

LITERACY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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RESUMO

É muito comum ouvir especialistas em educação afirmar que o presente mais importante que nós podemos dar para uma geração futura é a habilidade de ler e escrever. Quando uma criança nasce é quando ela começa a jornada em direção ao letramento/alfabetização. As interações que as crianças têm com adultos e outras crianças no ambiente em que estão convivendo ajuda desenvolver habilidades de linguagem que irá, em última instância, conduzir em direção ao letramento/alfabetização.

Palavras-chave: Letramento. Alfabetização. Habilidades de linguagem. Leitura e escrita.

ABSTRACT

It is quite common to hear education experts state that the most important gift we can give a future generation is the ability to read and write. When a child is born, that is when he/she begins the journey towards literacy. The interactions that children have with adults and other children in the environment help to develop the language skills that will ultimately lead towards literacy.

Key-words: Literacy. Language skills. Reading and writing.

WHAT IS EMERGENT LITERACY?

“Emergent Literacy” is a term which proposes the view that literacy begins at birth and is a continuous and developmental process (Reutzel and Cooter, 2000). Emergent literacy focuses on reading, listening, speaking and writing, which develop into literacy. This term has brought about a profound change in the way we approach early literacy. It suggests that in the early stages of childhood, children are in the process of becoming literate. Children who are surrounded by a literacy-rich environment and engage in constructive activities with their parents and teachers are more likely to develop literacy skills. Emergent literacy has developed the awareness that a connection exists between the oral and written language children are exposed, to from birth to the time they begin to read.

History of Early Literacy

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For decades, educators have debated over a skills-based approach (phonics) and a holistic approach (whole language) to teaching children to read. In the 1950's, the traditional phonics instruction was abandoned and a "look-say model" was developed to help children learn to read. Educators believed that the reason children were reading and writing so poorly was because they were not being taught to sound out every letter, and because of this, phonics again gained its momentum.

In the 1960's and 1970's, experts they began to discourage phonics and the basal reader, and focus on a whole language philosophy. This popular debate continued into the 1980's and 1990's, and even the U.S. federal government became involved. The debate still continues, and the best way to teach our children to read has not yet been determined. However, parents should not become overwhelmed with all the reviews and controversy surrounding this issue. Instead, it is important to note the tremendous progress that has been made in recognizing the need for more research, in search of a 'best method'. Regardless of which model is being taught, there are elements of 'best practices' that have been identified, and that parents can incorporate in order to help their children become good readers.

Phonics v. Whole Language

There is an ongoing debate as to which is the best method for teaching children to read. Research suggests that a combination of both phonics and whole language will develop good readers. Phonics is the association of speech sounds with printed text. It is a method of teaching children to read using a series of rules to sound out new words. By applying phonic skills, or the system of signals, to new or unknown words, the reader blends a series of sounds which are decoded and help the child arrive at the pronunciation of printed word symbols.

Whole language focuses on the "whole-part" method of teaching children to read, which is very different from the phonics reading method. In this method, teachers use connected print to teach children to read. The child is encouraged to recognize words as whole units and participate in many hands-on activities, such as writing in journals, and analyzing words in context. An advantage of this method is that children learn to write at an earlier stage and find the process of reading more interesting. Using this method, sometimes children do not receive

an adequate foundation in phonics, and are not able to decode new words. Research continues to suggest that a balanced approach in teaching children to read will develop good readers.

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is very important for success in beginning reading. It is understood that spoken words are made up of sounds. This method focuses on the sounds in the context of the words, independent of their meaning. Phonemic awareness is the ability to manipulate and blend sounds in spoken words. The difference between phonics and phonemic awareness lies in the understanding that phonemic awareness is really an oral language understanding; it is actually the child's construction of a bridge between spoken and written language. Children as early as age five can engage in practices that support the development of phonemic awareness. This awareness will not happen automatically, and parents and teachers can help their children develop these skills in the context of songs and rhymes.

Hierarchy of Phonemic Awareness Competence:

1. Awareness of words.
2. Ability to rhyme.
3. Ability to blend.
4. Ability to segment into words and syllables.
5. Ability to identify beginning sounds (onsets).
6. Ability to segment words into phonemes.
7. Ability to substitute and manipulate beginning phonemes.
8. Ability to substitute middle and ending phonemes.

(Cecil, N. 2003)

www.hh-pub.com/excerpts/CecilCh03ppt2ed_files/frame.htm

MYTHS ABOUT LITERACY DEVELOPMENT:

Schickedanz (1999) lists several myths that surround literacy development. These are important to consider, as they help us recognize the fact that we have an important role in the child's language development.

MYTH #1: Oral language must develop before written language can begin.

Although oral language development is essential to good written language development, it is not a prerequisite in the way it was once believed. Oral and written language skills develop simultaneously, with supporting each other.

MYTH #2: Children learn oral language naturally, but acquire literacy knowledge through direct instruction.

We tend to overestimate the extent to which oral language learning simply unfolds through maturation, regardless of the social circumstances, while we underestimate the extent to which written language learning can occur in day-to-day functional contexts, starting long before children receive formal instruction in the classroom.

MYTH #3: Children must achieve a certain level of physical and mental readiness before written language learning can occur.

Variations in rates of literacy development are due primarily to individual differences in children's learning rates, rather than to differences in children's early literacy experiences.

The research shows that if we can support language and literacy skills at a very early age, a foundation can be established that will provide students with the necessary resources to be successful readers and writers. The fact that myths still exist about when and how to support the language development of children is reason enough to continue providing the necessary resources for parents and educators.

INTERNATIONAL SPOTLIGHT ON LITERACY INITIATIVES:

There is currently a worldwide initiative that highlights the importance of preparing all young children for a successful schooling experience. All countries are interested in how to best educate their children, and how to provide the necessary resources to lower illiteracy rates. In the United States, The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002) is an important federal investment in education that was passed to help improve the schooling experience of all children. This legislation has led to many initiatives, including the *Ready to Read, Ready to Learn* program

sponsored by the former first lady of the USA, Laura Bush. (www.whitehouse.gov/firstlady/initiatives/readytoreadoverview.pdf)

Besides this program, there are many other organizations around the world that seek to support literacy development among young children:

National Association for the Education of Young Children

- The NAEYC worked together with the International Reading Association (IRA) to publish a position statement entitled *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*. The purpose of the statement is to detail the principles and recommendations for teaching practices and public policy that are fundamental for helping all children learn to read.

www.NAEYC.org or www.reading.org

Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy

- Literacy as a value in every family.

www.barbarabushfoundation.com

National Center for Family Literacy

- The NCFL is recognized nationally and internationally as the leading organization in the promotion of family literacy. The intergenerational approach pioneered by the NCFL has received critical acclaim and has helped hundreds of thousands of families start on a path to success. By providing professional development services, research and policy analysis, the NCFL trains more than 5,000 practitioners each year, and reaches thousands more through its advocacy efforts, working to expand the literacy opportunities for all families nationwide.

www.famlit.org

Reading is Fundamental (RIF)

- Founded in 1966, RIF develops and delivers literacy programs for children and families that help prepare young children for reading, and motivate school-age children to read regularly.

www.RIF.org

Reach Out and Read

- Reading aloud is one of the most important things parents can do to help their children learn. *Reach Out and Read* is a program that builds on the special relationship between doctors and parents of young children to support children's language and literacy development.

www.reachoutandread.org

America Reads

- Families form the foundations for reading success. Loving parents can nurture a child by talking, reading, singing, and rhyming. These acts also help to raise a reader. The love of reading begins at home. Here you will find guidance and resources on how to be your child's first and best teacher.

www.ed.gov/inits/americanreads

Heads Up Reading

--*HeadsUp! Reading* is an early literacy course for educators and parents of young children that focuses on strengthening crucial early childhood literacy skills.

www.huronline.org

LITERACY ASSESSMENT

Assessment of Early Literacy Development

Teachers spend a great deal of time gathering information for the purpose of conducting on-going assessments in the classroom. The literacy development of young children should not be determined by one formal (or standardized) assessment tool. Rather, should involve gathering data from multiple instruments, daily observations, and work samples that measure progress. Often, schools have a data-gathering system in place that reflects the child's growth and development in the area of literacy skills. As a parent of young children, it is important to ensure that your child is enjoying the reading process and at the same time, that the child is developing his literacy/reading/writing skills to maximum potential. Not all children learn the alphabet by a specific age, and children often learn to 'sing' their abc's before they can identify letters in isolation, or tell you what sounds a letter makes, or what words start with a specific letter. It is an on-going developmental process that takes time, and this is why assessment is important in early childhood. We assess to determine how well a child is progressing at a specific time, and to document a specific aspect of learning. Keeping careful progress records helps teachers adapt the curriculum to make it meaningful and child-centered. Furthermore, if assessment is to be effective, parents need to be kept informed in order to help support the child's learning at home.

Early childhood literacy assessment should be conducted for the purpose of informing instruction. These are some of the things early childhood caregivers should take note of when a child is in the Emergent Literacy Stage:

Concepts About Print (Marie Clay, 2000)

Does the child handle books correctly? (Identifies the front cover, back cover, etc...)

Does the child recognize English is read from left to right? (Does he/she track words across a page?)

Phonemic Awareness

Does the child recognize specific letters? Can the child play word games that focus on rhyme?

Can the child identify beginning sounds and ending sounds in words? Can the child identify the different letter sounds heard within a word?

Reading Comprehension

Is the child able to retell a story accurately? Can the child identify characters in the story? Can the child predict what might happen next in a fictional story?

Attitudes toward Reading (and Writing)

Can the child identify favorite books/authors? Does the child identify reading/writing as a favorite activity?

As children grow and gain more experience with reading and writing, the assessment of a child's literacy development involves many different types of assessment tools. Therefore, teachers of early primary grades (1st – 3rd) have many different formal and informal assessment protocols to help them gather information on a child's literacy growth.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS/TEACHERS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Parents and teachers can engage in a series of activities that help develop literacy. Development of literacy in the earliest phases begins at home, with the parents interacting with their children through conversation, songs, games, and rhymes. Play is also very important in the overall development of children. It is critical for young children to have fun and enjoy playing games, reading books, and singing songs.

At home, parents have a unique opportunity to introduce children to literature from an early age. These interactions help young children develop literacy skills that are invaluable for the future, as they provide a foundation for reading and writing. Where do you begin? It's easy...

- **“Read Aloud”**—Kathy Egawa and Jennifer Katahira (2000) espouse the belief that “Reading Aloud is seen as the single most influential factor in young children's success in

learning to read.” They reiterate the ideals of Mem Fox, who calls for both parents and teachers to recognize the benefits of reading aloud on a daily basis. Choose a quality piece of literature and share it with young children, either in a lap reading setting (one on one), or in a small or large group setting.

- **Share a Variety of Books with Young Children** - Some books quickly become favorites, and it is often important to read and re-read books, for children to feel comfortable with the plot and characters. Young children enjoy the predictability of some books, and this makes for a very successful reading session. Introduce the classics (nursery rhymes, fairy tales, etc...) or search for books with rhythm or rhyme that engages young children. As parents and teachers, we must not forget the need to introduce expository (informational) texts. Children benefit greatly from reading and interacting with books that challenge their understanding.
- **Talk About Books** - Simply reading a fictional story book or informative text aloud does not develop an appreciation of the experience. Ask questions as the book is being read - “What do you see on the cover?” “What do you think the book might be about?” “Who is the author or the illustrator?” “Who are the characters?” “Where does the story take place?” Occasionally, you might consider stopping at a special place in the story to have young children predict what might happen next.
- **Provide Books in a Variety of Settings** - Keep books in the car for entertainment. Prepare some favorite books on tape for young children to follow along with the story as you read; they can listen in the car, or using a ‘walkman’ they can listen anywhere! Buy books for the bathtub or to share by the pool or at the beach. Take a special book about zoo animals to read along at a trip to the zoo, or a book about food to the grocery store.
- **Bring Books to Life** - Consider dressing up as a favorite character or making puppets of all the characters in a favorite story. This gives children the opportunity to “act out” favorite stories and to interact with the dialogue. Reading a story and retelling a story are two distinct skills, and young children are quite capable of retelling a favorite story if given the opportunity to think about the beginning, middle and end, and the main elements of the plot.
- **Showcase Letters and Words!** - Emphasize to young children the fact that letters make up words and words make up sentences that create the stories they are reading. Take the time to point out other words that begin with the same letters as the letters in their name. Let young

children tell you the sounds they hear as you read to them the many different words on the printed page. This “phonemic awareness” is the foundation for future success in reading.

Internet Resources

International Reading Association (www.reading.org)

National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org)

National Institute for Literacy (www.nifl.gov)

A Child Becomes a Reader www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/reading_pre.pdf

www.ed.gov/pubs/Family_Lit_2000

www.ed.gov/pubs/FamLit/index.html

www.familyeducation.com

www.scholastic.com

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