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AUTHOR Diffily, Deborah
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study which examined kindergarten students' concepts about authorship and how these concepts affected their view of themselves as readers and writers. The teachers' role in helping form students' attitudes was also examined. Thirty-eight children from two kindergarten classrooms and their teachers were interviewed. The teacher in the first classroom characterized her teaching philosophy as traditional, while the teacher in the second classroom characterized her philosophy as developmentally appropriate. Results indicated that the views which the children in each of the two classrooms had of themselves as readers and writers were different. Generally, the children in the first classroom saw writing as copying teacher-given words and sentences, while those in the second classroom saw themselves as authors writing stories. Students in the second classroom, in which theories of emergent literacy were in practice, demonstrated a disposition for learning, reading, and writing, and felt good about what they had learned. Contains 15 references. (HTH)

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Kindergarteners' Concept of Author:

Comparison between a Developmentally Appropriate Classroom
and a Traditional Classroom

Deborah Diffily
3905 Sanguinet Street
Fort Worth, TX 76107-7237
(817) 731-4378

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ABSTRACT

Many factors affect how young children learn. This study looks at kindergarten student's concepts about authorship and how these views affect their self-view of themselves as readers and writers. Additionally, the teacher's role in helping form student attitudes is examined.

In the early 1970's, a new perspective on reading and writing began to appear in professional literature. Reading readiness concepts gave way to new ideas and new terminology. These terms included concepts about print, literacy before schooling, and print awareness. Since the time of that paradigm shift, "emergent literacy" has generally been accepted as the term which describes the newer view of how young children learn to read and write (Sulzby and Teale, 1991).

In this paradigm shift, many ideas about reading and writing development have changed. We know believe that children are learning to read and write from the time they are born, rather than as they move through workbooks designed to "get them ready" to read. We view reading and writing as interrelated skills which support each other, rather than as separate skills which develop sequentially. We believe that children actively construct their understanding of reading and writing primarily through informal interactions with parents, childcare givers, and other literate people and through exploration (Teale, 1986).

The teacher's role in the emergent literacy paradigm is no less important than before (Routman, 1988; Hyde, 1990). Teachers must provide the physical environment to support the explorations of young children's literacy-related explorations. They must also provide the psychological environment where children's early

attempts at reading and writing are honored and supported. Children learn from activities that are meaningful to them and are child-initiated. It is clearly the responsibility of early childhood teachers to meet these needs of the young learner and to provide a variety of opportunities for literacy development (Black, Puckett, & Bell, 1991).

Many components should be included in a classroom which enhances emergent literacy behaviors. A diversity of materials should be available in the classroom: trade books, a variety of writing materials (Genishi, 1988), meaningful print from the child's environment, e.g. logos, signs, food containers. Books should include good fiction, content books, student-made and class-made books. A specific Writing center and Reading center should be set up in the classroom, but books and writing materials should be included in as many centers as the students will utilize.

Another component of the teacher's responsibilities to young children considered necessary by many reading experts is that of helping young children develop the concept of author (Rowe & Harste, 1986). Author means "one who writes or composes a book," but it is also defined as "one that originates or makes" (Webster's, 1963). Young children must be helped to value literacy, a wide variety of literature, and the work of authoring. They must also be led into valuing their own work as literature. Two primary ways to help children view themselves as authors are the Author's Chair (Graves, 1983; Delz, 1989) and a publishing program (Harste & Burke, 1984; Morrow, 1989). When students' attempts at writing are honored by adults, they become more willing to risk writing at their level. When they are able to share their writing orally through Author's Chair times and share their "published" works with friends and family, they begin to view themselves as authors who want to write and share their writings.

Despite the prolific information about emergent literacy and how teachers can best help young children develop literacy

behaviors, not all early childhood teachers believe in or use these methods. This study looks at the students in two different classrooms in the same large urban elementary school. How these children view themselves as readers and writers is definitely affected by the different classroom environments and the teaching practices in their respective classrooms.

THE TEACHERS

Two kindergarten classes were selected for this study because of the difference in classroom teacher philosophy and actual classroom practice. One teacher described her philosophies as "traditional." She believes in large group instruction, daily phonics lessons, and workbooks. The other teacher described her teaching practice as "striving toward developmentally appropriate practice." She believes in providing a print-rich environment for children, in reading to her students several times a day and extending literature often, in modeling writing, and in having students write daily.

The first teacher stressed academics and group recitation. Every morning the children began their day sitting in straight rows on the floor, reciting the alphabet, letters sounds, and words that began with all the letters, e.g. "A, ah, apple, B, buh, ball..." Their morning work was organized by rotating centers. Groups of 5-6 children worked at tables and changed tables at 25- to 30-minute intervals as the teacher directed. Their work usually involved worksheets relating to the letter of the week, numerals, or addition problems. Children meticulously copied capital and lower case letters over and over. They also copied assigned spelling words and sentences relating to their unit topic. Art work usually involved coloring, cutting, and gluing the assigned pattern onto construction paper. Center work was assigned, except for Fridays when the students were allowed to have "Game Day," meaning they could

choose their activities. The teacher spent her time at one center, the Teacher Table, in small group instruction of specific skills.

The second teacher stressed emergent literacy behaviors and the understanding of number concept. Mornings began with reading and planning morning work. After the group meeting, children were allowed to complete the three or four assignments in any order they wished. Children worked in small groups, in pairs, or individually as they chose, at tables or on the floor. The first part of the morning, children came to the teacher to get their "word for the day." She spent a few minutes with each child, talking about their day, and working on letter recognition, phonemic awareness, or conventions of writing, depending on each child's needs. During that activity, other children worked in centers and on morning assignments. All centers in the room were open to the children as they chose. The teacher moved through different centers, sometimes observing, sometimes entering into the students' work. At times she called small groups of children to a particular place in the room to work on specific skills.

THE CLASSROOMS

Much can be learned about teaching philosophies by observing the classroom environment itself. Both classrooms were colorful and had child-sized furniture and manipulatives.

The first classroom was filled with commercially prepared materials. Alphabet cards and charts, months of the year, days of the week, pictures and descriptions of African-American leaders covered all available wall space. Math manipulatives and toys were in baskets on one shelf in the room. A Home Living center was in one corner of the room and a Listening center with a variety of musical tapes was set up. No other centers were evident. The only student work displayed in the classroom was spelling tests which had a grade of 85% or better. On the wall outside the classroom were 22 identical shapes of the state of Texas which had been outlined in

glitter. A large computer-generated sign and teacher-cut shapes of Texas were included in the display.

The second classroom was organized by labelled centers. A double-deck Reading/Listening center was in one corner of the room with both levels filled with pillows. This center was located adjacent to the Writing center which had a typewriter, a variety of paper and markers, pencils, and crayons available and the Book center which was filled with a variety of books. A grocery store center was set up nearby. There was a math center, with a variety of manipulatives; a Science center, with gerbils, plants, magnets, smelling jars, specimens borrowed from a local museum, and books on a specific topic; an Art center, with paints, watercolors, or playdoh; a Block Center, with unit blocks, and a Game/Puzzle center, with puzzles, pattern blocks, cards, and teacher-made games. Class-made books, group experience charts, word banks, student-made signs, individual student stories, drawings and paintings were displayed throughout the classroom.

THE STUDENTS

The sample of subjects for this study was 38 children from two kindergarten classes in the same elementary school located in a large southwestern city. In the first classroom, there were 19 children, 11 girls and 8 boys; 18 blacks and one Hispanic. In the second classroom, there were also 19 children, 9 girls and 10 boys; 18 blacks and one Hispanic. All had been allowed in the kindergarten program by their age on September 1, so in April of their kindergarten year, ages ranged from 5 years, 8 months to 6 years, 6 months.

THE INTERVIEWS

Each child was interviewed individually, using the semi-structured interview instrument developed by Dr. Robert Nistler

(1989). Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed for easier analysis of data. The primary interview questions are listed below:

1. Does anyone at home read to you?
2. About how often?
3. Does anyone at school read to you?
4. About how often?
5. Are you a reader?
6. Do you have some favorite books?
7. Can you name some of them?
8. Do you know what an author is?
9. What does an author do?
10. Are you an author?
 (Y) What makes you an author?
 (N) Could you be an author?
 (Y) What would you have to do to be an author?
11. Can you write?
12. Why do you write?
13. Where do you write?
14. When do you write?
15. What is your writing like at home?
16. What is your writing like at school?
17. Who reads what you write?
18. Who makes decisions about your writing?
19. Can you give me some examples of those decisions?

INTERVIEW RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When asked if anyone read to them at home, 14 students from the first classroom answered yes; 5 said no. Most students were confused by the word "often," so the interviewer added the words "some days or every day." Five students answered every day; 9 said some days, and 5 did not answer. In the second classroom, 16 said they were read to at home. Three said no one read to them. Four students said their families read to them every day; 11 said some days.

Fourteen children in the first classroom said their teacher read to them at school; 8 some days/6 every day. Five said that no one read to them at school. All nineteen children in the second classroom said their teacher read to them. One said some days; 18 indicated the teacher read every day. One child answered, "My teacher reads to us every single day." Another answered, "She reads every day and a lot!"

When asked if they were readers, 12 students in the first classroom said yes; 7 said no. All 19 students in the second classroom thought they were readers. Almost all children indicated they had favorite books. Only one child in the first classroom said no. When asked to name those books, 18 in the second classroom were able to name specific titles or favorite authors; only one child did not answer this question. In the first classroom, ten students were able to name book titles or authors; eight mentioned subject areas, like horse, tree, Ernest, Ninja Turtles.

In answer to the question, "Do you know what an author is?," 18 students from the first classroom said no. The one child who said they knew what an author was did not really know. When asked, "What does an author do?," he replied "swim." In the second classroom, 15 said they knew what an author was and all answered that authors wrote stories. Of the four students who said they did not know what an author was, three later indicated that an author wrote stories.

Two students in the first classroom believed they were authors; 17 said they were not. Of the two who thought they were authors, one did not know what she did that made her an author, the second said "when I be happy." In the second classroom, 17 children said they were authors; only two said they were not. Most of the 17 answered that they were authors because they wrote stories or drew pictures. Two answered that reading books made them authors. One said they would be an author when they grew up.

When asked if they could write, 16 students in the first classroom said yes. All students in the other classroom said yes. Answers to the why, where, and when questions about writing varied significantly in each classroom. More students in the second classroom said they wrote because they liked to or they wanted to write stories. One child answered, "cause I write like my friends," which indicates the social nature of writing in this classroom. Another child answered, "cause we be having (sic) to write a story every day." Children in the first classroom tended to say they wrote to learn or to get good grades. Only one child answered that she wrote because she liked to. One child said she wrote "because reading and writing are educational!"

In answer to where they wrote, several students in both classrooms said they wrote at home and at school. The most popular answer in the second classroom was "at the Writing Center." No student in the first classroom gave that answer.

In both classrooms, some children said they wrote when the teacher told them to or when it's time to write. In the second classroom, children tended to give more extensive answers, e.g. "today and tomorrow and ever (sic) single day," "after I illustrate the paper," "Saturday, Friday, Thursday..."

Answers to the questions about writing at home and at school varied from student to student; however, students in the first classroom tended to give answers that related more to handwriting. Only two children in the first classroom indicated they wrote stories at home. Three mentioned writing stories at school. Seven children said they did homework, wrote spelling words, or ABC's at home; 10 mentioned this type of writing at school. Almost all children in the second classroom mentioned writing stories and/or sounding out words at home and at school. One child in this classroom indicates the difference in how children respond to different environments when he answered the questions of "what is your writing like at school?" He responded, "I make lower case

letters in computers and I make upper case letters in here and I write stories in school." The teacher assistant insists the children write lower case letters in their Writing to Read computer booklets. His teacher accepts the writing as he does it.

Children in both classes tended to say that a member of their family or the teacher read what they wrote; however, three children in the second classroom said that they read what they wrote. Most children were confused about the questions, "who makes decisions about your writing?" The children who did answer the question tended to say their "mommas" or teachers made those decisions. When pressed for decisions that they make about their own writing, or how they figure out what to write, most said, "I don't know." One child in the first classroom did say, "I figure out that it's all really good and it's very good to read and stuff and it's educational and there's one thing you got to do. You got to say yes to education and dedication and say no to drugs!" In the second classroom, one child said, "I learn. My momma tell me to learn, to learn to do my stories cause she gonna put me in a big grade when I grow up." Another child said, "Well, sometimes I make my writing nice and neatly. When I was five years old, I used to be in this old class. I used to have a book and I used to do a lot of sloppy stuff in it. Not now."

CONCLUSIONS

The views that these children have of themselves as readers and writers is very different. Generally, the children in the first classroom see writing as copying teacher-given words and sentences. The children in the second classroom see themselves as authors, writing stories. These self-views may contribute significantly to their later learning experiences in language arts, and in fact, in many other areas. As Lilian Katz and Sylvia Chard discuss in the book Engaging Young Minds: The Project Approach, there is more to learning than knowledge and skills. Katz and Chard discuss the disposition to learn and feelings about learning as equally important in the educational process. The children in the

second classroom where the theories of emergent literacy are in practice do have dispositions to learn and reading and writing and have good feelings about what they have learned. While this study involves only two classes of children, the results may be dramatic enough to cause traditional teachers to rethink the priorities they establish in their classrooms.

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