



Creating A Research-based Literacy Framework

Purpose

Over the past thirty years there has been a compelling need for research in many fields of endeavour: health, science, including dramatic changes in technology and, of course, education. The speed of innovation has made it difficult to absorb, analyze and ultimately determine which new developments are most relevant for our children, our most precious investment in this 21st century.

As classroom, school and community leaders, we have to make certain that our program offerings meet proven, evidence-based research standards; this can only happen through our continuous monitoring of recent research and its implications for classroom practice.

Rationale

Fortunately, substantive research in the literacy field has provided us with wisdom and confidence. The following research mega-studies – all conducted post year 2000 – provide excellent guidance for educators seeking to improve services to all children.

HELP (2013)

We were blessed in British Columbia to be the academic home of Dr. Clyde Hertzman of the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) from 2000 to 2013. Dr. Hertzman documented the condition and needs of vulnerable children entering the school system.

Through his partnerships with kindergarten teachers across Canada and using the EDI (Early Development Instrument) he was able to prove that over 1/3 of children entering school are vulnerable in more than one developmental measure; that over 50% of these children live in middle and upper middle class neighbourhoods; and that unless we address these challenges early in their school careers, they will become school casualties in their high school years.

Vulnerable children present with varied challenges: they may have social issues, be emotionally fragile, have undiagnosed medical conditions, be second language students, or have had little experience with literacy. Without immediate, high quality, strategic interventions, these children typically will struggle with the results of these challenges throughout their lifetime. With repeated experiences of failure and overwhelming difficulties they often become high school dropouts sometimes developing a poor self-image that extends into their adult lives.

One of the most important pieces of evidence that emerged from Dr. Hertzman's UBC research was the fact that 93% of all vulnerable children are capable of school success by grade two -- if educators 'do the right thing'. It was Dr. Hertzman who insightfully pointed out that vulnerable children just need more 'doses' of practice because many of these children have not experienced a rich home literacy environment prior to kindergarten. Over 30% of children in British Columbia enter school vulnerable every year; this number remains consistent year after year. There are provincial plans to provide enhanced preschool, daycare and family support services for young children. Every year that they are delayed schools are left to try to fill the gap. This can't happen too soon.

In contrast, approximately 68% of kindergarten entrants enter school eager to learn, already reading, socially responsible, emotionally comfortable, physically healthy, verbally conversant and creatively motivated (HELP, 2016). Unlike vulnerable children they graduate successfully with few or no interventions.

Response to Interventions (2009)

Dr. Richard Allington emerged in the late 1990's as a passionate advocate for struggling readers. His insights and impressive research on Interventions for vulnerable children have

dominated the international educational scene. His research reinforced Dr. Hertzman's studies; both researchers agreed that over 90% of all children, including those with special needs, are capable of school success in their primary years. It was remarkable to see these two intellectuals reinforce each other's work at Joyful Literacy Summits.

The NELP Report (2009)

The NELP (National Early Literacy Panel) Report aligns itself entirely with the Hertzman/Allington research findings: no matter what children's pre-school experiences may be, they are capable of success in literacy in their early school years.

The NELP Report (2009) identifies five of the most important factors that promise success for five-year old children and their future literacy development:

1. Alphabet Knowledge;
2. Phonological Awareness;
3. High Frequency Words (RAN);
4. Shared Reading and Shared Writing; and
5. Family Involvement.

The Fluent Reader (2010)

Dr. Tim Rasinski's research added further insight and a sixth factor that influences literacy success - Fluency Development Instruction. Since the NELP Report was conducted only with pre-readers up to age five, fluency (a skill developed once reading begins) was not one of the factors studied in the Report. In British Columbia's provincial assessments, fluency has always been an identified weakness. An investigation over the past decades revealed that fluency was not a significant part of prescribed curriculum in primary grades; however, it is now being implemented in many school districts as an important daily literacy ingredient.

NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children)

The NAEYC has always set the highest standards for early learners, especially by demonstrating the links between socio-dramatic play, foundational skills and complex cognitive activities. Play builds the foundation for more general competencies necessary for cognitive skills and emotional self-regulation and is therefore a critical component of early learning classrooms where foundational skills can be taught through games and active learning embedded in playful activities.

Canadian Council on Learning (2010).

While the Canadian Council on Learning was only able to include 19 studies in its research (compared to 6000 studies reviewed in the NELP Report), the conclusions drawn from the Canadian studies are completely consistent with the NELP Report and the NAEYC Report.

In 2018, the district launched a 2.5-year initiative that examined primary grade literacy research and related implementation strategies. As a result, these Guiding Principles have been developed to ensure that literacy practices are consistent from school to school. It is anticipated that staff members will base classroom practices on this research as they engage in pursuit of the most effective implementation practices for all children.

Recommended Practices

In 2018, the district launched a 2.5-year initiative that examined primary grade literacy research and related implementation strategies. As a result, these Guiding Principles have been developed to ensure that literacy practices are consistent from school to school. It is anticipated that staff members will base classroom practices on this research as they engage in pursuit of the most effective implementation practices for all children.

References

Allington, Richard. (2009). *What really matters in response to intervention*. New York: Pearson

Canadian Council on Learning (2010).
<https://www.ccl-cca.ca/>

First People's Principles of Learning.
<http://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/PUB-LFP-POSTER-Principles-of-Learning-First-Peoples-poster-11x17.pdf>

HELP
www.earlylearning.ubc.ca

Mort, Janet N. (2014) *Joyful Literacy Interventions – Part One: Early Learning Classroom Essentials*. (85 – 116). Amazon.com: CreateSpace.

NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children)
<https://www.naeyc.org>

NELP Report (National Early Literacy Panel)
<https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NELPReport09.pdf>

A Video Connection

The Science of Reading : How the Brain Learns to Read
<https://youtu.be/Er3luXjT4dg>

What teachers should know about the science of reading (APM Reports Documentary – Emily Hanford)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HGS9EG0HgU&feature=emb_title&ab_channel=EducationWeek