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Supporting the reader in the first through third grade classroom: Strategies for parent and community volunteers

Kathleen Wright Maddox

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SUPPORTING THE READER
IN THE FIRST THROUGH THIRD GRADE CLASSROOM:
STRATEGIES FOR PARENT AND COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts
in
Education: Reading Option

by
Kathleen Wright Maddox
March 1997
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Approved by:

Joseph Gray, M.A., Chair

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ABSTRACT

"The whole village educates the child"-old African saying

Schools have seen a growing number of parents and other community members respond to a cry for help from public schools as the student to teacher ratio rises. For children to become literate, many need individual attention from supportive adults.

Many of these senior and parent volunteers have not stepped into an elementary classroom in decades. They are unfamiliar with natural literacy strategies and techniques that help support young readers. They fall back on decoding and skills techniques they were taught many years ago. According to Spreadbury, "I believe that there is a great need to inform parents about how teaching in schools has changed from their school days and the reasons why this is so" (1994, p.22).

Parents and volunteers desperately need ideas and strategies to help support beginning readers in the process of obtaining meaning from print. When parents and volunteers are empowered with strategies, they are better able to support the reader in the first through third grade classroom.

The goal of this project is to create a strategies workshop for parents and volunteers that will emphasize the use of natural literacy strategies to help support the first through third grade reader in the classroom. When parents and volunteers are empowered with strategies, they are then able to support reading in the classroom. This workshop will be a beginning step in bridging the gap so parents and volunteers can become a useful addition in supporting the process of helping children develop a love of reading and become lifelong readers.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Statement of Problem

"The whole village educates the child."-old African saying

Schools have seen a growing number of parents and other community members respond to a cry for help from public schools as the student-to-teacher ratio rises. Parents and other community volunteers, especially seniors, can help bridge this gap between 1 teacher and thirty and forty students.

Many of these senior and parent volunteers have not stepped into an elementary classroom in decades. They are unfamiliar with natural literacy strategies and techniques that help support young readers. They fall back on decoding and skills techniques they were taught many years ago. This project emphasizes educating parents and volunteers in the use of whole language strategies to help support the reader in the first through third classroom.

My school is located near several retirement-oriented housing developments. Many of these seniors have expressed a desire to get more involved in the community, especially working with children at our elementary school.

We also have many young families in our neighborhood where only one parent works outside the home. Many of these parents have also expressed a desire to become more involved in their child’s education and have several hours per week to volunteer in the classroom. Parents can play a vital role when they become involved in their child’s education. According to Routman (1991) the importance of parent involvement is backed by research on effective
schools. Routman states, "Effective parent involvement programs, all of which have elements in common- positively effect achievement across diverse populations" (p. 485). With an awareness and training in natural literacy strategies, parents can then better help support the learning process at home and in the classroom.

Many parents and volunteers are unfamiliar with the fact that there are various approaches when teaching reading. Parents' impression of reading is in reality their impression of reading instruction. Many parents and volunteers fall back on the only approach they are familiar with when it comes to reading, based on their personal experience as early readers many years ago, the decoding approach. The decoding approach relies heavily on phonics as a means to learn to read. Many of these parents are misinformed about the natural literacy approach. As a result, many of these parents and volunteers believe that phonics is not taught in whole language or natural literacy and have other misconceptions about how reading is taught, how children learn to read and the goal of reading. Because of these misconceptions by parents, the media and others, whole language has become an unpopular and misunderstood approach to reading. I have chosen instead to use the term natural literacy in this project. I think parents and volunteers will be more open and willing to accept the term natural literacy.

There are various approaches to teaching reading. One approach is decoding. Within the decoding approach, the smaller units of sound are introduced starting with the separate sounds produced from letters and moving into larger chunks of sound created from words. Children learn letter/sound correspondence so they can sound-out or "decode" words. The alphabet is
taught along with the sounds the letters represent and phonics rules are
learned and emphasized. The students use these phonics rules in reading
when they come to a word they don’t know— they apply the appropriate phonic
rule to sound out the word. According to Weaver (1988), “...Most proponents of
a phonics approach seem to think that once words are identified, meaning will
take care of itself. The emphasis is on rapid and fluent decoding rather than
comprehension” (p.41). The teacher emphasizes flash cards, workbook pages,
drills, and vocabulary words to practice reading. The goal is to sound out every
word correctly.

Another approach to teaching reading is the skills approach. The skills or
“look-say “ model is similar to decoding in that reading is taught through
isolated skills. Whole word recognition is the focus through children learning to
recognize basic sight words such as I, and, the, tree, dog, and apple.
According to Weaver (1988), “Advocates of a sight word approach argue that if
children can begin with a stock of about 100 basic sight words, they will be able
to read about half the words in any text they might ordinarily encounter”(p.42).
This sight word approach also assumes that once these basic sight words are
identified, meaning will take care of itself. Language and reading are taught
from parts to whole like the decoding approach, but larger units of meaning and
individual words are emphasized rather than sounds. Word recognition is the
focus rather than meaning.

In the skills approach reading books have a controlled vocabulary in order to
place emphasis on learning individual sight words. Basal readers are most
often used in this approach. Common goals are to be able to recognize flash
card words out of context and be able to answer the questions in the book at the
end of the story. Many parents and volunteers are familiar with decoding and skills instruction because it was most likely the way they were taught to read.

Another approach to teaching reading is the natural literacy approach. Learning language is thought of as a natural process of communication where learning takes place from the whole to parts, in and out, through and beyond reading and writing just as it did when children learned to talk. Students are not grouped by their ability to read or write but may choose to work individually or in groups depending on their interests. Language is taught as a natural process of communication. Making personal meaning out of what is being read is more important than pronouncing every word correctly.

The goal in natural literacy is for children to make meaning of what they are reading and writing. The students are taught strategies to predict, confirm, and integrate knowledge to gain meaning from their reading. The student learns to read by combining all three cueing systems of language which are graphophonic or symbol-sound cues, syntactic-often called grammatical cues, and the semantic cues or meaning. With natural literacy, students integrate the symbol/sound relationship cueing system by seeing the relationship between the sounds of language and their graphic symbols. With the syntactic-grammar cueing system students learn the functions of grammar and spelling when writing or reading something that has purpose. With the semantic-meaning cueing system, the focus is on constructing meaning out of what a student is reading or writing. According to Smith(1985) children do not need to master phonics to learn to identify words while reading. "Once a child discovers what a word is in a meaningful context, learning to recognize it on another occasion is as simple as learning to recognize a face on a second
occasion, and does not need phonics” (pp.129-130). Teachers help children to recognize and use various strategies which facilitate meaning-making.

Natural literacy learning is taught through natural and authentic forms of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Natural forms of language learning include encouraging children to choose their own reading materials. Students are encouraged to choose books, magazines, articles, and stories based on their own interests. They begin to take ownership for their own learning and to trust themselves as learners. When students are given choices in their reading and writing, based on their own interests, they develop more confidence and are more willing to take risks and participate, engage, and stretch themselves as learners to try things they thought were not possible. Students begin to view language as a tool for expressing themselves and to make sense of the world they live in. They read “real” books rich with words and meaning, not modified versions with controlled vocabulary. M. Manning (1995) states that, “The language arts are best learned naturally as students engage in these processes in authentic ways using whole and real-life activities and materials” (p.52). Manning goes on to say that students construct their own knowledge or meaning from within, rather than having it imposed on them from the outside. Students are not grouped by ability by the teacher but choose projects based on what they have read and participate in small group and individual activities based on their own areas of interest. Within a natural literacy approach, children learn to read and write naturally by building upon their own language and experiences. They read and write everyday, with the emphasis on reading “real” literature and writing that has “real” purpose. Reading instruction is taught within natural literacy but through demonstrations,
strategies, and mini-lessons in context to student needs.

In natural literacy, the role of the teacher is more of a coach and guide to the student rather than a director. The focus of learning is on the students rather than the teacher. Reading and writing projects are not chosen by the teacher but by the student. Symbol to sound correspondence is used as young readers and writers need additional assistance but is taught in the context of meaningful written language. Real, quality, literature is used in natural literacy.

In a natural literacy classroom, the teacher also becomes a "learner". A sense of community develops when everyone learns from each other, and people's opinions are shared and respected. When individual similarities and differences are shared and respected students develop confidence and trust in their own inner "voice". They draw personal meaning from what they read and write.

This project will equip volunteers with natural literacy strategies to help build reading success in beginning readers. The reading strategies emphasized will be fluency, making meaning from reading, and encouraging independent reading at home and in the classroom. Parents and other volunteers can then be more effective partners in helping first through third graders develop success and a lifelong love of reading in and out of the classroom.
CHAPTER TWO
Review Of Literature

When reviewing the current literature about parent and volunteer involvement and supporting reading in the classroom, there are a number of strands that need to be taken into consideration. They are parent and community involvement in local schools and the importance of volunteers in the whole language classroom. I will also present an overview of the natural literacy approach and reading strategies that help support the reader in the 1-3 classroom.

“I believe that there is a great need to inform parents about how teaching in schools has changed from their school days and the reasons why this is so” (Spreadbury, 1994, p. 22).

NATURAL LITERACY APPROACH

In order for parents and volunteers to support a classroom literacy program, it is important for them to understand the philosophical climate the teacher has established in the classroom. This can help clarify the goals so everyone, students, teachers and volunteers, are working in the same direction. The strategies I intend to introduce and practice with parents and volunteers will emphasize a whole language or natural literacy approach.

The main goal of natural literacy is for children to use “active literacy” in their everyday life, not just in school. Regie Routman (1988) defines genuine literacy as “using reading, writing, thinking, and speaking daily in the real world with options, appreciation and meaningful purposes in various settings and with
other people" (p.14). She goes on to say that for children to become “actively” literate, school’s must change the method in which we teach reading and writing. Most parents were taught to read with a traditional approach that relied on breaking the reading process into smaller, more manageable units, such as letters, sounds and words. “Instruction focused on helping students master individual skills until they could orchestrate their use when reading” (Raphael/McMahon, 1994, p.102). This type of instruction began to be questioned in the 1970's and 80's because students spent so little time actually reading and reading was viewed as merely an accumulation of skills. Research indicated the value of teaching reading around authentic literacy experiences, especially the value of using real literature (Anderson, Heibert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Durkin, 1978-1979, 1981).

According to Harp (1988), natural literacy instruction places great emphasis on reading as a process of constructing meaning. Reading and writing are viewed as processes, rather than accumulations of small skills. Harp (1988) goes on to say,

Our assessment of a child’s progress should be process oriented rather than product oriented. We are product oriented when we ask if a child has mastered a specific skill. We are process oriented when we look at improvement in the child’s use of the writing process or when we analyze the child’s growth in using the processes of reading (pp.160-161).

With natural literacy, emphasis is on children predicting, confirming and self-correcting when reading. Mooney (1995) discusses the value of teachers helping children establish the habit of not only working for meaning, but of checking and reflecting as they read. According to Goodman, Hood &
Goodman (1991), “Comprehension depends on the processes of gathering new information (perceiving), playing around with that information (ideating), and later presenting related ideas (presenting)” (p. 184). This type of meaning making while reading is more valuable than having children answer the questions from the teacher’s manual to check comprehension because it requires children to use higher level thinking skills which have more than one correct answer.

With natural literacy, children are excited about reading and writing and consider themselves to be members of the literacy club (Smith 1988). Skills are taught with natural literacy, but are usually integrated and are discussed naturally when they come up as children are reading literature. Learning is experienced from the whole to the part, so as the need for skills arise, children are given mini-lessons. Edelsky (1987) has termed this type of information FYIs- For Your Information. An FYI is information presented briefly at a time when it is relevant to the needs of the children.

Literacy can be acquired naturally just as children learned spoken language. According to Routman (1988),

In the late 1960s, Don Holdaway, a New Zealand educator, theorized that the ways in which children learn oral language could be used as a developmental model for how children learn to read and write. Working with teachers in New Zealand, he took the 4 principles (below) and applied them to the classroom.”

Young Children:

1. observe “demonstrations”.
2. are encouraged to participate actively.

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3. try out or practice independently.
4. gradually become competent and confident (Routman 1988 pp.17)

This developmental process is used by adults as well as children when learning anything that is new to them.

Using poems, songs, stories, and big books, a child in the classroom could interact with meaningful text in the same way the preschooler interacted with text while being read a bedtime story. Each word is pointed to as the text is read and the child is encouraged to join in when they are ready. Individual books are available for the child to read independently or with another child later. In this way, children use language that is meaningful, has purpose, and is used naturally-in whole units, not in small units.

When literacy is taught naturally, the activities or task are open-ended. In open tasks, students are usually in control of not only how they carry out the task, but what the outcome will be. An open task might involve, after a student has read a story, choosing a variety of ways to share it with their classmates. They might choose to create a poster highlighting their favorite parts, writing and performing a readers theater, or writing a new ending to the story taking the place of one of the characters. There are many "correct" answers to open tasks.

Closed tasks, which are taught in the skills model, are those in which the product and the process are specified. A closed task might be completing a worksheet that goes along with a story the student has just read such as filling in the cloze sentences at the end of the story with some of the vocabulary words from the story. There is only one "correct" answer in closed tasks.

Open tasks create an environment in which children can learn reading and

"Research has shown that choice is a powerful motivator. When students can choose tasks and texts they are interested in, they expend more effort learning and understanding the materials" (Schiefele, 1991, p.664). "Opened-ended activities provide students with opportunities to mold task to interests and values, thus supporting their efforts to make meaning while engaging them affectively" (Turner and Paris, 1995, p.665). Choice can encourage students to take personal responsibility for their tasks by setting goals and deciding how to reach those goals.

With a natural literacy approach, teachers often have to find tasks that challenge students but do not cause frustration or failure. Many times, workbook pages and other assignments are given that children can easily master, thinking such tasks will build confidence. Turner and Paris (1995) have found, "The most motivated students were those who were engaged in moderately challenging tasks that led them to make new discoveries and to reorganize their understanding" (p.666). With natural literacy, teachers, taking the lead from students, design tasks or opportunities that require reflection and planning that could not be accomplished in a rote or automatic fashion. According to Turner and Paris (1995), children used more and varied reading strategies such as picture clues, meaningful substitutions and persisted longer at activities when they were challenged.
Students are given some control over their learning when literacy is taught naturally. Research has shown that children who share control in their classrooms are more interested in their schoolwork and see themselves as more competent than those in teacher-controlled classrooms (Ryan & Grolnick, 1986). Children become more self-directed and aware of their own learning process when they have control over their own learning.

Newman & Schwager (1993) have described the desired relationship between teachers and students (as well as other students) as “an apprenticeship in which a more able companion guides, supports and challenges another’s understanding (p.663).” Social benefits and cooperation are also advantages when children collaborate on projects. Children’s observations of their classmates’ progress may increase their confidence in their own ability to succeed (Schunk, 1989).

One of the main goals of natural literacy is for children to construct meaning from what they read and write. “Constructing meaning promotes motivation by assisting children in making sense of their learning-the tasks in which they engage and the strategies they employ” (Paris & Byrnes, 1989, p. 669). With this approach, children find that literacy allows them to construct purposes for reading that are entertaining, informational, and useful. Students will associate reading and writing with thinking, challenge, and personal growth (Turner & Paris 1995).

With natural literacy, assessment is focused on whether students have achieved the purpose, used good tactics and if they tried to do their best. This creates a positive feeling about effort, ownership, achievement and
responsibility (Turner & Paris 1995).

PARENTAL/COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

With class size increasing in most schools, children are getting less and less individual time with their classroom teacher. This increased class size makes it even more difficult for first through third grade students to attain the goal of literacy. Children in the 1-3 classroom are not only focusing on becoming literate, but are learning many school and social skills that become a large focus for the young student entering a classroom for the first time. Because social and school skills are also being introduced, practiced, caring, helpful adults in the classroom provide needed individual attention to young students.

Therefore, parents and community volunteers have become a valuable resource in the elementary classroom. According to Hewison (1985) “Parental help leads to improved reading performance” (p.48). Flood and Lapp (1995) state, “Every parent benefits from time spent in a classroom. When they participate in their children’s education, they acquire insights about their children, the culture of their peers, and the school curriculum that help them to see relationships between their parenting practices and classroom practices” (p. 614). Parents are encouraged to tutor individual children at school. They are good at giving students extra attention, praise, and encouragement. Parents provide a valuable resource for both students and teachers (Flood and Lapp, 1995).

Parent involvement is particularly important in natural literacy because of the emphasis on the meaningfulness and functionality of reading and its goal of making lifelong readers. A strong home connection is a natural, necessary
element of this approach (Fredericks & Rasinski, 1990).

Other studies also point to the positive effects parents/volunteers can play in supporting readers. Parent involvement has become an accepted approach to ending reading failure (Hewison, 1985). “Effective family/school partnerships may very well be essential for helping more students reach the ambitious education goals that the nation has set for the year 2000.” (Solomon, 1991, p. 359). “Research on parental involvement consistently shows that parents can make a difference in the quality of their children’s education if districts and schools enable them to become involved in a variety of ways (p. 360).

PARENT AND VOLUNTEER WORKSHOPS

Parent and volunteer workshops are some of the ways schools can build stronger partnerships between parents and teachers so that children’s learning can take place both at home and in the classroom.

According to Solomon (1991), the state of California has adopted a policy on parent involvement which states that programs should be designed to:

1. help parents develop parenting skills and foster conditions at home that support learning.
2. provide parents with the knowledge of techniques designed to assist children in learning at home.
3. provide access to and coordinate community and support services for children and families.
4. promote clear two-way communication between the school and the family regarding school programs and children’s progress.
5. involve parents, after appropriate training, in instructional and support roles at school; and
6. support parents as decision makers and develop their leadership in governance, advisory and advocacy roles (pp.361).

Parents can be more involved in their own child's education as well as helping other children in the classroom when parent involvement programs can be linked to support reading strategies which reinforce learning in the classroom.

READING STRATEGIES

The main focus of the parent/volunteer workshop (Support a Reader!) will be to introduce whole literacy strategies to parents and other volunteers that support readers in the classroom. What are strategies? Strategies are ideas, questions and plans that help a reader make meaning from print. Strategies are often confused with "word attack skills", or phonics. Strategies are the thoughtful plans or operation readers use while involved in the reading process; these plans are activated, adjusted, and modified for each new reading situation (Routman-1991). According to Don Holdaway (The Foundations of Literacy, 1979),

The major difference between a "skill" and a "strategy" is the coordinating control of a human mind operating in purposeful, predictive, and self-correcting ways. The major difference, then, between "skills teaching" and "strategy teaching" concerns the presence or absence of self-direction on the part of the learner. In skills teaching the teacher tells the learner what to do and then "corrects" or "marks" the
response. In strategy teaching the teacher induces the learner to behave in an appropriate way and encourages the learner to confirm or correct his own responses... (in Routman, 1991, p.40).

The good reader develops personal strategies that use all three major cueing systems (semantic, syntactic and graphophonic) to make sense of print. These readers develop a personal awareness of the strategies they use during different situations.

Paired Reading

Paired reading begins with a child selecting a book or other reading material she would like to read. The parent or volunteer reads the text simultaneously with the child. The adult paces their reading of the text to fit the child’s. The child does not echo what the parent or volunteer is reading, they read it together. When the child feels ready to read the text alone, she gives the adult an agreed upon signal. The reading cycle moves from duet to solo and back to duet/solo based on the child’s comfort level.

Paired reading seems to be more successful than reading aloud with the parent/volunteer as listener. The child may feel pressure to perform as a reader and may feel unable to carry out the task competently and independently. Listening to a child read does not demonstrate to the child that reading is an event in which meaning is interactively and socially constructed. The focus of reading then becomes a solitary task. (Hayden 1995/96).

This is an compelling reason to equip parents and volunteers with strategies to help the young reader that reaffirms reading as a meaning making
activity. When parents and volunteers are empowered with strategies and resources, they are then able to support learning strategies that are similar to those in the classroom.

Toomey (1993) reviewed over 40 studies of parents hearing their children read at home. These studies indicated this practice may not result in literacy gains, particularly for the at-risk reader, unless parents have received some training in specific procedures to assist their children during the reading sessions. His review indicates that low competence students may need more than a listening parent to improve their reading abilities (Hayden, 95/96).

Based on the theoretical framework that maintains that parents scaffold their children's literacy development by reading to them and supported by the research that addresses the centrality of meaning in the reading process, the strategies contained within the paired reading approach encourage less able readers to move from supportive (reading with parent) to independent reading as parents and children share texts together over a relatively short period of time. (Hayden, 95/96 p.335).

Parents and volunteers need to create an environment where readers are supported through so they can make meaning from print.

Shared Reading

Shared reading is another natural literacy strategy that helps invite children to become readers. During shared reading an adult and a child or group of children spend unhurried and uninterrupted time viewing, reading and sharing a book together. Children are able to act and be seen as readers as they participate in or opt in and out of reading while the adult ensures that the
author's message and the flow of meaning are maintained throughout the book (Mooney 1994). During the first reading of a book in shared reading, the aim is to help children think like an author and act like a reader. Children unfold the author's message and develop confidence in how the text works that allow them to read along with you (Mooney 1994).

Mooney goes on to state many of the benefits of shared reading with children of any age, but especially in the early stages of their reading and writing development. Shared reading provides opportunities for you to:

1. create a welcoming and supportive climate which encourage the children to participate in supported reading.
2. acknowledge the children's contributions as those of readers and writers.
3. provide opportunities for children to participate in a variety of ways.
4. show the roles of author, illustrator and reader in creating and recreating meaning.
5. model strategies that children may soon require in guided and independent reading.
6. introduce an increased range of forms of writing and illustrative styles in a supportive setting and without overt expectations.
7. draw children into the reading through the intrigue, fun and excitement of the book.
8. introduce new, memorable and more complex language.
9. increase familiarity with book language through texts beyond the children's level of independent reading.
10. model fluent, expressive reading that creates interest and invites participation.

11. demonstrate how readers decide the most appropriate response to a text (pp. 71).

Discussion and comments during shared reading can demonstrate predictive and confirming strategies a reader uses to maintain the flow of the text. Examples of open-ended questions that encourage children to make meaning from their reading are as follows:

1. I wonder how _______ can get out of this predicament?
2. I hope the next page will tell me how . . .
3. I was really surprised when . . . Was that how you expected it to happen?
4. That was an unusual and surprising ending, wasn't it? What else could the author have done?

"Most questions and discussion starters at the end of the reading should engender thought or discussion with the group rather than "an answer" for you. You are modeling how readers think rather than inviting a response" (Mooney, p.72).

Contextual Reading Strategies
(what to do when you come to a word you don't know)

Readers need to be able to use a variety of specific strategies or cues to use when they come to word when reading and "get stuck". Newman and Church
(1990) explain that everyone uses graphophonic clues (symbol/sound) when reading but these aren't the only clues good readers use. We use a variety of other language cues: cues about meaning (semantic cues) and cues about the structure of a particular text passage (syntactic cues). We use pictorial cues and bring our general knowledge about the subject into play.

According to Routman (1991),

When readers get stuck, the teacher needs to help them to help themselves by providing prompts. Always the message to the child is, 'How can you help yourself?' The child then learns that he is responsible for doing the reading work and that the teacher will help him when necessary" (p. 42).

Routman goes on to state specific strategies to use when a child comes to a word they don't know and gets stuck:

* Remind the reader to start the sentence again. ("Try it again.")

* Ask the reader if what he just said made sense. ( "Does that make sense?" (semantics) "Does that sound right?" (structure)

* Tell the reader to skip the word and read on to the end of the sentence. ( "Now, what is the word?")

* Encourage the reader to take an educated guess. ( "What do you think it could be?")

* Remind the reader to take a careful look at the word. ("Could it be...?"
  What would you expect to see at the beginning of ...? "What would you expect to see at the end of ...?" "What do you see here?")

* Ask if he can find the word on a previous page. ("Where else did you see that word?") (p. 42)
Natural literacy teachers do teach symbol/sound correspondence but not as something separate from actual reading and writing. Teachers might offer students some symbol/sound hints at an appropriate moment after they have successfully figured out an unfamiliar word.

For children to become literate, many need individual attention from supportive adults. Parents and volunteers desperately need ideas and strategies to help support beginning readers in the process of obtaining meaning from print. When parents and volunteers are empowered with strategies, they are then able to support reading in the classroom. This workshop will be a beginning step in bridging the gap so parents and volunteers can become a useful addition in supporting the classroom teacher in the process of helping children become lifelong readers.
CHAPTER THREE
Goals, Outcomes, and Limitations

GOALS

This project develops a school-wide, hands-on workshop for volunteers in the 1-3 classroom where a natural literacy philosophy and strategies will be shared and practiced in a fun, non-threatening environment. Classroom volunteers will be equipped with strategies that help support beginning readers in the classroom. Classroom volunteers can then become partners with the teacher to help students develop a love for reading and become lifelong readers.

Volunteers want to be an effective partner in helping children become literate. To be effective, they must share and contribute to the philosophical climate in the classroom. When strategies used in the classroom are shared with the volunteers, they begin to understand and support the philosophical climate in the classroom.

OUTCOMES

One of the expected outcomes of this project is to empower parents and volunteers with natural literacy reading strategies where children are encouraged to make personal meaning from what they are reading in natural and authentic ways. When volunteers are equipped with natural literacy strategies, they can help support beginning readers in the primary classroom.

Another outcome of this project is for parents and volunteers to lend
support to the classroom teacher in grades one through three. When teachers and parents/volunteers work together using the same philosophy, children will benefit as readers from their combined support and guidance. Lastly, but perhaps the most important expected outcome of this project is for parents and volunteers to be more effective partners in helping first through third graders develop success and a lifelong love of reading in and out of the classroom.

LIMITATIONS

One of the main limitations of this project is the limited target population of its volunteers. This project's focus population is middle and upper income families with school aged children and middle and upper income seniors. The middle income families and seniors must have one adult member who does not work outside the home or who has flexible work hours. They must be able to volunteer at least 1 hour a week in the classroom on a regular basis.

A second limitation is teachers and administrators will need to support the idea of having parents and seniors be a part of their classroom. Teachers must be willing to spend time introducing volunteers to their own classroom philosophy and then support the volunteer as needed.

A third limitation is the volunteers commitment to change. The whole literacy philosophy and strategies introduced in the workshop might be completely different than the way the volunteers learned to read themselves. Volunteers must be able to commit to a "new view of reading" and be willing to accept and support readers with whole literacy strategies.
APPENDIX

VOLUNTEER STRATEGIES WORKSHOP:
SUPPORT A READER!

INTRODUCTION

In my school's community, we are fortunate to have parents, seniors, and others expressing an interest in volunteering their time working in the classroom with individual students. Unlike teachers, many of these senior and parent volunteers have not stepped into an elementary classroom in decades. They are unfamiliar with strategies and techniques that help support young readers.

I wanted the volunteers to be truly helpful in their effort to support readers in my classroom. As volunteers came into my classroom, I ended up spending a lot of time with each of them, sharing my philosophy about reading, and the reading strategies I was encouraging my class to use. I would share bits and pieces of these ideas and strategies with different volunteers throughout the week. I began to realize that if the ideas and strategies of my reading program were shared with my volunteers in a workshop during non-school hours, I would not only be saving myself some time, but I could do a more through job. If I could equip volunteers with natural literacy strategies it would help build successful readers in my classroom. The volunteers could be more effective partners in helping my readers become successful and develop a lifelong love of reading both in and out of the classroom.

This is how Support a Reader! came into being. I realized that in order for parents and volunteers to support a classroom literacy program, it is important for them to understand the philosophical climate the teacher has established in the classroom. This helps clarify the goals so everyone,
students, teacher, and volunteers are working in the same direction.

The strategies I intend to introduce and practice with parents and volunteers will emphasize a whole language or natural literacy approach. Regie Routman (1988) defines genuine literacy as "using reading, writing, thinking and speaking daily in the real world with options, appreciation and meaningful purposes in various settings and with other people" (p.14). She goes on to say that for children to become "actively" literate, school's must change the method which we teach reading and writing.

When literacy is taught naturally, the activities or tasks are open-ended. In open-tasks, students are usually in control of not only how they carry out the task, but what the outcome will be. Open tasks create an environment in which children can learn reading and writing as a natural process. Open-ended tasks positively affect children's motivation and self-esteem when learning to read.

Parent involvement is particularly important in natural literacy because of the emphasis on the meaningfulness and functionality of reading and its goal of making lifelong readers. A strong home connection is a natural, necessary element of this approach (Fredericks & Rasinski, 1990).

The main focus of the parent/volunteer workshop (Support a Reader!) will be to introduce natural literacy strategies to parents and other volunteers. What are strategies? Strategies are ideas, questions, and plans that help a reader make meaning from print. Strategies are plans that readers use while involved in the reading process which the reader adjusts, activates and modifies for each new reading situation (Routman, 1991). Parents and volunteers will be introduced to paired reading, shared reading, and contextual reading strategies (what to do when you come to a word you don't know).
This workshop can be adapted for 2-3 parents/volunteers from one classroom or for a school-wide workshop. Please adapt it to meet your own specific needs in your classroom or at your school site.

I hope your parents/volunteers become empowered with natural literacy strategies and then are able to support readers in your classroom and at your school site. This workshop is meant to be only a beginning step in bridging the gap so parents and volunteers can be a useful addition in supporting the classroom teacher in the process of helping children become lifelong readers.
Support a Reader!

Agenda for Presenters

1. Thank You and Introduction of Presenters

2. Outline Philosophy and define reading using 3 approaches-decoding, skills and natural literacy.

3. Non-English Reading Experience-Hand out #1
   a. Discussion-What did you do to try to figure it out? List on chart paper

4. Introduce Contextual Strategies:
   a. Ask which parents/volunteers are readers. Ask what they do when they come to a word they don’t know when reading. List on chart paper. Add strategies that are not listed by parents- Handout #2

5. Introduce Paired reading -Handout #3 - practice /questions

6. Introduce Shared reading-Handout #4 - practice/questions

7. Discussion/Additional Questions

8. Evaluation-Handout #5

9. Complete form listing when they are available to volunteer-Handout #6 (emphasize the importance of their volunteering-teachers and children will be looking forward and planning for their arrival-please try call the teacher at school the day before if they cannot volunteer that week.)
Support a Reader!

Agenda for Volunteers

1. What is Reading? Three approaches to teaching reading.
   a. Decoding Approach
   b. Skills Approach
   c. Natural Literacy Approach

2. Non-English Reading Experience.

3. What are Strategies? Examples of ways to support beginning readers.


5. Practice

6. Discussion and Questions

7. Evaluation

8. Volunteer Sign-up
Reading Approaches

Decoding Approach

One approach to teaching reading is the decoding approach. Within the decoding approach, the smaller units of sound are introduced starting with the separate sounds produced from letters and moving into larger chunks of sound created from words. Children learn letter/sound correspondence so they can sound-out or “decode” words. The alphabet is taught along with the sounds the letters make and phonics rules are learned and emphasized. The students use these phonics rules in reading when they come to a word they don’t know- they apply the appropriate phonic rule to sound out the word. The goal is to sound out every word correctly. Flash cards of letters and sounds, phonics worksheets, and commercial phonics programs are examples of the decoding method.

Skills Approach

Another approach to teaching reading is the skills approach. Whole word recognition is the focus through children learning to recognize basic sight words such as I, and, the, tree, dog, and apple. This sight word approach also assumes that once these basic sight words are identified, meaning will take care of itself. Language and reading are taught from parts to whole like the decoding approach, but larger units of meaning and individual words are emphasized rather than sounds. Word recognition is the focus. Round robin
Another approach to teaching reading is the whole language or natural literacy approach. Learning language is thought of as a natural process of communication where learning takes place from the whole to parts, in and out, through and beyond reading and writing just as it did when children learn to talk. Language is taught as a natural process of communication. Making personal meaning out of what is being read is more important than pronouncing every word correctly.

The goal in natural literacy is for children to make meaning of what they are reading and writing. The students are taught strategies to predict (what they think is going to happen?), confirm (did it happen the way I thought it would?), and integrate (relate it to their personal experience) knowledge to gain meaning from their reading.

Students are encouraged to choose books, magazines, articles, and stories based on their own interests. They begin to take ownership for their own learning and to trust themselves as learners. When students are given choices in their reading and writing, based on their own interests, they develop more confidence and are more willing to take risks to participate, engage, and stretch themselves as learners.

Another goal of natural literacy is for children to use “active literacy” in their everyday life, not just in school. Regie Routman (1988) defines genuine literacy
as using reading, writing, thinking, and speaking daily in the real world with options, appreciation and meaningful purposes in various settings and with other people.

Using poems, songs, stories, and big books, a child in the classroom interacts with meaningful text in the same way the preschooler interacted with text while being read a bedtime story. Each word is pointed to as the text is read and the child is encouraged to join in when they are ready. Individual books are available for the child to read later. In this way, children use language that is meaningful, has purpose, and is used naturally-in whole units, not in small units.

Learning is experienced from the whole to the part, so as the need for skills and strategies arise, children are given mini-lessons. Edelsky (1987) has termed this type of information FYIs-For Your Information. An FYI is information presented briefly at a time when it is relevant to the needs of the children. Buddy reading, poems, songs, stories, big books, and magazines are examples of natural literacy.
Non-English Reading Experience

Goal: For adults to experience the difficulty beginning readers encounter when they are asked to find their name tag or desk when they enter school.

Preparation:

1. Choose a computer font to print English into non-English.
   (ie: Times and Cairo Macintosh fonts)
2. Assemble a list of those parents attending the workshop.
3. On the computer print the names in English, then change the names into non-English using the font.
4. On the computer, type the nursery rhyme in English, then change the nursery rhyme into non-English using the same font the name tags were printed in.

Procedure:

1. Before the workshop begins, tape the name tags up on the front chalkboard.
2. Tell the audience that you are going to give them the opportunity to be beginning readers again. Explain that each of them has a name tag up on the front board, and that you would like them to come up and choose their tag. Discuss with the parents some of the strategies that they can use to decide which name tag is theirs. They can look at the number of letters, or after one person has found their tag, they can use information about the letters to find their name.
3. After parents have chosen their name tag, tell them that the
information that they have gained from the name tags (the characters that stand for each letter of the alphabet) will be helpful in reading.

4. Place the nursery rhyme that is printed in non-English on the overhead. Give the parents a few minutes to work together in figuring out how to read the nursery rhyme.

5. Discuss the strategies that they used to figure out the non-English story. The parents will tell you that they used background information of the English alphabet to read the story.

6. Compare these strategies to the strategies that a beginning reader used when asked to read a name tag or a book. The strategies that a beginning reader uses are their knowledge of the alphabet, the pictures in the literature they are exposed to, and background knowledge from their experiences.

7. Compare beginning reading to beginning language. The parents can recall how their child began to speak. Explain that beginning reading is developmental just as beginning speaking is developmental. Explain that all children develop at different rates, and that children in school are in the same class but that they are at different levels of development.

8. Explain to the parents that their role in beginning reading is the same as it was when their child began to speak. Parents praise the achievements and lovingly encourage the child in other areas. The self-esteem of the child is the most important factor. The child will sense the parents' frustration. Once the child feels like a failure, the parents have an even harder job of working with a beginning reader.
Handout #1

Mary had a little lamb,
It's fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to go.
It followed her to school one day,
which was against the rules,
the children laughed,
to see a lamb at school.
READING STRATEGIES

What are strategies? Strategies are ideas, questions and plans that help a reader make meaning from print. Strategies are often confused with "word attack skills", or phonics. Strategies are the thoughtful plans or operations readers use while involved in the reading process; these plans are activated, adjusted, and modified for each new reading situation (Routman-1991).

Reading Strategies

or

"What can you do when you come to a word you don't know?"

* Remind the reader to start the sentence again.

"Try it again."

* Ask the reader if what they just said made sense.

"Does that make sense?" "Does that sound right?"

* Tell the reader to skip the word and read on to the end of the sentence.

"Now, what is the word?"

* Encourage the reader to take an educated guess.

"What do you think it could be?"

* Remind the reader to take a careful look at the word.

"Could it be . . .?" What would you expect to see at the beginning of ...? "What would you expect to see at the end of ...?" "What do you see here?"

* Ask if the reader can find the word on a previous page.

"Where else did you see that word?"
Handout #3

Paired Reading

1. The reader selects a book or other reading material they would like to read.

2. The parent or volunteer reads the text simultaneously with the child. The parent or volunteer paces the reading of the text to fit the child's. The reader does not echo what the parent or volunteer is reading, they read it together. When the reader feels ready to read the text alone, an agreed upon signal (ex. tap on the knee) is used.

3. The reading cycle moves from duet to solo and back to duet/solo based on the child's comfort level.

Shared Reading

Shared reading takes place when an adult and a child or group of children spend unhurried and uninterrupted time viewing, reading and sharing a book together. Shared reading creates a welcoming and supportive climate which encourage the children to participate in supported reading.

Discussion and comments during shared reading can demonstrate predictive and confirming strategies a reader uses to maintain the flow of the text. Examples of open-ended questions that encourage children to make meaning from their reading are as follows:

1. I wonder how ______ can get out of this predicament?
2. I hope the next page will tell me how . . .
3. I was really surprised when... Was that how you expected it to happen?

4. That was an unusual and surprising ending, wasn’t it? What else could the author have done?

   Questions and discussion starters at the end of the reading should engender thought or discussion with the group rather than “an answer” for you. You are modeling how readers think while reading.
SUPPORT A READER!
Workshop Evaluation

To help us meet your needs better, please fill out the questions below:

A. List 2 pluses from the workshop (things you liked, something that got your attention, something that made sense etc.)
   1. 
   2. 

B. List 2 wishes from the workshop (things we should change next time, something we should add or delete, etc.)
   1. 
   2. 

Other Comments:

Name(optional)__________________________________________

Yes, I am willing to help volunteers at the next Support A Reader! workshop
No, I cannot help out at this time. (please circle one)
SUPPORT A READER!
SIGN UP SHEET FOR VOLUNTEERS

Name________________________ Child's name________________________

Phone_______________________
Child's grade and Teacher_______________________________
The best time/day for me to volunteer in the classroom is:
(please write in a beginning and ending time)
Mondays:________________________

Tuesdays:________________________

Wednesdays:______________________

Thursdays:________________________

Fridays:__________________________
I prefer to volunteer in grade: (k-3)
_______(1st choice) Teacher___________
_______(2nd choice) Teacher___________
Comments/Questions:________________________________________________
________________________________________________
________________________________________________
THANKS FOR SUPPORTING A READER!
REFERENCES


