

A Study on the Development of an Emergent Literacy Program and its Application for Young Children

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This study is to examine: (1) the effects of whole language program on 3-, 4-, 5-year-olds' literacy developments, and (2) the effects of whole language program of kindergarten on children's communications and literacy developments at the 1st grade. This study shows that the whole language program facilitates the children's literacy development such as emergent literacy concepts and retelling of the stories read to them, and the children's writing development. It also demonstrates the effectiveness of the whole language program on the communication skills in the 1st grade. This study shows that children in whole language program grasp most of the emergent literacy concept and abilities during the time period of 3-, 4-year-olds. Therefore, it is advisable to apply the whole language program early on.

Until recently few people have considered written language program for the preschools or kindergartens since there were many problems due to the trend of direct instruction with a predetermined curriculum without considering the characteristics of written language development of young children. Recent researches (Sulzby, 1985, Teale & Sulzby, 1986) on literacy development indicates that the reading readiness paradigm of either maturationist viewpoint nor environmentalist viewpoint is theoretically and practically inappropriate. Teale and Sulzby (1986) claimed that emergent literacy development is the appropriate way to describe what is called reading readiness: The child develops as a writer and a reader. And young children's literacy development does not proceed as a linear form

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from gaining abilities of sensory discrimination to recognizing phonemes, letters, words, and comprehending sentences as claimed by reading readiness or code-emphasis approach. The notion of reading preceding writing, or vice versa, is a misconception. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities develop concurrently and interrelatedly rather than sequentially.

Young children learn written languages when they use them in a daily life naturally as they learn oral languages. And they learn written languages spontaneously when they deal with written languages in a total meaningful contexts. As indicated in Clay (1982), Sulzby (1985), Teale and Sulzby (1986), and Lee and Lee (1985), young children are developing the concept of reading and writing long before children start formal instruction. The search for skills which produce subsequent achievement have been misguided because the onset of literacy has been misconceived.

Lee and Lee (1985), Rubin (1980), and Schickedanz (1987) strongly suggest that written language education should be different from the traditional language education which emphasized decoding letters. That is, young children's ability to comprehend and use written languages cannot be achieved by discrimination and recognition of letters only. It comes only when they comprehend integrated functions of language or only when they understand principles, rules, and cultures related to written language. It was emphasized that such understanding of functions and principles are possible by considering literacy-related materials of activities dealing with written language. Since the meaning of language can be drawn from actual contexts, the education for written language has to start with the situational contexts and proceed in the way that is appropriate for young children's written language developments. Instruction of spelling letters or words according to the code-emphasis approach should be avoided.

According to Klesius and Colleagues (1991), the meta-analysis of studies revealed that whole language approaches and basal reader programs were equally effective and that the whole language approach is more effective with beginning readers but should be followed by systematic instruction in word recognition and decoding (Stahl and Miller, 1989). Stahl and Miller (1989) suggested that after children learn that reading is a form of communication through whole language, they must learn reading skills to decode written language fluently and automatically.

However, many researchers (Clarke, 1987; Goodman, 1986; Weaver, 1989; Harste, 1985; Clay, 1990; Edelsky, 1990) have raised