Reaction and action: A study of progress into whole language

Susan Pietsch

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REACTION AND ACTION: A STUDY OF PROGRESS INTO WHOLE LANGUAGE

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
Education: Reading

by
Susan Pietsch
June 1994
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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

The process of introducing a staff to the philosophy of whole language and aiding them in the transition from a traditional teaching background can be a rewarding experience. A change such as this causes people to reflect upon their personal philosophies, beliefs, and behaviors. This project examines the process of change. More importantly, it explains how implementors of change can prepare their staff for the new innovation and together create the design for the desired change. The project focuses on the growth of four third grade teachers over a period of two years. Through their reading of professional materials, inservices, peer discussions, and much personal reflection over the two year period, these teachers grew in their roles as facilitators. The project stresses the importance of allowing each group member's voice to be heard before, as well as throughout, the change process. If this is allowed, successful, lasting change can occur.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my husband, Daniel, for all of his support and encouragement throughout my Masters Program. A special thanks goes to my two wonderful children, Jeremy and Sierra, who showed extra patience and love during my evenings spent away at class or studying. My appreciation goes out to the staff that grew with me during these past two years. May we all never stop learning and changing.
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INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Change in any aspect of one's life can be difficult for many people. Introducing a new idea, way of viewing a situation, or exploring a new philosophy can make many people uncomfortable. Thus, introducing an elementary faculty to whole language and aiding them in their transition toward a child-centered curriculum can be challenging, frustrating, yet extremely rewarding. Kenneth Goodman (1986) notes several key factors that are needed to succeed in transitioning a staff into whole language. First of all, the staff must want to change to a more humanistic approach. There is also a need to be supported from the district as well as to identify leadership among the teachers to implement the training. Change in the role of the teacher in the classroom as well as with administration must be desired and accepted. The role of students also must change and expand, allowing them to participate in planning their education. Parents must learn about the approach, and then support the efforts of the teachers in their transition. And finally, the teachers must view themselves as professionals and have the desire to continue their growth through a commitment to learn about whole language and build a program together. It would be an immense job to fully detail and record an entire faculty's transition and growth toward whole language. Thus, this project narrows down the faculty to examine the progress of a group of third grade teachers as they explore the philosophy of whole language and implement various methods.

Change can challenge a teacher's self concept and self esteem on a personal as well as professional level (Byrnes, 1992). Because of this possible threat, I believe that the faculty's input from the very beginning needs to be emphasized to achieve success in approaching teachers with a new philosophy and way of regarding
learners. Establishing the needs and wants on a personal as well as site base will assist in individual support and willingness to participate and take risks in the classrooms. Training and teacher inservices need to be available so that staff members can become informed, thus enabling them to make their own professional decisions. The state developed Its Elementary! (1992) and the English-Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (1987) were used as a base from which to survey the staff. The survey results presented areas in which the staff believed there were weaknesses in the established program. There were also many areas in which the staff felt very comfortable and secure. The awareness of strengths and needed growth, however, did not equal the desire for growth or change. This turned out to be an important aspect for the entire project. Having the framework as an established base for progression towards whole language added more credibility to the venture. Traditional teachers did not have to completely leave their comfort zone and abandon their established methods without a secure base on which to develop their new ideas, philosophies, and methods.

Theoretical foundations

A goal of whole language language is to "keep language whole and involve children using it functionally and purposefully to meet their own needs" (Goodman, 1986, p. 7). Whole language addresses the needs of all children at whatever level they come to the classroom. The whole language philosophy considers what children bring with them as the base for new learning. This concept was an especially vital point, as many of our students had limited experiences in their past and were having difficulties succeeding in a basal, skills based curriculum. The awareness of need for change was established by the staff, but it was strongly expressed that the change must include training in this new method. School Improvement Plan goals were
developed by a selected leadership team, and the progression towards whole language began.

The district in which the teachers are working encourages whole language. Yet, there are many perspectives of what whole language is and what it includes. The district has adopted a literature-based reading program. It also has set a list of 25 proficiencies dealing with specific phonics rules, grammar rules, and math facts that each child must pass by the end of each grade. Supporting whole language, yet setting up the curriculum as it presently exists shows inconsistency in basic learning philosophies. This district, as well as many districts across the country, is currently facing this difficult situation, as not all administrators and board members are ready to incorporate change at the same time. The staff involved in this project did not have a whole language training background to build upon. For this reason, it is necessary to explain the two other basic models of reading that the teachers based their methods upon before establishing the whole language philosophy which is the base for this project.

The decoding model, which some of the teachers based their reading program on, involves strict letter-sound relationships. The reader learns the sound of each letter, strings these letters together to form a word, then attaches meaning to the word. Decoding teachers are concerned with the child’s ability to convert spoken language to written language. The meaning of the text is straight from the page the child reads. Due to the needed accuracy in which the letter-sound method stresses, any deviations from the printed words are errors. Yet, as Smith (1985) states, "The system of "phonics" is both cumbersome and unreliable, and only rarely produces an accurate pronunciation for a word not recognized on sight" (p. 71). This model of reading instruction needs a controlled vocabulary text so that new sounds and words
being studied can be emphasized. Words that do not fit the pre-learned patterns are considered "sight words" and are taught as such. Instruction using the decoding model involves the use of flash cards, work books, drills, and, as mentioned before, controlled vocabulary text. Teachers who use the decoding method realize that syntax and meaning are part of the reading process, but believe that they are not primary factors for the beginning reader to be concerned with. Meaning and context clues will become useful after the child has learned sound-symbol relations and puts them together to form words. Language is learned by starting at the smallest unit and building to the largest unit.

A second model of reading instruction used by teachers in this study is the skills model. The main emphasis in the skills model is the word as a whole. The process of reading is broken down into three parts, or sets of skills. Vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension all play important roles in the skills model of reading. Thus, a reader must know and use all three of these skills in order to read. The skills to be learned are arranged into hierarchies by text developers and publishers. A major problem arises when using the skills model because "Classrooms heavily slanted toward performance on tests and exams, and with heavy emphasis on "academics" often have an agenda understood only by the teacher and a few top performers" (Watson, Burke, and Harste, 1989, p. 35). Instruction using the skills model involves the use of basals or literature-based basals, workbooks and worksheets. This model of instruction takes the decoding method a step further. Decoding is applied in the vocabulary skills, but the emphasis is on the whole word. Meaning occurs once the string of recognized words is put together in a sentence. Due to the needed accuracy of identifying each word separately, any deviations in reading are considered errors. Smith (1985) states, "This "breaking down reading"
makes learning to read more difficult because it makes nonsense out of what should be sense" (p. 6). Thus, in the skills method of instruction, reading becomes a series of skills the child must master. The meaning of what the child reads comes from stringing the words together.

The final model of reading instruction, and the one that this project is based upon, is the whole language model. "It has a strong theory of learning, a theory of language, a basic view of teaching and the role of teachers, and a language-centered view of curriculum" (Goodman, 1986, p. 26). In whole language, the child is the focus for the curriculum. The learning environment is centered around the reading and writing program. The diversity of each student's linguistic experiences is acknowledged and built upon through this holistic approach. Like the decoding and skills model, the whole language model uses the three systems of language (writing, speaking, and listening) to achieve reading. The strength of whole language, Cambourne and Turbill (1991) emphasize, is that these three systems are not artificially separated, but are used simultaneously. No one system is developed without the others. Reading is always focused on the reader's comprehension. The materials being read are relevant to the reader's experience, so they are often built on the oral language base already established by the reader. Reading becomes a process of communication, not a set of skills broken apart and put together to make sense. Whole language, like the skills and decoding model, uses three cuing systems (graphic, syntactic, and semantic). But in whole language, the three systems are used to predict, confirm, and then integrate the meaning of the text. When using the whole language model, reading is not a perfectible process. Deviations from the text are considered miscues only if the meaning has been changed. Since reading is comprehending, and comprehension is based on the reader's background.
experiences, there will be variations between what the reader understands and what the author wrote. Natural, familiar language is used and vocabulary is not controlled in the whole language model. Instruction using whole language involves, among many other strategies, the use of predictable books, literature, group reading, composing, journal writing, natural writing the child’s personal needs create, and sustained silent reading periods.

In whole language, there is no set curriculum. Thus, there is no one specific way in which to become a whole language facilitator. This project examines the progress of a group of third grade teachers who have skills based and decoding based teacher training. The process of introducing them to whole language, the initial steps and reactions toward their changing roles from teachers to facilitators, and examples of classroom environment changes will be described. This project will aid other teachers and administrators who want their staff to move toward whole language. It will also help other innovation leaders in becoming aware of, preparing for, and lessening the stress that often accompanies change for many people.
LITERATURE REVIEW

"...those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything."

George Bernard Shaw

In reviewing the literature that involves transition from a traditional teaching method toward whole language, it is valuable to form a brief view of American schools today. Reform and change are nothing new to education. Change, as defined through the literature reviewed, is perceived as a process and not an event. Therefore, motives and barriers that impede change, teachers as learners, and procedures for preparing staffs for change will be researched in this literature review. Since the project which accompanies this review deals with the progression toward a whole language philosophy of teaching, the essentials of whole language, stages in becoming a whole language teacher, roles of the teacher and student, environmental changes, and the vital role collaboration plays in implementing whole language are reviewed.

American education

The situation American society finds itself in today can be rather frustrating when looking at the advancement of education. Carlisle (1993) reports that on standardized tests, American students score at or near the bottom when compared to international students. American businesses are spending immense amounts of funds yearly for remedial training to create competent employees. As of 1993, 25 million American adults were functionally illiterate and 25 million more needed to update their skills and knowledge. With these figures to reflect upon, one naturally wonders what is happening in the education system today. Ten years ago the
emphasis education policymakers stressed was to "crack down" on students and
teachers (Olson, 1993). It was believed that the best plan for schools was to do more
of what they were already doing. The key to success involved more homework,
longer school days, more difficult grading, more tests and better textbooks. The
problem compounded when this method did not work. American students continued
to score low on international comparisons and, worse than the score results, students
had become bored and turned off to school. Olson (1993) continued to explain how
"much of what passes for education in schools violates what both research and
common sense tell us about how people learn best" (Olson, 1993, p. 28). Traditional
education groups students by age, focuses learning by listening, and stresses
competition over cooperation. Yet, people are social by nature. They naturally work
better when involved in situations that require collaboration. The classroom thus did
not match or prepare students for the society they were going to enter. Change in
the form of new methods of teaching, as well as student responsibility for learning,
were created. The key word that complicates the situation is "change".

Byrnes (1992) stresses the point that change is a process and not an event.
Change is based on past experiences. It is necessary to acknowledge these
experiences to truly accomplish any change. Viewing change as an active component
in learning is also an essential element. "In the past 5 years, our profession has
undergone more change than in the past 50 years" (Balistreri, 1987, p. 3). He
continues to explain how change can come about in basically one of two ways.
Change can occur when people agree philosophically with the change or change can
occur purely through coercion.
Change - why resist?

Byrnes (1992) defines resistance as "a refusal to consider new ideas, methodologies, or approaches presented in the learning situation" (p. 4). People tend to be creatures of habit. Yet, "resistance implies behavior that is willful. However, much so-called resistance to change is not premeditated or engaged in consciously" (Poole, 1991, p. 11). New ideas, beliefs that conflict with personal philosophies, or changes to traditional behaviors and routines can cause distress. Rowland (1993) states that most individuals view change as something that threatens their stability, is risky, uncertain, and overall provides danger to their comfort and security. Resistance often occurs when a "learner has to re-appraise his/her existing knowledge or opinions" (Byrnes, p. 4). In the same sense, no resistance can be an even greater disguise for the fear felt by the learner. Jeschke (1990) believes that resistance is a natural reaction to change and should not be viewed as a negative element. Byrnes also views resistance as a powerful force. "Resistance is a way for both trainers and trainees to measure the degree of significance of the issues or ideas being presented" (Byrnes, p. 4). In general, the greater the resistance, the larger the degree of change trying to be accomplished. Rowland expands on this view by explaining that a healthy way to view change is to see it as a natural necessity for success. Change gives individuals the opportunity to celebrate the past while creating the future. "Personality and psychological characteristics are related to whether or not innovations are adopted and continued" (Poole, p. 4). The goal of change is usually to make yesterday's innovative idea become today's status quo (Jeschke). To accomplish this, the leaders trying to implement a new philosophy, method, or idea find it beneficial to look at the motives behind the change as well as the barriers they may face.
Motives behind change

The key to successful implementation of any change is teacher commitment (Eiseman, 1990). Teachers want to be aware of what is being changed, and more importantly, why it is being changed. "Perception causes resistance in the sense that a person may not perceive that there is a problem or may not agree with the change agent's view of its nature, causes, or solutions" (Poole, 1991, p. 2). Motivation for change can come from fear or from aspiration. Yet, when teachers realize and accept, like Balistreri (1987), that their professional lives will continually change just like their personal lives do, the resistance is lessened. Margolis (1991) reports that "resistance is less likely when the teachers view proposed changes as making their lives more meaningful and productive" (p. 4). Portman (1993) stresses the importance of a joint consensus amongst the staff in desiring to improve the program. Political intentions (state, taxpayers, and school board) have to also be supportive of the proposed change. The new idea will face less resistance if it is in compliance with the established system. If these three factors that Portman discussed are in place, initial resistance can dissolve away into productive growth.

Balistreri (1987) expanded on these ideas with a list of concerns that teachers believed were required for effective change to occur. Most important to the group of teachers that he surveyed was the fact that the proposed change must be in the students' best interest. Teachers also appreciated the opportunity to review literature which supported the proposed change. If the change was accepted, assurance that finances would be available to implement the innovation was a concern to most of the teachers surveyed. Supportive parents, administrators, and school board members were listed as essential to growth. And, for many, most important on their list of concerns was the availability of training sessions and
resource personnel. The teachers believed that if these motivating factors were enacted, the course of change could be clearly directed.

Rowland (1993) explains how change can prepare, repair, or create. Change is a reactive process. Those trying to implement the change look jointly with their staff to view where they are at and where they want to be. This would be a type of repairing change. Many times a staff believes they are on a good course and simply need some minor adjustments along the way to keep the focus clearly on the goal. A type of preparing or planning change occurs as the group predicts where they are headed, where that lies in comparison to their jointly set goal, and then make changes to redirect clearly to the goal. The last type of change that Rowland discusses is creative change. This occurs when the group attempts to "leap out from what exists and create alternative futures" (Rowland, 1993, p. 30). This is not done by reflection or prediction, but from imagination. A key note that Rowland points out is that all three of these types of change can be carried out apart from the actual action of changing. This enables the advocates of change to view the group’s overall receptiveness to change. All of these factors can be motives and positive forces supporting change. Yet, realistically, barriers to change will and do occur. In order for change to be institutionalized and not merely a passing phase, these barriers to change in education are further reviewed.

Barriers to change

*World Book Dictionary* (1990) defines barrier as "something stopping progress" (p. 166). Poole (1991) stressed that "the individual does not present the only obstacle to innovation" (p. 2). Portman (1993) had individuals rank their top twenty-eight barriers that they believed most strongly hindered or dissolved change. Rated as the main reason individuals did not accept change was that the planning for
the innovation had been done by a small number of individuals. Along with the few who planned and were trying to implement the change, often times it was an outsider who helped design the proposition. The second largest barrier to change, according to Portman's study, was that often the change was dissonant with the staff's current established knowledge base. "People have made significant financial and social psychological investments in existing programs and therefore it is difficult for them to let go of the status quo" (Poole, 1991, p. 2). Cynicism due to previous change efforts conducted in similar manners also created a strong barrier for implementing new ideas. Margolis (1991) stressed the importance of identifying organizational sources of resistance as well as individual reasons. The individual teacher could not be to blame for an unsuccessful implementation of change when the change being desired required unwilling board members or administrators to give up some of their power. Caldwell and Gould (1992) believe this is a strong barrier to many currently proposed changes, and one that change implementors are prudent to view with deep concern. Developing strategies to relieve the fears or anxieties of these people in power, since they are important factors to the effectiveness of the proposed change, has become an essential part of the innovation planning period.

Rowland (1993) agreed with Jeschke (1990) as to the importance of group involvement in the proposed change. "Individuals have no shared vision of what the change will accomplish" (Jeschke, p. 6). When this occurred, the change quickly began to appear complex, the teachers believed they would not succeed, and soon they believed they would loose control of their class. The people also lost any trust they had in the group who were trying to implement the change. Eisner (1992) agreed with Jeschke and Rowland on the effect distance between the reform proposers and the teachers could have on successful change. He continued to dive
deeper into the recurrent theme of reform in American education. When he attempted to implement change to help a traditional school to a whole language philosophy, he found that it was much easier to change an education policy than to change the way schools function. The social stability of the school was too established. The role of the teacher had been internalized since individuals were five or six years old. Thus, sending new ideas into an old system did not work.

Society as a whole has an attachment to the familiar pedagogical routine. The content being taught and the method of teaching has been mastered and is secure. The past education of most individuals has established clear, rigid, and enduring standards for the behavior, and especially roles, of students as well as teachers. Conservative expectations for the function of schools is well established. If there is any challenge to tradition, (as the past always tends to have a rosy glow) the implementors of change can expect to encounter difficulties. Goodman, Smith, Meridith, and Goodman (1987) state that "schools in the United States have a tradition of local political control. That's one reason for the slow spread of innovative ideas in American schools. It also, however, explains the resilience of some school reform movements in the face of public criticism" (p. 386). To compound how society views changing the established school system, Eisner (1992) explains the difficulties that teachers face in incorporating change. The isolation factor of never seeing peers in the role of teacher fosters ignorance. It is difficult to change if you have never viewed how another peer teaches or had the time and input to reflect upon how you teach yourself. Inservices that accompany new innovations tend to be too general. The presenters also do not know the teachers, their particular traits, or their situations. Direct observations on the implementation and growth of the new concepts is rarely done, so the teachers rarely have direct
feedback as to how they are achieving the desired growth. This brings about the crucial role of the teacher as a learner. As a traditional view of teachers usually places them on the opposite side of learning, they, as a unique group, deserve specific attention in their role as successful change implementors.

**Teachers as learners**

Change often comes about to teachers through coercion. Often there is not a genuine desire to change on the part of each individual, so naturally there is less than full enthusiasm for the new idea (Balistreri, 1987). But change does not have to be presented to teachers dictated from the top down. Kagan (1991) stresses the goal to begin the educational change at the teacher training programs and work down from there. Teachers have a variety of reasons for resisting change. Byrnes (1992) explains this resistance occurs because of "well established ideas about methods and learning styles, about planning and organisation, and about directions for learning" (p. 4). This covers the basic professional side of teacher's unwillingness to change. Balistreri goes into detail on the emotional side effects of change. His research includes many comments one could hear in almost any staff lounge in America. His list of reasons compiled from teachers includes: its always been done this way; neighboring schools do it this way; there are no funds to implement a change; there is no administrative support; I tried something like this before and it didn't work; the school board won't like it; it simply can't be done; I don't know how; I'm use to it this way; what will we change to; the faculty is not supportive; I like it the way it is now; I'm not trained; and I'm too close to retirement. When viewing these comments, they truly are not reasons, but mere excuses. The excuses are valuable so that the implementors for change can accurately judge exactly where their group is coming from as far as the degree of resistance and the personal as well as professional
reasons they give for avoiding change. Jeschke (1990) also warns change implementors of the immediate resistance that arises if the new way creates more work than the old way. As stated previously in this review, resistance is not all bad. Margolis (1991) explains how by challenging change, it can actually help to improve change for their specific needs. Clearer goals can be established and all members of the staff can benefit. It appears from the research that the key to teacher commitment to a new idea or method is to allow them to have influence in the change from the very beginning. Margolis adds that the reputation of those proposing the change has a great influence on the success rate, too. Successful transitions also depend on "the clarity of the school’s goals and the degree to which the teachers embrace the goals" (Margolis, p. 4). The professional side of being a teacher is often overwhelmed by the personal aspects of being a teacher. Byrnes details five important aspects to how teachers view change from the personal affective side at their school site. First of all is the teacher's reaction to subject matter being changed. If the teacher believes that their knowledge of the subject has been mastered and then becomes threatened in this area, these new ideas are often very difficult to be tolerated let alone accepted. Teachers also fear that they will be deprived of knowing what is happening and why. If a new learning methodology is being introduced, the initial resistance to even listening to the program may occur. The trainer or change implementor has a great effect on how well the change is received. According to Byrnes, teachers tend to strongly resist status change in a colleague. This personal and professional doubt leads to a slow start in most innovations. Byrnes continues on to state that a way out of many of these personal doubts is to continually change the roles of teacher and learner throughout the implemented change course. Teachers take over the trainer’s role and thus keep
their professional self judgement and self concept. Once again, Olson (1993) stresses the fact that change cannot be imposed from the outside. True change arises from the staff within and is accomplished classroom by classroom, school by school, and not district mandated down. Another dilemma arises when teachers desire to help shape and focus the change and thus empower themselves within their professional growth. Along with this empowerment comes authority and responsibility. Unfortunately, this is often where teachers are not willing to commit themselves.

This review has thus established a view of how teachers approach change. The key to successful change lies in the preparation, planning, and implementation of the proposed change, keeping always in mind the audience that is being asked to change.

Planning effective change

Education reform has often been said, throughout the years, to be a pendulum swinging from side to side. "Pendulums are objects that move without going anyplace" (Eisner, 1992, p. 612). In order to dismount from this pendulum, change has to come from the true belief of each member that this new idea is beneficial to the students as well as the teacher. Eiseman (1992) details the importance of establishing decision makers and opinion leaders. He begins by having the group involved in the possible change state a visionary plan in clear language which is understandable to all. Then a list is established of people whose decisions will or could influence the ability for the change to be successfully implemented. These people also are clearly identified as to the power they have in opposing or supporting the innovation as well as their official role in the situation. Other essential roles that are identified include personnel whose commitments are necessary, parents, and any other organization or group of people that have influence at the school site. Once it has been established as to individual roles in the
proposed change, the implementors look at the skills required to succeed, the training involved, the percent of time required to maintain and apply the innovation, and the materials and equipment necessary to successfully implement the desired goal.

Once this clear picture has been established by the group as a whole, Jeschke (1990) stresses the need for looking at each individual. People enjoy seeing how they will fit into the proposed change. By doing this, participation is insured. Individuals also are reassured that they will continue to keep basic control of their environment, as well as having the knowledge that their concerns can quickly be responded to. The proposed change is more manageable if broken up into steps, having the information being shared and presented in small items. Demonstration of commitment from all levels is an obvious encouragement for all. To insure success, individuals need to possess ownership of the project. It is necessary for individuals to have freedom in designing and implementing the program. Decision making, choices, and options are presented and allowed by each member. Responsibilities are spread amongst the group to develop further ownership. Throughout this process, administrative support and interest is maintained, a stable funding source is established, and staff development for new as well as old personnel is scheduled on a regular basis. By insuring the self worth, personal fulfillment, and career or personal professional advancement, Balistreri (1987) believes enthusiastic change can occur. Johnson (1992) adds the importance of showcasing what has been learned so that other groups, as well as the one participating in the change, can witness successful advancement.

Margolis (1991) approaches change from the administrative background. This also happens to be the way most change is attempted in schools today. He
believes success will come if the "administrators understand why teachers oppose change. Only then can proper adjustments to resistance be made" (p. 2). He is also quick to add that solutions should not be imposed upon the group. There are many ways to achieve a goal, and the goal will unify and energize the group trying to achieve it. Concentration on beliefs and perceptions of the proposed change is encouraged. Emphasis is on the process and open systems thinking rather than the product. A give and take relationship is established to develop the trust and respect needed for positive change in attitude or philosophy. Margolis continues on to say that the group's focus is on immediate, important, and troublesome ideas. Mistakes are viewed as an essential part of creativity. Teachers require reassurance in the knowledge that no punishment, such as reprimands or dismissal of support funding, will occur as new and better ideas are created. Thus, successful implementation of an innovation can occur when teachers are allowed to fit their needs and ways of doing things to the proposed change as well as maintaining the right to make their own professional decisions for their classrooms.

Added to the planning and preparation for change, Caldwell and Gould (1992) focus on the leadership strategies and self assessment. They believe that it is essential for leaders in change to come from all levels of the program, not just the top. Leaders individually assess their style of presenting as well as how they are perceived by their peers. These leaders then challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, become the force enabling others to act, model the way, and encourage each individual to explore their inner beliefs. Developing trust is an essential element, and trust usually occurs only after a great deal of time. Communication is continually open to develop an effective team and a clear structure for change. Shepperson and Nistler's (1992) emphasis on the time element cannot be understated. The main
concerns of people undergoing change are for themselves, the task, and the overall impact the proposed change will make. Their experience after spending one year in implementing a new methodology was that, as time went on, self concerns diminished while task concerns increased. The trust factor had been established, and then real change could begin. Shepperson and Nistler continue to state that "change is best understood as it directly affects classroom practice, students, and preparation time" (p. 63). Change is a process, not an event. It is a highly personal experience, as it involves developmental growth on the part of each individual. Change in an individual's attitudes and behavior takes time to occur. Often the change is very slow, even if the change is desired. Establishing a community of learners to develop a joint knowledge base, share and plan with peers, and express ideas, experiences, and encouragement toward one another are essential elements to achieving the desired change. Through allowing individuals time to reflect on their own methods, they can build confidence about their own philosophy and instructional practice.

Project proposed change

The literature reviewed thus far has dealt with how individuals perceive change, and how best to achieve change so that it becomes institutionalized and not just another swing of the pendulum. The project accompanying this literature review focuses on changing from a traditional teaching background to a whole language philosophy. Johnson (1992) sums up the difference in these two methods as the old paradigm is teaching, the new paradigm is learning. The basal approach, with a decoding emphasis, claims to guarantee sequential skill mastery. Whole language integrates all of the components of language and thus improves the process of comprehending. Yet, as of 1986, 90% of American teachers were using primarily basals as their method for reading instruction (Dewalt, Rhyne-Winkler, and Rubel,
Gersten and Dimino (1993) eloquently describe the "emotionally flat, routinized instruction" that basal methods achieve (p. 7). They continue on to explain how many teachers have established set routines for getting through worksheets and drills. Comprehending, which is the main purpose for reading, becomes a rushed session with little probing, feedback, or time to allow students to describe how they feel about the story. Gersten and Dimino also observe that the lower the reading group's ability is, the less time the process of comprehending is focused upon. When teaching with a whole language philosophy, there is no ability grouping. All students discuss what their individual stories mean to them, as this is the essence upon which they build their learning. A whole language teacher, as Gersten and Dimino note, develops a richer, more dynamic view of children as active learners. Students have more voice in what they read and write. The work thus becomes more cognitively demanding. More time is also spent on literature and writing tasks in a whole language classroom than in traditional basal programs (Gersten and Dimino). As for the success rate of whole language programs, Dewalt, Rhyne-Winkler, and Rubel discuss a 1990 study by Langer which involved 13,000 students in grades four, eight, and twelve. Langer found that reading comprehension increased between grades four through eight, but decreased between grades eight through twelve. The main emphasis in the reading program was phonics, basals being primarily used in fourth grade. Little reading was done at school or assigned as homework. Reasoning activities were not emphasized in class. Students' interest in books decreased as they progressed in school. This all occurred in a traditional basal method research program (Dewalt, Rhyne-Winkler, and Rubel p. 95). These researchers also reviewed another research project by Miller and McKenna (1989) which compared decoding as well as comprehension skills between eight first grade
classrooms. Each classroom contained thirty-three students. Four of the classes continued on with their basal method of instruction in reading while the other four classrooms used whole language strategies in reading instruction. At the completion of the study, there was no difference in the two groups on their decoding test scores. Both methods achieved equal success. Where the significant increase in scores occurred was on the comprehension portion of the assessment. The whole language instructed groups all scored significantly higher than the basal instructed groups.

Dewalt, Rhyne-Winkler, and Rubel (1993) also reviewed Kramer's (1969) research into student attitude toward reading. As they found from Langer's research, the traditional basal method developed students who enjoyed reading less and less each progressive year. In Kramer's research, he had teachers in grades four, five, and six replace basals for 1-2 weeks with novels. At the end of the year, the students rated the stories they had read. Only 12% rated the basal stories as excellent where 60% rated novels as excellent. More powerful yet is the fact that 56% of the students rated the basal stories as poor, as compared to 11% rating the novels as poor. When Kramer looked at the details in comparing the novels to the basal stories, 98% of the students found novels more interesting, 81% believed the novels aroused better discussion, 79% believed that the novels promoted more silent reading, and 72% believed the use of novels resulted in their learning more new words. With statistics such as these, it is hard to dispute the effectiveness that whole language can have on the growth and attitude children have toward reading. Once teachers have accepted the desire for change, they must also become knowledgeable in the necessary elements of a whole language program. This will aid any type of change towards the philosophy and method of whole language teaching.
Introduction to whole language

It is important to realize that whole language is more an attitude and a process than a method. The underlying force that binds whole language beliefs is that the teacher cannot give knowledge to students. The students construct knowledge for themselves. Reid (1993) describes whole language teaching as the "process of engaging learners in meaningful, interesting, and productive activities" (p. 15). A main obstacle that many traditional teachers struggle with is the belief that whole language does not teach phonics. Routeman (1991) explains that whole language does teach phonics, just never in isolation as do traditional basal methods.

The phonics is always integrated. Reid continues on to explain that:

Phonemic awareness, for example, normally develops spontaneously from language play, especially rhyming, and other language games. When children do not achieve this level of awareness spontaneously, there is nothing in whole language instruction to prevent teachers or other children from providing learning experiences specifically to lead to its acquisition. (p. 15)

This is done contextually with the use of high repetition and predictable books. The letter and sound is focused upon in real text and words and stories as opposed to isolation. Reid noted that unfortunately some teachers who have not had the necessary background in the whole language philosophy and strategies have reduced whole language to "discovery learning." Earlier in the literature review the necessity for training staff members as they begin to implement change was a major focus. This is especially essential for the whole language transition.

Stages to becoming a whole language teacher

As there is no set methodology, curriculum, or specific rules that must be followed to set up a whole language classroom, there is no one way in becoming a whole language teacher. Shepperson and Nistler (1992) discovered that teachers at their school wanted to know what whole language was and how it was similar or
different to what they already do. They spent one year simply exploring and
developing the philosophy behind whole language and how to view the child as a
learner. Though the staff showed great eagerness that first year to learn strategies
that they could begin using in their classrooms, Shepperson and Nistler realized that
without the basic understanding and common background knowledge developed and
questioned together as a staff, true change and transition to whole language would
not occur. Shepperson and Nistler also explain that to become a whole language
teacher, one needs to understand how interactive, child-centered philosophies can be
implemented into practice. Initially the staff felt overwhelmed and threatened. Yet,
one the teachers realized they still had the ultimate control of their classroom and
developed trust with the change implementors, they were much more willing to learn
and take risks.

"Integrating the whole language philosophy in the regular classroom can seem
overwhelming at first - and perhaps even impossible" (Yeager, 1991, p. 2). Before
attempting to implement whole language strategies, Yeager believes that teachers
need to get to know their students. Selection of materials, subject matter, and
teaching strategies will then meet the students' needs. The teachers must also be
very familiar with literature that is appropriate for their particular students. School
librarians, district resource centers, and children's bookstores can often become
valuable allies to the teacher in developing this knowledge. Along with help from
these professionals, existing whole language teacher groups in the area can be a
valuable source of information as the members share together at meetings. The
teachers also try to connect literature to the already existing curriculum as well as
have a thorough knowledge of the district and state language arts programs and
guidelines. The California Department of Education recommends in the book It's
Elementary! (1992) that teachers should begin their transition by mastering a single subject area. From there, teachers begin to reduce the amount of time spent on skill-based activities, choose depth over coverage in teaching a subject, and schedule class work in longer blocks of time.

An important role of the teacher is to model reading and writing. Yeager (1991) continues on to explain that the teachers who view themselves as readers and writers, keep a journal of their growth, and share these ideas with their class have given their students a strong model for being a learner.

Routeman (1991) believes that the key to successfully becoming a whole language teacher is to learn to believe in yourself. This is often difficult to do since many teachers have had years of pre-conditioning on how plans and answers could be easily found in textbooks. Many teachers have grown to be convinced that textbooks and publishers know more about their students and what these students need to learn than the actual classroom teacher knows. Routeman stresses that the answers to becoming a whole language teacher are not in books. The experts can give advice, strategies, and ideas, but it is up to each teacher to carefully select and choose what is right for their particular students as well as their own style of teaching. A teacher can reflect upon past experiences and learn to trust on intuition. Interacting with students, colleagues, professional journals, texts, and courses all aide in this development. Goodman (1986) suggests a possible sequence for teachers to follow. First, teachers assess their current program. Next, teachers consider what they are already doing that is consistent, as well as inconsistent, with the whole language philosophy. Finally, the teachers are ready to take the first steps toward whole language. Routeman stresses "that the transition to whole language is at least
a five- to ten-year process" (p. 22). These are encouraging words for teachers transitioning to whole language.

One of the most difficult behaviors to change, when transitioning to whole language, is that of learning to give up control. Many teachers have always directed a classroom where they are the dominant figure and students need to always raise their hands for permission to talk. Becoming a co-learner in a cooperative learning environment can be a big adjustment. Routeman (1991) wrote that most teachers go through five stages. The first involves total lack of confidence in the ability to become a whole language teacher. From there, many people move into a phase where they believe that they may be able to transition to whole language if they research more about it. The next stage finds teachers following exactly as the experts advise. From there the teacher begins to adapt what the experts advise to their own students’ needs. Finally, many teachers reach the stage where they trust themselves "as an observer-teacher-learner-evaluator" (Routeman, 1991, p. 27). This final goal takes time to achieve, but is the ultimate goal of becoming a whole language teacher.

**Role of teacher and student in whole language**

"Being a whole language teacher raises the level of professional authority and responsibility. It means accepting the responsibility of staying informed, of developing a sound base for classroom planning, practices, and decision making" (Goodman, 1986, p. 67). The initial change from traditional teaching methods to whole language has to come from the teacher. Traditional classrooms often find the teacher worrying about control and power and limiting the children’s opportunities to talk, thus enabling the teacher to keep control and power. In the traditional classroom teachers talk far more than the students. Smith (1985) states that "a good deal that is done at school - and also sometimes by well-meaning adults out of school
- has the consequence of making learning to read more difficult" (p. 129). They tell the students what to learn instead of leading them to learn. In a traditional classroom, "children talk only in response to a bid from the teacher" (Hansen and Graves, 1986, p. 808). In comparison, the responsibility to learn in a whole language classroom rests upon the students. Children investigate, research, and explore various topics. They teach others as well as learning themselves, and thus learning is expanded. The teacher acts as a facilitator, not a lecturer, to encourage and nurture the growth of each student. Hansen and Graves believe when the students have the opportunity to view their teacher as a learner, it greatly affects the nature and quality of learning in the classroom. When the students have the opportunity to choose what they want to write about and what they want to read, they are naturally more interested in their work. When they care about the content, their talk is on task, also. The teacher maintains contact with the students through individual, small group, and whole class conferences on their reading and writing. Shepperson and Nistler (1992) have found that the planning time required for whole language teachers is cut in half, thus allowing the creative teacher time to develop thematic centers, activities, and strategies to help children increase in their own needed way. Olson (1993) summed up the role of the teacher as shifting "from expert to coach" (p. 31). Along with the changing roles of teacher and student, the classroom environment also needs to take on changes.

No one physical structure or classroom arrangement can guarantee a successful whole language classroom. Yeager (1991) expands on this idea in stating that most whole language classrooms contain areas for conferencing, a class library, publishing center, author's area, reading area, and writing center. The activities and noise levels for each center or area are well established before students are given the
responsibility to work in them. Olson builds upon this new environment to explain what one might see when entering a whole language classroom. The students are active learners who have responsibility for their learning. The activities the students are doing are rich, stimulating, and in context with real situations. Students apply their newly acquired knowledge and not simply regurgitate it. The classroom day is set up in longer blocks of time than in a traditional classroom. Projects that students work on often cut across the curriculum. In short, a visitor witnesses a community of learners. This grand accomplishment is rarely done without collaboration amongst other staff professionals to encourage and help develop growth. This much needed element is often overlooked in helping a group on their transition toward whole language.

**Professional collaboration**

In order to fully institutionalize any change and not have it quickly become a passing phase, collaboration amongst educators is a necessity. This collaboration needs to happen at the school site, but also needs to begin at the level of teacher training programs. These programs have been "essentially the same for the past fifty years in spite of numerous reform and innovation efforts" (Portman, 1993, p. 14). Reid (1993) explains that most teacher training programs teach how to do teaching rather than how to make decisions about teaching. Portman agrees with Reid and strongly believes that if we fix how teachers are trained, we will improve their effectiveness in schools. This would also save school sites immense amounts of funds in retraining the teachers. Thus, an essential beginning to the success of whole language is the universities' willingness to collaborate continually with nearby schools to learn what is desired for their future teachers.
When looking at school sites, Olson (1993) quotes Deborah Meier, founder of Central Park East Secondary School in New York City, to sum up a goal for all educators. "Schools must create a passion for learning, not only among children but also among their teachers" (p. 31). The focus of collaboration need not be blinded by the whole language versus phonics debate. The focus instead can be on effective teacher training and ways in which teachers can guide, encourage, and challenge students to becoming active, interested learners. By meeting on a weekly basis, Shepperson and Nistler (1992) found that teachers began establishing the needed common knowledge base. Though teachers were at different levels in their growth, they all were reexamining their beliefs in learning, teaching, and using language on a daily basis in the real world. These elements are essential to the philosophy of whole language, and exploring them individually as well as in a group provides the needed opportunity for continuing growth that one day workshops and seminars do not provide. Through collaboration, teachers can close the gap between doing research and implementing research findings. New roles can be assumed by teachers, and the weekly discussions help to "legitimize teachers' practical understanding and professional concerns" (Shepperson and Nistler, p. 65). Watson, Burke, and Harste (1989) as well as It's Elementary! (1992) stress the importance of teachers meeting outside of the school environment to share experiences and journal articles. Teachers then have the opportunity "to experience how discussions come alive, how inquiry becomes urgent" (Watson, Burke, and Meridith, p. 41) just as their students do in their classroom literature study groups.

Thus, the task of implementing a change from traditional to whole language teaching is a lengthy, time consuming one. Anyone trying to implement this or any other major change would be wise to carefully assess the views and perceptions of the
group members they are working with in order to have success. A smooth start to the transition can begin if the following has occurred: careful pre-planning, inclusion of all members from the very beginning, and understanding, professional leadership from all levels. Once a change process has begun, the most effective way to have it continue and eventually become the norm for the school site requires continual assessment and collaboration amongst staff members. Dedication to the change is essential to the continuing success of the program. The project that accompanies this research focuses on the introduction and initial steps to helping four third grade teachers transition from traditional to whole language teaching. The materials and forms provided can be an aid for those who are contemplating change at their school site. The growth that these teachers made can be an encouragement for those who are implementing change, and the shortcomings that the project had will hopefully benefit others from not taking the same route. The literature reviewed for this project focused on the aspects of change. Though this project focuses on the change to whole language, it is the author's belief that the materials reviewed, as well as much of the project, will assist other implementors of change.
GOALS AND LIMITATIONS

The overall goal of this project is to help educators understand the process of change and how to implement it successfully as a group rather than a dictated leadership. This project examines a selected group of teachers as they transition from traditional teaching methods to whole language strategies.

The main limitation for this project is the people involved. To successfully implement a change in teaching philosophies, the group involved has to desire to change. There needs to be a willingness amongst the staff and administration to share leadership roles. Staff members who are experienced whole language teachers, or daily access to these teachers, is essential for the success of the transition. Funding is always a major limitation to innovations in education. Money for quality literature in each classroom, for hiring substitutes (to allow teachers observation time), and funds for whole language inservices is essential to the success of the project.
Appendix A

A Study of Progress

Into Whole Language
INTRODUCTION

Change can be a positive force. In fact, Byrnes (1992) claims that change is beneficial and can reward all members of a group. Yet, when most people learn of a proposed change, their reaction is one of resistance. Often action is taken against the change before group members are fully informed on the proposition. Through the research provided with this project, the key to successful change appears to lie greatly in the preparation of a group before any planning of change occurs. It is wise for all members involved in a proposed innovation to remember that change takes time. Often the process appears to be a series of one step forward and two steps backwards. True, lasting change does not occur over night. This project developed over a two and a half year period, and continues progressing at the date of this writing. Superficial change can occur quickly, but for change to become the accepted norm, a lengthy period of time is often needed. This is especially true in education. Thus, in leading a staff toward whole language, the implementors need to feel comfortable working within a large growing period.

Jeschke (1990) and Rowland (1993) stress the importance of group members involvement from the very beginning of a project. Olson (1993) believes that successful change occurs from within an organization much more enthusiastically than if the proposed innovations are introduced to the group by outsiders. Thus, site developers of School Improvement Plans have the ideal opportunity to become aware of changes that they, as well as all staff members, are ready to implement on a yearly basis. If the school happens to be going through Program Quality Review (PQR) that year, the opportunities for introducing new methods and philosophies is almost endless. This project was initially implemented with a staff during a PQR year. The leadership team for the school consisted of administration, upper and
lower elementary teachers, and parents to help insure representation from the entire school community. The focus for the PQR year was language arts, and there was a desire from the principal, many teachers, and encouragement from the *English-Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* (1987) to move toward whole language methodologies.

**STAFF PREPARATION**

**Assessment survey**

One key element, according to Eiseman (1992), is the inclusion of all members involved in a change process. This involvement begins with the initial conception of the change implementation design. In this project, a staff survey was formed to allow each individual teacher to assess the established language arts program (see Appendix B). The survey used the highlight points from the PQR pilot program’s (1992) criterion to assess the current language arts program. Teachers rated how they believed the language arts program at the school measured up to these state-developed goals. At this point, trust in the implementors of the proposed change was not yet established, and risk taking amongst the group members was very low. Having a known, accepted base for the initial questions concerning new methodologies was essential to insure the comfort level of all members. Teachers were given instructions to work on their own and were asked to spend time reflecting before answering each question. The surveys remained anonymous. Teachers, administrators, classified staff, certified staff, parents on the School Site Council, and PTA officers were given surveys to complete. Once all of the surveys were completed, the results were tallied and presented to the staff. Jeschke (1990) stresses the importance of keeping all members involved in a proposed change informed throughout the process. The immediate feedback to the staff was a crucial
show of the dedication to the project by the change implementors. At this time, no change had yet been suggested. The group reviewed the results as a whole at a staff meeting.

The survey provided an accurate view of how staff members viewed the language arts program. Two drawbacks did occur, and stating them may help future users of the survey avoid these actions that lessened the accuracy of the results. First of all, some staff members worked together on the survey. By working together, it helped to improve their own understanding of the questions. It also raised many topics of discussion. What often resulted, though, was a group agreement as to what number to rate the quality of the program. Another difficulty arose when there was confusion as to whether the rating was being done on the individual teacher’s classroom or on viewing the entire school. Many teachers felt that since they had not had opportunity to see fellow staff members at work, they were unable to rate the school on the various qualities. Both of these events created possible inaccuracies in the survey results, but the positive aspects of both events far outweighed the negative. Because of these actions and questions by staff members, grade level meeting times were established on a bimonthly schedule, and funds were allocated to hire substitutes so that staff members could observe other classrooms at our site or within the district. Being a year round school, there was the difficulty of never having all staff members at every staff meeting. Notes were made for those off track, but the staff was still lacking the feeling of unity. The staff decided as a whole to schedule a breakfast staff meeting on the morning of every track change. This once a month meeting was a time when the entire staff could catch up on topics of concern and growth. Change had begun from the desired goals within the group without pressure from outside sources or administration.
Securing a common knowledge base

Members of a school staff are always at various levels of knowledge, methodologies, and beliefs in language arts. According to Jeschke (1990), a common knowledge base is essential to successful change. To help insure this, copies of It's Elementary! (1992) and the English-Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (1987) were given to each staff member. The staff was asked to independently read both books. They were then asked to review the survey and the areas that they personally had indicated a need or desire for change or growth as a staff. They were then to develop ideas on how to go about achieving these goals. Grade levels met together to formulate ideas, and these ideas were compiled and printed out for a complete staff review. A cover letter introduced the formulated objectives and activities for improvement (see Appendix C). A strong reminder at this point in group self-assessment was to try and steer clear of negative comments. There often becomes a tendency to turn assessment into a complaining session, especially if ideas are gathered in animosity. The process of establishing goals and developing steps, procedures, and activities to make the eventual actions of change occur smoothly over a transition period can be achieved by helping the group think constructively. A chart of where the staff believed they were, where they wanted to be, ideas on how to achieve their goals, and proposed dates for beginning each activity was created. This chart was then copied onto large poster paper and posted in the staff lounge.
PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Off-site meetings

Eiseman (1990) states that professional growth comes from each person's desire to learn. Often teachers neglect to develop this aspect of their profession. Most schools subscribe to professional journals and make them easily accessible to teachers. Many faculty members subscribe to professional journals on teaching or their main subject or interest area. Building upon this wealth of knowledge and sources of information can be a great asset in introducing a staff to the philosophy behind whole language. It can also be a source for beginning whole language strategies, once the staff is comfortable with the philosophy. In order to help create a common knowledge base, It's Elementary! (1992) suggests that teachers meet outside of the school setting to have professional discussions. Since the goal of this project was to introduce and begin the transition toward whole language, monthly meetings at a staff member's house were organized. Refreshments were served, and reading material was provided well ahead of time so that all who wanted to participate could come prepared for the discussion. The focus was on the English-Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (1987) and It's Elementary!. Both of these books supported whole language methods and encouraged a child-centered curriculum. Also, both of these books were created by education consultants from the state of California. Staff members who needed the extra reinforcement of staying within the guidelines and requirements of a set curriculum could feel secure with the base of the program.
Shared articles

Articles were copied for all staff members and discussed over an arranged lunch period each week to continue enriching the staff's common knowledge base. The articles varied from professional journals to sections of Goodman's book *What's Whole About Whole Language* (1986). Staff members were encouraged to find articles to share at the weekly discussions. The articles all needed to deal with language arts, but did not have to support whole language. Often those articles that did not favor the whole language approach caused much more effective discussions than those which did support whole language.

Needs and strengths assessment

After the monthly meetings and weekly lunch discussions had been underway, a form was sent out asking teachers to list areas in which they would like additional information or training. The form also asked the teachers to list strengths or areas of knowledge that they felt comfortable in sharing with the staff at future meetings (see Appendix D).

Inservices

Early in the year, whole language teachers throughout the district had organized an inservice to be offered one afternoon. The inservice was open to the entire district. Basically, it was designed to attract teachers' interests toward whole language. The presenting teachers shared how they were introduced to the whole language philosophy and way of teaching, as well as how they implemented some of the strategies in their classrooms. The session was two hours long, and gave interested teachers some initial information about whole language. It also gave them human resources to turn to for more information and shared discussions.
The decision was made as a staff to have consultants come to the school site and talk to the staff about whole language. This was preferred over sending individuals out to conferences and having these fortunate few report back to the group. Twice during the two year period funds were set aside for whole language consultants to give half day seminars to the staff. Both were at introductory levels, dealt with the philosophy as well as beginning strategies, and helped to develop much discussion during, as well as after, the seminars.

In the months between these two seminars presented by outsiders, teachers from another school in the district came and discussed how they implemented their writing workshop. This seminar was a two hour session from teachers that were known by a majority of the staff. An important part of each inservice was the evaluation that teachers completed individually following each session (see Appendix E). Through these evaluations, the group, as a whole, could decide more closely where they were at, where they continued to want to go, and accurately choose activities or future seminars to help them achieve their goals. This continual input from each member helped to insure that implementation of changes toward whole language moved smoothly.

**STAFF PROGRESSION**

The group going through the process of change is wise to limit themselves to one particular area. Routeman (1991) states this quite clearly. Abandoning all traditional teaching methods and trying to completely move into whole language will usually bring frustration upon the teacher as well as the students. The staff, in this case, decided to focus on the writing segment of language arts. From this decision, a review of the PQR writing program criteria was typed up for each staff member. Attached to this criteria was the district writing expectancies for each grade level.
The staff realized the importance of collaborating as a group to successfully implement the changes they believed were necessary. One staff meeting a month was designated as a group sharing time for grade levels to share with the staff their progress, as well as strategies that they were attempting. The PQR process suggested that each teacher select samples from their class of a high, medium, and low level of writing (see Appendix F for the form which was attached to each sample). These samples were collected from each teacher, then laid out by grade levels on tables. This project was especially beneficial for the staff. The teachers found it interesting to see how at the same grade level, one teacher’s high was another teacher’s medium. Secondly, staff members expressed how much they benefitted from viewing what the grades before and after their level were doing. Thirdly, the staff found it interesting to see the types of writing samples collected. Often this greatly reflected the style of teaching being done in the classroom. The staff agreed that this was so beneficial that they wanted to do this at least two times each year.

The collection project aided in the discussion and development of beginning portfolio assessment. Agreeing on exactly what goes into a portfolio is an ongoing project. The initial introduction, steps, viewing portfolio samples from other school sites, and purchasing the supplies each teacher would need was completed during the second year of transition.

GRADE LEVEL PROGRESSION

The steps and stages that the staff went through before, in between, and following each inservice, journal article discussion, and home-meeting discussion are too numerous to discuss in this project. The focus for the remainder of the project deals with the growth that the four third grade teachers went through during the two
year period. Similar steps and stages were done at each grade level, and the ideas and processes that the third grade went through could be applied to all grade levels.

Grade level meetings

Formal grade level meetings were scheduled twice a month. Often the third grade teachers chose to meet briefly each Friday to update their progress with one another. The first meeting did not focus on change, but was a time when all four teachers described their present writing programs and how they directed them. The second meeting was scheduled so the teachers could describe their spelling programs and why they chose to set them up as they did. The third meeting was established so that all of the teachers could describe their reading programs and state why they believed their program was effective. At none of these three initial meetings were methodologies questioned or supported. All of the teachers had equal time to share their beliefs and curriculums. This risk-free sharing was an important element to the future growth of the group as a whole.

Writing program

The third grade teachers, as well as the staff, decided to focus on writing. After reading articles, attending inservices, and holding group discussions, the teachers decided a child-centered writing program following the writing process would be the goal that they wished to achieve. Each teacher had a different way of achieving this, and all of the teachers were trying to grow into the role of facilitator, allowing the students to take on more and more responsibility. The successes and failures were shared during this period where the roles of teachers and students evolved. The beauty of whole language, not being a set of rules or an exact curriculum, shone through as each teacher explored and achieved their set goals in a variety of ways. This writing process naturally led to development of a writing
portfolio. After two meetings, the group came to a consensus as to what writing samples would be included and a minimum time table of how often entries would be made to the portfolio. Discussion of our writing strategies continued. True collaboration occurred as each teacher learned and built upon one another’s ideas. The teachers became much more willing to take risks in their classrooms as well as in their group sharing.

The discussion at one meeting led to the spelling curriculum. There was never a consensus as to which way was best, as a third grade, to teach spelling. The techniques varied greatly. Some teachers believed in strictly adhering to the district established weekly list, while other teachers allowed students to independently choose words that they wanted to learn to spell from their literature. The students chose these words so that they could then begin to use them conventionally in their writing. Each teacher had strong beliefs in the area of spelling instruction, so as a group, we moved onward in our discussions. Over time, all of the teachers began allowing some student chosen words, and the act of learning spelling has become much less of an isolated subject and more closely incorporated into the writing process.

This process of growth occurred over a two and a half year period. Trust and bonding had developed between the teachers. Methodologies and ideas were respected, and discussions were not intimidating to any of the four members. The move toward whole language methods began well after the basic philosophies were explored and discussed. One area at a time was focused upon so that success could be witnessed before adding on additional change. Once the teachers understood how well the students could take responsibility for their writing, it was a natural step to move into reading.
Reading Program

Routeman (1991) states that many people believe whole language means throwing away the basal reader. This is not necessary, nor the key, to teaching whole language. Many teachers teach using whole language strategies while continuing to use their basals. Whole language is the teacher and students more than the materials being used. Yet, basals do not allow students the full responsibility that a student chosen reading program allows. After many discussions and class observations, one by one, the members of the third grade staff were ready to try independent reading programs using trade books. The teachers shared various forms that helped in establishing reading logs, reading conferences, response times, and reading circles (see forms in Appendix G). The success in the reading program spread to allowing the teachers to facilitate, rather than direct, in other curriculum areas. Science and social studies in all of the third grade classrooms became much broader than the basic text books supplied by the district.

The process of becoming a whole language teacher is never ending. Most people do not consider themselves whole language teachers for many years. This group of teachers has accomplished much in the past two years on their way to developing child-centered classrooms. Their roles as teachers have evolved from being directors to facilitators. They have learned from their own experiences, fellow teachers’ experiences, and through collaborative discussions with their peers. Most of all, they have grown to value their own professional judgement.

GUIDELINES FOR CHANGE

Change cannot be broken down into a step by step manual. However, certain key ingredients to successful change have been shown, through this project, as essential to the success of transitioning into whole language.
1. Remember that whole language is a philosophy and a way of viewing how children best learn.

2. Include the group that is being introduced to a new idea or methodology from the initial development of the change process. Allow them to give their opinions on where they are presently and where they want to grow. Then together begin developing the process of change.

3. Create clear goals as a staff. Insure that all members understand where the group is heading and the activities that will aid in implementing the change along the way.

4. Help each individual understand how they personally fit into the change process.

5. Respect the voice and opinions of others. Remember that they, too, are trained professionals. Changing personal philosophies, traditional behaviors, and routines involves a great deal of risk taking.

6. The implementors of change need to show commitment to the staff and the goal. Being ready to assist is essential to developing trust amongst the group, the new idea, and the implementors.

7. Insure that the change comes from within the group and is not solely directed from outsiders or superiors.

8. Assure staff members that the change to whole language is in the best interest of the students. Support this with resources, testimonials, and videos showing whole language in action.

9. Supply journal articles and books so that the staff can build a common knowledge base and begin to get a true picture of where they will be heading. Give ample time for the staff members to read, reflect, and discuss the materials.
10. Allow time for teachers to observe other whole language classrooms or staff members attempting a whole language strategy. More can often be learned from a day’s observation than a year’s worth of reading and discussing.

11. Give special attention to insure that members of the group are informed throughout the process of change.

12. Realize that resistance to change will occur. Use the resistance as a way to create clearer goals for all members involved in the change process. Remember that no resistance at all can be a sign of apathy toward the teaching profession. That is a much more difficult attitude to attempt to change.

13. Most importantly, allow time for the transition to whole language to occur. Change can be slow, even if it is desired. The process of changing an individual’s attitudes and behaviors takes time to occur. Present the materials and ideas, allow time for discussion, supply easy access to resources (text and people), then wait for the individuals to feel comfortable to begin risk taking. Change is not an event, but a process individuals go through.

It is the author’s intent that readers of the project will benefit from the research on the process of change as well as the outlined experiences of a selected staff going through the transition from traditional teaching methods to whole language. Each staff is different, so this project will require adjustment to meet the needs of each individual group of teachers. Allowing teachers’ voices will insure ownership in the process and lead to successful change. True collaboration can then occur, and the boundaries to individual and staff growth are limitless!
Appendix B

Language Arts
Group Assessment Survey

1. The language arts program is literature-based and meaning-centered and exposes all students to significant literary works.

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As part of making meaning, all students draw upon prior experiences to make predictions, ask their own questions, and initiate discussions about their interpretations of the text.

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Students read or listen to self-selected works, including student-authored text, and works which are representative of a variety of genres.

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Students respond to literature representative of a variety of genres and cultural perspectives.

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Students confront personal, moral, and ethical issues and values presented in literature.

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Students help select core, extended, and recreational titles.

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2. The instructional program emphasizes the integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

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Students share written, dramatic, or graphic responses to the literature they have read or heard. This integration helps students construct personal meaning.

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Students listen and respond daily to a variety of works.

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Students read, publish, and display both individual and class projects.

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3. The program includes reading to construct and clarify meaning and directs attention to the various stages of the reading process. Reading is perceived as part of the process of acquiring and developing language.

Students of all ages exhibit the behavior of readers.

Beginning readers learn letter/sound correspondence and word order through their interactions with predictable/repetitive texts and while writing words during drafting.

Students synthesize personal experiences with the situation presented in the text, thereby comprehending and making meaning for themselves.

Students read with increasing fluency, independence, accuracy, and understanding from a range of literature.

Students read in different ways for various purposes.
4. The program includes writing to construct and clarify meaning and directs attention to the various stages of the writing process.

Students who may be prewriters author stories through creating drawings or wordless text.

Early in the writing process, students invent spelling. In later stages of the writing process, students use a variety of sources for correcting spelling. Final written products include correct spelling.

Students model their writing after examples of quality literature.

During all stages of the writing process, students talk to each other about their work.

Students use the writing process while writing on self-selected topics and teacher-assigned topics.
Students produce final drafts in which the meaning is made clear to the reader and in which the conventions of language - grammar and usage, spelling and handwriting - are used appropriately.

| no idea | low | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | high | 5 |

Through a variety of writing experiences in all subject areas, students synthesize information and gain insights.

| no idea | low | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | high | 5 |

From the time they enter school, students write daily as a vehicle for making meaning in all subject areas.

| no idea | low | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | high | 5 |

Students revise their writing using various techniques.

| no idea | low | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | high | 5 |

Students write frequently in response to writing prompts.

| no idea | low | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | high | 5 |

5. The program includes attention to oral language development and proficiency.

| no idea | low | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | high | 5 |
As part of making meaning, students make predictions, ask their own questions, and initiate discussions about their interpretations of the text.

Students regularly engage in formal and informal oral discussions; each is given opportunities to participate.

Students use appropriate tone, style, and voice when preparing oral and written presentations for intended audiences.

Students examine the qualities of effective speech in situations involving various audiences, purposes, or forms.

Students see themselves as orators and storytellers. Frequently, they create dramatizations of works read.

Students speak in their home/community language when appropriate.
Students talk and write about works they have read, identifying favorites, and telling why they like them.

6. The program includes an assessment component that encompasses the full range of English-language arts goals and incorporates performance-based approaches to assessment.

Samples of student work are collected in a portfolio, the overall content and purpose of which is determined by the site- or grade-level team.

Students actively participate in evaluating their written and oral work.

Both formal and informal teacher observations of students, their work, and classroom interactions are used frequently in the overall evaluation of student progress.
Teachers regularly use student work to evaluate, adjust, and/or plan future instruction.

In assessing student language abilities, teachers take into consideration information gained from students and parents regarding the student’s home language.
Appendix C

Evaluation Summary

The information in this packet is a compilation of thirty individual evaluation packets. As you will see, the opinions regarding the condition of our school program vary greatly. Certificated and classified staff, as well as parents on the School Site Council and in the PTA participated in the evaluation. We must remember that we all see things from a unique perspective.

Because some of the descriptors and suggested objectives and activities for improvement tend to show negative characteristics, we must stop to remind ourselves that spreading negativity will not lead to successful change. Being open, talking about it among ourselves, collaboratively making decisions, and having responsible follow-through on all our parts will make a difference.

As we participate in the next step of the self study process (deciding upon a few improvement objectives and activities), we must consider the following:

1. Be honest, but polite and professional in discussing the suggestions and comments that are included in this summary. They are the sincere thoughts of someone in our school community.

2. Select objectives and activities that are realistic and achievable:
   a. There are fiscal restraints that severely limit the adoption of some suggestions.
   b. some suggestions may have to be sought through the negotiation process.
   c. There are district policy restraints on what we can do as a site.
Most activities take time and energy. Who will do it, and when?


4. The best change is usually incremental. Plan the small steps that lead to the big picture.
Appendix D

Needs and Strengths Assessment

Please list the type(s) of training which would enhance your ability to perform your instructional duties. (Examples: whole language instruction, cooperative learning, authentic spelling, choosing appropriate literature, etc.)

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

Please list any area(s) of expertise in which you may be willing to share information with other staff members. (This is not a commitment!!)

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

Name: ____________________________
Grade/Track: ________________________
Appendix E

Language Arts Inservice Evaluation Form

Please take some time to fill out this evaluation of the recent inservice on whole language.

1. Hopefully, you received some good ideas from the session that you can begin using in your classroom. List three things that you plan to use toward improving your students' reading and writing abilities and enjoyment:
   1. ______________________________________________________
   2. ______________________________________________________
   3. ______________________________________________________

2. Was there anything that you hoped to learn that was not presented?

3. What other language arts topics would you like to have the committee address?

4. How would you have improved the whole language inservice?
Appendix F

Work Sample Description

Date Submitted

Grade level

Topic was: (check one)

student selected

teacher directed

Check a box to indicate where in the writing process this work occurred:

rough draft

final draft

other (specify)

In comparison to work generally expected at your grade level, this work is...

high

medium

low

Other comments or information needed to adequately evaluate this work sample:
Student Conference Record for Reading

Date: __________________________________________

Student's Name: __________________________________________

What is the title of the book you are reading?

__________________________________________________________

Who wrote it? ____________________________________________

Have you read other books by this author? ______________________

Why did you choose this book? ________________________________

________________________________________________________________

Tell me something about the story so far.

________________________________________________________________

What would you like to do when you finish this book? (Options: write a report, draw a poster, give an oral report to the class, write a letter to the author, etc.)

________________________________________________________________

Would you like to read another book by this same author? Why?

________________________________________________________________

Teacher Comments:

________________________________________________________________

Reading Response

Name: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________

I read ____________________________

by ______________________________

It had ________ pages.

It was easy just right hard

I want to

  make an oral report ________

  make a written report ________

  draw a picture of my favorite part ________

  * do something different * ________ (see class-created list on board)

The next book I want to read is ____________________________

__________________________________________

# Student Reading Record

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


