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A Comparison of Early Childhood Education in Powell/Dublin, Ohio: Pedagogical and Literacy Practices

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Introduction/Abstract

The research project examined exemplary preschool literacy practices in the United States. Governmental policy now prioritizes the accessibility of preschool education more so than ever before. This investment influences teaching strategies and classroom environment so more can provide high quality education. The United States preschool education system has many standards and expectations for how the classroom should look and function for literacy development. The Ohio Content Standards of Early Learning and Development gives guidelines outlining what is to be taught in a preschool classroom. The standards are research-based and provide clarity on how the strategies analyzed enhance student's literacy skills.

The research investigation included on site observations of preschools organized around various philosophical perspectives, research article conclusions to compare, interviews with preschool teachers to gauge opinions of the current literacy curriculum, and introspective, detailed reports of the findings.

Objectives/Standards

School Observations:

Smoky Row Preschool
Dublin Montessori Academy
Meadows Academy

Phonemic Awareness and Literacy Development

L.20 With modeling and support use phrasing, intonation and expression in shared reading of familiar books, poems, chants, songs, nursery rhymes or other repetitious or predictable texts.

L.21 Demonstrate an understanding of basic conventions of print in English and other languages.

L.22 With modeling and support, recognize and produce rhyming words.

Oral Language and Literacy Development

L.6 Use language to communicate in a variety of ways with others to share observations, ideas and experiences; problem-solve, reason, predict and seek new information.

L.13 With modeling and support, follow typical patterns when communicating with others (e.g., listen to others, take turns talking and speaking about the topic or text being discussed).

Dramatic Play and Literacy Development

L. 16 Retell or re-enact familiar stories.

Environmental Print and Literacy Development/Writing and Literacy Development

L. 31 With modeling and support, use a combination of drawing, dictating and emergent writing.

for a variety of purposes (e.g., letters, greeting cards, menus, lists, books).

L. 25 With modeling and support, recognize and "read" familiar words or environmental print.

Read Alouds and Literacy Development

L.15 Ask and answer questions, and comment about characters and major events in familiar stories.

L.4 Demonstrate understanding of increasingly complex concepts and longer sentences.

Example of Two Exemplary Literacy Practices

Oral Language and Literacy Development

Pretend talk allows a student to enunciate and engage orally with words and helps a student practice language in their own form. A great example of pretend talk between a mother and her 4-year-old playing with cars is below:

Child: You better watch out from that guy.

Mother: I know, he's gonna pass him.

Oh, he's gonna pass on the side. [Makes engine sounds.]

Whoops, now he's gonna make a U-turn. [Makes more engine sounds.]

Whoops, now he has to go slow.

He's in back of a bus.

[Makes more engine sounds.]

Child: How did he come back over that side?

Mother: I don't know; he's just driving around.

He likes to drive.

Child: You-he has to drive. He's the teacher, right? He's the...

[Dialogue continues]

(Katz, 66) (Bennett-Armistead, Duke, Moses, 2005, 50)

The dialogue between this mother and child displays how a child's imagination is capable of creating story lines, plots, and adding sound effects to enhance the play. The child is willing to take risks and guide the mother through how he/she wants to play with the cars. Pretend play encourages a child to be curious, control the play, and invite others into their scenario. All of these oral dialogues cultivate and develop a child's literacy language.

Writing and Literacy Development

Stages of Emergent Writing		
Stage	Description	Example
Drawing	Drawings that represent writing	
Scribbling	Marks or scribbles the child intends to be writing	
Wavy scribbles or mock handwriting	Wavy scribbles that imitate cursive writing and have a left-to-right progression; child pretends to write words	
Letter-like forms or mock letters	Letters and marks that resemble letter-like shapes	
Letter strings	Strings of letters that do not create words, written left to right, including uppercase and lowercase letters	
Transitional writing	Letters with spaces in between to resemble words; letters/words copied from environmental print; letters often reversed	
Invented or phonetic spelling	Different ways to represent the sounds in words; the first letter of the word or beginning and ending sounds represent the entire word	
Beginning word and phrase writing	Words with beginning, middle, and ending letter sounds; short phrases	
Conventional spelling and sentence writing	Correct spelling of words, generally the child's name and words such as mom and dad; sentences with punctuation and correct use of uppercase and lowercase letters	

Results: Comparison of Observed Schools Literacy Practices

Preschool Program	Smoky Row Preschool	Dublin Montessori	Meadows Academy
Theory Inspired By	Emergent curriculum	Montessori	Core Knowledge and Reggio Emilia
Phonemic Awareness and Literacy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sounding out words Singing songs Rhyming words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sounding/streching words Rhyming words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phonetically repeat alphabet with teacher
Oral Language and Literacy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer conversations Recasting words Problem solving dialogue at block area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer conversations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Descriptive language of weather, play, weekend
Dramatic Play and Literacy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housekeeping station (Kitchen play) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lots of pretend /imaginative play occurs here Block area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kitchen area with realistic cooking materials No pretend play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mini Movers class - imaginative play with games Pretend play with sounds (cars)
Environmental Print and Literacy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kitchen, tubs, shelves, stations labeled Disks labeled with name of seat arrangement for meeting times Students have concept of print 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No labels in classroom Images on walls are real world artwork Calendar in classroom Students have concept of print 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students create environmental print in classroom for the walls Calendar in classroom Schedule of day in classroom
Read Alouds and Literacy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two read alouds Introduction before reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One read aloud before reading Paused with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two read alouds Students read aloud to each

Excerpt from Research Paper: Observations on Phonemic Awareness and Literacy Development Compared

Sounding out is an exemplary practice for developing phonemic awareness (Bennett-Armistead, Duke, Moses, 2005). At **Smokey Row preschool program**, the teachers focused on teaching students the skills to phonetically sound out letters and words. The students had phonemic awareness and the practice of saying the phoneme of the letter helped them make more **connections between letters and sounds**. At **Dublin Montessori preschool**, the teachers phonetically stretched the individual sounds in words. The teacher stressed and enunciated the individual phoneme for each word to the student. First the teacher would **stretch**, and then s/he would combine the stretched letters to help students see their **connections** to this blending of letters. At **Meadows Academy**, the teachers worked with students phonetically repeating alphabetically. The students would recall and repeat the letter and sound associated with it. For example, a student would say the letter "d" and then the sound /d/.

All programs observed reiterated the importance of developing phonemic awareness and teachers used strategies to **support** student learning. Although every school did not apply nor introduce the skill in the same way, each student observed demonstrated phonemic awareness and teachers used strategies to continue developing student knowledge in ways deemed effective in the research literature.

Conclusions of Exemplary Literacy Practices to Preschool Programs

The research concluded the three schools each integrate exemplary literacy practices and reiterate the importance of the strategies, yet each apply them in different ways. The content standards for Ohio outline the importance to teach students skills to read and write. Then each school's philosophy guides the strategies chosen and how to implement them. Each observed preschool validated the significance and influence the developmental strategies for phonemic awareness, oral language, read alouds, dramatic play, environmental print, and writing have on a student's education.

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