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ABSTRACT
        A study examined strategies for embedding literacy
skills within a whole language program. A questionnaire was given to
full-time whole language elementary school teachers who taught in
kindergarten through second-grade classrooms. All the participants
teach in suburban school districts in the Bay Area including San
Francisco. Marin, Sonoma, and Napa counties (California). The
questionnaire was composed of 12 questions designed to gather
information on how literacy, with an emphasis on skills, is taught in
a whole language classroom. Nine of 12 participants completed the
questionnaire. Results indicated that whole language teachers used
many strategies to embed skills within their daily classroom
curriculum. Among the most commonly used strategies were guided
reading, a phonetic spelling program, teacher modeling of literacy
skills, and immersion in a variety of literature sources. Responses
also indicated that whole language teachers emphasized meeting
individual students' needs instead of teaching the same skills to all
students. (Contains 14 references and a table of data. Appendixes
present the cover letter and the teacher questionnaire.)
(Author/RS)

Examining Strategies For Embedding Literacy Skills Within
A Whole Language Program

by

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San Rafael, CA
May 1995

Running Head: Whole Language Strategies

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined strategies for embedding literacy skills within a whole language program. Information for this study was obtained from a questionnaire given to whole language elementary school teachers.

The questionnaire was given to full time whole language teachers who teach in kindergarten through second grade classrooms. The questionnaire was composed of twelve questions designed to gather information on how literacy, with an emphasis on skills, is taught in a whole language classroom.

The information gathered from this questionnaire indicated that whole language teachers use many strategies to embed skills within their daily classroom curriculum. Among the most commonly used strategies are guided reading, a phonetic spelling program, teacher modeling of literacy skills, and immersion in a variety of literature sources. Responses also indicated that whole language teachers emphasize meeting individual students' needs instead of teaching the same skills to all students.

Examining Strategies For Embedding Literacy Skills Within

A Whole Language Program

INTRODUCTION

In the last ten years there has been a shift from the skills-based approach of teaching reading and writing to the whole language approach. Currently there is some debate over the success of the whole language approach. It is perceived that students taught within a whole language program lack basic literacy skills needed to learn to read and write successfully. Yet, at the same time these students have a strong interest in literature and an understanding of the purposes of written communication. This debate leaves educators divided over the best approach to teaching literacy.

As a primary teacher I am motivated to find an approach to teaching literacy that both embeds skills and interest. Does the whole language approach of teaching literacy ignore the importance of basic literacy skills or is the approach being misinterpreted rather than effectively implemented? Many educators and authors have written about the benefits of a whole language program. It is my goal to review their findings as well as directly ask teachers how they are embedding literacy skills within their whole language classroom.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine strategies for teaching reading, writing, and oral language skills within a whole language literacy program. The key terms in this study originate from four main areas: reading, writing, and oral language skills and the whole language approach to teaching literacy.

Reading skills include phonics, picture clues, memorization, context clues, and comprehension. Phonics skills involve knowledge of letter names-sounds and the relationships between letters. Picture clues allow students to use pictures to decipher unknown words in the text. Memorization is simply memorizing text. Context clues enable students to use the known words in context to figure out unknown words. Comprehension is a student's ability to understand and retain information from written or verbal language.

Writing skills include phonics, the elements of a story, and the types and purposes of written communication. The elements of a story include the plot, the characters, the setting, the beginning, the middle, and the end of a story. The types and purposes of written communication are informational writing, letter writing, story writing, play writing, poems, and songs.

Oral language skills include listening and speaking. Listening to others speaking and reading for the purpose of comprehension. Speaking as a skill is a students ability to verbally convey their thoughts or information to others.

The whole language approach to teaching literacy involves creating a print rich environment and a meaning centered curriculum. This approach immerses students in literature that is relevant and interesting to the stur nts. Each student is assessed and then taught based on their ability level. Skills are taught when they occur naturally within literature or a student's own reading and writing.

RATIONALE

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the findings of The California Department of Education's document It's Elementary (1992) and on the work of Brian Cambourne (1988) including his model of learning as it applies to literacy . The purpose of It's Elementary is to define an outstanding elementary school through a series of recommendations. These recommendations are geared towards assisting parents, teachers, and administrators in making changes in the environment and curriculum of elementary schools. The recommendations of this document call for a meaning centered, thinking curriculum and a focus on thinking about and learning how to learn. Within the subject of language arts this is achieved through authentic varied literature that creates interest and connections for students. Also, students should be taught to learn from their own reading and writing. These recommendations are critical components of whole language classrooms.

Cambourne (1988) developed his own model of learning that includes seven conditions necessary in order for learning to take place: immersion, demonstration, expectation, engagement, responsibility, use, approximation, and response. Cambourne's model of learning as it applies to literacy can be carried out within the context of a whole language classroom. The environment as well as theory that is present in a whole language classroom provides the opportunity for all seven conditions to exist. These conditions also concur with the recommendations of It's Elementary. Cambourne asserts that students need to be immersed in variety of literature sources. These experiences then become demonstrations for appropriate uses of reading and writing. Cambourne also encourages students to experience literacy first hand by reading and writing their own material, as well as the work of others.

It's Elementary and Cambourne both advocate for students learning literacy through hands on experiences from a variety of literature sources. Both assert that learning literacy should be part of a natural learning process based on students' interests, experiences, and need for knowledge. This study examines whole language classrooms and embedding literacy skills within the structure recommended by It's Elementary and Cambourne.

BACKGROUND AND NEED

In 1991 two studies evaluating the effectiveness of whole language programs were presented. Roberts' (1991) study compared the writing abilities of students in a whole language classroom with the writing abilities of students in a skills-based classroom. Thirty-seven students, in two first grade classrooms from a low socioeconomic area were instructed for seven months and then their reading and writing skills were assessed using a Stanford Achievement Test. The 19 students instructed in the whole language classroom scored significantly higher on all tools of assessment, than the 18 students instructed in the skills-based classroom.

Engel (1991) also evaluated a whole language program located at the Longfellow School's primary grade literacy project. The study was a two-part study with 336 kindergarten-third grade student participants. The study was conducted from 1984-1990 and a total of 1,021 individual assessments were conducted. The assessments found that the whole language students all learned to read and write competently by the upper elementary grades, students learn in uneven increments, students learn literacy from a variety of sources, and morale and self-respect are central to learning.

Roberts (1991) and Engel (1991) both found whole language programs to be successful in teaching reading and writing in the primary grades. The results of studies like these and my own personal needs have inspired me to examine strategies for embedding skills within a whole language program. After all, a whole language program cannot be effective if students are not learning literacy skills as well as to enjoy literature and feel empowered as readers and writers.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following literature review addresses the whole language approach to teaching literacy including the areas of learning literacy and basic literacy skills, the role of a whole language teacher, and the possible downfalls within a whole language program. This review in conjunction with the teacher questionnaire study should provide helpful information in structuring a whole language classroom in which basic literacy skills, comprehension, and student motivation are key factors.

Learning Literacy and Embedding Skills

Cambourne (1988) used a naturalistic mode of research in order to gather information on how literacy learning occurs. Cambourne's research led to his Model of Learning as It Applies to Literacy. His model includes eight elements necessary for learning literacy. (1) Immersion- a learner needs to be immersed in all types of text. (2) Demonstration- learners need to be exposed to how texts are created and used. (3) Engagement-the learner believes they may create or use text, text has a purpose in their life, and they are safe to try and fail. (4) Expectation-the learners success is directly tied to their teachers expectation. An expectation of failure may produce failure and an expectation of success may produce success. (5) Responsibility- learners need to take responsibility for when, how, and what they learn. (6) Use- learners need real life opportunities to use and practice their literacy skills/knowledge. (7) Approximation- learners need to approximate what is modeled for them with the freedom and support to make

mistakes and learn from their mistakes. (8) Response-learners need responses from their teachers about their learning. The responses should be accurate, timely, and non-threatening. Cambourne continues on to describe how his Model of Learning can be used in a whole language classroom setting to teach literacy. Cambourne includes his observations as case studies in order to demonstrate his theory put into practice.

Routman (1991) offers readers specific advice and information about putting whole language theory into practice. Routman begins by explaining the components of a whole language program: a balanced reading and a balanced writing program. A balanced reading program is composed of four elements. (1) Reading Aloud-teachers should read aloud daily to their students of all grade levels. (2) Shared Reading- involves a teacher inviting their students to join in reading text as the teacher models reading with fluency and expression. Shared reading can include teacher reading, student reading, paired reading, or the use of a tape recorder. (3) Guided Reading- a teacher and students read a book together each with their own copy of the book. Together the teacher and students talk and question their way through the book. Guided reading can be conducted with a whole class. small group, or an individual. (4) Independent Reading- an opportunity for students to choose what they read. A balanced writing programs also composed of four elements.

(1) Writing Aloud- a teachers models writing in front of students while verbalizing what they are thinking and writing. (2) Shared Writing- a teacher and students collaborate to compose writing. (3) Guided Writing- a teacher guides students in their writing by responding to them and helping them to extend their thinking and writing. (4) Independent Writing- a students opportunity to write without teacher

intervention. Routman provides specific strategies and demonstration lessons for implementing a balanced reading and writing whole language program.

Routman (1992) later explains the difference between teaching isolated skills and teaching literacy strategies. An isolated skill is taught with a emphasis on practice and automatic correct response. In teaching strategies the learner shows a need for a specific skill in the instructional setting. The skill is taught because the learner needs to use it. "The learner must know how and when to apply the skill; that is what elevates the skill to the strategy level."(Routman,1992 p.36) Routman also offers advice on how to teach phonics strategically. Children should learn phonics through real-life contexts including books, signs, labels, charts, calendars, poems, and names. Routman recommends teaching phonics in the following order: 1. beginning consonants, 2. ending consonants, 3. consonant digraphs (sh, th, ch, wh), 4. medial consonants, 5. consonant blends, 6. long vowels, 7. short vowels.

Villaume and Worden (1993) assert that developing literate voices is the essence of whole language. The authors formed a learning partnership with a fourth grade class for seven months in an attempt to understand how literate voices are developed. During the seven month partnership Villaume and Worden sat in on small group literature discussion groups. The fourth grade students followed the lead of their teacher who took on three different roles during the course of the seven months. The teacher's roles included demonstration, facilitation, and direct instruction. The authors were hoping that the students would take on complete responsibility for the literature discussion groups and were initially disappointed with their failure to do so. Later, the researchers came to the realization that the teacher needed to continue to participate along with students and take turns for the responsibility of the different

roles of accepting, facilitating, elaborating, and probing. Not unlike adult discussions, the fourth graders occasionally got off task or appeared to be bored. The fourth graders also often took the discussion in directions the teacher had not anticipated. This caused th authors to come to the realization that if we truly desire to develop literate voices we need to empower students and provide them with the opportunity to take responsibility for their discussions. The authors found that the students did not confine their literate voices to text, but also carried them into conversations, television and radio. In closing Villaume and Worden stated that "Literate voices are the challenge of a whole language philosophy." (Villaume & Worden, 1993 p.468)

Students learn to become literate through natural and enjoyable experiences with literature. Students are most likely to learn to become literate if they feel personally connected to literature and are motivated by need and interest. Literacy skills should be learned when the students have the need for the skill; however, the learning of skills should be facilitated by teachers, parents, peers, and other classroom support. Students learn from observing and participating in reading experiences: such as listening to a story, reading a street sign, or reading a book. Students learn to write by observing and participating in writing experiences such as: writing a shopping list, writing a letter, or dictating a story. Oral language skills are learned by engaging in discussions about text written by students and published authors. Exposure to different types of literature is key to students understanding the need for literacy and being inspired to engage in literacy experiences. Research indicates that the responsibility of creating a whole language classroom belongs to the students and the classroom teacher.

Role of the Teacher

Garan (1994) describes her ethnographic study of a first grade classroom and focuses on the first grade teacher's struggle to empower her students, while at the same time providing quality learning experiences and structure. Garan acknowledges the fears of skills-based educators around chaos, noise, and a student's ability to be responsible for their own education, but raises the question "How are students supposed to learn responsibility if we never give them any?".(Garan, 1994 p.195) Within Garan's year of observation she witnessed the teacher model responsible decision making and guide her students towards making their own decisions. Garan found that developing a whole language classroom environment is not easy or quick. It takes time and patience to create a classroom where students are actively engaged in creating and being responsible for their own education. Garan also found that there is no recipe for creating a successful whole language classroom, but rather that this first grade teacher went through a continual evolution of reflection, change, and growth.

Hatch (1992) recognizes that most teachers were prepared for teaching and were taught themselves using a skill-based approach to literacy. For this reason he acknowledges that change will take time and must allow for teachers to experiment and use their own judgment in implementing change. Hatch worked with the Tennessee State Department of Education Whole Language Pilot Project during the 1989-90 school year and developed the following recommendations for change based on the experience. (1) Change should be made in one area at a time in order to reduce both student and teacher anxiety. (2) A manageable plan for change should be established to allow teachers to break

up a big change into smaller more manageable steps.   (3) Teachers should be encouraged to explore many options and then experiment and make adjustments as necessary.   "Just as integrated developmentally appropriate strategies assume that children actively construct their own knowledge, so it is assumed here that teachers construct their own best practices by actively processing information and trying out what makes sense to them." (Hatch, 1992 p.57)   (4) Teachers need to use their professional juagment about skills instruction and the role of basal readers in their classrooms.

Ruddell (1992) centers on a teacher's role within a whole language, literature based program.   He begins by defining whole language as a philosophy based on meaning making at the center of a students learning. Ruddell asserts that a literature based program is critical for enabling students to make meaning and develop motivation.   He states that teachers should immerse students in literature in their classrooms and provide students the opportunity to use literature for meaningful demonstrations, real life purposes, and to be exposed to and learn from the experiences of others.   Ruddell believes that it is the classroom teacher's role to facilitate students in making meaning.   In order for teachers to be successful in facilitating students in meaning making Ruddell makes the following recommendations. First, a teacher needs to be sensitive to individual students' needs, motivations, and abilities. Second, a teacher needs a strategy, oriented with a clear instructional plan. Third, a teacher should have high expectations for their students and allow students to share in the responsibility of meeting these expectations.

The teacher's role in a whole language classroom is based on teaching students to be responsible for their learning. By doing this they are empowering

students to be actively involved in creating their own learning experiences. It is

the teachers' responsibility to assess their students and meet their needs on an

individual basis. A teacher is able to facilitate learning through immersing students

in literature, supporting students in learning literacy skills when a need for the skill is

encountered in a natural context, and asking students questions that guide them

in understanding and critically thinking about literature. In order to be successful

a teacher needs to be aware of the problems that can exist within whole

language classroom.

Possible Downfalls of Whole Language

Field and Jardine (1994) discuss the "shadows" of whole language and the

potential for "shadows" to be used as learning opportunities by teachers. Whole

language is not merely a shift in the teaching of language arts , it involves

"... profound political, ethical, spiritual, and ecological reorientations of our lives.

It contains powerful notions: democratization, empowerment, ownership, choice,

child-centeredness, authorship, silencing/voice, images of being public and

being private, self-evaluation, and self-expression community and individuality."

(Field & Jardine, 1994 p.259) This article provides three examples of the

"shadows" of whole language. The first "shadow" is embedded in the nature of

empowering students to asses their work. This practice opens up the possibility of

abandoning students to rely only on their judgment for guidance. The second

"shadow" comes from the ideas of choice and ownership. Teachers need to

take responsibility for teaching students the difference between appropriate and

inappropriate topics and should not be afraid to guide students in choosing a

topics. The third "shadow " involves the idea of no one right answer to

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interpreting literature. Teachers need to be careful that this ideas does not open up the gateway to a lack of discipline, attention, or skill when interpreting literature.

Cullinan (1992) shares her opinions on the problems with the whole language, but also highlights some of the promising aspects of the movement. Cullinan points out that when she started teaching in the 1940's that phonics was a hot topic of debate and continues to be. The problem is that even among whole language teachers there is debate over the role of phonics. Her concern is that this type of disagreement leads the general public to believe that whole language teachers cannot agree on the right way to teach reading. Another problem stems from a need for new assessment procedures. Standardized tests do not accurately assess a student from a whole language classroom, and yet standardized tests are used to rank achievement. The last problem Cullinan addresses is the role of the basal reader. Cullinan asserts that teachers teach, not materials and therefore teachers should be allowed to choose their teaching materials. And as long as whole language teachers call for a ban on basal readers they are alienating their colleagues. Even with these problems in place she still sees promises for success within the whole language movement because the movement continues to grow, publishers are producing a higher quality of varied literature in their texts, and parents are paying attention to what their children enjoy reading.

In order for a whole language program to be successful it must be designed to avoid the possible downfalls. Some major obstacles in the path of success for the whole language approach are the disagreements over appropriate materials and methods of teaching among whole language teachers.

Disagreements about materials and methods make the whole language approach seem vague, inaccurate, and risky. Downfalls also include the possibility of students being left completely responsible for their own learning and assessment. True whole language programs are designed to empower students, but they also need to plan for the teaching of literacy skills through teacher demonstrations, guidance, and a variety of literature sources. Although the downfalls may seem few in number; they are compelling enough to impede the success and acceptance of the whole language approach if they are not addressed.

Summary

Together, the articles reviewed tell the story of a whole language classroom with basic literacy skills, comprehension, and student motivation as integral parts of the total program. Students learn to be literate by being exposed to a wide variety of literature that they can make personal connections with and learn basic literacy skills from. This allows for students to learn basic literacy skills when they are ready and not under random circumstances. Students can also learn basic literacy skills through their own reading and writing. The teacher acts as a facilitator by teaching a student about basic literacy skills like phonics and grammar while editing the student's work or reading a published story together. It is the teacher's job to assess an individual student's needs and teach the student accordingly by embedding literacy skills in genuine, not contrived, learning experiences. Teachers also need to be aware of the possible pitfalls in a whole language program. Student empowerment is critical to success in a whole language program and at the same time it opens up the door for students to rely

only on their judgment. Students need their teachers to guide them through and to help them create learning experiences. Assessment tools also need to be developed in order to more accurately evaluate whole language students.

METHOD OF THE STUDY

Subjects

All participants in this study were selected because they are self-proclaimed whole language teachers. The participants range in experience from one year teaching to thirty years teaching. All study participants are female and teach full time in the primary grades: kindergarten through second grade. Some of the participants teach in multi-aged classrooms and others teach in single grade classrooms. One of the participants teaches a kindergarten-first grade combination class, two participants teach in kindergarten classrooms, four participants teach first grade, and two participants teach second grade. All the participants teach in suburban school districts in the Bay Area including San Francisco, Marin, Sonoma, and Napa Counties.

Apparatus

The participants were asked to respond to a twelve question questionnaire (see Appendix B) designed to gather information on how literacy, with an emphasis on skills, is taught in whole language classrooms. The questionnaire asked the participants to describe where they teach (question 1), what type of classroom support they have (question 2), how they assess their students (question 7), materials they use to teach literacy (question 8), and methods of teaching literacy skills (questions 9-11).

Procedure

Each participant was mailed a questionnaire that took approximately thirty minutes to complete. After completing the questionnaire the participants were

asked to return it in the provided self-addressed stamped envelope. This research study adhered to the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association (1994) in protecting the rights of all human subjects . Subjects were informed of the general nature of the study, its basic purpose, their rights to preserving their confidentiality, and availability of the researcher to answer questions during the course of this study. Permission to conduct the study was granted on an individual basis by each participant. No participant names were used in compiling or reporting the results of the study. The study participants will have the opportunity to learn about the results at the conclusion of this study.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Nine of twelve participants completed and returned their questionnaires, yielding a 75% response rate. The participants' responses to the first five questions help to paint a picture of their classrooms and school communities. All of the respondents teach full time in kindergarten through second grade classrooms in suburban elementary schools. Participants reported classroom enrollments ranged from twenty-seven to thirty students. A majority of the participants reported less than 25% of their class as "At Risk" or needing extra support in learning to be literate. All of those surveyed use additional classroom support, such as aides, parent volunteers, cross-age tutors, and specialist teachers including Reading, Chapter 1 and ESL.

Assessment Methods

Method	Participant Use
Observations	100 %
Student Portfolios	100 %
Standardized Tests	11 %
Running Records	56 %
Other	50 %

The table shows that all of the respondents use observations and student portfolios to assess their students. Only one teacher is currently using standardized tests to assess students. Running records of students reading aloud are kept for assessment purposes by five of the participants. Four participants

use other types of students assessment, such as students book talks, writing and reading continuums, reading and writing benchmarks, book handling and alphabet checks, high frequency word tests, and assessment by specialists. Most of the assessment tools are based on teacher input and minimal standardized test information.

All of those surveyed use a district adopted reader to teach literacy. All nine of the respondents also rely on other materials and literature to supplement their district reader. The supplemental materials being used include library books and other published reading series.

The study participants report that between 26 and 100 percent of each school day is devoted to teaching literacy. Teaching literacy is integrated throughout the entire day, from taking attendance in the morning to closing the afternoon with oral questioning about what was learned during the day. Participants were also asked to answer three open ended questions about how they embed basic literacy skills within their whole language program. While there were a wide range of answers to the open ended questions certain strategies were included by most respondents. Specifically, reading skills are embedded through shared reading; students join in reading text as the teacher models reading with fluency and expression, guided reading; a teacher and students read a book together each with their own copy of the book, and Mc Cracken's (1982) phonetic spelling program. Writing skills are embedded through writer's workshop; individualized writing projects with teacher modeling, Mc Cracken's (1982) phonetic spelling program, and classroom news: composed by students and facilitated by the teacher. Oral language skills are embedded through students sharing, oral questions and discussion, and class meetings.

The final question asked respondents to describe their students' attitudes towards language arts. All participants gave positive responses to this question revealing that most, if not all of their students see themselves as readers and writers, are confident in their abilities, and choose reading and writing activities when given the opportunity.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine strategies for teaching reading, writing, and oral language skills within a whole language classroom. A review of the current literature was conducted in conjunction with a teacher questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to elicit information about whole language classrooms. The study gathered input on classroom composition, materials, and strategies for embedding skills.. While some strategies were unique many were shared by all of the participants. The responses collected show similarities in: classroom support, materials, skills strategies, and assessment tools used by the whole language teachers surveyed.

The information given in response to the questions dealing specifically with how teachers embed literacy skills within their daily classroom routine illustrate the strong similarities in strategies being used. The participants responded that 26-100 % of their school day is devoted to teaching language arts. Reading skills are embedded through strategies such as guided reading, shared reading, and Mc Cracken (1982) spelling. Findings indicate that immersion and interest are key factors in teaching students reading skills. Writing skills are embedded through classroom daily news, writer's workshop, and Mc Cracken (1982) spelling. All of these strategies include teacher modeling and instruction geared toward individual student needs. Oral language skills are developed literally throughout the entire day, with constant modeling by the teacher, students, and other adults. Teachers facilitate small and large group discussion and question sessions, sharing, and class meetings in order to focus students' attention on developing oral language skills.

Assessment is another area in which there was a great deal of overlap in the participants' responses. The majority of those surveyed use assessment tools,

such as observation and portfolios that allow for a broad picture of growth. Theses tools depend on looking at a student over a period of time versus an isolated experience or test. These methods of assessment rely on teacher input and observation.

The results of this study imply that there are some basic strategies for embedding skills in a whole language classroom. Students must be immersed in a variety of literature sources that they are motivated to listen to the teacher read aloud and to read independently . By immersing students in an abundance of literature opportunities are created for teachers to facilitate the learning of skills as they are needed by the students. Teachers also need to design lessons for modeling literacy skills for students. Whether teachers read a book aloud, model writing while verbally expressing their thoughts or orally answers questions, they need to show their students how to be literate. These whole language strategies depend on the ability of teachers to assess their students' individual needs and provide individual instruction based on the assessment results.

The strengths of this study are that all of the participants were whole language teachers and they had the opportunity to share their knowledge through open-ended questions. The open-ended questions allowed for in-depth answers that provide an overview of the individual respondents' strategies for embedding basic literacy skills within their whole language classroom. The limitations of this study include the small number of participants from a limited geographic area, some responses only provided a list strategies instead of providing detailed descriptions, and there were no follow-up or clarification interviews conducted.

One of the study limitations creates an area for possible future research. Follow-up interviews could be conducted with all or some of the study participants to allow for additional information to be gathered on how strategies

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are used, instead of just collecting a list of strategies being used. The study could also be expanded to include a larger pool of subjects from communities that are more diverse socially and economically.

Information gathered in this study is consistent with information presented in current research.   Routman (1991) recommends the use of guided and shared reading to teach literacy skills. A trend in participant responses indicated that these teachers, in fact, use guided and shared reading. Cambourne (1988) asserts that the first step to teaching literacy is immersion in literature, followed by the modeling of literacy skills, and student practice of literacy skills. Another connection can be made between participant responses and Cambourne's (1988) key elements of teaching literacy. Both of these author-researchers are in agreement that the strategies being used by study participants are necessary and effective elements of successful whole language classrooms. The information gathered about assessment also coincides with current literature. Participant responses are consistent with Cullinan's (1992) assertion that most student assessment in whole language classrooms is based on teacher observation and opinion. While these assessment techniques prove effective for the individual teacher, they may not always provide consistent standards that transfer from classroom to classroom. Cullinan (1992) sees current assessment techniques as a possible downfall of the whole language approach because they lack consistency.

The question "Does the whole language approach of teaching literacy ignore the importance of basic literacy skills or is the approach being misinterpreted rather than effectively implemented?" was asked in the introduction . The review of the current literature, responses from the teacher questionnaire, and my own personal experiences lead me to believe that the whole language approach of

teaching literacy is being misinterpreted rather than effectively implemented. My research indicates that basic literacy skills can be embedded within the whole language approach, but not without an abundance of literature sources, teachers with the ability to assess their students' individual needs, and teachers with the ability to teach literacy skills during genuine, not contrived, learning experiences.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Study Participant,

This study is designed to research if it is possible to embed reading, writing, and language skills within a whole language approach to teaching literacy. It will achieve this through a questionnaire and and review of the current literature.

The information collected will be used by Jennifer Botenhagen as part of the requirement a Master's of Science in Education at Dominican College of San Rafael, California.

Study participants are being asked to make a thirty minute (approximately) time commitment to completing and returning the enclosed questionnaire. There should be no physical or psychological risks associated with participation in this study. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times, a summary of the information will be used not specific answers by participants. If you have any questions, problems, or discomfort with the study, please contact Dr. Barry Kaufman or Dr. Madalienne Peters immediately at (415) 485-3287.

The results of the study will be posted at the Education Department Office. All responses will be kept in a locked file which no one will see except for the researcher and the advisors. One year following the study the information will be carefully destroyed.

You may keep this cover letter for future reference. If you choose to participate in this research study, please give me your response to the questionnaire as soon as possible. I have enclosed a self addressed stamped envelope to be returned to Dominican College.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Botenhagen

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire

Please read each question carefully and respond as completely as possible. Your response is critical to the success of the study I am conducting. Thank you again for your time and input.

1. Describe where you teach as one of the following:
    Urban( )   Rural( )   Suburban( )

2. What type of additional support do you have in your classroom?
    (Check all that apply)
    Aide( ) Parent Volunteers( ) Cross-Age Tutor( ) Reading Teacher( )
    Other( ) Please describe:

3. What grade level(s) are you currently teaching?

4. How many students are in your class?

5. How many students in your class are "At Risk" or require additional support
    in learning to read?
    0-25% ( )   26-50% ( )   51-75% ( )   76-100% ( )

6. What portion of the school day is devoted to teaching language arts ?
    0-25% ( )   26-50% ( )   51-75% ( )   76-100% ( )

7. How do you assess your students' reading, writing, and oral language skills?
    (Check all that apply)
    Observation ( ) Portfolio ( ) Standardized Tests ( ) Running Record ( )
    Other( ) Please describe:

8. What type of literature do you use to teach reading?
    (Check all that apply)
    District Adopted Reader ( ) Title:
    Thematic Books ( )
    Published Series (ie. Wright Books, Rigby Books,etc...) ( ) Please describe:

    Other ( ) Please describe:

9.   How are reading skills (phonics, word attack skills, comprehension,etc..) taught in your classroom? Please describe:

10.   How are writing skills (spelling, grammar,etc...) taught in your classroom? Please describe:

11.   How are oral language skills (verbal questions, responses, descriptions, etc...) taught in your classroom?   Please describe:

12.   Please describe your students' attitudes toward language arts:
       •Do they choose to read and write on their own?
       •Are they confident in their abilities?
       •Do they actively engage in conversations/discussions about what they are reading and writing?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Botenhagen graduated from Sonoma State University with a Bachelor's of Arts degree in 1991. In 1992 she completed the work for her Multiple Subject Teaching Credential at Dominican College of San Rafael, where she also earned her Master's of Science degree in 1995. Currently, Jennifer is teaching first grade in Novato, California.