

The Foundations of Literacy

Don Holdaway

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Foundations of Literacy.

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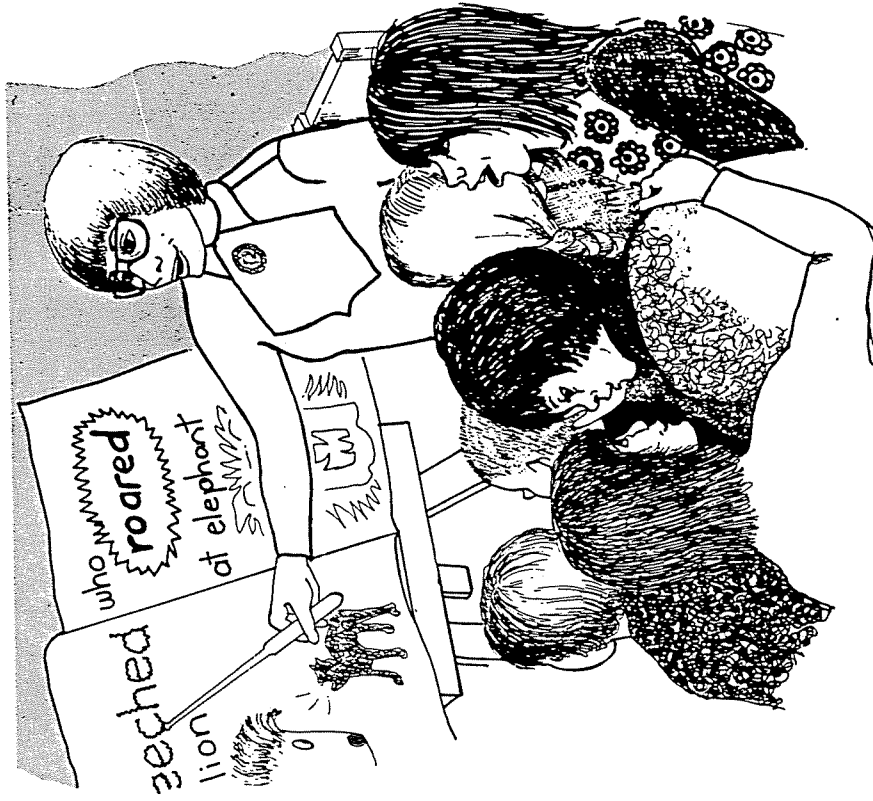
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time keep before the infant's attention the fact that the process is print-stimulated. Teachers can do the same by using enlarged print for the experience of listening to stories and participating in all aspects of reading.

Suppose we begin by taking half an hour from each day in a new-entrant or kindergarten classroom—it could be half an hour from the developmental period or just a slight extension of storytime. In preparation, we make a selection of books which we know are often favourites for young children or that we judge from our experience of children's books will be enjoyed and may become favourites. We look for fairly simple stories that the children will readily understand, but we don't worry too much about vocabulary—we are going to follow the model as closely as possible using good sound common-sense just as a reasonable parent would do. Some of the stories will be old nursery favourites. We need lots of books—at least twenty for the first fortnight—and we hope that ten or twelve of them will become real favourites.

Three or four of the books—the ones we feel most certain will be popular with all the children—we enlarge so that the bold print can be seen clearly from

4 A Fresh Start: Shared-Book-Experience

We have reached a very critical stage in our enquiry. So far everything has been so theoretical, at least as far as schooling is concerned. The realities of pre-school learning are curious and fascinating, but are they *useful*? How are we to apply the model of developmental language-learning to the classroom? Is it possible? Will it work? Fortunately, yes—and there are many years of devoted practice to substantiate it.¹

The major problem we have to face in applying a model of individual learning to the classroom is one of numbers. In what way does this affect the operation of the model? The individual infant in a home setting of delight and encouragement role-plays as a user of literacy in reading-like and writing-like behaviour. What adjustments will we have to make to compensate for the loss of this quiet intense concentration, and for the loss of the warm personal exclusiveness of the bed-time story? If we turn to our study of language transmission through the oral tradition in human societies less self-conscious than our own, and apply these insights to the classroom, the problem does not look so hopeless. We find that corporate experiences of culturally significant language have *always* been powerful modes of learning. In initiation ceremonies, in church services and festivals, and in playground games and rhymes passed down from generation to generation, we find models for intensely meaningful and satisfying corporate learning. If we are to avail ourselves of such vital learning energy, the most important insight we must carry over into the school from these models is that cultural learnings are non-competitive—they are entered into to be *like* other people—to be significantly human—and they have nothing at all to do with excelling for the purposes of personal power. Truly corporate activities are concerned with ego-sharing and not with ego-uppance. If we can achieve this corporate spirit, there is no reason why a large class cannot learn together.

Another aspect of the problem of numbers concerns the visual intimacy with print which characterizes pre-school book experience. Teachers have always used the special power of reading to a group of children as an important but separate aspect of their language teaching, but they have seldom brought that power over into the centre of the instructional programmes in reading and written expression.² Reading to a group of children in school has little instructional value simply because the print cannot be seen, shared, and discussed. The parent is able to 'display the skill in purposeful use' and at the same

fifteen feet or so. We don't need to illustrate all of them because the children will enjoy contributing their own illustrations to some of the books. Nor do our illustrations need to be polished pieces of art—the children will return to the normal-sized book in their independent reading and be able to savour the original illustrations at that time. If we have ready access to an overhead projector, we may put one or two of the books on transparencies to obtain the enlarged print. This may seem a lot of trouble for a questionable return, but when we think that in the model situation each book may be enjoyed with the parent five or ten times and independently many more times, we realize that our work will be put to good use in the next few months.

On the first day we gather the children round as we usually do for a story. They don't settle easily so we sing a favourite song and a nursery rhyme or two. We have several books with us, one of them enlarged. We want to be sure that the first book we present is fresh to all of the children, and will be large and attractive enough to interest them visually. We choose *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle which captures the magic of nature in the magic of print. There is a little discussion and comment during the reading and a satisfied glow at the end. We can see that real experience with a caterpillar pupating in the classroom would keep interest at a high level and help to make the book a favourite in the next few weeks.

Now we bring out our first enlarged book—a version of 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff'. We choose this partly because of the strongly emotional language of the repetitive section which may draw the children into prediction and participation even on the first reading. The children are delighted with the enormous book and many keep their eyes glued on it as we use a pointer to follow the story as we read. Sure enough, on the second occasion of the 'Trip, trap!' and the 'Who's that tripping over my bridge?' some of the children chime in, encouraged by the invitational cues we give off. They are delighted in the closing couplet, 'Snap, snap, snout, This tale's told out', and want to say it for themselves. We compare the idiom with 'This story's run out', and return to the original. We didn't expect this interest—youngsters are full of surprises. However, the children are obviously ready to dramatize the story and we have a first run at this to give them a little 'global involvement'—and it is very easy to improvise a bridge. We can see there is a lot more running time in this story in many kinds of activities.

Since the participation goes so well, we choose the Ezra Keats's version of *Over in the Meadow* as a closing experience. We have great fun with this, stopping to talk once or twice about how we know what to expect next. By the time we reach the 'little froggies nine' all but one or two of the class are chiming in, and at the end they ask for it again immediately—and we just have time.

As the session breaks up, we make a mental note or two. The children liked the song at the beginning—they're not shy about singing. Why not teach them some new songs using enlarged print on big sheets? Some of their instructional reading material can be their new songs—and poems. We wonder if we've been wasting our time—and our scarce supply of books. Three new stories in half an hour! And all the work in making that giant book! The youngsters were certainly delighted and it did seem to make a difference to their attention. But will they get interested in print that way? In any case, we don't feel exhausted—rather guilty in fact about enjoying ourselves so much. At least we can stand an exploratory week or two of this just so long as no-one complains.

On the second day we have our new song ready on a big sheet of heavy paper—a very simple old song, 'Love Somebody! Yes I Do', that didn't take long

to print in gaily coloured letters. There was no picture—we couldn't think of anything but hearts—and that seemed a little corny. We wondered whether the children would be interested in the text just by itself. They certainly watched, and seemed to have some idea that they were acting at real reading.

Our second big book was 'The Gingerbread Man', and they did enjoy the 'Run, run, as fast as you can. You can't catch me, I'm the Gingerbread Man'. To tell the truth, we quite enjoyed it ourselves—a nice, secure, regressive feeling—it always was one of our favourites. The children asked for 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff', again, and we repeated dramatization. They also wanted another experience with *Over in the Meadow*. We said we would finish with that after our last story, *Nobody Listens to Andrew* by Elizabeth Guilfoile. Well, the talk that went on with that story! We had a long discussion about who had the most sensible suggestion for dealing with the bear. The boys finally came round to the view that Sister Ruthy made the most sensible suggestion of calling the zoo. It was good to see the children's satisfaction in dismissing the suggestions of the adults—fancy calling the police or the fire station! What would they know about bears! This self-satisfied feeling helped them to identify with Andrew on the last page looking Very-Pleased-with-Himself!

We ran over the half hour by a bit, but the sense of guilt was not so pricking as yesterday. We move around the room as the children engage in developmental activities. There are at least three bridges in the block corner and the fierce cries of trolls resonate through the room. Mr and Mrs Neighbour from 'Andrew' have turned up as new characters in the playhouse. The four children painting



gingerbread men are singing 'Love Somebody', and a quiet little fellow has a big copy of the 'Three Billy Goats' on the floor pointing at the story with his foot. What do you do about that? The model doesn't indicate what to do except to leave well alone.

The next enlarged text we use is the Rose Bonne and Abner Graboff version of *I Know an Old Lady* because that can be enjoyed first as a hilarious story, and then as a song—Alan Mills' score is in the back of the book. We present *Bears in the Night* by S. and J. Berenstein in an enlarged version, and this brings an unexpectedly strong response—after all it's a very unassuming little story but it fascinates the children with its scary crisis and logical reversal back into the security of bed. When the two copies of the original are put out in the library corner, they are seldom out of use, and two children ask to take the book home. When we probe a bit to find out why, one of the children says she wants to read it to Mummy and proceeds to perform there and then. She doesn't point or follow the print, but she seems to have the words off almost perfectly. So off she goes home with it.

During the first fortnight we try to introduce at least one new poem or song and one or two new stories every day, but the children enjoy the re-readings so much that the half hour has become three-quarters of an hour and the normal developmental period each day expands the book-centred activities into the normal programme. Of the ten books introduced in the normal edition only two have not been requested again, and two have been so popular, *Drummer Hoffby* Emberley, and Paul Galdone's version of 'The Three Bears', that we decide to make large-page versions of them for further study.

Most of the children spend some time with the familiar books during the day. Some seem to prefer using the enlarged edition, and a group often forms spontaneously to enjoy a big book together. The idea of taking the books home in the original edition to share with parents has caught on, and one parent has popped in to comment on the enjoyment her child experienced in sharing *I Know an Old Lady*—much to the delight of the whole family. We decide to send a letter home to parents explaining in simple terms what we are doing, and helping them to accept the reading-like behaviour without getting anxious and trying to correct the children when their version is different from the text.

Thinking about the model, we decide to induce the children into predicting vocabulary more actively during the following week. For this purpose we read over some of the stories we plan to introduce and mark those places where prediction could readily occur. In the beautiful Emberley version of *One Wide River to Cross* we see the possibility of a good balance between structural expectation on the one hand, and on the other, prediction of vocabulary on the grounds of meaning or picture clues:

- Old Noah built himself an ark,
- He built it out of hick'ry bark.
- The animals came in one by one,
- and Japheth played the big bass ----
- The animals came in two ----,
- The animals lost his ---- (Picture clue if necessary.)
- The animals came in ----,
- The ostrich and the chickadee.
- The animals came in ----,
- The hippopotamus ---- (Let the children try both 'got stuck in' and 'blocked'.)
-
- The yak in slippers did arrive.
-

- The elephants were doing ----.
-
- A drop of rain dropped out of ----. [Is the rhyme sufficient?]
-
- Some came in by roller ----. (Children may prefer 'on roller skates'.)
-
- The cats and kittens kept in ----.
-
- Let's go back and ----. (And so we will.)

The story goes on for four pages completing the biblical tale. There will be discussion and perhaps a fuller telling of the story. While the story is fresh in the children's experience we could explore Gerald Rose's *Trouble in the Ark*. There are some more opportunities for prediction, but, even more inviting, the opportunity to talk about written words, some of which are enlarged and decorated appropriately in the text. The idea may catch on with decorated name cards or personally 'special' words in the style of Sylvia Ashton-Warner's work.

It is beginning to look like a good month ahead with the chance to talk naturally about printed words and spaces, and finding words by pointing in a text we know. 'How can we find the word two or the word hippopotamus?' 'Why are they so different in length?' A secondary interest may be stimulated in the printed words that are our names. There is a delightful story in the Ainsworth and Ridout series 'A Book for Me to Read' called, *A Name of My Own*. This could be enlarged and read with the particular purpose of 'displaying the activity of reading in purposeful use', as we put it earlier. As reader, we will discuss how we go about working with print, inducing the children to participate in the problem-solving process. This works so well that we repeat it with another book in the series, *Come and Play*:

- One day she met a frog.
- She said -- -- --:
- "Who is she talking to?"
- "How many words?"
- "Frog, frog,
- please play with me
- I'm all by myself
- As you can see."
- "Yes," said the frog,
- "I will ---- -- --."
- We will play at j-----.
- So the frog j-----
- into the middle of a pond.
- "Oh dear," said the little girl.
- "I can't j--- like that."
- "What does she want him to do?"
- Perhaps discuss names beginning with j.
- 'Can this be jumping again? Why not?'
- We can play a little prediction game.
- 'I can jump', 'I like j-----'
- 'I j----- over the fence.'

The second month actually turns out to be as interesting as we predicted. Several of the children display a quick grasp of the phonetic principle in problem-solving exactly as we had modelled it. They are fascinated and want to know more. We keep them working with the class group because their questions are so interesting to other children who have not quite caught on, and a few of these begin to see the light. This signals a readiness for alphabet knowledge—if we want to talk about letters, we have to know what to call

them. So we pick up *Dr Seuss's A.B.C.* and one or two others, and incorporate a short time each day when we study the alphabet and a special letter.

BIG F little f F f F

Four fluffy feathers on a fiffer-feffer-feff.

We learn that alphabet song too—'Now I know my ABC. Come along and sing with me.'

We think we are going too fast, so we go back to the model to see what we ought to be doing. The independent, reading-like behaviour seems the important thing. Are the children actually exploring favourite books independently, as the model suggests that they should? Certainly they are, but often in groups with one of the children acting as teacher, pointing more and more accurately and being corrected when she goes wrong by the 'pupil children'. This isn't quite what we predicted—we didn't expect to have our function so rapidly eroded. But it is nice to see how meticulously the 'teacher children' follow the pattern we have laid down. It is quite an experience to see oneself so faithfully modelled—and be proud of it.

Two months! We are now spending an hour a day within the model—and this is not accounting for the way in which the children are extending the activities into other parts of the programme. Two of the children, including the little girl who went off home with *Bears in the Night*, seem to be really reading. They are pointing accurately, recognizing many words at sight, busily making their own books with strange collections of letters in linear file which they 'read' with bold assertion. Perhaps they were almost reading when they came to school. In any case we don't have to worry about them—we use them. They have been so attentive to our shy instruction that they not only ape us perfectly in playing teacher, but seem to have a genuine interest in sharing their newfound secrets with anyone who will sit down and listen.

After three months, sixty books, twenty poems, ten songs, and a chant or two, we give up the 'readiness programme' and are now busily answering questions and demonstrating literacy skill. We are enjoying the process—we hadn't realized that we were so literate ourselves. We are finding children's literature so personally fascinating and we are enjoying ourselves so much that we wonder how it was that we missed out before.

And then things outside the classroom start to go wrong. The principal is already considering re-organizing the department because some teachers, including ourselves, are carrying too big a load, and he wants to know whether there are half a dozen children ready to move on into the next class. One of the parents is proving difficult. Despite the explanatory letter, he thinks that what we are doing is unjust. He wants his child moved into a more organized class where he will be taught phonics and not encouraged to think he can read when he can't. And suddenly the lad who is already reading starts to throw his weight around. Somebody must have been telling him how brilliant he is! It never rains but it pours!

We start to worry. Where are we going and what are we achieving? Some form of monitoring would be helpful. We need some way of evaluating the literacy status of the children before they begin the programme and a checklist for observing progress. The headings in the analysis of the characteristics of 'Literacy Set' on page 62 could form a useful guide. It is fairly obvious to us that the children are making healthy development in the motivational, linguistic, and operational areas. Interest is developing in the orthographic area.

And so we decide to explore ways of evaluating our programme continuously. It will sustain our own security in a responsible manner even if it does nothing else. We could have predicted many types of opposition and criticism.

We will do our best to explain that what we are doing has a sound basis, and try to be in a position to justify the experiment by keeping personal records of children and being able to point to the progress of individuals. However, we won't allow outside pressures to influence what we are doing until we have assured ourselves that in some areas the programme is not working. This is clear in the model itself—no pressures for results either from inside or from outside the learning environment.

About this time we are fortunate in discovering the work of Bill Martin—he seems to be a fellow-thinker who has put together a wonderful range of literary material in the Sounds of Language series and in the Instant Readers, and backed this up with practical guidance of a rather special kind—he seems to convey the deep trust that an effective literature, well presented, will do its own job. In any case, we have a new store of useful material of high literary impact and an almost inexhaustible supply of teaching suggestions. The *Teacher's Guide to the Instant Readers* (Martin and Brogan 1972) is an inspiring presentation of developmental ideas about introducing print, and we feel comforted to have such support. Two quotations from his chapter headings will illustrate what we mean. 'Book experience should precede word experience in bringing a child to print', and 'An emerging reader needs a battery of books that he can zoom through with joyous familiarity'. That seems to describe what we are achieving in our programme at this early stage, and we feel more confident about what we are doing.

The developmental literacy environment

After three months of expanding activities in shared-book experience we have the courage to reorganize the language and the developmental sectors of our new entrant programme. Our aim is to incorporate these two sectors into a single developmental environment focussed on emergent literacy. Physically, the environment has all the features of areas for developmental activity except that the reading and writing areas have been highlighted and carefully furnished in a relaxed fashion. The total environment is alive with print, displaying all its functions, from things as simple as signs and labels right through to literature. A large area furnished with a carpet can seat the whole class of thirty-two children and has a large low easel for holding big books and charts.

At some time each morning we have our major sharing session, which corresponds to the bed-time story setting in the model—it is the major input or modelling part of the programme. This session may last for up to an hour on some occasions. On some days we have two shorter periods. We try to introduce at least one new literary experience every day—a poem, a song, or a story—and every day we complement this by exploration of the real world in language-experience ways. Thus, we have two sources of language to explore: the literary experience of books, and the language-saturated and personalized experience of the outside world, with all its real purposes for writing.

A new literary experience tends to go through three stages in the course of a few weeks:

A. Discovery.

Introduction of the new experience in the listening situation with maximum participation in predictable, repetitive structures, and in the problem solving strategies of decoding.

Objectives

To provide an enjoyable story experience to all of the children. (*This objective should not be sacrificed to any other purpose.*)

To induce a desire to return to the book on subsequent days.

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To encourage participation by inducing children to chime in on repetitive sections, suggest an obvious word, predict possible outcomes, engage in suitable expressive activities.

To provide a clear and spoken model for the book language. To induce sound strategies of word solving by encouraging and discussing suggestions, at an appropriate skills level and without unduly interrupting the story. Remember that the thrill of problem-solving is a natural and proper part of the enjoyment of a story.

B. Exploration.

Re-readings—usually on request—for familiarization and teaching where applicable. Increasing unison participation is natural to this re-experience.

Objectives

To establish firm oral models for the language of the book.

To deepen understanding and response.

To provide opportunities for all children to gain oral practice of the language of the story by unison, group and individual participation.

To help children become aware of the special structures of the story so that these may be used in reconstructing and decoding in later independent readings, or be used as patterns for personal expression.

To teach relevant reading skills in relation to the text, especially sight vocabulary, structural analysis and the use of letter-sound relationships in strategies of decoding.

To provide further expressive activities based on the language of the book both to personalize response and to provide purposeful practice of the language models.

To provide additional, enjoyable listening experience for slower children who require more repetition than others to develop strong memory models. Listening post activity is most useful for this purpose.

C. Independent Experience and Expression.

Independent retrieval of the experience in reading or reading-like ways by individuals or small groups. Creative exploration and expression of meanings from the experience, involving all the expressive arts.

Objectives

To provide opportunities for independent reading by individuals or very small groups (Sometimes one child will act as teacher in guiding others through the book).

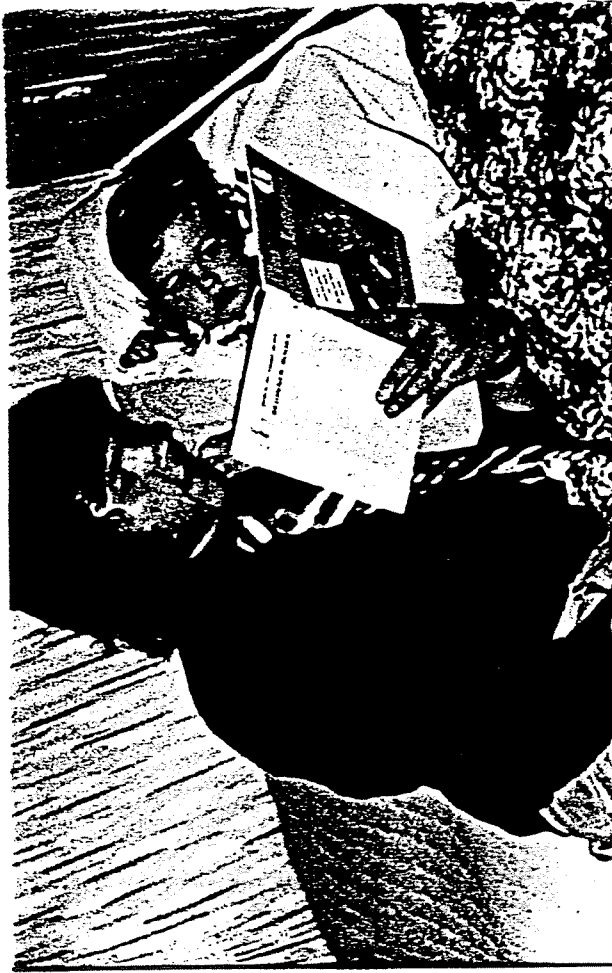
To give a sense of individual achievement and competence.

To encourage the development of self-monitoring and self-correction, using the familiar language models.

To encourage expressive activities using the interests and the language arising from the book so that children will identify more fully with the story and internalize the language as a permanent part of their competence.

However, the total programme is concerned with a great wealth of literary experience happening together, and within this richness different children seek out their own preoccupations, determining for themselves where their own 'working face' in language learning will be from day to day. To give some order and security to this diversity of experience, the daily input session tends to have a predictable structure something like the following:

1. **Tune-in** Verse, song, and chant—favourite and new. Enlarged print and charts are always central
2. **Favourite stories** Re-reading of stories, usually by request but sometimes planned. Unison participation. Learning reading-skills in context. Dramatic and other relaxing counterparts. Exploring syntax—substitution, simplification, extension, transformation, innovating on verse and story structure.
3. **Language activities** Alphabet study and games. Learning other cultural



The bed-time story. David, just turned two (from Chap. 3, pp. 42-3) enjoying the input which he will later re-enact in reading-like behaviour.



At age four Leslie (Chap. 3, pp. 41, 45-6) engages in personal re-enactment of a loved story—the important converse of the bed-time story.



A talented teacher, Carol Blackburn, models the reading process with whole-hearted and emulative pleasure.

The children participate whole-heartedly in a corporate experience of familiar language—unison response in Shared-Book-Experience. (Chaps. 5, 6 and 7.)



Attention is at a high level as the class become absorbed in the joys of a rich literature. (Chaps. 4, 6 and 7.)

Verse, chant and song, using enlarged print become a vital part of the instructional programme in reading and a basis for innovating on literary structures in creative writing.



In a developmental literacy environment the children soon become engrossed in unsolicited, independent enjoyment of their favourite books.



Role-playing as teacher, a vital developmental activity which mirrors all the precision of the teacher as model.

The children often illustrate their own big books, coming back later with fresh enjoyment to the original art in the published version.

The big books suit the immature level of muscular development and co-ordination of young children as, with deep involvement they role-play themselves as readers.



Libby Handy introduces the Tailyppo sequence described at the end of Chap. 10, pp. 195-6. Lively mental images replace the need for illustrations on some occasions.



Permitted a wide range of materials and the time-scope to rework on successive days, the children move towards deeply satisfying experience.



Reworking a personal creative response to the Tailyppo story. (See Chap. 8, pp. 162-6.)



A display of individual art mounted with proper respect for the children's highly individual exploration of meanings. (See Chap. 8.)

sequences. Exploring language—riddles, puzzles, vocabulary games; exploring writing—approximations towards spelling.

4. **New story** Introducing new story for the day either in normal or enlarged form. Word-solving strategies induced within the unfolding context of a new language experience. Modelling how print is unlocked.

5. **Independent reading** Enjoying old favourites—individual or group. Pointing encouraged—pointers available. Much playing at being teacher—children teach each other.

6. **Expression** Related arts activity either individual or group. Painting, group murals, construction, mask-making for drama. Group drama, puppetry, mime. Writing—innovating on literary structure (teacher as scribe).
[Note: 5. and 6. interchangeable in order.]

After four months a few matters are becoming clear. As would be expected, the children have separated themselves out very quickly. Four are reading and we are giving them individual hint-sessions from time to time. The majority are enjoying themselves with print—exploring, puzzling, approximating. They are obviously in the middle of the emergent-reading stage, performing reading-like activities and writing-like activities with great abandon, and concentrating at their own individual 'working faces'. A large group at the tail—about eight children—seem confused. Some are only just beginning to enter fully into the unison experiences. They are interesting in that they follow the others in their own style, seeming to learn, or gain confirmation, from the surrounding full-blooded response of the rest. But they are miles away from reading.

Task control

We find that we actually have more control over the difficulty of tasks that children undertake than we ever had before. The difficulty a child experiences in 'reading' favourite books is in direct relationship to the number of repetitions he enjoys before attempting to read independently. We are using this factor to keep challenge at an appropriate level for different children. We can *all* enjoy the introduction of the same story, but some children will need less repetitions before they attempt independent reading. So we encourage the more advanced children to attempt the retrieval very much earlier than the slow-developing group. Sometimes the more advanced children opt out of repetitions into activities that preoccupy them more deeply. But what about the slower moving group?

The listening post

We gain much greater control over repetitions when we bring a listening-post into the room. The less ready children are then able to gain much more massive repetition before 'reading' than they otherwise would. The tape-recorder seems to be the second most important invention for literacy after the book.³ We use mainly male voices because many of the slower children are boys and they must not get the idea that reading is a feminine occupation. In our chauvinistic society, if they once begin to think of reading as sissy, they're in real trouble.

Pace

We had never realized before how much young children can absorb in a few seconds. Attention problems only arise when there is not enough going on. We keep a very snappy pace. Then if some children get behind, they soon tune in. We've given up calling for attention and admonishing those who are distracted: they are so because nothing interesting is going on at that moment. And if we



Group drama based on a favourite story, played out against the backdrop of a corporate mural of Jack and the Beanstalk. (See pp. 165-6.)



Children respond to the total environment of literary pleasure and aesthetic excitement—they mime symbolic meanings from the literature.

break the spirit of the session to admonish one child, *all* of the children are likely to become distracted. So if attention flags, we crack on the pace. The result is amazing—if rather exhausting for us. Fortunately, we work only part of the day, and can relax among the children as *they* work for most of the time.

Positive teaching

The model suggests that there should be *positive* interaction and very little negative ticking off. That was hard at first, but so effective. In earlier teaching we were always telling children when they were going wrong—they did the performing, we did the correcting. Now that we are teaching reading skills in context there can be five or six suggestions for an unknown word—and to all of them we can say 'Fine, could be' or something similar. In introducing a story and throwing over to the children the prediction of some word, we can say 'Yes' ten times more often than we have to say 'No'. Let's imagine that we are enjoying the 'Discovery' session with Bill Martin's delightful ghost story *The Haunted House*, in which the reader is taken from room to room and 'NO-ONE IS THERE!' We came into the -----! 'Lounge' says someone. 'Library' says another. 'Two words' says someone else. (There is a vague sort of picture, and it can't be 'bathroom'.) 'Living room' suggests someone else. 'No! We've had living room!' comes the response of the reflective reader. We write 'd--ing r---' on the blackboard. 'Yes, dining room!' says the phonetically forward Frances, 'It starts like dog.' The only thing we've said is, 'Yes', or 'It could be!' Impatient correction or approval would have suffocated the development of skill and insight.

The phonetic principle

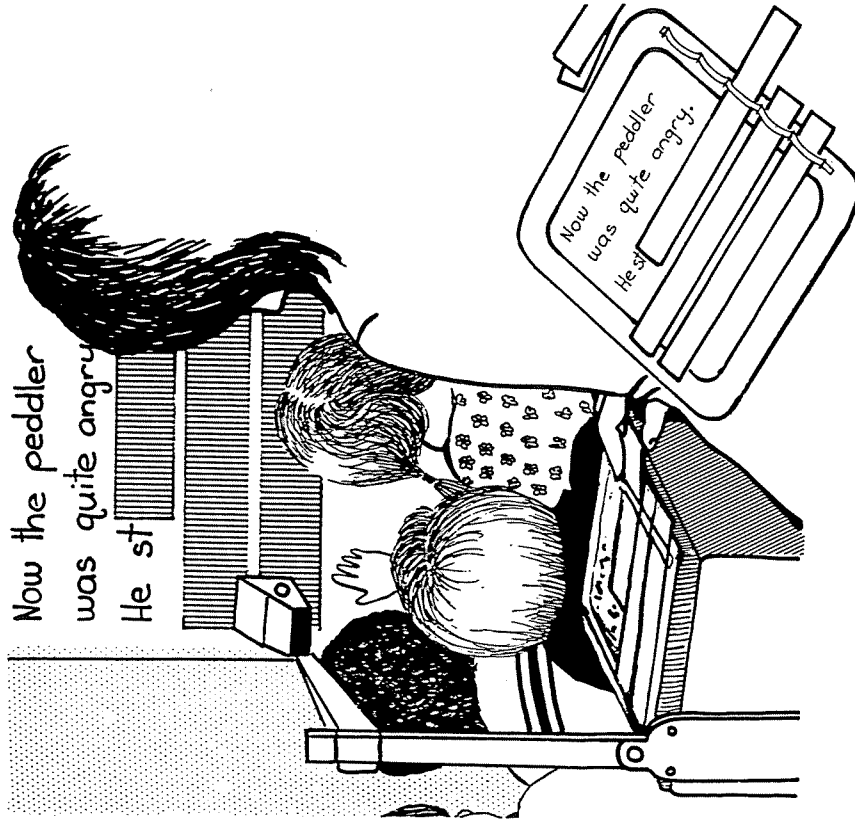
A few children have caught on to the idea of letter-sound relationships after three or four explanations, but the majority haven't seen it. We decide to take the matter very carefully and introduce two highly contrastive letter-sound associations: 'm' because the children can hum—and we have an extroverted Molly in the class—and 'f' because it has a primal slippery sound and feel. Then we go looking in the familiar books we know, and keep our eye out for 'm' and 'f' in the new stories.

Some of the little rascals scan the text way ahead of where we are up to and shout at inappropriate times, 'There's an EM!' We learn how valuable it is to know how to start saying a word that we're expecting. We get into that delightful *Fun on Wheels* by Joanna Cole and find quick confirmation in 'four' and 'five wheels' for our beginning 'f'. Then comes 'f----- on wheels' with a picture of a parading carnival animal on wheels—'Wow! FLOATS on wheels!' and then, later, 'Zip, Trip, F---, on wheels', and sixty percent of them are there. Careful pairing of letter-sound relationships through 'b', 'g', 's' and 't'—all contrastive—brings insight for many of the children. The rest of the initial consonants and consonant blends are learned rapidly by those children in the following few weeks without specific instruction. For the remainder, a continuing programme of contrast and use brings insight at varying rates.

Alternative forms of large print

We have a friend who likes photography. He makes slides of Bill Martin's *When It Rains . . . It Rains*. Well! We have a long strip of cardboard which we use to block out some of the words with a shadow. The word-solving excitement is fantastic. So we think about this for a bit. We make a large cardboard mask with a slot. Now, the word we want to highlight stands out with shadow all around.

What if we could progressively unmask a text as we read it? Wouldn't that be great? The obvious answer is the overhead projector, so we rush to Bill



Martin again in that beautiful version of Esphyr Slobodkina's 'Caps for Sale' in *The Sounds of a Pow Wow* and make a transparency. We cut little strips of cardboard to cover the text, and as we read, we slide the top one along exposing the words as we come to them. We have so much fun working out the words in that story, that we decide to repeat the operation many times.

The overhead projector is actually a lot of fun. You make a transparency with hinged words that can be flipped over into a slot at the right time—or even better, you make several hinges exposing letter detail progressively. In this way you can teach the strategy of prediction focussed on letter information, followed by confirmation with further letter information. And it's quite a lark!

Pointing

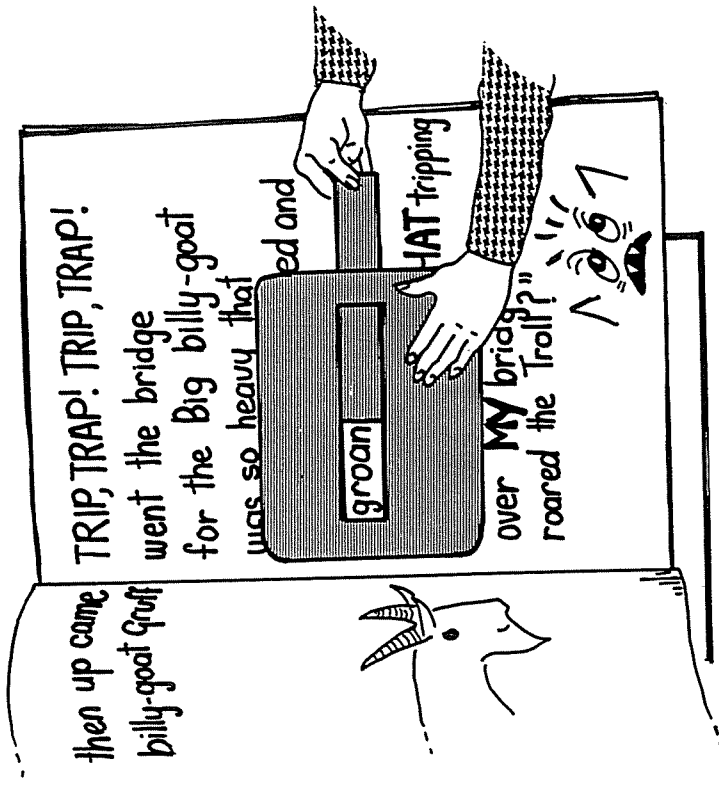
We have mentioned pointing many times as if everyone would agree that this was a Good Thing, but we haven't presented any evidence. Marie Clay's studies show very conclusively that pointing is a crucial strategy during the early reading stage (Clay 1972a, pp.7.1-3). Two vital insights are driven home

by pointing: the insight that there is a one-to-one relationship between spoken and written words; and the insight that print moves from left to right along the line, back and down. Both insights are fundamental, but both can be confusing. So, in our teaching (and in the practice that children model from us) we are absolutely meticulous when we are pointing—not the sweeping movement that suggests a jet flight through the text, but that careful, word-relates-to-word pointing that suggests that reading is a strongly visual task.

Masking

If we were merely to talk about the print detail we would notice children's eyes wandering aimlessly across blurred details of letters and illustrations. It is vital that when we choose to talk about some detail of print, every eye is observing that detail at the same time as the accompanying sounds are uttered. Only then are we teaching that crucial eye-voice-ear link which makes print intelligible in the earliest stages of reading.

So, in our teaching we use masking devices. The best solution we have achieved is a sliding mask which allows us to highlight any word or letter or affix which we want to talk about.



Open versus graded material

We have already started off by choosing material that would fascinate children rather than material that was 'easy enough' for them. In our endless search for new engaging material, we often found delightful stories in graded

texts—the old Beacon Readers with their wealth of simplified folk stories, or the brilliant simplifications of Scuss, or the early stories in Scott Foresman's Systems. (*The Bus Ride* is a classic).

But as children become conscious of their ability to decode print, it is important to make available to them caption readers and other simplified readers, which they can handle independently at a sitting—say, in five minutes. This seems to us the proper use of graded materials, rather than to attempt to use them as instructional material. We remember that we are committed to using a captivating literature in which prediction can operate at a deep level, and then we provide a wealth of more simple material upon which children can cut their teeth as independent readers. But, heaven forbid giving any child one of those linguistically mangled texts which have been designed to introduce words or phonetic elements in a so-called rational progression. 'Ratty on the Matty' is out.

Language experience and book experience

As the programme develops along as natural a line as possible, the distinction between language-experience procedures and book-experience procedures gradually diminishes. Book experience generates the thrust to use written language and to arouse new interests and curiosity, to explore the real world more deeply. Intellectual activity is stimulated by the impact of the developing meanings of literature and attention is turned outwards onto the world. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* heightened interest in insect life cycles and led naturally to observation and discussion of live insects brought into the room and located outdoors. The keeping of a diary arose naturally and purposefully from this activity, and established a convention which was applied to a wide range of topics such as the weather, and personal records of what different children had accomplished. Often an interest aroused by observation of the real world stimulated a search back towards related books.

Dictated stories both in individual and group situations constantly display the enrichment of language arising from the deeply familiar literature—words, idioms, structures, intonations. From time to time a book idiom that has caught the fancy of the children becomes part of class-room language, carrying a special twist of humour and intimacy, and this helps to bind the class together as a group with very special common feelings for the world and for each other. For instance, the saying, 'No harm in that!' from *Just in Time for the King's Birthday*, had a popular run for two or three weeks as a humorously exclusive answer to any request to be allowed to do something. Sendak's distinctive locutions for the passage of time in *Where the Wild Things Are* keep cropping up in the stories that the children dictate—'In and out of weeks and through a day'. 'It's time for me to be on my way' from *The House of Hay* has become a favourite farewell, and 'I guess she'll die!' is a common comment when someone has been hurt or has done something shocking.

The more noteworthy and memorable happenings on an outing tend to be suggested for language-experience stories. 'Paul put his head in the culvert and yelled. His voice came out the other end. It sounded like a troll.' Instead of 'Our Visit to the Butcher', this adventure story received the title, 'The Day We Lost Anne'. In these ways the children carry over imaginative modes into their corporate living and expression—not only the *language* of books but also their *cognitive styles*.⁴

The procedures we use for encouraging and supporting written expression are fundamentally those of language-experience technique augmented by the acceptance of writing-like play. Examples of personal writing, both the tracing

or copying of captions and the developmental attempts at independent writing are kept in individual files, and these display progress very clearly. Some children have attempted little writing and they tend to be those who have moved slowly in reading.

The children often attempt to copy words or phrases from their favourite books. We adopt Sylvia Ashton-Warner's approach, and each has a file of special, personal words both from books and from personal request. Following the procedure which worked so well for her, all the cards of a group are sometimes mixed together, and the children sort out their own, reading them to each other before placing them again in their own personal file. Those cards which are not recognized and are left on the floor are discarded—the words kept by each child are those that retain personal meaning and utility. Attempted copies of these personal words often appear as the only intelligible items in the exploratory expression of the children—but they are able to 'read' the complete message of their own scripts.

Innovating on literary structure

Following the ideas of Bill Martin (1972) we engage in analysis of the structure of stories and poems and create original versions of old favourites. This is usually a corporate activity in which we record the children's suggestions on large sheets of paper that can be made into books later. Often these personal versions of favourite poems and stories become popular reading material. An early example that proved so was based on the Instant Reader, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* After some fun changing the adjectives of colour to adjectives of size, the following structure was set up:

----- Bear, ----- Bear, Which became
Huge Bear, Huge Bear,
What do you hear?
I hear a ----- bird
----- -- me.
Singing to me.

and so on with other verses. That big book now has the title, 'Huge Bear' and is illustrated by the children.

We visited a large sailing ship which happened to be open to the public at the time we were enjoying *The Haunted House*. Following Bill Martin's suggestion in the teacher's Manual, we rewrite the story something like this:

Once upon a time I came upon an old pirate ship.
I went along the wharf. No-one was there.
I went up the gangplank. No-one was there.
I went on the upper deck. No-one was there.
I went to the bow. (Stern. Down the hold.
Down into the bilges. Up to the wheelhouse.
Up into the crow's nest.)
I looked over the edge.
I was there. (Reflection in water.)

Not exactly a graded text with controlled vocabulary, but most of the children can read it. Many of the children are now experimenting with their own versions of favourite poems and songs.⁵

The early-reading stage

As children move from emergent reading into early reading, standard sequential or graded readers come into natural use in association with shared-book-experience and language-experience procedures. Many caption readers normally used in the preparatory stage are available in the room, and as individual children spontaneously display their ability to read these little books with appropriate pointing and matching, they are given the first little book of

the 'Ready to Read' series. Their first reading is made with the teacher so that appropriate help can be given in response to direct questions. Many children are able to handle the first reading at a sitting and with a high level of accuracy and self-correction. In these cases the children are simply given the next reader in the series about a week later. All of the children are able to take these books home, and parents then feel secure in seeing their children use the same books as are used in other classes.

None of the normal instruction associated with the vocabulary or themes of the basic series is undertaken, and there seems some advantage in the children coming to these books as completely fresh little stories. In the structure operating within our school, children are moved on to another class as they become capable of reading the 'Little Books' in the series. Two of the children, however, move rapidly through the twelve 'Little Books' and the first two of the big 'Readers' without the usual instruction and are then moved to a higher class.

Shared-book-experience—a tentative evaluation

During the year the shape of the programme became more settled. At the centre, based on the developmental model, were procedures which we first came to call 'co-operative reading', and later, more appropriately, 'shared-book-experience'. Figure 2 'The Cycle of Success in Shared-Book-Experience' displays the relationship of parts of the programme, highlighting the cyclic success-structure which seems evident in the children's behaviour.

The relationship of shared-book-experience to other aspects of the programme as it developed is shown in Figure 3. Here we are to imagine that for many children the learnings of the emergent-reading stage would have begun through procedures of shared-book-experience in the home long before school entry. For a few children language-experience procedures may have begun through such activities as letter-writing and captioning introduced by parents and practised by children in writing-like behaviour.

Our first attempt to apply the developmental model at the new-entrant stage of schooling seems more hopeful than we might at first have supposed. At least we are encouraged to go on and explore the matter more deeply and work out the implications for the traditional core of the literacy programme in the teaching of basic skills in reading and spelling. To what extent can developmental structures support the learning of central skills throughout the junior school? In what ways does the model need to be refined for it to apply more aptly to the processes of reading and written expression, or for it to apply more sensitively to the institutional nature of schooling? What clues can we gain from the study of related specialties and models in linguistics and psychology? What is the best of educational research in literacy saying about the matter? These are the sort of questions we should now proceed to study.

Our classroom experiment has been stimulating, and if we must take a holiday, it will be with a load of books about all manner of related topics. We are becoming sufficiently fascinated by this business of literacy learning to spend some of our leisure hours teasing out the ramifications of it all. One of the unplanned results of the experiment has been the marked change in teacher role. Increasingly we have come to see ourselves as attendants and facilitators of natural processes rather than as instructors. Our major function in the active, input aspect of the programme has been to share pleasure with the children and to model literacy in operation. Although exhausting in pleasant ways, this activity has tended to make teaching a much more satisfying task. At first we felt somewhat guilty about having scripted ourselves out of our stereo-

typed occupation, and about the absence from the children of the typical first-year dependence on the teacher, but later, during the surge in growth of literacy, we recognize ourselves as observers and helpers. We reflect more deeply and with a kind of wonder on the intense preoccupation of the children and on their confident, self-regulated activity, which meets their individual needs more accurately than any sequential programme could do.

Figure 2 The Cycle of Success in Shared Book Experience

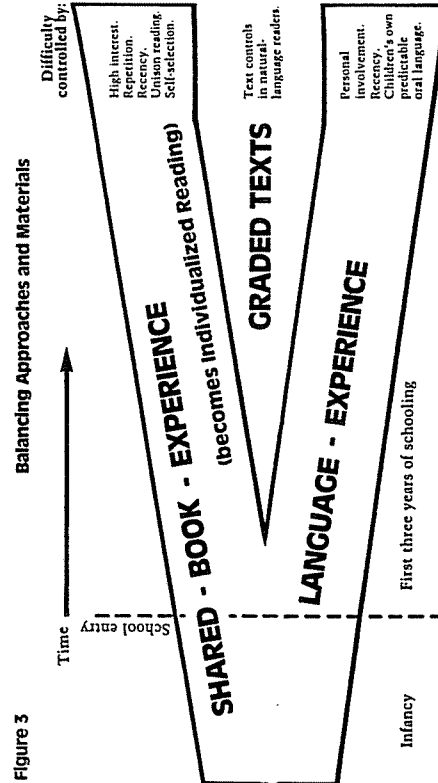
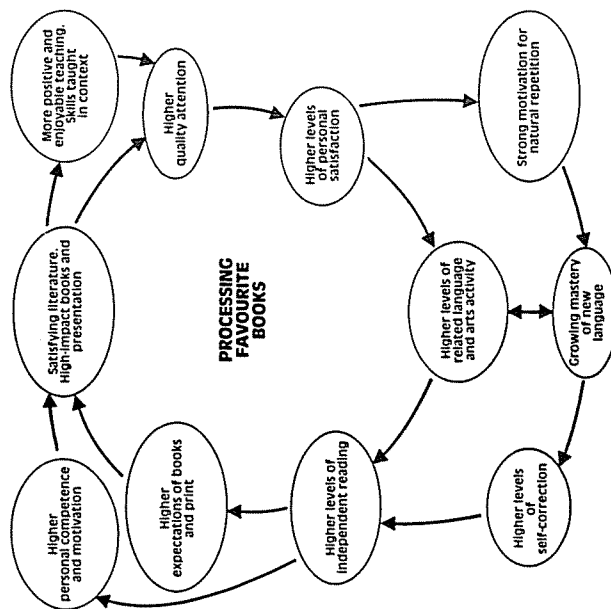


Figure 3

5 Refining the Model

One of the advantages of the developmental model, especially as it occurs in the acquisition of spoken language, is that it accepts the efficiency of the learner's own system to govern the complexities of the process—it does not require a teacher to control the immensely complicated behaviour or provide a learning progression. The parents and others act as efficient teachers without having any deep understanding of the nature of the processes to be learned, except that they are of course efficient users of them. One of the pleasing results of applying this model to the classroom is that the teacher's role becomes more simple and natural and rewarding.

In shared-book-experience and related language-experience programmes teachers provide a favourable environment and an emulative model within it. They induce appropriate activity in literacy tasks rather than provide instruction. They give hints about how to solve problems in reading and writing and provide simple answers to direct questions. But the complex work of learning is carried out by the individual learners in a self-regulative manner and the teacher does not pretend to know what all children ought to be doing and how they ought to be functioning. The children learn by actually behaving in the skill, and by approximating towards mature function. They learn too, from the small proportion of self-corrected mistakes they make in this wider body of successful activity.¹

But what is really going on in the experience of the learner? If we knew more about it, could we provide instructional short-cuts and make the learning process more rapid and efficient? Could we prevent failure occurring? Could we diagnose problems more accurately and provide effective guidance and remedial instruction? That is the unquestioned assumption of traditional teaching. To what extent can it be achieved? When *should* we intervene in the activity of a learner, and what distinguishes helpful from harmful intervention? If we want answers to these questions we must at least expect the questions to probe the tremendous complexity of the behaviour itself, and we will probably realize at crucial points that we cannot yet answer these questions fully.

The Meaning Systems of Language

Before seeking some insights from studying the actual behaviour of children learning to read and write, we should perhaps attempt a simple account of how language functions. But right at the outset we find many difficulties in