

OWL (2005) Curriculum Development: Research Meets Reason and Reality

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Context

Authors, Policy/Political, Publisher/Market

Authors

- D. Dickinson: Early language/literacy researcher. Some PreK L & L instructional design experience in funded intervention projects.
- J. Schickedanz: PreK teaching and curriculum development (Right to Read; Chelsea Project; BU lab school); broad knowledge of basic child development and early literacy. Some small scale, case-study research.
- OWL Development Roles: Collaborated on overarching language and literacy goals (WHAT children should learn) and OWL's architecture. Initial instructional design (Judy); discussed frequently with David and publisher contact person.



Policy/Political Context

- “No Child Left Behind” legislation, 2002
- “Early Reading First” (ERF)

Purpose: Develop early childhood centers of excellence focusing on *all areas of development*, especially early **language**, **cognitive**, and **pre-reading** skills that prepare children for continued school success. Must serve primarily low-income children.

Stipulations: Must include whole group and small group, teacher-directed instruction, with explicit instruction in these settings for literacy skills and oral vocabulary.

Publisher/Market Context

- ▶ Pearson Early Learning (PEL). Small group within Pearson Learning. Products for PreK: Read Together/Talk Together (Whitehurst); Prek-Math (Klein & Starkey); Work Sampling assessment tool (Meisels)
- ▶ Originally wanted a literacy skills program for ERF. We argued for a comprehensive, integrated, full day, PreK curriculum.
- ▶ PEL agreed. Had a site in NC (Charlotte-Mecklenburg public school PreK) from which sought mentors' advice about instructional approaches. Also piloted some OWL components (minimally).



Overarching Goals

Predictors of Decoding and Comprehension: Research Base

- Literacy Skills (phonological awareness, letter ID, alphabetic principle, sound-letter associations, print conventions)
- Oral Language (vocabulary, syntax, pragmatics; listening comprehension).
- Content Knowledge (science, social science, art, music).
- Knowledge of Text Structures (narrative, expository, verse).
- Thinking (recalling info; connecting info in, and brought to, the text; drawing inferences).
- Social Skills (attending, persisting).
- Dispositions (What kind of learner, citizen?)



OWL Architecture

Components and Features (grouping, time allocation, child/teacher control)

- Story Time (20 mins; WG/TD)
- Circle Time (SWPL) (20 mins; WG/TD)
- **Morning Meeting** (15 mins; WG/TD) ("intro Centers")
- Center Time (60 mins., CD/TS)
- **Let's Find Out about It** (LFOAI/LTAI) (15 mins; WG/TD)

WG/TD :Whole Group/Teacher Directed

CD/TS: Child Directed/Teacher Supported

- **Small Groups** (25 mins; TG/CAM)
- Outdoor Play (35 mins; CD/TS)
- Snack and Lunch (30 mins., CD/TS)
- Rest
- Transitions (WG/TD)

TG/CAM: Teacher Guided/Child Active Manipulation

Kind of experience in each component

- Story Time (narratives)
- Circle Time--SWPL (predictable text books; literacy skills & language tasks; songs & poems)
- Morning Meeting ("intro Centers") (demonstrations/explanations)
- Center Time (water/sand table, dramatic play, blocks, writing, books, puzzles/manips., art easel & table)
- Let's Find Out about It (informational books; demonstrations and explanations)
- Small Groups (3-day cycle, 3 of 6 kinds of experience each cycle: science, math, games, book browsing, writing, language and literacy manipulatives)
- Outdoor Play (outdoor environment-temperature, wind, shadows, puddles, leaves; motor play equipment; props; conversation)
- Snack and Lunch (items, conversation)
- Rest
- Transitions (literacy skills and vocabulary)

Social skills: Develop as children adapt to different behavioral expectations across components, with teacher support. **Units Design:** Components are related and knowledge and skills build across units.

Developing Research-based Instruction: Two Examples



Story Reading and SWPL-Circle Time (literacy skills)

Research-based Approaches to Story Reading

- ▶ (Whitehurst, et al.) **Dialogic** reading. Small groups in classrooms (e.g., 3-5 children); one-on-one with parents. Goals: Receptive and expressive vocabulary, and MLU. Approach: Literal questions.
- ▶ (Dickinson & Smith, 1991) **Performance style**. Whole group, 15 children. Goals: Deep levels of vocabulary and comprehension. Approach: Cognitively challenging talk (connecting info, defining critical words, drawing inferences). Teacher comments during a reading. Very few questions. Higher level questions after to prompt discussion.
- ▶ (Wasik & Bond, 2002) **Beyond the Book**. Whole group. Goal: Oral vocabulary. Approach: Vocabulary introduced before reading, using concrete objects; questioning throughout reading, some open-ended; follow-up experiences with vocabulary items.
- ▶ (Justice & Ezell, 2002) **Print skills** (and oral vocabulary). Small group in classroom (3 to 5 children); and one-on-one with parent. Goals: Print skills. Approach: Literal questions.



Validity Issues, Goal Mismatches, and Differences in Instructional Options

- ▶ External validity was low for Dialogic and Print-Focused small groups, given *OWL*'s whole group story reading context.
- ▶ Goals (i.e., receptive level vocabulary, print knowledge, literal understanding of "story facts") in Dialogic and Print-Focused approaches were a mismatch for *OWL*'s meaning focused goals.
- ▶ *OWL* had multiple contexts for teaching print skills (Justice & Ezell). No need to make that a primary focus for book reading. Also had multiple contexts for deepening book vocabulary. No need to teach vocabulary before a reading (Wasik & Bond) and risk attention/behavior issues that can result when preschoolers must sit for too long.



Current Story Reading Practices: Raised by PEL (What teachers liked/wanted.)


- ▶ Picture walks before the first reading. “What do you see here?” “What do you think is happening on this page?” (Rationale: Language development opportunity and comprehension support.)
- ▶ Prediction in book introductions, based on title and cover illustration: “What do you think this book will be about?” All ideas accepted. (Rationale: Reading strategy and language development opportunity.)

Decisions: Reading One


- ▶ Introduction: Read title, and author and illustrator names, while underlining. Make brief story-related comment. (Statement of story problem for each book would have been ideal, but not enough space in TG. PEL decision.)
- ▶ Friendly definitions for target words when encountered while reading. Other OWL components (LFOAI, Small Groups, Center Time).
- ▶ Few questions during reading. Comprehension asides instead (e.g., teacher summarizes events so far, draws inferences, states own wondering about what will happen). Cognitive apprenticeship approach (Collins, Brown, Newman, 1987) during reading to reveal the adult reader's thinking.
- ▶ Discussion after reading using higher level questions. Teacher scaffolds.
- ▶ Reading One: Performance Style (Dickinson & Smith, 1991).
- ▶ Reading Two: Much more active, reconstruction, by teacher and child. Children already know story; tolerate interruptions better. Higher level discussion question posed after the reconstruction. Or NOT, if little time.

Research-based Approaches to PreK Literacy Skills Instruction: Murky Mess

- ▶ Development of phonological awareness (PA) is not stage-like (i.e., each level not a prerequisite for the next). Levels overlap — multiple levels in progress at once (Anthony, et al., 2003).
- ▶ Developmental course of PA in independent assessments (i.e., large units/simpler manipulations mastered prior to small units/complex manipulations) need **not** dictate instructional sequence.
- ▶ No specific order is better than any other for alphabet letter learning. Children learn letters in name first. Frequency of encounter the key.
- ▶ Letter learning requires differentiating among designs that share features (Gibson & Gibson, 1995). Is not simply an object and name association task. Efficient letter ID instruction involves comparing/contrasting.
- ▶ Letter learning should include function—alphabetic principle.



Research-based Approaches to PreK Literacy Skills Instruction: Murky Mess (continued)

- Most research on instruction for literacy skills used one approach compared to “business as usual.” Including different approaches for developing PA or letter name knowledge was very rare.
 - Explicit/direct instruction, with explicit feedback, needed. Intentional program of instruction is better than hit and miss, or only embedding literacy skills instruction as situations arise.
 - Instructional decisions come down to preference for isolated skills instruction—rote learning— vs. something different, and to efficiency: What can one accomplish in X amount of time?
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Decisions: Literacy Skills Instruction in SWPL

- ▶ Appropriate for large group setting. Short tasks tucked in among songs and poems. **Not** 20 minutes of explicit literacy skills instruction.
- ▶ Must be interesting and engaging. Should involve thinking (e.g., contrasting/comparing, working from clues, possibilities for “going beyond the information given”).
- ▶ Direct and explicit literacy skills instruction, yes, but as thoughtful as possible, not primarily isolated bits and pieces.
- ▶ Should model and scaffold literacy skills use in meaningful contexts, *from the beginning*. This integrates PA and Letter ID, and supports acquisition of the alphabetic principle and sound-letter correspondences. (Cognitive apprenticeship approach, Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1987.)
- ▶ In addition to age-level mastery items stipulated in state standards, should support beginning understanding of concepts for which mastery is not expected until later.



Continued in the same way for all OWL
components

18-months in development



Revised instruction in the field: Springfield, MA and DC in 2004; State of ME later

- Readings three and four.
- Center time (writing center guidance)
- Small groups science (designed for more child involvement).
- SWPL (shortened by deleting a song, poem, or literacy skills task; made instructional guidance clearer)
- LFOI (dropped "Let's Talk about It" and added more LFOAI. Divided some original LFOI plans into two, etc.