《研究ノート》

Emergent Literacy within a Child Development Program.

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Abstract

The specific stages of development leading up to the acquirement of skills required for literacy (reading and writing) is known as emergent literacy. A diverse range of early childhood experiences that positively encourage and contribute to the use of oral, visual and written language provides the foundation for literacy.

Research has shown that children need to be sufficiently and positively involved and immersed in language and literacy rich environments from birth, if not beforehand.

This paper considers recent research into emergent literacy which can be applied to a first language emergent literacy program, along with EFL and ESL courses. With English language classes being brought forward to earlier grades we hope that teacher training programs such as Sapporo Gakuin University's Kodomo Hatatsu classes find the paper useful.

Keywords: second language learners, language acquisition, imitation, learning theory

1. Introduction

Learning to read and write is one of the most important skills one can learn. Not only is it essential for successful schooling and day-to-day functioning but it opens the door to a lifetime of self-study and development. Too many children enter the school system unprepared to tackle this complex task. Inevitably, these children fall behind their peers with lasting negative consequences on both scholastic achievement and success in life. As educators, the most important thing we can do to reverse this deficit is introduce children to books as early and as often as possible.

Literacy proficiency has many benefits. As well as being fundamental to all areas of learning it is correlated with increased self-esteem, higher paying jobs and better health. It is particularly important in this fast paced digital age. Never before have we been exposed to so

much information. There is a need to read quickly, to scan, process and respond to all manner of online communication, all which requires a certain literacy competence. These abilities are built on foundations that develop in our early years. It is crucial that young children master reading and writing to kick-start their academic life. If they do not they will likely struggle, with their school years becoming a frustrating, unhappy time. This is shown by the strong correlation between reading ability in the first few years of school and the probability of dropping out of high school (Hernandez, 2012). The problem becomes more difficult to overcome as the child matures so it is imperative to tackle it early. Ideally beginning in the preschool years, giving young children a literacy base upon which to grow for when they enter elementary school.

The development of the skills necessary to read and write in young children is referred to as emergent literacy. Beginning at birth, when a baby first hears and processes the sounds of language, it is a gradual cumulative process that is stimulated by interaction with books and other print materials. Historically it was thought learning to read and write required a specific set of skills that were taught once a child began formal school education. Teaching literacy was considered the domain of trained teachers with reading being taught first followed by the more difficult task of writing. New Zealand researcher Marie Clay was one of the first people to challenge these beliefs publishing Emergent Reading Behaviour (1966) after observing children in their first year of school. Clay advocated the idea that early intervention could help those children who had difficulty reading and writing and went on to implement the Reading Recovery programme which has had much success in schools worldwide. In the last 30 years there has been an explosion of research in this area as the processes underlying emergent literacy and their importance have become better understood. To understand why early intervention is so critical we need to consider the development of the infant brain.

２．Language Development.

The brain develops fastest in the first three years of life with an infant's brain being 2 and half times more active than an adult (Hoff, 2001). Additionally at age 2 to 3 the brain has twice as many neural connections (synapses) as an adult brain. Together this suggests a crucial stage in development in which a young child's brain is full of potential and primed to flourish given positive stimulation. Animal studies have demonstrated that in this early developmental stage stimulation from an enriched environment leads to increased synapse production, more

complex neuronal branching and increased blood flow to neurons resulting in increased brain activity. These animals also exhibit more complex behaviours and are better at learning and problem solving. Conversely, human studies suggest a lack of brain stimulation can slow down and impair cognitive development. It is clear is that environmental stimulation alters brain physiology particularly in the early years of brain development. We also know that there is a sensitive period for language learning in the early years of life. This is when children will automatically learn to speak, a time when they have the ability to learn to two languages simultaneously which they appear to do relatively easily.

This theory, that young children are going to benefit most from literacy intervention was demonstrated by Arams (2006). After her yearlong study of the effect of storybook reading and alphabet lessons on a group of 3-4 year olds and a group of 4－5 year olds, Arams discovered the vocabulary of the younger age group saw the most improvement. This supports the findings of Whitehurst et al (1999) who followed children through an emergent literacy intervention Head Start programme from preschool into second grade. Here it was also concluded that there is a sensitive period for language development and younger children benefit the most from literacy programmes.

Infants and young children demonstrate behavior that they are processing language before they attain the necessary expertise to talk, read and write. For example, Kuhl (1993) writes that while infants can distinguish sounds from languages without prior exposure this ability begins to disappear after 6 months as the child focuses on his or her natie language. Young children will pretend to read books before they are able as they have learnt there is a story in that coded print. Children will also scribble something indecipherable on a piece of paper and ask an adult to read it. These emergent language behaviours suggest the development of literacy is a long complicated process with multiple stages. It is not an all-or-none facility that one can or cannot do but is instead a continuum of skills that compound one another and take time to establish.

To understand better how a child learns to read the process can be broken down into the following stages, print awareness, letter knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary and print motivation. Print awareness refers to the purpose and conventions of print. The fact that the words in a book tell a story and it is from the print not pictures that the main story comes. Conventions such as in English, books are read from left to right, from the top of the

page to the bottom and that the story continues over to the next page. Letter knowledge is a knowledge of the alphabet, the names of the letters and the sounds each make. This usually begins with familiar letters such as the ones in a child's name. Leading on from letter knowledge is phonological awareness, the sounds letters make when joined together first as phonemes, then as syllables and words. Once the word can be pronounced and read children need an ever-broadening vocabulary to make sense of what they are reading. The two are interrelated and highlight the importance of reading early as the ability to read results in a rapid increase in vocabulary. Print motivation is the desire of a child to read. This is dependent on the home environment with young children picking up the enthusiasm of parents towards reading. Conversely disinterest in reading by the parent can result in a lack of desire to read by the child. Considering these stages one can imagine how young children gradually piece together the puzzle that is books and reading. An awareness of the purpose and conventions and print and a familiarity of the alphabet leading into an understanding of the sounds each letter and group of letters make. The steady increase of vocabulary as words begin to be pronounced all driven by the motivation to read stimulated by parents who read themselves and live in a print rich environment.

３．The Importance of Reading Aloud

Trelease (2006) notes that the reasons we talk to our children are often the same as why we read: to reassure, to entertain, to bond, to explain, to create curiosity, to inspire and to inform. He also states reading aloud has the benefits of

1, Conditioning the child's brain to associate reading with pleasure;

2, Creating background knowledge;

3, Building vocabulary;
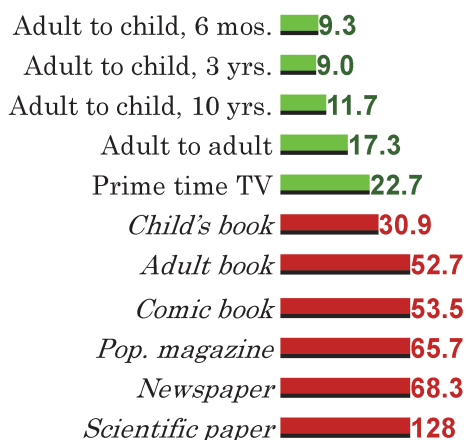
4, Providing a reading role model;

By conditioning the brain to associate reading with pleasure we are turning our children into lifetime readers where reading is considered enjoyment and not school time readers where reading is considered a chore. At school, students who read the most are the best readers, the best achievers, and stay in school the longest. This is why reading aloud to children before they enter primary school is so important. You do give them a head start. They associate reading with pleasure, they want to pick up a book.

Reading books aloud is an important way to broaden the vocabulary that we as parents and teachers use with young children. Everyday conversation tends to be plain and simple with basic conversations consisting of the 5000 words we use all the time plus another 5000 used less often in conversation. Eighty-three percent of the words we use with children come from the 1000 most commonly used words. Beyond these 10,000 words are the rare words which play a critical role in reading and determines the strength of our vocabulary. As you can see from the chart below it is when we reach the printed matter in the form of a child's book that we see a significant increase in the number of rare words met. The vocabulary of children's books is at least three times more complex and rich (31 rare words per 1000) than parent-child conversations (9 rare words per 1000).

Reading and listening skills don't begin to converge until about eighth-grade (Shaywitz, 2003; Biemiller, 2003). Until then, they usually listen on a higher level than they read on. Therefore, children can hear and understand stories that are more complicated and more interesting than anything they could read on their own. This also correlates with a change in reading development whereas the importance of phonological awareness in early reading development gives way to vocabulary and the necessity to understand the message by middle elementary school age. Children who have not acquired the vocabulary necessary to understand the material at this level are at a disadvantage.

Number of Rare Words Met Per Thousand

■listening ■ *reading*

Adult to child, 6 mos.	9.3
Adult to child, 3 yrs.	9.0
Adult to child, 10 yrs.	11.7
Adult to adult	17.3
Prime time TV	22.7
Child's book	30.9
Adult book	52.7
Comic book	53.5
Pop. magazine	65.7
Newspaper	68.3
Scientific paper	128

Source: Hayes & Ahrens, Journal of Child Language Taken from The read aloud handbook by Jim Trelease. Penguin, 6th ed., 2006.

Trelease (2006) writes that one of the factors common to the best student readers around the world is the frequency of teachers reading aloud to students. Trelease suggests reading at least 3 to 4 times a week but we should have a daily 15-20 minute commitment. Shaywitz, (2003) calculated that 20 minutes reading a day will result in an exposure of 1,800,000 words a year in contrast to a daily commitment of 1 minute or less per day resulting in an exposure of only 8000 words per year.

４．Dialogic Reading

Reading aloud to a child isn't just us doing the reading and the child simply listening. To be enjoyable and beneficial the child has to actively take part in the reading. Allowing two year olds to participate in the reading by encouraging their comments and responses both verbally and physically can accelerate their language development by as much as 9 months. This method of reading to a child is known as dialogic reading and focuses on how we actually read to children.

According to Whitehurst (1992) with dialogic reading we "slowly help the child become the story teller and we become the listener, the questioner and the audience for the child". We can't ride learn to ride a bike by watching someone else ride and likewise we can't learn to read just by listening to someone else read. Children learn most from books when they are actively involved in the reading. The fundamental reading technique in dialogic reading is the PEER sequence. This is a short interaction between a child and the adult.

The adult:　　Prompts the child to say something about the book

　　　　　　　Evaluates the child's response,

　　　　　　　Expands the child's response by rephrasing and adding information to it.

　　　　　　　Repeats the prompt to make sure the child has learned from the expansion.

As an example imagine you and the child are looking at the page of a book that has a picture of a blue train engine on it. The parent says, "What is this?" (the prompt) while pointing to the train engine. The child says, train, and the parent follows with "That's right (the evaluation); it's a blue train engine (the expansion); can you say train engine?" (the repetition).

Whitehurst suggests using dialogic reading from the 2nd reading of the book and the PEER sequence can be used on nearly every page.

There are five types of prompts that are used in dialogic reading to begin PEER sequences. These prompts can be remembered by the acronym CROWD and the following examples are from Whitehurst's 1992 publication on dialogic reading.

Completion Prompts

You leave a blank at the end of a sentence and get the child to fill it in. These are typically used in books with rhyme or books with repetitive phases. For example, you might say, "I think I'd be a glossy cat. A little plump but not too ____," letting the child fill in the blank with the word *fat*. Completion prompts provide children with information about the structure of language that is critical to later thinking.

Recall prompts

These are questions about what happened in a book a child has already read. Recall prompts work for nearly everything except alphabet books. For example, you might say, "Can you tell me what happened to the little blue engine in this story?" Recall prompts help children in understanding story plot and in describing sequences of events. Recall prompts can be used not only at the end of a book, but also at the beginning of a book when a child has been read that book before.

Open ended prompts

These prompts focus on the pictures in books. They work best for books that have rich, detailed illustrations. For example, while looking at a page in a book that the child is familiar with, you might say, "Tell me what's happening in this picture." Open-ended prompts help children increase their expressive fluency and attend to detail.

Wh- prompts

These prompts usually begin with what, where, when, why, and how questions. Like open-ended prompts, wh- prompts focus on the pictures in books. For example, you might say, "What's the name of this?" while pointing to an object in the book. Wh- questions teach children new vocabulary.

Distancing Prompts

These ask children to relate the pictures or words in the book they are reading to experiences outside the book. For example, while looking at a book with a picture of animals

on a farm, you might say something like, "Remember when we went to the animal park last week. Which of these animals did we see there?" Distancing prompts help children form a bridge between books and the real world, as well as helping with verbal fluency, conversational abilities, and narrative skills.

It is important to remember that distancing prompts and recall prompts are more difficult for children than completion, open-ended, and wh- prompts. Frequent use of distancing and recall prompts should be limited to four- and five-year-olds. Children will enjoy dialogic reading more than traditional reading as long as you mix-up your prompts with straight reading, vary what you do from reading to reading, and follow the child's interest. The reading needs to be enjoyable. Limit the number of prompts to insure the children can happily manage them.

５．Creating a language and literacy rich environment.

Children experiencing a language and literacy rich environment that is stimulating and motivational are "more likely to develop an understanding of literacy concepts".

Such programmes should be:

i, Broad based and holistic

ii, Meaningful, purposeful and 'reflecting 'family and community'

iii, Active in 'relationships' with people, places and things

iv, 'Empowering'

One way to create a literacy enriched environment is to have a wide range of literacy tools and props readily accessible.

Examples of writing tools and props include:

chalk	crayons	pens
markers	pencils	coloured pencils
fingers for sand and finge-paint		sticks
whiteboard markers	notebooks	card
calendars	paper	pads
sand	walls	mud
whiteboards	chalkboards	cardboard
frosty windows	string	ink stamps
rulers	stencils	glue

Reading tools and props include:

newspapers	magazines	flyers
posters	alphabet puzzles	newsletters
storybooks	picture books	

Reference books. For example books on insects, animals, plants, countries, cars. Instruction books that show how to make or use things such as cookbooks, art and craft, science projects.

Environmental Print.

Having a print rich environment can play a vital part in supporting literacy development and can be on walls and surfaces, on objects or be moveable signs such as "Please don't remove", "Wet floor" etc.

Environmental print can include the use of labels to identify objects in the classroom, words of songs being sung, signs such as brush your teeth, wash your hands, welcome, close the door, birthday trains etc. Using the children's names is particularly valuable. A child's name can be used to identify belongings, for a classroom roster, as a way to have kids sign in when they arrive etc. When children become familiar with their name and pronunciation they will start understating the concept of beginning and end sounds.

Literacy focused resource areas.

Resource areas within the classroom allow children to focus on specific literacy activities such as reading, writing, listening, and information centers. Briefly, **a writing center** will provide the space and material for children to engage in a range of tasks such as writing notes, names and messages or simply writing or pre-writing activities.

A listening station can give children access to music, nursery rhymes, audio books and allow children to follow their favorite stories through book narration. Children can also record songs and stories they have created.

An information centre on insects for example may include story books, picture books, magazines, toys, pictures as well as writing material and implements. Children should participate in the creation of an information centre to reflect their own interests.

A book corner should be a comfortable place for children to be read to and for children to read. It should be cozy and inviting allowing adults to sit and read with children. Books should

be easily reachable with the covers facing the children, not the books spines. Books should reflect children's lives, interests, and experiences.

6．Conclusion

A successful early emergent literacy program is essential to the development of literacy skills which in turn insures success during formal schooling years. For the brain's language network to be successfully wired up, sufficient exposure to a coherent combination of sound, meaning and grammar from any single language (or combination) must have occurred over the first 4-6 years of a child's life. This is highlighted by numerous studies showing the correlation between reading ability in the first few years of formal schooling and the probability of dropping out of high school.

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