The Foundations of Literacy

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Literacy Learning Before School

A large group of children enter school at five and with remarkable confidence take to the business of reading and writing almost immediately. During the 'readiness programme' they display considerable knowledge about the conventions of print, and often take advantage of the special environment to role-play themselves as writers—which they do in ways that imply some familiarity with the process. They make rapid progress in reading almost regardless of how they are taught, and they show up in the most diverse programmes.

The success of these children cannot be accounted for by any simple explanation—intelligence and language background account for only a part of the effect (Clay 1967). They are a quite disparate group on most measures, yet they show a remarkable consistency in the ways that they operate in the contexts of literacy—at least, they rapidly converge towards similar ways of operating. They display meaning-oriented strategies very early, and without being taught to do so self-correct a high proportion of their errors (Clay 1972). They read with considerable accuracy from the first books, often above the level of one error in twenty running words. By what processes do they recognize the majority of words so early, or in what context have they learned some of the words previously? On what basis do they know so sensitively when they have made a mistake?

In many cases these rapid beginners display a deep familiarity with a number of favourite books which they love to read repeatedly regardless of whether or not they have an audience. They spend much more of their time reading than other children, and display an equal fascination for, and facility with, writing (Robinson 1973). They come to print with high expectations, not only that they will succeed in unlocking its mysteries, but also that the mysteries are *worth* unlocking. Even though they are often quick in everything they do associated with print, they will persevere and puzzle and practise with remarkable attention to the task, and in the more relaxed setting of story-time, they usually listen with rapt attention for long periods despite distractions. How did they develop these facilitating behaviours?

A number of children enter school actually reading. The evidence suggests that they were not deliberately taught but learned in natural, developmental ways. (Clark 1976; Durkin 1966). This group, too, display few similar characteristics apart from their ability to read. A significantly common feature in their *background*, however, is the presence of a certain type of supportive and

emulative adult or peer who answers questions directly and readily without interfering with what the child is trying to do. What other factors in the pre-school environment may account for these very early readers?

A study of literacy-orientation in the pre-school years may provide answers to some of these questions and create a picture of what the entry to literacy in a developmental environment may look like. It is surprising how little this situation has been studied, and how little was known ten years ago about the conditions which produce our literacy-primed five-year-olds. It is almost as if the notion that nothing could be learned about reading outside the school environment had been accepted axiomatically by everyone. A few cliches summed up about all that was generally known. Everyone agreed that it was a 'Good Thing' to read to young children, and the virtues of the bed-time story were praised for reasons which remained vague and sentimental. Even in professional circles people joked tolerantly about the tiresome demand of infants to have their favourite books read again and again, and seemed to put this down to the quaintness of early childhood. As Holt (1975, pp.85–92) and others have pointed out, as soon as we regard youngsters as being 'cute' we become incapable of perceiving their behaviour accurately or taking its significance with due seriousness.

There was, indeed, a great deal of speculation about 'reading readiness', and people began talking about teaching 'pre-reading' skills, and setting up 'readiness programmes', without reference to the learning situations which actually produce the most literacy-ready children at school entry. Recently, there have even appeared a number of 'pre-literacy' programmes beginning with text-less books! More responsibly, research has begun to indicate that many of these purported pre-reading skills and activities which have been speculated into our schools seem to have little relationship to actual progress in reading. (Clay 1976a, p.75; Clark 1976, p.100).

Literacy learning in early childhood

Many parents in our culture read to their pre-school children regularly and provide them liberally with books and with the materials for writing. There may be a tendency for this custom to be associated with the middle class, but for our purposes this is probably not an important consideration. There are many other ways in which young children come in contact with print and we will consider these later. Our present purpose is to study the environment, the practices, and the outcomes of story reading and book handling in homes where these play a significant part in child-rearing.

Looking at the situation generally in the first instance, we find some surprising features. Most obviously, for the parents who engage in it, reading books to their youngsters provides deep satisfaction and pleasure. It is not engaged in as a duty or to achieve specific educational advantages for the child: it is a simple giving and taking of pleasure in which the parent makes no demands on the child, but is deeply gratified by the lively responses and questions that normally arise. It provides a stimulus for satisfying interaction between parent and child, different, richer and more wide-ranging than the mundane interactions of running the home. *The major purpose from the parent's point of view is to give pleasure, and the parent is sustained in this behaviour by the ample bonuses provided.*

From the child's point of view the situation is among the happiest and most secure in his experience. The stories themselves are enriching and deeply

satisfying—there is something emancipating in the experience which transcends normal time and space. It provides an expansion of mental room, and freedom within it. The nature of the relationship with the parent is very special to the situation: the parent is giving complete attention; there are none of the normal distractions most of the time; the parent is invariably positive and interesting, with an enhanced being from association with the richness of the literature; and there is a feeling of security and special worth arising from the quality of the attention being received. *Thus the child develops strongly positive associations with the flow of story language and with the physical characteristics of the books.*

For these children introduction to books and book language begins at a very early stage of infancy, long before the tasks of oracy are mastered. The infant begins to experiment with book language in its primary, oral form while still using baby grammar and struggling with the phonology of speech. Yet this time seems ideal for such exposure: the sooner book-orientated activities begin, the more likely it is that book-handling and experimental writing will become an important part of the infant's daily preoccupation. *Literacy orientation does not wait on accomplished oracy.*

The language of the books used by parents even with infants below the age of two years is remarkably rich in comparison with the caption books and early readers used in the first year at school. Although the adults are usually willing to explain meanings and answer questions, they are seldom very worried about making certain that their infants understand every last word or have direct sensory experience of every new concept. The stories are usually allowed to carry growing understanding from an initial grasp of their central meanings. Just as speech develops in an environment which is immensely richer than the immediate needs of the infant, so *the orientation to book language develops in an environment of rich exposure beyond immediate needs.* In both situations *the infant selects appropriate significant items to learn from an immensely rich range.*

From the very beginning the infant is involved in the selection of those books which will deeply preoccupy him: the request to 'read it again' arises from a natural and important developmental demand. Furthermore, in his own play at 'being a reader' the infant quickly avails himself of the opportunity to practise and experiment with a selection from the material made available through repeated readings. As in the mastery of other developmental tasks, *self-selection rather than adult direction characterizes the specific tasks which will be intensively practised by the infant.*

Reading-like behaviour—a neglected feature of early literacy

By far the most surprising and significant aspect of pre-school book-experience, however, is the independent activity of these very young children with their favourite books.[1] Almost as soon as the infant becomes familiarized with particular books through repetitive readings, he begins to play with them in reading-like ways. Attracted by the familiar object with which he has such positive associations, the infant picks it up, opens it, and begins attempting to retrieve for himself some of the language and its intonations. Almost unintelligible at first, this reading-like play rapidly becomes picture stimulated, page-matched, and story-complete.

The time spent each day in these spontaneous attempts to retrieve pleasurable book experiences is often greatly in excess of the time spent in listening to books being read by the adults being emulated. The infant attends for surprisingly long periods of time until each book experience has achieved a

semantic completeness, and the process may be repeated immediately with the same or another book.

Before going any further we should sample some of the behaviour to determine what sort of processes are in operation. First of all we will look at the behaviour in a fairly mature form after three years of exposure to books.[2]

Leslie has just turned four and will obviously be a high progress reader when she begins school. She is enjoying Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are'*—which has been read to her four times. Note the way in which she determines the precise relationship between the story and reality as she 'reads' the title:

> " 'Where the Wild Things Are'—see? (sighs) I'm scared of these things but they're only in books—not in real countries. Only in books."

We now sample her reconstruction of the text beginning about a quarter of the way through the book.

Text	**Re-enactment**
and an ocean tumbled by with a private boat for Max and he sailed off through night and day	Max stepped into his private boat and sailed off one day and one night
and in and out of weeks and almost over a year to where the wild things are.	then when he came to where the wi—— OO look at that thing—he's blowing smoke out of his nose
And when he came to the place where the wild things are they roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws	and where the wild things are they lashed their terrible claws—*oh no!* they lashed their terrible teeth—Hrmm!— (Interviewer: 'What did they gnash?') They *lashed* their terrible claws!—showed their terrible claws and showed their terrible yellow eyes (but we've got blue eyes)
till Max said "BE STILL!" and tamed them with a magic trick of staring into all their yellow eyes without blinking once and they were frightened and called him the most wild thing of all	till Max said, "BE STILL!" that's what he said. One of these ones have toes (turns the page to find the toed monster) Toes! (Laughs) until Max said "BE STILL!" into all the yellow eyes without blinking once. And all the wild things said, "You wild thing!" (Note the elegant transformation into direct speech.)
and made him king of all the wild things. "And now," cried Max, "let the wild rumpus start!"	And then Max said, "Let the wild rumpus start!"
No text. (Picture of wild dance)	That's got no words, has it? He'd better pull his tail out of the way.

The outstanding feature of this behaviour, particularly if it can be heard, is the deep meaning that it has for the child—the process displays language in proper use. The fact that 'gnash' is related to and transmuted into 'lashed' is not a matter for concern—as the interviewer obviously felt in making her pleasant attempt at a correction. It will not be long before this peripheral item comes under control. What we have here is another instance of the sort of approximation that goes on freely in speech learning. Another obvious feature is that the conventions of print are being mastered: Leslie knows that the message comes from print and not from the picture, she knows where to begin the book, and turns pages with unfailing precision.

A superficial assumption about this reading-like behaviour would be that it is a form of rote learning, based on repetitive patterning without deep comprehension or emotional response—that it would produce attempts at mere surface verbal recall. Leslie's performance clearly refutes this: at the very least, some of the parts she doesn't remember are filled from her own verbal inventory in an encoding activity springing from deep understanding.

A clearer picture of the actual linguistic and cognitive processes going on may be obtained from studying the re-enactment behaviour of very young children and observing its characteristic development in older children.[3]

A book that proves very popular and intelligible even for infants under two years of age is *Are You My Mother* by P.D. Eastman. This is a favourite book of David, aged two years no months. His control of syntax is still at a very primitive level yet he handles many aspects of book response with a remarkable range of skills which point to several months or prior learning.

Page	Text	Re-enactment
3	A mother bird sat on her egg.	The mummy bird sat at an egg.
4	The egg jumped. "Oh oh!" said the mother bird. "My baby will be here! He will want to eat."	Ow ow! A bumble bird baby here. ('Bumble' is a regressive form of 'Mummy' in David's speech.) Someping a eat. ('a' always used for 'to' and 'for').
6	"I must get something for my baby bird to eat!" she said. "I will be back." So away she went.	Must baby bird a (i.e. 'to') eated. Dat way went. Fly a gye (Fly to the sky).
8	The egg jumped. It jumped, and jumped, and jumped! Out came the baby bird.	Ig jumped and jumped. Out baby bird!
10	"Where is my mother?" he said. He looked for her.	Whis my mother? She look a her and look her.
12	He looked up. He did not see her. He looked down. He did not see her.	Her look up, look down, see her—(plus shake of head.) (Perhaps meaning, 'She can't see her'. Throughout, David shows no surface language for negation, yet operates meaningfully on what must be a comprehended deep structure.)
14	"I will go and look for her," he said. So away he went.	Look down. *Look* her! Way went. Way went. (The second 'look' is signalled by intonation to mean, 'I will look for her'—a typical syntactic elision by babies—cf. 'kiss' meaning 'give me a kiss'.)
16	Down, out of the tree he went. Down, down, down! It was a long way down.	Down, down, down, down, went. Down, down, down the bay went.
18	The baby bird could not fly. He could not fly, but he could walk. "Now I will go and find my mother," he said.	Could fly. Could walk. ('Could fly' turned into a syntactic negative by a violent shake of the head!) Now fin find mother (a self-correction).

This is as far as we will follow David. The point has been made that even at the stage where David is using baby grammar, what the linguists call 'pivot

structures', he is still entering into book experience with considerable sophistication, especially in terms of identifying the action, page-by-page, carrying the whole story forward in terms of plot, and getting tremendous gratification from his own performance.

Now we will study a version by Robyn, aged two and a half, and youngest of a large book-oriented family. She enters with great gusto on the second sentence of page 8, beating out the rhythms of the language with a stick on each page.

Page	Text	Re-enactment
8	The egg jumped. It jumped, and jumped! Out came the baby bird.	It jumped and jumped. Out the baby bird. (We still have the remains of pivot structure, but Robyn adds the definite article. She then turns two pages impulsively as she is in the habit of doing.)
12	He looked up. He did not see her. He looked down. He did not see her.	He looked up and down. (Now another two pages.)
16	Down, out of the tree he went. Down, down, down! It was a long way down.	Looked down, down, down, down. (Another two pages.)
20	He did not know what his mother looked like. He went right by her. He did not see her.	Go wound the big wock.
22	He came to a kitten. "Are you my mother?" He said to the kitten. The kitten just looked and looked. It did not say a thing.	"Are you my mother?" "No said the cat."
24	The kitten was not his mother, so he went on. Then he came to a hen. "Are you my mother?" he said to the hen. "No," said the hen.	Den e came a hen. "Are you my mudder?" "No," said the hen. ('Den he came a hen' is a slight advance on David's grammar.)

Robyn becomes confused by the syntactically complex recapitulation sections in the following pages. We will take up her performance at page 44:

Page	Text	Re-enactment
44	Just then, the baby bird saw a big thing. This must be his mother! "There she is!" he said. "There is my mother!"	Den e came a big thing. "Are you my brudder—mudder big thing?" (Notice the early incidence of self-corrective behaviour.)
46	He ran right up to it. "Mother, Mother! Here I am, Mother!" he said to the big thing.	"No," said mudder big thing.
48	But the big thing just said, "Snort." "Oh, you are not my mother," said the baby bird. "You are a Snort. I have to get out of here!"	Itsa Snort!

50	But the baby bird could not get away. The Snort went up. It went way, way up. And up, up, up went the baby bird.	Went up, up, up, up. "Werya going put may—baby bird?" In the back the tree. (Self-correction of an earlier b/m phonemic confusion as she targets the first syllable of 'baby', cf. 'Brudder—mudder' above. Also David's 'bumble' equals 'mummy'.)

The first thing we notice in these two performances is the distance of the rendering from the text, especially syntactically. Yet there is no question here but that *deep* processing is going on. It is being expressed in syntactical operations at the level of spoken language mastery—both infants use their own primitive grammatical operations. They have encoded the *meanings* of the story into a unique structural form. They have remembered very little at the surface verbal level: what they have remembered most firmly is meanings.

Both infants self-correct what *they* perceive to be their errors—as we would find them doing also in their normal spoken language. They are mastering different aspects of the language at what might be called a 'working face' where they are making progress. This 'face' is quite narrow and no outsider would be able to determine exactly where it was placed. Any interference by an outsider is likely to be obstructive or harmful because it is not likely to be understood by the infant—as we saw in the 'gnash' case above. Yet both infants are working very conscientiously at their own current language 'face'. Both are monitoring their own output correctively *and* in confirmation of appropriate performance: their intonation patterns—not available, of course, in print—and the meaningful connectedness of the narrative, indicate that where self-correction does not occur, they are justifiably satisfied with their performance.

Even more complex syntactical operations can be seen in the performance of Emelia at three and a half years tackling the recapitulation section that was too much for Robyn. She displays most of the forms of normal, mature syntax, but this does not mean that she will pattern the text perfectly. She too encodes from meanings into an appropriate syntax which often stands in transformational relationship to the original text (like a translation into a different grammatical form).

Page	Text	Re-enactment
28	Then he came to a dog. "Are you my mother?" he said to the dog.	Now he came to a dog. "Are you my mother?" he said.
29	"I am not your mother. I am a dog," said the dog.	"No!" said the dog. "I'm a dog!"
30	The kitten was not his mother. The hen was not his mother. The dog was not his mother.	Den . . . so . . . The kitten wasn't his mother. The hen wasn't his mother. The dog wasn't his mother. (The 'Den . . . so' indicates awareness of a special structure coming up, and gives time for the thinking ahead required to get it rolling.)
31	So the baby bird went on. Now he came to a cow.	So the . . . so the . . . so the baby bird went on. Then he went to a cow. (The textual 'Now' or 'Then' beginnings are interchanged as at p.28, i.e. no word-by-word processing of print is going on.)
32	"Are you my mother?" he said to the cow.	"Are you my mother?" he said.
33	"How could I be your mother?" said the cow? "I am a cow."	"How could I be your mother? I'm a COW!"
34	The kitten and the hen were not his mother. The dog and the cow were not his mother.	Um . . . um . . . ummmm. The cow wasn't his mother, the dog wasn't his mother. The he . . . The kitten and the hen weren't his mother. (Starting at the bottom indicates that Emelia is not secure about the directional principle involved. The re-run at 'hen' indicates her awareness that this difficult structure changes from a single recapitulation to a double-barrelled one.)
35	Did he have a mother?	"Do I have a mother?" (Transformed from indirect to direct speech, and from past to present tense.)
36/7	"I did have a mother," said the baby bird. "I know I did. I have to find her. I will. I WILL!"	"Did I have a mother? Yes I'm did I had a mother. I know I did have a mudder. (Regression) I have to look for her, I do, I do, I do and I DO!" ('find' becomes 'look for'. The intensive construction of the text in 'I WILL' is perfectly echoed in the "I do" sequence with the intensive use of "and".)

Characteristic of her age, Emelia has difficulty in articulating the 'th' and 'r' phonemes in the next example. This is about the only thing which reminds us that she is still an infant making transition into the early childhood stage displayed by Leslie, who is six months older. We continue with Emelia's performance.

44/5	Just then, the baby bird saw a thing. This must be his mother! "There she is!" he said. "There is my mother!"	Then he saw a big Snort. (From p.48) "Dere, dere's my mother. Dere she is!" (To herself) Is that his mother? Naahohoho! (Big laugh.)
46/7	He ran right up to it. "Mother, Mother! Here I am, Mother!" he said to the big thing.	Then e went fwigh up to it. Said, "Mother, Mother! Here I am!" to the big HING.
48/9	But the big thing just said, "Snort." "Oh, you are not my mother," said the baby bird. "You are a Snort. I have to get out of here!"	But the big hing said, "Snor-or-ort!" And the . . . "Oh," said the baby. "You not my mother!"said the baby bird. "You are a Snort! I hafta get outa here!"

Emelia's false starts as in 'and the' and repetitions as in 'Dere' are automatic predictive devices which act as time fillers while she engages consciously in organizing the coming structure—a type of advance organizer. We often see this device in reading behaviour and fail to understand what is happening. Such a device is a useful strategy when confidence is low, or when the text becomes difficult. We should not interpret it as inaccuracy or error.

Very similar in many respects to Emelia, Leslie displays the great sophistication of mature reading-like behaviour. She has no difficulty in transforming to direct speech where the text uses reported speech and vice versa, making all the appropriate adjustments for grammatical agreement. The embroidery of the text indicates the semantic energy generated by the activity, and as a sub-vocal strategy will have powerful effects on the efficiency of Leslie's reading when she enters school.

4 The egg jumped and jumped. And the mother bird said, "Oh, oh! I'd better go get some food for my baby bird to eat, 'cos he'll want to EAT."

6 And she said, "I will be back in a moment".

8 The egg jumped, and jumped, and JUMPED! Till the baby bird came out.

10 He said, "WHERE IS MY MUMMY? I'm going to go out and look for her."

12 He looked down, up down, up. He could not see her.

14 "I will go and look for her." He fought it was a path—see? Fought it was a path, doesn't he? But he'll fall—he really will—see?

Note the formality of the language, except when Leslie gets excited by the story: it approximates the tones and structures of the written dialect even when it departs from the text.

Page	Text	Re-enactment
26	The kitten was not his mother. The hen was not his mother. So the baby bird went on. "I have to find my mother!" he said. "But where?" "Where is she? Where could she be?"	And—so—the pussy went on, the hen went on, the baby bird went on. (Shades of 'Chicken Licken', another book Leslie is enjoying at the time.) I have to find my mother. "Where can she be?"
32	"Are you my mother?" he said to the cow? "How could I be your mother?" said the cow. "I am a cow."	He saw a cow. The baby bird said. "Are you my mother?" And the cow said, "HOW COULD I BE YOUR MOTHER?" said the cow. And the cow said, "I am a COWWW!" Hahmm!
34	The kitten and the hen were not his mother. The dog and the cow were not his mother. Did he have a mother?	So the pussy wasn't his mother, the hen wasn't his mother, the dog wasn't his mother, the cow wasn't his mother. And the baby bird said, "Did I have a mother?" An e DID! (Note the fluent transformation of the grammatical structure—similar in nature but more elaborated than Emelia's.)
36	"I did have a mother," said the baby bird. "I know I did. I have to find her I will. I WILL!"	What a sad face. That one says—"Did he have a mother? Did he have a mother? HE DID!"
38	Now the baby bird did not walk. He ran! Then he saw a car. Could that old thing be his mother? No, it could not. The baby bird did not stop. He ran on and on.	Now the baby bird did not run—he ran. (Leslie is going too fast to self-correct here—another sound strategy). He shoulda got in there—eh? It'd keep him warm. It would keep stopping the breath coming on him. He shoulda just sitted down in there—eh? Yes.

As Leslie completes the story it is fascinating to hear the lively and often subtle intonation patterns she uses in recreating the text, and to see the way in which she monitors and self-corrects her own performance. It is an experience of remarkable gaiety and verve.

During the leisurely period of three to four years of active literacy-learning before school entry most of these children become fascinated in print as a mystery that is well worth solving. They begin to play with writing in the same way as they play with reading, producing writing-like scribble, the central feature of which, for them, is that it *carries a message*. They learn to write their names, and explore creating letters and letter-like symbols with a variety of writing devices. They show intense interest in the print around them on signs, labels, advertisements, and TV, and often imitate these forms in inventive ways. By the time they enter school they are likely to know the alphabet and be able to recognize many of the letters in both lower and upper case forms, and name them. We will look more closely at this behaviour later.

Many of the same principles that we have been studying in reading-like behaviour of pre-schoolers are also clearly evidenced by very young children who have been exploring writing in a developmental environment in which approximation was tolerated. In a fascinating article entitled 'Invented Spelling in the Open Classroom', Carol Chomsky (1971) includes a lengthy excerpt from a 1970 thesis by Charles Read, who studied the spontaneous writing behaviour of pre-schoolers. He describes one of his cases as follows:

> *The beginning of spelling*
> The beginning of reading and spelling for Maria was typical of what parents reported, in that parental teaching was in response to the child's expressed interests and was of the most informal kind—there was no "training" in reading and writing . . . Maria, an Australian girl, recognized the letters BP on service station signs at 18 months. She then generalized this notion, calling all letters (not gas stations) "BP's". She quickly learned to recognize and name the letters that she saw in signs, licence plates, and books. After BP, Maria learned A and C (from books with ABC on the cover), then the M of her name. With three children quite close in age at home, her mother started using M to distinguish the toys and other objects that belonged to Maria. The mother emphasized that she told Maria the names of letters only when she asked, and used letters as a convenience only after Maria could recognize them. The informality of this process is illustrated in that although she could recognize all the letters before age two, she did not "learn the alphabet"—in the usual sequence—until age four. At twenty to twenty-two months, Maria had begun to learn the sounds that certain letters spell, beginning with the idea that "*b* says 'buh' ". On her third birthday Maria's parents gave her a blackboard; at that time she could write most of the letters according to their sounds . . .
>
> At the age of three Maria began to go to an Australian nursery school two days a week. According to the mother, the school was comparable to an American kindergarten, but somewhat more formal. The teacher gave no specific training in reading and writing, but a great deal of what Maria's mother considered 'ear training', including listening to and telling stories. Sometime during this year, Maria began to write some words, beginning with DADE (Daddy).

The behaviour of the children was marked by an independent search for the significance of writing from an analysis of their own spoken language—the behaviour was essentially self-regulated and the spelling principles were largely intuited from their knowledge of the *names* of the letters. For instance:

> One child of 4 produced this "get-well" message:
> 2 DADDY I EM SRY TAT U R SIC NED LUV DADDY

And a 5-year-old wrote:
DER MUMOY I HOP YOO OR FEELIG BEDR I AM MKIG THS PRESIM FOOR YOO BI DIANE

It seems that the alphabetic method is alive and well among pre-schoolers! It was something of a surprise in our study of reading-like behaviour that the infants engaged in this activity for their own satisfaction and generally without an audience. It seems that even in this early 'writing-like' behaviour, where we would expect *communication* to be the driving motivation, the same principle holds. Read says:

> Some children wrote messages to others who they knew could not read. Although they enjoyed having their parents read what they had written and sometimes used writing purposefully, their writings were usually messages intended for no one, stories apparently for their own amusement. Furthermore, the good readers often had more difficulty in reading their own writing (a few days later) than in reading standard orthography, and they would read their own writing only when asked to. The difficulty was increased by the distortions, such as ill-formed letters and sequences of words that wind in various directions around the page, that make a child's writing more difficult to read for extraneous reasons, but sometimes in reading their own writing, the children stumbled over just those features that distinguished it from standard spelling. It seems clear that they distinguished writing rather sharply from reading; the former was more fundamentally an expression than a communication.

We will consider the application of these principles as described by Carol Chomsky to the classroom at a later point, but in terms of pre-school behaviour it is clear that the incidence of writing-like behaviour complements reading-like behaviour and displays the same characteristics of personal initiative and approximation.

The relationship between reading and writing at the earliest stages is only beginning to be worked out. Marie Clay (1975, p.74), in her comprehensive treatment of early writing development, says:

> One frequently sees a statement which implies, 'How can the child write words until he can read them?' (This book's) analysis suggests the opposite point of view . . . If a writing program fosters the development of self-direction in locating, exploring and producing appropriate analysis of printed forms, then one is tempted to say, 'How can any child who is not exceptional learn to read until he can write some words?'

And Read reported:

> Among the original spellers, those who had begun to spell before they began to read predominated by approximately a three-to-one margin. Some children began to spell a few months or even a year before reading, some began reading and writing at about the same time, several parents were uncertain, and there is some vagueness in dating the beginning of either activity, but there were clear cases of both kinds.

Margaret Clark (1976) in her Glasgow study of thirty-two children who read before five reports:

> Already before four years of age, ten of the children were also interested in writing. Some began by copying words, other letters, a few wrote their names or little messages—while one wrote the football scores. (pp.51-2)

In a short monograph, *"Write Now, Read Later": An Evaluation*, Marie Clay (1977) summarizes the scarce information available on this topic, and concludes with these words:

> Perhaps the challenge is this. How can we get young children to want to hear the sound segments in words and to search for these on their own initiative? That is worth thinking about. And *why is it easier to go from sound to print than vice versa?* That is a question worthy of an answer. (p.13 Italics mine—and we consider an answer in Chapter 5.)

At this stage we could summarize some of the major characteristics of these children as they enter school primed to become rapid literacy learners (unless they suffer radical setbacks of some form).

Literacy oriented pre-schoolers

Children with a background of book experience since infancy develop a complex range of attitudes, concepts, and skills predisposing them to literacy. They are likely to continue into literacy on entering school with a minimum of discontinuity.

They have developed high expectations of print, knowing that books bring them special pleasures which they can obtain in no other way.

They have built a set of oral models for the language of books and practised these models to the point where they have become almost as natural and familiar as the forms of conversation: they have developed native language control of the fundamental forms of written dialect.

They are familiar with written symbols as signs which are different in their interpretation from normal visual experience, and have become interested in them to the point of experimenting in writing them.

They have begun to understand the complex conventions of direction and position in print, knowing, for instance, that the message unfolds from the print itself, and from top to bottom of the page.

They have learned to listen for long periods to continuous language of story-length related in terms of plot, sequence, or central ideas.

They are able to attend to language without reference to the immediate situation around them, and respond to it in complex ways by creating images from their past experiences—they have learned to operate vicariously. This has opened a new dimension of fantasy and imagination, allowing them to create images of things never experienced or entitities which do not exist in the real world. By these means they are able to escape from the bonds of the present into the past and the future.

The concept of literacy set

Such children are all set up for reading and writing—they are *ready to go*. All their faculties have been trained to work in appropriate and harmonious ways whenever they are in contact with books or stories. Using the term 'set' in this psychological sense to mean an ability to tune in with appropriate action, we could say that the formidable range of early skills and attitudes which we have sampled constitutes a 'set towards literacy' or a 'literacy set'.

Children who have developed a strong literacy set begin to operate immediately and automatically in appropriate ways whenever they are faced with print. We should spend a little time exploring this concept, for the primary incentives to read and write at all levels, and the readiness to develop appropriate skills, are dependent on it.

A further example, Gregory, at the age of 4.0 displays many of the features of a sound literacy set. He is retrieving *Kittens* by Mollie Clarke. In his spoken

language development, Gregory has not yet quite mastered such grammatical problems as irregular verbs, as in his 'drived' for 'drove'. This is another indication that the processing is at a deep syntactical level rather than a simple recall of the surface language which was modelled repetitively through listening to the story being read.

Text	Re-enactment
Here go the kittens with a fishing rod, and a red basket, and a bucket. This kitten goes to the pond to catch a fish.	This kitten goes to the pond to get a—fish.
But here come two ducks. The ducks say, "Quack, quack, quack! This pond belongs to us. Run away kitten! Poor kitten runs so fast that he falls into the pond. The little fish laughs.	But here comes some two little ducks. And the ducks said, "This is *my* pond. Run away little kitten." He runs so fast he fell into the pond. The little fish laughed. (Syntax adjusted from present to past and back again. The familiar concept 'my' over-rides the literary syntax of 'belong to'. Emotional reaction and indentification with the characters is at a high level.)
But along comes a kind girl. The kind girl drives away the ducks. She picks up poor kitten. She says, "Never mind, kitten! I know a kind boy. I will ask him to catch a big fish for you."	The little girl came and drived away the ducks. She picked up poor kitten. "Never mind, kitten. I wi——I know a kind boy. I will tell him to get a fish for you." (Note the rapid self-correction. Inflected verb forms are changed to retain grammatical agreement within the remembered structure.)
This kitten goes to the farm to find an egg. She has her little red basket. Brown Hen says, "Cluck, cluck, cluck! Here is a beautiful brown egg to put in your red basket."	This kitten goes to the farm to get a egg. "Cluck——" What now? (Request for aid—he was actually worrying ahead to the complexities of the next sentence.) "Cluck, cluck", said the hen. "Here's a beautiful egg," said the brown egg—hen. (The child is worrying about the complex structure one sentence ahead of his utterance—even the linguistic operation of a young child is immensely complicated and beyond our ability to analyse fully. Note the self-correction on semantic grounds.)
But here comes a barking dog. Barking Dog says, "Bow-wow, bow-wow. This is my farm-yard. Run away kitten!" Poor kitten runs so fast that she drops her red basket. The beautiful brown egg is broken!	But here comes the barking dog. The dog said "Bow-wow, bow-wow! This is *my* farmyard. Run away kitten!" (Very animated.) He runs so fast the beautiful brown egg is broken. He ran so fast he dropped his—he dropped his—basket (Knows there's something wrong but proceeds to next page. Intonation patterns are recreated as a major part of response. Syntax is the guiding road map.)
But along comes a kind boy. The kind boy drives away the dog. He picks up poor kitten. He says, "Never mind, kitten! I know a kind girl. I will ask her to find an egg for you."	Here comes a kind boy. "Never mind little kitten." He drived away the dog. (This is said with a self-correcting inflection as he tries to achieve a logical sequence.) "Never mind little kitten. I know a kind girl. I'll get—I will tell her to ca——get a egg for you." (The elaborated vocabulary of written dialect—as in 'ask'—has not yet been strongly enough modelled for utterance. But compare the confident use of 'fetch' on the next page. Highly appropriate substitutions are made.)
This kitten goes to the bridge to fetch some water in his bucket. But here comes an angry goat. Angry goat says, "Maa, maa, maa! This is my bridge. Run away kitten!"	This kitten goes to the bridge to fetch some water. (This time he gets the literary word 'fetch' even though he had replaced 'ask' by 'get' on the previous page.) But here comes a angry goat. The angry goat say, "Go a——Run away little kitten!" (This experience of recreating a text can proceed at a pace which is both natural and satisfying. The laboured pace of later early-reading can be tolerated if it has been preceded by this type of processing.)
Poor kitten runs so fast that he falls over. He spilt all his water. But see who comes to help him! The kind girl, and the kind boy and the two kittens, come to help him.	He runs so fast he falls over and spilt *aaall* his water. See who comes. The kind boy, the kind girl, the two kittens (pause) come to help him. (Self-monitoring is sufficiently careful to trigger completion of the structure.)
The kind girl puts an egg in the basket. The kind boy fills the bucket and catches a big fish. The kittens say, "Thank you!" and run home to Mother Cat. Mother Cat takes the water, the egg, and the fish, and makes a big pie!	The kind boy catched the fish and the kind boy got a egg. The kind girl fetched some water. And that's the end. (Prompt, "What did the kittens do then?") They said, "Thank you!" And then brought it home to Mother Cat. Mother Cat made a big pie! (The notions of plot, climax, and story-resolution are fully comprehended. This child displays a strong 'literacy set'. He is ready to begin processing print itself, and will persist through considerable frustration.)

In actual fact Gregory had a further year of consolidating experience before he entered school and began to be taught to read. His taste for stories during that year became much more sophisticated. He loved highly structured stories that had a special bounce to the language, like *The Magic Fish* by Freya Littledale, and books in the Ainsworth and Ridout Series, 'A Book for Me to Read' such as *A Name of My Own*. In these books his recall of the exact language became very precise, because that is required for the full savouring of the special effects. His self-corrections were directed to getting the language dead right from memory, intonation and all, and the subtle processing we see in the example above

became sub-vocal and seldom appeared on the surface. In those instances where it did, he tended to use a re-run technique, returning to the beginning of the sentence to get a semantically complete utterance, and to savour it in its perfect form. For instance in the Ainsworth and Ridout story, *Huff the Hedgehog*, he says:

> I'm Huff the Hedgehog, and I want my dinner.
> If I don't get it soon, I'll g——
> If I don't have it soon, I'll get thinner and thinner.

The potential jangle of the two 'gets' offends his ear. This re-running is an important and effective strategy in the early reading stage ahead (Clay 1972a, p.19)—it provides insurance against becoming syntactically or semantically tangled, and re-illuminates the context before a problem of word-recognition is faced or corrected.

The marks of emergent literacy

From the examples we have been studying we can summarize some of the learning that has been achieved in the interactive and productive situation of the bed-time story. The examples of very early behaviour are particularly useful to us, because there the children are vocalizing most of their problem-solving.

Motivational factors

Predominant is the personal joy and motivational strength displayed in the behaviour. These children are impelled by the deeply rewarding structure of the listening situation into independent practice similar in its cyclic pattern of reinforcement to the practising of spoken language. They are sustained in approximation, self-correction, repetitive practice and modification by very powerful reinforcement contingencies of an intrinsic kind. Almost all book experiences have been highly satisfying so that the children gradually develop unshakably positive expectations of print, and powerful motives to learn how to interpret it for themselves. The quality of the enjoyment is global, evidenced in the facial expressions and toe-curling excitement that were going on throughout Gregory's retrieval, or in the page-beating displayed by Robyn.

Linguistic factors

Linguistically, the children are operating at a level of deep semantic processing, they are manipulating their own syntax in relationship to the deep syntactical structure of the text, and they are sorting out possibilities, striving to maintain grammatical agreement while experimenting with complex transformations. They are learning how to throw a syntactic rope across the abyss of meaning before they shuttle vocabulary over to the other side—a sort of flying-fox strategy of encoding. This process requires thinking ahead of where the voice has got to, in its realization of the surface level of language. It is a multi-level cognitive process going on simultaneously with the articulation. Another image for this would be that the child is engaged in a preparatory syntactic and semantic mapping of the tangled verbal path ahead.

The vocabulary chosen to fill the unfolding sentence-slots displays highly appropriate substitutions. New content words tend to be remembered and learned first, as in 'private boat' or 'Snort' or 'drived', while structure words (syntactical markers such as auxiliary verbs) tend to be drawn more frequently from the children's spoken language, as in 'look for' instead of 'find', or 'go get' for 'go and get'. Only slowly are the elaborated structure words of written dialect brought under control, as in 'said the cow' or 'I will ask'. Approximating is crucial and healthy: 'lashed' this week will become 'gnashed' next week. Could fly. Could walk' this month becomes 'He couldn't fly, but he could walk' six months later.

The language of the children is remarkably alive intonationally—vigorous and full-blooded. The power of the intonational system to carry and refine meaning has become deeply associated with the written dialect for these children—the tunes of language ring in their ears and sing in their voices. When their pace is slowed temporarily during the early-reading stage at school, these children will continue to recreate the intonations crucial to meaning—it has become second nature to them. They will not be trapped into mindlessness by the slow, word-by-word visual checking of early reading.

Closely allied to this because of intonational involvement is the grasp of literary idioms—those special ways of saying things that are unique to particular utterances and sometimes depart from rule, such as, 'Never mind why!' or, 'That very night' or 'He made mischief'. These special literary forms are among the first things learned whole, perhaps because of their strong intonation, their freshness, and their emotionally complete semantic sting.

Operational factors

Self-regulating operations The most complex aspect of the children's behaviour involves *process*: they are learning much more than simple linguistic items, they are mastering ways of operating, strategies for generating language from meaning. They monitor their own output, yea-ing and nay-ing as they go: one part of their attention tastes their success or otherwise in encoding the deeply understood meanings. On the surface, this throws up self-corrections of an increasingly refined kind, entailing the strategy of semantic and syntactic re-running of confused sentences. All of the delicate operations of the task involving the organism at several levels, are under personal control. A product of this self-regulating behaviour is the steady flow of intrinsic reinforcement, confirming, sustaining, relaxing and restoring. Where in many typical reading programmes after five we find children unable to sustain attention through a tiny caption reader, and where the teacher sometimes 'sets' two or three pages of a reader to prepare at home, here we see children just turning two years old able to sustain attention for the full sixty-four pages of *Are You My Mother!*

Predictive operations We have already drawn attention to evidence of Gregory's concern foraging ahead into the difficulties of the sentence following the one he is uttering—he is operating predictively. By their ability to make appropriate substitutions, *all* of the children display a powerful predictive strategy. Placed in the interactive situation of the bed-time story as it is developed by the most sensitive parents, these children make appropriate predictions during the *first* reading of a story. This is particularly so when the story has a reliable structure of a repetitive or cyclic kind, as so many fine stories for the age group do.'Father bear's bed was too hard. Mother bear's bed was too —— . Baby bear's bed was j —— r ——'. In such ways as this, these children learn how to use every clue available to find the precise word to fill a slot—even those of plot and story structure which lie beyond sentence limits. There is no more powerful strategy for decoding than this predictive search of the available verbal inventory—in reading, it is at the heart of word-solving skill.

Using the structures of written dialect Infants are not born with the ability to understand and use cognitive structures and logical processes—these must be learned. Written language is distinctive in using a wider range of such structures, more rigorously developed, more crucial to understanding, and more sophisticated in their refinements, than occurs anywhere in conversational language. Lack of experience with these encompassing structures of logical arrangement, temporal sequence, cause and effect, plot, and so on, can present tremendous impediments in learning to read.

For three to four years of unpressured learning, these children work assiduously at understanding complex cognitive structures, and the stories they love abound in examples of the most central structures involved in early cognitive development—opposites, hierarchies (small, middle-sized, big), structures of logical relationship or consequence (because, if . . ., then . . ., however . . .). Often these structures are manipulated in their reversible functions at a quite early age, as in 'Little Red Hen', or 'The Five Little Chickens'. By the time they start school these children are very familiar with all the important cognitive structures which give stories their shape and meaning.

Context-free operations Conversational language takes much of its meaning from the real situation in which it occurs. The sensory situation constantly provides confirmation and clarification of what is being said, and a glance at the speaker's face and his gestures, and an ear to his intonations, provide further clues to meaning. Normal spoken language is therefore a kind of composite message coming from language in association with sensory context. In consequence, spoken language structures may be incomplete or ambiguous in themselves without being confusing, because the situation adds its own components to the meaning. Written language cannot afford to be incomplete in these ways—it must carry the *total* load of meaning without ambiguity. This is the main reason why the written dialect is so different from conversational language. It is more formal, more complete, and more textured than spoken language, and to avoid ambiguity it has distinctive structures which do not appear in spoken dialects. For instance, people hardly ever use words like 'nevertheless' in speech.

We can call most speech 'situational language' and most writing 'non-situational language'. Learning to operate linguistically without reference to the immediate situation constitutes a much bigger task than is generally recognized. Many children enter school quite unable to interpret language which is not supported by the sensory situation around them. They are so used to gaining sensory confirmation or clarification from their eyes and ears that they become insecure and disoriented when they are denied such support. This is the major function of illustrations in early reading: they are special mediating symbols which replace the real environments of conversation until they can be fully replaced by mental images in mature reading.

The bed-time story situation is neutral in relationship to outside sensory stimuli except those of the human voice. The children we have been studying rapidly learn to transfer their outward-looking attention to pictures and to mental images induced by the language. They gradually learn how to operate in non-situational modes—to obtain total messages from language without external sensory aid. They learn to operate vicariously in the way that written language demands.[5]

This non-situational way of operating has its own semantic and syntactic

conventions triggering responses of a quite different kind from those triggered by speech. For instance, when we hear a demonstrative such as 'this' or 'those' in speech, we look around us to find what is being referred to. The same demonstratives in written language require a quite different response—we must think back in the story or the discourse to locate what the 'this' or the 'those' refers to. Pronouns such as 'they' or 'hers' must be interpreted with the same backward-looking search. Non-situational operations of written discourse are time-oriented and energize memory for the previous part of the discourse—the language or the meanings must be held in mind in order to interpret some of the structures. Situational operations in speech, using the same syntactic signals, are here-and-now oriented and energize sensory exploration of the environment in which the communication is occurring. (When conversation is about something which happened in a different place or at a different time, these same signals ask for the 'as-if' explorations of that mental image, and the situational mode is thus maintained. Hence the way conversation about a film or even a story gets peppered with such structures as, 'Well this man points the gun at this other fellow, see, and he just grins and nods his head over to the corner of the room behind the other chap, and he turns—and there's this girl with the automatic pointed at his head.')

This is a complex and confusing matter—as the last four paragraphs have indicated! Perhaps we can simply say at this point that children exposed to book-language at an early age learn in this arena to take more of their meanings from the language and from their own *images* of reality than they would do in conversational speech. They are freed from the necessity or desire to clarify, complete or confirm meanings by looking around them. This is what we mean by 'non-situational operations' or 'situation-free modes of understanding'.

Imaginative operations Finally in this operational field, the sort of children we have been studying have learned to use imagination in powerful ways. Stories are usually about the inner world of emotion, intention, behaviour or human purpose—things for which there are no clear verbal equivalents. We all know how vague and empty 'I love you' can be if not backed up by action and given body in metaphor. The images we use to represent and to explore the inner world operate in complex metaphorical ways which turn sensory experience into symbolic language. The images are often untrue to sensory experience itself and thereby signal their metaphorical purpose. The wild things of Sendak's powerful story about love and fear and power exist nowhere except in the mind, yet they are amalgams of sensory images. Lesley says they don't live in real countries, only in books, and so places herself in a proper imaginative relationship to the symbols. She enters the story with a zestful enjoyment knowing that the images are truly about real emotions (otherwise they would be trivial) and that she can experience her own fear and explore it in *total security*. If it's in the imagination, it's for real!

Knowing how to operate imaginatively is *learned* behaviour, and highly complex learning at that. The children we are studying have been introduced to these operations since infancy and spent several years learning how to make meanings from metaphors, symbols, and analogies. Because this behaviour is so difficult to study, its significance has been almost overlooked in traditional teaching of literacy. Sentimental things are said about the magical world of literature and the imagination, but few think of applying this driving force to the basic learning of literacy tasks. Nor do they think of remedying the situation for those children who have not learned to operate imaginatively. For such children, half their motivation for becoming literate is paralysed, and so learn-

ing to read must be like learning to walk with one leg.

This is such an important and little-understood part of the literacy undertaking that we must return to it in greater depth later. At this point we should acknowledge that the functioning imagination is crucial to literacy, and that early book-experience can be seen to develop a wide range of imaginative operations often associated with the deepest satisfactions that are to be experienced with print.

Orthographic factors As traditional approaches to the teaching of reading and writing remind us, print is a system of visual symbols organized by complex conventions of directionality, punctuation, and letter-sound association. It is the mastery of this system, and the relating of its cues into the wider systems of language cues, which constitute the task of early reading and characterizes what we would call 'real reading'.

Children who are exposed to print as carrying fascinating messages become curious at an early age and usually attempt to create print in writing-like behaviour. There are many insights about the way in which print operates to encode language meanings, and these insights must be made before words or letters can have any real significance. Children must understand that the message comes from the print itself, and that it is preserved there in a verbally invariable way—that the story as read today will be verbally identical with the story as read yesterday. They need to know at which end a book begins, that the message starts at the top of a page and goes down the page before returning to the top of the next page, and finally, that the message is linear and moves from left to right, line-by-line, back-and-down. The directional conventions of print are intrinsically confusing and confusible and we should expect that mastery of them will be a lengthy process which is progressive in nature.

In the developmental setting, understanding of the conventions of print tends to be slow and late in developing. The features of print in the form of letters and words tend to be explored in a fairly unco-ordinated way before there is any understanding of their functional significance. Children may learn to make a few letters which are repeated in linear forms to approximate writing. They may learn to recognize their own names as signs similar to those which distinguish products on labels or advertisements, and yet have no clear concept of a printed 'word'. They may learn the alphabet as a cultural sequence introduced in books and songs, and even recognize some of the letters by name, yet still have no clear concept of a 'letter'. Finally, all of these unrelated insights and items of knowledge may begin to come together in systematic ways, but this is a very late development normally associated with the first months of schooling (Clay 1972a, p.137).

The emergent stage of literacy

These learnings add up to a formidable range of behaviours indeed. They enrich our notion of reading readiness, and present an ideal picture of what entry into literacy can be at its best. When we apply a term like 'pre-reading skills' to such behaviours we demean their real status as early literacy skills, for they actually display all the features of mature strategies already achieving sound and satisfying outcomes well beyond what could be called embryonic—or pre-anything. These strategies, if they are permitted to develop naturally, will lead into mature reading and writing without any discontinuity brought about by a regression into the print starvation of traditional readiness activities such as

'reading' picture books without print. From the point of view of reading, we should call this stage of development 'emergent reading', in contrast to the 'early reading stage', in which close attention to the visual detail of print in the final relating of cues brings about what we would recognize as 'true reading'.[7]

The vital learnings of this emergent stage of literacy development centre around the tasks of creating a healthy 'literacy set' in the terms discussed above. Most children enter school with a poorly developed literacy set—they have not mastered the tasks of the emergent reading stage. To pass them through a pre-reading programme which is not oriented towards literacy, and then move them on into early reading before they have developed a strong literacy set, seems very unwise in light of the sort of evidence we have been studying. Without adequately developed strategies for exploring written language, we would expect such children to experience great difficulty and confusion in facing the highly complex and refined processes of relating cues in early reading. The characteristics of a well-developed literacy set are summarized at the end of the chapter, and, at the beginning of the practical aspects of our enquiry, in chapter 4, we will use these characteristics as the objectives of a 'readiness programme'. However, to avoid traditional misunderstandings, we will refer to this programme as an 'emergent literacy programme'.

Language, ritual, and culture—the oral tradition

Closely associated with the experience of an enriching literature in early childhood and continuous with it in content, we find what might be called 'the oral culture'. Nursery rhymes and songs make up a large part of this tradition in our culture, but there is much more to it than this. Special forms of language have always been important in the enculturing process and often take the form of chant, song, dance, and ritual. The language of enculturing is usually highly wrought, firstly because it is, in fact, memorable, and secondly because it is designed to have a powerful and lasting effect on development.

In our society much of this special language is no longer transmitted from memory but has become embodied in print—it is therefore not possible to make a clear distinction between the oral enjoyment of books and participation in a purely oral tradition. In most societies much of this special language use is centred around religious belief and social custom, but since church-going has become a minority activity in our own culture, a great part of the tradition has been lost. Indeed, our modern secular culture must be distinctive in the small use that is made of linguistic patterning to implant important cultural meanings. Apart from some aspects of courtesy—'How do you do', 'Excuse me', etc.—little is left of that great wealth of common cultural experience which used to be so important in early education, and used to contribute so much to general language development.[8] Few mothers can sing a lullaby, and even the nursery rhymes may be disappearing. We can no longer expect that the rhythms of the Authorized Version of the Bible ring in every ear.

An important aspect of an oral tradition is that it is largely learned in unison situations—and gains in its social meaning from that togetherness. Much of the language is rhythmic and set to some form of chant or melody. Because of its purposes in forming attitudes, focussing emotions, and controlling personal interaction, it tends to be symbolic or metaphorical in form, using all the devices of a literature to make it penetrating, pleasurable and meaningful. Chant, song, dance and linguistic rituals are among the most powerful forms of human learnings, primitively satisfying, deeply memorable, and

globally meaningful. Much of its power comes from the sense of security generated by repetition, familiarity, and universality.

Many of the features we observed in the bed-time story situation are shared with the transmission of the oral tradition. The oral tradition is linguistically enriching for many of the same reasons, presenting special styles and conventions of language which both stimulate linguistic awareness and introduce forms common in the written dialect. We can observe similar types of learning going on as in infants learning to talk. The following example displays this learning going on before the child has successfully distinguished all of the major phoneme boundaries in her speech (i.e. she does not discriminate yet between some related sounds such as /b-p/, /f-v/, /k-g/, /d-j-t/). Carol is two and a half years old:

Umdy Dudty sad on the woll
Umdy dudty ad a great foll
Aw the king's orses and aw the king's men
Couldn but Umdy dogether agan
Ay Diddle Diddle an the gat an the fiddle
A gow dump over the moon
A liddle dog laughed to see da bort
And the dis ran away with a boon
(loud burp) Sowwy (Definitely coping with her world.)
a b c d e f d h i day k l m n o p/b u r s t u fee w ax y z
Now i know mine abc
Gome along and zing with me

(The alphabet, of course, is part of the oral tradition, as are such common cultural sequences as the days of the week, the months of the year, the seasons, etc.)

Dom Dom the biber's son
Dole a big and away woo wa

(Parent intervenes—"Who's naughty there?")

Dom Dom

("Why was he naughty?")

Begos dat dole a big.

Quaint—if that is what you are attending to. But here is a child mastering the linguistic forms of cause and effect before she can articulate properly. The parents of this child realize that she is quite normal and therefore they don't persistently correct her.

Important additional insights we can draw from observing the transmission of an oral culture in our own and in other societies include:

the power of chant and melody to assist in the implanting of important language;

the reinforcement provided by the physical pleasures of language in rhythm and rhyme;

the rewarding nature of aesthetically satisfying and polished language;

the support provided by other art forms such as dance and drama, and their power to activate the learner globally;

and finally the sustaining influence of unison participation in learning language and associating this participation with acceptance and security.

A study of cultural and linguistic learning in any pre-literate society will indi-

cate the effectiveness of these principles in establishing life-lasting attitudes and skills.

Reading before five

There has been great interest in the last few years in children who learn to read and write at a very early age. Before considering reports on spontaneous literacy-learning prior to school entry, we should look briefly at earlier research related to the *teaching* of reading during infancy.

The teaching of reading before five

We will look briefly at two approaches to *teaching* very young children to read. We may have serious doubts about the value of such early instruction and would expect to discover problems in the undertaking, but our main concern here will be to determine to what extent principles derived from the developmental model were important in successful early literacy experiments.

The notoriously popularized approach of Glenn Doman (1964) will be familiar to most of us in the form of the little bright red book, *Teach Your Baby to Read*, if not in the form of the kitset of teaching materials. Although massive sales all over the English speaking world have not produced the generation of literate school-arrivers which may have been expected, the efficacy of Doman's procedures in teaching three-and-four-year-old children to recognize words cannot be doubted. If Doman had known something more about the reading process and not been trapped into the traditional fallacy of equating reading with word recognition, the approach may have had some lasting contribution to make—'Nose is not toes' would be a good mnemonic for linguistically mutilated reading materials.

Nevertheless, his method, which arose from success in teaching disabled children to walk and to talk and simultaneously to read, reminds us of the power of positive teaching. Essentially, Doman suggests a programme of intensive positive reinforcement and the absolute avoidance of criticism, correction, or punishment of any kind. Such principles should be the foundations of any teaching programme. The two big questions are: Is it possible for parents to maintain such a programme without communicating some negative judgement of the infant in unconscious and invidious ways? And would not the positive attention given to the baby be better used to teach more appropriate and useful behaviour? The behaviour of parents in the bed-time story situation is *naturally* positive, without any form of illicit expectation, and the learning they encourage is immensely more rich and appropriate to the needs of very young children. Furthermore, it produces in the infant a drive towards self-seeking and self-regulation in the enjoyment of books rather than a dependence on adult instruction.

Of far greater significance was the work of Omar Khayyam Moore in teaching very young children to read in what he called a 'responsive environment' with the aid of a computerized 'talking typewriter'. His work is sympathetically reported by Maya Pines (1967, pp.62–86) (who observed Moore's work personally and discussed it with him) in her *Revolution in Learning: The Years From Birth to Five*. It is impossible to give a brief account of this research without producing serious misconceptions, and we will not attempt to do so—it was technically sophisticated and highly successful, but deeply humane. The important principles from our point of view were:

the programme was voluntary for the children—they could choose to have their half-hour a day, leave whenever they wished, or simply not attend

it was individualized—the child was alone in the learning booth and he could choose what he wished from the resources available—consequently children learned to read and write by remarkably different sequences of activity

the programme was largely self-regulated—the environment (particularly the talking typewriter) responded to all they did without giving any instructions or advice, and they worked out their own strategies from there

it operated without *extrinsic* reinforcement in the forms of praise, blame, correction, or rewards other than success in self-chosen tasks.

> At no time was the child actually 'taught' anything. For many children, this phase proved somewhat annoying; they would frequently ask, and get, a chance to go back to free-typing of letters. But after periods of varying lengths—days, weeks, or sometimes months—the child would suddenly realize that the letters he knew actually made up words that had a meaning, and that he himself could now write such words. This discovery is so elating that when it happens, children have been known to jump up and down in excitement, or run out of the booth to talk about it.
>
> In Moore's opinion, this is the way to introduce learning to children—to make it so exciting that they are hooked for life. 'It's an affront to your intelligence to be always told, always presented with everything,' he says.Most systems in school alienate children for this reason. The children who are very able will learn anyway, but they won't like the learning part because it is too didactic. (p.67)

Each child learned to read, write, and touchtype effortlessly—most of the children in under a year. In the first and second grades at school they were so advanced and intellectually lively that they enjoyed an extremely rich programme in comparison with other children. As Moore left the programme to take up other aspects of his research, the project foundered on the age-old rocks of jealousy, politics, and finance.

'Spontaneous' reading before five

There is a growing literature about children who begin to read before school without direct teaching from parents. In two major studies Dolores Durkin (1966) working among children in California and New York, and Margaret Clark (1976) working among Glasgow children, present very similar findings about very early readers. The studies include a range of children almost as varied as a random selection of the child population except that the I.Q. averages are somewhat above the norm. (Although there is some evidence to suggest than an I.Q. around 115 is normal in large urban centres).

In these studies few of the children had been subjected to direct teaching. Parents or siblings tended to answer the children's questions, such as the request for a word, and leave them to continue the task on their own (Durkin, p.135; Clark p.53). A majority of the children began to read (or write) without any prompting from parents, and some of the parents were surprised, or even a little disconcerted, that their children had begun to read (Durkin, p.135; Clark p.49). Most of the children engaged in active writing as they learned to read, or before they learned to read (Durkin p.137; Clark, pp.14–15, and 17). It was evident that the children showed a great interest in print in the environment—on TV, on labels, in the names of cars, etc. (Durkin, pp.137–8; Clark p.50). Margaret Clark also reported on the importance of the local library in the experience of the early readers she studied (1976, pp.102–3).

Refining the developmental model

The behaviour we have been studying in this chapter clearly fulfils all the

criteria of developmental learning, but in this case the learnings are directed towards *literacy*, and intimately related to the skills of reading and writing. The most important discovery we made was that the much-lauded bed-time story situation is only half the picture: practice of reading-like behaviour and writing-like behaviour completes the picture. A noteworthy feature of this behaviour is that it arises naturally without direction from the parents—and perhaps that is one reason why its significance has been overlooked. It is independent behaviour which does not depend on an audience of any kind and is therefore self-regulated, self-corrected, and self-sustaining. It occurs at just those times when the adult whose behaviour is being emulated is *not available*. The infant is not overawed by the need to please an adult—although delighted if the adult responds joyfully to the behaviour and encourages it. It would seem that *independent experience with books and with writing is natural in the developmental setting from the earliest stages of book-handling in infancy*.

The bed-time story situation should not be separated from the independent productive behaviour which it generates. Such behaviour normally engages the infant in extensive, self-monitored, linguistic behaviour for longer periods of time, involving far more intensive language use than is the case with the input activity of listening. Both activities are complementary aspects of the same language-learning cycle. In both aspects there is close visual and tactile contact with books, becoming increasingly focussed on the conventions of print. All of the most powerful strategies of mature reading are being established and the complexity of the behaviour makes the normal description of pre-reading skills look quite ridiculous. Going hand in hand with the practice of reading-like behaviour is an equally spontaneous involvement in writing-like behaviour. Both activities are message or meaning-oriented and support each other, especially at the stage when precise attention to print detail becomes appropriate.

In this developmental setting we have a further model for literacy-learning consistent in every way with the model derived from learning spoken language. It is based on the learning behaviours and strategies actually demonstrated in the learning of many high progress school beginners and in the majority of cases where children learn to read and write before school entry. A simplified version of this model is presented in Figure 1, page 63.

The crucial thing now is whether or not this developmental model can be applied to classroom settings in the school environment, and whether or not it is applicable to literacy learning of children above the age of five in that setting. Is there any way in which the school environment may be adapted to accept this model? How will the model operate in association with more traditional procedures? In what ways is the model changed by being applied to groups of children rather than to an individual learner within a non-competitive environment? We will consider answers to these questions in the following chapter.

Literacy Set

A. MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS (High expectations of print)
Enjoys books and stories—appreciates the special rewards of print.
Has had extensive, repetitive experience of a wide range of favourite books.
Seeks book experiences—asks for stories, goes to books independently.
Is curious about all aspects of print, e.g. signs, labels, advertisements.
Experiments with producing written language.

B. LINGUISTIC FACTORS (Familiarity with written dialect in oral form)
Has built extensive models for the special features of written dialect.
Syntax—grammatical structures learned through meaningful use. e.g. full forms of contractions such as 'I'm' or 'What's', structures which imply consequence 'If . . . then . . .'
Vocabulary—words not normally used in conversation e.g. 'however', 'dine', 'ogre'
Intonation Patterns—appropriate intonations for literary or non-conversational English e.g. 'Fat, indeed! The very idea of it!'
Idioms—special usage contrary to normal grammatical or semantic rules e.g. same example as for intonation—illustrates that idiom often works with special intonation.

C. OPERATIONAL FACTORS (Essential strategies for handling written language)
Self-monitoring operations: Self-correction and confirmation.
Predictive operations: Ability to 'use the context' to fill particular language slots
Structural operations: Ability to follow plot, temporal and causal sequences, logical arrangements, etc.
Non-situational operations: Ability to understand language without the help of immediate sensory context.
Imaginative operations: Ability to create images which have not been experienced or represented in sensory reality, and apply metaphorical meanings.

D. ORTHOGRAPHIC FACTORS (Knowledge of the conventions of print)
Note: Few pre-schoolers would have grasped more than a few of the orthographic principles.
Story comes from print, not from pictures.
Directional conventions—a complex progression:
- Front of book has spine on left
- Story begins where print begins
- Left hand page comes before right hand
- Move from top to bottom of page
- Begin left along line to right
- Return to next line on left margin

Print components—clear concept of 'words', 'spaces', 'letters'
Letter-form generalizations—same letter may be written in upper and lower case, and in different print styles
Punctuation conventions
Phonetic principle—letters have some relationship to speech sounds
Consistency principle—same word always has same spelling

Figure 1