

Effective Practices Brief



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Center on Disability Studies, COE
University of Hawai'i at Manoa

Supporting All Students to Achieve High Standards

Purpose of this Brief:

To review the progression of literacy in education, to familiarize K-12 administrators, educators, and parents with the approach of the new Department Of Education (DOE) Literacy Program, housed in the Special Education Section and directed by Literacy Specialist, Dr. Lisa Stevens, and to highlight some of the literacy developments through out Hawaii's public schools.

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Literacy in Education Creating a Context

Overview: The DOE Special Education Department has hired Dr. Lisa Stevens, a literacy specialist from the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, to design and implement professional development in literacy for special education teachers. Dr. Stevens, along with 10 Resource Teachers positioned at the state level and serving at the district level, will train all special education teachers over the next two years. Currently, Principals are strongly encouraged to create cadres of teachers, including general education teachers to participate in these scheduled training.

Why all the debate?

A birds eye view of developments in the field of literacy over the past 50 years, reveals the broad swings of the pendulum from holistic approaches to skills-based frameworks. Some of this vacillation is reflective of the complexity of literacy acquisition. Different children acquire literacy at different rates in different ways, it is a multifaceted issue, and one that requires both a broad based and targeted approach. Below you will find a sketch of literacy approaches used in the past:

- Basal program, skills based, focused on dividing students into groups, typically three, to read and answer questions about the reading, students were tracked into their group with little success in moving across groups
- Literature-based programs, authentic/real literature, kids more engaged, not as skill based, spelling and/or writing might suffer

- Writing/language experience (whole language) assumes that exposure to reading leads to good writing ability, process oriented
- Phonics, decoding and work attach strategies, focus on speed and fluency of reading out loud, assume kids who can decode words understand the content, this presents a clear problem to any child with auditory processing problems or neuropath way development issues.

Contemporary perspectives in literacy emphasize a balanced approach to instruction with a developmental focus for teaching literacy skills from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Basic principals of a balanced literacy program:

There are three interrelated components to a balanced literacy program, which should be taught daily, they are **reading comprehension, word study, and writing.** When addressed together these components are clearly rooted in meaning and authentic purpose, they are relevant.

A balanced approach to a solid literacy program for all children includes:

- The developmental nature of skill acquisition and literacy instruction
- The interrelated components of reading comprehension, word study, and writing
- Focusing on on-going formative assessments as a tool for teachers to target literacy approaches to the needs of each child.

It is important to realize that literacy approaches for students with learning differences or disabilities are no different than they are for general education students. The difference lies in the supports or scaffolding that educators build around the more highly challenged student to ensure their success. As the child demonstrates increased proficiency the supports shift and change, encouraging greater independence and providing the next step in skill acquisition.

Learning Disability Focus

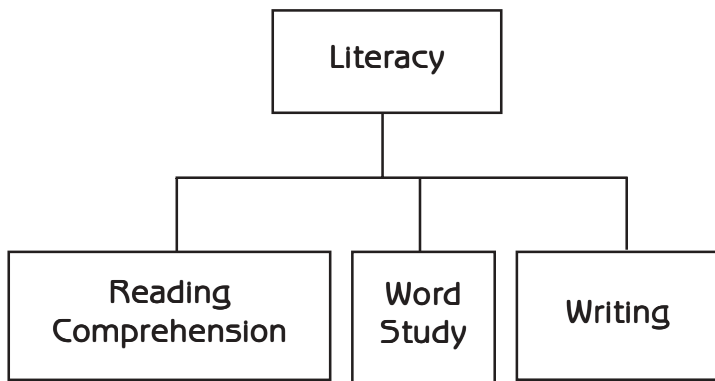
- There tends to be parallel development between reading comprehension, word study, and writing. Often times when a disability is emerging comprehension will lag behind.
- National Assessment of Educational Progress

What basic principles do students need in literacy?

Elementary and Secondary literacy programs share four foundational components to a balanced literacy program, while they each have their own developmental focus.

1) Expert Instruction based on ongoing assessments

Formative assessments give teachers the power to design targeted responsive literacy curriculum for their students. Formative assessments **formulate**



classroom instruction by identifying what stage the student is at, what skills are needed in reading comprehension, writing, and word study to support the student in their development of metacognitive skills, as they are ready to learn them. For example, a formative writing assessment may show that a student is in the Developing stage of writing and can write names and favorite words but still needs to work on directionality of writing: top-bottom and left-right.

2) Ample opportunities to read, write, and talk

Structured and open classroom experiences that are designed to boost comprehension. As adults, we discuss what we have read and seen. This cements our understanding and helps to explore and refine nuances. Students should have similar opportunities in a literacy-rich environment. For example, students should have ample opportunities to read texts of their choosing and to talk about those texts, moving beyond a simplistic question and answer routine that typically follows reading activities.

3) Access to appropriate texts and tasks

Much of contemporary literacy focuses on text reading instructional texts are most effective when utilized to build knowledge through shared reading and augmented with instruction. This level of reading and comprehension is building the students skill. Text materials should be coupled with independent reading, which most effectively consists of a variety of interesting materials that represent a range of reading and comprehension levels for students to experience success and enjoyment in reading. Students need to be able access content area texts that are at their independent level of reading, these texts need to be enriched with authentic

tasks that engage the student. For example, a 10th grade studying the Civil War should have access to appropriate texts and independent reading materials to research the causes of the war for an oral report.

4) Useful and explicit strategy instruction

Structured learning approaches that target the specific developmental task of students will support learners in their progressive literacy acquisition. When students demonstrate difficulties in certain aspects of reading, they need explicit instruction that targets those aspects. For example, a teacher might help a student to use a variety of word attack strategies for use with unknown words. Eventually, the student should assume responsibility of these strategies and apply them within the context of authentic activities.

The developmental principal for elementary literacy includes fluency to foster comprehension. Building fluency requires that students have a balanced opportunity to move between building meaning on their own through silent reading of materials first, followed by reading aloud for speed, tone, and building comprehension. Choral readings and teacher-lead read-alouds can also be used to model fluency.

For secondary students the development of critical literacy skills assists the student in assessing which text is needed for a particular task and teaches students to decipher the writer's position on their topic, and the deeper threads of what the writer is trying to convey.

Literacy approaches for students with learning differences or disabilities are no different than they are for general education students, the difference lies in **the supports or scaffolding** that educators build around the more highly challenged student to ensure their success.

Assessments, the place to begin

There are two categories of assessment:

Summative assessments give us an analysis of the trends across groups, comparing one group to another. Summative assessments provide the grade level and/or stanine that the student is performing at, however there is no agreed upon standard in the field of literacy that clearly delineates what grade level achievement includes. Although these assessments identify where a student falls compared to other students it gives no information relative to next steps in instruction.

Formative assessments are administered at the classroom level, the results identify the student's strengths and needs, allowing the teacher to formulate classroom instruction to meet the needs of students and move them to the next step in their literacy development.

With Summative assessments students can be performing at "grade level" while missing big developmental pieces that may go undetected until more serious problems arise.

Formative assessments give us a way to move beyond a comparison based number, offering teachers a powerful tool to design targeted curriculum in response to results of classroom-based assessments. Many teachers will need support and training to develop their roles into more analytic and diagnostic oriented teaching, and then to

build their repertoire of targeted strategies to assist students.

This shift will require teachers to look more closely at evidence in the classroom, and to work with students and their families to probe where learning is working and where there are breakdowns in learning. This process is rich with opportunities to more fully involve students in the technology of their own education, exploring and raising awareness together, relative to how the student learns and how the teacher can most effectively support the student in their learning. Assisting students to become experts in what they need to learn effectively will enable the student to develop a sense of empowerment and success in life long learning. Formative assessments open the doorway for teachers, students, and families to become more fully empowered around teaching and learning.

What to look for in literacy friendly classrooms

Formative assessments lay the groundwork for instruction responsive to the needs of students. There is a balance in the components of literacy with appropriate supports for all students with opportunities for flexible grouping. Discussion and language use will be pervasive with many levels and options for independent reading, as well as instructional/text-based materials. Assignments will be relevant, and the three components of literacy (reading comprehension, word study, and writing) will be taught every day. Supports for students with learning differences and disabilities will be appropriate, integrated, and readily available and will shift as the student becomes more self sufficient and independent.



Summary

As the DOE is training all special education teachers to develop a balanced approach to literacy, general education teachers are invited to participate in these trainings so schools can build cadres of literacy specialists. Although this will require additional funding, schools are strongly encouraged to pull together to meet this challenge. As the development of a strong and balanced literacy program for all children continues to build through out Hawaii schools it will integrate additional scaffolding for students who need these targeted supports.

The world is moving at a faster and faster pace, we are a culture that depends on reading and writing as a primary form of communication and information dissemination with printed word on the Internet and on the page. We can no longer conceive of paths that students may take in their futures. It is critical that all students are literate and have mastery of the written word. This investment is multifaceted, as we become more efficient at supporting children in their intellectual growth and development; we give them the gift of infinite possibility. As they pursue the full range of their potential they are positioned to contribute to the community in ways we cannot even imagine today. Now is the time to make the shifts in our approach to literacy, creating a balanced and quality instruction for all children.



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