Literature-Based vrs. Controlled-Vocabulary

Approach for Beginning Readers

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2016

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Introduction

There has been an ongoing debate among educators as to what is the best method of teaching beginning readers how to read (Hiebert & Pearson; 1999, Pearson, 2001) Adams (1997) tells us that "over the centuries and around the world, many different proposals have been offered regarding how best to teach people to read" (p. 49). Goodman, Smith, Meredith and Goodman (1987) point out that "methods for learning to read come and go across the educational area…" (p. 239). Chall (1983, 1967), in her seminal research *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* sought to determine what was the best method of teaching children how to read. She focused her research on phonics methods, on look-say [whole-word] methods, and on determining the effects of knowing the alphabet. Since learning how to read, unlike oral language, does not develop naturally for most children, the method of teaching children how to read is an important one if we are to ensure the success of all children who attend formal schooling. According to Menon and Hiebert (1999), "the texts read by beginning readers are influential in determining their reading abilities because of the opportunities they provide for developing independent reading skills" (p. 1). There have been two competing methods of teaching beginning readers through the ages (Pearson, 2001). These two methods are the literature-based (whole language) approach and the controlled vocabulary (phonics) approach.

The literature based approach emphasizes reading comprehension over the teaching of phonics skills in isolation. Frank Smith (1971) and Kenneth Goodman (1987) claimed that, when reading, children relied more on the meaning of language than on the graphic information from the text. It was Smith's (1971) contention that teaching children to focus on individual letters and words was misguided. He believed that, if children were given sufficient experience

with meaningful text, they would be able to learn how to read just as naturally as they learned how to talk. Over time, Smith's theory became known as the Whole Language Movement.

Goodman (1987) further developed the whole language theory as a holistic approach that blended reading, writing, speaking, and listening. In the holistic approach, learning goes from "the whole to the part, from general to specific, from gross to fine, from highly contextualized to more abstract" (Goodman et al., 1987, p. 248). As children acquire a repertoire of whole words, they begin to read familiar words and phrases which eventually allow them to handle unfamiliar parts in familiar uses anywhere. In this method, there is no sequence of skills that beginners must learn before they can read. If skills, such as word recognition or phonics are taught, they are taught within the text, while children are reading, and are not taught in isolation. In the whole-language approach, comprehension is stressed over the teaching of discrete skills.

In contrast, the controlled vocabulary approach is often associated with graded reading series called "basal readers" which made their debut in the 18th century (Reyhner, 2008). Reyhner (2008) said basal readers were introduced by publishing houses and consisted of sets of graded books which were used by all the students in the classroom. Every student read the same book at the same time, led by teachers who based their reading lessons on those found in a companion teacher's edition of the students' book. The guide included suggestions and examples of activities and assessments that teachers could implement, and workbooks for independent student practice of skills taught (Reyhner, 2008). Reyhner (2008) goes on to say that the sets consisted of books that were specially written to include stories that emphasized the sounds of letters in words. This was especially true at the beginning reader level. This emphasis on the sounds of the alphabetic letters was referred to as the phonics approach. Adams (1990) defined phonics as the instructional method "intended to help children to understand the

fundamentally alphabetic nature of our writing system and, through that understanding, to internalize the correspondences between…the words, syllables, and phonemes…(p. 1). She goes on to say that "the debate over phonics, centers on whether its instruction promotes or impedes development of the attitudes and abilities required for reading comprehension" (p.1).

Historical Background

At the beginning of the 20th century, an increasing number of the stories that were included in basal readers emphasized particular sounds or other targeted reading skills (Reyhner, 2008). Reyner (2008) found that "these specially written stories, with controlled vocabularies, were often of little interest to the students" (p.2). Hiebert and Pearson (1999) say that "for much of the 20th century, most American school children learned to read with texts that featured high frequency words, exemplified by [the] Dick and Jane [basal readers]" (p. 4). The books employed a *whole-word* approach to teaching reading, where words were repeated on each page enough times that students could recognize them *on sight* (Menon & Hiebert, 1999). The authors discovered that early basal series repeated words as many as 60 times across a series. A study by Saragi, Nation, and Meister (1978) has shown that a word needs to be encountered at least five times in order for it to be remembered.

Supporters of the phonics approach did not accept the whole-word approach to teaching beginning readers. They believed that children should be able to sound out words based on how they are spelled (Reyhner, 2008). The only problem with this approach is that the English language does not have a true one-to-one sound-symbol correspondence (Adams, 1990; Reyhner, 2008). Reyhner (2008) estimates that about one half of the words in the English language cannot be pronounced correctly using phonics rules and would therefore have to be memorized as "sight words" to become automatized. Adams (1990) theorizes that there is a core of 100 high

frequency words which account for approximately 50% of the text in the elementary grades. She goes on to say that there is evidence that learning these core set of words is linked to children's ability to become independent readers. Adams (1990) further says that by the end of the third grade, children will be expected to recognize over 80,000 different words, and not just recognize them but also know their meaning.

The literature-based approach is associated with the "whole language" instruction approach that became popular during the 1980's and 1990's. Reyhner (2008) says that:

> with whole language, teachers are expected to provide a literacy rich environment for their students and to combine speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Whole language teachers emphasize the meaning of texts over the sounds of letters, and phonics instruction becomes just one component of the whole language classroom (p. 2).

The whole-language, literature-based approach, has also been referred to as the "top-down or inductive approach" because it begins with the whole word not the letter-sound symbols that make up the word (Reyhner, 2008). Children are taught to memorize the word rather than sound it out as the phonics approach teaches. A literature-based approach to reading does not place the same emphasis on the "skills" needed to read; children are taught to read by reading whole texts rather than learning the mechanics or rules of reading. Since the whole word is taught, rather than the parts of words, children are expected to learn how to read by recognizing the word without using phonics to decode the word. When children have trouble figuring the word out, they are often encouraged to 'guess' what the word might be based on the context of the sentence. In this approach, the content of the selection and comprehension are emphasized. In the literature-based approach the belief is that in order for children to learn how to read, they just have to be surrounded with 'good' literature (Goodman et al., 1987). Immersion in literature will

lead them to become interested in reading and will encourage them to want to learn how to read (Goodman et al., 1987).

Literature-Based/Whole-Language Approach

Educators who support the literature-based approach say that "through the use of children's literature in a school reading program, youngsters can enter the world of literature while they learn to read" (Aiex, 1990). The belief is that literacy can be promoted by developing a love of literature and reading through positive contact with books. This contact can start before children know how to read independently when teachers read aloud works of literature. Aiex (1990) tells us that "some language arts specialists hold that real stories and real characters are better vehicles for teaching reading comprehension than the basal readers and accompanying workbooks" (p.1).

The literature-based approach relies on children's literature to provide the basis for learning how to read. In the early years, pattern books are often utilized because of the rhyme, the repetition, the predictability, and the high frequency vocabulary (Goodman et al., 1987). There is also a connection between the printed text and the use of pictures which makes "reading" easier for young children. Children can study the pictures clues to aid them in determining the meaning of the story (Goodman et al., 1987).

Educators who follow the literature-based philosophy believe that children learn to read naturally and that the emphasis should be on reading comprehension and immersion in high quality literature. The whole language, literature-based approach, is based on the premise that children will learn to read and write naturally, without direct instruction, if they are immersed in a literacy-rich environment (Goodman, 1986; Smith, 1971). Sykes (1995b) tells us that

advocates of the literature-based approach believe that "children learn best when learning is kept whole, meaningful, interesting and functional" (p. 8).

In the literature-based approach children are taught to "look at pictures; [to ask themselves] what would make sense?; to look for patterns; look for clues; and to skip the word [they don't know] and to read ahead and then go back to the word. Nowhere is the child told to *sound it out*" (Sykes, 1995b, p. 6). In this method, children are taught to 'guess' the word they do not know by looking for clues from the context, from the earlier and later parts of the sentence, and from the story.

Leu and Kinzer (2003) tell us that "a major goal for younger readers is to develop automatic decoding skills or fluency with reading" (p. 156). It is this automaticity that allows the reader to focus on comprehension and meaning-making. The authors contend that good literature gives students the opportunity to develop automaticity as they re-read favourite books. It is these repeated readings that will allow children to practice their reading and decoding skills, to learn the letter-sound relationships, and to learn how to use the context of a sentence to "figure out" the unfamiliar word.

Controlled Vocabulary/Phonics Approach

Leu and Kinzer (2003) define phonemic awareness as "an awareness that speech is composed of separate sound elements, and the ability to segment speech into constituent parts" (p. 136). The authors say that "examples of this awareness can be seen as young children repeat and make up rhyming words, as they notice and comment on the sounds or patterns of words, and as they play games that involve clapping as they say words or syllables" (p. 136). Supporters of the controlled vocabulary approach see phonemic awareness as an important skill for beginning readers if they are to develop the automaticity that will lead to fluent reading of

text, and will in turn, aid comprehension. Children who spend too much time trying to recognize the word they do not know often find that their ability to understand the text is compromised.

Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) say that:

> a major goal for younger readers is to develop automatic decoding skills, or fluency with reading. Because automatic decoding permits readers to focus their attention on a text's meaning and on their response, both comprehension and response increase with the development of automatic decoding (p. 186).

The decoding skills needed in the phonics approach rely on deductive instruction to teach the specific skills. The skills are taught by means of teacher directed, direct instruction. Leu and Kinzer (2003) tell us that "deductive instruction contains four procedural steps: 1) state the skill; 2) provide examples of the skill or rule; 3) provide guided practice; and 4) provide independent practice" (p. 46). After the teacher is certain that the children understand the rule, then they are encouraged to practice the skill by themselves. Providing the opportunities for independent practice will help to show the teacher that the children have understood and mastered the concept.

Supporters of the controlled vocabulary approach believe that children have to first learn the rules of the alphabetic system and the sounds associated with the letters (Snow et al., 1998). The authors further state that in this approach, teachers show the children the letter and tell them the sound that goes along with that letter, then they show examples of words that begin with that letter, and let the children practice the sound with the word examples. Children are then given books to read that contain words that begin with that letter for independent practice (Snow et al., 1998). We cannot expect children to pick up and read adult novels before they master the simple sound-symbol patterns of the language.

Teaching Reading

Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, and Tarver (2004) say that "reading is a complex process – complex to learn and complex to teach" (p. 2). For Leu and Kinzer (2003) teaching reading is a continuous decision-making process. Teachers make decisions about how to teach reading by monitoring their students' reactions as they teach. Leu and Kinzer (2003), say that "the factors involved, their relative importance, and the ways that the [reading] process takes place and develops will have a direct and significant impact on the decision making process" (p. 7). If reading is seen as a skill based process, then there will be more emphasis on the sound-symbol patterns, otherwise known as phonics. In this approach, children are taught the names of the letters and the sounds of those letters. If reading is seen as a meaning-making process then there will be more emphasis on teaching students how to read for meaning.

Leu and Kinzer (2003) tell us that:

> reading is a social, developmental, and interactive process that involves learning. It is a process incorporating a person's linguistic knowledge and can be powerfully influenced by an insightful teacher as well as other non-linguistic, internal and external conditions. It can be developed by self-directed learning experiences as well as by direct instruction and is increasingly important in the information age in which we live (p. 12).

Hiebert and Pearson (1999) focused, not on instruction, but on how the relationship between the readers and the texts guide reading acquisition. The authors investigated "what are the characteristics of readers and texts that have the greatest influence on early success in reading? [and] how can interactions between beginning readers and texts be enhanced" (p.3). The authors determined that the most important interaction for beginning readers is with the text that they use to learn to read.

Learning How to Read

The key elements of literacy instruction that will be addressed in this paper are taken from Snow et al. (1998). The authors base their principles on the recognition that reading ability is influenced by many factors. They further state that factors and experiences can contribute to reading ability without necessarily serving as a prerequisite to it and that none of them are considered sufficient in themselves. According to Snow, et al. (1998) the factors that most contribute to reading success are:

- Having a working understanding of how sounds are represented alphabetically by being exposed to frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships (*Decoding Knowledge -Letter-sound relationship)*
- Sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different kinds of texts, by having frequent and intensive opportunities to read (*Fluency)*
- Sufficient background knowledge and vocabulary to render written texts meaningful and interesting by using reading to obtain meaning from print *(Vocabulary knowledge*)
- Control over procedures for monitoring comprehension and repairing misunderstandings by understanding the structure of spoken words *(Reading for meaning-comprehension),* and
- Continued interest and motivation to read for a variety of purposes (*Motivation).* (p.2)

It is Snow et al's. (1998) contention that a "disruption of any of these developments increases the possibility that reading will be delayed or impeded" (p.3). They also give what

they call “three stumbling blocks” that could prevent children from learning how to read proficiently. These three are:

> 1) Difficulty understanding and using the alphabetic principle – the idea that written words systematically represent spoken words. It is hard to comprehend connected text if word recognition is inaccurate or laborious;
>
> 2) Failure to transfer the comprehension skills of spoken language to reading and [failure] to acquire new strategies that may be specifically needed for reading;
>
> 3) The absence or loss of an initial motivation to read or failure to develop a mature appreciation of the rewards of reading (p.3).

The Respective Advantages and Disadvantages of the Literature-Based and Controlled-Vocabulary Approaches

The next part of this paper will focus on the principles of reading, identified by Snow et al. (1998) and how a literature based approach and a controlled vocabulary approach address each of these principles.

Table 1

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Literature-Based and Controlled-Vocabulary Approaches

	Literature-Based Beginning Reading Program	Controlled-Vocabulary Beginning Reading Program
Key elements of Emergent Reading		
1. Decoding Knowledge	**Advantage:** Students learn how to decode by reading authentic text. They come to this knowledge through reading, not by instruction. Any teaching of decoding is incidental from the meaning-making, and is considered a natural part of learning to read rather than a process of learning sounds independent of a story. **Disadvantage:** Authentic literature-based texts introduce too many unique words for children to be able to successfully read them independently.	**Advantage:** Students are taught the letter-sound patterns of the alphabet system through direct instruction by the teacher. Initial instruction involves teaching students how to "sound out" the words. **Disadvantage:** Stories used are often modified versions of real literature and as such, employ shorter sentences, adapted vocabulary, and fewer illustrations than the original.
2. Reading for Meaning - (Comprehension)	**Advantage:** This approach is concerned with building general comprehension strategies, ways readers use cues from the printed text, and from themselves to make sense of print. These strategies develop when children learn to draw inferences and make predictions to monitor their reading. (Goodman et al., 1987). Children do not attend to parts but focus on the whole.	**Advantage:** Through explicit instruction involving pre-reading, during reading and post-reading activities, children are taught how to comprehend the story through such strategies as building background knowledge from prior experiences, and teacher led vocabulary instruction. **Disadvantage**: Children who cannot keep up to the pace of instruction can fall behind their peers. If children do not have the same prior

	Disadvantage: For beginning readers, there are two types of texts. Those that are written to be read aloud through shared reading; and those that the child can read independently. For the beginning reader who has no experience with recognizing text, most books are too difficult for them to read independently.	knowledge, they cannot understand the vocabulary, recognize the words, or comprehend the text even with teacher led scaffolding.
3. Vocabulary Knowledge	**Advantage:** Words are learned within the reading of the text. Children figure out the meaning from the context. Since so many different genres are read, children can gain new vocabulary at a rapid rate. **Disadvantage:** The main problem with this approach is that texts used in beginning reading instruction often have so many new words that children only recognize a handful of words. This makes vocabulary learning difficult and comprehension impossible.	**Advantage:** Vocabulary is taught systematically by the teacher. New words are highlighted and definitions are provided. There is a limited amount of new words introduced at each level making it easier for children to learn new vocabulary. **Disadvantage:** Texts are written with fewer words which could make stories less interesting. As well, children would be exposed to a small number of new words thus limiting their vocabulary development.
4. Fluency	**Advantage:** Literature-based approach is based on the belief that the more children read, the better they will become at reading. Fluency is taught through predictable texts that are re-read many times. Authentic texts are used that mimic real speech patterns. **Disadvantage:** When beginning readers get texts that are made up of words that they cannot read on sight or decode through context, then	**Advantage:** Children learn sight words and how to decode new words so that they can read with automaticity and fluency. **Disadvantage:** Modified texts are written to conform to word count, sentence length, and letter-sound patterns. Text that has been modified with these restrictions are not written with authentic speech patterns which could make reading less natural and,

	they cannot read fluently.	therefore, less predictable. Children might be able to read all the words but it would not be fluent
5. Motivation	**Advantage:** Since children get to choose their own stories to read, built in motivation is present. As well, children are motivated to read because the stories are interesting. **Disadvantage:** Not all children have the self motivation to select their own books and may require the assistance of their teacher to choose suitable reading materials. As well, children might not be motivated to choose books that challenge them and would prefer to keep re-reading books that they have mastered.	**Advantage:** Children can be successful early on when reading controlled-vocabulary books. This success will lead to children wanting to read more. **Disadvantage:** Not all stories in the controlled-vocabulary texts appeal to all children so motivation to read might be less than if children get to choose their own story. Since the stories are often contrived with controlled vocabulary, and short sentence patterns, children may find the stories stilted and therefore lose interest in reading.

Advantages of using a literature-based approach to teaching beginning readers

The advantages to using a literature-based approach, based on the key elements of emergent reading (Snow, et al., 1998), are: 1) reading for meaning; 2) vocabulary knowledge; and 3) motivation.

Reading for Meaning (Comprehension)

In the literature-based approach, reading for meaning is at the centre of an effective reading program. Meaning is based on what is in the text but it also is dependent on the background knowledge a reader brings to the text (Leu & Kinzer, 2003). Leu and Kinzer (2003)

differentiate between two ways of developing comprehension: syntactic knowledge and discourse knowledge. Syntactic knowledge is the understanding of how words go together; words will have different meanings based on how they are combined with other words. Leu and Kinzer (2003) say that children's literature can provide a supportive environment for helping children develop knowledge of syntactic structures. When reading quality literature, children learn how words go together and how word patterns contribute to meaning. According to Leu and Kinzer (2003), discourse knowledge allows children to get meaning out of sentences. Discourse knowledge "contributes to comprehension because it includes the knowledge of language organization that helps us understand entire texts" (p. 324).

Vocabulary Knowledge

Leu and Kinzer (2003) say that using the literature-based approach to teaching reading "increases vocabulary knowledge as it captures, entertains, and enriches the lives of readers with vivid experiences that are impossible to create in a classroom" (p. 186). The authors go on to say that, through storybooks, children can be taken away to far off places without ever leaving the classroom, or their home. Additionally, the authors say that good literature gives students words that they might not come in contact with except through a story book. Leu and Kinzer (2003) believe that children learn without realizing that they are learning when they are engaged in reading a book and that, even if the book has unusual vocabulary, children will learn what the words mean from reading the text. The authors trust that children are willing to put more of an effort into learning difficult words when they are motivated to read. Having motivation makes children want to read more and the more children read, the better they become at reading (Leu and Kinzer, 2003).

Cullinan (1987) said that it is harder to teach comprehension if there is not a good story to start with. She says that by the time children reach the age of five or six, "most children have a well developed sense of story; they have expectations of what a story should be" (p. 2). Teaching good literature ensures that the teacher has a good story to start with so that children can develop their comprehension skills. Cullinan (1987) also says that "children learn from the language that they hear; it makes sense that the richer the language environment, the richer the language learning" (p. 5). A literature program models language for children that they can begin to claim as their own.

Motivation

Children who are taught using the literature-based approach can self-select the books that they want to read. As a result, students will be more motivated to read the books because they would have ownership of their learning activities (Goodman et al., 1987; Oldfather, 1995). Oldfather (1995) found that children who had the opportunities to plan their own learning and select their own books were more motivated to learn. The students also reported that activities that allowed them to interact with authentic activities were more motivating than completing worksheets.

Goodman et al. (1987) say that "communicative need is the most important motivation in reading and writing as it is in oral language . . . children become aware that all around them there is language that is being used and understood by readers" (p. 250). It is the children's need to understand the written communication that surrounds them daily that motivates them to become literate as they encounter street names, store names, warnings, instruction postings, boxes, and candy wrappings. In a literature-based approach, children are seen as being internally motivated to become print aware. Learning starts with the "premise that all learners are intrinsically

motivated; they want to understand written language; they want to be able to read" (Goodman et al., 1987, p. 252). In order to sustain their natural motivation, reading materials must be interesting and self-selected. In order for children to construct meaning, reading materials must be composed of real language with real stories that are within the children's experiences and background.

Disadvantages of using a literature based approach to teaching beginning readers

The main disadvantages to using a literature based approach are: 1) children's difficulties acquiring decoding knowledge, and 2) children's difficulties acquiring fluency.

Decoding Knowledge

The literature-based approach does not teach decoding knowledge as a separate set of skills that are taught in isolation. Instead, decoding is learned through the reading of real text. Children read and reread texts thus allowing them to begin paying attention to the words and how they sound. It is through the authentic reading of texts that students will come to know what the different letters sound like. Students are intended to acquire decoding strategies as they read but this is not possible with all beginning readers. Some students need more explicit instruction to learn the sounds of the words. These students cannot just "pick up" the sounds from listening to books or from reading books. Since the literature-based approach does not teach decoding skills in isolation, it is unclear how students with difficulties will learn how to read.

Fluency

In a literature-based approach, beginning readers are exposed to authentic literature where the vocabulary is not controlled, where new words are introduced at a faster rate than students can be expected to learn, and where words are not repeated frequently. Leu and Kinzer

(2003) say that the lack of fluency hinders comprehension when children are not able to read the passage smoothly, quickly, and with few errors. If children using a literature-based approach do not have the necessary skills to decode new words, or if they do not have the sight-word vocabulary that is required to understand the content, than they will have trouble getting meaning from the text. In the literature-based approach, children are not taught the skills that the controlled-vocabulary instructors believe are necessary for fluency.

Advantages of using a controlled vocabulary approach to teaching beginning readers

The advantages to using a controlled-vocabulary approach, based on the key elements of emergent reading (Snow, et al., 1998), are: 1) decoding knowledge, and 2) fluency.

Decoding Knowledge (letter-sound patterns)

Sykes (1995) said that "for generations, children were taught to read by being first taught the mechanics of reading" (p.4). This involved teaching children that letters had sounds and that they could learn how to decode words by sounding them out. Sykes (1995) tells us that "at the end of a couple of semesters, a child with a mastery of phonics could read an estimated 24,000 words" (p.4) while those "children who learned through the whole-word, or look-say method were able to read only a few hundred" (p.4). Sykes (1995) goes on to say that children who learn to read following the phonics approach learn the mechanics of reading first, and when they have learned the rules, they can read. He says that, by contrast, the children who learn through the whole-word method memorize many words but still do not know how to read.

Carnine et al (2004) say that "during the beginning stage [of reading], the major part of instruction revolves around teaching students how to decode regular words" (p. 47). The teacher instructs students in how to sound out words. Eventually, after they have mastered the sound-symbol correspondence, students will move on to independent reading. At this stage, the teacher

has to provide students with adequate practice so that they will achieve accuracy in recognizing words either by sight or by sounding them out. It is important for teachers to make use of many strategies when teaching decoding skills. These include using "phonic analysis, context clues, picture clues, syllabication, structural analysis, and configuration clues as aids to identify new words correctly" (Ediger, 1977, p. 23).

In *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (1985), the commission of the National Institute of Education reported that classroom research shows that, on the average, children who are taught phonics get off to a better start in learning to read than children who are not taught phonics. They also found that the advantage of learning phonics was most apparent in word identification tests, and sentence- and story-comprehension.

Adams (1990) found that "instructional approaches that include systematic phonics lead to higher achievement in both word recognition and spelling, at least in the early grades, and especially for slower or economically disadvantaged students" (p.2-3). Snow et al. (1998) corroborated Adams's (1990) findings by verifying that the teaching of reading requires specific skill instruction, including phonics, and phonemic awareness which is the awareness of the separate sounds in words.

Teachers of the controlled vocabulary approach teach word identification skills in a structured environment by providing instruction in the letter-sound relationship, which makes the decoding of unknown words easier. The benefit of this approach is that teachers provide structured practice opportunities and can monitor the students' progress (Tompkins, 2001). If teachers observe that the students are not learning the letter-sound relationship, then they can re-teach the strategies as needed. Since a controlled-vocabulary approach often makes use of basal

readers, there is detailed guided instruction for teachers to follow. This is especially important for beginning teachers who need some guidance as to how to teach and what to teach.

Fluency

Carnine et al. (2004) define fluency as "the ability to read a text quickly and accurately with ease and expression" (p. 182). The authors go on to say that fluency acts as a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Fluent readers can focus on the meaning of the text because they do not have to concentrate on decoding unfamiliar words (Carnine et al., 2004). Carnine et al. (2004) further state that it is the teachers who must take the responsibility of developing accuracy and fluency in their students reading skill by focusing on instructional practices that provide guidance and feedback. The controlled-vocabulary approach relies on structured activities such as repeated readings and independent silent reading to provide practice and application of skills. These skills, taught by the teacher, provide students with the practice necessary to become accurate and fluent readers. However, if selections are too hard for the students to read, then they will lose interest in the book and not want to read it again. In the controlled-vocabulary approach, a successful reading program is "possible only if the stories presented … are carefully controlled to ensure the student has a strategy to decode every word in the passage" (Carnine et al., 2004, p.183). Controlled-vocabulary advocates believe that children need a set of foundational skills, which include: decoding knowledge, phonological awareness, sight word knowledge, and content use strategies to help them achieve fluency (Leu & Kinzer, 2003).

Disadvantages of using a controlled-vocabulary approach to teaching beginning readers

The disadvantages of using the controlled-vocabulary approach include: 1) teachers do not concentrate on teaching reading for meaning, 2) children do not have as many opportunities to develop vocabulary knowledge, and 3) children may not be motivated to read basal readers.

Reading for Meaning

Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, and Murphy (1988) found that some basal series attempt to use real literature but they do so by revising the stories using controlled-vocabulary. This is accomplished by using words that have already been introduced in the basal series or by substituting high frequency words for those that are less common. Adapting the text by using more familiar words and shorter sentences leads to a reduction in text, which, in turn, leads to the loss of the original story meaning. When attempting to control for vocabulary and syntax, the original intent of the story may be lost, the language may become stilted and the text may become less predictable, which could compromise meaning (Goodman et al., 1988). Garibaldi-Allen, Freeman, Lehman, and Scharer (1995) concur that "while many of the newer editions of widely used basal reader series use quality selections from children's literature, the selections are frequently shortened and the author's language is changed and simplified" (p. 388).

Vocabulary Knowledge

Another disadvantage of the controlled-vocabulary approach, especially at the beginning reader level, is that due to the limited number of words in stories, the stories often sound very contrived. This occurs because the stories are not written the way that people talk. When limited vocabulary is paired with short sentence patterns, reading fluency is compromised due to the unnatural speech patterns (Pearson, 2001). Hiebert and Pearson (1999) also found that "because high-frequency and phonetically regular texts require the creation of special books for beginning

readers . . . questions were raised about the quality of literature used to teach young children to read" (p. 4).

In a controlled-vocabulary approach, children are taught new words independent of the meaningful context. It may be harder for children to learn new vocabulary if the words are taught in isolation. Goodman et al. (1988) say that "words out of context lose textual meaning and grammatical function. They also become abstractions. Furthermore, the value of the information in the parts is not the same as it is in the whole natural text" (p. 82). The authors also say that "basals in their treatment of language have tended to isolate sounds, letters, and words" (p.82). Learning vocabulary out of context, using the controlled vocabulary approach, makes reading for meaning more difficult and could hinder vocabulary development.

Motivation

Chall (1983) wondered "whether the child is motivated by his interest in the stories and pictures or by his desire to master the process or skill of learning to read" (p. 60). She further states that educators who follow the skills-based/controlled vocabulary approach operate with the understanding that the "child masters the process because he is interested in what he reads" (p. 60). In a controlled-vocabulary approach, basal readers are chosen for the children. Due to the emphasis on direct instruction, children are usually taught to attend only to the skills needed to learn the words, and not to the meaning of the text.

The major disadvantage to using a controlled vocabulary approach is that children do not get to choose their own books, which might lead to disinterest in the basal reader stories (Tompkins, 2001). In addition, children do not advance through their reading development at the same time. Therefore, keeping children in graded reading texts might not serve the purposes of all learners and might lead to decreased motivation to learn.

Conclusion

Leu and Kinzer (2003) say that learning how to read is too complex a task to be taught using only one particular method and that it takes an insightful teacher to make decisions about each and every student. The teacher needs to understand the nature of the reading process, the way that reading ability develops, and how to implement different reading methods to meet the needs of the students in the classroom. Leu and Kinzer (1995) tell us that "insightful teachers know what to do and why it should be done" (p. 28). Teachers develop their own beliefs about reading and how children learn to read and these beliefs will inform the teacher's decision about how to teach reading.

Hiebert and Pearson (1999) say that "one size does not fit all when it comes to beginning reading instruction" (p. 15). Juel and Roper-Schneider (1985), in their study of first-grade readers, found that teachers should not rely on a single approach to beginning reading instruction. They found that:

> [the] selection of texts used very early in first-grade may, at least in part, determine the strategies and cues children learn to use, and persist in using, in subsequent word identification. Further, the results suggest that when there is a match between methods of instruction (i.e., synthetic phonics) and the decidability of words in initial reading texts a more consistent and successful use of letter-sound correspondence strategy will result than when there is a mismatch. In particular, emphasis on a phonics method seems to make little sense if children are given initial texts to read where the words do not follow regular letter-sound correspondence generalizations (p. 150-151).

Marie Clay (1991) sums up the problems with focusing on only one reading program or using only one type of text. She says:

> When a program controls what children are allowed to learn, placing strong emphases on some things to the neglect of others, then it will constrain children's functioning. It follows that theorists arguing for a particular starting point or emphasis must go on to show how, and when all the other processes which good readers use (such as comprehension in a decoding programme) can survive the initial emphasis and become part of the reading behaviours of the less competent readers (p. 240).

It seems that the debate between literature-based reading and controlled-vocabulary reading should finally be put to rest. There is no one "best" way to teach all children to read. Reading is a complex learning process that requires some explicit instruction from teachers. Some children benefit from a greater focus on direct skill instruction while others learn the sound-symbol patterns more easily by reading authentic, predictable texts. It is up to the teachers to discover which method, or combination of methods, works best for each one of their students.

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