BEST PRACTICES IN READING INSTRUCTION FOR EMERGENT READERS

PRE-K THROUGH FIRST GRADE

A Project

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EDUCATION

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by

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Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
Abstract

of

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Recent education reform has narrowed its focus on early childhood curriculums and increased awareness toward the preparedness of students entering schooling for the first time. Research in the field of literacy has been clear in its recommendations that all children necessitate early literacy education, as reading achievement is proven to be directly related to academic success, the need to ensure that all students begin schooling with the proper foundational abilities is more important than ever.

Multiple theorists have studied and recommended hierarchies of early literacy competencies, central of those being: phonological awareness, concepts of print, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension strategies.

The researcher sought to examine the importance of early literacy education, its function in early childhood classrooms and clarify the term emergent reader.
Primary and limited secondary sources were used to provide a framework for the literature review and inform the creation of the handbook of best practices.

Activities and lessons that contribute to knowledge and ability to hear, manipulate and delete sounds are suggested for the improvement of phonological awareness. Understanding print in our world, its function, message, and form are essential to prepare emergent readers for active engagement with print. Vocabulary gaps among students of varying socio-economic levels present difficulty for teachers to bridge gaps of deficiencies. Along with direct instruction of vocabulary words from independent and oral book readings, educators must encourage social interactions between peer groups and adults in order to promote effective vocabulary acquisition. Filling students’ experiential reservoirs and schema aid in vocabulary retention and contribute to comprehension. Higher-level literacy activities that allow students to connect with text and practice comprehension should be directly taught and practiced. Oral book readings that are above decoding level provide sophisticated language and story arc for newly decoding readers to employ said practices.

Providing these foundational experiences and environments will go far to improve the preparedness of all students to engage in formalized reading instruction.

_____________________, Department Chair
Susan Heredia, Ph.D.

__________________________
Date
DEDICATION

The project is dedicated to the nurturing, passionate, and tireless early childhood educators. As your students pass through your classrooms, may you fill them with the tools they need to be better readers, better learners, and better human beings. Your mission is clear and your work is difficult. Nevertheless, always remember, your contributions are innumerable.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In homes, childcare centers, and classrooms all over our country, parents, caregivers, preschool, and elementary teachers are responsible for providing the foundation of readers. As little as 15 years ago students engaged in literacy activities at the start of grade level schooling. Preschool and kindergarten curriculums were geared toward social and emotional maturity and fine and gross motor development. Knowledge of letters and numbers were end of year benchmarks in many kindergarten classrooms with the primary instruction of literacy education reserved for end of kindergarten through second grade.

We have significantly changed as a society. Our success is measured by an ability to produce advanced degrees simply to engage in the modern workforce. The average citizen should be able to operate multiple computer programs and facilitate processing on the computer in our pocket, a cell phone. Because of these changes, learning to read and write are not only the hallmarks of a person in a literate society, such as ours, but a mandate. It is with this in mind that the author set forth to better understand the role of early or pre-literacy education and compile a handbook to better prepare teachers for the changing face of literacy in our school environments.

Problem Statement

In a report published by the National Reading Panel in 2000 it was estimated that close to 37% of fourth grade students would fail to reach basic levels of reading achievement without improved comprehensive reading and writing instruction in
grades K through four. Unfortunately, the number is significantly higher for students of low-income families, ethnic minority groups, and English language learners (National Institute of Child Health & Human Development [NICHD], 2000).

However, this is not a new phenomenon and is one that was evident 24 years earlier when Stanovich (1986) published a powerful article explaining his theory of Matthews Effects of achievement gaps in learning. What Stanovich found was that if students came from environments of higher socio-economic levels with language and literacy awareness, and began schooling with proper developmental cognition, their trajectory of learning would exhibit continued academic achievement. However, students in lower socio-economic levels, or those with difficulties in cognitive development, and those with non-literacy or language rich environments, would start their schooling significantly below those of their counterparts and their trajectory of learning would continue to be less than that of their peers. The gap would continue to widen and the effect would leave lasting effects academically.

In response to the further understanding of academic deficiencies among students, the National Early Literacy Panel was convened in 2002 to study the gaps in the knowledge base, specifically from birth to age five, and define strategies to better prepare all young children for the formalized instruction of reading and lessen achievement gaps among all children.

Numerous studies have concluded that academic success is directly tied to reading achievement in the classroom (Adams, 1990; Pressley, 2006; Stanovich, 1986, Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) and that early reading readiness is a contributing factor
to later reading achievement. Experts are also united in their belief that early literacy practices should be taught to all children to better prepare them for the academic rigor of reading instruction, narrow achievement gaps, and to establish a trajectory of reading achievement.

**Significance of the Problem**

The move toward the formalized teaching of reading is progressing to younger and younger ages. Students are asked to perform tasks in language arts programs in the kindergarten and first grade years that in the past would have been reserved for the second and third grade year of education. Because of these changes, some students are being forced into developmentally challenging situations with expectations that are focused on immediate outcome results. Assessments of the memorization of letters, sounds, sight words, word families and fluency as rate, often come at the cost of less time listening to oral readings, discussions of literature, expression of thought, phonological awareness activities, and opportunities for personal narrative; all of which contribute to a balanced literacy program and provide foundational support to future reading success (Pressley, 2006).

What are the most important competencies needed for pre-literacy education to be successful? How can early childhood educators prepare children for the formalized instruction of reading as it progresses to earlier grades?

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Association (1998) collaborated to present a joint statement on the importance of developmentally appropriate and explicit instruction of literacy
practices for young children, ages zero to eight. This report specifically acknowledged the many components that go into the formation of a successful reader and focused on five distinct strands of successful literacy instruction that provided a framework for the foundational elements of a comprehensive literacy curriculum.

It is the goal of the researcher to establish that, before decoding, fluency and comprehension are formally taught, many things can be done at home and in the preschool, kindergarten, and first grade environment to prepare students for these literacy tasks and contribute to the foundational development of reading success. This project will aim to research and discuss such practices, as well as provide research based activities that can be implemented into early childhood curriculums and work in conjunction with packaged literacy programs to better prepare students for future success in reading.

**Methodology**

Utilizing the literature review and the categories of research in emergent literacy practices will be vital in the completion of the handbook. The researcher will provide a foundational body of research that will inform and guide the creation of a handbook that may be an addendum to packaged or required classroom curriculums. Lessons will address four components of foundational reading practices; Phonological Awareness, Concepts of Print, Vocabulary Acquisition, and Comprehension Strategies. Activities within the handbook will be directed at early childhood classrooms, specifically pre-kindergarten through first grade and complement both whole word and text-based curriculums.
Limitations

There will be no data collection and risk to any participants in the creation of this thesis project, therefore, limitations in regards to Human Subjects will be nonexistent.

There is a potential limitation of bias in the formation of the handbook. Because the researcher does view both text based and whole word based theories equally plausible and important, some readers who favor one philosophy as solely correct, may find improbability of some of the lessons. This may also affect the potential users who may not have similar reading research theory or varying levels of educational credentials and therefore may interpret lessons differently than they were intended.

This thesis project and handbook also present limitations with its targeted student population. Because it is so narrowly focused on the specific development and age of the predominant young child, early reader, use in adult literacy educational programs may be limited.

Definition of Terms

**Dialogic Reading** - Discussions and interactions about the story or pictures with the audience as a book is read.

**Emergent Literacy** – Coined by Marie Clay (1966), it refers to the beginnings of literacy or the process of becoming literate. Further expanded to the continuum of development rather than an all or nothing acquisition of literacy skills at the start of schooling (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998)
Experiential reservoir- Coined by Louise Rosenblatt in her Transactional Theory, she states it as: “The residue of the individual’s past transactions—-in particular, natural, and social contexts---constitutes what can be termed a linguistic experiential reservoir….this inner capital is all that each of us has to draw on in speaking, listening, writing, and reading” (2004, p. 1367).

Expressive language- This is the usable vocabulary that a person voices within their vernacular.

Orthography- The study of language and its representational symbols in print.

Phonological Awareness- Tasks associated with sound analysis as it pertains to words, syllables, onsets and rimes, and individual phonemes.

Receptive Language- This is the vocabulary that a person understands as spoken to and read.

Socio-Economic Status or SES- Relating to or concerned with the interaction of social and economic factors.

Tiered Leveled Vocabulary- This terminology and hierarchy was created by Beck and McKeown (1985). It is a system by which vocabulary words and concepts are organized by difficulty and vocabulary maturity. The first tier being words that are used in everyday language and often do not need explanation. Tier Two words are high frequency words that are found across a variety of domains. Tier Three words are often domain specific and are not common unless they are being study within a certain domain.
Project Organization and Contents

This project will consist of four chapters and a handbook for educators working in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade educational environments. Chapter 2 will synthesize the research evidence for the importance of early literacy curriculums, the hierarchy of disciplines within, and specific activities that support pre-literacy in early childhood classrooms. Chapter 3 will focus on the methodology of the creation of the project handbook and its specific activities and lessons. Chapter 4 will discuss the conclusions, significance of the project, uses and educational implications. Lastly, the handbook for educators will be included in the Appendix and will be stand alone material for study and inclusion in early childhood classroom curriculums. Incorporating skills practice, the handbook will provide lessons for all three grade levels and specifically address four distinct threads determined to be essential as foundational skills of a reader: Phonological Awareness, Concepts of Print, Vocabulary Acquisition, and Comprehension Skills.

Summary

This chapter discussed the importance and significance of early and pre-literacy activities for emergent readers. This chapter also explained some key vocabulary words that will allow the reader of this thesis project to be better prepared to understand and transact with the information provided. Along with a statement of the problem and supporting evidence for addressing said problem, methodology and layout were presented. The following chapter will focus on the literature review that
will guide the formation of the handbook of best practices in emergent literacy education.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

From the time they are born, children and their well being become the greatest focus of their parents’ lives. Parents ensure they are nurtured both physically and emotionally and great emphasis is placed on the understanding of cultural norms, rules of decorum, and etiquette. However, upon the start of schooling whether it be preschool or elementary school, many children are not prepared to participate fully in the single most important task they will master in order to achieve success academically and in all life endeavors, the act of reading (Adams, 1990).

Many authorities in the field of reading have discussed the various literacy activities young children should be engaged in at the start of their academic careers with regard to reading readiness. Each have established hierarchies of the importance of such competencies as, phonemic awareness, concepts of print, vocabulary acquisition, letter memorization, and story narrative understanding. Along with these types of activities much research has been done in the field of child development with regard to the age appropriate techniques and activities in which children should engage. The purpose of this literature review is to establish the importance and provide a framework for literacy instruction with emergent readers. In doing this, a clear picture of the development of students labeled as emergent will be established. Culminating in identifying the components of a well-rounded early literacy environment, and synthesize the strategies put forth by leading researchers in the field.
The Importance of Early Literacy Instruction

According to a joint position statement by The International Reading Association and The National Association for the Education of Young Children (1998), one of the best predictors for a child’s success in our ever changing literate society is the level at which that child progresses in reading instruction. Our society is changing rapidly to which basic literacy no longer is substantial enough to participate. Adults and children alike, operate computers and cell phones, and are bombarded with text representations in the media. Because of this, success in our society mandates a highly competent and literate mind.

The classrooms of today are also diverse in their student populations in regard to ability, language learners, and cultural diversity. In response to the ever changing world, schools, districts, states and the federal government have all shifted a narrow focus onto the formalized and systematic, earlier, teaching of reading.

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson, as part of his “War on Poverty” established the Head Start program. At the time, Head Start was created to help promote school readiness for low income children with specific attention placed on cognitive development, educational and nutritional health, social services, and parent education, in order to provide a much needed boost for these children in order to attend school ready to learn. Importance was placed on parental engagement and promoting the importance of a parent as their child’s first teacher. In 1998, The Head Start Re-Authorization Act expanded on the ideas of the original Head Start program, but clarified the definition of family literacy and sought to provide stimulus awards
toward successful chapters of the program (Familieslearning.org, 2013). Currently, low income families of many cultural backgrounds participate in Head Start preschool programs across the nation. While early education and school readiness is fundamental to all children, those who are identified as low socio-economic level are more likely to have restricted access to early literacy environments, education, have limited vocabulary knowledge, and proceed on a trajectory of underachievement throughout their school careers (Stanovich, 1986). Thus, it could be concluded that the federal government’s acknowledgement of this problem, subsequent funding, and measures to counter balance such effects prove their necessity. What about the children who are not deemed low socio-economic level? Do they also benefit from early literacy and readiness programs? Research findings in the field of literacy unanimously agree that all children benefit from early literacy education (Moore, Moore, Toratore & Fowler, 2012; Reilly, 2007; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). This idea of pre-literacy emphasis was highlighted in 1990 when Marilyn Adams succinctly stated:

> But ever before children enter grade school, we must become universally committed to developing their appreciation of and familiarity with text. We hug them, we give them treats and good things to eat; we teach them to be clean and polite, good natured, thoughtful and fair. We do these things to set them off on happy, healthy lives. We must do as much with reading. In our society, their lives depend on it. (p.91)
Emergent Literacy Principles

It should be understood that the term *emergent literacy* denotes the idea that literacy is best conceptualized as a continuum of development rather than an all or nothing acquisition at the start of schooling (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). From the earliest starts of language development in infancy, to the concepts of print exposure in shared book readings, when children are immersed in emergent literacy environments they may develop skills of reading, writing, and language concurrently and interdependently in the absence of formal instruction (p. 849). Emergent literacy practices can happen in the home or the preschool setting. However, they may also continue into the classroom as children move along their own educational continuum. When used in conjunction with structured language arts curriculums, many different learners can be addressed with similar lessons. Emergent literacy practices best appeal to those on the beginning of their reading journey, however the reinforcement of key components of literacy should be reiterated and reflected upon continuously in a strong language arts curriculum. Fluent readers and advanced readers would benefit from such reflection and practice. Furthermore, because emergent literacy practices do not fully adhere to specific programs that teach decoding, encoding, or fluency, they can be applied jointly with learning environments that are either text based or whole language based curriculums.

Researchers in the field are relatively united in their distinction of the best practices in emergent literacy instruction. A good example of this is the culminating report published by the California Reading Association in 1995 entitled *Building*
Literacy: Every Child a Reader. It stresses that there are five distinct threads to the successful foundation of a balanced and comprehensive literacy curriculum. Those being:

- Oral Language, Listening, Speaking
- Awareness of Sound, Symbol, and Structure
- Skills Integration
- Reading and Comprehension Strategies
- Writing, Vocabulary, and Spelling

This literature review will highlight four subsets of those components, Phonological Awareness, Concepts of Print, Vocabulary Acquisition, and Comprehension Strategies. Utilizing these as guiding principles, the production of a handbook will address the category of Skills Integration and provide lessons and experiences to support the findings.

Phonological Awareness

In order to understand the significance that sound and auditory discrimination play in the development of reading, a brief understanding of oral language development is needed.

From the very first babblings as babies, human beings are engaged in communication and negotiation. New parents learn quickly which sounds and cries are related to their child’s needs. As babies continue to grow and engage socially with caregivers and others, the role and importance of language is quickly understood.
While the actual pronunciation of words comes much later in a child’s development, many researchers agree that gestures, babbling, mimicking facial expressions and crying all fall under the category of communication. Such communication evolves and becomes more complex in different environments. Bloom and Lahey (1978) conceptualized oral language into three interactive components: form, content, and use. Form is the way a message is delivered, rather than the message itself. Content is the second interactive component and is focused on semantics, or the content or meaning communicated through language forms. The third interactive component is use or pragmatics. All three of these must work together in order for language to be effective. However, beyond just communication, the ability to hear and manipulate sound is something that is integral in the development of a reader. The ability to hear, distinguish, isolate or manipulate sound is phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness involves many different tasks associated with sounds. D. B. Elkonin (as cited in Adams, 1990) described such tasks as the ability to analyze “sound structures”. These tasks could be:

- Words in sentences (eg. /We/-/are/-/going/-/to/-/the/-/park/).
- Syllables in words (eg. /com/-/pu/-/tet/ computer).
- Onsets and Rimes in words (eg. onset - /b/- /east/ in beast, rimes - /st/- /and/ in stand.
- Individual phonemes in words (eg. /cl/- /al/- /u/ in cat.
Phonemic awareness is a subset of study under the umbrella of phonological awareness that breaks down sounds into small units known as phonemes. Phonemic awareness should never be confused with phonics instruction. While the two are often combined for instructional purposes, they are very different. Phonemic awareness and phonics instruction are often coordinated because they complement each other in the process of reading development. As stated above, phonemic awareness involves units of sound, whereas phonics is the understanding of symbols that represent sounds in written language. Yopp and Yopp (2000), foremost researchers in the field of phonological awareness, have suggested that “phonemic awareness---appears to be critical for readers in an alphabetic orthography. Why? Because an alphabetic orthography maps speech to print at the level of the phoneme…users record the smallest units of sound of their spoken language in print” (Phonemic awareness and reading section, para.1).

**Phonemes.** Phonemic awareness is a difficult task to teach and understand because individual sounds or phonemes are not always easily heard. When we speak, we co-articulate sounds in order to say words. Words are very easily broken into syllables, but individual phonemes are much more difficult to hear or identify. Some words allow vowels to be heard or stand alone as sounds. Words like *eye* or *oh* are such words. This is in part because in the field of linguistics, vowels are known as *sonorants*, or continuous speech sounds. You can draw out the sounds of the vowels in words because of this distinction. The majority of consonants are *obstruents*, which are sounds that close off the passing of air over the vocal chords. Because of this,
many consonants must be attached to a vowel to even produce their sound. A prime example of this would be to try to make the /d/ sound without adding a short /u/ to the end of it (Uhry & Clark, 2004).

Knowledge of the role of phonemes is foundational in reading because, as children begin to understand the greater value of literacy, they also quickly become aware that symbols and sounds are related when recording ones thoughts, ideas, or knowledge. When faced with the task of writing, failure to understand the connection of individual sounds and symbols makes the alphabetic orthography arbitrary (Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

Bradley and Bryant (1983, 1985) found strong correlations between children who exhibited strong phonological sensitivity and future reading success (as cited in Uhry & Clark, 2004). One of their research studies involved four and five-year-old children who were deemed at risk for reading difficulties and who were explicitly taught the activity of sound categorization. The subjects were divided into four different intervention groups; sound alone, sound with plastic letter tiles, categorization by concepts other than sound, and a control group. The students who were in the group with sound categorization with letter tiles showed a significant improvement in spelling and reading. These results still held true two years after the study had ended.

Many tasks can be incorporated into an early literacy environment to improve phonemic awareness. The following is a compilation of hierarchical tasks determined by Marilyn Adams (1990) to improve phonemic awareness in early or emergent
readers. The tasks and sample activities are also listed with appropriate developmental expectations.

Response to rhymes. Most three- and four-year-olds can memorize and recite nursery rhymes and rhyming songs. Many children of this age can also listen to a story and provide the ending phrase in rhyming text. Once thought to be dated and politically incorrect, nursery rhymes also offer a world of higher-level language structure and vocabulary for developing readers.

Classifying or matching phonemes. Many four- and five-year-olds can also identify the onset phonemes in words. This can start with simply identifying words that begin with the same letter as the child’s name or composing alliteration sentences with the child as the subject. For very young and pre-readers, a task that involves matching pictures with the corresponding sound can be completed. A picture of a bear would precede three other pictures of a bat, a baby, a cat, and a ball. The child could be asked to underline the matching pictures that start like bear, or underline the picture that does not fit in.

Segmenting part of a word. When the previous task is taught and understood, most five-year-olds can usually segment the onset phoneme in words and isolate them. Most kindergarten aged children can tell you that dog starts with the /d/ sound. This is also when inventive or phonetic spelling with letters begins to take form as knowledge of sound symbol relationships is implicitly understood or explicitly taught. Inventive spelling is part of phonemic awareness because the stretching of the word is necessary to spell and write a word; however, segmenting activities do not have to involve
letters. Teachers can break apart words for students to chorally chant, fill in the missing sound in the beginning, middle, or end in vocal language activities.

**Full phoneme segmentation.** By the end of kindergarten or the beginning of first grade, many students should be able to completely segment short words. This is easier to do with two phoneme words like *at*, and *me*, and more difficult to do with words like *name* and *stay*. Utilizing tiles, tapping out sounds, or vocally breaking apart phonemes in order are all activities that could improve this ability.

**Phoneme deletion.** Possibly the most difficult of all of the tasks is the ability to identify, isolate, and remove phonemes from words. This is impart because mastery of this task involves being able to isolate and delete, beginning, middle and ending sounds. An example of this would be to say the word, *same* without the */s/*. Many kindergarten and first grade students could complete this task with ease. Whereas removing the */t/* in *star* would be difficult at the same age level but developmentally appropriate in grade two and three.

Understanding the smallest units of sound, or phonemes can be casually learned incidentally in a literacy rich environment. However, many researchers believe that while early childhood educators have been incorporating the above mentioned activities incidentally, in order for all children to achieve success in future reading ability, tasks that improve phonological awareness should be directly and explicitly taught (Adams, 1990; Bradley & Bryant, 1983, 1985; Uhry & Clark, 2004; Yopp & Yopp, 2000, 2009).


**Concepts of Print**

We know that phonological sensitivity is crucial to readers in an alphabetic orthography, but how do you introduce and integrate that orthography in a developmentally appropriate literacy environment? Pre-readers, early, and emergent readers can intuitively absorb the many functions of print when they are a part of a print rich environment; but children in some lower socio economic levels may not have the language or print rich environments from which to absorb. In print rich environments, children as young as two- or three-years-old understand when a story is being read to them and can often be seen imitating the act of reading; upside down books with babbling, pointing to letters and saying “ABCs” or simply singing the alphabet song (Adams, 1990). Children are shrewd observers and given the opportunities for engagement with print, they will likely understand the significance of its power and meaning. R.V. Allen (1976) summarized the understanding educators should try to impart to assist children in learning the significance of print, “What I can think about, I can talk about. What I can say, I can write. What I can write, I can read. I can read what I write and what other people can write for me to read” (as cited in Adams, 1990, p. 371).

**Print rich environments and incidental learning.** There are some very distinct pre-reading understandings that children must learn in order to understand and engage with print. Many of these happen intuitively for some children and the complete understanding of why it does not happen for all children is still unknown. Normally developing children as early as age three develop the some basic
understandings of print. Print is categorically different from other visual patterns in their environment. That is to say that print does not resemble pictures or visual cues for its meaning, unlike pictures or drawings. Print is observed across a variety of media and is all around them. Even the child growing up in a low SES can walk down a city street and see print on buildings, signs, clothing, cars, busses, television, or the computer. Children can observe great amounts of print or little, it can accompany pictures or not. Once they notice it, print appears to be everywhere. They also understand that adults use print in a variety of ways; they read things, write things, point out things with print and gain information from print. It is in the process of this realization that children intuitively understand the function of print as a form of communication. This type of incidental learning is very important for a developing reader, but researchers are united in their findings that incidental learning should not replace the understanding of the orthographic nature of language; it is merely the stepping stone by which to gain real understanding.

Educators can do many things to create print rich environments in their classrooms that bridge the gap between basic understanding of print and the intricacies that are involved in writing the English language.

Writing systems are very complex in nature. In the alphabetic system of the English language, although there are only twenty-six letters that can be combined to form words, there are very stringent rules for the organization of those letters to become legible words. Letters become words, small groupings of symbols that together make a symbolic code for understanding at a visual and meaning level.
Words are written directionally left to right and not backward or upside down. There are groupings of words and spacing around words but not within words. These are just a few of the basic principles of text to which knowledge and understanding are foundational to the success of an early reader (Levy, Gong, Hessels, Evans, & Jared, 2006).

Name recognition. Vygotsky (1962) noted that at the age of two, children begin to identify with a sense of self. This is also the time, by which he concluded that knowledge and thought work together to create intellect. At this point in age, children understand that their name identifies them in the context of their family and that such labels are used for other family members, objects, and experiences. Utilizing this heightened sense of self in the literacy environment has proven to increase motivation (Haney, 2002). Children are far more likely to recognize their name in oral settings before they solidify their knowledge of pronouns. Children are also more likely to identify their name if they attend a day care or preschool environment where name labels are used on cubbies, lunchboxes, birthday charts, and bulletin boards. In these environments, labeling and giving names to other objects also helps to create a print rich foundation for the learning of print significance.

Play with print purpose. Classrooms and child care centers are exciting places to explore. Teachers should strive to build engaging spaces that are both fun and functional in their approach to literacy. Neuman and Roskos (1990) explored literacy development through literacy centered imaginative play centers. In their study they changed the imaginative play centers of a preschool classroom into a library.
office space, and a post office. What they found was that when children played in imaginative play centers that were not specifically themed to correspond with literacy learning, the act of engaging in literacy activities was incidental and seldom. However, when they created specific imaginative play centers with enhanced literacy themes they saw an increased attention to acts such as writing, reading, and expanding schema through social interactions among students.

There are many different themes that can be built into imaginative play centers. Restaurants can be staged with menus, receipts and order books for servers. A student post office with letter writing supplies, mail carrier costumes, and mailboxes. A hospital for stuffed animals can have patient charts and prescription pads.

Classroom libraries and reading areas are also very important to have in a print rich environment. The act of reading at this age, even as imitation is an important foundational part of learning to read (Calkins, 2001). Book areas should be created with the books used in shared reading activities, grouped by authors, and in different themes. Fiction and non-fiction texts should be available to provide a balanced literacy environment and varying reading levels should be represented for the understanding of print as a message and information (p. 440).

It is important to note that there has been much written about the correlation of specific letter learning and print awareness. Because this project deals with the pre-reader, early, and emergent readers, the role of formalized letter learning with respect to instruction in reading will be omitted. Therefore, the strategies and activities
presented in the handbook focusing on print awareness are geared toward an addition to both whole word and text based curriculums.

**Vocabulary Acquisition**

Vocabulary acquisition and reading achievement have been heavily studied. Researchers in the field unanimously agree that students should know more words in order to read, comprehend, and write more words (Stanovich, 1986). Much of the recent research has been directed towards English language learners, middle school student achievement gaps, and Response to Intervention strategies where reading deficiencies have been diagnosed. However, with the current emphasis on pre-kindergarten educational reform, studies are now aiming to define the correlation and emphasize that early and explicit teaching in vocabulary instruction is warranted and prepares students for future reading success.

**Defining vocabulary.** In the simplest of terms, vocabulary can be broken into two parts: receptive language and expressive language. Receptive language is the ability to interpret language that is heard or read; expressive refers to speaking or writing (Jalongo & Sobolak, 2011). As previously stated, Bloom and Lahey (1978) determined the three interactive components of language; form, content, and use. While speech and sound deal primarily with form, vocabulary is primary to content and use.

**Economics and the acquisition of vocabulary.** As children interact socially with their caregivers, the learning of vocabulary happens naturally. Adults label items, experiences, emotions, and feelings. This social dynamic, or give and take, is essential
to the acquisition of vocabulary (Vygotsky, 1962). As children become more verbal, this exchange becomes more discerning and, as careful observers, children begin to understand and categorize words and labels, building their vocabulary through these experiences. Because of this, vocabulary knowledge in reading and academic achievement is closely related to the early environment a child is reared in.

Hart and Risley’s pivotal 1995 study of vocabulary word knowledge and language experiences in differing socio-economic home environments, clearly established that the language experiences in these homes varied greatly, and combined with the longitudinal study, showed a trajectory of learning that was closely correlated to the language experiences of the child’s early childhood upbringing. For two and a half years, they studied forty-two families, for an hour each month to learn about what typically went on in homes with one and two-year-olds learning to talk. Specifically, studying homes with differing socio-economic status was critical to their findings, as the children raised in these different environments had very different experiences with language. The findings were very clear from the beginning. In the professional households, the average of different words said per hour was 382 for the adults and 297 for the children. In the median SES households, the averages of different words said per hour was 251 for the adults and 216 for the child. Finally, in the low SES welfare class, the adult total was 167 and 149 for the children. What they saw was children speaking, listening, and emulating the patterns of language expression that they were exposed to by their caregivers. The research also noted that the professional families used all available opportunities to engage and speak with their children and
the same opportunities were not afforded to or utilized in the median or lower SES family environments.

Hart and Risley (1995) have shown the effect SES has on the vocabulary acquisition of all groups. While the findings are discouraging in regard to students of lower SES level households, knowledge and understanding must pave the way for educational reform and implementation. Early intervention can change the trajectory of learning. A follow up study with many of the same participants found, in third grade, the gap of vocabulary knowledge was still present and predicted a path of continuous widening between the three groups.

**Vocabulary instruction.** Given what we know about the varying SES levels in which today’s students live, it should be obvious that all students, of all SES levels, should be exposed to explicit vocabulary and language experiences in the home, preschool, and early elementary environment (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002).

At age three, the average child processes a 900-100 word vocabulary of receptive language, but will only produce sentences with three and four words at a time. At age six, that same child will have an estimated receptive vocabulary that is over 20,000 words with a 2,600 word expressive vocabulary. Finally, in order for the average high school student to graduate, they will need a 45,000 word vocabulary at graduation (Nagy, 1988; Uhry & Clark, 2004). In the short time between ages three and six, in order to stay on track for developmentally appropriate learning, the average child must learn 19,000 words. In contrast between the ages of six and eighteen, an additional 25,000 must be learned.
Language experiences in the home and early school environments are critical for the development of vocabulary, but to ensure that all students are growing and expanding their vocabulary reservoirs, explicit teachings must happen, even in the earliest classrooms. For many years, educators thought pure emersion in a language rich environment was enough to create this effect, through a sort of osmosis. However, recent studies find that this sort of incidental learning is not substantial enough to produce the necessary results needed for reading success. The time before and at the beginning of schooling is critical for young children and vocabulary development, and incidental learning is not enough to accomplish this feat (Beck et al., 2002).

*Tiered leveling of vocabulary words.* Children immersed in a language rich environment will have many more occurrences of language experiences. As stated before, Hart and Risley (1995) determined that the more language experiences a child has, the better the chance of learning words that have been heard repeatedly. Beck and McKeown (1985) and Beck et al. (2002) also recognized that this was needed to develop student’s vocabulary, but that explicit teaching of specific vocabulary is also warranted. Yet, they also argue that not all words need to be taught; there is a hierarchy of words that are needed for academic success, and those can be sectioned into three different tiers of learning. Given the expansive number of vocabulary words children must learn, they devised a strategy to isolate significant groupings of words that serves to inform educators how to achieve such a feat.

Tier One words are words that are commonly heard on a daily basis; or labels and names that children already know and widely use. An example of these might be
book, talk, mother, or sad. Tier Three words are content specific words that apply to very specific content areas. An example of these might be isosceles, plateau, colonial, or refinery. This leaves Tier Two words or high frequency words that are widely used across many different domains by mature language learners. Examples of Tier Two words are coincidence, absurd, industrious, and fortunate. When educators utilize the leveled tiers to guide instruction, the daunting task of teaching and addressing the mountain of vocabulary words becomes less overwhelming. Coupled with vocabulary games and activities that use these tiered words, students can actively engage in vocabulary instruction. Maturation and application are also important; students must have many opportunities to see, say, repeat, and use these words in their learning environment.

**Teacher read alouds.** Because some of vocabulary learning happens within the context of reading, how do educators insure that the right words are being read and learned? This is another instance when the explicit teaching piece becomes important. Early and emergent readers are very limited in their ability to decode quality reading material, let alone focus any attention on the content when decoding is not automatic. Teachers can circumvent the inability to decode material and engage students by reading aloud books above their decoding level. Dialogic read alouds create an environment where the reader and the listener are engaging in a dialogue about the book. Teachers can ask questions about the information, storyline, or pictures to teach specific targeted words. Dialogic interactions can be teacher or student directed. When teacher directed, certain vocabulary words should be selected prior to the reading and
expanded through exercises before, during, and after reading sessions (Beck et al., 2002). Student directed interactions are also integral to building an environment of social interaction learning (Vygotsky, 1962). Teaching children to question what they do not know is a vital part of academic success and a hallmark of metacognition. Providing a forum like a dialogic read aloud will empower children to ask when they don’t understand and clarify, something that will contribute to comprehension strategies in their academic career.

Another method of utilizing the read aloud for vocabulary instruction is the idea of frontloading specific vocabulary before engaging in a reading activity. A teacher may target the Tier Two words that they wish to teach in the reading and provide examples, definitions, or visual aids of the targeted words prior to reading. Students then can listen and understand the new words in their context.

**Comprehension**

It was once thought that the act of comprehension was purely the ability to interpret symbols of written language. We now know that comprehension involves many different processes and seeks to go beyond basic understanding of symbols. While learning to read is at its foundational level is an exercise in understanding symbol relationships, beyond that is a transaction of ideas and information between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 2004).

While many have thought that comprehension strategies were best utilized by proficient readers and fluent decoders (Willingham, 2006), current research says that comprehension skills can and should be taught to emergent readers through direct
instruction of strategies and oral book readings. Researchers believe that students must be exposed to higher level literacy practices in early childhood classrooms in order to meet the demands of our highly literate society. Further studies in the field of child development have concluded that children are also capable of engaging in higher-level literacy practices with teacher support and interactive discussions (Hoffman, 2011).

**Transactional reading.** Now that we know that emergent readers should be taught comprehension strategies, how can we best teach them? One method is the active creation and filling of linguistic-experiential reservoirs. A term coined by Louise Rosenblatt (2004), it directly relates to an idea that a person’s experiences, culture, and background are crucial to understanding and interacting or transacting with text. She states: “We ‘make sense’ of a new situation or transaction and make new meanings by applying, reorganizing, revising, or extending public and private elements selected from our personal linguistic-experiential reservoirs” (p. 1367).

Educators in early childhood classrooms should be tasked with the supplementation of experiences both linguistically and environmentally that help children fill these reservoirs for future use. It has already been established that vocabulary knowledge and language experiences contribute to future success in reading and both components are crucial to enhancing experiential reservoirs. When children can relate to text, transact with text, or communicate deeply with text, they can comprehend text, and then meaning is made (Rosenblatt, 2004, p. 1369).

**Schema theory.** David Rumelhardt (1994) also theorized that experiences, vocabulary and knowledge are all stored within the mind of a reader and should are
engaged when in the task of decoding. His Schema Theory denotes a very specific filing system in the brain where classifications, labels, and experiences are stored. He explored the idea that when such schema are constructed and enhanced they can be accessed and used to understand, predict, and make conclusions about words and in doing so work simultaneously with meaning making while reading. He states, “While reading starts as a simple flutter of patterns on the retina it ends, (if successful) with a definite idea of the author’s intended message (p. 1149).” Educators can use Rumelhardt’s Schema Theory as another prime example of how to enhance the knowledge of emergent readers and provide information that builds and extends schema.

Early education environments should provide opportunities to build schema, enhance linguistic experiential reservoirs and teach children higher-level literacy strategies to comprehend text like making predictions, comparing and contrasting different texts, learn about story structures, and how to draw conclusions about the text. All of these higher-level literacy practices can and should be part of an emergent reader’s environment. Inclusion of these strategies will go far in providing the foundation for future success in reading.

Summary

This chapter provided a literature review focused on the importance of emergent literacy, its core principles, and the components that contribute to a balanced pre-literacy curriculum.
The importance of emergent literacy practices has been valued since Lyndon Johnson’s first creation of the Head Start Preschool program in 1965. Initially created to serve underprivileged families and their children for school readiness, this program now serves as a crucial component of the history and importance of pre-literacy instruction for all children. Numerous studies, national panels, and professional organizations have studied the effects of emergent literacy, its core competencies, and structures for implementation. They have concluded that direct, explicit teaching is vital to an early literacy curriculum, essential for narrowing achievement gaps, and provides foundational elements for reading success. These programs should not only include elements of phonological awareness, concepts of print, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension strategies, but include practice and opportunities for maturation in order for students to engage and succeed in literacy tasks in the long term. As our changing society becomes more and more dependent on high-level literacy abilities, and as academic success is directly tied to reading achievement, the necessity to provide every child with the tools needed to achieve that becomes greater.

The next chapter will use this literature review to guide the formation of the instructional activities described in the handbook of best practices.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY: DEVELOPMENT OF THE HANDBOOK

As stated in the previous chapters, the importance of foundational skills in pre-literacy has grown over the course of the last fifty years, specifically with the creation of the Head Start preschool program in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson. More recently there has been an increased awareness of the skills needed, and inequity of skills for many children entering schooling for the first time. Specific studies of varying socio-economic levels also have been studied and determined a potential result of increased inequity among learners. With the emphasis on “leveling the playing field” for all learners, many pre-school and early education classrooms have shifted focus to addressing specific practices to better prepare emergent readers to enter schooling ready for the formalized teaching of reading. The formation of this handbook serves to compliment those programs with research-based activities that can be taught in conjunction with established curriculums.

**Theoretical Development**

The formulation of the handbook is theoretically research based. Utilizing primary, some secondary sources and studies, the researcher aimed to provide research proven lessons that contribute to the foundational skills required of an emergent reader.

Primary to the task of creating the handbook was establishing an understanding of the term emergent reader and the educational environments in which they engage. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) best described emergent literacy as a part of a
continuum of learning that happens before, during, and after the formal start of schooling. In an effort to include the multitude of different learning environments and the continuum of learning, this project was aimed at three different age and grade levels. For the purposes of the handbook, Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, and First grade students will all be considered emergent readers and the primary focus groups by which to participate in said lessons.

Secondary to the process was the study and distinction of the five primary strands of learning researchers found as foundational in the preparation of a successful reader. Using multiple sources including the culminating report published by the California Reading Association (1997), the five primary strands were determined as:

- Oral Language, Listening and Speaking
- Awareness of Sound, symbol and Structure
- Skills integration
- Reading and Comprehension Strategies
- Writing, Vocabulary and Spelling

Because the researcher sought to isolate specific subsets of the five distinct strands, the following categories were decided to be focused on intensively:

- Phonological awareness
- Concepts of Print
- Vocabulary Acquisition and Enhancement
- Comprehension Strategies
The category of skills integration would be addressed as the specific lessons which are also differentiated by the learning levels of pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade.

Creating the lessons to be included in the handbook was a difficult task for the researcher. Utilizing recommendations from peers and the wealth of knowledge currently available on Pinterest boards and teacher blogs was crucial in determining the final collection of activities. The researcher created the lesson template and this became the framework for the lessons. The inclusion of the learning objectives and research rationales section further clarified the lessons to be used. However, in the end it was only the lessons that were both clear examples of the learning objectives and were deemed engaging and accessible to many types of learners by the researcher that were chosen.

It was essential for the researcher to strive to create a collection of activities that students of all levels of emergent literacy could participate in successfully. Completion of many of these activities is possible because of the varying modalities that are used and the developmental approach to the lessons. Singing, drawing, chanting, and talking are all activities that young children love to do naturally. As a teacher, the researcher looked for lessons and experiences that would use those interests and provide teachable moments at the same time.

**Phonological Awareness: Superheroes of Sound**

Phonological awareness and auditory discrimination abilities can be enhanced by exposure to many different activities that focus on the use of sound as a medium
for learning. For the creation of this handbook, activities that were chosen for this section were measured against the following criteria as established in 1973 by D. B. Elkonin (as cited in Uhry & Clark, 2004, p. 97):

- Provides opportunities to analyze sound structures including; words in sentences, syllables in words, onsets and rimes, and individual phonemes.

Further distinction of phonological awareness activities were measured with the hierarchical tasks determined by renowned researcher and theorist Marilyn Adams (1990). Those tasks were:

- Response to Rhymes
- Classifying or Matching Phonemes
- Segmenting Parts of Words
- Full Phoneme Segmentation
- Phoneme Deletion

Lastly, lessons in this portion of the handbook were created with time constraints relevant to the inclusion of phonological awareness activities into an existing literacy program.

**Concepts of Print: Print in Our World**

Understanding the function of print in our world was the primary focus of this portion of the handbook. Because this handbook does not directly address the formalized instruction of letters, and aims to be used in conjunction with whole language and phonics based programs, it was the goal of the researcher to provide
lessons that enhance a child’s knowledge of print as communication, information, and expression. Activities in this section were measured against the following criteria:

- Provides opportunities to engage with print in the world
- Understand its role in communication of language
- Provide insight into directionality, structures of words, sentences, stories and grammar
- Foster an interest in literacy

Because understanding of print comes from both direct instruction, and incidental learning through immersion in a print rich environment, the activities that address print awareness were set to counter balance incidental learning with specific strategies of direct instruction. Print rich environments that contribute to interest in literacy are not addressed in the handbook. However, further information about creating spaces that focus on print exposure and play with print purpose can be found in chapter two, the literature review.

**Vocabulary Acquisition: Collecting Words**

The primary focus of this portion of the handbook was to raise consciousness and the importance of the increase of receptive and expressive vocabulary in emergent readers.

Due to the social dynamic in which learning takes place, Vygotsky (1962) along with the direct correlation of language experiences and reading success as noted by both Hart and Risley (1995) and Stanovich (1986), activities were chosen that
specifically sought to increase receptive and expressive vocabulary. Lessons for this portion of the handbook were measured against the following criteria:

- Provide opportunities for acquisition, maturation and participation with new concepts, and new labels
- Expansion of knowledge of word families
- Foster understanding of new words in contextual use

Working within the understanding that vocabulary is directly related to linguistic experiential reservoirs (Rosenblatt, 2004) and schema (Rumelhardt, 1994), very specific attention was placed in choosing vocabulary words and activities that allowed for deeper level extensions to maximize word learning for all learners who could engage those processes and advance comprehension. Such activities would develop vocabulary acquisition and contribute to the experiential reservoir and schema and contribute to present exposures and future comprehension of text.

**Comprehension: Literature Connections**

Comprehension can be viewed as an understanding of the message within the text or a transaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 2004). Connection to personal experiences, tapping into linguistic experiential reservoirs and creating clear pathways to schema (Rumelhardt, 1994) were carefully considered in the creation of this portion of the handbook. Because comprehension can happen incidentally with interest, this portion of the handbook was specifically created to counterbalance that with direct instruction of higher-level literacy activities and explicit lessons in comprehension. However, teaching specific comprehension strategies with emergent
readers can be difficult to accomplish when decoding is not automatic. This is especially evident in beginning reading material, when decodable texts provide minimal structure or concepts to apply higher-level literacy activities. The activities in this portion of the handbook are designed to incorporate exposure through many different mediums and connect to multiple modalities for understanding. Comprehension activities in this portion of the handbook also aimed to provide a balanced approach to literacy, which provides opportunities for independent reading and shared oral book reading. Because of this, lessons in this portion of the handbook were measured by the following criteria:

- Provides an opportunity to connect with literature using a variety of mediums
- Engage in connections to text and provide opportunities for maturation and practice
- Supply an understanding of purpose with reading tasks

**Layout of Handbook and Audience**

The handbook is arranged into four sections; Superheroes of Sound; Phonological Awareness Activities, Print in Our World; Concepts of Print Activities, Collecting Words; Vocabulary Activities, and Literature Connections; Comprehension Activities. Each section provides four lessons that relate to the individual themes. Also included in each lesson are ideas for expanding activities with cross-curricular ideas and topics for theme studies. Utilizing theme studies and connections to other
non-language related domains provides opportunities for further maturation and integration for students in math, art and science.

The primary audience of the handbook is educators who teach in preschool, kindergarten and first grade classrooms. While the audience for each of the lessons alternates in focus between the three grade levels, differentiation directions are also included in each lesson to appeal to the other grade levels.

**Summary**

This chapter addressed the methodology in creating the handbook. Utilizing primary sources and studies, the author established an understanding of the term, emergent reader along with a description of literacy strands that contribute to reading success. The researcher isolated specific subsets of the literacy strands to be addressed and provided criteria by which the included activities were measured against. A description of the handbook layout was also discussed. The next chapter will address the discussions, implications, limitations, and conclusions in the creation of the handbook.
Chapter 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The necessity of pre-literacy instruction for emergent readers has never been as important as it is today. This understanding became more significant to me over the course of this process. While early childhood education has always been my comfort zone as an educator, intensive study and examination have propelled me to act with improved vigor for the cause of finding, reporting, and contributing to the best practices for emergent readers in early childhood classrooms.

In an effort to balance the playing field for all students, much research has been conducted to identify learning issues, improve remediation techniques, and justify instilling stricter standards and repercussions on underperforming teachers and schools. What is often missing from the discussion is the changing face of our students, the literacy needs of today’s society, and the socio-economic influences on students, schools, and overall learning. So important is the goal to understand these achievement gaps, kindergarten through fourth grade literacy practices were the focus of the NICHD (2000) Reading Panel report. However, it took two years after the publication of that report to create the National Early Literacy Panel to study the period of learning and impact of pre-literacy training for children from birth to age four.

What can we do to better prepare our children for the rigors of our curriculums and how can we improve their ability to achieve reading success and academic achievement? The answer is, prepare them before they enter school, engage them as
they are in the beginnings of their literacy education as emergent readers, and create balanced literacy environments that are more cohesive in connecting all pieces of the literacy puzzle. It is my hope that the culmination of the handbook will serve to aid that very purpose and provide minutia for the early childhood educators to challenge these issues and incorporate pre-literacy practices daily in their classrooms.

This chapter will discuss the summary, conclusions and recommendations for its implementation and addition of the Best Practices of Reading Instruction for Emergent Readers Pre-K through First into existing language arts curriculums.

Discussion

In our modern society, basic literacy is not sufficient to achieve a successful experience in school, participate in the modern workforce, or even operate a cell phone. Because of this, educators and school systems are shifting their curriculums in language arts development to earlier grades. Children are now being held to a higher standard of literacy development in kindergarten and first than were previously expected in first and second grade, with little regard for developmental appropriateness. Formalized reading programs with measured benchmarks are being implemented that demand immediate outcome results with an increased frequency of formalized assessment. However, formalized assessments often dictate instruction rather than inform it. As a result, much has been removed from language arts curriculums in order to attain results geared toward assessment benchmarks. This is troubling and stifling to educators who strive to create environments where learners are engaged, motivated, and successful in ways not measurable by a standardized test.
Classrooms should be places where students have opportunities to expand vocabulary, increase phonological awareness, engage in oral books readings that contribute to comprehension, and practice critical thinking. Social experiences and opportunities for personal interactions with quality literature have been consolidated and somewhat removed from prepackaged curriculums that focus on speed of reading, fluency, and memorization of sight words, letters, and word families. Yet recent research has found that these very same activities are essential components of a balanced literacy program and therefore contribute to foundational knowledge for reading achievement (Pressley, 2006). In order for students to be prepared to engage successfully in such advanced curriculums, more must be done to lay the groundwork of successful reading achievement. Phonological awareness, concepts of print, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension strategies are foundational to reading achievement and hallmarks of a balanced early literacy programs. While it was previously believed that these practices could be learned through incidental exposure, the research is very clear that it should be a part of explicit and direct instruction programs, and inclusion of these practices is warranted, appropriate, and of dire necessity.

**Summary of the Handbook**

Through the course of study of literature on the topic of emergent literacy practices, it became very clear to me the prevailing themes that would create the framework of the handbook. With collective emphases among many researchers and theorists in the field of reading, I determined that the handbook should specifically
address the themes of phonological awareness, concepts of print, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension strategies. Establishing the criteria by which to choose the activities became the next task and one that would require synthesis of the research combined with developmentally appropriate expectations. Because of the varying educational levels for which the handbook would be an audience, both in student population and educator competency, each theme provided an introduction into the importance, purpose, and the research rationale of the chosen emphasis. Multiple modalities were sought to appeal to all learners and establish an environment that was engaging, motivating, and educational.

**Superheroes of Sound**

The primary goal of this portion of the handbook was to provide activities that improve phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is the one of the most misunderstood components of literacy programs. What I found in much of the research were theorists focused solely on sounds and sound manipulation. What I have seen in classrooms is attention to sound but with phonics included. In an effort to “kill two birds with one stone”, many programs attempt to tie phonics and phonological awareness together without the knowledge that the letter or symbol/sound relationship is more a function of print and phoneme awareness. Phoneme awareness or the isolation of the smallest units of sound is only one component of the overall concept of phonological awareness. As a result, students are missing instruction and practice manipulating, identifying and attuning to sound and language. We cannot hope to have our students participate in attaching symbols to sound when we haven’t assessed
their understanding of sound and language. Including the lessons in phonological awareness does not mean that all phonics should be removed from instruction, just that careful thought and planning should go into curriculums that seek to remove this very foundational aspect of literacy learning in order to “bulk up” lesson that focus on symbol/sound knowledge.

The lessons in this portion of the handbook were created with the principle purpose of sound awareness and manipulation. They are require minimal time to complete and can be added to existing curriculums. Included are two activities that apply to identifying sound structures in rhyming and syllable count. We Can Rhyme, a chant, sung to the tune of Three Blind Mice, will allow students to work with word families and create rhymes. These activities are fun and engaging for students because young children can participate easily with rhyming games and enjoy song or performance environments. Syllable Segmenting, utilizes humming to help students hear breaks in words to identify syllables. The other two activities were chosen to narrow focus to manipulation of sound with phoneme emphasis. Odd Sound Out, provides practice with identifying onset rimes and removing the “odd sound” that does not belong. Phoneme Puzzlers utilizes physical movement to help visualize the placement of phonemes in words by tapping the head for the beginning, the waist for the middle, and the knees for the end placement of specific phonemes.

Print in Our World

Understanding print’s significance, purpose, and its communicative properties are the primary objectives of this portion of the handbook. We know now that our
students will come to our classrooms from very different backgrounds and experiences. Some will see print all around them, engage in shared reading experiences, and understand the meaning of words and letters. Others may come to us with very limited exposure, lesser understanding of the messages that print carries, and be less able to identify different types of print from their narrowed environments. The activities in this portion utilize letters, words, sentences, symbols, and visual graphics to promote further understanding of print concepts.

*The Happy Birthday Mix Up* is a very fun way to incorporate print purpose with a familiar subject. Singing the words to Happy Birthday correctly, then in a mixed up order truly shows the students print’s relationship to speech. *We Can Read* helps very beginning readers to see themselves as readers in the world. Utilizing visual orthography, students create pages filled with logos, brands and labels that they can read from their lives around them. This activity encourages even the most novice of readers to interact with print and helps provide motivation and promote confidence in beginning readers. In the Individual ABC Books activity, teachers use quality literature to model, provide inspiration to students, and connect an alphabetic principle to print awareness. The Morning Message further involves students in creating messages about print and clarifies its primary purpose as communication.

**Collecting Words**

Vocabulary acquisition is the primary subject of this portion of the handbook and activities aim to instruct and provide experiences geared toward, practical use and maturation. Vocabulary acquisition is a great determining factor in the success of
reading achievement. Purely stated, the student who knows more words, reads more words, and writes more words (Stanovich, 1986). The activities in this portion of the book were created with that very sentiment in mind. Nevertheless, these lessons are merely a starting point for educators to include in their curriculums. The research is very conclusive that vocabulary acquisition should be direct, explicit, and primary to all learning environments. The knowledge gaps among our students are too great, and not enough curriculums place the proper importance on vocabulary teaching.

In the Collecting Words activity, students use beginning dictionaries to collect words about certain topics. In Word Webs, teachers work with students to provide definitions of certain words to further assess prior knowledge and aid understanding with simpler explanations. The Text Talk Read Aloud activity is specifically used to integrate high quality literature, above independent decoding levels, into lessons that provide new vocabulary word exposure. In Word Detectives, students learn vocabulary words and definitions, discuss them, and create student definitions; and then determine their proper use in other contexts.

Literature Connections

Introducing higher-level literacy practices in comprehension is the focus of this portion of the handbook. A common misunderstanding is that emergent readers cannot participate in these types of activities because of their limited decoding abilities. The research is also very clear in stating that higher-level comprehension activities can and should be implemented through exposure to quality literature and oral readings.
In this section of the handbook, students will engage with the text, synthesize new knowledge and establish the clear understanding of meaning making while reading. On the *Response to Literature Pages*, students make connections to oral readings by providing personal responses to the material read. *Interacting with Non-Fiction Texts* allows students to extract information and then create their own text with the new information learned. *Text Sets* compare narrative and nonfiction texts to introduce new information and determine fact vs. fiction. Finally, *Text Mapping* helps students to isolate the beginning, middle and end of a narrative story arc.

**Strengths and Limitations**

There are both strengths and limitations of the handbook and its use in the learning environment. A significant limitation that I identified was the potential difficulty in persuading teachers to include these activities in curriculums. With modern classrooms structured so heavily on learning objectives pursuant to assessment tools and prepackaged literacy programs, convincing teachers to deviate from the norm and squeeze another learning objective onto the docket of the day may be difficult. As a response to that limitation, and to alleviate some aversion to the activities, I aimed to condense them to fifteen or twenty minute intervals of instruction. Because the activities are high interest, motivationally oriented, and involve art or games, teachers may find that these lessons provide moments of levity for all involved. This and the potential use in free choice work times, as curriculum in Response to Intervention tutoring, or as extensions for advanced learners, are all perceived strengths of the project.
The curriculum standard of the school may also pose a limitation if the language arts program is strictly text based or strictly whole word. Some educators may find improbability of some of the lessons and question their developmental appropriateness in the view of their particular program. While I worked very hard to provide activities that could be used in conjunction with both types of programs, strict adherence to either reading philosophy may be incongruent with some of the lessons.

Another limitation of the handbook’s use in educational settings is its efficacy with the differing degrees of teacher education. Preschool educators require certifications and degrees different from credentialed teachers. Teachers with limited knowledge of reading processes and theory may not understand the research rationales of each lesson nor be able to synthesize the ideas to properly present the activities in their classrooms. In response to this limitation, the research rationales included in each of the lessons were geared specifically to inform educators, provide reasoned understanding and rationale to further include the lessons in their programs.

**Recommendations for Implementation of the Handbook**

It is the author’s hope that this handbook will be welcome material in the classrooms of early educational environments and provide inspiration for implementation and further research. Schools, which are already implementing lessons that address emergent literacy practices, will have additional ideas for lessons with this handbook, and those that are interested in expanding existing language arts programs may find a body of activities that are research based and justifiable in a balanced literacy program. Educators in both types of learning environments should use the
handbook as a beginning discussion about emergent literacy practices and the research currently being used in the field. This handbook is also a powerful tool for parents who are looking to prepare their children for schooling, and can be used for parent education with parents who need guidance for supporting educational goals.

**Conclusion**

Academic success is directly tied to reading achievement (Adams, 1990; Pressley, 2006; Stanovich, 1986; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) and when preparing young children for success in schooling, there should be an ample supply of inspiration, techniques, and resources to accomplish the task. Research tells us that pre-literacy education is important, happens unequally among differing socio-economic classes, is incidentally learned by some, yet requires direct instruction for all. The students of the future need foundational learning experiences that make them prepared to have academic success. With the proper tools, we, as educators, are mandated to nurture young minds, inspire young spirits, and provide environments that foster the love of learning and the value of academic success. Teaching even our youngest learners the power of reading and its avenue for enjoyment and preparing them for academic achievement, should be part of all early childhood classrooms.
APPENDIX

Best Practices of Reading Instruction for Emergent Readers

Pre-K Through First Grade

A Handbook for Teachers
Best Practices of Reading Instruction for Emergent Readers Pre-K through First Grade

A Handbook for Teachers

Kristina D. Q. Mathisen
California State University Sacramento
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Dear Early Childhood Educator,

One of the most rewarding feelings we are able to experience as educators is knowing that we have made a difference in the life of a child. From nurturing the emotional and social growth of our students, to preparing them for the academic rigors of an academic career, early childhood teachers have the opportunity to contribute to the learning potential of their students on a daily basis.

However, our classrooms are changing, just as the world around us changes, too. The basic literacy knowledge that would once suffice the average citizen is no longer substantial enough to guarantee success in our highly literate society. Our classrooms, schools, and governing minds are reflecting these changes, as well. Standardized tests, school wide and district wide benchmarks are measured, and the rigor of language arts curriculums are being implemented in younger grade levels. All of these changes are often at the expense of the development of our students. Children are asked to perform at different levels than previously expected. Formalized literacy instruction is now common practice in Kindergarten classrooms, when it had previously been applied to first and second grade. Combined with the changing face of our students, differing socio-economic levels, English language learners, and varying abilities of school readiness, the role of literacy in the classroom is more important than ever.

Nevertheless, what can we do as teachers to ensure that our students have the best experiences to propel them through their academic careers ready and able to
achieve success? The good news is that research is very clear about the practices we should provide our emergent readers and from this research, academic success is directly tied to achievement in reading. Therefore, preparing our students in the early childhood classrooms with foundational elements to help build better readers will go far to help them on a trajectory of academic success.

Before we teach our students a formalized language arts program, we must engage them in the pre-literacy and emergent literacy practices that will provide a foundation of literacy understanding. Phonological awareness, concepts of print, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension skills can and should be taught to our emergent readers, even before we teach them that an “A” says /a/.

This handbook was created to be a companion piece to your existing language arts programs. Whether your students are practicing text based learning through phonics, whole language, or a balanced literacy program, the lessons created in this handbook will work in conjunction with all of those as a part of a comprehensive language arts program.

Lastly, I hope that this handbook brings you many fun and engaging teachable moments with your students and that wonderful feeling knowing you made a difference in a child’s life.

Your colleague,

Kristi Mathisen
Users Guide

This handbook was created to complement existing language arts programs with research-based activities that are essential to pre-literacy foundational knowledge. Whether your curriculum participates in text based phonics instruction, whole language learning, or a balance of both, this handbook can serve as an addendum to those programs. The handbook is divided into four themed sections:

1. Print in Our World: Concepts of Print Activities
2. Super Heroes of Sound: Phonological Awareness Activities
3. Collecting Words: Vocabulary Acquisition Activities
4. Literature Connections: Comprehension Activities

Included in each of the sections are four lessons that apply to the specific theme. Lessons are designed for the emergent readers in Pre-K, Kindergarten, and First Grade and differentiations are explained for each of the grade levels for implementation. Each lesson also contains a research rationale, bonus activities that can be used in cross-curriculum integration, and ideas for theme units to accompany the lessons.

Lastly, the lessons in this handbook were created to be completed in 15 to 20 minute periods of learning. However, because these lessons are high interest, motivationally oriented, and involve songs, art, and games, teachers may find many opportunities for inclusion and lengthen their implementation.
Print In Our World

Concepts of Print Activities

Our society has changed dramatically over the last five, ten, twenty, or even fifty years. Basic literacy is no longer a substantial amount of knowledge one needs to compete in this new world. Because of this an increased focus on literacy practices that were once deemed too difficult for young children, are now being adapted to be more age appropriate, and introduced earlier in educational settings.

This portion of the handbook will specify activities that assist in the foundational knowledge of print awareness. Understanding print; its importance, its purpose, and its message are foundational to all emergent readers in an alphabetic orthography. R. V. Allen (1976) summarized the understanding that educators should try to impart while teaching children about print significance, “What I can think about, I can talk about. What I can say, I can write. What I can write, I can read. I can read what I write, and I can read what other people can write for me to read” (as cited in Adams, 1990, p. 371).

Therefore, the following research based activities serve as a starting point for print awareness education in the classroom.
I. Happy Birthday Mix Up

**Targeted Learning Group:** Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten

**Objective:** Associate word knowledge through speech with visually orthography.

**Research Rationale:** Connecting the words of a familiar song to a game with language helps solidify phonological awareness. Attaching a visual representation of familiar words helps to attach meaning to symbols (Yopp & Yopp, 2009).

**Materials:**

1. The lyrics of Happy Birthday, with each word printed on an individual card
2. A pocket chart to display the cards or a board to adhere them to
3. A pointer for pointing to specific words while singing
4. Name cards for all of the students participating

**Implementation:** Display the words in the correct order for singing in horizontal lines. The words should fill four lines with four words on each line, including one name card of a student. While singing, point to each word being sung. Instruct the students to carefully observe the words that belong to the spoken words and advise them that you will be changing the words around the next time you sing it. After you have sung the song normally two times, have one student switch all of the words around into any order they wish. The words must be in four lines and in groupings of four words per line. Sing the song again and point
to the individual words. The students will delight in the mixed up version of the song and clearly see the relationship of print and speech.

**Differentiation for First Grade:** Expand the lesson by counting syllables, teaching a mini lesson about “y” endings in words, vowel patterns, or homophones with the word “to”.

### Bonus Curriculum Activities

#### Cross-curriculum Integration

Art: Design and paint birthday cakes

Literature link: *Happy Birthday To You* by T. S. Geisel (Dr. Seuss) Dr. Seuss (1959)

**Theme Study Ideas:** Birthdays and Cultural celebrations
II. We Can Read

**Targeted Learning Group:** Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten

**Objective:** Acknowledge, compile and organize environmental print, in order to synthesize its purpose in the world.

**Research Rationale:** Understanding environmental print is foundational to a reader because it provides context for print meaning prior to letter and word reading. Environmental print also encourages reading and the importance of literacy as it is likely present around emergent readers in both educational and home environments (Adams, 1990)

**Materials:**

1. Clear page protectors, enough for each student to have one each
2. Card stock for mounting labels, enough to give each child one-two-page layout
3. Environmental print labels from student families, minimum of 10 per child

**Implementation:** After engaging in various print activities in the classroom, send information home to parents about finding ten labels or clippings that their child can read. These can be food labels, store symbols, clippings from magazine or newspaper titles, name stickers, or any other print that may be seen in their world. After all are collected, mount each piece on the child’s individual two-page layout and compile into a class book. Read with the class and provide
opportunities for the individual students to read their own page. Place in the classroom library for further exposure.

**Differentiation for First Grade:** First grade students can create their own individual books with various print labels and categorize them. Categories could be comprised of product purpose, genre of store or food categories or simply alphabetical by name.

**Bonus Curriculum Activities**

**Cross-curriculum Integration**

Science: Analyze foods and labels to study the food pyramid, nutrition, and healthy living.

Social Science: Discuss cultural traditions with food labels.

**Theme Study Ideas:** Cultural Traditions, Geography, Health, Nutrition
### III. Individual ABC Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targeted Learning Group: Kindergarten and First Grade</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective:</strong> Evaluate print in the context of ABC storybooks. Analyze and formulate personal versions for further understanding of print purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Rationale:</strong> Literature that the children can read and share independently becomes a powerful tool for understanding print as communication (Calkins, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Individual books, with 26 pages stapled together for each student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Writing and drawing tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ABC example books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementation:</strong> Over the course of multiple days, read many different versions of ABC books. Highlight in your readings the titles of each page and be careful to isolate the letter that is represented. When possible use ABC books that also use alliteration as they can be very helpful in teaching beginning onset phonemes and highlight specific letters. While selecting your ABC books, be mindful of the theme which the book is written in. After a good portion of books are read, allow the children to think of a theme to use for their own ABC books. Kindergarten students might only be able to group certain letters or portions around a theme while first graders should be able to tap into many other vocabulary ideas to use in an entire book theme study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Differentiation for Pre-Kindergarten: Read books as stated above but compile a book as a class or with individuals’ assigned letters.

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<tr>
<th>Bonus Curriculum Activities</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cross-curriculum Integration</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Math:</strong> Consider exposing the students to and creating counting books with themes to highlight the structure of both types of books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Science:</strong> Create a class ABC book utilizing only science terms or facts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme Study Ideas:</strong> ABC letter knowledge, Animals, Nursery Rhymes,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ABC Books for each age group**

**Pre-Kindergarten:**

3. *Alphabet Animals; A Slide and Peek Adventure* by S. MacDonald (2008)
4. *ABC Dinosaurs (ANMH ABC board series)* By the American Museum of Natural History and Scott Hartman (2011)

**Kindergarten:**


5. *ABC is for Circus* By Patrick Hruby (2010)

First Grade:


5. *S is For S’mores: A Camping Alphabet Book* By Helen Foster James
   
   (James & Judge, 2007)
### IV. The Morning Message

**Targeted Learning Group:** Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten

**Objective:** Present an example of print, its function for communication, and its process with a morning message to students.

**Research Rationale:** The morning message is a powerful tool in a literacy rich environment. Teachers can use this form of communication to explain the day, introduce vocabulary words, and model writing form and function (Wasik & Hindman, 2011)

**Materials:**

1. White board, large print notebook, or overhead projection appliance
2. Colored pens for writing
3. Message about learning

**Implementation:** The Morning Message can be done prior to students arriving for the day or while they are present. Both can be informative as to print’s purpose however, writing with students will enhance the procedure of writing. When writing with students, talk about what you would like to convey in the message. Practice directionality; emphasize formation of letters, use of punctuation, and form. You may also choose to write each sentence in a different color to enhance the awareness of sentences being independent and ending in punctuation. Messages should be in letter format and provide information that is
related to the day’s events or have some personal meaning to the students. A sample message might be:

Good Morning Boys and Girls,

Today we are going to be doing some very exciting things in Kindergarten. We will continue to prepare for our 100th day celebration by making noise makers for our parade. Hip, Hip, Hooray- it’s almost the 100th day!

Love, Mrs. Mathisen

Differentiation for First Grade: First grade students can be involved in the creation of the message daily. You may select students to write the message for the class and conduct discussions about the message contents. Phonics rules can be more thoroughly discussed while writing and proper punctuation can be modeled.

Bonus Curriculum Activities

Cross-curriculum Integration

All disciplines can be reflected in the Morning Message contents.

Theme Study Ideas: Post Office Study
Superheroes of Sound
Phonological Awareness Activities

Phonological awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate sound. There are subsets to the category, but at its core, phonological awareness involves synthesis tasks like, matching, blending and adding sounds, and analysis tasks like, counting, segmenting and deleting sounds. Generally the synthesis activities are easier for students to grasp, whereas analysis appears more difficult (Yopp & Yopp, 2009). The goal of all phonological awareness curriculums should always aim to guide children into the ability to narrow their attention to the smallest units of sound, the phoneme. While general phonological awareness is needed to attain reading success, phonemic awareness allows a more specific understanding of sounds and leads to better abilities in decoding and spelling. Not to be confused with phonics which connects a symbol with sound, phonemic awareness activities allow the student to remove meaning from the words spoken and simply attune to the sounds.

It is widely thought that instruction in phonological awareness should be direct and intentional. Therefore, the following research based activities address some core principles of phonological awareness in developmentally appropriate learning environments.
## I. We Can Rhyme

**Targeted Learning Group:** Kindergarten

**Objective:** Analyze rhyming words in an oral reading, formulate lists of word families to substitute, and construct rhyming triplets in order to further examine individual phonemes.

**Research Rationale:** Exposure and manipulating rhymes is foundational to phonological awareness and provides an opportunity to hear individual phonemes (Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

**Materials:**

1. White board for brainstorming word families
2. Laminated poster printed with:
   
   We can rhyme. We can rhyme.
   
   Listen to the words. Listen to the words.

   ______ rhymes with _____ and _____

   ______ rhymes with _____ and _____

   ______ rhymes with _____ and _____

   We can rhyme. We can rhyme.

3. Dry Erase markers
4. Book; *Three Blind Mice* by John W. Ivimey (Ivimey & Galdone, 1987)
**Implementation:** Read *Three Blind Mice* by John W. Ivimey to directly identify rhyming words in context and familiarize with the tune. Then brainstorm with students some rhyming words in various word families; *-at:* fat, cat, bat, sat, mat

As the students sing the tune stop and ask them to input words from the lists to finish the song. Use dry erase marker and erase afterward to repeat using multiple word families.

**Differentiation for Pre-Kindergarten:** Read aloud *Three Blind Mice* by John W. Ivimey. Discuss rhyming words and identify rhymes found in the story.

**Differentiation for First Grade:** Have students use only one word family at a time to stretch thinking. Incorporate consonant blends and digraphs in your brainstorming portion.

**Bonus Curriculum Activities**

**Cross-curriculum Integration**

Art: Create renditions of the three mice.

Science: Study mice characteristics; habitats, behaviors, and compare and contrast to the fictional mice in the story.

Social Studies: Understanding handicaps and blindness.

**Theme Study Ideas:** Nursery Rhymes, Animals, Senses
<table>
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<tr>
<th>II. Odd Sound Out</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Targeted Learning Group:</strong> Pre-Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective:</strong> Recognize onset phonemes by identifying the non-matching sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Rationale:</strong> Concrete representations of sound units may help mental manipulations of sounds easier for some children. Visuals may help reduce memory load (Yopp &amp; Yopp, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Picture cards with groupings of three matching onset phonemes with one non-matching card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image: Picture cards with groupings" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementation:</strong> Pre-sort the cards into groupings of four with one card to be identified as not matching, or the “odd word”. Show the students the four cards and recite the names of the objects on them. The students should be able to tell you which card or sound should not be part of the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Differentiation for Kindergarten:</strong> Add labels of words to picture cards to incorporate grapheme knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Differentiation for First Grade:</strong> Picture cards have blank spaces beneath to be labeled by students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bonus Curriculum Activities

Cross-curriculum Integration

Science: Compare content specific pictures and labels to improve vocabulary acquisition of various science studies.

Theme Study Ideas: Transportation, Animals,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III. Syllable Segmenting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Targeted Learning Group:</strong> Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective:</strong> Practice segmenting syllables by humming. Utilizing sound as a modality will help students to better hear syllable breaks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research rationale:</strong> Humming allows the student to better isolate syllables. Clapping may become confusing for students when they voice syllables incorrectly while clapping. Some may add sounds to certain consonants that cannot be voiced without a vowel sound, example /d/ with a /u/ after it. (Shefelbine, 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Pictures of animals with varying syllable counts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Syllable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementation:</strong> Start by segmenting each student’s name by humming. Then present pictures of animals and segment those as well. Finish by organizing cards in numeric order by syllable number.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Differentiation for First Grade:</strong> Combine student name cards or photos to the animal cards and graph all names by number of syllables in each.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bonus Curriculum Activities

**Cross-curriculum Integration**

Art: If I were an…draw self portraits as animals

Science: Classify animal groups, identify characteristics of habitats for certain species

Math: Transfer graph information to written form to be analyzed mathematically

**Theme Study Ideas:** Animals, Environment
<table>
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<th>IV. Phoneme Puzzlers</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Targeted Learning Group:</strong> Kindergarten</td>
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</table>

**Objective:** Discriminate phoneme placement in words utilizing a physical modality.

**Research Rationale:** Understanding that speech and communication is mapped to the smallest unit of sound is fundamental to emergent readers in an alphabetic orthography. This knowledge will also be foundational for reading and spelling as the learner moves beyond the task at a phonemic level and incorporates a phonetic awareness with letters (Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

**Materials:**

1. List of two and three phoneme words.

2 **Phonemes:**  at, to, my, is, off, new

3 **Phonemes:**  cat, dog, mud, fine, feed, baby

**Implementation:** Using the head, hips, and knees for reference points of beginning, middle, and end, students will identify the placement of phonemes in words.

Teach the children that all words can be isolated by sound and not just syllable.

Say the words one by one followed by the phrase: “Is the /p/ in pig at the front of the word (touch your head), in the middle of the word (touch your hips), or the end of the word (touch your knees). Visually assess for correct identification and elaborate or correct as needed.
**Differentiation for Pre-Kindergarten:** Use only two phoneme words.

**Differentiation for First Grade:** Focus on middle sounds and add words with multiple phonemes to be segmented. You can also delete phonemes with this age group, example: “If I say pig but drop the /p/ what two sounds are left? Have the children touch the hips for /i/ and the knees for /g/.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Bonus Curriculum Activities</th>
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**Cross-curriculum Integration**

Art: Make self-portrait mats that can be used with magnetic letters to connect letter knowledge with placement of sound.

**Theme Study Ideas:** Anatomy and self
Collecting Words
Vocabulary Activities

Vocabulary acquisition and reading achievement have been heavily studied. Researchers in the field unanimously agree that students should know more words in order to read, comprehend, and write more words (Stanovich, 1986). Much of the recent research has been directed at English language learners, middle school student achievement gaps, and Response to Intervention strategies, where reading deficiencies have been diagnosed. However, with the current emphasis on pre-kindergarten educational reform, studies are now aiming to understand the correlation that early and explicit teaching in vocabulary instruction is warranted and prepares students for future reading success.

The following research based activities are presented as a sampling of vocabulary strategies that can be used in many different curriculums to better prepare emergent readers for reading success.
### I. Dictionary Scavenger Hunt

**Targeted Learning Group:** First Grade

**Objective:** Provide an introductory exposure to working with dictionaries. Students will utilize both written and illustrated input to complete the task, and in turn, connect labels with pictures.

**Research Rationale:** Recording words while learning them is essential to the new vocabulary learner. As a word becomes more clearly understood, students can use journals or notes of words to reflect, expand understand or change initial definition to suit other contexts (Beck et al., 2002).

**Materials:**

1. Multiple copies of the *Children’s Illustrated Dictionary* By DK Publishing (McIlwain, 1994)
2. Collecting Words Worksheet

**Implementation:** This activity is aimed at providing an introductory experience with dictionaries and new vocabulary. Students are given a specific topic and asked to “collect words” from the student dictionaries. After they search for the words, they print the word they found and draw a picture of the object. These worksheets can be compiled into a private dictionary to be used in other studies. This activity is especially great for the very beginning reader because the use of illustrated dictionaries provides many opportunities to visually recognize objects and attach labels to them.
Differentiation for Pre-Kindergarten: Work as a group to collect the words for a page. Use the *My First Dictionary* by DK Publishing (Root & Langley, 2004).

Differentiation for Kindergarten:

Use *My First Dictionary* by DK Publishing and remove the writing portion or eliminate three boxes for shorter duration. Specific search topics may also be omitted and students may be directed to make general search for words.

### Bonus Curriculum Activities

**Cross-curriculum Integration**

Science: Make a science dictionary with specific topics.

Math: Make a math dictionary with explanations and examples of math concepts learned.

**Theme Study Ideas:**

Animals; Habitats, Groups, and Shapes, Colors, Feelings
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collecting Words</th>
<th>Name ____________________________</th>
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<tr>
<td>About ____________</td>
<td>Date ___________________________</td>
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## II. Word Webs

**Targeted Learning Group:** Kindergarten and First

**Objective:** Reinforce connections between words and word meanings while providing a visual component to assist in understanding. Utilizing group learning this also helps to encourage peer interactions.

**Research Rationale:** Asking children how a new word relates to words they already know helps them to understand how words connect with their prior knowledge and gives ideas as to how they can use a new word (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002).

**Materials:**

1. List of pre-selected words for teaching
2. Whiteboard or paper for display
3. Writing tool

**Implementation:** This activity starts with a discussion about the word ‘web’. Because many young children will only think of a spider with a web, this is a perfect representation for them to understand that a web is a visual tool along with being the habitat of a spider. After you have introduced the children to the visual and decided which word you would like to focus on, you will be asking for input from the students about the chosen word and their ideas of related words or feelings about the word. You will gather consensus from the group before adding the words or ideas to the web. Be very careful to correct any confusion about the word as the discussion develops.
This example will use the word, *exhausted*

Using the input from the children decide on the definitions that are related to exhausted.

Differentiation for Pre-Kindergarten: Use only Tier One words or labels to work within word webs.

Differentiation for First Grade: Follow up this activity with a round of sentence building with the word in the group. You might say “Can anyone give me an example of when they were exhausted? Can you describe that in a sentence using the word exhausted?”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Cross-curriculum Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science: Use this web to explain characteristics of new concepts and new labels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Study Ideas: Insects, Animals, Habitats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### III. Text Talk Read Alouds

**Targeted Learning Group:** Kindergarten

**Objective:** Identify and teach through sequencing, specific vocabulary words for learning in language rich, developmentally appropriate children’s literature.

**Research Rationale:** Because beginning reading material often only contains Tier One vocabulary words, this type of text makes vocabulary instruction difficult. Through teacher read alouds, with vocabulary instruction sequencing, students can be exposed to language above their decoding level and learn in a developmentally appropriate context (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002)

**Materials:**

1. Targeted literature and pre-identified vocabulary words for the specific age group. For this example the text chosen is *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes (1991) and the pre-selected words are: Chrysanthemum, dreadful, fascinating, absolutely, scarcely.

**Implementation:**

Begin by reading the story aloud to the students. When you come to a point in the story where the pre-selected vocabulary word is placed, finish the text on that page and then proceed with these steps in sequence.

1. First indentify the word selected and present its meaning as contextualized in the story. “Her parents thought her name must be absolutely perfect.”
2. Then ask the children to say the word to create a phonological representation. “Say the word with me, absolutely”

3. Next explain the meaning of the word. “Absolutely means that you are very sure that this is the correct choice, there is no doubt that you have said or done the best thing. There is nothing to argue about, you are sure.”

4. Then provide examples of the word in other contexts not provided in the story. “You might tell your parents that you do not like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. You could say, I have tried them many times and I am absolutely sure that I do not like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.”

**Differentiation for Pre-Kindergarten:**

3. *Harry the Dirty Dog* by Gene Zion (Zion & Graham, 1956): except, strange, wonder
4. *Curious George Plays Baseball* by Margaret and H.A. Rey (Rey & Shalleck, 1986): curious, sneak, hero
5. *Sheila Rae the Brave* by Kevin Henkes (1987): fearless, convince, dashed

**Differentiation for First Grade:**


   amusing, detest, impressive

4. *A Pocket for Corduroy* by Don Freeman (Freeman & Terheyden, 1982):
   insisted, reluctant, drowsy


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<th>Bonus Curriculum Activities</th>
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**Cross-curriculum Integration**

This activity can be done in all content areas that involve text.
IV. Word Detectives

Targeted Learning Group: Kindergarten and First Grade

Objective: Decipher meanings and use of words in context outside of the initially presented form.

Research Rationale: Beyond providing child friendly definitions, it is very important to provide examples of the new word’s use in contexts beyond its use in the story (Silverman & Crandall, 2010).

Materials:

1. A list of new vocabulary words that are to be taught after exposure in a read aloud text. The text used for this example is *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* by William Steig (1969) and the words being taught are bewildered, embrace and ceased.

Implementation:

This activity is a follow up activity to the formerly discussed Text Talk. After reading *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* by William Steig, reintroduce the words you preselected for vocabulary teaching. Instruct the children that you will be giving them clues like a detective to listen to and make judgments about. Their job will be to listen to the clues and respond with their answer to the meaning of the specific vocabulary word. You will give them three choices for answers and they will choose their response by holding up one, two, or three fingers to show their choice. An example should sound like this:
“The word I will be describing is embrace, it means to hug someone or hold them close. The clues are these:

1. Molly wanted a Popsicle so she went to embrace the freezer for one.
2. Stanley was frightened and held his teddy bear in a tight embrace.
3. I really didn’t want to eat my brussel sprouts, so I lifted my plate in an embrace

Show me one finger if you think that is the correct way to use the word embrace, two for number two, and three for number three.”

**Differentiation for Pre-Kindergarten:**

Use three responses but ask them to pick the response that does not belong. At this developmental level the students will be much better at understanding the differences or the odd explanation other than synthesizing the word used in more complex circumstances.

“The word I am going to talk about is confused, it means that you don’t understand something or don’t know what something means.

1. My mom took me with her to work today and not to school, I was very confused.
2. I love to eat macaroni and cheese it makes me feel confused.
3. My best friend wasn’t at soccer practice today, I was confused, where was he?
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Which sentence does not mean confused? Show me with your fingers the sentence that is the wrong way to use the word confused.</th>
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<td><strong>Cross-curriculum Integration</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>This activity can be done in all content areas that involve text.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Theme Study Ideas:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rocks and Geology, Animals, Fairy Tales</td>
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Literature Connections
Comprehension Activities

It was once thought that the act of comprehension was purely the ability to interpret symbols of written language. We now know that comprehension involves many different processes and seeks to go beyond basic understanding of symbols. While learning to read is at its foundational level is an exercise in understanding symbol relationships, beyond that is a transaction of ideas and information between the reader and the text, (Rosenblatt, 2004).

While many have thought that comprehension strategies were best utilized by proficient readers and fluent decoders (Willigham, 2006), current research says that comprehension skills can and should be taught to emergent readers through direct instruction of strategies and oral book readings. Researchers believe that students must be exposed to higher-level literacy practices in early childhood classrooms in order to meet the demands of our highly literate society.

The following research based activities are presented in developmentally appropriate framed lessons to teach some of the basic comprehension strategies that may be employed in higher level reading activities.
I. **Response to Literature Pages**

**Targeted Learning Group:** Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten

**Objective:** Make a personal connection to a character in a story to better assist comprehension.

**Research Rationale:** Michael Pressley states that, “Good readers make many interpretations as they read…They form personal images of the events described in the text.” (p.56)

**Materials:**

1. *The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear*
   
   By Don and Audrey Wood (Wood & Wood, 1984)

2. Literature response page

**Implementation:** First read the story to the students. Use the read aloud time to highlight the actions that Little Mouse takes to protect his strawberry. After reading, brainstorm with the students good ideas for where you could hide your strawberry if you were Little Mouse. Encourage the students to think outside of the box for their illustrations. The students can dictate their responses for teachers to write or students may write themselves.

**Differentiation for First Grade:** Read *The Recess Queen* by Alexis O’Neill and Laura Huliska-Beith (2002) and complete the response page. An example may be:
Have you ever met someone like Mean Jean? How could you be a good friend at recess?

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<tr>
<td><strong>Art:</strong> This activity is connected with art in illustrations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme Study Ideas:</strong> Animals, food groups, habitats</td>
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</table>
Where would you hide your red ripe strawberry?

I would hide my strawberry...

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
## II. Interacting with Non-fiction Texts

**Targeted Learning Group:** Kindergarten and First Grade

**Objective:** Expand understanding of vocabulary and concepts in nonfiction texts and synthesize information with personal retelling.

**Research Rationale:** Because repeated exposure to words better helps to formulate understanding of new words and concepts, teachers should continually review and reinforce the meanings of words throughout the school day. (Graves, Boettcher, Peacock, & Ryder, 1980)

**Materials:**

1. *Chickens Aren’t the Only Ones* by Ruth Heller (1981)
2. Page inserts for each student to create their own book
3. Colored pens and pencils for writing and illustrating

**Implementation:** Begin by telling students that you will be reading a book about the different types of animals that lay eggs. This could include a vocabulary discussion about the word oviparous. Tell the children that they will be creating their own version of the book with animals that lay eggs. After reading, create a list with the group about the different types of animals that they learned came from eggs. The student book should include animals that are not birds. The key being to understand that many animals come from eggs and are oviparous.
Differentiation for Pre-Kindergarten:

*Read An Extraordinary Egg* by Leo Lionni (1994) then discuss the story, the mistaken identity, and what came out of the egg. Because this book gives three examples of oviparous animals; frogs, snakes, and chickens, it is a good entry level understanding of animals born from eggs.

Bonus Curriculum Activities

Cross-curriculum Integration

This activity combines science and art in one lesson.

Theme Study Ideas: Animals
Chickens Aren’t the Only Ones

By ______________________________

_________________________ lay eggs.

_________________________ lay eggs.

_________________________ lay eggs.

_________________________ lay eggs.
### III. Text Sets

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<td>Objective: Compare and contrast fiction and nonfiction texts with visual representation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Rationale:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Fiction Book (example): <em>The House on East 88&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Street</em> By Bernard Waber (1962)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Text Set Comparison diagram</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Pencil for writing</td>
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**Implementation:** Because this lesson involves an oral reading of two books, it can be done over the course of the day depending on the attention level of the students. First read *The House on East 88<sup>th</sup> Street* and discuss the story, characters, setting and narrative arc. Then read the nonfiction book about crocodiles. Talk with the students about the nature of narrative texts and informational texts. What differences are there? How can we tell that one is a story and one is a fact book? Complete the text set comparison diagram as a class. Then complete the same type of diagram about crocodiles.
Differentiation for Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten:

Combine *Why Do Cats Meow?* By Joan Holub (Holub & DiVito, 2001) with *Splat the Cat* by Rob Scotton (2008)

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<tr>
<td><strong>Art:</strong> Draw or paint houses, The Prim Family, or crocodiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme Study Ideas:</strong> Reptiles, homes, families, habitats</td>
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Example diagram:
Lyle the Crocodile

Lives in a house with a family
walks on two legs, is friends with people and animals
as big as a person

Real Crocodiles

Lives in rivers and swamps
walks on all four legs
is a predator to many animals
as big as a great white shark

Things that are the same

eats caviar or fish eggs
green
scaly
IV. Text Mapping

**Targeted Learning Group:** First Grade

**Objective:** Identify beginning middle and end segments in a text to better understand story structure.

**Research Rationale:**

**Materials:**

1. Guided reading group and *Poppleton* By Cynthia Rylant (Rylant & Teague, 1997)
2. Text Mapping form
3. Colored pens and pencils for writing and illustrating

**Implementation:** Prior to reading the story tell the students that we will be thinking about the story and the order in which the author wants us to read it. Emphasize that all stories have a beginning, middle, and an end. Read the story as a group and then discuss the story points that happened in each part of the book. Brainstorm with the students to ensure understanding. Have the students fill in the Text Mapping form with their own illustrations and ideas of beginning, middle and end. Students can dictate descriptions of the illustration or write themselves.

**Differentiation for Pre-Kindergarten:** Read *Llama Llama Red Pajama* by Anna Dewdney (2005) and have students dictate their descriptions to be written.
Differentiation for Kindergarten: Read *Kindergarten Rocks* by Katie Davis (2005) and have students dictate their descriptions.

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<tr>
<td>Cross-curriculum Integration</td>
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<tr>
<td>This activity is a combination of art illustration and writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme Study Ideas: Animals</td>
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## Text Mapping

Name___________________________

Date__________________________

Book_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________

Author________________________________________

___________________

_________________________________________________________________

**Beginning**

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

**Middle**

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

**End**

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________
REFERENCES


