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Using whole language strategies with learning disabled children

Turi Moffitt Lindquist

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USING WHOLE LANGUAGE STRATEGIES
WITH LEARNING DISABLED CHILDREN

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 Option

By
Turi Moffitt Lundquist
June, 1993
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April 12, 1993

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Abstract

In this project, I have developed a handbook for primary special education teachers that will help them implement whole language into their instructional curriculum. This handbook is set up in two parts. The first part provides different models of what a special education whole language classroom looks like, including physical appearance and materials that would be needed in such a classroom.

The learning environment is an essential element in the learning process for learning disabled children. No longer should teachers and children be carelessly placed in a learning environment that just happens to be vacant at that hour of the day, or in a space resembling a closet in the basement. The resource room can no longer be that "other room for those other children" but must look like any other appropriately designed language classroom in the school (Hollingsworth & Reutzel, 1988, p. 480).

The second part of the handbook includes example lessons for integrating each of the four Language Arts: Listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each section has simple, easy-to-use lessons that a teacher new to whole language can use immediately, with little or no preparation time involved.
Acknowledgements

This project is dedicated to Dr. Kathy O'Brien, whose support will always be there when I teach.
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Introduction

Although whole language is used successfully in many regular education classrooms, most special education and resource teachers have yet to try whole language in their classrooms. There are several reasons for this.

Teachers of children with learning disabilities are taught their students can only learn information in small chunks. Direct Instruction, a widely accepted decoding model, (Carnine & Silbert, 1979) is very specific that students be taught no more than seven bits of information at one time. Any more information will be confusing to students. Gersten and Dimino (1990) agreed that "...explicit step-by-step instruction is optimal for at-risk students" (p. 13).

Special education teachers are also concerned that "real" language found in authentic literature will be too hard for their students to comprehend. Without precise, controlled vocabulary, students will find the reading too difficult.

Many of these same teachers believe teaching phonics is the key to "at-risk" students learning to read. The basic premise, according to Farris and
Andersen (1990) is once students know the parts they will be able to combine the parts to form the whole.

Also, classroom instruction has been dictated by textbook guides and publishing companies for so long, many teachers believe they are not allowed to come up with original ideas or write their own lesson plans for their students. Teachers trained in the Direct Instruction technique (Carnine & Silbert, 1979) are given scripts to use with their students, and no deviation from what is written in the script is allowed. Yet no one is better equipped than the classroom teacher to deal with information on what is happening in their own classroom and what their own students need.

Recently, research presenting an alternative view has begun to surface. This research shows how whole language and literature-based programs can be used successfully with at-risk and learning disabled students. According to Salvage and Brazee (1991), "It is long past time that special educators recognize this research in literacy education and begin to explore its significance and relevance for themselves..." (p. 365).

This newest research shows whole language strategies and literature-based programs actually work in special education classes and with at-risk students.
Carbo (1987) stated that "In recent years, the whole language approach to teaching reading has been one of the most successful reading programs for primary school children" (p. 199). Children with learning disabilities have a great need for reading and writing experiences and teachers who use whole language help their students to receive authentic and whole communication experiences. "In effect, the child is learning by doing" (Tefft-Cousin & Richeck, 1992, p. 8). This is consistent with the whole language theory of teaching from whole to part. Goodman (1988) found that "authentic, sensible, and functional language is the easiest to read and to learn to read" (p. 8). This fits with the whole language belief that reading should be taught using real literature, not controlled vocabulary passages.

Farris and Andersen (1990) stated that a change to a literature-based reading program for students with reading problems could result in "the improvement of self-esteem and a positive attitude towards reading" (p. 8). They also found that motivation for reading increases when teachers use a whole language program.

Carbo (1987) stated that the kinds of reading programs that work for poor readers are programs that
accommodate students' global, tactile, and kinesthetic strengths. "Youngsters with global reading styles are whole-to-part learners" (p. 198). This is another attribute of the whole language philosophy.

With all the research that has inspired regular education teachers to make whole language a reality in their classrooms, the goal of this project is to inspire reluctant special education teachers to get their feet wet. It is time these teachers start using some elements of whole language in their classrooms, time to give whole language a try.

The purpose of this project is to develop a handbook for all primary teachers of at-risk students, whether they be special education, resource, or regular education teachers. The goal in developing this handbook is to help these educators understand the philosophy of whole language and to give them some strategies they can use immediately and easily in their own classrooms.
Statement of the Problem

Children with learning difficulties often come to school with a built-in feeling of failure based on their past experiences. One aspect of whole language that would greatly benefit students with learning disabilities is the idea of focusing on what students are already doing successfully. "Rather than trying to identify deficiencies, the whole language educator seeks to uncover what the student already knows about language usage, reading strategies, and the conventions of written language" (Salvage & Brazee, 1991, p. 357).

If more special education and resource teachers could use whole language in their classrooms, they would help these students learn they are already successful in many areas and that reading and writing are simply extensions of the language they are already using. Hollingsworth and Reutzel (1988) found "the solution to the problem for many learning disabled children is to put language together again for the LD learner and help him rediscover the meaningful relationships that exist in our language" (p. 487).
Theoretical Foundations of the Project

At the present time, there are three distinct theoretical views of reading, lined along a continuum. On one end is the decoding, or phonics model. This approach is based on the philosophy that language is learned from part to whole. Individual sounds and matching individual letters are dealt with separately. "Reading is the mechanical skill of decoding, or turning the printed symbols into the sounds which are language" (Harste & Burke, 1980, p. 3). Once students have learned these sound/symbol relationships they will be able to understand the meaning of what they read.

In the middle of the continuum is the second theoretical view, called the skills model. This approach is also based on the philosophy that language is learned from part to whole. Rather than using sound/symbol relationships, practitioners of the skills model believe that the four processes of language, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, are discrete skills which can be taught separately. These instructors develop a hierarchy of isolated skills in vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension. Reading stories contain controlled vocabulary and students often study the vocabulary words first, out of context of the story.
On the other end of the reading continuum is the whole language model. In this theoretical view the function of language is to obtain meaning. This model is based on the philosophy that language is learned from whole to part. In whole language, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are considered interdependent and interactive with each other (Harste & Burke, 1980). "Reading and writing are viewed as whole processes, not compilations of isolated skills that are mastered separately and then put together" (Salvage & Brazee, 1991, p. 357).

Until recently, special education teachers have been influenced most by the decoding and skills reading models. Traditionally, the reductionist view of special education has been the basic premise that once students know the parts, they will be able to combine the parts to form a whole (Farris & Anderson, 1990).

This project will offer a contrasting approach, based on the whole language theory. "Whole language proponents decry the emphasis on skill sheets and instruction in discrete comprehension or word-attack skills. They feel that reading instruction should be more spontaneous, more authentic, more integrated, more fun" (Gersten & Dimino, 1990, p. 2).
Literature Review

Recent research has established that special education teachers who employ whole language in their classrooms find it effective with at-risk students. This literature review will cover five aspects important for special educators making a transition from traditional methods of teaching to a whole language program.

Limitations discovered by this growing body of research within the traditional curriculum for at-risk students will be reviewed first. Next the review will demonstrate how researchers established whole language as a successful alternative to traditional curriculum. The third aspect will discuss the time frames researchers feel are necessary for implementing whole language into one's classroom. The fourth aspect will explain the collaboration and support needed to begin implementing a whole language curriculum. Finally, this review will examine the successes that recent research has established using whole language with at-risk students.
Limitations of the Traditional Curriculum

According to recent research, traditional special education methods often look for the problem and the solution to teaching at-risk children to read within the children themselves (Tefft-Cousin & Richeck, 1992). The common belief has been that a language-learning disability is viewed as something innately wrong with the child (Goodman, 1986). Carbo (1987), stated there was an unspoken presumption in our schools, "...that there is one right way to teach children to read - and that there is something inherently wrong with any student who cannot learn to read by that method" (p. 198).

This concept of one right way to teach a child began to be questioned in the early 1970's (Gersten & Dimino, 1990). According to Carbo (1987), research has shown that the most common approaches to teaching reading in the United States are ineffective for many students. Routman (1991) felt there were very few true learning disabled students. "We have made them learning disabled by focusing on their deficits, instead of their strengths" (p. 376). Gersten and Dimino (1990) agreed, stating,
Year after year students placed in low reading groups receive too much instruction in isolated skills and sight words...at the expense of comprehensive instruction. Low achieving students rarely have the experience of sustained reading. The major failure in conventional reading instruction is that students don't know why they are doing these exercises, and are both bored and frustrated with the material they read (pp. 4-5).

Research indicates many at-risk students experience such failure with traditional reading instruction; they become afraid to try. Learning disabled students are so conscious about giving the "correct" answer they tend to be hesitant about speaking (Farris & Anderson, 1990). According to Tefft-Cousin and Richek (1992), many other special needs students tend to focus on decoding to such an extent they pay no attention to the meaning of what they are reading. "These students may know their phonics skills, but their meaning does not make sense" (p. 6).

Whole Language as a Successful Curriculum Alternative

Current research indicates that whole language proponents believe there are many alternative strategies for teaching reading to at-risk students. Instead of looking for the problem within the child, one should look at the potential inadequacies of a particular program, philosophy, or practice (Goodman, 1986). The at-risk student should not be seen as deficient, but
rather as emerging and developing along a continuum (Salvage and Brazee, 1991). Carbo (1987) found instructional practices that force students to learn their reading-style weaknesses will produce boredom, failure, and a lack of self-esteem, while approaches that focus on students' reading style strengths will increase their self-confidence and their reading achievement. Pinnell (1989) agreed, adding,

The kind of curriculum that has evolved is rich in opportunities for students to experience and use written language in meaningful ways. This whole language approach provides a contrast to the kind of "bottom-up" curriculum that focuses primarily on small language parts such as letters, sounds, and words. Whole language approaches are based on the idea that children are better able to build on their strengths when they are engaged in talking, reading, and writing that are whole, meaningful, and relevant to them (p. 163).

In a strong statement aimed towards educators who are still holding onto traditional methodology, Carbo (1987) wrote, "Parents, educators, administrators, and legislators are blatantly ignoring the facts, the research, and the consensus of experts about how young children learn and how best to teach them" (p. 200).

According to this new body of research, whole language is a strategy that will work well with at-risk students.
In the past few years, an ever increasing number of reading specialists (Harste, Goodman, Routman) – and some state departments of education – have decided that whole language approaches to teaching reading are the answer to the problems of at-risk students. Proponents of whole language decry the emphasis on skill sheets and instruction in discrete comprehension and word attack skills. They feel that reading instruction should be more spontaneous, more authentic, more integrated, and more fun (Gersten & Dimino, 1990, p. 2).

Researchers have found that when using a whole language approach, even children with severe learning disabilities receive authentic and whole communication experiences. "In effect, the child is learning by doing" (Tefft-Cousin & Richeck, 1992, p. 8).

According to the research, rather than trying to identify a student's deficiencies, the whole language teacher tries to uncover what the student already knows about print, text, language usage, reading strategies, and the convention of written language. Whole language educators focus on what students can do as readers and writers (Robbins, 1990, Tefft-Cousin & Richeck, 1992, and Salvage & Brazee, 1991). Carbo (1987) stated that reading programs for young children should incorporate holistic reading approaches and involve the tactile and kinesthetic modalities of the learner. Many at-risk students learn best using this global strategy.

"Youngsters with global reading styles are whole-to-part
learners" (p. 198). Teaching whole-to-part is a major component of whole language, a statement with which Hollingsworth and Reutzel (1988) agreed. They felt that at-risk students learn through their collective experiences, which are best served with the use of a holistic learning model. "Under a holistic model the emphasis...is shifted toward [a student's] strengths and ability" (p. 479).

Researchers believe a major goal of whole language is to bring a sense of wonder and joy back into reading instruction for at-risk students. The whole language classroom fosters respect for what children already know. By connecting students' own life experiences to the experiences gained from their readings, the full integration of the whole language program takes place (D'Alessandro, 1990, Tefft-Cousin & Richek, 1992, Farris & Andersen, 1990, Robbins, 1990). This integration is best achieved when reading, writing, listening, and speaking are taught as a whole, and not broken down into discrete skills. Reading and writing should be viewed as whole processes, not isolated skills that are mastered separately and then put together again (Salvage & Brazee, 1991). "The opportunities for mastery come from experiences in reading and writing.
Reading teaches skills; skills do not teach reading" (Tefft-Cousin & Richeck, 1992, p. 7).

This recent research stresses that whole language educators are not proposing to do away with phonics altogether. Students do need to spend some time on phonics skills in the early grades. However this instruction should always be integrated within the literature being read, never taught in isolation (Gersten & Dimino, 1990).

In whole language, reading and writing are seen as integrated processes. "Writing generates an enthusiasm for reading and reading creates the impetus for writing" (Robbins, 1990, p. 50). By surrounding children with a print-rich environment, they receive more exposure to reading and writing (Tefft-Cousin & Richeck, 1992).

**Time Line for Implementation**

The current body of research indicates there are two aspects to consider when implementing a whole language curriculum in a special education classroom. First, educators must concern themselves with learning whole language theory and starting to integrate it into their teaching style. Routman (1991) stated that the transition to a whole language classroom is a five to ten year process. By going slowly, and adding only one
new component or procedure at a time, teachers will gradually build their confidence and their competence.

This same procedure of moving slowly to build confidence is also important when trying out new strategies with learning disabled students. Salvage and Brazee (1990) reported that special education teachers often get discouraged when their students do not respond as quickly and as competently as regular education students. "The use of teaching strategies consistent with the whole language philosophy require considerable modification and extended periods of time for experimentation when working with special education students" (p. 356). These authors also remind special education teachers to be patient as they incorporate whole language into their classrooms. At-risk students will respond well to whole language teaching practices over a long period of time. "Learning disabled students need much more time, encouragement, and coaching to become independent literacy learners than most regular education students" (p. 364).

Collaboration and Support

Emerging research shows that there are two groups of people who need collaboration and support while the transition to whole language takes place. First are
teachers, who need the support of their staff, both other teachers and their administrators, as they take their beginning steps into new and unfamiliar territory. Robbins (1990) stated that support for teachers is essential as they implement whole language and the writing process in their classrooms. O'Neal (1991) agreed, saying support from the principal is critical. Lovitt (1990) found this principal support will come if teachers are impassioned and committed to student learning. "Leaders must provide time for teachers to learn more about literacy and to learn how to collaborate when planning programs for special youngsters" (O'Neal, 1991, p. 422).

Second is student support, which researchers say is critical as teachers of at-risk students begin to implement whole language strategies into their classrooms. Tefft-Cousin and Riecheck (1992) reported that students with special learning needs require more support from teachers and should receive more demonstrations of the uses of oral and written language than regular education students do. Salvage and Brazee (1990) felt the need for more time, structure, and safety in order for their students to feel comfortable in taking the risks necessary to learn. "Whole language
instruction is a process, not a particular method, and a teacher must share experiences with students, give up control, and celebrate risk-taking" (Gersten & Dimino, 1990, p. 5).

**Successes in Whole Language Teaching**

According to Farris and Andersen (1990) a change to a literature-based whole language reading program can result in an improvement of students' self-esteem and a more positive attitude toward reading. Gesso (1991) also found gains in students' self-esteem. An increased motivation to read was found by Farris and Andersen (1990), Gesso (1991), and Robbins (1990). Other successes include high scores in reading comprehension on the California Achievement Test, increases in the quantity and quality of books being written by students, improvement in students' ability to identify words, a drop in the number of students identified for special education services, lengthier sustained silent reading, improved concentration, decreased acting out during reading time, and greater interest in, and motivation, for reading (D'Alessandro, 1990, Robbins, 1990, Farris & Andersen, 1990, and Gesso, 1991). "Even older children who have experienced years of failure with reading and writing have been exposed to literature-based, whole
language programs with notable success" (Farris & Anderson, 1990, p. 8).

In order for educators of at-risk students to make a successful transition to a whole language classroom, they need to be familiar with the five major issues discussed in this review: First, the limitations of traditional special education curriculums; second, the successful use of whole language as an alternative to traditional curriculum; third, establishing a time line for implementing whole language strategies into special education classrooms; fourth, the collaboration and support needed to implement whole language strategies in classrooms; and fifth, the successes that are possible using whole language with learning disabled students. It is essential that educators of children in special education realize how all these factors work together to help at-risk students learn to be successful readers.
Goals and Limitations

Goals

The goal of this project is to provide a handbook for primary special education teachers. This handbook is to be used as a guide for teachers to help them implement whole language in their instructional curriculum.

This project is set up in two parts. The first part provides different models of what a special education whole language classroom looks like, including physical appearance and materials that would be needed in such a classroom.

The second part of the project includes example lessons for integrating the four Language Arts: Listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each section has simple, easy-to-use lessons that a teacher new to whole language can utilize immediately, with little or no preparation time involved.

It is the goal of this project to assist primary special education teachers in implementing whole language in their classrooms with easy, simple steps, that will cause the least amount of chaos during the change in their curricula.
Limitations

This project has several limitations: (a) the time-line precludes any post-implementation assessment of the project, (b) the lessons provided are in no way inclusive of a complete whole language curriculum, but rather just the beginning of such a program, (c) the activities are limited to the primary grades, and (d) it is aimed at special education teachers in just one district, although it might be applicable to other districts.
References


Appendices

USING WHOLE LANGUAGE STRATEGIES
WITH LEARNING DISABLED
CHILDREN
This handbook has been designed for any teacher of at-risk students, whether you are the resource teacher, the special education teacher, or the regular classroom teacher worried about your students who are at-risk. In this handbook you will find suggestions for implementing whole language strategies into your classroom, in easy, simple, steps. Consider it your "how-to" handbook for beginning to learn how to use whole language.

Setting Up a Whole Language Classroom

The first step in moving a classroom towards a whole language environment is knowing what is needed in the classroom. What does a whole language classroom look like? What materials are available to students? What kind of room environment should one see when children are working with whole language?

According to Tefft-Cousin and Richeck (1992), materials available in a whole language classroom would include trade books, poetry, comics, newspapers, magazines, and other literature found in real life. Children would be reading each other's writing, as well as writing and publishing their own pieces. "Materials such as magic markers, post-it notes, blank paper, magazines, written notes, and comic strips are as important as books" (p. 7).
Hollingsworth and Reutzel (1988) found that a well-designed whole language classroom will have a home-like feel, with tables, chairs, bean bag chairs, couches, and carpeted areas for silent reading. Another important aspect, according to the authors, is that the resource room should no longer be exclusively for learning disabled children. They hope the special education teacher would cycle average learners in and out of their resource room in order to lower the stigma attached to students who use the room.

Routman (1991) discussed the physical climate and the room arrangement. A whole language classroom has a distinctive look and feel to it. There are displays of children's work, books are everywhere, and the room is full of attractive, purposeful print. The room is arranged so students can read and write comfortably by themselves or in groups. Desks are clustered together so students can work with a partner or in small groups. There should also be a whole-group area, where the whole class can come together for shared reading and discussion. Appendix I shows two examples of the physical arrangement of a whole language classroom.

Different learning centers set up around the room are another aspect of a whole language classroom.
There should be a writing center with paper, pencils, markers, and book covers, so students have everything they need to write and publish their own stories. There should be a listening center for small groups of students (using headphones) to listen to cassette recordings of their favorite stories, while they follow along in their own copy of the book. There should be a classroom library with a cozy corner for silent reading. Other learning centers would depend on what is happening in the classroom. They might include math manipulatives, science projects, and other curriculum or theme areas of study.

How does one introduce all these elements in the room environment? One step at a time. The whole point of beginning to use whole language in the curriculum is to encourage students to be successful. In order to accomplish this, the instructor must feel successful as well. Routman (1991) said the transition to a whole language classroom is a five to ten year process. Pick some of the ideas listed above that interest you and begin. Do you have a classroom library? Then how about establishing a small, cozy reading area to go with it. Use a rocking chair, or a few bean bag chairs, or even a couple of throw pillows
on the floor. In addition to all those books in your classroom library, do you have any magazines? There are several magazines suited to primary students that are available for a subscription. Some, like *Highlights*, are Language Arts based, but there are many others, in different content areas, that would be a start to integrating reading throughout the curriculum. Appendix II has a partial list of magazines that would fit well into a classroom library.

Do your students have access to different types of paper for writing? Try a stack of trays, each with a different type of paper, and let students have unlimited access to it. How about a listening center? Already have one? Then why not try leaving out several different story tapes and book copies and let students choose their own story to listen to. Student choice is a powerful part of whole language learning. What about bulletin boards? Do you hassle yourself trying to keep each one up-to-date and meaningful? Why not turn one bulletin board completely over to students. Assign a different group to come up with a topic for the bulletin board each month. You may be surprised at the results.

These are just a few examples of some easy and practically painless ways to let whole language creep
into your room environment. As you begin to feel more comfortable with the small steps you have taken, you will be ready to tackle some of the bigger and more difficult steps.

Below you will find a partial list of items that will help you in transitioning your room.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materials needed</th>
<th>Yes, I have it</th>
<th>No, I need it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* chart paper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>* classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>library magazines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* writing paper of all sizes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* pencils</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* marking pens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* large unlined chart paper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* book sets with cassette tapes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* blank books for publishing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* glue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>* scissors</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Materials needed</td>
<td>Yes, I have it</td>
<td>No, I need it</td>
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<td>--------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>* tape recorder</td>
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<td>* tape</td>
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<tr>
<td>* stapler</td>
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<tr>
<td>* staples</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>* crayons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* rulers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>* construction paper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>* newsprint</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* post-it notes</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* couch, or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bean-bag chairs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or throw pillows</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* carpet</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As you can see, many of these materials are items you would already have available at your school. They may not have always been stored in your room, but in order for students to have access to them, they need to be in your room from now on. Many other items, such as carpeting, or a couch, can be found by asking parents for donations. Most parents are more than willing to help. In addition, there are books which can help you find free materials for your classroom. A partial list...
of these books can be found in the appendices.

The next section of this handbook will be devoted to strategies in the four areas of Language Arts: Speaking, listening, reading, writing. While these four areas have been divided into discrete parts for the convenience of this handbook, teachers must realize that in a whole language classroom it is almost impossible to divide strategies into parts this way. What is a writing lesson for one student may be a listening lesson for another. While one student is working on oral language by sharing, the other students are working on their listening skills as they listen. While a small group is listening to a story written by a student, that student is getting practice in reading aloud. So, although these parts are intended to help you understand how a whole language classroom works, do not be surprised when you start using these strategies to see the parts run together to form the "whole" in your whole language classroom.
Sample Lessons for Integrating the Four Language Arts: Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing.

Speaking - Oral Sharing

For some learning disabled students, oral responses are their only chance to participate in the classroom. Routman (1991) stated that a student who is unable to read and write should be allowed to take a test orally, dictating their answers to the teacher. These students need to know their verbal responses are just as valid and valued as written responses.

A simple way to begin is with sharing. Many teachers already have some form of sharing, or "show and tell" in their classrooms. An easy way to set this up is to have a different group share each day, so that sharing doesn’t become too long for students' attention spans.

Another easy way to get students to share is when the whole class is discussing a story they have just read. Instead of asking the usual questions and expecting students to raise their hands to answer, ask the question, give some wait time, and then ask the students to discuss their answer with the person sitting next to them. Then ask the pair to discuss their answers with another pair. For many students, this
informal group is much easier to talk to than trying to speak in front of the whole class.

Another good place for oral sharing is when the students need some ideas generated for journal writing. While some students discuss what they want to write about, others are developing and practicing good listening skills and getting ideas for their own writing. "Taking time for oral sharing promotes language development, inspires confidence, and gives reluctant writers possible topics from which to choose. Oral language is used as a tool for learning and is integral to successful journal writing" (Routman, 1991, p. 213).

Another forum for students to speak is when they have finished a written project and are ready to share it with others. Whether they read their story to the whole group or to a smaller group of peers, it is good practice and helps them to articulate and understand what they have written.

**Listening**

A simple way to get students to listen is to set up a listening center. Using a story, a cassette of the story, four headphones, and four copies of the story, students can listen to the story as it is read aloud to
them. A variation on this idea is to have students record the story themselves, then listen to their own recording as they follow along with the book.

Another good listening strategy is to have students read in pairs. Each student has a copy of the story. They sit next to each other, side by side, and take turns reading to each other. The first student reads the first page, then the other student reads the next page and so on, until they finish the story. The students must listen to their partner and follow along so they know when it is their turn to read.

Another opportunity for students to listen is when other students are sharing. Being a "good listening audience" is a practice in my classroom. Before students share they check their audience to make sure everyone is ready to listen. Those whose turn it is to speak know they should not start until they have a "good listening audience."

Reading

One of the easiest ways to incorporate real literature into a classroom is to read aloud to your students. "Teachers reading to students is an essential aspect of whole language, and observations of whole language classrooms reveal that a good deal of time is
spent with teachers reading to students" (Gersten & Dimino, 1990, p. 7). Farris and Andersen (1990) agree, stating, "A characteristic of literature-based whole language programs is that teachers regularly spend more time reading aloud to their students" (p. 9). Many teachers already read aloud to their classrooms, but they use read-aloud time as filler time. Whenever an extra ten or fifteen minutes crops up, they pick up the chapter book and read a chapter. It is essential that there be time set aside every day for teachers to be reading real literature to their students. Not just the book they are using during language arts time, and not just a book that fits in with the season, but a separate, real piece of literature that students expect to hear at the same time each day. Start scheduling twenty minutes of read-aloud time into your curriculum every day and you will be amazed at how many books you can read to your students over the course of a school year. To help you get started, Appendix IV has a partial list of read-aloud literature that is appropriate to use with primary children.

Another easy way to get students to read is to establish a daily time for sustained silent reading in your classroom. Sustained silent reading occurs when
everyone in the class, including the teacher, is reading to themselves for a certain amount of time.

Most learning disabled children after they have experienced success in reading will like to read for some part of the day in a quiet, informal area. This is especially true when they have learned to successfully read the stories and books that are available in the classroom" (Hollingsworth & Reutzel, 1988, p. 486).

Whether you call it S.S.R. (sustained silent reading), U.S.S.R. (uninterrupted sustained silent reading), or D.E.A.R. time (drop everything and read),

Quiet reading time of self-selected books is a desirable and appropriate alternative to workbooks and skills sheets. We no longer need to feel guilty that students are "just reading." Reading is probably the most worthwhile activity students can be doing (Routman, 1991, p. 42).

Writing

Journal writing is the simplest way to introduce students to a nonthreatening, supportive style of writing. Unfortunately for many at-risk students, writing has been another area in which they have experienced failure. "It is overwhelming for many special education students to have to integrate the whole writing process with the physical task of handwriting. They tend to be perfectionistic and to get bogged down with penmanship and mechanics" (Salvage & Brazee, 1991, p. 360).
Personal journals are so positive for students because they use them to write about whatever they choose. Since they are personal journals, their teacher is not correcting spelling or pointing out mistakes in grammar and punctuation. In my classroom we write in our journals (me too) every day for about ten minutes. The only constraint is that students must be writing something for ten minutes, even if they are only writing, "I can't think of anything to write about." They must write it down, not come to me and tell me about it. Once a week I collect the journals to read, looking only at content. Sometimes students ask me not to read a particular passage and I respect their request. The whole idea of this journal is to get students interested in, and used to, writing daily.

Another aspect about journal writing is there are so many variations on how it can be used. In addition to a student's personal journal, a dialogue journal can be a different way to help students expand their writing abilities. Using this type of journal, the student and the teacher carry on a "written conversation." Each student writes an entry, to which the teacher responds. The student can then respond to the teacher's writing, or start a different topic. Again, it is the content
only that the instructor needs to focus on, not spelling, or penmanship. Since responding to each students' dialogue journal does take a large amount of the instructor's time, it is suggested that only a small group of students use their dialogue journals each day. One group could write in their dialogue journal while the rest of the students are working in their personal journals.

A more formal journal is the literature log. In this type of journal, students write their reactions and respond to something they have read that day. The teacher can write a response to help extend what the student has expressed.

Another type of journal is called the learning log. In this journal, students reflect on what they have learned from a particular lesson or activity during the day. A learning log can help students focus on their experiences. They can also help the teacher by providing information about what the students are retaining from their lessons.

Journals can be used throughout the content areas. Their whole purpose is to get students used to writing down their thoughts, ideas, and feelings. The goal is to get students comfortable with their own writing,
rather than have writing time always be a struggle with perfection, every i dotted and every word spelled correctly.

How to incorporate whole language assessment

One of the major concerns of teachers transitioning to whole language is the matter of assessment and evaluation. In giving up the traditional skill sheets and discrete skills training, the instructor wonders what to base students' grades on. As with everything else that has been suggested in this handbook, evaluation must be taken slowly and one step at a time. As you become comfortable with what you are doing, so will you become comfortable with evaluating students in a new way.

The major goal of whole language assessment is evaluating a student's growth and progress. Evaluation is ongoing, and focuses on students' learning as a process. Both the teacher and the students observe not only what the students are learning, but also how they are learning. In order to evaluate this growth, various methods of authentic assessment can be used.

No single behavior, strategy, activity or task can provide a comprehensive picture of student learning. Only a variety of measures, examined carefully over a period of time, can give an accurate picture of a student's progress, strengths, and needs (Routman, 1991, p. 307).
Observation

One of the most informative means of assessment is teacher observation. Teachers can learn a great deal about their students by observing them while they are involved in any activity. When students are working in groups, a teacher can watch how they are interacting with other students and how they work together to problem solve. By watching students work independently, a teacher can see how they are processing their work. Teachers can often be more effective in determining how to help a student when they have watched the student work through the whole process, rather than just grading the end product.

Anecdotal Records

Anecdotal records are important to help teachers remember what they have observed. Not that teachers would spend time writing down every observation they see, but as certain information on student processing was repeated at different times during the year, an anecdotal record would be a reminder of that student's growth. For example, in my classroom, I use anecdotal records when my students are sharing to help me check on their oral language. I do not keep a record of every sharing time, but once a month I pull out my list of
computer printed student labels and just jot down the date and how the student presented the information. At the end of each reporting period, I have a running record of students' oral language abilities.

**Interaction**

Teacher interaction with students is very similar to observation, only, as teachers observe their students, they ask them questions, and have a short discussion about what the student is working on. This short conversation can tell the instructor a great deal about how students are responding to their assignment. Teachers can immediately give feedback on students' strengths, or help them if there is a need.

**Portfolios**

Student portfolios offer an excellent opportunity to show student growth over time. A portfolio should contain a student's writing in several content areas for the whole year. Samples might include finished stories involving the five-step writing process, works in progress which students chose not to publish, homework samples, oral reading miscues, and other documents which would show similar examples for the student throughout the year. In this way it is easy to show a student's growth over time.
**Journals**

Journals are another good source for showing students' growth in writing. Since personal journals are used throughout the year, a teacher can use them to chart students' growth over time. A dialogue journal would be especially valuable as it is another example of interaction between student and teacher.

In order for assessment to be effective, it needs to be authentic. Whole language teaching not only involves using holistic and meaningful teaching practices, but developing holistic and meaningful ways of assessing students as well. The methods listed above for evaluating students are only a partial list. There are others that can be used. However the evaluation techniques in this handbook are easy to implement in your classroom as you transition towards a more whole language environment. As you become successful using these assessment tools, you will be able to start looking at other authentic assessment tools to use.
Taken from *Investigations* by Routman.

Classroom Library Magazines

**Highlights for Children: Fun with a Purpose, and Hidden Pictures Magazine.**

2300 W. Fifth Avenue  
P. O. Box 269  
Columbus, OH 43272-0002  
1-614-486-0695

**Chickadee, and Owl.**

Young Naturalist Foundation  
56 The Esplanade, Ste. 306  
Toronto, Ontario, M5E 1A7 Canada  
1-416-868-6001

**Ranger Rick, and Your Big Backyard.**

National Wildlife Federation  
1412 16th Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20036-2266  
1-202-797-6800

**National Geographic World.**

National Geographic Society  
P. O. Box 2330  
Washington, D. C. 20077-9955

To find more magazine titles, the following two books could be very helpful.

*Children's Magazine List*. Free from Educational Press Association of America: Glassboro State College, Glassboro, NJ 08028.
Sources for Free and Inexpensive Materials

Educator's Progress Service, Inc., Randolph, WI 53956, publishes the following books and updates them annually:

Elementary teachers guide to free curriculum materials.

Educators guide to free filmstrips.

Educators guide to free science materials.

Educators guide to free teaching aids.

Educators guide to free social studies materials.

Educators index of free materials.

In addition, the following books can also be helpful:


Partial List of Read-Aloud Books

Kindergarten


First Grade


Second Grade


Third Grade


For more read-aloud titles to read to your students, the following books will be helpful.


Reference List


