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Learning to read in an experiential cooperative learning centers' classroom: Effects on reading comprehension

Valerie Ann Martin-Rivers

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LEARNING TO READ IN AN
EXPERIENTIAL COOPERATIVE LEARNING CENTERS' CLASSROOM:
EFFECTS ON READING COMPREHENSION

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

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Interdisciplinary Studies: Integrative Studies Option

by
Valerie Ann Martin-Rivers

December 1996
LEARNING TO READ IN AN EXPERIENTIAL COOPERATIVE LEARNING CENTERS' CLASSROOM: EFFECTS ON READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

During the last decade there has been considerable research in the area of literacy. Of general concern among researchers is why there is a disproportionate number of children exiting our schools lacking competent literacy skills. Current research has focused on this problem and the need of our school system to redefine Reading instruction in an effort to make it more meaningful to a culturally diverse student population. Studies have shown that children learn in a variety of ways and construct meaning of information accordingly (Heath and Mangiola, 1991; Eisner, 1991; Bowyer, 1995). Our Reading programs must therefore be defined in a manner that affords all students the opportunity to successfully acquire fluent reading skills.

The purpose of this project is to examine the Reading program of a cooperative learning centers classroom and the theories that support the benefits of cooperative learning centers within the context of a literacy program in a first-grade classroom.

The research question to be examined is: Do first grade students who participate in a reading program within a cooperative learning center, activities-structured classroom develop and demonstrate significant reading ability and comprehension over those not involved in learning center reading activities?
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Joan Medlock, who allowed me to use her class as a control group for this research project.
DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my daughters, Kelly and Becky, who lovingly supported me throughout this endeavor and to the memory of my paternal grandmother, who provided me with the encouragement and opportunity to attend college.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................ iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .............................. iv
DEDICATION ....................................... v
LIST OF TABLES ................................... viii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY ........ 1
  Statement of the Problem ..................... 3
  Significance ................................... 4
  Statement of Hypothesis ....................... 5
  Assumptions ................................. 6
  Limitations ................................... 6
  Delimitations ............................... 7
  Definition of Terms ........................... 7

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ........ 9

CHAPTER THREE: PROCEDURES ..................... 29
  Assumptions .................................. 32
  Experiential Learning - Cooperative Learning Groups
  Activity Daily Routine ....................... 32
  The Subjects .................................. 38
  The Teachers .................................. 39

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY .......... 41
  Reading Readiness Test: Pretest and Post-Test .. 44
  Reading Level According to Reading Recovery .... 44
  Teacher Observation ........................... 45
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Ethnic Breakdown of Classes. . . . . . . . . . . . 40

Table 2. ITBS Total Reading Post-Test
   Individual Student Performance . . . . . . . . . . . . 43

Table 3. ITBS Total Language Post-Test
   Individual Student Performance . . . . . . . . . . . . 66

Table 4. Reading Readiness Pretest
   First Grade Rubric Score . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 67

Table 5. Reading Readiness Post-Test
   First Grade Rubric Score . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 68
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In recent years there have been changes in the structure of the reading curriculum in first grade. These changes address the importance of recognizing the diversity of the language, culture and experiences the students bring to their classrooms. It is important that educators be aware of the impact this would have on the way their students will ultimately learn to read. Recent research has demonstrated the benefit of incorporating learning centers as an integral part of the academic program (Bowyer, 1995; Cowles and Aldridge, 1992; Eisner, 1991; Schwartz and Pollishuke, 1990).

Teaching children to read is a great responsibility; and an important component of an effective reading program is making reading interesting, enjoyable and meaningful. Eisner (1991) stated that "neither reading nor writing would be of value if it did not serve as an instrumentality through which we create and share meaning. While we may say we enjoy reading, what we mean is that we enjoy reading when the text is enjoyable to read" (p. 120).

Research has shown that learning is both developmental and social and is facilitated by affording children the opportunity to interact with their environment in a way that makes learning purposeful and meaningful (Cowles and Aldridge, 1992). Recognizing that children have unique ways of receiving, interpreting and transmitting information,
Heath and Mangiola (1991) in their research on becoming literate in a culturally diverse classroom, emphasized that it is "crucially important, then, that educators be vigilant to the fact that students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds may bring different ways of knowing to school, different patterns of preferred interaction." (p. 23)

According to the report, *Rising to the Challenge: A New Agenda for California Schools and Communities* (1995) there exists a definite need to redefine the reading program presently being taught in the public schools. That reading program established a literacy curriculum by which the students were taught in an absolute sequential process. Many primary teachers, however, feel that this process often frustrated children and confused them in regards to how print works. Reading specialists argued that it did not offer children enough of a variety of literature choices that were developmentally appropriate.

Studies have shown that it is important to take into consideration the cognitive stages of a child's development and to construct a curriculum that is appropriately stimulating and effective (Frick, 1994; Goodman, 1986; McDavitt, 1994; Vygotsky, 1962; Wortham, 1995). We must also keep in mind that children are continually learning. Experiential learning affords children the opportunity for meaningful interactive hands-on learning experiences which are develop-
mentally appropriate and promotes their becoming literate by introducing information to them in a manner that relates to information they have previously acquired.

The focus of this project is to examine the effects and outcomes of learning for students who are taught to read by using an experiential reading instructional approach, within a cooperative learning center environment. The project also examines educational research that has affected this curriculum development.

**Statement of the Problem**

There is a disproportionate number of students exiting our public schools with inadequate reading skills. In a report of the *California Reading Task Force* (1995) it was determined that the *English/Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools* (1987) had not provided a "comprehensive and balanced reading program" for emergent readers (p. 2). That Framework had also neglected to adequately address the culturally diverse needs of the state's growing multi-ethnic school population. The Task Force stated it:

> strongly reaffirms that all students, regardless of home language or socioeconomic background, can and must have an equal opportunity to excel in reading. Each child's experience and culture should be recognized and celebrated. The strength and vitality of California linguistic, cultural, and ethnic richness will be weakened if all students cannot fully and equally participate in society because of limited literacy skills.

Numerous researchers concur that there is a definite
need to accommodate the students' individual differences, recognizing that these differences impact on how students will make meaning from the information presented to them (Cazden, 1988; Cowles and Aldridge, 1992; Dickenson, 1994; Goodman, 1979; Heath and Mangiola, 1991; Weaver, 1994). Their research advocates the need for schools to implement a reading program that is developmentally appropriate, comprehensive, balanced and incorporates skills instruction while affording children a reading curriculum that is literature rich. An effective program of reading instruction would both recognize and be sensitive to the differentiation within children's environments and how this would impact on their learning to read.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the effectiveness of learning to read within an experiential literacy center instructional model and test the theories supporting this method of literacy acquisition. The question that this study asks is: Will implementing cooperative learning literacy centers have a significant benefit in a child's literacy development?

Significance

Reading is an indispensable component of communication. The publication, Becoming a Nation of Readers (1984) stressed, that within our country, educators must recognize and address the "critical importance of reading for the individual and for the nation" (p. 1). It further empha-
sized the urgency of the reading crisis existent in our public schools while concluding that restructuring of the present reading program should be viewed as our highest priority.

Language learning is a social process and children develop language skills in an effort to communicate both verbally and by print. Effective reading instruction then must address the fundamental importance of reading to the individual. All children have the capability to be successfully literate if they are instructed in a manner that encourages risk-taking and discovery and does not frustrate or inhibit them.

All children go through the same stages when learning to read. Thus reading instructional strategies should recognize this fact and be thoughtful and meaningful to be effective. Teachers can be assisted in developing an effective reading curriculum if they take into account and build upon what students already know. Students should have the opportunity to actively participate in learning activities that have relevance in their daily life.

**Statement of Hypothesis**

The Iowa Test of Basic Skills National percentile Language Arts reading and writing scores, rubric scores, and Reading Recovery evaluation scores for students who have participated in a cooperative learning centers literacy program will show that there is a significant growth when compared to
students who receive a traditional method, sequential process, skills-based form of instruction. Pre-testing and post-testing will serve to validate this hypothesis.

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, it was assumed that:

1. Language acquisition is a noncompetitive social process.
2. Learning to read is an integral component of learning to write.
3. Children bring to class a meaningful and individual repertoire of information and experiences.
4. Children are capable of literacy if the instructional method does not frustrate and confuse them in regards to how print works.
5. Children must be read to daily in order to experience the sounds of written language.
6. Reading skills will improve with practice that is meaningful and purposeful.

Limitations

1. This study is restricted to implementing and examining experiential cooperative learning reading centers in the authors’ first grade classroom and the growth was measured against another first grade classroom which used the traditional reading instructional method.
2. The use of the ITBS test as an assessment tool in reading is not a form of authentic assessment.
3. The study is an in-house study.

4. Limited English speaking students were not used as participants in this study.

**Delimitations**

1. The classroom teachers participating in this study are equally competent as measured by administrative evaluations and assessments. Each teacher has been teaching for over twenty years.

2. For the purpose of this study, both of the classes have been equalized by gender, special needs, Reading Recovery and Chapter One students.

3. The duration of the study was nine months (September 1995-May 1996).

**Definition of Terms**

1. **Experiential Learning** - An experiential learning curriculum involves individualized hands-on activities in whole-class or small groups. Instructional design is not based on ability level but affords children the opportunity to draw from their experiences to problem solve and reinforce skills by using them in a learning environment that is meaningful and relevant (McDavitt, 1994).

2. **Cooperative Learning Centers** - Cooperative Learning Centers allow children to work in small groups. They foster an interconnection between problem solving and critical thinking. They also afford group members the opportunity to share group roles emphasizing cooperation.
3. **Reading Recovery** - Reading Recovery is an early intervention program in reading for at-risk first graders. The children are assessed and identified within the first two weeks of the school year. Students spend thirty minutes a day in one-to-one reading instruction for twenty weeks. The goal of Reading Recovery is to enable the student to self correct when reading and be able to read at the average literacy level of their classroom peers by the time they exit the program. Reading Recovery was developed in New Zealand where it is a nationally instituted early intervention program for children with reading problems.

4. **ITBS** - The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills is a standardized test for the purpose of measuring students' achievements in the basic skills taught in the public schools.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

During the past decade, the educational system in the United States has been subject to a great deal of criticism. There has also been an increased demand for educational accountability on the part of our schools. Critics claim that there is a disproportionate number of high school students graduating ill-prepared for the rigors of our progressively complex society.

Solutions to problems in education are of national concern. Researchers examining the factors which contribute to a positive educational experience have determined that the curriculum and teaching methodologies must be re-examined and where necessary restructured in order to address the needs of our increasingly diverse socio-cultural population. Research has shown that one of the most significant factors for promoting school achievement is that of enabling a child to be a successful reader.

An effective reading program must be purposeful, flexible and structured in a manner that takes into consideration the needs, experiences and developmental readiness of the participants.

Dorothy Strickland in an article entitled Emergent Literacy: How Young Children Learn to Read (1989) examined the new perspective on learning to read in comparison with the traditional perspective. In her examination, she outlined three important dimensions of the new perspective.
The first is the importance of providing children with a print rich environment to assist them in constantly observing and learning about the function of written language in the everyday scheme of their lives. Second, educators need to recognize the interrelated function of reading and writing that progressively develops in conjunction with the child’s speech. Strickland stated:

The old belief that children must be orally fluent before being introduced to reading and writing has been replaced with the view that the language processes—listening, speaking, reading and writing—develop in an interdependent manner. Each informs and supports the other. Recognizing the value of informal activities with books... one teacher in an urban program for four year olds sets aside a short period of time each day especially for book browsing. Book browsing usually follows a read-aloud session. [The teacher found that] They [the children] constantly make corrections between the content in books and related discoveries inside and outside the classroom. (p. 20,21)

Third, the new perspective on reading instruction emphasizes the importance of a personally meaningful reading curriculum to enable the success of all participants. And lastly, it advocates interactive learning activities with "responsive others" (p. 20).

The traditional perspectives about reading according to Strickland (1989) held that:

the mastery of reading has been considered an arduous learning task, requiring a period of intense readiness. Only
after children were thoroughly primed with the necessary prereading skills was "real" reading instruction begun. "Getting them ready" consisted largely of direct instruction of learning letter names, letter-sound relationships, and a variety of visual-perceptual tasks. Children were considered literate only after their reading and writing began to approximate adult models. (p. 20)

By contrast, a balanced and meaningful literacy program stresses skill development in reading through the student’s immersion and active participation in appropriate literacy learning activities. These activities should be relevant and purposeful from the perspective of the child. As educators, we recognize the importance that being a successful reader serves in promoting a student’s over-all academic success and school achievement.

Research has shown that there is a positive effect on learning to read when the activity is relevant and the teacher allows for and encourages her students to have input on curriculum themes and class activities (Bowyer, 1995). Taking into account the diverse experiences and cultural backgrounds of children when developing a reading curriculum can also provide many opportunities for learning in a classroom. Learning is further assisted when there are interactive experiences among class members affording them the opportunity to learn not just along with, but from, one another. Bowyer is a strong proponent of "self-directed" learning strategies as an alternative to whole-class instruction. It is his contention that children benefit by
being allowed input in the direction of their curriculum and curriculum activities. Recognizing that children learn differently, he suggests that the curriculum be structured in a way to allow students to work at a pace developmentally appropriate for them.

Research has addressed the differences in the way children learn, and recognized the importance of the environment and activities which best facilitate learning (Cowles and Aldridge, 1992). Eisner (1991) points out that:

It is interesting and significant that kindergarten teachers often encourage children to use their senses to explore materials and tasks. When the educational stakes are still moderate, there is time and even merit for such activities, but once the child moves into the first grade, the grade in which the "real" business of schooling begins in earnest, teachers seem to have less time for such matters. Grade-earning and teacher-pleasing gradually become more important to children then securing the satisfaction a sensuous world makes possible. (p. 124)

Eisner has been a very vocal advocate for the need to restructure the way children are being taught. His research addresses the importance of making learning a meaningful event in a child’s life rather than a concentration of basic skills dogma. He contends that children are natural explorers and it is in their nature to be curious about their world; it would therefore be beneficial to take advantage of this natural curiosity to assist them in learning in a way that fosters their desire to do so.
Reading is as important a means of communicating as is speaking or writing. The reading curriculum should be stimulating and realistically structured in a way that allows each child to develop his potential capacity at his individual pace. "By encouraging the students' input in the curriculum planning and development, they are given an opportunity to make their reading program one that is personally meaningful to them and one that thereby contributes to satisfying their intrinsic need to learn to read." (p. 123)

Research by Cowles and Aldridge (1992) and by Eisner (1991) shows a correlation between a student's academic success and a curriculum that is student-centered and environmentally stimulating and challenging. Their studies show conclusively that children are eager participants and more readily susceptible to the challenge of learning to read when the material is relevant to them.

Additional research has been done that acknowledges the benefits of a student centered curriculum that allows the teacher to take the opportunity to make literature an integral part of the overall curriculum (Anderson, 1984; Bowyer, 1995; Cullinan, 1989; Eisner, 1991; Schwartz and Pollishuke, 1990; Tunnell and Jacobs, 1989). Books should be challenging, not frustrating. An essential component of a good reading program is to provide the students with a print-rich environment which assists them in understanding how print
works.

Teachers can provide such an environment by becoming personally acquainted with their students individually and having available titles which address their individual interests. Dialoguing about various topics while in whole group or small group activities can assist in this regard. By modeling appropriate reading strategies during a shared reading activity or a guided reading activity, the teacher can also facilitate good literacy skills for the students to imitate. A well-developed literacy program will recognize the natural connection between certain children’s literature and children’s lives. Children seek out those connections in their mental and emotional interactions with characters and themes within a story. Weaver (1994) concurs that in fact "involvement in reading begins with a reader’s identification with a character" (p. 539). (Michelle) Landsberg (1987) explains that "books let us see how other people grow towards conclusions and solve dilemmas. More than that they make us feel every step of the way; it’s as though we could live a dozen lives simultaneously, and draw on the wealth of all of them to help shape our own lives" (p. 127). In this respect the interconnectedness between children and literature is demonstrated.

As educators, we are aware that children learn differently. This has been a major issue of debate and study over the last three decades (Vygotsky, 1978; Eisner, 1991; Phil-
Vygotsky’s research on intrinsic development showed that children learn from a combination of their "inner maturational promptings" and their natural curiosity (1978, p. 217). He recognized, however, that these two components of a child’s intellectual development requires formal instruction on some level in order for that child to realize his fullest potential. Vygotsky further examined how intrinsic development and an individual’s culture and environment (which he referred to as extrinsic factors of development) interacted and subsequently impacted how the individual received and ultimately understood and connected with the information.

Vygotsky viewed the role of a teacher as that of an individual whose job it was to move the students’ minds forward by introducing new concepts rather than allowing for students to simply discover these concepts on their own. His studies indicated that there was a correlation between how much a child could learn and how much assistance the child was given to do so. He maintained that an individual could not perform at the highest level of thinking and reasoning ability without having been formally instructed on how to do so. His theory of the zone of proximal development addressed this issue in stating that:

\[
\text{the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of}
\]

15
potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (1935, p. 86)

A practical application of this theory is seen in the interactive group work being done within learning centers. Cooperative group members are encouraged to take responsibility for their individual contributions to the activity while assisting group members in their contributions. The role of the teacher then is to assist in the learning experiences and provide extended related activities for group members. This provides a beneficial learning experience for all members.

The success of our multicultural student population requires that schools restructure their traditional curriculum to recognize and address the diverse needs and learning styles of all the students. Teachers can incorporate a meaningful student-centered literacy curriculum within their classroom through encouraging student input of curriculum themes. Children who are exposed to an approach to learning that is primarily skills based are hindered in reading acquisition, according to Harste (1989). Children who are immersed in a personally meaningful literary environment are encouraged and stimulated to learn.

In their book, Creating the Child-centered Classroom, Schwartz and Pollishuke (1990) state:

Effective learning centers allow children opportunities to interact, share,
and cooperate with each other. Students become involved in peer teaching and gain valuable leadership skills. There is little pressure to compete with others because this approach to learning emphasizes cooperation. The goal is for children to do their best for their own benefit and for the benefit of the group. (p. 56)

Huck, Helper and Hickman, in their book Children’s Literature in the Elementary School (1989) agree that literacy learning centers are beneficial and afford children the opportunity to interact with their peers in the learning process. Recognizing that children bring to their groups varied experiences which allow for an interchange of ideas and interpretations of information, their research emphasizes that in order to insure a successful reading program within a literacy center the teacher must recognize the varied "interests and preferences" (p. 54) of the group members. Literacy is greatly benefitted when students are continually involved in learning to read through their participation in activities that provide constant usage of language in ways that are personally relevant to them. There must also be a wide variety of appropriate literature readily available for this purpose.

Trottier and Knox (1989) orchestrated a program of English instruction with Middle School students that involved cooperative group interactive learning activities in centers. Their approach provided a balanced program of individual and teacher-directed learning activities. The
students were allowed daily access to the school library and their class library offered an inventory with a wide selection of literature choices. The students were also allowed input in establishing the criteria of the reading activity they chose to complete. All the students demonstrated enthusiasm in their participation in these learning activities. They were also encouraged to discuss their language experiences and expand on them in additional activities which included role-playing, art and writing.

Shared reading is an interactive activity which encourages discussion and a sharing of ideas, experiences, and opinions (Mooney, 1994). Accordingly, shared reading allows for the modeling of "appropriate reading behavior and pronunciation" (p. 71) and encourages children to reflect on the story read. Shared reading is a cooperative learning activity involving students and teachers in an interactive activity-based experience. The advantages of incorporating this instructional activity in the reading program, according to Adrian Chambers (1985) include:

* It encourages children to participate and become involved in the reading.
* The teacher's enthusiasm and presentation style demonstrate the joys of reading and what a skilled reader does with text.
* It is a supportive approach that respects children as co-readers. Less efficient readers, or those for whom English is a second language, read more confidently because they are encouraged by the enthusiasm of the group and feel their "mistakes" go unnoticed.
* It develops a "community spirit." Children sit close together, sharing responses, movements, and motions appropriate to the story they are reading.
* Repeated readings help children to become confident to choose and read the text independently.
* Although there is a range of ability, all children can learn something at their own level.
* Strategies and skills perhaps previously taught in isolation can be introduced and practiced in the context of reading a story.
* When using Big Books, the enlarged text allows the differences in presentation, layout, and convention used for various registers to be easily seen and discussed.
* It provides models for innovation on text and children's own writing.
* It provides opportunities for children to respond in many ways through reading, writing, art, craft, drama, etc. (p. 24)

Research has shown that there is a correlation between children successfully learning to read and their having been regularly read to (Cazden, 1988; Dickenson, 1994; Phillips, 1972). Reading to children demonstrates the language and patterns of books. It also serves to integrate new vocabulary and ideas in the children's language repertoire.

Kristen Kerstetter, a teacher who teaches a combination kindergarten-first grade class commented:

I read to my children a lot—a whole lot! I’ll read anywhere from one to three stories at a time. Sometimes I’ll read a favorite story twice. And I read four or five times a day. I read to the whole group, small groups of four or five children and to individual children. While I’m reading to the groups I’ll encourage them to join in on the
refrains. With individuals I may point to words, talk about what a word is. Sometimes I’ll frame a word with my hands or put it on the board. I put songs, poems and refrains on chart paper so children will try to read them by themselves. And I’ll read stories over and over again, just the way children hear bedtime stories. It is not unusual for me to read a book twenty times in one month. (an interview in Children’s Literature in the Elementary School, 1961)

Like Shared Reading, Guided Reading instruction allows the teacher to work in whole classes or small groups to facilitate, observe, and monitor the strategies used by students to process print. The advantages of Guided Reading according to Frank Smith (1991) are:

* it allows the teacher to match children to appropriate reading materials
* in a small group instructional arrangement, the teacher can observe the reading strategies used by the students and demonstrate appropriate strategies and language conventions in context while assisting in the development of the students’ ability in using the strategies and conventions
* it enhances critical thinking ability on the part of the participant
* it assists the children to make interconnections between the story and their lives
* it encourages independent reading
* it encourages dialoguing about the story, characters, and students’ feelings and interpretations of the story

(p. 27)

Teachers need to be mindful of the importance to learning that discussion serves for students. Children derive a greater satisfaction in learning when it affords them the opportunity to explore through dialogue, writing, art,
music, games and role-playing. A study by Collett (1991), affirms the benefits of integrating art, music and role-playing into the reading curriculum, particularly for at-risk students. It affords the children the opportunity to express their interpretation of a story in a non-written manner. It is an effective way in which to extend literature.

Children in primary grades can use art or role-playing as a means of sharing their thoughts and opinions of a story theme or character and providing their personal interpretation of a book. In doing so, other students can be encouraged to read the book and interact in other related activities. A recent study by Wortham (1995) addressed this "participant examples" approach to instruction, which requires the students and teacher to role play situations from the text they are reading. This approach seeks to make information meaningful and interesting to the participants.

An earlier advocate of this approach, Phillips (1972), maintained that students enjoyed and benefitted academically from participating in activities in their curriculum program which afforded them different ways to express what the meaningfulness of the learning experience was to them. It is imperative that teachers encourage their students to interact with learning in a way that promotes the integration of the complex styles of learning found in a culturally-rich classroom environment.
The classroom environment can stimulate or discourage child's readiness to learn. Schwartz and Pollishuke (1990) encourage teachers to allow for student contributions in the development of a classroom environment that will enhance learning. Most teachers recognize the importance of a room environment to which children can identify and in which they feel comfortable. The learning centers in the class should be both developed and designed by the teacher and the students. The centers are restructured periodically to accommodate the academic needs and learning styles of the different group participants.

The consensus of research supporting experiential learning in cooperative learning centers affirms that traditional teaching methods in reading must be restructured and diversified and learning outcomes made to be more meaningful to accommodate the needs of all students (Cazden, 1988; Au, K.H., 1980; Au, K.H. and Mason, J.M., 1983; Heath, 1983).

In order for children to learn to read, books must be easily accessible. There needs to be a wide variety of literature choices that stir the interest and imagination of the entire student population. The teacher must demonstrate the importance of books to their students by regularly reading to them (Huck, Helper and Hickman, 1989). A teacher who loves books and reads daily to the students serves as a positive model for reading enthusiasm.

Research has shown that learning is facilitated when
children are enabled to function positively, independently and cooperatively and with creativity in class. Pulling from their own experience-pool and connecting to and expanding their existing knowledge promotes learning.

Schools in the United States are facing a major challenge today. It is essential that education address the needs of a culturally diverse student population in a manner that will ensure that all students will attain appropriate literacy levels. Such academic success can serve to enable future success. It is imperative that educators introduce information to children in a way that is relevant to the information that they bring with them to school (Heath and Mangiola, 1991).

Heath and Mangiola further state:

Educational institutions currently have the goal of moving people’s values, skills, and knowledge toward generalized, predictable norms, and this is especially true for minority students. Schools now try to make all learning equally familiar, predictable, and uniformly simplified for what is often viewed as "remedial" learning.

Educators tend to... urge people to change in the direction of the mainstream or the predictable. This push to conformity often rewards those who passively accept orders, await and accept directions from others, and offer no resistance to mainstream institutions’ ways of operating. (p. 17)

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) in her book The Dreamkeepers stressed the importance of teacher instructional methods being "culturally relevant" (p. 25) to all their
students. She defined culturally relevant teaching as employing teaching strategies that aim toward excellence in student achievement rather than "slight improvement" (p. 23). These strategies function to assist students in making corrections "between their local, national, racial, cultural, and global identities" (p. 25). Billings defined teachers who utilized this method as those who:

encourage a community of learners; and
encourage their students to learn collaboratively. They [teachers] believe that knowledge is continuously recreated, recycled, and shared by teachers and students alike. Rather than expecting students to demonstrate prior knowledge and skills they help students develop that knowledge by building bridges and scaffolding for learning (p. 25)

(Lilia I.) Bartolome (1994) maintains that the historical oppression of certain minorities is indicative of the "power relations of society" that is mirrored in our educational system (p. 173). The result is that certain minorities disproportionately represent those members of the school population that are usually academically unsuccessful throughout their formal educational experience. Bartolome refers to these students as culturally and linguistically subordinated minorities. She defines her use of the word subordinated as referring to:

- cultural groups that are politically, socially, and economically subordinate in the greater society. While individual members of these groups may not consider themselves subordinated in any
manner to the White 'mainstream,' they nevertheless are members of a greater collective that historically has been perceived and treated as subordinate and inferior by the dominant society.

(p. 173)

Bartolome concurs with research which further stresses the need for the development of additional programs which successfully serve to enable culturally and linguistically subordinated minority students to attain academic success in school (Knapp and Shields, 1990; Tikunoff, 1985; Webb, 1987).

Our classrooms face the challenge to provide a learning environment for children that maximizes their personal meaning and emphasizes their intrinsic motivation to learn. Research has shown that well-orchestrated experiential learning activities have afforded children the opportunities to learn new concepts by relating them to concepts already familiar to them (Wortham, 1995; Trottier, 1993; Kakugawa, 1994; Frick, 1994; Reid, 1993). According to Caine and Caine (1991), this method of instruction "capitalizes on a natural process with which they [children] are already equipped--the ability to learn from experience" (p. 5).

Early literacy learning involves not just skill development but also the meaningful transfer of information to the individual's life. The idea of a part-to-whole process of literacy instruction has come under scrutiny by researchers who argue against it as an ineffectual means of teaching children to read. According to Weaver's socio-psycholin-
guistic transactional view there is a "some part-to-whole processing involved in how a child learns to read. However, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic research confirms that reading is to an amazing degree a matter of whole-to-part processing" (1994 p. 42) Weaver emphasizes the importance of a literacy program that recognizes that this whole-to-part transfer of skills applies to children.

Goodman (1986) also stands in opposition to the concept of language acquisition being taught in this part-to-whole technique. In his book, What's Whole in Whole Language? he states, "children learn oral language without having it broken down into simple little bits and pieces. They are amazingly good at learning language when they need it to express themselves and understand others, as long as they are surrounded by people who are using language meaningfully and purposefully" (p. 7).

Both Weaver and Goodman, further, agree that for a reading program to be beneficial it must afford meaning and purpose for the reader and motivate them to want to learn.

An experiential learning curriculum encourages dialogue, sharing, and interactionism. In planning and implementing the curriculum the teacher takes into consideration the developmental readiness of the students and the skills to be addressed. Incorporating what is being learned with what students already know is of the utmost importance in fostering a learning environment that maximizes critical
thinking, creativity, and risk-taking to promote academic success.

Three necessary components of successfully implementing a literacy program based on experiential learning are addressed in the book *Mindshifts* (Caine, Caine, and Crowell 1994):

1. orchestrated immersion of the students in curriculum themes and activities that are full of authentic complex experiences.

2. a state of mind of relaxed alertness on the part of the students—the teacher must create an atmosphere that allows their minds to be ready and wanting to learn—the students have had the opportunity for input into the curriculum structure—and there exists a balance of shared power between the students and the teacher.

3. learning comes from active processing, the consolidation of learning experiences in the classroom with the experiences the children bring with them.

The success of experiential learning is dependent on the teacher developing a program of activities that utilizes all of a child’s senses. This is done by effectively integrating a multitude of complex, interactive, and meaningful learning experiences for students (Caine, Caine, and Crowell, 1994).

A study by McDavitt (1994) on the effectiveness of experiential learning in promoting student achievement found
that students in an experiential learning program attained higher achievement level outcomes than those in a traditional program.

Experiential learning has also been demonstrated as effective when incorporated in a meaningful curriculum framework. It enables children from divergent backgrounds to attain higher order thinking and learning by utilizing their personal resources for understanding. Experiential learning allows the incorporation of all of the individual's senses in their immersion in various interactive learning activities in the classroom.

The experiential cooperative learning centers class examined in this project afforded the students the opportunity to provide input in curriculum themes and activities. It encouraged self-examination and risk-taking and individual and group assessment and responsibility for the completion of activities. The students were provided a wide variety of literary choices which addressed their differing interests and experiences. They were encouraged to share their interests and experiences through dialoguing in whole group and small group activities. Literacy acquisition was positively demonstrated by these students by the end of the school term.
CHAPTER THREE: PROCEDURES

A review of the related literature has supported the need to redefine the reading program in the first grade. Studies have demonstrated the need for instruction to be meaningful and diversified in order to recognize the unique ways that children receive and interpret information. Equally important, the curriculum must be sensitive to the experiences that are an integral part of the students' sociocultural environment and subsequently impact on the way they will construct meaning from what they are being taught.

Over the last ten years there has been significant research conducted on literacy acquisition for young children. With our public schools becoming more culturally diverse, there has been a growing awareness and concern for addressing the needs of all our students to insure their successful completion of the education process.

Recognizing that children learn best when teachers relinquish instructional methodologies that are insensitive to children's individual needs, Schwartz and Pollishuke (1990) advocated the importance of involving students in curriculum decisions. In their book, Creating the Child-centered Classroom, they stated:

Before beginning an integrated, child-centered unit, you might want to ask your students what they already know, what they need or want to know, and how they think their needs might be met. You are, in essence, negotiating the curriculum with your students, and
throughout the program, your students should be encouraged to assess, evaluate, shape, reshape and restructure their own learning opportunities.

When the planning of an integrated, child-centered curriculum is done with the children and by the children, the curriculum, the themes, the activities and the active learning experiences become more relevant, because they are built on the backgrounds, interests and everyday life experiences of each individual student. Children move towards the goal of becoming life-long learners as they gain a positive attitude towards school (p. 50).

More recently, Caine and Caine (1994) addressed how children make meaning from new information introduced to them based on information they have already acquired. They observed:

We must help students relate the material they need to know to what they already know. Doing so capitalizes on a natural process with which they are already equipped: the ability to learn from experience (p. 51).

Children are not blank slates. They change, both psychologically and physiologically, as they "absorb" life. Winston Churchill is reputed to have said of Parliament that "we shape our houses and then they shape us. We could as easily say that our experiences shape our brains, and then they shape our experiences (p. 31).

When developing a reading program, it is of the utmost importance then that teachers recognize this natural process of learning on the part of their students. Doing so will enable the teacher to design lessons and strategies that facilitate literacy acquisition in a way that is both mean-
ingful and purposeful for all their students. It will foster a shared learning environment while promoting independent learning experiences. According to Caine, Caine and Crowell (1994):

> the teacher... orchestrates experiences and draws from the collection of meanings that are created by the students. This means that the teacher never controls everything that happens in the classroom; rather, it implies that he or she sets into motion a wide range of connected experiences or occasions for learning and actively observes, directs, and engages the learning processes (p. 205).

With this in mind and incorporated with recent research on the benefits of experiential learning in cooperative learning centers, this writer implemented a daily reading program in a first-grade class in Fontana, California for the 1995-1996 school year. The results of this program for teaching reading will be documented in comparison with another first-grade class where reading instruction is taught following a more traditional method with an emphasis on sequentially taught skills development.

The purpose of this study is to determine if children who learn to read in an experiential learning cooperative group instructional environment will demonstrate a significant growth in literacy acquisition. Assessment of growth in both classes will be done by pretests and post-tests of students' reading readiness samples, ITBS national percentile scores for reading and language arts and Reading Recov-
ery evaluations. The duration of the study was approximately nine months.

The organization of the reading curriculum incorporating experiential learning in the instructional process utilized the Schwartz and Pollishuke model for cooperative learning center instruction. The assumptions, structure, and activities are outlined as follows:

Assumptions

1. The children have access to a wide variety of literary choices.

2. All students are required to actively participate in all activities and cooperative interaction with group members is encouraged.

3. The children are afforded the opportunity to participate in the negotiation of the curriculum themes and activities in an effort to insure it being relevant to each individual student.

4. Curriculum areas will be integrated to insure a balanced program of study.

5. Children will learn to read when the material available is meaningful, relevant, and enjoyable.

Experiential Learning - Cooperative Learning Groups Activity

Daily Routine

Whole Group Shared Reading: (Approx. 20 minutes)

In an effort to make reading more enjoyable and to stimulate the students' desire to more actively participate
in the reading experience, the teacher begins the instruc-
tional period by introducing a book to be read. The selec-
tion is predetermined by student input from a variety of
literature choices. The selection may be based on a theme,
cultural significance, holiday, time frame (past, present or
future) or rhyming pattern. The students are encouraged to
participate in the shared reading activity. In the begin-
ning of the school year, for example, in an effort to make
the transition from kindergarten reading activities to first
grade reading activities more comfortable, it is recommended
that the teacher read stories with easy-to-follow rhythmic
patterns to encourage such active participation.

Discussion: (Approx. 20 minutes)

The children sit on the floor before the teacher.
During this time, they are afforded the opportunity to
express their opinions of the story theme, characters, and
illustrations. They are encouraged to discuss their
feelings and the personal meaning the story has for them.
Before dividing into their cooperative learning groups, the
children role-play characters and express their interpreta-
tion of the characters' feelings through dramatization.
They are then encouraged to continue this role-playing
activity but as an expression of their own personal feelings
when placed in the character's position.

Literacy Centers Activities: (Approx. 30 minutes)

The children are divided into five groups; four groups
made up of five members and one group with six members. During center time, each group works at one of the five literacy centers. The groups rotate through the different centers during the week.

Center #1 - Overhead projector center:

Transparencies and colored markers are available for the children to use to print and illustrate. A copy of the shared reading book is available for the children to re-read. They expand on the information from the shared reading activity by changing the theme, setting, or characters in the story. They also chart unfamiliar vocabulary which helps the group utilize appropriate strategies for problem solving. Story mapping is done to record the sequence of events in the story as follows:

Center #2 - Listening center:

A tape recorder and individual headphones for each member of the group is provided. The children first listen to the story and then each member is individually taped reading the story. The group will next listen to its individual member's reading of the story and together, utilizing appropriate strategies, they will correct any recognized errors. The teacher monitors and assists in this activity but encourages the children's independent efforts in problem solving. The group will next work in pairs to develop a story relative to the story they've just shared. The stories will eventually be written out to be shared within a
whole-class format.

Center #3 - Writing center:

Children are introduced to reading and writing strategies such as directionality and matching one-to-one. The Reading Recovery teacher was particularly helpful in setting up the components of this center. Book selections take into account the student’s developmental readiness and their experiences. There is an easel, pencils, markers, and chart paper available to record meaningful information and unfamiliar vocabulary from the stories. The teacher models reading and writing strategies to encourage the students to develop their own independent self-correcting strategies. The group is divided into two separate groups of two or three members each. These students discuss their interpretations of the story and the meaning they ascertain from it. They work enthusiastically composing and sharing their work with group members. A comparative charting activity of their interpretations is done allowing the children to discuss their differences and similarities. This activity also enables the children to make meaningful connections between the books and their own lives. The children can then work on writing individual and group books as a product of this center.

Center #4 - Big Book center:

In this center, we take advantage of our wide variety of Big Book titles to expand on the children’s reading and
writing. Using attached computer paper, the children print and illustrate a story which relates to the Big Book title they've just read. A manila envelope containing sentence strips from the story is attached to the back of the Big Book. The children may use these as a frame of reference in their writing activity. These sentence strips can also be used in the Pocket-chart center to recreate the story. The students work individually and in pairs.

Center #5 - Pocket chart center:

A copy of a story or poem is kept at the side of the pocket chart to assist in self-correcting if needed. The story or poem used in this center may be chosen from our class library or may be a writing product from an individual or group within our class. The story or poem is written on sentence strips. The sentence strips are color-coded to assist the exhibiting difficulty decoding new vocabulary students in this writing activity. This shared writing activity has also been beneficial in assisting students with sentence structure and punctuation usage. In another related activity, we use a favorite book from our library and rewrite it leaving blanks within the sentences to be filled in by participants in this center as they interpret their own special meaning to the story. Using the book *Ira Sleeps Over*, for example, the fill-in spaces include a blank where the children can write the name of a special friend who has spent the night with them or put themselves in Ira's place.
and their special sleep-with toy in place of the teddybear in the story.

When we return to a whole class instructional format, the children share any center activity products that they might have completed. We use this whole class activity time to discuss any problem we might have encountered and share our problem solving strategies and our learning experiences.

A related Guided Reading activity is often done at this time with full class participation encouraged. A small group and individualized Guided Reading activity follows. This affords the students another opportunity to observe, share, and participate in a reading activity which further assists them in becoming independent readers. An important component of an effective Guided Reading experience is to facilitate the student’s ability to personally relate to the theme or characters of the story in a way that makes it personally meaningful to them. The Guided Reading Practicum refers to this as cognitive webbing.

Keeping in mind that learning is a natural process of a child’s life, it is important to maintain a print-rich environment to assist and stimulate their desire to learn to read. The room environment is full of written work done by individuals and groups. All written activities include the children’s names to give them the recognition their effort deserves. Illustrations and art activities of story characters and children’s interpretations of stories, feel-
ings and class events adorn the bulletin boards. Personalizing the class with the students' work enhances their enthusiasm to contribute academically. The availability of their individual and group written work serves as a stimulus to motivate them to read and share what they've read.

The children are assessed on a daily and weekly basis. This enables the teacher to meet the academic needs of all the students. Parents are encouraged to participate in this assessment process. They receive weekly rubrics which are to be filled out and returned to the teacher. All parent correspondence is in an appropriate language to take into consideration those parents who may not be fluent in English. The importance of parent contact in the successful implementation of this program was emphasized by Schwartz and Pollishuke (1991) where they stated, "being able to articulate for your parents what you are doing helps them to become more knowledgeable and supportive of your program." (p. 83)

The Subjects

There were 52 participants in this study. All of the participants were first grade regular education students. They are equally divided between two first-grade classes at a southern California elementary school. The school is on a continuous school program calendar, with the school year beginning in July and ending in June. Although total class enrollment figures were higher, 52 participants represent
those children who remained in the classes the entire year.

The students' in both classes had abilities varying from high to middle to low range. Both classes consisted of 13 boys and 13 girls. The ethnic makeup as indicated in Table One shows that Anglo students represented (48%), Hispanic students represented (38%) and African American students represented (17%) of the class population.

The Teachers

The two classroom teachers who participated in this study are both employed by the same school district and work as first-grade teachers on the same school site. Both teachers have been evaluated by their site administrator and are rated as excellent, creative and extremely capable first-grade instructors. Both of the teachers have been teaching in excess of 20 years.
TABLE ONE: ETHNIC BREAKDOWN OF CLASSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Coop Learning Center Classes</th>
<th>Control Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglo</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
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</table>
CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The focus of this project was limited to reading instruction within an experiential cooperative learning centers instructional program. This writer contends that learning to read within a program of instruction that provides a purposeful and personally meaningful individualized curriculum has proven to be an effective method of teaching children how print works and how to be proficient readers.

The question that this study asked was: Will implementing cooperative learning literacy centers demonstrate a significant benefit in a child’s literacy development? The hypothesis of this project was that students who participated in cooperative learning centers literacy activities would demonstrate significant growth in literacy acquisition as compared to students who participated in a more traditional method, sequential process, skills based reading instructional program.

The hypothesis of this project is supported by the following test results: the first-grade ITBS Level Test; Total Reading and Total Language Arts Battery; first-grade reading rubric scores; and Reading Recovery scores for all participants.

The students in this study were pretested in July, 1995, by means of an in-house grade level reading readiness analysis that was administered to all first-grade students, the ITBS tests were administered in May, 1996, a post-test
since it is not utilized as a testing device in kindergarten. The Reading Recovery teacher evaluated all students and ranked them according to their readiness levels. The results of these tests are indicative of the benefit of literacy instruction within experiential cooperative learning groups for literacy acquisition.

ITBS Testing: Post-test May, 1996

The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills is a standardized battery of tests. The Language Arts and Reading components are designed to measure language development, spelling, writing, vocabulary, word attack skills and the student's ability to understand factual meaning, inferential meaning, and evaluative meaning. It is not administered in kindergarten but the results of the tests administered in May, 1996, at the end of the first-grade term, confirmed that the mean from the cooperative learning centers class was significantly higher than that of the control group class. The mean score of the cooperative center group class was at the 62 percentile. The mean score of the control group class was at the 48th percentile (see Table Two). These results show that although both groups demonstrated growth in reading and language development, the cooperative learning centers class scored 14 percentile points higher than the control group.
TABLE TWO: ITBS TOTAL READING POST-TEST
Individual Student Performance

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>10</td>
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</table>

- Co-op NPR
- Control NPR
Reading Readiness Test: Pretest and Post-test

All students entering the first grade are given an in-house reading readiness assessment test. The test measures letter recognition and phonetic strategies for letter sounds. The test also evaluates students' awareness of how print works in regards to directionality, word attack strategies and capitalization and punctuation.

The pretest scores for both the cooperative learning center group and the control group were similar. The post-test scores however, indicated that there was a significant difference in the growth between the two groups with the cooperative learning center group demonstrating significantly more proficient literacy growth outcomes than those of the control group.

These results support the research studies that advocate cooperative learning center instruction that is purposeful, developmentally appropriate, and personally meaningful as being more beneficial for learning than instructional methods which teach in a sequential process skills-based format.

Reading Level According to Reading Recovery

At the beginning of each school year, the Reading Recovery program teachers at the school site where the research for this project was conducted do a preliminary assessment of all incoming first-grade students. The Reading Recovery teachers then evaluate the students
demonstrating the lowest reading readiness abilities according to the criteria addressed in the Reading Recovery program format. These students are then identified as at-risk students for reading and are scheduled for daily one-to-one intensive instruction in reading and writing for approximately twenty weeks.

For the purpose of this project a pretest and post-test assessment and evaluation was done on all the students of both the cooperative learning center class and the control group class. The results of the post-test again support the benefit to literacy acquisition of learning to read in a cooperative learning center environment which affords the students a reading curriculum that is developmentally appropriate and personally meaningful to them.

Teacher Observation

By incorporating learning centers in the classroom, this writer was able to observe and record the benefit to literacy acquisition that this curriculum program provided for the students. Test results confirmed that the students’ reading abilities were enhanced by their learning to read in an environment that afforded them the opportunity to do so at their developmental pace and in a manner that was personally relevant. Accordingly, this writer emphasizes that cooperative learning centers provide a holistic way for children to learn how print works and of motivating them to actively participate in the reading experience.
The reading program realistically and sensitively takes into consideration the emotional and physical developmental factors involved in learning. The teacher plans a curriculum that emphasizes motivation, independence, cooperation, discovery, and risk-taking. Most importantly, within this context, the students are learning through purposeful and meaningful activities which afford them the opportunity to fully realize their potential capacity in all academic areas.

By incorporating learning centers in the classroom, this writer has been able to observe and better understand the impact of the student's experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds on the way in which they "construct meaning" from information. This has significantly affected this writer's development of curriculum and instructional methods. It has also profoundly impacted the way the students are viewed and their individual academic needs are met. Research has demonstrated that many traditional teaching methodologies are no longer effective. If our educational system is to afford all of its students the opportunity to be successful academics, we must recognize the need to address the learning styles of our diverse student population.

Accordingly, Schwartz and Pollishuke (1990), advocates of cooperative learning center instruction stated the following:
The goal is for children to do their best for their own benefit and for the benefit of the group.

Your students will gain a greater willingness to take risks in these small group situations. As they gain confidence in their own abilities, they will become more self-motivated and independent and will begin to evaluate themselves more critically. When presented with a choice of learning activities at various levels of difficulty, they will begin to take greater responsibility for their own learning, becoming better decision makers and problem solvers.

As the tasks become more active, the experiences can become more meaningful and relevant to your students' cognitive stages of development. They are encouraged to use every facet of communication. They experiment, experience, question, discuss and reflect, thus participating in the process of discovery learning, the process of "learning how to learn." (p. 56)
Cooperative learning. This educational practice has received widespread attention in recent years. In small groups, students learn content cooperatively and collectively. Although group learning is not new to education, the emphasis here is on the "cooperative" aspects of the process. Each student becomes responsible not only for his or her own learning, but also for that of each member of the group. Roles are rotated to ensure that students participate actively. Outcomes are often judged collectively rather than individually. The "success" of the group depends on how it functioned as well as on the performance outcome. There is clear emphasis on student interaction and the experiential lessons in learning together.

Cooperative learning fosters connections among learners and emphasizes the role of nonlinear interaction in solving problems and completing assignments. The emotional significance of being a valued member of a group is thus related to the learning process. Content, here, is viewed not only as information but as the experience of cooperation itself.

Complex instruction. This variation of cooperative grouping emphasizes both barriers to achievement and the teacher's role in the management process. Groups are arranged to work through discovery activities, with both individual and group outcomes expected. Roles are assigned to each member and cooperative interaction is encouraged. There is greater emphasis on the content of the lesson in this approach, however, than is typical in cooperative learning.

As many as six groups explore different activities that relate to various aspects of the same concept, for example, sound. Each day the lesson includes an introduction, the group activity, and a wrap-up that engages the groups in sharing their findings. During six days, the groups rotate through each activity, expanding and extending the interrelationships. While there is clearly an emphasis on group process, the conceptual emphasis is similar to variations on a theme.

Complex instruction provides a powerful connection between content and process. Theoretically, the interrelationships among sociology, psychology, interaction theory, and curriculum content are important to learning. These disciplines become most useful when the interconnections are realized and accentuated.

Whole language. This approach to language and literacy rejects the common separation of language processes into reading, writing,
speaking, and listening. Instead, language is viewed as a totality that is an integral part of our experience and a natural means of expression. Literature, art, music, and drama become important ways to encourage this expression. The process of writing is taught; students become authors of their own books. Mistakes are viewed as valuable sources of information for helping students achieve greater overall literacy. Classrooms become rich in stimuli and language production. Meaning and experience are emphasized as children are immersed in the process of becoming "meaning makers."

Whole language is an excellent example of many new paradigmatic concepts. The concepts of integration, complexity, and holism are central to this approach. Process and content are intertwined, as are the student and learning.

Brain-based learning. This approach includes a number of techniques based on new understandings of how the brain works. Research in the neurosciences has contributed greatly to this new knowledge. Caine and Caine (1989) have summarized important principles of brain-based approaches that help define the possibilities for learning theory:

* Although we may focus on one thing at a time, the brain processes and organizes many things at the same time.

* Learning is a physiological experience and much more than just a mental exercise.

* The brain organizes new knowledge on the basis of previous experience and meaning.

* Patterns of experience help determine the significance of content.

* The relationship between one’s emotional state and learning is critical.

* The brain processes parts and whole simultaneously.

* We have a spatial memory system that retrieves experience quickly and easily. Spatial memory allows us to recall holistic images. Take, for example, last night’s dinner. Although we made no attempt to memorize the particular foods, our memory of the experience is intact and perhaps rather detailed.

* Facts and skills that are not embedded in spatial memory need more practice and rehearsal.

* The brain responds to challenges but is less effective when threatened.

These principles are closely compatible with our new way of conceptualizing the world: complexity, interrelatedness, unity, and emergence.

APPENDIX B: Student Evaluation Sheet

Name

Date

Group Members’ Names

Check the statements that apply to you.

1. I listened to others while they were speaking. [ ]

2. I offered my own ideas and information. [ ]

3. I asked others for their ideas. [ ]

4. I shared the materials and supplies. [ ]

5. I asked my group for help when I needed it. [ ]

6. I helped someone in my group. [ ]

7. I took my turn and encouraged others to take their turns. [ ]

8. I praised someone in the group. [ ]
**Student Evaluation Sheet**

**WORKING TOGETHER**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Smiley</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Sad</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did we share?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did we take turns?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did we say something nice to each other?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did we help each other?</td>
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<td>Pages Read</td>
<td>Title</td>
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**Student Reading Record Sheet**

**MY READING RECORD**

Name __________________________

53
Each column represents one centre completed. Fill in each box in the column before going on to your next centre.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Centre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Centre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Started</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe the activity you chose.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Completed</td>
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<td>What materials did you use for this activity?</td>
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<td>Who did you help, work or share with?</td>
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<td>Did you clean up at your centre?</td>
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<td>Teacher's Comments</td>
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Name ______________________
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<td><strong>Date Started</strong></td>
<td><strong>Date Completed</strong></td>
<td><strong>Comments</strong> (Self-evaluation)</td>
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### Teacher Checklist for Completed Activities

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# Student Tracking Sheet

Name ___________________________  Starting Date ___________________________

## MY ACTIVITY CHECKLIST

Stamp or print the date in the date column when you have completed an activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity (&quot;Musts&quot; are marked with an &quot;)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>My Comment</th>
<th>Teacher's Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1.</td>
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APPENDIX C: Creating and Improving Parental Involvement

The following letters were used to explain to the parents how their children would be involved in the "learning centres" and what language learning experiences their children could expect throughout the year.

The letters were reproduced from Creating the Child-centered Classroom by Susan Schwartz and Mindy Pollishuke.
Copyright: 1990 Irwin Publ., Toronto, Canada. Reproduced with permission of the publisher.
Dear Parent or Guardian

Throughout the school year, your child may mention his/her involvement in "learning centres".

In our classroom, "learning centres" are planned around various themes or curriculum areas. These centres encourage the developing physical, social, emotional and intellectual needs of the children. When taking part in these centres, your child will have many opportunities to work with a group, to develop and strengthen the understanding of concepts and skills, to make decisions, and to solve problems.

Interaction with their fellow students and between teacher and students at centres promotes co-operation—an essential life skill—and makes for valuable and positive learning experiences.

Attached to this letter is a list of the centres that your child will be taking part in this term.

If you have any questions, please call me at the school at ____________.

Sincerely
Dear Parent or Guardian

I would like to outline some of the language learning experiences that your child will have this year.

SPEAKING
There will be daily opportunities for your child to express questions, ideas and opinions, in large group discussions, with a partner, and with adults. These opportunities are designed to encourage communication skills.

LISTENING
Listening carefully is an important part of our language program. Children must learn to listen carefully in order to learn new facts and ideas and to understand instructions and directions. Developing listening skills will be emphasized in large and small group discussions, and also at our audio-visual centre.

READING
Research has proven that children learn to read by reading. The more they read and discuss what they read, the better readers they will become. Our focus is to encourage children to read for meaning, to understand what they are reading, and to read more fluently. To reach this goal, the children will take part in many reading activities throughout the day.

I hope that you will encourage your child to read at home and that you or another adult will read to him/her daily.

WRITING
The writing program this year emphasizes daily writing and a sense of authorship. The children will be involved in much the same activities as real authors. They will

- discuss their ideas
- talk out their stories
- write draft copies
- share their stories
- change and revise/rework selected stories
- edit and publish selected stories

.../2

Figure 8.11
The letter in Figure 8.11 provides information about the language focus in the classroom. It can be useful as a starting point for discussion on a curriculum night or during interview sessions.

Page 2

When the children first write their stories, I encourage them to write all the letters they hear and not to worry about correct spelling at first. In this way, their thoughts will flow freely onto paper. The students will be revising or changing selected pieces of their writing. When they prepare to share their work with others, they see the need for correct spelling, punctuation and grammar. When they publish their writing, they gain confidence and pride in their accomplishments.

I hope that you will encourage your child to write often at home. I would welcome sharing any home writing at school.

SPELLING
The children's spelling skills will improve as they read, write and experiment with words. Research has shown that children must feel free to try different spellings before they become competent spellers. They will be working with words from their own writing and from their theme studies.

MUSIC
The music program will also emphasize language. Children read and learn new words to a variety of new songs and sing for enjoyment. The music program will also involve experimenting with sound, rhythm, and movement.

I hope to communicate with you frequently. Please get in touch with me if you have any questions or concerns (call the school at 769-2222).

Sincerely

M Pollishuke

M Pollishuke
Dear Parent or Guardian

Here are some practical suggestions for how you can help your child do well in school and enjoy learning.

- Let your child explore and experiment with materials, toys and "hands-on" activities such as building with blocks, typing, cooking, and sewing. Children learn best by doing.

- Take advantage of daily learning situations to point out colours, numbers, letters and words. Count the number of plates on the table, talk about the colours in the striped shirt she/he is wearing, read and discuss prices during shopping outings, etc.

- Oversee the type of television programs your child watches and control how much time he/she spends watching. Discuss the programs with your child and make television a shared experience.

- Let your child be responsible for some household chore.

- Let your child make decisions by giving him/her choice in such matters as breakfast food, birthday celebrations, bedroom colour, clothing, etc.

- Seek out your child's strengths and capabilities and praise her/him whenever possible.

- Play games with your child that require concentration. Often such games can help to increase problem-solving and thinking skills.

- Have good conversations with your child and ask thought-provoking questions. Listen actively.

Thank you for your continuing interest and support.

Sincerely

S. Schwartz
Dear Parent or Guardian

The following suggestions are some practical ideas for you to use to encourage your child to read at home.

. Set up a shelf with his/her favourite books.
. Make regular trips to the library.
. Ask the librarian to recommend good books.
. Give books as gifts.
. Let your child see you read. Children learn by imitating.
. Read and share books and stories with your child regularly in the language you are most comfortable with.
. Establish a regular daily reading time, for example, after supper or before bedtime.
. Relate reading to everyday life situations (billboards, traffic signs, menus, TV guides, catalogues, labels, maps, etc.)

Thank you for your continuing interest and support.

Sincerely
APPENDIX D: Reading Rubric - First Grade

5 Strong Reader
- strong reading development
- reads at/above grade level
- uses expression and phrasing
- self-correcting and self-monitoring

4 Good Reader
- recognizes most primary word families and patterns
- automatically recognizes 50 high frequency words
- understands and extends book language

3 Progressing Reader
- recognizes basic word families and patterns
- knows and uses decoding strategies
- complex letter/sound correspondences
- understands more complex concepts about print

2 Emergent Reader
- uses semantic and syntactic cues
- compares similar words
- beginning comprehension strategies predicting and connecting what is known

1 Beginning Reader
- knows most/all letters-sound correspondences
- understands initial concepts of print
- sounds out words

Rubric based on Sample Reading Curriculum Timeline information from Every Child a Reader (1995)
TABLE THREE: ITBS Total Language Post-Test
Individual Student Performance

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Percentile Rank</th>
<th>Co-op NPR</th>
<th>Control NPR</th>
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Number of Students: 25
TABLE FOUR: Reading Readiness Pretest
First Grade Rubric Score

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<tr>
<td>Classes</td>
<td>Coop Learning Center</td>
<td>Control Class</td>
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</table>

# of students

Rubric Scores

Coop Learning Center Classes

Control Class
### TABLE FIVE: Reading Readiness Post-Test
#### First Grade Rubric Score

| # of students | 10 | 8 | 6 | 2 | 0 |

#### Rubric Scores

<table>
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<th>Score</th>
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<th>Control Class</th>
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</table>

*Note: The graph illustrates the distribution of rubric scores between Coop Learning Center Classes and Control Class.*

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68
REFERENCES


McDavitt, D.S., (1994). *Teaching for Understanding: Attaining Higher Order Learning and Increased Achievement through Experiential Learning* EDRS.


