After defining whole language as a philosophy of literacy instruction based on the concept that students need to experience language as an integrated whole, this ERIC "FAST Bib" presents an annotated list of 35 ERIC documents and journal articles consisting of critiques of and responses to the whole language approach in the elementary school. The materials, which were published between 1988 and 1992, are divided into six sections: (1) Overview; (2) Critiques; (3) Recent Research; (4) Elementary Applications; (5) Applications to Special Populations; and (6) Teachers' Roles. Some related publications are also cited at the end of the document. (RS)
Whole language is a philosophy of literacy instruction, based on the concept that students need to experience language as an integrated whole. This philosophy focuses on the need for an integrated approach to language arts instruction within a context that is meaningful for students. This FAST Bib presents a number of critiques of and responses to the whole language approach. Six sections are included: (1) overview; (2) critiques; 3) recent research; (4) elementary applications; (5) applications to special populations; and (6) teachers' roles.

Two types of citations are provided in this bibliography: ERIC documents and journal articles.

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Overview
Summarizes some of the criticisms which have been directed at basal instruction. Discusses how whole language approaches enhance the ability to teach students to read and engage them in a democratic and democratizing educational experience.

Examines the philosophy of the whole language approach to teaching and learning. Stresses that language should remain whole and uncontrived, that children should use it in ways that relate to their own lives, and that finding correct answers is not as important as learning processes.

Identifies key premises from whole language theory relative to language and language acquisition, reading and writing processes, teaching and learning, and curriculum. Discusses questions and underlying principles using classroom events.

Presents comments by several reading experts on the whole language approach to teaching reading and on the whole language debate. Includes definitions of whole language, characteristics, justifications, shortcomings, and critiques.

Critiques
Answers the five following common objections to the whole language approach: Haven't we tried this all before? What will happen to the child if some teachers use whole language and others don't? Where does the teacher
find the time to do all this? Where’s the proof that it works? and What about the future?


Presents the explicit assumptions structuring the whole language movement using 18 articles cited in the ERIC database. Attempts to accurately portray the whole language position in terms of definitions of whole language and statements about reading/writing behavior and instruction.


Uncovers and presents the implicit assumptions of whole language, the beliefs that lie beneath the arguments, and perhaps beneath the level of conscious awareness of those who make the arguments. Uses the figurative language in whole language writings as the basis for an interpretive and critical method called deconstruction. Expresses concern that the rhetoric of whole language may block the process of thoughtful, substantive change.


Attempts to appraise the whole language instructional philosophy in relation to what is known about reading methodology. States that this critical perspective is catalytic.


Asserts that there is a gap between theory and practice in literature-based reading programs. States that such programs often lack an underlying theory and mimic methodology associated with basal programs.

Recent Research

Reviews a study which investigated the decoding automaticity of elementary students when receiving rule-based instruction (as a process of applying syllable and structural analysis rules and limited phonics) and when receiving holistic instruction in a whole language program (exercises in listening, reading, and writing, integrated with classroom instruction when possible).


Disputes the version of whole language presented by Michael McKenna, et al., in an earlier article. Argues that whole language is an educational paradigm complete with theoretical, philosophical, and political assumptions and a congruent research agenda. Contends the “paradigm blindness” prevents critics from seeing the legitimacy of whole language-generated research.


Examines the differences in the effect of language and traditional instruction in encoding, reading, writing, and spelling achievement with varying levels of incoming phonemic reading, and writing ability.


Reports on research that investigated the assumptions of the purpose of certain whole language. Concludes that, even in whole language authenticity may be missing. Helps educators deeply about what literacy lessons should be and how instruction can help develop strategies while maintaining the integrity of the Alphabetic Principle.


Examines three questions regarding: (1) views about the role of children’s literature in reading instruction; (2) how teachers implement literature programs in their classrooms; and (3) the nature and extent of the agreement between teacher perceptions and teaching practices.


Offers criticism of a research study by Miller which compared the effectiveness of whole language/language experience programs versus traditional instruction concerning the broad goals of whole language.

Shaw, Patricia A. “A Selected Review of Research Concerning the Whole Language and Traditional Approaches to Beginning Reading,” Journal of the Wisconsin Association for Reading Education, v35 n1 p3-17 Win 1991.

Identifies qualitative research on pre-literature and basal approaches to teaching first-grade children, whole language and traditional approaches to beginning reading, students’ views about the role of children’s literature and basal approaches to teaching reading, and different stages of reading development.


Criticizes the study by Stahl and Stahl’s longitudinal data, alternative interpretation concerning the broad goals of whole language.
Elementary Applications


Reviews changes made in a Milwaukee, Wisconsin district of the reading program, based on a philosophy that spoken, read, and written language must flow naturally from the child, be used in meaningful ways to communicate real need, and involve tradebooks. Discusses challenges which remain involving distribution of tradebooks, financial constraints, and developing methods of assessment consistent with the principles of whole language. Provides a list of the tradebooks used in the district and a tradebook evaluation guide.


Describes the Readers' Workshop and the Focused Study Reading Workshop. Offers them as a way to accommodate the characteristics of individuals, to respect the knowledge of readers who are at earlier stages of reading development, to establish a system which teaches problem solving, and to provide for active child involvement and ownership in the reading program.


Discusses problems associated with literature-based reading programs which use children's literature in the same way basal readers are used. Encourages teachers to allow students the freedom of exploring and learning from books without creating drill and vocabulary lessons from them.


Identifies the need to resolve inconsistencies between the whole language teaching approach and school, district, or state grading and evaluation policies.


Provides examples of how holistic procedures can be implemented by teachers who want to supplement the required basal. Demonstrates how student's reading ability, language acquisition, and communication skills can be strengthened as teachers activate prior knowledge, provide language-rich environments, consider reading/writing connections, and focus on thinking.


Describes a teacher's efforts to create an anthology of poems written by fourth grade-students. Includes whole language activities progressing from poetry reading and group writing to individual writings based on outdoor themes.


Identifies factors which whole language teachers view as important to the readability of the literature they select: print size, illustrations, repetition, vocabulary, predictability, and interest.


Clarifies the term "emergent literacy" and reviews significant informal assessment techniques, record-keeping systems, and reporting measures appropriate for emergent literacy. Discusses guidelines for whole language assessment and outlines steps to follow in developing local assessment measures.


Discusses the use of literature in the whole language approach. Describes the integration of a second grader's experiences with the curriculum, integrating the language arts in the middle school via study of the author as well as the book, and the integration of literature into the study of history.

Applications to Special Populations


Shares the findings of three classroom teachers and a university professor from their collaborative study of how whole language instruction affects the students that teachers worry about most.

Calfee, Robert. "Schoolwide Programs To Improve Literacy Instruction for Students at Risk." 1991. 33p. [ED 338 726]

Argues that a reformulation of reading and writing in the elementary grades can integrate the following three buzzwords of American education: (1) students at-risk for school failure; (2) the whole language movement; and (3) restructuring. Describes a schoolwide approach to the literate use of language, beginning with anecdotal accounts of two correlated programs, Project READ and the Inquiring School.


Contrasts philosophies of optimal reading instruction held by special and general education, which appear to be in stark conflict. Discusses approaches based on the work of cognitive psychologists that can be integrated into either direct instruction or whole language frameworks to address some of the nagging concerns about each of the
two models. Suggests that educators consider seriously the issues and criticisms raised by whole language authors.


Describes five generalizations for reading instruction with disabled and normal readers: (1) caring, positive relationship between teacher and student; (2) the role of re-reading and daily reading; (3) appropriate materials; (4) interest as a springboard to learning; and (5) the unification of instruction.

**Teachers’ Roles**


Describes experiences of a fifth-grade teacher who converted her classroom into a whole language classroom. Emphasizes student empowerment and decision making, cooperative learning, and flexibility.


Discusses events between the late sixties and the eighties which were major influences in empowering Australian reading teachers to break the basal habit. Explains reasons why teachers were so willing to break away from dependence on basal texts including the empowerment of teachers through political acceptance of alternatives, training, a grass roots movement, and cooperative effort.


Enlarges the phonics/whole language debate by focusing on the classroom teacher’s evolving role. Suggests a complex paradigm shift is needed from teacher’s transmission of knowledge to students’ transaction or engagement with constructing meaning.


Searches for some precision in the discourse of whole language with respect to the role of the teacher as expressed in words such as empowerment, control, predictability, and authenticity. Observes and interprets the practice of two successful whole language teachers to refine understandings of these concepts as they are enacted in classrooms.

Winners, Diane; Cassidy, Judith K. "Teaching Reading and Writing in a Whole Language Atmosphere: The Teacher’s Role," *Ohio Reading Teacher*, v24 n4 p14-17 Sum 1990.

Discusses the whole language teacher’s role in the development of children’s writing and creating a positive writing environment in the classroom.

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