children should be taught. Which way is better? In fact, both approaches teach children to read and write. The balanced literacy model is imbedded within a whole language framework, and reading and writing skills are taught explicitly.

Other components of balance in balanced literacy might include the following:

- listening and speaking as well as reading and writing
- variety in instructional delivery, whole group, small group and individual
- various levels of support provided to students
• variety of instructional techniques, modeling, sharing, guiding, independent practice

• variety of teaching/learning materials to address the diverse learning styles of children

• books, books, and more books at all levels on a variety of topics
STAGES OF READING DEVELOPMENT

Emergent literacy, or emerging literacy, is a term used to describe the developmental stages of learning to read and write. Children begin learning about literacy in infancy and continue to learn throughout their lifetime. Literacy includes listening and speaking, as well as reading and writing.

When you hear teachers say that parents are children's first and most important teachers, they are referring to the preschool years. During this period, children learn how to listen and communicate. Parents may not think they are actively teaching, but children are learning how to make sounds and organize those sounds to express their needs and feelings. This learning occurs naturally during normal daily activities.

Communicating with children is very important in providing a good background for later literacy learning. Children learn the many purposes of spoken language and gradually refine their understanding of word meanings and how words go together to make sentences. They do this by observing and responding to adult models. They try to do what their parents do. Their first attempts at oral
language are not perfect, but they receive praise and encouragement. Gradually children learn how to make themselves understood. Conversations with children give them a greater understanding of language and the world around them.

Most children have had many stories read to them before starting school. They like to hear the rhythm and sounds of language in nursery rhymes and simple stories. They love to hear their favorite stories read over and over again. Storybook reading is a special time parents and children share together. There is no pressure put on the child, but the child is learning to listen and attend for longer periods of time, participate in discussions about the story and he is also expanding his knowledge of the world and written language.

Preschool children like to write and draw. Early writing often looks like scribbles or random markings. As children gain more control over the pencil, they draw pictures and use scribble writing to make meaning. As they start attending to print, they want to know how to write their own name. Soon, their marks begin to resemble letters.
Children who have had many experiences with reading and writing, and show an interest, are ready to learn to read. Parents can easily provide these important experiences before children start school:

- Read to your child regularly.
- Have conversations with your child.
- Let your child see you read and write.
- Give your child paper and pencils to write and draw.
- Let your child have access to the books they love so they can practice reading.
- Have fun with nursery rhymes and sounds. Children need to learn how to listen.

Depending on abilities and experience children may enter first grade at any of the following levels:

- Emergent Readers and Writers - ages 2 to 7
- Early Readers and Writers - ages 5 to 7
- Transitional Readers and Writers - ages 5 to 7
- Independent Readers and Writers - ages 6 to 9

These stages are broad and overlapping. Children may appear to be in more than one stage at a time. They may skip stages or seem to move backwards.
Emergent Readers and Writers

The following characteristics are typical of kindergarten and first grade children at the emergent level:

- They understand that the writing, as well as the picture, carries the message, but they rely mostly on information from the picture.
- They use their background knowledge to make meaning.
- They are beginning to use one-to-one word matching and move left to right across print.
- They may recognize periods, question marks and capital letters.
- They may know some letters and sounds, and may be able to read a few words.
- They use their memory to help them read patterned books when the pattern has been introduced or is familiar.
- They can read environmental print, like the name of a favorite restaurant, breakfast cereal or toy.
- In writing, they can print their name and write some letters.
- Written messages may contain pictures, random marks and groups of letters.
• If they can hear and write some sounds, they may be using inventive spelling.

**Early Readers and Writers**

The following characteristics are found in kindergarten and first grade children at the early level:

• These children depend less on the picture and are using more information from the print.

• They have greater control over the early strategies, reading left to right across print and return sweep to the next line, reading from the top of the page to the bottom and left page before right page, and one-to-one word matching.

• They can read familiar stories fluently and with phrasing.

• They use more than one cueing system. The three cueing systems are meaning, structure and visual. (See the glossary for an explanation.)

• They are beginning to monitor their reading to see if it looks right, sounds right and makes sense.

• They can self-correct if the cues do not match.

• They know several high frequency words they can readily find in print and can write them fluently.
• They are using letter/sound association in both reading and writing, but focus mostly on the first letter of a word.
• In writing they separate words with spaces and are beginning to use upper and lower case letters and punctuation.
• They can read their own writing, even though they are still using inventive or temporary spelling.

Transitional Readers and Writers

Transitional readers are well on their way to becoming independent. The following characteristics are found in children in kindergarten through second grade classrooms:
• These children have good control over the early strategies and use all the cueing systems.
• They read longer stories with fluency and phrasing.
• They read for meaning and are beginning to make inferences from the story, as well as the picture.
• They can read and write many high frequency words.
• They attend to the ends and middles of words, not just the first letter.
• They use known chunks, like sh or ch, in reading and writing. They notice little words within big words.
• Spelling, grammar and punctuation are becoming more conventional.

• Writing is more organized and they are learning how to write for different purposes and audiences.

**Independent Readers and Writers**

The following characteristics are found in these first through third grade children at the independent level:

• These children monitor their reading and problem solve unknown words independently.

• They are reading a variety of longer and more complex books, both fiction and non-fiction.

• These children have reading strategies in place. It can be said that they are no longer learning to read, they are reading to learn and reading for pleasure.

• In writing, they use conventional spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, organization and structure most of the time.

• They are confident in all phases of the writing process.

• They can write on a variety of topics and for different purposes.

These stages are not rigid. Children differ in their
rates of literacy acquisition. Children may not pass through all stages, nor will they pass through stages in a fixed order. At times they may seem to have forgotten something they once knew because they are trying to solve a new problem.
CLASSROOM PRACTICES

When first grade children go home after school, they often are not able to tell their parents what they did during the day. If they take home a worksheet or a story they have written, then parents know a little bit about what their child has done in class. Many reading and writing activities, however, do not require a lot of paperwork. The activities are demanding, and children work very hard, but they do not bring home a lot of evidence of their hard work.

This section will describe some of the most common teaching and learning activities in balanced literacy classrooms. You will also learn about some of the skills and strategies beginning readers need to know.

Reading to Children

First grade teachers read books to their class every day, sometimes five or six times a day. At the beginning of the year, the stories are shorter to accommodate children's shorter attention span. The stories get longer as the year progresses and children can attend for longer periods of time.

Teachers read stories that are above the children's
reading level. This introduces them to good literature, rich vocabulary and a variety of writing styles. They become familiar with the more complex language structure of books, which is different from the way we speak. The teacher is also modeling fluency and expression.

Group discussions after the story help develop higher level thinking skills. During the reading of the story, there are few interruptions. The teacher may wish to explain or clarify a concept, or ask the children to predict what will happen next. But, the emphasis is on reading a good story together, and enjoying it.

Shared Reading

Shared reading is done with the whole class. Instead of using a regular size book, the teacher uses a big book, usually placed on an easel so that all the children can see the words. At the beginning of the year, stories are short, with only one or two sentences on a page.

After reading the title and the author’s name, the teacher will ask the children to predict what the story is about from the pictures. She reads the story to the children the first time. As the teacher reads, she models the early strategies, one-to-one word matching, moving left
to right across print and return sweep to the next line.

On subsequent readings of the book children will be encouraged to join in the reading. Children may be asked to point and match too. The teacher will have chosen some important skills or strategies the children need to learn, and she teaches them from the book. For example, she may want them to know the high frequency word the, so she will have the children find the word in the book. Or, she may want to teach them a strategy to figure out a new word, so she might have them check the picture and use the first letter to help. At the beginning of the year emergent readers are quite dependent on the picture as the teacher guides them to use visual information as well. The visual information is the text of the book. Big books may be read together five or six times, or more if it is a favorite. Many children will be able to read the book independently after the first few readings.

As children become transitional readers, the teacher will no longer need to point to the words. The teaching points will be higher level, for example, suffixes or adjectives may be the focus.
Guided Reading

Guided reading is a type of instruction where the teacher brings together a small group of children, usually two to five, who are reading at approximately the same level. Books or stories are chosen to fit the needs of the children in the group. The teacher guides children through the reading of a book using a set procedure. Round robin reading, and its variations, are the exception, rather than the rule. Round robin reading is characterized by having one child read aloud while the rest are supposed to follow along. What usually happens is that children try to predict what page they will have to read, instead of attending to the story and trying to predict what will happen next.

Before guided reading groups are started at the beginning of the year, the teacher makes sure that children have a lot of experience with print. Shared reading accomplishes this very nicely. Children are also assessed on their knowledge of letters, sounds, words, book knowledge and reading level. Children with similar abilities are placed together. Because all children are different and progress at different rates, the group
members change frequently. Emergent readers have guided reading groups four to five times a week; transitional and independent readers may meet three to four times a week.

A guided reading lesson proceeds as follows:

- The teacher selects a book appropriate for the group. She reads the title and tells the children briefly what the book is about.
- The teacher and children do a picture walk, which means they look at the pictures together and talk about them. This is very important because it helps children put meaning in place. All first grade books have pictures, and if they do not, they should. At the emergent stage there is a great deal of picture support. Teachers provide a high level of support early on, and gradually transfer the responsibility for the picture walk to the child. As children progress through the stages of literacy, the books they read have less picture support, and children have to rely more on the meaning within the story.
- During the first reading, each child has his own little book. Early emergent children may read along with the teacher, and they often read the story together a second
time. This high level of support decreases gradually, until the children can attempt the first reading on their own with minimal support. The teacher listens as all the children read aloud at their own pace, at the same time. When a child gets stuck, the teacher prompts him to use a strategy to figure out the word.

- After the story, there is a short discussion focusing on meaning. This is not an oral question and answer comprehension quiz.
- The teacher may choose one or two teaching points based on errors, or miscues, in the children’s reading.
- Sometimes children are given the opportunity to read the story again independently the same day. The book is usually read again the following day, and is then considered a familiar book. Children should be able to read familiar books and stories with at least 90 percent accuracy. They are usually made available in the classroom for children to read during independent reading time. These books are often the ones sent home for children to read to their parents. If a child brings home a book he can not read, it is better to just read it to him. The rereading of familiar stories is
important to help children develop fluency.

- One of the ways teachers assess reading progress is by recording a reading record. The teacher listens to a child read and records the correct responses and the errors or miscues. The records are analyzed to see what kinds of errors and child makes and what cues he is using. This information helps the teacher place children in groups, and guides her selection of books and teaching points. Reading records are usually done at least once a week for emergent and early readers, and less often for transitional and independent readers.

Independent Reading

While a teacher is busy with a guided reading group, the rest of the children are busy at centers, or at their seats doing other reading and writing activities. One of these activities is called independent reading and it can take different forms. It can even be done with a partner, but it does not require assistance from the teacher. These are some of the things children read:

- the wall (all the environmental classroom print)
- familiar stories and little books
- pocket chart activities
• poems and other charts
• big books from shared reading
• stories written by the class

Modeled Writing

Just as teachers model reading aloud, they also model writing. They might use a large piece of lined chart paper, a chalkboard, or even the overhead projector. It is important that all the children can see the writing. As the teacher writes, she thinks out loud, planning what the message will say. For emergent readers she may talk about the details of print or spelling. With transitional and independent readers, she may model how to write a friendly letter, again, she is thinking out loud about the message and format.

Shared Writing

In shared writing, the teacher still writes for the children so they can all see. The difference is that the children decide what to write. In one popular form of shared writing, the children write about the important news events of the day. Together, the teacher and the children decide what to write and how to say it. With emergent children the teacher will have them help with the early
concepts about print, where to start, where to space, when to put in periods and capital letters. Children will learn to say words slowly, listen for sounds, and decide which letter makes that sound. At this stage, the teacher may write what the children say, even if it is not grammatically correct. Later, when the children have concepts about print in place, the teacher will work on grammar, having children listen to see if the words sound right.

Interactive Writing

Interactive writing is similar to shared writing, but the children write what they can and the teacher writes the rest. This is done on a large sheet of lined chart paper at an easel.

For emergent children, interactive writing is an excellent time to teach phonics. Children learn that when they want to write a word, they have to say it slowly, listen for the sounds and decide which letters make those sounds. Then they have to decide where to write the letters, how the letters should look, and if there needs to be a space. There is a lot to think about when you are just learning. And, if somebody makes a mistake, or gets
tricked, the teacher has a big supply of boo boo tape to cover it up so it can be fixed.

Shared writing and interactive writing are often left out or put on the wall for children to read during independent reading. For this reason, it is important that conventional spelling, punctuation and capitalization are used.

Guided Writing

Teachers often pull out one child or a small group of children to address specific needs in writing. She may do a mini-lesson on how and when to use capital letters, or she may just provide support and focus for struggling writers. This individual attention is invaluable for students, but most teachers feel there is never enough time in the day to see as many children as they would like.

Independent Writing

Most first grade teachers have children write in a journal every day, starting with the first day of school. Emergent readers may only know how to write a few letters and they may not know the letter names or sounds. These children always need to draw a picture about their story to help them remember what it says. The teacher will probably
have the children read it to her. After making a comment about the content of the story, the teacher will often write the story in the child’s words, “so that everyone can read it.” Most of the time children can remember their story, but it may not say the same thing from one day to the next. These journals can be dated and kept as a record of children’s progress.

As children learn how to write high frequency words, or learn to look for them on the word wall or other environmental print in the room, they begin to use conventional spelling. If they do not know how to write a word, they should attempt to write it using sound analysis, just as they did in shared and interactive writing. The child says the word slowly and writes what he hears. In the beginning children usually focus on the first letter. They progress to hearing ending sounds, then they hear the middle of the word. They hear the consonants before they hear the vowels. This progression is called developmental spelling. You may also hear the terms inventive or temporary spelling. This is a good thing for first grade children to do. They will soon learn other strategies to spell words.
Even after children know the letters and sounds, there may still be confusions. Some letter sounds are made in the same part of the mouth. The letters B and P are one example that sometimes confuse children. Children are also not able to articulate all the sounds in the English language in first grade. Some children have a hard time articulating the letters S or R in words. They can still learn to spell, but they may need to hear another person articulate some words.

**Spelling and Phonics**

Many teachers are no longer giving children weekly spelling tests. Children need to know how to spell words, but spelling tests do not always translate into long-term learning. Children memorize words for a Friday test, but by Monday, they have been forgotten.

Spelling and phonics are taught all day long during reading and writing activities. In books for emergent readers the same high frequency words show up again and again. After reading a word like *the* in several books, a child will probably be able to find it in another book if he is attending to print. Being able to read a word does not mean the child can write it unless he has made the
connection between reading and writing. Once a child learns how to learn a word, he will pick up new words at a faster pace and many words he reads will become part of his writing vocabulary.

Children more readily learn to spell words they want to know how to write. Their own name is one example. They usually learn mom and dad quickly, and often learn to write siblings’ names.

Teachers provide support for emerging writers by immersing them in a print-rich environment. There are words and stories everywhere. One section of a wall is often dedicated only to words. In first grade the words are grouped by the beginning letter. About five new words are put on the word wall each week. Children learn to use the word wall to help them spell words in their stories. Teachers also use the word wall for explicit teaching of phonics.

Another spelling/phonics activity teachers use involves children in making words. Each child is given a set of letters and the children are directed to make words, and add or rearrange letters to make new words from a word they already know. After they have made a number of words,
children look for similarities and patterns in the words they made. Emergent readers may group words together that begin with the same letter. Early and transitional readers may look for words that sound the same at the end (rhyme) and group them according to spelling patterns.

An example of a useful pattern would be in the word cat, a familiar word to many children. The rhyming part, at, is found in other words, such as sat and hat. So, if a child can write cat, he can change one letter and write hat or bat. He can learn to use what he knows to figure out new words.

Understanding of how patterns can be used to read and write new words is more helpful than trying to sound out every letter. One example can be found in the word night, often found in children’s stories. If a child can read night, then he can change the first letter and also read light. This word, and many others, cannot be sounded out letter by letter.

Finding patterns comes naturally, memorizing rules does not. Most phonics rules are broken sometimes, and some are broken more often than they are true. For example, read and lead can both be pronounced two different ways,
depending on the context, or meaning of the sentence. English is a very tricky language, and if a child's only strategy is sounding out, that child will have a difficult time.
PARENT/CHILD ACTIVITIES

This section will give suggestions for parents to help their children at home. Activities children do in the classroom can be extended to the home and adapted to fit the needs and interests of the child and his family. Many children, for various reasons, need the extra help a family can provide. Children who have parents who are involved in their education are more successful in school. Do not underestimate your contributions to your child's progress.

Literacy

Literacy, basically, is reading and writing. More importantly, the purpose of writing is to communicate meaning and reading is the deciphering of written language to derive meaning. Written language is the means by which people have recorded and passed on to future generations their history and culture. Written language gives us the ability to preserve information we cannot remember and the ability to retrieve it. Written language also allows us to communicate with others who are separated by distance and time.

Just as different cultures have determined their own literacy needs and direction, today, family histories,
life-styles and needs guide the course of literacy activities that take place in the home. The literacy events, or activities, normally occurring in families are purposeful and meaningful. Written messages contain meaning and are not just created to practice letter formation. Reading enables us to obtain information and is not done to practice decoding skills. It is important that children have this basic understanding too. Families can help them realize this and encourage participation in meaningful reading and writing activities by valuing children's efforts and contributions at their level of understanding.

Modeling

Children learn a lot just by observing the significant others in their life. Watch them at play and you will often see reenactments of events in their life. This type of modeling by adults is often unconscious, and sometimes unintentional. Modeling, as a teaching strategy, is simply a demonstration of how to do something. Parents do this intuitively, as they did when teaching language to their babies.

Children admire their parents and try to be like them.
With this in mind, a parent can instill values towards reading and writing just by letting their children see them read and write. Things that are important to parents will also be important to their children. For this reason, children need to see their parents reading and writing for a variety of purposes. They need to understand reading and writing are a form of communication and are used to accomplish things in daily life.

Modeling can be taken a step further by involving your child in your reading and writing activities. You can talk about what you are reading and why. When making a shopping list, ask your child to add something to the list, write it down, then read it back. Let him contribute to letters to grandma or thank you notes. This will help him make the connection between oral and written language, and between reading and writing. What you can say, you can write. What you can write, you can read.

Providing a Print Rich Environment

Because we are a literate society, we live in a print rich environment. Parents can take advantage of existing environmental print during normal, daily activities. There are also things you can do at home to provide further
opportunities for your child to interact with print.

- A trip to the grocery store can provide many opportunities to direct a child’s attention to print. Ask him to read traffic signs or find the name of a favorite restaurant. Children who are learning the alphabet may find letters they know on license plates. At the store they can locate items on a shopping list. Older children may help parents by having their own list, or reading the parent’s list, then locating items throughout the store.

- Make a travel kit to keep in the car. It can include books, a magic slate, writing paper, pencils, crayons or markers. At home, the adults in the home usually have a selection of books, magazines and newspapers. Children need to have their own books and magazines too. Keep them in a place the child can readily access. Be sure to include an ABC book.

- When children first begin reading little books on their own, start a collection. Keep them together in a shoe box or other container. Decorate and label the box. Keep it handy so your child can read anytime. Take it with you on trips.
• Label personal items with your child’s name. Put labels on furniture in his room. Label light switches “on” and “off.” Label doors “in” and “out.”

• Ideally, children should have a work area free from distractions, such as the television set.

• Always have writing materials available to your child. If the kitchen table is often your child’s desk, keep the materials in a storage box. Decorate and label the box. Include a variety of paper and writing tools.

• Provide different writing surfaces, like magic slates, Magna-Doodles and chalkboards. Store the chalk in a sock, which also doubles as an eraser.

• Put magnetic letters on the refrigerator or another metal surface. Have your child find letters he knows, or letters in his name. Pull aside the letters in his name, and show him how to make his name. Then mix up the letters and have him do it. Have him make some of the new words he has learned.

• Make a family message center and write notes to your child. Encourage him to write notes too. White boards work well for this.
Reading To and With Children

Reading to children is the intervention most often recommended to parents for helping their child with reading. There are many benefits. Reading to children:

- expands their knowledge of the world.
- adds to their vocabulary.
- introduces them to book language, which is different from oral language.
- helps children hear and become aware of the sounds and rhythms of language.
- shows children reading is fun and encourages their interest in books.
- gives them experience with good literature.
- demonstrates fluent, expressive reading.
- gives parents the opportunity to share a special time with their child and provide him with good memories of reading and books.

The following guidelines will be useful to keep in mind when reading to children:

- Read to children regularly.
- Read different types of material, stories, poems and non-fiction.
• Choose books that are at their level of understanding and that interest them.

• Do not be surprised if they choose the same book over and over again. Go ahead and read it. Each time a child hears the same story he will focus on something new, and develop a deeper understanding of the story or characters.

Lap reading time is a good time to help children develop an awareness of how books work and concepts of printed language. These skills are taught in school, but at home the child has the advantage of being able to see and touch the book. The following suggestions will help your child develop an understanding of how print works:

• Always read the title, the author’s name and the illustrator’s name. Children often have favorite authors and recognize the similarities in pictures.

• Talk about the pictures on the cover and first page or two. Have children predict what will happen in the story.

• For children who do not have directionality under control, move your finger under the words when reading. Children need to see that we read from left to right,
then move down to the next line and again read from left to right. This also helps them see that we read from top to bottom, and the left page is read before the right page.

- If the book has few words on a page with good spacing between, point to each word so the child can see the visual/voice match. This does not need to be modeled for children who are already reading and control one-to-one matching.

- Show children how to turn pages and talk about beginning, middle and end.

- Find places in a story where you can have children predict. Stop and ask, "What do you think will happen?"

- When you are done reading, talk about the story in a natural way. Think about how some of the characters or events in the story might be like your family, or how they are different.

- Talk about language. Children love alliteration and rhyme. Find some words that start like their name. Expand their vocabulary, e.g., "They call their grandmother nana. What do we call our grandmother?"

- On subsequent readings of a story, read up to a refrain
or key word, stop and let the child fill in the blank.

- To help a child develop oral language, try a wordless picture book and have him tell you the story from the pictures. Encourage greater detail and description of the pictures.

- Continue to read to your child even after he can read for himself. Read together for fun. Read material that is beyond the child's reading level or that contains difficult vocabulary or concepts.

**Children Reading**

Pre-emergent and emergent children have often had a story read to them so many times it is almost memorized. Sometimes these children sit down with a book and read the pictures, very nearly word-for-word. They are not attending to the print, but they are interacting with the book and getting meaning from it. This is a good first step.

When children begin guided reading groups in school, they often start bringing home little books at their level to read aloud. As children progress in reading ability, the little books will be at a higher level. Again, these books should be familiar stories that children can read.
with at least ninety percent accuracy, whether they are emergent, early or transitional readers.

Some of the benefits of having children reread familiar stories are:

- Rereading helps build fluency and expression. Children read faster and smoother, and they begin to sound like readers expressing the emotions of the story and the characters.
- Familiarity with the story means children should have meaning in place, but there may still be some tricky parts to work out. When meaning is there, the child has one less thing to think about and can focus on how to figure out the tricky part. As he practices reading and problem solving, his problem solving abilities become routine.
- Each time a story is read, there is less to problem solve. The child can attend to other details of print.

Emergent readers start out reading books with one line of print and a pattern that repeats on every page with one word changed. Any change in text is supported by the picture cues. When this type of book becomes a familiar story, children often have the book memorized. Many of us
have heard a child say, "I can read this with my eyes closed." Teachers start with this kind of book so children can practice early strategies and attend to print.

Suggestions:

- When children read these books at home they should point to each word with their reading finger, sometimes called the "smart finger." They need to match the spoken word with the written word. If it does not match, ask the child if it matched, were there too many or not enough words. He should then go back and reread to make it match. Children are encouraged to use their finger until their eyes take over the job of one-to-one matching. Prolonged use of the reading finger slows them down and interferes with fluency. If you are not sure if your child should be using his finger, ask his teacher.

- Watch to see if the child is moving left to right across print. Some children have confusions with directionality and point from right to left. If this happens, put a green "go" sticker on the left side of the table to remind him where to start.

- Interrupting a child to correct words during the reading
of a story interferes with meaning. If a word substitution makes sense in the story and is grammatically correct, let it go. Sometimes children recognize their error and fix it themselves. This encourages independence. Children who are frequently stopped and asked to correct miscues on the spot become dependent on someone else to monitor their reading, when they should be doing it themselves. If an error does not make sense or sound right, wait until the child has finished reading the story, then go back to the page where the error was made and ask him if it made sense or sounded right. Often a child will reread the sentence and will be able to correct the error.

- If your child is stuck, stops reading, and waits for you to tell him the word every time, wait a minute and give him time to problem solve. If he works it out, or attempts to, praise him. If he sits there and makes no attempt, tell him to try it, then praise the effort.

- If you know the picture could help your child read a word, tell him to check the picture. This early strategy, using meaning to solve a word, is not always automatic. We put so much emphasis on directing
children’s attention to the print, they sometimes have to be reminded that the picture can help them too. When children become transitional readers, the pictures offer less support and they have to rely on the meaning from the story. At this stage, you can ask what would make sense?

- Encourage your child to reread the sentence when he is stuck. This often helps him predict the word using the structure of language because he knows what would sound right.

- When children self-correct, fix reading errors, independently, praise them. Praise works better than criticism to encourage children to use the strategy again.

- When a child knows some letters and sounds, he can be directed to use the first letter of a word to help him. Have him look at the first letter of the tricky word and make the letter’s sound, then check the picture to see what would make sense and starts like that. (When making the sound of the first letter, he should not sound like a broken record, repeating the sound over and over.) This encourages the child to use two sources of
information, visual information from the word, and meaning from the picture or sense of the story.

- Early and transitional readers can be asked to tell you something they know about a word that is tripping them. It might be a chunk, like sh or the ing ending, or it might look like another word they know. You can show them how the bits they know can help them with new words.

- Be careful about telling a child to sound out a word. It does not always work. Try to sound out eight or through. Children have to use other cues, like meaning and structure, to help them read these words.

- There are times when it is acceptable to sound out a word. Teachers usually tell children to look across the word. In the past, children were taught to segment each sound in a word. For example, cat would have three sounds, c-a-t-. Now children are told to blend the sounds together without breaking them apart.

- Children should be encouraged to use strategies independently to attempt unknown words, but if too much time is spent trying to get a child to figure out a word, the meaning of the story evaporates. Without
meaning in place, the child will continue to struggle,
and reading will be a painful process of decoding words.
• To keep meaning central, talk about the story after the
  reading in a natural way, without quizzing for
  comprehension.
• Praise the reader for what he has done well.

Book Selections

The books in children’s home libraries are often more
suitable for parents to read to children. To become better
readers, children need to read too. The more they read,
the better they get. Sometimes schools and teachers are
unable to send little books home for children to read.
Parents may also want their children to read during school
vacations. Books at the appropriate level can be found at
chain bookstores, teachers’ bookstores and libraries. The
following will help you select appropriate books for your
child:

Emergent Readers:
• Large print, not too many words.
• Big spaces between words.
• Pictures that support the story.
• One or two lines of print on a page, with regular
placement of print. Children should not have to look for words in unexpected places.

- Look for books with natural language, the way we talk.
- Books at this level have a predictable pattern or phrase that is repeated on each page.
- All the words do not have to be short, so do not be put off by a book that has the word hippopotamus in it. If the picture supports the story, it should not be a problem.

**Early Readers:**

- The print may be slightly smaller to accommodate more words on a page.
- There are usually two to five lines of print.
- Text may be found on the left or right page, and at the top or bottom of a page.
- Pictures still support the meaning.
- Some books still have repeated patterns, but others do not.
- These books should contain many of the child's known words, or high frequency words, repeated in the text.
- Sometimes you will find dialogue and quotation (talking) marks.
Transitional Readers:

- These books are longer, with more complex stories and less picture support.
- If you want to know whether a book is suitable for your transitional reader, have him read a page or two. If he seems to struggle or makes too many errors, then it is probably not the right choice for independent reading. It may, however, be a good choice to read to him.

Fluent Readers:

- Children at this level can choose their own books and decide if the level is comfortable. They may choose books that are very easy to read for pleasure and relaxation. They also may choose books that are above their reading level because the subject interests them. We, as adults, choose books for the same reasons.

Book Introductions

Emergent and early readers need support before attempting to read a new story for the first time. Just as teachers do a brief book introduction and picture walk, you should do the same before the child's first reading. Emergent readers may need the first page or two read to them. Early readers may need to hear some of the language
of the story. This can be accomplished when you do a
picture walk.

Writing for Children

Books for emergent readers are easy and fun to make. You can save some money, and personalize books to delight your child.

Directions:

Take three or four sheets of typing paper and fold them lengthwise, like a hot dog bun. Cut along the fold. Stack the sheets and fold them in half like a book. Staple at the center or use a needle and some yarn to fasten the pages together at the spine.

The next step is to plan your story:

- On the cover page write the title and author's name.
- Number the inside pages 1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6, etc.
- On Page 1, the left page, you will write the text. On Page 2, the right page, draw or use a magazine picture to illustrate the text.
- Here is a sample story:

  - Cover: Things I Like

    by

    Author's Name
Writing with Children

Most children know how to write their name when they enter first grade. A child's name can be the starting point in many writing activities. The subject of the writing can be anything that interests him. Writing a book about a child, and using his name in the story, will motivate even the most reluctant reader and writer.

For the following sample activity, use a full sheet of unlined paper and turn it so the writing goes across the
length. Children need plenty of room to write. There will probably be enough room for the illustration to be placed under the writing. Using the guidelines in Writing for Children, you can generate a story you and your child can write together.

Directions:
1. Take pictures of your child doing various activities, such as running, playing, eating, dancing, coloring and reading.
2. When the pictures are ready, tell him you are going to write a story about all the things he can do.
3. Have him choose a picture. If his name is Carlos, your story might say, “Carlos can play.” Show him where the story will go on the paper and where to write his name.
4. After he writes his name, tell him you are going to write the word can. Stretch the word (say it slowly), and have him listen for sounds he can hear and identify. He may, or may not, be able to tell you can starts like his name. If not, show him, and have him say the words. Help him make associations with what he already knows.
5. Children’s knowledge and learning, early on, are unpredictable. When you get to the second page, “Carlos
can dance,” he may be able to write the c in can without prompting. Some children may need prompting on every page. Be patient. Remember that praise will work better than a reprimand for not remembering.

6. Write for your child what he can not yet do alone. If you have to write the a and n in can, tell him the letter names, and show him the a in his name.

7. After each page is finished, glue the photo underneath.

8. All books need a cover with a title and the author’s name. After you write the title, write by underneath, then have Carlos write his name.

9. Staple or bind the pages together. Carlos now has a book he wrote and can read by himself.

Your first book should be short, four to six pages. Write only one or two pages a day. Adapt the length of time spent writing to the attention span of the child. If you can only keep his attention for one sentence, then stop. The next day have him read the parts of the story already written.

This activity demonstrates for the child the interconnectedness of reading and writing and provides the child an opportunity to use letter knowledge and phonemic
awareness in a meaningful way.

Write about anything that interests your child, something you have done, places your have visited. You might want to start a journal or write a letter to Grandma. Your stories can reflect the interests of your child and family.

Suggestions:

- The sample story was basically generated by the parent, with the child participating in the writing. You can guide children towards writing certain high frequency words in a story. For example, if you want the child to write the word have, you might ask, "What do you have in your toy box?" The child might reply, "I have a ball." He may also say, "I gots a ball." Even though it is hard not to correct the grammar, write what the child says. If you change the words for him, he is no longer the author and probably will not remember or be able to read your words. Work on grammar another time.

- If you are writing a story with the intention of having the child read it at a later date, and you are providing support, the spelling of high frequency words should be correct. Children need to know a word is spelled the
same way every time they read it or write it. The child
is also learning a lot about phonics and spelling
patterns in the process of writing.
• Often there is no easy way to explain the way a word is
spelled. For example, the word *thought* sounds like it
should be spelled *thot*. If this is a word you write for
your child, just tell him the other letters are there to
make it look right.
• As children start learning high frequency words and
develop in their ability to hear and record sounds in
words, their stories will transition from patterned
writing to narrations of events, descriptions and
stories.
• Here are some ideas for early patterned stories
containing high frequency words:

  I can ____.
  We can ____.

  Here is ____.
  This is my ____.

  It is ____.
  We are ____.

  I see a(an) ____.
  We go to the ____.

  I went to the ____.
  I like to play ____.

  I am going ____.
  Can you ____?

• High frequency words occur often in children's
storybooks and in their own writing. They need to be able to read and write these words quickly and easily. A high frequency word list appears on Page 119.

**Children Writing**

As adults, our writing is done for a variety of purposes. We may write lists, notes, journals, letters and reports for our jobs or school. There are forms and applications to fill out and checks to write. Writing can be divided into two groups: messages intended for others to read, and messages you write to yourself. If someone else is going to read your writing, then spelling and using the conventions of print correctly are important. If you are the only one who is going to read your writing, then spelling and punctuation are not as important as the message.

We can apply this concept to children's writing also. Not everything they write has to be perfect either. When a child writes a book with parent help, and the book will be read by the child later, then spelling and conventions of print are important. When children write independently, without any help, others may, or may not, be able to read the message. The important thing to remember is, the child
has created a meaningful message, and he can probably read it to you. The message should be valued for itself. For example, if a child writes, "I Luv You," respond to the message, not the incorrect spelling. Children need to be encouraged to write frequently, and we can do this by being positive. The more a child writes, the better writer he will become.

Children not only need to be given the materials and opportunity to write, they also need to be given a reason to write.

- When you make a shopping list, have your child make one too. When you are at the store, he can read his list and help you remember what to buy.
- Show him how to make notes to himself to help him remember things he might forget. Suppose he is going on a sleep over and he wants to take his teddy bear and toothbrush. Tell him to write a note to himself. All notes do not have to be written on paper. Hang a chalkboard near his bedroom door.
- Encourage your child to write notes to family members. If the child is in the early stages of writing and you cannot read the note, ask him to read it to you and
respond to the message.

- Ask your child to write stories about places you have gone and things you have done together so you will not forget important events in your life. Remember to illustrate the story.

- Children at the transitional stage may be taught how to take telephone messages. Again, the message is the important thing, not the spelling or mechanics of English.

- Children at this stage may also enjoy keeping a journal or diary. Journals and diaries are personal, intended to be read only by the author.

**Letter Formation**

Just as children need to develop fluency in their reading, it is important to be able to write fluently. Part of this is letter formation. If a child knows how to form the letters he wants to use, and write them efficiently and quickly, then he can concentrate on the message.

There are several styles of printing commonly taught in kindergarten and first grade classrooms. Teachers at different grade levels may not always teach the same
manuscript styles. Parents who work with their children at home may have developed a unique style of their own and passed it down to their children. Children, also, may have their own ideas or confusions about letter formation.

Ideally, children should be taught one style of printing in kindergarten and first grade. Children need to be flexible in reading different styles of writing, but that can come later. They need consistency when they are first learning letter formation. Parents should check with their child’s teacher to find out which style she is using.

Page 120 contains a basic letter formation chart that shows stroke progression and sequence. Letters are made from sticks, circles and curves. Most letters are formed from top to bottom and left to right. It is faster to form individual letters without having to lift the pencil for each stroke. You can script the stroke sequence for a child or have him do it. Refer to the chart for the following examples of sample scripts:

- Lower case a, say: circle, stick down
- Capital A, say: down, down, across
- Lower case b, say: stick down, up and circle around
- Lower case h, say: stick down, up, and curve down
• Lower case w, say: stick down, stick up, stick down, stick up.

You do not have to use the exact language in the examples, it just has to be language the child understands.

Page 122 contains an alphabet chart you can put with your child’s box of writing materials. This is helpful for children at the emergent and early stages who are writing independently, but do not remember what all the letters look like. Teachers often put similar charts on each child’s desk. The letter formation chart would be too confusing for a beginning writer.

Phonics and Spelling

Early research indicated a child’s ability to identify and name letters was a good predictor of his later success in learning to read. Teaching a child to name the letters, however, is not enough. More recent research identifies phonemic awareness as one of the best predictors of a child’s success in learning to read.

Phonics is the understanding that each written letter represents one or more sounds. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear sounds in words and to distinguish words, sounds and syllables based on those sounds. Emergent
readers can read beginning text, simple patterns containing picture support, with very little knowledge of phonics or phonemic awareness. In order to progress and become independent readers and writers, children need to know and understand both.

Developing Phonics Knowledge and Phonemic Awareness:

- Read to your child. Read frequently and read a variety of texts, including stories, poems, rhymes, chants, songs and raps.
- Teach your child to recite nursery rhymes, poems, chants and raps. Show him how to sing, clap or dance to the rhythm of the words.
- Read alphabet books with your child.
- Put an alphabet poster on your child’s bedroom wall.
- Play word games with your child. Think about what he knows and will probably be able to answer correctly. Children enjoy games much more when they can win.
  - Play rhyming games such as: *I see something that rhymes with red*. The child might say, *bed* or *head*.
  - Listen for beginning or ending letter sounds:
    *I see something that starts like* (name a word or letter sound).
I see something that ends like (name a word or letter sound.)

- Put magnetic letters on the refrigerator. Make letter cards by cutting a 3x5 index card in half and writing a letter on each card.

- Make your own alphabet book together:
  1. Take 27 sheets of paper and fasten them together like a book. On the cover write "Alphabet Book" and have your child write his name. On the next page, in the top right-hand corner, write a capital and lower case Aa. Continue putting a letter of the alphabet on each succeeding page.
  2. Gather together some old magazines. Find pictures of things that start with each letter. For example, the letter a sounds like the a in apple or alligator. You might find an ant or an astronaut. The choice of pictures should be up to your child and you may have more than one picture.
  3. If your child knows some letters, do those first.
  4. If you want him to learn new letters, just work on one letter at a time.
  5. If he has letter confusions, such as b/d, choose the
easier one to work on and save the other for a later time.

6. Have your child read the Alphabet Book daily as follows: Have him point to the picture, then the letters and say apple, A, a, as he points.

• Write with your child.
• Have him find letters he knows in magazines and newspapers. He will soon learn to recognize different styles of print.
• Show him how to stretch words slowly, listen for the sounds and write the letter that represents each sound.
• Remember that most phonics rules we learned as children are only true some of the time.

Spelling:

When children write, they should focus on ideas. They should not be limited by using only the letters and sounds they know, or by the vocabulary they can spell. Towards the end of first grade children are often exposed to the writing process with a high level of teacher support. The teacher may model the process:

• First, ideas are written down.
• Next, the writing is revised for meaning and edited for
spelling and punctuation.

- Last, the story is rewritten for publication, with corrections.

Children learn the first writing, or rough draft, does not have to be perfect. The final product does have to contain correct spelling so that everyone can read it.

Spelling does not come easily for all children or adults. Constant exposure to words in reading and writing helps. Phonics knowledge and phonemic awareness help. Teaching children to stretch words and listen for and record the sounds they hear also helps.

There are, however, many words that cannot be sounded out. Teachers teach these words as sight words. The goal is to have the child develop a visual memory for what a word looks like. This will help him read and write those words fluently.

Teachers who give spelling tests usually select the words from a sight word or high frequency word list. The following exercise will help your child develop fluency in reading and writing selected words. It is also a good way to prepare for a spelling test. Use a chalkboard or a sheet of paper.
1. Show your child how to write the word.

2. Have him look at it carefully. He needs to remember what it looks like.

3. Have him close his eyes and picture it.

4. Cover the word and have him write it.

5. He should then check the word with his finger and his eyes to see if it looks right.

6. If he is right, cover the word and repeat Steps 4 and 5 two to four more times. Do this every day, but limit it to three to five words.

7. If the word is written incorrectly, repeat Steps 1 through 6.

Some children find it difficult to learn new words. Three words may be too many for some children, so work on one word. The hardest part of learning new words is learning how to do it. Try the following for children who are struggling:

- Write in the air.
- Write on the carpet with the finger only.
- Write on the sidewalk with sidewalk chalk.
- Write in the sand or the dirt with a finger or stick.
- Write on chalkboards and magic slates.
• Spread colored gelatin or sand on a cookie sheet and write.
• Write in finger paint or shaving cream.
• Trace over a word using different colors of crayon or marker.
• If the word is visible to the child, remember to have him check it with his finger and eyes.

These activities can also be used for children finding it difficult to learn the letters of the alphabet. Children can also make letters out of pipe cleaners or a hunk of clay or play dough.

In Conclusion
* Reading and writing with your child can be a bonding time and a rewarding experience. You have the opportunity to have real conversations about important things.
* Plan for success for your child. Children who feel successful have more desire and motivation to learn.
* Always find something to praise.
* Your child's teacher cares very much about your child and his progress. Contact her whenever you have questions or concerns.

* Have fun!
GLOSSARY

anecdotal records - notes a teacher makes describing a child’s development; these notes are used for assessment.

assessment - formal and informal observations of a child’s progress.

care concepts of print - how print works, including directionality, word-by-word matching, understanding the difference between letters and words, and the meaning of punctuation.

case context clues - words in a story that give the reader clues to the meaning of an unknown word.

decoding - using knowledge of phonics to pronounce words.

environmental print - print in the world around us.

fluency - the pace at which one reads; fluent readers read without hesitation, problem solve quickly and read with expression.

intervention - providing extra help before a child gets very far behind.

language experience - children participate in a shared experience, such as a field trip, then write about it.

meaning cues - pictures and/or the story line (Does it make
miscue - a reading error

phoneme - a single sound in spoken language

portfolio - a collection of student writing, or other work, for purposes of assessment and evaluating progress

reading cues - sources of information for reading text; the three reading cues are meaning, structure, and visual (refer to specific heading for definition)

remediation - providing help for children who have fallen behind

scaffolding - providing an appropriate level of support based on what the child can control

skills - knowledge that is specific to one situation, such as knowing the names of the letters

strategies - an understanding that can be applied in different situations, for example, when readers come to a word they do not know, they might reread or check the picture

structure cues - how language is put together (Does it sound right?)

visual cues - text, or print, in the book (Does it look right?)
# HIGH FREQUENCY WORD LIST

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LETTER FORMATION CHART

Lower Case

\[ \begin{array}{cccccc}
\text{a} & \text{b} & \text{c} & \text{d} & \text{e} & \text{f} \\
\downarrow & \downarrow & \downarrow & \downarrow & \downarrow & \uparrow \\
\text{g} & \text{h} & \text{i} & \text{j} & \text{k} & \text{l} \\
\downarrow & \downarrow & \downarrow & \uparrow & \downarrow & \uparrow \\
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Upper Case
ALPHABET CHART

Aa  Bb  Cc  Dd  Ee  Ff
Gg  Hh  Ii  Jj  Kk  Ll
Mm  Nn  Oo  Pp  Qq
Rr  Ss  Tt  Uu  Vv
Ww  Xx  Yy  Zz
APPENDIX B

PROJECT EVALUATION
PROJECT EVALUATION

Reading Recovery Teachers

1. This handbook addresses current theories of literacy acquisition and research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>strongly agree</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>neither agree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>strongly disagree</th>
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2. This handbook provides an accurate description of the most beneficial instructional strategies.

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<th>disagree</th>
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3. This handbook provides a comprehensible description of appropriate parent/child activities.

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<th>disagree</th>
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4. This handbook presents theories of literacy acquisition and classroom practices in a manner parents can understand.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>agree</th>
<th>neither agree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>strongly disagree</th>
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124
5. This handbook will help parents understand how to work with their children.

[Table]

| strongly agree | agree | neither agree nor disagree | disagree | strongly disagree |

COMMENTS: __________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

INDICATE SECTIONS WHICH WILL BE MOST USEFUL AND WHY: ______

______________________________________________________________

INDICATE SECTIONS WHICH WILL BE LEAST USEFUL AND WHY: _____

______________________________________________________________

IF YOU WOULD CHANGE ANYTHING, WHAT WOULD IT BE? _____________

______________________________________________________________

WHY? _______________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

IF YOU WOULD ADD ANYTHING, WHAT WOULD IT BE? _______________

______________________________________________________________

WHY? _______________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

IF YOU WOULD DELETE ANYTHING, WHAT WOULD IT BE? ___________

______________________________________________________________

WHY? _______________________________________________________

125
PROJECT EVALUATION

First Grade Teachers

1. This handbook addresses current theories of literacy acquisition and teaching practices.

strongly agree  agree  neither agree  disagree  strongly disagree
agree nor disagree disagree

2. This handbook provides an accurate description of the literacy activities and instructional strategies I use in my classroom.

strongly agree  agree  neither agree  disagree  strongly disagree
agree nor disagree disagree

3. This handbook provides a description of parent/child activities I would recommend.

strongly agree  agree  neither agree  disagree  strongly disagree
agree nor disagree disagree

4. This handbook presents theories of literacy acquisition and classroom practices in a manner parents can understand.

strongly agree  agree  neither agree  disagree  strongly disagree
agree nor disagree disagree
5. This handbook will help parents understand how to work with their children and provide them with a higher level of support.

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COMMENTS:________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

INDICATE SECTIONS WHICH WILL BE MOST USEFUL AND WHY:________

________________________________________________________

INDICATE SECTIONS WHICH WILL BE LEAST USEFUL AND WHY:________

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IF YOU WOULD CHANGE ANYTHING, WHAT WOULD IT BE?______________

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WHY?________________________________________________________

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IF YOU WOULD ADD ANYTHING, WHAT WOULD IT BE?______________

________________________________________________________

WHY?________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

IF YOU WOULD DELETE ANYTHING, WHAT WOULD IT BE?______________

________________________________________________________

WHY?________________________________________________________
**PROJECT EVALUATION**

**Parents**

1. This handbook addresses current educational issues.

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2. This handbook provides an explanation of the kinds of class work and homework my child has done in first grade.

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3. I understand how to do the parent/child activities presented in this handbook.

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4. I understand more about how children learn to read and write as a result of reading this handbook.

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5. This handbook describes parent/child activities I would use with my child.

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COMMENTS: __________________________________________

INDICATE SECTIONS WHICH WILL BE MOST USEFUL AND WHY: ______

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INDICATE SECTIONS WHICH WILL BE LEAST USEFUL AND WHY: ______

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IF YOU WOULD CHANGE ANYTHING, WHAT WOULD IT BE? ______

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WHY? __________________________________________________

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IF YOU WOULD ADD ANYTHING, WHAT WOULD IT BE? ______

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WHY? __________________________________________________

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IF YOU WOULD DELETE ANYTHING, WHAT WOULD IT BE? ______

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WHY? __________________________________________________
REFERENCES


Gadsden, V. L. (1996). Designing and conducting family literacy programs that account for racial, ethnic,


early years. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.


