Reading & Writing in Literacy-Based Curricula

A project by

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Major emphasis: Early Childhood Education
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Designing an ideal literacy curriculum

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**Introduction**

Educational demands are increasing year after year; being literate is a must for all people in order to adapt and fit in the society. Literacy is nowadays considered as a prerequisite for people to function in the society they belong to, especially since “literacy is an aspect of living and coping in a community” (Whitehead, 2002, p. 54) that is perceived by caregivers and parents as the key to the endurance and success of their youngsters (Whitehead, 2002). “Literacy is often viewed as the ability to read and write” (Teale & Sulzby, 1986, in Cooper, 1997, p. 6) and most definitions of literacy give a lot of weight to the ability to read and write (Whitehead, 2002).

**Purpose of the project**

From the above stemmed the purpose of this project, which is examining literacy in all its aspects, taking into consideration its various definitions as stated in previous literature on the topic. Moreover, this paper points out to the different kinds of literacy, its elements and goals, in addition to a discussion of what a balanced literacy program includes. In doing so, the literacy classroom is analyzed, guidelines are provided for teachers, and the significance of integration in such a literacy program is highlighted.

The main concern of devisers of literacy curricula is the need and individual dissimilarities that exist among youngsters. This is also a significant aspect of integration, which focuses on interactions among those who take part in the learning process and also between the students and their learning experiences (Morrow, Strickland & Woo, 1998). Integration in early childhood deals with learning reading, writing and other language skills concomitantly, in addition to the interaction between play and the subject areas. To achieve this goal, themes are to be prepared to engage the students and have them read, write and integrate all the skills (Morrow, Strickland & Woo, 1998).
Since students are active components of the learning process, they are required to perform various activities in the classroom, especially in one that emphasizes literacy and integration (Kern, 2000). For this reason, this paper also presents a definition of the role of learners in a literacy classroom, naming some of the responsibilities they have when a literacy-based curriculum is applied. However, the role of the student would not be played properly without the guidance and scaffolding of the teacher, who is also as integral as the students in the literacy classroom. "If you believe all students can learn and share these feelings both directly and indirectly, you set up expectations for success for all students" (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003, p. 33). The role of the teacher is multi-faceted, and many researchers have attempted to define and dissect the instructor’s duties in a literacy classroom (Abram, Brailsford & Hetherington, 1999; Kern, 2000; Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003; Whitehead, 2000).

In addition to the above, this project aims at revealing how a literacy curriculum should include activities that foster communication, employ overt instruction, facilitate critical framing and give the students a chance to be creative in inventing their own activities and in building their own knowledge (Kern, 2000).

For this learning experience to be complete, and for a literacy-based curriculum to be effective, assessment should be designed in a way that is in sync with all the principles of literacy and its components. Paflard (1999) states that the aims of assessment include discovering more about students as individuals, checking progress, enabling curriculum developers and staff to enhance the educational system, and making the job more enjoyable. Moreover, teachers need means of seeing if the students are learning and how well they are doing so, teachers can change the way they deal with the learning experience as a whole. However, it is also important for the learners themselves to evaluate themselves and to change
their actions in the classroom accordingly (Cooper, 2000). Assessment is the final part of the literature review, which sheds light on the difference between assessment and evaluation, gives conditions for having effective assessment, puts forward means of evaluating students' reading and writing skills and, finally, emphasizes the role and features of portfolio assessment in a literacy-based curriculum (Cooper, 1997; Johns, 1997).

**Research context**

The kit is designed for Kindergarten II students. It includes a number of activities to be implemented in a classroom that depends on literacy-based curriculum. Furthermore, the kit emphasizes the theme Me, Myself and I, providing sample exercises that can be designed and implemented by the teacher. This kit has been devised to meet the project's objective of pinpointing appropriate activities that can be put into practice in a classroom that takes literacy, in general, and reading and writing, in specific, into consideration (see kit). For instance, Word Walls stresses the world of print, which is one of the most crucial parts of reading and writing (Morrow, Strickland & Woo, 1998). Book Reading, on the other hand, shows how essential it is for an adult to read for the child, since listening facilitates literacy acquisition (Cooper, 1997). Another activity is the Puzzle, in which students have to combine letters to make words, and this is emphasized by Merchant (1999).

**Literature Review**

*Definition of literacy*

Most definitions of literacy give a lot of weight to the ability to read and write (Whitehead, 2002). However, a classic study conducted by Health (1983) revealed that literacy is related to details and elements that we come across in our everyday lives such as reading signs and advertisements, writing letters, reading magazines and publications, in addition to
communicating orally with other individuals in order to convey certain messages (Health, 1983, in Cooper, 1997). In other words, literacy is nowadays considered as a prerequisite for people to function in the society they belong to. Cooper (1997) states that literacy must be viewed as "the ability to communicate in real-world situations, which involves the abilities of individuals to read, write, speak, listen, view and think" (pp. 6-7).

Another feature of literacy is that each literate society differs in its acquisition and use of literacy. In other words, a lot of variations exist among groups with respect to the literacy skills and traditions. Furthermore, "individuals and groups are judged and pigeon-holed according to the kinds and amounts of reading and writing they do" (Whitehead, 2002, p. 55).

Types of literacy

According to Solomon (1986), there are three kinds of literacy, the first of which involves the skills that no one can do without if the purpose is for individuals to have decent jobs and to live independently and flexibly in society. These skills are reading and writing, both of which constitute what is called "functional" (Solomon, 1986, p. 41) literacy. This type of literacy deals with simple acts such as reading a contract or filling out an application, and this is why it is assigned substantial significance which is regarded as "unquestionable" (Solomon, 1986, p. 41). The second kind of literacy is considered the elitist one that is concerned with abilities such as quoting lines of Shakespeare or of any other important figure in literature. This type of literacy designates a high level of social superiority. The third type of literacy is the "knowledgeable" (p. 41), referring to books, film and other arts. It can originate from discussions, lectures, and political meetings. It revolves around the printed word and "has to do with participating in certain basic or even essential experiences" (Solomon, 1986, p. 41).
**Children and literacy**

When one speaks of literacy, one instantly refers to children, who, whether they are two, three or four years old, notice print that exists everywhere in society. These youngsters ask questions about print and even try to create it themselves. Since all learning comes from the need to comprehend and manage ourselves and our environment, and since literacy is part of culture and society, small children continuously attempt to explore and discover objects, events and people they come across (Whitehead, 2002, p. 57). Actually, children start to learn literacy skills even before they are exposed to formal instruction in reading and writing (Access for all, 2001, p. 1), and their behavior is characterized by exploration and inquiry. Whitehead (2002) enumerates strategies that children evolve in their striving to find out how literacy works. For instance, children ask questions and deserve direct answers or demonstrations from adults, especially since they usually watch others and imitate actions. Children also use alphabets and sounds in order to understand the world of print and written signs in a better way. Therefore, it is of great importance to rectify the misunderstanding that “little children have little brains” (Whitehead, 1997, p. 55).

Therefore, children develop literacy by being exposed to authentic experiences and by getting help and support from older and/or more experienced individuals. In addition, literacy learning has to do with all the components of the communication process, namely reading, writing, speaking, viewing and thinking (Cooper, 1997), and all these elements “develop together in an interactive way” (Cooper, 1997, p. 455). In fact, one of the principles for guided literacy learning is that these components of the communication process develop simultaneously. Moreover, another principle is that literacy learning cannot take place without real literacy
experiences. Furthermore, one cannot develop literacy and construct meaning without making use of his/her prior knowledge and background (Cooper, 1997).

Since elements of literacy develop at the same time, it is essential to remember, while devise literacy curricula, that these components should not be taught as separate subjects. The interactive nature of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and thinking implies that children should be given the opportunity to engage in exercises and activities that integrate all the literacy skills (Cooper, 1997). It is important for a literacy curriculum to take the above fact into consideration and for early childhood curricula to include a rich diversity of developmentally appropriate educational experiences which stress "play, language and investigations in a context of adult support" (Whitehead, 2002, p. 69) and which takes into account the age and interests of the child. Moreover, such curricula should emphasize the significance of real literacy tasks that help children develop literacy through their authenticity (Cooper, 1997). Furthermore, "the real basics of literacy must include purposes, motives and understanding. Children learn skills in the process of using writing and reading for their own purposes" (Whitehead, 2002, p. 56). Any learning experience that takes place needs a specific purpose that should be clear to both teacher and students.

**Literacy goals**

One of the major goals of a literacy-based curriculum is to develop in learners "the ability to analyze, interpret, and transform discourse" (Kern, 2000, p. 303), in addition to the ability to think critically and to have metacommunicative awareness. This implies knowledge of "how discourse is derived from relations between language use, contexts of interaction, and larger sociocultural contexts" (Kern, 2000, pp. 303-304). This entails that several changes have to occur in the curriculum, with a shift in objectives "from an emphasis on conversation for
conversation's sake or the delivery of linguistic and cultural facts to the development of learners' ability to interpret and critically evaluate language use in a variety of spoken and written contexts" (Kern, 2000, p. 305).

**Literacy-rich environments**

The classroom environment should be rich with language and print, both of which act as stimulants that promote "the concept of a class as a community of people who are learning together" (Cooper, 1997, p. 25). "A balanced literacy program includes times for independent reading and writing as well as instruction in all aspects of literacy" (Cooper, 1997, p. 455), and this form of instruction takes place in what Morrow, Strickland and Woo (1998) call literacy-rich environments. Building motivation is an essential part of literacy instruction in a classroom that adds an element of motivation and drives in students in order to explore language more and become active literacy learners (Cooper, 1997). A literacy classroom needs several elements that work together in order to give children real literacy experiences. For instance, materials should encourage reading and writing, print should be displayed in class, and literacy centers should exist to engage learners in authentic tasks (Cooper, 1997; Morrow, Strickland & Woo, 1998).

Cooper (1997) offers guidelines for teachers in their endeavor to organize and manage a balanced literacy classroom. Several elements are emphasized, and the most vital aspect of a literacy classroom is encouragement and support. Students need constant support, and having an exciting classroom with activities that are of interest to students would aid in achieving the goal of developing literacy. The organization of a classroom should not only be based on what the children like; it should also be based on their strengths, since the main goal of literacy curricula is to emphasize students' strengths rather than weaknesses. Making students part of the decision-making process is another important aspect of the classroom environment, whereby children are
empowered and feel they have a say in what to do and what to engage in. Daily times for independent reading and writing is one way in order to make students feel that the classroom is not a place controlled by the teacher but a place where they can also decide what to read or how to write. Having developmentally appropriate materials and activities is another integral aspect of the literacy classroom, with the pace of any instruction that takes place being suitable to the students and their abilities. Finally, teachers need to be flexible and to contact the students’ homes on continuous basis in order to provide these children with optimum literacy experiences at home and at school.

_Literacy corners_

In addition to the above considerations, several researchers in the field of education advocate the implementation of learning centers or literacy corners in the classroom (Cooper, 1997; Ford & Opitz, 2002; Morrow, Strickland & Woo, 1998; Rybczynski & Trasy, 1995; Whitehead, 2002). These corners are defined by Ford and Opitz (2002) as “small areas within the classroom where students work alone or together to explore literacy activities independently while the teacher provides small-group guided reading instruction” (p. 711). These areas have been portrayed as effective ways for the child to explore literacy and its significance in his/her culture and to gain more desire to engage in play, which becomes a means of exploring the world. Moreover, “literacy-enriched play centers allow for children’s individual abilities and preferences, because they can explore in unique ways and at their own rates” (Rybczynski & Tray, 1995, p. 11).

Cooper (1997) states that a literacy-based classroom needs to include specific areas in which the child plays and interacts with the language in a stimulating and exciting atmosphere. He offers several suggestions such as having a library, writing and publishing, listening and
viewing, group meeting and creative art areas. Such corners need to be organized in a way that facilitates their use and makes it easy for the child to move around and interact with the material, his/her peers and the teacher. Moreover, it is not a must for all classrooms to have the same organization and arrangement of such corners. However, it is recommended that these areas “should be in the center of the room” (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984, in Cooper, 1997, p. 25). In other words, the classroom becomes similar to a workshop which is both motivating and integral in developing all the language components. Through working independently with the materials and tools that are easily reached and clearly labeled, the students’ previous knowledge is expanded, authentic reading and writing take place, and all the children will be sharing information (Cooper, 1997, p. 28; Whitehead, 2002).

For instance, the library corner may be used by students in order to look at books in a relaxing atmosphere or to act out what they have read. In the listening corner, students can listen to a story as they read it or can enjoy songs (Morrow, Strickland & Woo, 1998).

**Literacy corners: guidelines for teachers**

When a teacher decides to include literacy corners in his/her classroom, there are certain considerations to think of. With respect to the activities, the teacher should continuously be concerned with the autonomy of the child. In other words, all exercises that are designed should facilitate independence to allow the advancement in the students’ knowledge about literacy. Furthermore, the general objectives of the national or state curriculum need to be taken into consideration, especially since the classroom should be a place where students are provided with opportunities to master this curriculum. Moreover, corners need to be designed in a way that emphasizes success and not failure of the child (Ford & Opitz, 2002). Morrow, Strickland and Woo (1998) offer additional strategies that facilitate literacy-center time. Children need to be
part of the selection process, thus participating with the teacher in choosing books, materials and tools to include in the corners. If the teacher chooses these elements, he/she should introduce them to the children and stress the need to care for them. The selection is not only concerned with the materials; it is also related to activities. In other words, children should be able to have a checklist on which they indicate what they would like to do. This way, every child would know ahead of time his/her short-term schedule that he/she has set for himself/herself.

Definition of emergent literacy

The concept of literacy cannot be discussed without mentioning emergent literacy, which is "the idea that children grow into reading and writing with no real beginning or ending point, that reading and writing develop concurrently, interrelatedly, and according to no one right sequence or order. Instead, learners are always emerging. Moreover, this process begins long before children enter school, through the activities and experiences in their everyday lives and through their interactions with peers and adults" (Cooper, 1997, p. 9). In fact, youngsters discover print and get to know facts about literacy before they go to school (Whitehead, 2002). The term emergent literacy was introduced by Clay in 1966, and it included children’s behavior that is not yet conventional, excluding any behavior that is similar to that of an adult (Morrow, Strickland, & Woo, 1998).

Integration of literacy: reading and writing

Integration in early childhood classrooms deals with learning reading, writing and other language skills concurrently, in addition to the interplay between play and the subject matters. "This integration can be done through the use of themes that bring meaning and purpose to learning and provide a reason to read, write, listen, and speak" (Morrow, Strickland & Woo, 1998, pp. 69-70). In fact, Kern (2000) suggests that reading and writing are inherently connected
and highly complement each other. The ability to read is closely related to the capability to write, and one cannot do one without the other. In fact, "writing requires reading for its completion, but also teaches the kind of reading it requires" (Lodge, 1977, in Kern, 2000, p. 171).

Before children can comprehend written language, they must be able to comprehend the feedback the environment provides. They must be able to read the faces of other people and their emotions. They must be able to comprehend the sounds, actions, smells, and changes of the world that surrounds them (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003, pp. 115-116).

Thus integration implies that reading and writing should be taught together. Cooper (1997) argues that both language skills are constructive processes that share similar cognitive procedures and types of knowledge. So, when reading and writing are taught together, this integration improves achievement and facilitates communication, and consequently leads to results that cannot be ascribed to one of the skills separately.

Students' role

The role of the student in a curriculum that focuses on literacy and on integration between reading and writing is one that includes many responsibilities and actions. For instance, the student has to write reflections on any text that he/she reads, come up with written predictions about the topic or theme to be read, evaluate and critique his/her own reading experience, read with the purpose of enhancing his/her writing by trying to incorporate the same rhetorical or stylistic elements that they come across while reading in their writing, and critically read his/her own work in addition to that written by others while engaging in the process of editing and proofreading (Kern, 2000).

The reading and writing processes
"If children were left to their own devices, some educators believe writing would precede reading (Chomsky, 1971). Others claim that reading is the first accomplishment" (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003, pp. 48-50). However, reading and writing are acquired in chorus as children explore their environment (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003). "Learning is facilitated through the interaction among learners and more knowledgeable members of the social and cultural communities within and beyond the classroom" (Hiebert & Raphael, 1996, pp. 11-12), and reading and writing are two of the processes that are coined by Vygotsky as higher order ones that originate in social interaction (Hiebert & Raphael, 1996).

"Becoming literate in the earliest years is bound up with trying to behave like a reader and a writer and gradually getting the pretending closer and closer to the real thing" (Whitehead, 2002, p. 60). In other words, children learn how to read and write through practicing these skills repeatedly and through exposure to support from others as they go through these learning experiences (Cooper, 1997). Families, caregivers, parents, teachers and peers play a vital role of demonstrating to children the processes involved in reading and writing. In fact, "we demonstrate writing for our children every time we scribble a shopping list, sign a document or fill in a form. We demonstrate reading for them every time we open a letter, read the instructions on a food package or flip through a newspaper" (Whitehead, 2002, p. 124), and such instances of modeling take place in our everyday lives and are integral to the literacy development of youngsters (Whitehead, 2002).

Reading

In attempting to define reading, Rasinski, Sampson and Sampson (2003) state that reading can simply be "appreciating a painting or anticipating the feelings of another person. At other times reading is the more traditional interaction with a book" (p. 115). No matter what the
definition is, an important point is that "reading is a transaction that occurs between human beings and their environment" (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003, p. 115). "Reading is not an act of absorbing information, but a communicative act that involves creating discourse from text" (Kern, 2000, p. 107). This is probably why Kern (2000) states that reading has two aspects: its interactive nature as a dynamic rhetorical process, and its establishment and reliance on social and individual factors. Moreover, there are various collective conventions and personal statutes that affect imagination and creativity of individuals (Kern, 2000).

A pivotal part of reading is decoding words. However, reading does not limit itself to understanding words, which exist in text, as separate entities. The mere fact that they are part of a greater context implies that reading involves comprehending the overall meaning of the words as they are put together to form the text (Cooper, 1997). As evidence to the aforementioned point, Naggy (1988) points out that readers may be able to "tolerate text in which as many as 15 percent of the words are not fully known... Students do not have to know all of the words in a text to read it with a high level of comprehension" (p. 29). In addition, comprehension deals with constructing meaning by the reader’s interaction with what he/she is reading, and this interaction entails connecting new to prior knowledge (Cooper, 1997), and "real readers have the right to choose what they like, or need, to read, and they also have the right to skip irrelevant or unappealing material" (Whitehead, 2002, p. 55).

Learning to read is a complex process that involves several stages, and Merchant (1999) lists five aspects of acquiring the ability to read. Syntactic awareness is the first aspect, and it deals with knowledge of grammatical structures. Word recognition is another aspect of learning to read, and it relates to knowledge that letters are combined to form certain words. As for phonological awareness, it is knowledge about the units of sound and how these sound structures
make up and are derived from words. Orthographic awareness is knowledge about the writing system and how letters and letter strings are used to represent words. The fifth aspect of learning to read is literacy awareness or the youngster’s comprehension and experience of print, which means knowledge about the written word.

Therefore, one of the crucial parts of reading is the world of print. As children reach a point where they start reading, they embark on becoming aware of print and of the several functions involved in it such as names, sounds and patterns of letters and words. As children progress in their reading abilities, they start to recognize that print is restricted by certain conventions such as writing the English language from left to write, in addition to the designations of punctuation marks (Morrow, Strickland & Woo, 1998). Children start to realize that print is an important aspect of their lives and of reading at a very young age as they start to explore and discover the world around them (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003). However, Whitehead (2002) indicates that there are conditions for children to learn from print, namely that print needs to be genuine and the situation has to be supportive to play.

For children or any learner to develop reading skills, someone has to read for him/her. As time passes, this receptor of information gradually becomes its producer (Cooper, 1997). In fact, in order to support young readers, there are steps to follow, and these stages are based on the assumption that children learn reading from listening to other read for them. Babies and older toddlers respond to pictures and to print in books in a variety of ways such as smiles, squeals and bouncing or pointing. Eventually, these youngsters start naming, joining in with the words and talking about conventions of print. Furthermore, the most important part of learning to read is sharing it with others, and this mainly happens with older or more experienced adults. Children at this stage may touch the paper as the reader spells the words, name a character or join in a
repeated sentence. Through music and dance, pictures and sitting on laps, children learn reading in an enjoyable atmosphere and start to interact with the reader by dancing, singing or recognizing rhymes. Finally, an important aspect of learning to read is creating books. In other words, it is essential for children to devise their own books that may include already known or new stories. Moreover, listening to tapes, painting and role playing may all have an effect on how well the child acquires the ability to read (Whitehead, 2002).

In order for learning to read to take place, the curriculum should provide children, at the appropriate stage, with opportunities to become familiar with different genres, interact with texts, follow direction of print, retell stories in their own way, become aware of concepts of print and learn the names and most common sounds of letters (Abram, Brailsford & Hetherington, 1999).

**Modes of reading**

Reading can occur in several ways, and this depends on the abilities and interests of the child, in addition to the lesson or theme at hand (Cooper, 1997). Besides, all types of reading experiences may be executed in reading corners in which the student can work individually, in groups or with a more experienced coach (Ford & Opitz, 2002).

In group reading, the teacher is offered the chance to teach a variety of skills in an explicit manner. In whole-class reading sessions, there are several modes: quiet reading, paired reading, teacher reading to the class and big books (Chamberlin, Haynes Wragg & Wragg, 1998). Moreover, in independent reading, students read selections on their own with the least teacher or peer support possible. This increases reading comprehension, offers children wider background knowledge, enhances their vocabulary development, and facilitates the role of reading in the children's lives as a lifelong act (Cooper, 1997). Cooperative reading deals with pairs of students taking turns in reading portions of a text to each other, discussing what has been
read and predicting what will happen next before the reading selection is covered. As for guided reading, the teacher coaches students though the silent reading of a text by asking them questions, giving prompts or helping them formulate their own queries about the text. At the conclusion of each part of the text, the reading stops and a discussion of the read section takes place. This mode of reading is implemented in classrooms where students need support and scaffolding due to limited abilities or complex texts (Cooper, 1997, pp. 35-42; Ford & Opitz, 2002). With respect to shared reading, the teacher reads aloud, invites students to join, and asks them to respond through art, drama or discussions after the reading session ends (Cooper, 1997). "The teacher demonstrates and shares with the children the skills and insights which an experienced reader brings to a text" (Whitehead, 2002, p. 88). This mode provides support to the young learners, especially since the teacher acts as a reading model (Cooper, 1997).

Reading aloud to students is another mode that enhances their vocabulary and provides them with modeling. It is usually implemented when the selection has many complex words (Cooper, 1997). Such reading experiences influence students' writing (Drassel, 1990, in Cooper, 1997), motivate them and expands their oral language and prior knowledge (Feitelson, Kita & Goldstein, 1986, in Cooper, 1997). Reading aloud to children should take place everyday in a comfortable environment and using books that are interesting to the reader and listeners. Also, this kind of reading should involve a high level of feelings and expressions and should allow time for discussion after the text is read. Finally, it is a plus if students are allowed to write or draw as they listen to the story (Cooper, 1997).

Most children have some problems with adjusting to nonfiction and information texts because, although they may be written in a chronological narrative, they use a style which is very different from spoken and literary genres. This non-fiction style has long,
complex sentences; uses passive verb forms, and has the detached, tentative voice we associate with scientific writing and information books (Whitehead, 2002, p. 103).

Therefore, children need exposure to cookery books, word and picture dictionaries, atlases, and street maps. When they discuss these texts with each other and with the teacher, they can start making their own information instruction texts (Whitehead, 2002).

Writing

Writing is an integral skill in the literacy curriculum, and such an educational design should offer students "everyday" (Cooper, 1997, p. 344) opportunities to use pictures, letters and words to convey their intended messages. Moreover, children need to develop positive attitudes toward writing and confidence in their abilities to write for several purposes and in different styles (Abram, Brailsford & Hetherington, 1999).

"Writing is for real purposes which matter to people and it communicates important messages" (Whitehead, 2002, p. 70). Kern (2000) enumerates several reasons why writing is an important aspect of classrooms, and he highlights that fact that through organizing their thoughts and feelings in a well thought-out passage, students develop an ability to think unequivocally. Moreover as children write, they realize that there is an audience who will read this writing piece, and this instigates in these youngsters the awareness that what they write needs to be understandable by others. Another factor that makes writing essential is that as children write, they become able to put their ideas into words and to manipulate the language and its various forms and elements. In addition, an advantage of writing is that students take the time that they need in order to express their thoughts in the best way possible, without caring about pronunciation or about rehearsing the material. Finally, writing promotes the element of creativity, since when youngsters write, they imagine, create and craft various ideas.
Writing development starts at a very young age, and since that time, children start to portray knowledge that thoughts may be expressed in writing and in different forms. At the beginning, youngsters do not have the capability to distinguish writing from illustration, but with time, they start to realize that scribbling is different from pictures, and they are even able to point out to the picture and state when what they see are words and not graphics (Browne, 1999; Morrow, Strickland & Woo, 1998; Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003). "As children see others write and as they notice examples of writing in their environment, they often begin to experiment with producing marks that are intended to represent writing" (Browne, 1999, pp. 89-93). In fact, youngsters begin to scribble, and then they start to write letters and words, thus making more sense of their writing (Morrow, Strickland & Woo, 1998). "They try out the patterns of writing initially because it seems to be a satisfying activity and then later they begin to attribute meaning to their marks" (Browne, 1999, pp. 89). As children play around with the language, they reveal how they grasp the conventions of writing on their own, by experimenting, observing and imitating others (Browne, 1999; Morrow, Strickland & Woo, 1998; Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003). "The writing that young children produce, that might once have been dismissed as scribble, is now seen as an important first step in the development of literacy" (Browne, 1999, p. 90).

For writing to develop adequately and properly, and since children learn from observation and imitation, it is crucial that the people around the youngster show appreciation of the written language. These individuals need to reveal to the child that they give a lot of weight to the act of writing, and thus should model writing as much as possible (Whitehead, 2002). In fact, "it is important that he people around very young children use literacy in all its diversity of styles and purposes and are happy to share the fun of it with children" (Whitehead, 2002, p. 70).
"Writing is recursive in nature" (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003, p. 224), and comprehension and thoughts evolve as writers read and repeat reading what they have written (Attwell, 1998; Graves, 1994; Perl, 1994, in Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003). Therefore, one of the approaches to teaching writing is through emphasis on prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing, which constitute what is known as the writing process (Kern, 2000; Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003). In prewriting, students think about their purpose and audience, and they make decisions about the writing style they will adopt (Rasinksi, Sampson & Sampson, 2003). Moreover, this step entails a lot of brainstorming, emphasis on facilitating student self-expression and free writing, and instruction at this level is usually learner-centered and does not focus on grammar (Kern, 2000). In drafting, students elaborate on the ideas they came up with during the prewriting step. In other words, they let their ideas flow without putting a lot of weight on mechanics such as spelling or pronunciation, since in the revision phase, such elements are concentrated on. As for editing, the mechanics of the writing piece are corrected, and this is usually done by the writer's peer. Finally, the publication step includes making the writing piece accessible to the audience after it has been revised and embellished (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003).

While some educators stress process-based instruction, others accentuate product-based teaching, which focuses on "the structural well-formedness of students' writing" (Kern, 2000, p. 180). This type of instruction does now look at how well the student was able to address the audience. Rather, it focuses on grammatical error analysis, and its main method of teaching is using model texts that students read and then attempt to imitate (Kern, 2000). Moreover, Kern (2000) refers to a third orientation to teaching writing, namely genre-based instruction, which concentrates on social context. In other words, it is based on the notion that we act according to
conventions that are specific to our community or society. Therefore, instruction needs to instill in students awareness of these rules by facilitating student observation and teacher or adult modeling.

The act of writing is related to three essential elements, namely composition, transcription and review, and writing should pass through these stages at least once. Composition deals with deciding what the content of writing will be, by generating and selecting ideas. Therefore, composition is related to thinking and "begins with understanding what is to be written, to whom and in what way" (Browne, 1999, p. 87). As for transcription, it is the process of putting the ideas into words, thus focusing on spelling, handwriting, punctuation, grammar and layout. Before children can transcribe in an accurate manner, they needs to learn many things about writing. As for the last element of writing – revising – it means changes aspects of the composition and transcription with the purpose of improvement (Browne, 1999).

Domains of writing

Writing can have different styles and types, and Cooper (1997) states that there are our basic domains for writing. The sensory domain deals with descriptive writing, the imaginative with narrating a story, the practical with presenting information and the analytical with expository writing that has the purpose of explaining, analyzing and persuading. Furthermore, Browne (1999) lists three types of writing – expressive, transactional and poetic. As its name implies, expressive writing is related to expressing the writer's feelings and experiences, and young children's early writing is usually of this type. Transactional writing, on the other hand, seeks to offer instructions, persuade, inform or advise, and this type of writing lacks any personal element. Finally, the poetic type is usually composed and crafted with the purpose of entertaining
others by the use of exquisite vocabulary and linguistic forms. Examples include poems, songs, plays, rhymes and riddles.

Modes of writing

Another way to think of writing is according to modes, and Cooper (1997) divides them into four: independent, collaborative, guided and shared. Independent writing is when students write alone with little or no guidance, and this is why it works as a confidence builder. Collaborative or cooperative writing is when students work in pairs or groups in order to come up with a piece of writing, and this includes a lot of sharing and scaffolding. Guided reading, on the other hand, is when the teacher is available to guide the students as they write, and this is done through the use of questions. Finally, shared writing is what is also called interactive writing, in which students work together in order to write a group story. The teacher might start to do all the work when this mode of writing is introduced, but with time, students can start to take part in writing parts of this story, which needs to be of interest to the children and to rise from discussions among the individuals in the classroom. The message that they write can be short or long, but the most essential point is the quality of literacy discussions. The teacher plays a substantial role in this type of writing, since he/she uses a flipchart or a chalkboard to write the story as the children dictate (Browne, 1999; Whitehead, 2002).

Literacy areas

No matter what the type or focus of instruction is, writing has to have its own area in the classroom, just like any other the other literacy skills. "It is important that writing has its special place set aside for it in any group setting, although I would also expect literacy to permeate every corner of a nursery, playground or other kind of early years setting, including the outdoor areas" (Whitehead, 2002, p. 71). Such a corner can be easily created by offering children access to
writing tools, formats, and resources (Cooper, 1997; Ford & Opitz, 2002). The emphasis in a writing corner is to keep students involved and engaged in the activities by writing letters, correcting others' written work, or simply writing their own names or those of their favorite story characters. The writing center needs to include "varied provision for drawing, painting, modeling, mud and finger-paint" (Whitehead, 2002, p. 72). Moreover, the writing corner should include a wide variety and range of materials that would make writing more enjoyable and genuine. Such materials include maps, street directories, magazines, typewriters, computers and illustrations (Whitehead, 2002). "Without these materials, children will have difficulty in developing their interest, and knowledge about, marks, signs and letters" (Whitehead, 2002, p. 70).

**Literacy activities**

Children's knowledge and interest are increased and stimulated in the classroom through the use of activities that are carefully planned and designed by the teacher. For such activities to be effective, Kern (2000) states that they should be based on four curricular components, the first of which is situated practice. This implies stress on communication in the classroom, an interaction that facilitates free expression of thoughts. The second component deals with the necessity of designing activities that use scaffolding as one of their principles, and this component is called overt instruction (Kern, 2000). As for the third element of activities, it is critical framing – "the reflective dimension of literacy instruction" (Kern, 2000, pp. 133-134) – and it stresses making students aware of the relationships that exist among language, society and personal purposes. Finally, activities should be built with the knowledge that students need to be able to come up with their own creations. In other words, transformed practice should take place, where students "create new texts on the basis of existing ones, or shaping texts to make them
appropriate for context of communication other than those for which they were originally intended" (Kern, 2000, pp. 133-134).

When literacy activities are discussed, educators immediately refer to them as factors that facilitate literacy development, and two of the components of a literacy-based curriculum is reading and writing. In order to help children in becoming more advanced readers and writers, instruction needs to be designed carefully by the teacher in order to make learning as beneficial as possible. Therefore, it is the teacher's role to constantly encourage students, make the learning experience as meaningful as possible, model the language skills, help children practice word identification, and allow students to take risks as they attempt to get to know the world of literacy better (Cooper, 1997).

Activities that foster literacy growth include a wide range of exercises such as reading practice. During such an activity, the teacher introduces the book and has the children read it silently. Afterward, children are encouraged to discuss the story and share reflections on what they have read. Moreover, some students may volunteer to read aloud parts of the text, and others may select books for rereading or record the text on tape or video. As for writing practice, activities can be based on such a purpose, where students practice drafting with the objective of learning spelling and sight words. In order to facilitate such an activity, teachers can show students lists of high-frequency words that they can use while writing (Cooper, 1997). For independent reading and writing, teachers can design certain activities such as journal writing, and encouraging students to keep record of the books they have read and/or the time they spent doing so. Moreover, the teacher may designate a chair where students who have written or read a particular piece discuss their experiences (Cooper, 1997). Moreover, Whitehead (2002) suggests the use of poetry in classrooms in order to make them a "wonderful place for playing with
language". In addition, students may be encouraged to make their own books with the help and guidance of their teacher, and this "enables individual, or two or three in partnership, to become authors and illustrators and have work regularly published for classroom and home use" (Whitehead, 2002, p. 90).

**Teachers' role**

No matter what the activity is, what the students are supposed to do, and the context of the exercise, literacy-based curricula depend to a great extent on the teacher who needs to be motivated in order to instigate such a positive feeling in children. Moreover, one of the most important roles of a teacher is to show students that they can do any activity and succeed in performing it. "If you believe all students can learn and share these feelings both directly and indirectly, you set up expectations for success for all students" (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003, p. 33).

Kern (2000) specifies three teacher roles that he calls the "three R's" (p. 307), and they include responding, revising and reflecting, the three of which focus on feedback, encouraging students to reflect on their own and on others' work, in addition to making children aware that language can exist in different forms, even if the idea is the same (Kern, 2000). On the other hand, Abram, Brailsford & Hetherington (1999) list six roles of teachers, and these include supplying students with adequate resources and materials that foster literacy, supporting youngsters and helping them achieve their goals, scaffolding and helping students as much as possible, sharing ideas with the children, showing or modeling ways of doing things, saying or giving feedback to the students whenever they can, and seeing or observing youngsters with the aim of enhancing learning and making improvements. "The teacher's task is to work in ways that create in each student the desire to know and the desire to act on that knowledge" (Rasinski,
Sampson & Sampson, 2003, pp. 50-52), and to achieve this goal and be successful educators, teachers need to be "good listeners, tireless secretaries and enthusiastic publishers" (Whitehead, 2002, pp. 128-129).

**Literacy assessment**

Any curriculum, whether it is traditional or literacy-based, has a component without which the learning experience would be incomplete, and this element is assessment — "the process of gathering information about something" Cooper, 1997, p. 512) and "of collecting and measuring information relevant to student learning and performance" (Kern, 2000, p. 267). Evaluation is when this collected data is analyzed in order to check the level of achievement (Cooper, 1997; Kern, 2000), and grading is "a way of reporting the results of either assessment or evaluation with numbers, letters, or percentages. It is not the only reporting option, however, and written comments or reports are common alternatives" (Kern, 2000, pp. 267-268).

Assessment and evaluation are two processes that go hand in hand, and "a beginning step is planning for assessment in your classroom is to think about why you are assessing students" (Cooper, 1997, p. 512).

Paffard (1999) states that the purposes of assessment include finding out more about students as individuals, monitoring progress, enabling curriculum developers and staff to improve the educational system, and making the job more enjoyable. Moreover, teachers need means to see if the students are learning and how well they are doing so, and in this process, teachers can improve instruction and alter the classroom experiences accordingly. However, it is also the role of students to reflect on their work, and this helps them take ownership of their learning, seeing and planning ways to foster their own literacy growth" (Cooper, 1997, p. 513).
For assessment to be effective, it should be an ongoing and essential part of instruction. Moreover, it should be designed in several styles including different tasks that are developmentally and culturally appropriate in order to identify children's strengths. Also, assessment should be based on what we know about how students learn to read and write" (Cooper, 1997, pp. 517-518). An important principle when engaging in assessment is for the teacher to evaluate himself/herself, and "for a literacy curriculum to evolve, the teacher must be as actively involved in self-evaluation as in student evaluation" (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003, p. 400).

In the process of evaluating students' writing, teachers engage in responding or giving feedback about the elements of the writing piece at hand. In doing so, teachers are encouraged to write down comments on how the children did, focusing on clearly stating what was good and what could have been better. "A particularly useful form of response is a narrative account of what the teacher was thinking when reading the student's piece of writing" (Kern, 2000, p. 283). Moreover, in grading students' written work, it is recommended that the teacher assigns a single holistic grade, and then the final grade of the student would be designated after asking questions about how well the message was conveyed, how organized the text was, in addition to questions about grammatical and spelling mistakes. Based on a scale, the teacher then gives each student a specific score based on criteria or a rubric (Kern, 2000). The best way to monitor children's writing progress is to collect samples of mark-making, drawing and writing at regular intervals. These samples should be labeled, and the teacher should add his/her own analysis of the writing piece (Whitehead, 2002). Although the teacher is the one reacting to the writing piece, it is essential to have students choose the writing they want the teacher to examine (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003).
In assessing reading, "we are not just concerned with learners' verbatim reproduction of information ... What is important, in other words, is interpretation, getting at the communicative value of texts" (Kern, 2000, p. 275). Therefore, teachers need to offer students opportunities to link understanding with production, thus asking them to respond to reading through writing or discussions. Furthermore, teachers should allow for individual differences in the way students respond. "The point is not just students' ability to think what the teacher or tester has thought about a text, but what the student himself or herself thinks. What's crucial, however, is that learners be able to justify and support their interpretations by citing specific textual facts" (Kern, 2000, pp. 275-276). When assessing reading, teachers need to keep a profile of each student, and this profile should include records of children's knowledge and awareness of print. For example, the profile may include records of instances when the student was reading aloud, and the notes would include any trials to correct his/her own mistakes or ask questions about the text (Whitehead, 2002).

"In order to build up sufficiently rich records of children's language and literacy, notes and observations must be collected on responses and developments in the relevant curriculum areas: talking, listening, stories, books, poetry, rhyme, music, dance, print, science, drawing and pictures" (Whitehead, 2002, pp. 111-112). Furthermore, there are two categories of assessment that should be part of the literacy experience: informal and formal. Informal assessment includes observations and other nonstandardized processes such as checklists and performance assessments. As for formal assessment, it makes use of standardized procedures such as tests. These exams are usually reflective of the instruction and of student learning (Cooper, 1997).

"Evaluation can tell us how comfortable children are in the literacy environment and how successful they are in their literacy endeavors" (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003, p. 380).
One way of indicating these facts is observation, which is done as the teacher moves around in class and sees certain behaviors that hold essential meanings. Therefore, teachers keep record of anecdotes of students' behaviors and add reactions to such actions (Morrow, Strickland & Woo, 1998; Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003). Moreover, through observation, teachers can fill out checklists which show the same information revealed in anecdotal records (Cooper, 1997), but these data are more "at-a-glance" (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003, p. 382). Each checklist must include the qualities or behaviors that the teacher is striving for children to portray, and the checklist should include a procedure for recording what has been observed (Cooper, 1997). An important point to keep in mind when using observation is that "good assessment is multidimensional. Therefore, one observation is not sufficient" (Cooper, 1997, pp. 534-535).

Another means that might be used in order to assess children's performance is communicating with them, thus challenging, encouraging or stimulating them (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003). Due to its strong effect on instruction and evaluation, interaction is highly emphasized in the process of evaluation (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003, p. 382).

The last decade has witnessed an increase in the use of portfolio assessment, since it is regarded as a useful method to evaluate students' literacy progress (Cooper, 1997). "A literacy portfolio is a meaningful collection of student work and records of progress and achievement collected over time. It is usually kept in a folder, sometimes an accordion type with compartments or sections" (Cooper, 1997 p. 522). This portfolio acts as a vehicle for students and teachers to reflect on the learning experience and to assess their work and performance. Portfolios need to be accessible to both learners and their teacher/s at all times and should be
used daily as students take part in activities, whether these are group- or individual-based (Cooper, 1997).

Johns (1997) lists features of literacy portfolios, which are usually in the form of notebooks and are assembled by the learners over time. Moreover, these portfolios include literacy samples that consist of readings, writings and visual items. Usually, not more than five items are selected as samples that represent one school term, and these items need to be representative of the literacy-based curriculum and objectives.

Conclusion

Literacy is an essential component of any individual’s life, and without literacy, one cannot cope with everyday details and cannot feel a sense of belonging to the community (Whitehead, 2002). Since research has emphasized its integral role in society, literacy needs to be integrated in lesson plans, especially since the school is where students spend most of their time as they strive to become citizens who can function adequately in their community (Cooper, 1997). This implies a complex role for the teacher who needs to devise appropriate activities, in addition to designing literacy corners and selecting types of assessment to be used (Rasinski, Sampson & Sampson, 2003).
References


What do you like about yourself?

What makes you special?

What are the things that you can do better than anyone else?

The teacher can help the child describe the classroom.

The drawing and the sentences will be posted in the classroom.

Let each child draw a picture of him/herself

1. What is so special about us?
Materials needed:

- Glue
- A4 white papers
- Erasers
- Pencils
- Crayons
- Colored cardboards
What is so special about him/her/ourselves? His/her own way of coloring and ideas in expressing classroom and point out how each student has helped the students, hang the silhouettes in the classroom. After the work is done, the teacher, with the wrote for his/her partner.

The teacher can divide the students into groups of two. Let each child read what he/she special about themselves. Out and write a sentence describing what is so Let children color the silhouette of a child cut...

2. I am special because...
Materials needed:

- Glue
- Erasers
- Pencils
- Crayons
- A4 white paper
- White cardboard
I'm special because...
and exclamation marks.

of capital, small letters, periods, quotation marks
writing by breaking down the sounds and the usage
bottom, middle and top lines. Students are taught

The teacher introduces to the children the
down few words about the drawing.

The child draws and colors his/her drawing
(passing personal things, coloring, drawing etc).
This way his/her journal cover page on his/her own way
is decorated by the child. Each child decorates
drawing) and dotted lines. The journal's cover page
contains a square (where the child can draw his/her
3 - Dinie's Journal
Materials needed:

- Erasers
- Pencils
- Crayons
Materials needed:

- Erasers
- Pencils
- Crayons
- A3 white cardboards
- A4 white lined sheets

Read a story about the theme, and let the students choose their favorite part. Write and draw attached to the booklet. A list of books related to the theme is about it.
You Can

Sample of activity number 4
Write them in their journals. Children have to sound the words out and match the letter with the word and picture and in a picture word.

Flip books are used in introducing a letter.

Each sheet has a word that starts with the letter and contains a letter front page and many sheets. Each flip book contains small size flip books.

5-word bank flip book.
A list of sight words is attached to the booklet.

Sight word cards are pasted on a large cardboard in the reading corner where students can use during their journal writing.

Weekly sight word cards are introduced during the circle time on the small sight word board. Each week, a new sight word is introduced.
Sequence: Choose the note cards and fill the pockets by reading the schedule of the day and, accordingly, bulletin board. Each day, the schedule helper begins at the year and is posted on the schedule is set by the teacher from the

7 Schedule Pockets
Reading it and memorizing it visually.

Reading it would be observing what the helper is writing, thus
once every two weeks. Moreover, other students
each one gets a chance to be a helper at least

By doing so, students practice writing since
board or white board.

corresponding phrase that appears on the chalk

date. Both day and date are added to the
helper to write what day it is, in addition to the
During the circle time, the teacher assigns a

8-Calendar
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Year is: 2004
The Month is: May
Today is: Monday
matching words with pictures.

An additional purpose is teaching them the skill of
that might be used later on in their journals. An
aim of teaching students different words
then pasted on the shirt with the matching word,
with the picture accordingly. This picture is
then pasted on the shirt with the picture accordingly. This picture is
career he/she wants, and the teacher provides
shirt that has his/her picture. The child chooses the
For every child in the classroom, there is one

9- P迸tee! of Helpers
Materials needed:
time by numbers ex. 10 p.m.
time or to draw the watch arrows or write the
replace the picture by a written word, to read the
letters, commas, dots, or question marks, to
teacher asks the students to count the words.
The person will read the morning message. The
students come into classroom. The message
the morning message on the easel board before
Twice per week, the teacher writes down

10 - The Morning Message
Easel board

The Morning Message

Sample of activity number 10
A multi-sensory approach. This implies integration of the senses and a
read. This might be mentioned in the story being
objects that might be helpful in reading. The teacher can refer to many
helpful in reading. The teacher can refer to many
words or even the way it is written. Tubs are also
words, the teacher might use objects to teach the
words, the teacher might use objects to teach the
words for several purposes. When teaching sight
corresponding letter, and the object inside may be
same letter. Each tub is labeled with the
same letter. Each tub is labeled with the
which contains plastic objects that start with the
They are small transparent bowls, each of

Tubs

11 - Tubs
Start with the letter underneath it. Include different letters with the list of words that Word Walls are posted in the classroom. They
In retention, associate the word with the picture, and this helps corresponding phonemes. Moreover, they together, students learn different letters and their By trying to put the pieces of the puzzle 13 - Jigsaw Puzzle
My Special Box

Name: Darine Joudi

Thick cardboard box

Cover

Children can decorate their special box in their own way and collect special items they like in it.
All by myself. Mayer, Mercer, 1983
Mail myself to you. Guthrie, Wood, 1994
Some part of myself. Dobie, J. Fra, 1967
Portrait of myself. Bourke-White, 1963
I'm a stranger here myself. Bryson, Bill, 2000
I saw for myself. Nutting, Anth, 1958
More short & shivery. San Souci, Ro, 1994

List of books related to the theme: Me, Myself

and
List of CDs related to the theme: Me, Myself and I

- Getting to know myself. Palmer, Hap, 1995
- Ebeneezer sneezer. Penner, Fred, 1991
- The best of baby songs, 1994
- Peek-a-boo and other songs. Palmer, Hap, 1990

Video cassette related to the theme: Me, Myself

* Even more baby songs, 1990

Myself and
( Wee Sing )

What are you wearin'?

Now tall, now small

Good night

This is the way

Head & shoulders

and I

List of songs related to the theme: Me, Myself
He * He * The * I * I
Look * Have * See * To
Will * From * All * Can
Me * This * My * Be
Said * Do * You * Like
She * Your * Go * Am
On * We * Is * A

Number words to ten:

Yellow, green, orange, brown.

Color words: purple, black, pink, red, blue.