HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

BIRTH THROUGH KINDERGARTEN

FOURTH EDITION

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Helping Young Children
Learn Language and Literacy

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Birth Through Kindergarten

Fourth Edition

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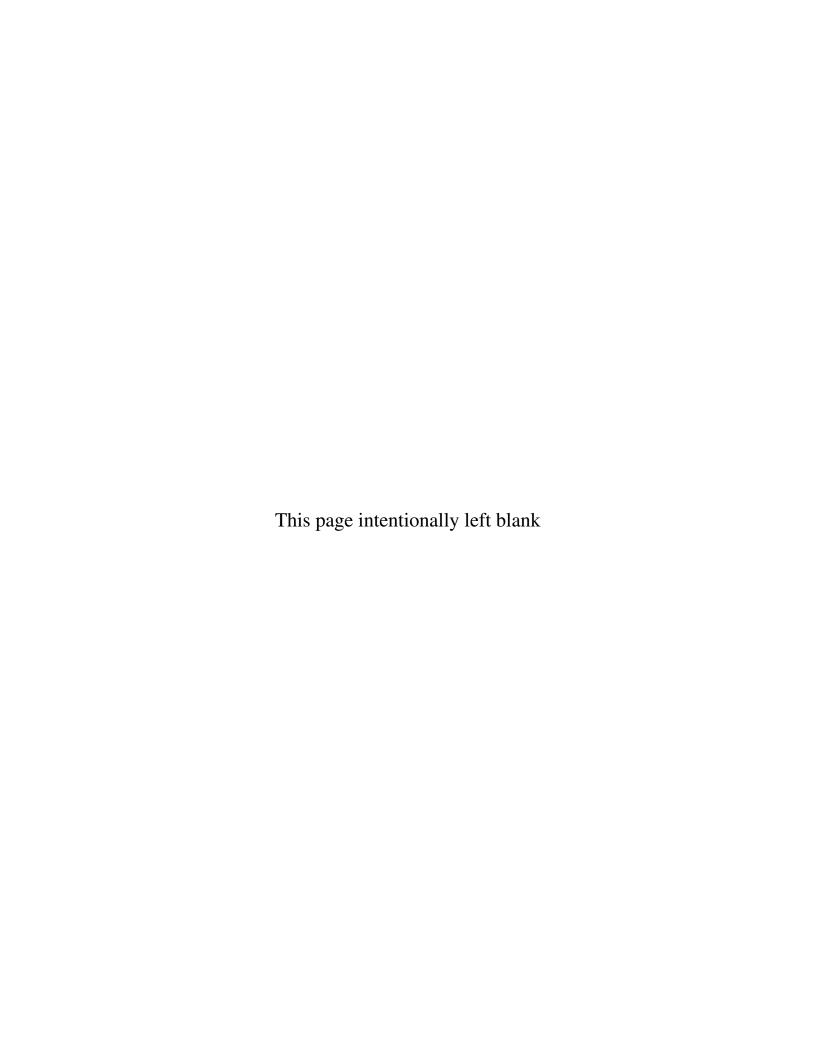
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Preface

Helping Young Children Learn Language and Literacy, Fourth Edition, is about teaching the language arts—about facilitating children's reading, writing, speaking, and listening development in pre-kindergarten through the upper elementary grades. The language arts are essential to everyday life and central to all learning; through reading, listening, writing, and talking, children come to understand the world. To be a successful teacher of language and literacy, you need to understand how children's language and literacy develop and how to help children become fluent, flexible, effective users of oral and written language. Children are at the center of all good language and literacy teaching. This principle underlies the four themes that run throughout this book: a perspective on teaching and learning that blends constructivism and science-based instruction, respect for diversity, instruction-based assessment, and family involvement in literacy learning.

This book describes how children acquire language and literacy knowledge in many different contexts and how teachers can effectively promote the development of oral and written language. It also describes numerous science-based instructional practices teachers can use to enhance children's language and literacy knowledge. We believe that children construct their own knowledge about oral and written language by engaging in integrated, meaningful, and functional activities with other people. Children do not first "study" speaking, then listening, then reading, then writing. They learn by engaging in activities in which language and literacy are embedded. We also believe, however, that literacy skills can be increased via direct, systematic instruction. This instruction can often take the form of games and other engaging activities, and it also contains the elements of direct instruction: explanations, teacher modeling, guided practice, and independent practice.

New to This Edition

There are numerous new features to this edition that reflect recent developments in the field of language arts education.

■ We have added a fourth author, Kathleen Roskos, who is a top literacy researcher and scholar. Dr. Roskos has extensive experience in early childhood literacy instruction. She has totally revised Chapter 5, Developing Oral Language Comprehension, and Chapter 7, Teaching Early Reading. In addition, she has made substantial contributions to Chapter 4, Organizing Early Language and Literacy Instruction, and Chapter 9, Assessing Young Children's Language and Early Literacy.

■ We continue to believe that it is important to frame the ideas presented in this book within the broader national context of what is happening in language and literacy in the United States. The most important development since the publication of the 3rd edition in 2012 has been the establishment of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, Grades K–12. These are truly national standards that specify what children should know and be able to do at each grade level. Almost all of the states have adopted these standards, so they are going to have a tremendous effect on language and literacy instruction. The Common Core State Standards are introduced in Chapter 1. The remaining chapters, when appropriate, each feature the standards that fit with that chapter's content.

■ We have added a number of new pedagogical features, including:
  ■ *Chapter Goals* that outline the learning objectives for each chapter;
  ■ *Pause and Think About …* that encourages students to reflect on the chapter content;
  ■ *Check for Understanding* quizzes* that allow students to self-assess their knowledge of key concepts; and
  ■ *Link to Practice* that enables students to apply key concepts in classrooms where they are doing observations and internships.

Please note that eText enhancements are only available in the Pearson eText, and no other third-party eTexts, such as CourseSmart or Kindle.

- We have greatly expanded our coverage of strategies for promoting language and literacy in infants and toddlers, both at home and in day care settings.
- Since the publication in 2012 of the 3rd edition of this book, much has been written about how to best support children's language and literacy development. Of course, we have revised the ideas presented in this book so the information shared is reflective of what is known about language and literacy development today. Many references were eliminated because they provided outdated information, and many new references were added. More than 30 percent of the references have been changed in this new edition.
- We also are grateful to the veteran teachers who describe how they provide their students with effective language arts instruction. This has been a feature of each of our previous editions. This edition includes several illustrations of how the teaching strategies we describe can be applied to specific situations and how real teachers deal with practical problems that arise in the course of daily life in the classroom.
- In response to reviewer feedback, we have added more practical, "hands-on" examples and activities.
- The chapters contain linked videos* that provide examples of the important discussions throughout the text. Each illustrates a teacher using one of the many instructional strategies described in the text. Seeing the strategy in action in a classroom with children helps to bring the print to life.
- Invigorate learning with the Enhanced Pearson eText. The Enhanced Pearson eText provides a rich, interactive learning environment designed to improve student mastery of content with embedded videos. The Enhanced Pearson eText is also available without a print version of the textbook. Instructors, visit pearsonhighered.com/etextbooks to register for your digital examination copy.

Themes

Children are at the center of all good language and literacy teaching. This principle underlies the four themes that run throughout this book: blending emergent literacy and scientifically based reading research into a high-quality program, respect for diversity, instructionally linked assessment, and family involvement.

Our first theme acknowledges the two very different views on how to teach language and literacy to young children, emergent literacy and scientifically based reading research. We believe that both approaches to early literacy instruction have their advantages. Emergent literacy programs provide opportunities for children to learn about literacy on their own and with help from the teacher and peers. Learning can occur at the appropriate pace for each child and build on what he or she already knows. This approach provides children with rich opportunities to acquire oral language and to move through the developmental progressions in emergent reading and writing. The downside to this approach is that not all children are ready or able to take full advantage of these learning opportunities. These children have a tendency to "fall through the cracks" in emergent literacy programs and make very little progress. Such children need to be explicitly taught vocabulary, phonological awareness, alphabet, and concepts of print before they can fully profit from the learning experiences in an emergent literacy program. The book describes how children acquire language and literacy knowledge in many different contexts, how teachers can design authentic classroom opportunities for using oral and written language, and how teachers can design developmentally appropriate ways to explicitly teach the core skills that have been found to be predictive of later reading achievement.

Our second theme is respect for diversity. Children's personal experiences, both at home and at school, are important factors in learning. In our diverse society, children come to school with vastly different backgrounds, both in terms of life experiences and language. This diversity needs to be taken into account when designing instructional activities for children and in evaluating children's responses to these activities. Illustrations of how teachers can work effectively with diverse learners can be found throughout this book. This new edition includes

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special features at the end of most chapters that explain how to adapt instruction for English language learners and children with special needs. Every child comes to school with a wealth of information about how written and spoken language works in the real world. Teachers must discover what each student already knows to build on that student's knowledge through appropriate classroom activities.

Because we recognize that assessment cannot be separated from good teaching, instructionally linked assessment is our third major theme. We introduce the principles of assessment-guided instruction in Chapter 1. Chapter 9 focuses on assessment and describes strategies that teachers can use to understand children's language and literacy knowledge in the context of specific learning and teaching events. Chapter 9 also describes how standardized tests can be used to document how well schools, and now individual teachers, are doing their jobs. This "accountability" function of assessment is becoming increasingly important in the current political climate, so it is crucial that teachers understand how to interpret the results of these standardized assessment instruments. So, assessment-guided instruction is our third theme. Find out what children know and can do—and plan instruction based on each child's needs.

The fourth theme running through this edition is the importance of the family in young children's language and literacy development. The family and the home environment shape children's early language and literacy experiences—the sounds and words they hear, the storybooks read to them, the experiences they have with written language. Connecting home and school is critically important. In several chapters, we include descriptions of how early childhood teachers can connect with families and engage caregivers in their children's school or center. The aims are twofold—to provide effective communication strategies to share information with and receive information from caregivers about the children and to provide suggestions for what families might do to support and celebrate language and literacy learning in the home.

Acknowledgments

Finally, our families have helped us write this book. Our grandchildren and grandnieces and grandnephews are providing wonderful examples of their use and enjoyment of oral and written language. The stories of their journeys to being competent language users bring life to the research and theory discussed in our book. Mary Christie, Don (Skip) Enz, Ron Vukelich, and Philip Roskos gave us time to write but also pulled us from our computers to experience antique shows, museums, trips, home repairs, life. And then, of course, there is our extended family—our parents, David and Dorothy Palm, Art and Emma Larson, Bill and Jeannine Fullerton, John and Florence Christie, William and Arlene Schenk—who provided our early reading, writing, speaking, and listening experiences and helped us know firsthand the joys of learning and teaching the language arts.

—C.V., J.C., B.J.E., K.A.R.

Foundations of Language and Literacy

GRANDMA and 3-year-old Carol cuddle in an overstuffed green chair. Grandma asks, "What book should we read?" Carol picks a book they haven't read before, *Caps for Sale* by Esphyr Slobodkina. Grandma and Carol study the cover. Grandma says, "What do you think that guy is doing with all those caps on his head?" Carol says that she thinks he's a circus man. They begin to read. They quickly come upon a word Grandma doubts Carol knows, *wares*. She explains that wares are things for sale. She reminds Carol of their recent trip to the City Drug store and asks, "What wares did we see there?" Carol remembers candy, Grandma's prescription, cards, and a few other wares. As they read, Grandma explains other words that Carol might not know with simple "child-friendly" definitions, and they talk about the story. Carol especially likes the monkeys in the tree and Grandma's tsh, tsh, tsh sounds. As she closes the book, Grandma asks, "So, was the guy a circus man?" Carol knows that he was a peddler carrying his wares on his head; they weren't on shelves in a store!

Language and Literacy: Definitions and Interrelationships

The terms *language* and *literacy* can be defined in many ways. **Language** can be defined very broadly as any system of symbols that is used to transmit meaning. These symbols can consist of sounds, finger movements, print, and so on. **Literacy** also has several different meanings.

CHAPTER GOALS

1.1 Explain the connection between language and literacy.

1.2 Explain why standards, like the Common Core State Standards, are important to early childhood educators' planning, teaching, and assessing.

1.3 Label instructional strategies that early childhood teachers might use to support their young learners' early literacy learning as originating from the emergent literacy perspective or from the scientifically based reading research perspective.

1.4 Describe several principles of effective early literacy instruction.

BOX 1.1
Definition of Terms

Alphabet knowledge: The knowledge about the alphabetic writing systems (e.g., letter names, letter sounds, group of letters)

Common Core State Standards (CCSS): Nationwide standards for K–12 in English Language Arts (ELAs) and mathematics that indicate what is expected for students at each grade level to know and be able to do

Context cues: Information near an unknown word that helps readers infer the meaning of the words

Contextualized language: Ability to engage in face-to-face conversations about everyday tangible experiences; listeners can build ideas by using contexts around the words

Contextualized print: Print embedded in a context that allows the reader to hypothesize about what words say

Decontextualized language: Language that is removed from everyday tangible and familiar experiences within the immediate context; no supports from the immediate environment to help get the point across

Decontextualized print: Print removed from its contexts (e.g., McDonalds without the golden arches)

Developmentally appropriate instruction: Teaching children differently by considering each child's age and specific needs

Early literacy: The reading and writing behaviors that children engage in from birth to age 5

Emergent forms of reading and writing: Forms of reading and writing children use as they move toward conventional reading and writing

Expressive language: The language used to communicate in speaking and writing

Extratextual conversations: Conversations among readers about content or topics that are related to but are not included in the text

High-frequency-word: List of words that readers are encouraged to recognize without having to "figure them out"

Highlighting tape: A tape used to emphasize important parts in a text; colored and see through

Informal assessment: Assessment by observation or by other nonstandardized procedures

Language: Refers to oral language (communicating via speaking and listening)

Literacy: Refers to reading and writing (communicating through print)

Phonological awareness: Awareness of the speech sound system (i.e., word boundaries, stress patterns, syllables, onset-rime units, and phonemes)

Print awareness: Knowledge of the conventions and characteristics of written language (e.g., direction of print, read print not pictures, identify front and back of book)

Rebus picture: A picture or symbol representing a word or a syllable (e.g., How R U? = How are you? I ♥ U = I love you.)

Receptive language: Language used to comprehend in listening and reading

Schema: A mental structure in memory including abstract representations of events, objects, and relationships in the world

Think-aloud: A technique or strategy in which the teacher verbalizes his or her thoughts aloud while engaging in a task

Standardized assessment: An assessment that is delivered in exactly the same way each time it is administered and for which there is a reference group that defines the norm for particular age groups

Ongoing assessment: Assessment that relies on the regular collection of children's work to illustrate children's knowledge and learning

It can refer to the ability to create meaning through different media (e.g., *visual literacy*), knowledge of key concepts and ideas (e.g., *cultural literacy*), and the ability to deal effectively with different subject areas and technologies (e.g., *mathematical literacy, computer literacy*).

Because the topic of this book is early childhood language arts—the part of the preschool and kindergarten curriculum that deals with helping children learn to speak, listen, read, and

write—we use school-based definitions of these terms. Language refers to oral language (communicating via speaking and listening), and literacy refers to reading and writing (communicating through print). However, as we describe how children grow in both these areas, it will become obvious that language and literacy acquisition are closely tied to the total development of the child—learning to think, to make sense of the world, to get along with others, and so on.

While we have organized this book into separate chapters on oral language and literacy, we know that the two types of language are integrally connected and related to each other. Oral language provides the base and foundation for literacy. Oral language involves first-order symbolism, with spoken words representing meaning. Written language, on the other hand, involves second-order symbolism that builds on the first-order symbolism of oral language. Printed symbols represent spoken words that, in turn, represent meaning. Do you see the connections between language and literacy?

One obvious connection between oral and written language is vocabulary. For a reader to recognize and get meaning from text, most of the words represented by the text must already be in the reader's oral vocabulary. If the reader can recognize most of the words in the text, **context cues** might be used to figure out the meaning of a few totally unfamiliar words. Similarly, a writer's choice of words is restricted by his or her oral vocabulary.

Catherine Snow and her colleagues (1991) point out a less obvious, but equally important, link between oral language and literacy. They point out that oral language is actually an array of skills related to different functions. One set of skills is relevant to the negotiation of interpersonal relationships and involves the child's ability to engage in face-to-face conversations (**contextualized language**). Another involves the ability to use language to convey information to audiences who are not physically present (**decontextualized language**). Decontextualized language plays a vital role in literacy because it is the type of language that is typically used in written texts.

Children gain experience in these different aspects of language through different activities. They become skilled at contextualized language by engaging in conversations with others, whereas they gain skill at decontextualized language by listening to stories, by engaging in explanations and personal narratives, and by creating fantasy worlds (Snow et al., 1991). It is not surprising, therefore, that research has shown that children with rich oral language experiences at home tend to become early readers (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001) and have high levels of reading achievement during the elementary grades (Wells, 1986).

The relationship between literacy and oral language becomes reciprocal once children become proficient readers. Extensive reading begins to build children's oral language capabilities, particularly their vocabulary knowledge. Cunningham and Stanovich (1998) present evidence that people are much more likely to encounter "rare" unfamiliar words in printed texts than in adult speech, and Swanborn and de Glopper's (1999) meta-analysis of studies on incidental word learning revealed that during normal reading, students learn about 15 percent of the unknown words they encounter. The more children read, the larger their vocabularies become. In the preschool years, the more children are read to, the larger their vocabularies become.

Because this book deals with the early stages of literacy development, the relationship between oral language and literacy is primarily one way. Anything teachers can do to build children's oral language skills, particularly their vocabulary knowledge and ability to deal with decontextualized language, will also benefit children's literacy development. So even if a teacher's primary mission is to boost young children's literacy skills, attention also needs to be given to building children's oral language abilities.

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One way that parents can grow their children's vocabularies is by reading to them.

✋ **PAUSE** and **THINK** about …

THE BENEFITS OF ADULTS READING TO CHILDREN

Based on your experiences, explain how reading a story to children, like Grandma did to Carol in the opening vignette, can support children's language and literacy skill development.

The Common Core State Standards

Standards? What are they? **Standards** define the knowledge and skills that children—all children—must attain. They clarify and raise expectations. Because they identify what all children must know and be able to do, they define what is to be taught and what level of child performance is expected.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education prepared a report titled *A Nation at Risk*. The commissioners warned that a "rising tide of mediocrity" in our schools threatened our future as a nation. Action was needed. The solution recommended by the commissioners was the creation of standards. High and rigorous standards, the commissioners believed, would restore the nation's place in the world. These commissioners launched the standards movement. While initially the standards movement focused on the writing of content standards in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies for the K–12 grades, attention soon turned to the writing of standards for pre-K education. By the early 2000s, nearly every state had state content standards for pre-K to grade 12. Typically, at the preschool level, standards also were written in the social, emotional, and physical development domains.

One issue, however, clouded the standards movement. Each state's standards were different, and some state standards were technically superior to others (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). Recently, there was a significant movement to "standardize" the standards. In 2009, 48 states, 2 territories, and the District of Columbia signed a memorandum of agreement with the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, committing to the initiation of a process to produce a set of rigorous, research-based K–12 standards in English language arts and mathematics, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). One year later, they released a set of standards. (Search for Common Core State Standards—English Language Arts.) States could elect to adopt the CCSS, and initially 45 states, the District of Columbia, 4 territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity did just that. Following adoption, these standards replaced each state's state-developed standards. The Common Core standards begin at kindergarten. This led to states revising their pre-K standards in the English language arts and mathematics to ensure alignment with the CCSS kindergarten standards in these two content areas.

Why are standards important to teachers and children? While standards, like the CCSS, set expectations for children's achievement, they do not tell teachers what curriculum to use or what instructional strategies to employ in their classrooms. Yet, standards drive instruction and assessment. When teachers plan their lessons, they use the standards to guide their decision making about such instructional features as the kinds of books to read to their children, the instructional materials to purchase and provide for their children's use, the explicit teaching instruction they will provide, the center time activities, and how to assess their children's learning. The standards movement continues to be viewed as an important means to improve the quality of education in the United States at all levels.

⚬⚬ **LINK** to **PRACTICE**

Access your state's department of education website to bookmark your state's early literacy guidelines. (You may need to search a bit. Your state's pre-K standards might be called "The Foundations of Learning," "Building Blocks to Learning," or something else; few states called their pre-K standards, "standards.") Compare what your state expects preschool children to know with what the CCSS expects K children to know. Do you see a clear link between the two sets of standards? Share your thinking with your peers.

Interview an early childhood education teacher (e.g., child care teacher, Head Start teacher, public school preschool teacher). Ask this teacher how he or she is using the state's pre-K standards, state's kindergarten standards, or the CCSS kindergarten standards to guide his or her decision making about what to teach and assess. For example, you might ask: How do you use standards in your lesson planning? What role do standards play in assessing your children's learning? Share what you learned with a peer and compare your findings.

Early Literacy Instructional Approaches

Emergent Literacy Approach

During the 1990s, emergent literacy was the predominant view of early reading and writing, and most conceptions of best practice stemmed from this meaning-centered perspective. According to this view, children begin learning about reading and writing at a very early age by observing and interacting with adults and other children as they use literacy in everyday life activities. For example, young children observe the print on cereal boxes to select their favorite brands, watch as their parents write notes and read the newspaper, and participate in special literacy-focused routines such as storybook reading with a parent or older sibling. On the basis of these observations and activities, children construct their own concepts about the functions and structure of print and then try these out by engaging in emergent forms of reading and writing, which often are far removed from the conventional forms adults use. Based on how others respond to their early attempts, children make modifications and construct more sophisticated systems of reading and writing. For example, early attempts at writing often shift from scribbles to random streams of letters (SKPVSSPK) and to increasingly elaborate systems of invented spelling such as *JLE* for *jelly* (Sulzby, 1990). Eventually, with lots of opportunities to engage in meaningful literacy activities, large amounts of interaction with adults and peers, and some incidental instruction, children become conventional readers and writers.

The emergent literacy perspective, then, suggests that children learn about language and literacy by observing, exploring, and interacting with others. Children assume the role of apprentice—mimicking, absorbing, and adapting the words and literacy activities used by more knowledgeable others. As they engage in social interactions, children integrate new experiences with prior knowledge, constructing and testing hypotheses to make meaning. They store this newly constructed knowledge in mental structures called **schemas**.

Proponents of emergent literacy believe that, if provided the right kind of environments, experiences, and social interactions, most children require very little formal instruction to learn to read and write. Early childhood language arts programs based on the emergent literacy perspective feature the following components:

The reading of big books provides teachers with opportunities to teach numerous concepts of print.

- Print-rich classroom settings that contain large numbers of good children's books; displays of conventional print (e.g., alphabet friezes, charts written by teachers); functional print (e.g., helper charts, daily schedules, labels); student writing; play-related print (e.g., empty cereal boxes in the housekeeping dramatic play center); and the like
- Frequent storybook reading by the teacher with lots of student interaction
- Shared reading of big books coupled with embedded instruction on concepts about print (e.g., book concepts such as *author* and *title* and the left-to-right sequence of written language)
- Shared writing experiences in which the teacher writes down oral stories dictated by children

- Projects and/or thematic units that link language, reading, and writing activities together
- Opportunities for children to engage in meaningful reading and writing during "center time" activities and a family literacy component

Emergent literacy proponents contend that these types of literacy experiences build on what children have already learned about written language, provide a smooth transition between home and school, and help to ensure initial success with learning to read and write. The teacher's role is to provide the materials, experiences, and interactions that enable children to learn to read and write. Direct instruction on skills such as alphabet recognition and letter–sound relationships is used only with children who fail to learn these skills through meaningful interactions with print.

🖐 PAUSE and THINK about …

WHEN CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE AND EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT BEGINS

Some researchers have concluded that children's language and early literacy development begins long before children enter kindergarten. What might lead these researchers to this conclusion?

Scientifically Based Reading Research Approach

By 2002, initiatives such as Good Start, Grow Smart (2002), and Early Reading First, a federally sponsored program aimed at supporting low-income preschool children's language and **early literacy** needs, pushed a skills-based approach to early literacy instruction, then referred to as scientifically based reading research (SBRR), into prominence. Perhaps the most valuable contribution of this movement has been identifying the "core" knowledge and skills that young children must have to become successful readers (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Longitudinal studies have shown that preschool-age children's oral language (**expressive and receptive language**, including vocabulary development), **phonological awareness**, and **alphabet knowledge** are predictive of reading achievement in the elementary grades. **Print awareness**, which includes concepts of print (e.g., left-to-right, top-to-bottom sequence), book concepts (author, title), and sight word recognition, has also been found to be positively correlated with reading ability in the primary grades (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). To date, 11 variables have been identified as predictive of later reading success. These 11 variables include *alphabet knowledge*, print knowledge, *oral language/vocabulary*, environmental print, invented spelling, listening comprehension, *phonological short-term memory*, rapid naming, *phonemic awareness*, visual memory, and *visual-perceptual* skills. The skills in italics are those evidencing the highest correlation with school-age children's decoding skills.

SBRR investigators also focused on identifying effective strategies for teaching this core literacy content to young children. One of the most consistent research findings is that core early literacy skills can be increased via explicit, systematic instruction. This instruction can often take the form of games and other engaging activities, but it also contains the elements of direct instruction: explanations, teacher modeling, guided practice, and independent practice.

SBRR instruction occurs in large and small group settings. Large-group instruction occurs during "circle time," when the entire class sits on the floor near the teacher, and may include:

- Storybook reading coupled with instruction on vocabulary (after reading "Did you ever see llamas eating their pajamas, down by the bay," the teacher asks, "Does anyone know what a llama is?") [skill—oral language]
- Alphabet charts with a poem for each letter that contains many examples of the "target letter." For example, after reading a chart poem for the letter *a* ("Andy Apple went out to play, Andy Apple had a bad day. He got bit by an ant and he forgot his address. Now Andy is full of dismay!"), the teacher asks children to come up and use **highlighting tape** to highlight the words that contain the letter *a* [skill—alphabet knowledge]
- Every-pupil response activities in which all children have a chance to respond at the same time. For example, the teacher might say a series of words, some of which begin with the /p/ sound and some of which do not. Children hold their thumbs up if a word starts with sound of /p/ [skill—phonological awareness]

Instruction can also be conducted in small groups. The advantage is that if an activity requires that one child respond at a time, all children get multiple opportunities to participate. For example, using a pocket chart, a teacher can give a small group of children each a **high-frequency-word** flash card (*my*, *the*, *is*, *big*, *fast*) or a **rebus picture** card (*truck*, *cat*, *girl*, *house*). After reviewing the words on the cards, the teacher can help the children build sentences by saying words and placing cards in the chart ("My cat is big," "The truck is fast," "My house is big"). The skill being worked on here is *print awareness*.

Children also need opportunities to practice and consolidate what has been taught in large and small group settings. This practice usually occurs during an "activity" time when children work individually or in small groups in learning centers. This requires that the teacher link the center activities to the skills taught in the curriculum.

✓ CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

Let's stop for a moment to click on the check mark icon to check your understanding of these two early literacy instructional approaches.

Blending the Two Approaches: The Early Literacy Approach

Both the emergent literacy and SBRR approaches to early literacy instruction have their advantages. Emergent literacy programs provide opportunities for children to learn about literacy on their own and with help from the teacher and peers. Learning can occur at the appropriate pace for each child and build on what he or she already knows. This approach provides children with rich opportunities to acquire oral language and to move through the developmental progressions in emergent reading and writing. The downside to this approach is that not all children are ready or able to take full advantage of these learning opportunities. These children have a tendency to "fall through the cracks" in emergent literacy programs and make very little progress. Such children need to be directly taught vocabulary, phonological awareness, alphabet, and concepts of print in order to fully profit from the learning experiences in an emergent literacy program.

We advocate instruction that blends together the key components of both approaches (see Figure 1.1). This approach features the print-rich classroom, storybook reading, shared

Figure 1.1   Blended Instruction

EMERGENT LITERACY

Print-rich classrooms

Storybook reading

Shared reading and writing

Projects and thematic units

Opportunities to engage in meaningful reading and writing during "center time" activities

Developmentally appropriate activities that promote literacy learning

+

SBRR

Large and small group instruction:

- Oral language
- Phonological awareness
- Alphabet knowledge
- Concepts about print

Opportunities to practice these skills during center time

Targeted instruction that helps all children learn necessary literacy skills

=

BLENDED INSTRUCTION

writing, projects/units, and meaningful center-based literacy activities advocated by proponents of emergent literacy, coupled with direct instruction and practice on core language and literacy skills featured in the SBRR approach. By blending the two approaches, teachers can provide their young learners with a high-quality early literacy program.

Special Feature 1.1 describes a teacher's use of a blended early literacy program like that being used in many pre-K programs across America.

SPECIAL FEATURE 1.1

An Example of Early Literacy Instruction

The program used in this classroom is a commercially published curriculum, *Doors to Discovery* (Wright Group/McGraw-Hill, 2002), which is a good example of a blended early literacy program. The *Doors* program is organized into 1-month "explorations" or units that focus on topics that appeal to young children, such as transportation, nature, food, and school. The *Doors* curriculum consists of three interrelated components:

- **Large Group Time.** Song and rhyme posters are used as a "warm-up" and to teach phonological awareness (e.g., rhyme recognition). This is followed by shared reading of big books in which the teacher encourages children to read along and engage in book-related talk. Three shared-reading books are used in each unit: a narrative storybook, an informational book, and a concept book. When stories are initially introduced, the teacher does a "picture walk" to introduce key concepts and vocabulary. Instruction on concepts of print, phonological awareness, and alphabet knowledge are incorporated into the shared-reading sessions. These two activities last about 20 minutes.
- **Discovery Center Time.** During a 60-minute period, children engage in self-selected activities in a variety of learning centers, including dramatic play, art, blocks, writing, mathematics, and science. Many of these activities are linked to the theme and to the stories that are read during shared reading. The teacher manual contains lists of theme-related Wonderful Words to be used with the children while they are engaging in center activities. These centers are stocked with theme-related literacy props and materials, providing children with a print-rich environment. For example, during the unit on transportation, the dramatic play center is turned into a gas station. Props include a gas station sign (e.g., *Chevron*) and a cardboard gas pump with a label (*gas*) and numerals to represent the gallons and cost of gas that is pumped.
- **Small Group Time.** During a 10-minute period, the teacher and teacher assistant meet with small groups of children. Each conducts a lesson. For example, one lesson focuses on vocabulary. The

teacher uses an interactive book: a wordless big book that contains a number of illustrations related to the unit theme. For example, *Our Big Book of Driving*, which is used in the unit on transportation, contains pictures of different types of vehicles (bus, ambulance, motorcycle), parts of a car (door, tire, speedometer), and a scene of a busy intersection. Children are encouraged to discuss the pictures. Another lesson uses Our Big Scrapbook, a blank big book. In a variation of the language experience approach or shared writing, the teacher writes down the children's oral language while they watch. The subject of the children's dictation varies. The subject, for example, could be photographs of children's play activities or the children's artwork. For example, children may draw pictures of the type of vehicles that their parents drive. Each child then dictates a sentence ("My mom drives a blue van"), which the teacher writes below the picture. The children's contributions are then pasted or taped to the blank pages of the scrapbook. Completed scrapbooks are placed in the classroom library center for children to read during the center time.

A positive feature of this program is the way the different components and activities are linked to the current theme. The following vignette occurred during one of the book's author's observations in a classroom. The unit was on building and construction:

During large group circle time, the teacher and children sang a song that had to do with building a tree house. The teacher paused to point out the words that rhymed in the song and then encouraged the children to come up with other words that ended with the same rhyming sound. She also focused on several tool-related vocabulary terms: *hammer* and *nail*. Next, the teacher did a shared reading lesson with a big book about building a doghouse. Before reading the book with the children, she did a "picture walk," engaging children in a discussion about objects in the photos in this informational book. The teacher focused children's attention on several tool vocabulary terms: *hammer*, *nail*, *saw*, *measuring tape*, and *safety goggles*. Then the teacher read the book and encouraged the children to read along. Some were able to do so because of the simple text and

picture clues. During center time, several children chose to play in a dramatic play center that was set up as a house construction site. There was a "house" made out of large cardboard boxes. In addition, there were toy tools (hammers, saw, measuring tape, level), safety goggles, hard hats, some golf tees that were used as make-believe nails, and several signs (*Hard Hat Area*, *Danger*, *Construction Site*). Two girls and a boy spent 30 minutes in the center, using the toy tools to measure, plan, and build the house. During this play, they used the target vocabulary repeatedly and also explored the uses of the tools. For example, when the boy attempted to use the toy saw without first putting on his safety goggles, one of the girls reminded him to put on the goggles. The dramatic play center was used as a means to provide children with an opportunity to practice and consolidate the vocabulary and concepts that were being taught in the instructional part of the curriculum.

Of course, how teachers implement a curriculum has a big influence on how appropriate and effective the curriculum will be for specific groups of children. Susan Neuman and Kathy Roskos (2005) share an observation that they made in a preschool using a commercially published early literacy curriculum that fits our definition of a "blended" program. The classroom did have a print-rich environment. However, the instruction that Neuman and Roskos observed was not developmentally appropriate for the 3½- and 4-year-old children who were participating in the lesson. Here is a vignette that describes the lesson (Neuman & Roskos, 2005, p. 22):

> The local school administrator recommends an exemplary school for us to visit. We watch a day unfold in a room filled with print. The walls are adorned with words; pocket charts, alphabet letters, numbers, signs, and environmental print claim every available space. A Big Book stands ready in the circle area, accompanied by a pointer for tracking print. The children sit "station style," with "quiet hands and feet," in their designated space in the circle and sing "Stop, Look, and Listen" along with their teacher. The day is about to begin.
>
> Taking flash cards in hand, the teacher begins, "Good morning, Charley. Do you know the first two letters of your name?" Charley moves tentatively to the board and slowly writes *C* and *H*. Moving to the next child, then the next, the teacher follows a similar routine. Some 14 children later, she reviews many of the letters, asking children to spell the names of the helpers of the week. The days of the week are next, and children repeat them in chorus. They compare the letters in Monday to the letters in Tuesday, then Tuesday to Wednesday, and Tuesday to Thursday. What follows is the Counting Calendar and "My, oh my, it's the 30th of the month," and so the children count each day up to 30. And finally with an "I like how you're listening" some 45 minutes later, circle time is about to end. Even so, the transition allows for one last teachable moment focusing on the *t-t-t* in teacher, the *m-m-m* in *Ms.*, and the */j/* in *j-j-jingle*.

This vignette shows that it is possible to take a blended curriculum and skew it one way or the other—resulting in too little or too much instruction. There is nothing inherently wrong with these activities themselves: writing the letters in children's names, spelling the names of classroom helpers, reciting the days of the week, comparing the letters in the days of the week, counting, and sounding out the initial sounds in words. In fact, with a few modifications, each of these activities could have been a very effective lesson. The problem is that the lesson contained all of these activities, making the lesson much too long for 3½- and 4-year-olds. These instructional activities could have been shortened (e.g., writing the beginning letters in several children's names, but not all 14!) and spread across several days.

The challenge, then, for early childhood educators is to carefully plan and teach the key elements through meaningful experiences. Our goal is to provide teachers with information on how to combine the emergent literacy and the scientifically based reading research perspectives to create a balanced, effective early literacy program—one with meaningful experiences and with direct, **developmentally appropriate instruction** in the key early literacy areas.