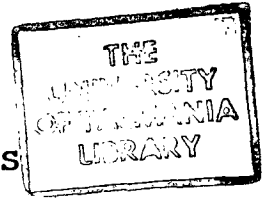


LEARNING TO READ:

**MAKING THE TASK EASIER IN
EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSES**

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EED858
Education Project 1

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November 1993

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CHAPTER 1: LITERACY AND READING

1.1 INTRODUCTION

"Reading is not the mastery of a single learning task. There are numerous elements which must come together meaningfully" (Watson & Badenhop, 1992, p.16). A successful reading program consists of more than a reading method; there are several connecting parts. If students are to learn to read, then they must understand what it means to read, and they must believe that they would like to read. Reading needs to be seen as a purposeful and meaningful activity.

This paper explores the features of a successful classroom reading program. It looks at how teachers can organise reading in ways which build on from the successful language learning that children have already accomplished in their homes and communities. The school is a key factor in facilitating reading success and will be held accountable to a large extent for the reading successes or failures of its students. The community expectation is that almost all students will master the basics of literacy. "While the backgrounds of the children can influence the ease with which they become literate, most children, in the first year of school, can learn to read irrespective of home background and the location, type or size of school. Schools clearly are responsible to provide students with effective literacy instruction" (House of Representatives Standing Committee,

1993, p.v).

It is through reading that children learn to read. Part of a teacher's role is to make reading easy and enjoyable for every student. "Every teacher worth her salts wants her pupils to be competent and sensitive readers" (Meek, 1982, p.10). This paper discusses how this happens. Teachers need to reflect on those characteristics that identify good classroom practice and the effective teaching and learning of reading. In a quality early childhood classroom where reading is valued and successful: how will the classroom look?; what will the students be doing?; what will the teacher be doing? What classroom characteristics nurture beginning readers? This paper explores the conditions which facilitate success in learning to read for every student in the class. It looks at preventing reading difficulties from developing. Prevention is considered in an absolute sense: preventing reading failure in the initial instance when students are introduced to reading during their early school years. How can we best ensure that students are introduced to reading in such a way that they succeed? This requires careful planning, skilled teaching and early intervention in the first years of schooling to assist students as necessary before they experience a sense of failure.

1.2 RATIONALE

A successful beginning in literacy during the early years of

schooling provides the foundation that is essential for long-term success in education. Teachers take on a critical role in ensuring that their students gain appropriate literacy skills, experience and knowledge. This is particularly so in the case of early childhood teachers. The Department of Education and the Arts believes that "instilling a capacity and disposition in children to read and write freely and for pleasure is a vital teaching aim" (Department of Education and the Arts, 1992, p11).

Reading is one of the components of literacy, along with listening, speaking and writing. Although this paper focuses on reading, it should be kept in mind that all four components of literacy are inter-related. Focusing on reading does not imply that this ability is distinctly isolated from any of the other literacy skills incorporated in writing, listening and speaking. Just as listening to stories and talking about them is a part of reading, so also will children's experiences in reading flow into their talking and writing. As they write their own stories, they will better understand how to approach the reading of a story written by some-one else.

Reading should not be considered as simply a set of skills which can be independently taught or learnt. Rather, reading needs to be viewed as an integrated aspect of the student's total linguistic development. "It is important ... to realise that reading is part of general language processing which

also includes listening, speaking and writing" (Sloan & Latham, 1981, p.171). For the purpose of this paper, however, reading has been discussed largely in isolation of the other literacy components to facilitate a focussed study on reading.

Parents often associate learning to read with the excitement of starting school. Along with teachers and students, parents expect that children will learn to read and regard the early years of schooling as critical to the learning to read process. "Evidence suggests that if children are not making progress by the end of the third year of formal schooling, they will not make up the gap through the rest of their schooling" (Department of Education and the Arts, 1992, p.2). Recent research suggests that a child who is a poor reader at the end of grade one is very likely to remain a poor reader through successive primary school classes (Department of Education and the Arts, 1992, p.2). Children who do not develop good reading skills in the first grade often begin to dislike reading and then choose to read considerably less than good readers both in and out of school. Some children develop successful coping strategies and their lack of reading competence remains unnoticed for several years. Early lack of success at reading provides the framework for a range of negative consequences and reading at a level below that of classmates may be only part of a far-reaching problem. The first years of instruction may be critical for learning to read because this is the formative stage of efficient

processing strategies.

1.3 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Essentially this paper focuses on early childhood education and one of the four inter-related components of literacy; that is, reading. Before continuing further it is desirable to offer definitions of these three key terms: early childhood, literacy and reading. The intention is to establish acceptable definitions which will serve as a guide for further discussion in this paper.

"Early childhood education in Tasmania is provided within a four-year framework, kindergarten, preparatory, Year 1 and Year 2" (Department of Education and the Arts, 1993, p.1).

"Literacy involves the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking; it incorporates numeracy. It includes the cultural knowledge which enables a speaker, writer or reader to recognise and use language appropriate to different social situations" (ILY Secretariat, 1989, INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR PAPER NO. 1, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra).

"...Reading might be somewhat simply described as 'thinking guided by print' ... Reading may at times be for purposes no more sophisticated than acquiring factual information from a directory or timetable. Generally, though, the ultimate purpose of reading is comprehension, requiring thoughtful consideration of information from the text" (Department of Education and the Arts, 1992, p.3).

CHAPTER 2: THE CLASSROOM

What does a classroom look like when the intention is to assist beginning readers?

Good readers instinctively know that where they read can affect how they read. Where they read can strongly influence the willingness brought to the task, the concentration during the task and the degree of pleasure derived from the task. At school, reading in a classroom where many different activities are taking place is different to reading in a sunny, secluded corner of the playground. The setting in which reading takes place should not be ignored by classroom teachers because of the influence it may exert on beginning readers. The social context must also be considered. Reading is influenced by many external factors: the availability of preferred books; personal mood; the amount of time available; the frequency of interruptions; the reason for reading; the place where reading occurs; the reader's general attitude towards reading (Chambers, 1991, p.7). For children, learning to read is more likely to be successful when the physical and social environments created are ones which assist and encourage young readers.

Teachers know that by nurturing voluntary reading in the classroom they are developing a powerful strategy to improve children's reading skills. "Young children who know about the

fun involved in reading will be eager to learn" (Wille & Fiala, 1992, p.147). Where they are forced to read as a duty, expecting no enjoyment, students are likely to find reading an unsatisfying and undesirable task which they prefer to avoid.

Early childhood classrooms need to provide opportunities for children to play at reading, pretending to read as they tell a story they are making up. Children who play at reading by imitating readers are in a sound position to begin reading themselves. They learn that books bring pleasure and delight, and another way of looking at the world. They also reinforce concepts such as left to right progression, sequencing of events, linking pictures with text, and word recognition, and that print carries a message.

Chambers (1991) refers to the two main influences on reading as "the set" and "the setting". "The set" is defined as a blend of mental and emotional attitudes brought to the task of reading by the reader. Expectations, previous experience and knowledge, mood, time, perhaps even the weather, sometimes condition the way a reader behaves. "The setting" refers to physical surrounding: the level of comfort; the actions of other individuals; the type and frequency of distractions which also might influence the way a reader behaves. All these elements must be acknowledged and considered by the teacher in planning individual and classroom reading programs.

2.1 THE CLASSROOM LIBRARY

For young children, reading is a form of play which they participate in because of the enjoyment that the activity provides. Reading begins with the selection of something to read. What beginning readers select and read may make a significant difference to their views of and participation in reading. Their book selection depends on both the availability and the accessibility of materials and on whether or not they find the available materials to be of personal interest. When the materials available are limited in variety or in number, are not easily obtained, or are not appropriate to the age group, then the chance of each reader finding something of interest to read is reduced.

For children, a varied collection of books must be constantly available and accessible (Chambers, 1991, p.18). A key characteristic for building a classroom community of readers is the use of a library; a special area where books are easily seen and easily accessible to students. Ideally, all readers should be able to find a book that they would like to read at any particular time. Accessibility partly depends on location. For beginning readers this usually means having the books in the classroom, and available for use throughout the day. Accessibility to books is increased when children have the opportunity to use both a classroom library and a school library as a part of the daily school routine.

Reading is an activity that has special behavioural needs. Children are more easily able to concentrate on reading if places are set aside for reading only. Fractor, Woodruff, Martinez and Teale (1993, p.480) claim that "research of the past decade clearly links the importance of classroom libraries to children's increased literacy activities". Classrooms with clearly defined reading areas help establish reading practices. Rules about use of the reading area support the intention of this area. By establishing a reading area in the classroom, and by protecting it with simple rules, an indirect message is being given to students and parents that reading is an important activity.

Fractor, Woodruff, Martinez and Teal (1993, p.478) summarise the work of a number of writers in discussing the physical features of high quality classroom libraries that increase children's voluntary use of books. The classroom library should be an attractive and highly visible area in the classroom. It requires a name and should provide students with a quiet place to read. To the observer it should be obvious that this area of the room is important. Boundaries should set the area apart from the remainder of the room. Comfortable seating in the form of cushions, chairs etcetera is essential for up to six students. This fosters the building of a community of readers who enjoy and discuss their reading. A significant number of books, (eight per child is recommended), will provide the required variety. The content and quality of the books are crucial. Good authors

and illustrators are considerations in planning to hold young readers' attention.

The books available should include a variety of genres and reading levels in order to increase children's voluntary use of the library. There needs to be a wide range of reading materials available to the students: fiction; non-fiction; poetry; children's magazines; multiple-copy materials; picture books; story books; informational texts (Hornsby, Sukarna & Parry, 1986, p.21). Books need to be organised into categories in some way. Topic, author, genre are possible criteria for grouping. Often readers can be encouraged to think of and organise their own ways of grouping their class collection of books.

Simply having books available in a classroom library is not enough to tempt all students to read. The classroom reading area should be designed to entice all children to read sometimes when given the opportunity to select from a variety of classroom activities (Fractor, Woodruff, Martinez and Teale, 1993, p.477). The ways in which materials are displayed and shelved can attract or discourage a reader. Book displays are a way of advertising reading: they stimulate interest and indirectly make recommendations about what is interesting to read. "Book displays make books prominent. They stimulate interest (Chambers, 1991, p.23). Such displays need to be set up in a location that ensures frequent viewing and in a way that makes an impact, making

even reluctant readers curious about the materials. Open shelving entices readers by displaying interesting book covers. Seeing the cover 'sells' the book to uncertain browsers. Other shelving with books displayed spine out allows for a greater number of books to be included. Both types of storage are required. Displays and props (including tapes, posters and puppets) add interest to the area and encourage re-enactments or re-readings of the books.

These physical features are linked with children's increased literacy activities. Fractor, Woodruff, Martinez and Teale (1993, p. 480) report on research which concluded that classrooms which incorporate well-designed library areas result in students who: interact more with books; have positive attitudes towards reading; spend more time reading and exhibit higher levels of reading achievement. It is important that students have frequent opportunities to choose much of their reading material. According to Hornsby, Sukarna and Parry (1986, p.10) this freedom to choose their own reading material assists children in developing skills and attitudes such as: selecting books which suit their interests, needs and abilities; becoming more discerning; learning to choose wisely and; being self-motivated to read. Students are more likely to read carefully and willingly those materials that they have chosen for themselves.

2.2 TIME FOR READING

The process of building up enjoyable experiences, and of extending the length of time that children can concentrate on reading, depends on daily, regular time and effort being given to reading. In the classroom, where many students are engaged in various activities, it is necessary to manage the learning programs so that all children have regular reading times. These everyday occurrence facilitate concentration, encourage reading and provide opportunity for the practising of reading skills.

Essentially, being a reader means reading for oneself. However, reading requires time in a busy classroom schedule. Thus, in the daily classroom routine, time needs to be set aside for personal reading by individuals. During this time students then have an opportunity to read at their own speed, material they have chosen to suit their preferred level of difficulty, as well as their emotional and intellectual needs.

In the first years of schooling children frequently talk about their books, sharing interesting parts with others, asking questions and making meaning from the text. Insisting on silence at this beginning stage of reading is not necessary and might discourage children from reading (Chambers, 1991, p.390). Quiet reading can gradually become silent as the readers mature. Reading time gives a purpose to the many reading-based activities which are a part

of the teaching program. Children learn to read when they are provided with structured opportunities for reading to occur.

2.3 TIME FOR TALKING

Two responses are important in helping children become thinking readers. Having enjoyed a book, children might want to experience the same pleasure again, by re-reading the book, or by reading similar books. Having enjoyed a book, children might also be eager to talk about it with someone else. For beginners, reading is a social as well as an individual activity. Opportunities should be readily available for students to re-read favourite texts, to read similar books and to talk about what they have read. When students have opportunities to talk about what they are reading they are able to refine their understanding of the intended meaning of the text.

Providing opportunities for students to talk about their reading also provides them with the opportunities to recommend books to each other. This is a powerful element in the process of learning to read. Chambers (1991, p.74) believes a common reason for children's choice of book is that they have heard about it from a friend. Thus, time spent encouraging talk between children about books that they have read encourages children to read. Children can be encouraged to share their reading with others through formal mechanisms

such as: 'have you read this?' sessions; book graffiti boards in the classroom; book reviews; participation in book purchasing selection panels and; displays organised by children.

2.4 PARENT PARTICIPATION

Parents can play a valuable role in their children's literacy development. This is particularly so during the early, formative years of early childhood education and schools must acknowledge this input. Students frequently achieve where their parents are involved in the learning program. Builder (1991) claims that the active involvement of parents in the reading program will assist teachers to be "far more effective in helping children become independent, successful, life-long readers and learners" (Builder, 1991, p.26). Parents also benefit when they are able to observe the reading program and beginning readers in a classroom setting. They learn from opportunities to observe teachers modelling behaviours that parents might use at home. Teachers need to plan how and when parents can become involved in the reading program.

Parents are able to participate in the classroom program in a variety of ways. They might read stories to students, play reading games with a group of readers, accompany students to

the library and assist with the changing of books, or listen to students reading for enjoyment. Children need time to practise reading for themselves. This often means reading to someone with the patience to listen while the readers "try out the tune on the page to find the voice of the author as well as the words they know" (Meek, 1982, p.95). "A book, a person and shared enjoyment: these are the conditions of success" (Meek, 1982, p.9).

Through interaction with an experienced adult reader children are introduced to the multi-layered messages presented in picture books and to the acceptable range of interpretations available to the reader. They are learning that their role as a reader is an active, interpretive role. How can schools provide every class of young learners with the experiences whereby each student reads and talks with an adult about the text, where there is close attention to print and sound-symbol relationships, and support for progressive approximation to effective, independent reading behaviour? The challenge for teachers of how to construct the kinds of classroom contexts which provide for this can, in part, be met by a parent participation program in the classroom.

Parent participation in literacy programs through home-based activities is another vital area of students literacy learning. Whilst acknowledging the influence of parents in working with their children at home, discussion of this issue would digress beyond the intended focus of this paper.

CHAPTER 3: THE STUDENTS

What might the beginning reader do at school?

3.1 LISTENING TO STORIES

People enjoy listening to stories: jokes, personal anecdotes, gossip. Young children enjoy listening to nursery rhymes and story tales. Later, they are told stories that help them to answer questions about who they are and where they live (Chambers, 1991, p.44). These stories, with their sounds and patterns of language, prepare children for what they will eventually meet in print. Children become accustomed to the rhythm of language. They are often introduced to printed literature through stories that they hear told aloud. "Storytelling is indispensable in enabling people to become literary readers, no matter what their age" (Chambers, 1991, p.46). Stories provide children with a background in text which they can then call on as they become "self-sustaining readers who know how to play the readers part in making sense of literature" (Chambers, 1991, p. 46).

Children's made up stories are equally as important as those made up by adults. "Characters and incidents must be invented, a plot has to be organized, the teller has to decide between past or present tense, ... the balance of dialogue as against reportage" (Chambers, 1991, p.47). Practising the art form of story telling raises children's

interest level in how others tell stories. They begin to view stories and reading differently. They become more conscious of the form as well as the content of a story. Children also begin to realise that readers are active participants in the reading process because they are required to fill in the gaps created by the author. They learn that only when these gaps are filled will the reader reach an understanding of what is being said and achieve a feeling of pleasure and satisfaction.

Students need to have texts read aloud to them every day as a way of assisting them to become readers (Mason, 1985, p.44). By listening, students gain an insight in to how writing is constructed and what to expect. They have opportunities to develop an awareness of the functions and purposes of print. Gradually they become more prepared for what they might find and what they could look for in a story. To enjoy a story the reader must be able to convert print into the drama of characters who think, talk, and act out a plot of changing pace. Children discover how to do this when they listen to an experienced reader bringing print alive by reading aloud, making full use of punctuation symbols, and the rhythm of sentence structures. For listeners, this process is assisted if they too have a copy of the text to view. Listening to others read aloud also helps children understand about different interpretations of the same text. Repeated readings can reflect varying interpretations. Picture books, through

their accompanying illustrations, provide a visual interpretation of the print.

Reading aloud by a more experienced reader provides students with the opportunity to experience books which they are, as yet, unable to read for themselves (Hornsby, Sukarna & Parry, 1986, p.122). It offers to children books they may decide they want to attempt to explore. It also offers children texts they might never attain in any other way. Reading aloud is also a great motivator. One of the best ways of encouraging children to read books they might otherwise ignore is to read books, or parts of books, aloud. Reading aloud also has the benefit of creating a socially binding effect on class groups: they become a reading community, willing to share their individual expertise and ideas. When they listen to someone reading, children usually relax and become absorbed. Later, they use the words, ideas and characters of the stories they have heard in their own language. Reading aloud introduces children to a variety of story structures, genres, characters, authors and illustration styles.

Hornsby, Sukarna and Perry (1986, p.121) suggest that two pre-requisites for learning to read are; the desire to learn to read and; an understanding of what reading is. Both these pre-requisites can be accommodated when an adult reads to students. Reading aloud to students: fosters an enjoyment of reading; helps them to understand what reading is and;

motivates them to want to read. Listening to some-one reading aloud stimulates the imagination, improves general language skills, extends vocabulary and creates a positive classroom atmosphere towards reading (Hornsby, Sukarna & Perry, 1986, p.121).

Listening to stories is important in developing children's understanding of the value and purpose of written language. Reading and telling stories aloud helps children overcome difficulties presented by the abstract nature of print. When adults read aloud with gesture and expression, they make the print 'come alive' and aid the comprehension of unusual language structures that are different from the kinds of language that children use in practical contexts. Stories provide a wealth of background experience which young readers are able to bring to a text. " ... research suggests that on the richness of this preparatory storying will depend a child's facility and progress as a reader of print" (Chambers, 1991, p. 47).

3.2 READING REAL BOOKS

" ... What the beginning reader reads makes all the difference to his view of reading ..." (Meek, 1982, p.11). Literary texts engage young readers because the issues that children are concerned with in their lives are addressed. These texts also teach young readers to become

active and interpretive readers. Through experience with a variety of narrator-reader relationships children learn what it means to read a book, as distinct from merely recognising the words on the page. Literary texts encourage children to decipher meanings from the interpretive contexts presented by the text form. The form of the text teaches young readers about how the reader forms a partnership with the author. Literary texts assist readers to understand the importance of attending to not only what the author is saying, but also to what the author is not saying. The text is organised to offer a rich experience through which thinking and prediction is valued by the author. "Learning to be alert to the many ways in which texts mean more than they say is a key resource which literary texts offer to young readers" (Unsworth & O'Toole, 1993, p.98).

The multi-layered meanings of literary texts are important not only because they offer distinctive interpretive contexts but also because they encourage repeated settings for the sharing of interpretation. Young children often ask to have the same story read repeatedly. Successive reading of literary texts can provide progressively more interesting possibilities so that the reader's engagement and interpretive facility increases with each reading. Revisiting of favourite books throughout the early years of schooling will enhance early reading development in ways other than rapidly progressing from one reader to the next.

An underlying principle in providing for good readers is the expectation that readers will find pleasure and meaning in the act of reading. This means re-creating new meanings from a printed message. Inappropriate reading materials can quickly reduce children's desire to read for pleasure. Texts which fall in to this category would include those about topics that are meaningless or uninteresting to children and those texts whose language is "completely unrelated to the real language used in sensible communication" (Sloan & Latham, 1981, p.27). "... Children's literature encourages the development of particular reading behaviours which cannot be engendered through many of the stories written for contemporary reading schemes" (Unsworth & O'Toole, 1993, p. 95).

Simply providing a supply of suitable books for students to read, however, is not all that is required for successful beginning readers. Teachers need to provide guidance for students, at least sometimes, in selecting materials to read. The reading material should contain a majority of words which are manageable. Otherwise, the reader may be required to pause and study so many individual words that reading for meaning becomes difficult or even impossible.

3.3 SILENT READING

It is Sloan's and Latham's (1981, p.7) belief that children

should be encouraged to read to themselves from the moment they begin to read. At first this personal reading will often occur in an audible form although there is no audience. This form of reading helps beginners to bridge the gaps between talking and reading silently. As children develop the habit of personal reading for pleasure and for information they will gradually become more like silent readers.

Silent reading needs to be taught and emphasized in early childhood classrooms (Elkins, 1975, p.35). Oral reading should not be over-emphasized at the expense of promoting silent reading behaviours. The implementation of basic meaning-making strategies often does not occur to any great extent when children are reading aloud to an adult. Silent reading provides opportunities for readers to practise strategies that not only identify words, but also construct meaning. Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR) is an effective classroom approach to recreational reading (Sloan & Latham, 1981, p.31). USSR is a strategy whereby readers select their own reading materials and then remain involved in reading without interruption for relatively long periods of time. Everyone in the classroom takes part in a USSR time simultaneously. The aim is to increase the amount of reading done by readers for pleasure.

During this USSR time children are likely to see the following things demonstrated by the classroom teacher and by their peers: how to read silently; how to read for a

sustained period; how to read different texts; how to read for different purposes. By setting aside a period of time each day, insisting that all children read at this time, expecting that there will be no interruptions, and with the teacher also engaged in silent reading, the message promoted is that reading is a valued activity.

3.4 VISITING THE LIBRARY

Children are unlikely to become committed readers by reading only books that have been chosen for the classroom. When children have opportunity to browse from what appears to them to be a vast collection of books, then they are able to choose reading material which is personally interesting. "It is a common trait of human behaviour that we attend more carefully and willingly to the things we have chosen for ourselves" (Hornsby, Sukarna & Parry, 1986, p.10). School and community libraries allow young readers to make personal choices. Giving students access to books provides them with the opportunities to try out for themselves the role of a reader. When students have opportunities to borrow books from the classroom or school library they are given a chance to choose independently. If the book is an unwise choice, students learn to acknowledge this as an incorrect decision, and to replace the book with another choice.

Browsing in a library is a valuable part of a school reading

program because of the resulting benefits (Chambers, 1991, p.34). As well as providing choices, browsing time can help children become experienced and skilled in finding books. During browsing time there are opportunities to talk with the teacher, classmates and perhaps a librarian and a parent helper about books. Peer influence in encouraging reading is likely to be strong at this time and its influence cannot be ignored. Although browsing itself will not enable children to become good readers, it is an important activity in the reading process.

CHAPTER 4: TEACHERS

What teaching is undertaken to develop children's reading abilities?

Positive beliefs, not only by students but also by teachers, are vital to successful classroom reading programs. Teachers must believe they are able to help each student in becoming a successful reader. They must believe that each student's success depends to a large extent on the learning activities organised within their classrooms. There are a number of skills children need to develop in order to become successful readers. Teachers can provide opportunities for students to acquire these skills. The teacher's goal is to structure programs that help each individual to succeed. Teachers and schools need to be aware of the literacy background of their students if teachers are to provide programs that do not leave out important information or labour over information and skills which some students have already acquired. Incorrect assumptions about what students know can lead to important introductory information and skills not being taught. This information might include knowing: that books are enjoyable; that text is speech written down; that letters/words on a page represent the sounds of speech (Cormack, 1992, p.177). Teachers must provide children with encouragement, support and opportunities to learn about reading as students explore, ask for help, take risk and make mistakes.

4.1 PROGRAMMING AND ASSESSMENT

The expertise of the classroom teacher in planning and organising the classroom program is an important component in facilitating students' literacy development (Unsworth, 1985, p.1). Planned classroom reading programs will need to follow a general pattern of units which build a sequence of knowledge, skills and attitudes in reading. Unsworth and O'Toole (1993, p.114) suggest that these units often fall under the broad headings of: orientation, introduction, collaborative reading, exploration, consolidation and extension activities. The exact composition of these units will vary according to the particular text(s) being used and the experiences and needs of the young readers. An overview of these six related units, as described by Unsworth and O'Toole (1993, p. 114) is outlined below.

Initially an orientation segment using texts which are either familiar to the students or very easy to read can be used as a teaching focus. These texts might include items such as rhymes, chants and songs. Although the words are known by heart, they are displayed on a board and children are informally encouraged to read as they perform. The aim is that children feel confident and enthusiastic in contributing to the reading activity.

The introduction of a new book to a group of students aims to arouse interest in a particular book by drawing attention to

external features such as the cover design, the title, and the name of the author. During this time opportunity might be taken to draw readers' attention to the sound-symbol relationships as they identify the title or author.

During a collaborative reading session, usually the teacher will read the chosen book first and so provide a model for the students. This will be followed by initial discussion with the children about the story. They will be encouraged to comment on what they thought about the story, anything they might have noticed about the text or the illustrations, and things that puzzled them. During a second reading children then have the opportunity to review their comments and questions. They might also participate informally as a group in the oral reading. After the second reading further discussion then draws on extended observations about the story. This discussion also provides opportunities to encourage and plan for participation by children in another reading. Sometimes a third reading with teacher-directed participation by the children might occur in small groups or with individuals. The aim of a collaborative reading session is to engage beginning readers in the reading of a story within a supporting framework. A strong emphasis is placed on enjoyment and positive attitudes towards reading.

Exploring the meanings of a text is vital to the development of what it means to be a reader. Within the classroom setting children learn to explore the patterns, deliberate

ambiguities of text and illustrations, and to consider the perspective from which a story is told. It is necessary to provide opportunities for students to investigate their interpretations of a text. During consolidation time children have opportunities to respond in many different ways to what they have read. Often they will be eager to share their thoughts and feelings about a book that they have just read. However, their response might be to find another book by the same author or on the same topic and begin reading immediately.

Activities designed by the teacher to follow-up reading sessions need to be purposeful. Students need to understand the purpose of the activity they are asked to undertake. Classroom activities designed to follow up a book reading may: provide opportunities for students to interact after periods of individual reading; help the reader to reflect on the book read or; form the basis for further questioning and discussion. Students might work in a group with listening posts, puppets, art materials etcetera to deal directly with the print, and to rehearse the grammatical and grapho-phonetic knowledge. Extension activities such as retellings and three-dimensional displays provide further consolidation opportunities for the readers.

Hornsby, Sukarna and Parry (1986, p. 129) regard monitoring students' progress, record keeping and evaluation as part of a total reading program. Because of the on-going nature of

evaluation, it can be viewed as an integral part of the teaching and learning program. Systematic observation results in record keeping which, in turn, provides the basis for evaluation. Evaluation requires the teacher to make judgements about each student's development. Depending upon the student and the nature of the task, intervention will be necessary at various levels and with varying degrees of explicitness and structure. Teachers need to assess students' reading progress continually, noting indicators of progress and understanding. Diagnostic information may also be required in the evaluation process. The records kept provide useful information about how students are working within the reading program: some students will be identified as requiring extra support or inclusion in a small group task.

Reading conferences provide opportunities for the teacher to identify and record many aspects of each individual's progress in reading including attitude, participation, comprehension, oral reading, use of cueing systems, and selection skills (Hornsby, Sukarna & Parry, 1986, p.132). Reading logs, reading folders, and other records maintained by students provide further information which teachers are able to use in evaluating a student's progress.

4.2 MODELLING

Students need to appreciate that reading is a worthwhile

activity. Modern forms of entertainment, such as television, frequently dominate students' leisure time. Often students need to be shown that reading is an alternative activity that they can choose. Teachers can achieve this through the modelling of reading processes and attitudes in the classroom.

All reading programs, not only through what they ask students to do, but also through what they show the teacher doing, present particular views about what reading is, and what reading is used for (Cormack, 1992, p.178). Young children use imitation of significant others as a way of learning new behaviours, and this is particularly evident when children are learning to talk (Sloan & Latham, 1981, p.19). Teachers need to be aware of the value of modelling as an aid in learning to read. The teacher is possibly the main model of reading behaviour available to young students. Appropriate modelling can be extremely valuable in the development of good readers and so it is necessary for teachers to read a variety of texts to children, modelling enthusiasm and involvement in both oral and silent reading.

Modelling is a most effective and powerful way of sharing information about reading (Wille & Fiala, 1992, p.151). In planning to develop children's reading abilities teachers can create opportunities to model reading to beginning readers. Teachers can model to students by 'thinking aloud' step by step the strategies they use and the information they bring

to the text in order to make meaning from the sentence or sentences. Frequent and regular reading to the class by a teacher models the successful reader. This reading should be an enjoyable part of the daily routine. It provides an excellent opportunity to model oral reading. Thus, at least on some occasions, these readings should be carefully prepared to demonstrate strategies used when, for example, unknown words are encountered or when a section of text does not seem to make sense. Specific skills can be introduced through teacher modelling. These skills might include: direction; predicting; checking; confirming; self-correction; backwards and forwards referencing; phonics; and word study (Wille & Fiala, 1992, p.151). Teachers of beginning readers also need to model sustained silent reading; reading a wide variety of texts. Children observe that silent reading is a worthwhile activity which can be entertaining and informative.

Children will also benefit from observing teachers locate, sample and borrow a book from the school library. This behaviour reinforces for children the idea that borrowing a book is a rewarding experience. Another means of modelling is for the teacher to refer to some small section of a book that they have borrowed from the library. This provides a message to students that the teacher enjoys and learns from what has been read. Students need to be able to listen to and watch successful reading models. They need to see and hear how and

why reading is carried out (Mason, 1985, p.33). The teacher who reads many different kinds of materials to the class, and who reads often and with pleasure, is demonstrating how print is used and how to go about reading.

4.3 INFORMATION ABOUT PRINT

There are many strategies which readers can use to meet the challenges provided by new texts. Independent readers have control over and use a range of strategies. These strategies are based on an understanding of what can happen in the world and a knowledge of how language works. The strategies for processing text are often identified in relation to the types of information with which they deal. Four types of information about print are available to readers: visual, semantic, syntactic and phonic.

Often, beginning readers are able to attend to only some of these sources of information about print. Currently there exists a wide and growing body of research on how children learn to read and write. "...Experience suggests that to rely on a single or narrow range of approaches to reading and writing will prove to be counter-productive in the longer term" (Department of Education and the Arts, 1992 p.v). A House of Representatives Standing Committee (1993, p.23) concluded that "by far the greatest amount of research indicates that reading requires the use of three cueing

systems, namely semantic, syntactic and grapho-phonetic" (House of Representatives Standing Committee, 1993, p.23). The Committee wrote of its acceptance that there is no single correct method of learning to read which will suit all children. It was considered necessary therefore, that teachers need to know which methods and approaches are likely to work with certain children.

In a reader's mind, visual, semantic, syntactic and phonic information is rapidly integrated as reading occurs. The teacher must focus on aspects characteristic of a child's reading behaviour; and in particular on the difficulties a student experiences in using the full range of strategies that are possible during reading. Students will become competent readers when they are able to use the grammar and meaning of the text, and relate the reading to their own experience, and interact with the text "so that reading is another way of experiencing life" (Elkins, 1975, p.34). The capacity to think about what is read depends upon the time and effort involved in identifying individual words.

Two forms of metalinguistic awareness (defined by Rohl and Milton as the deliberate reflection on language) which appear to be particularly important when children begin to read are syntactic and phonological awareness (Rohl & Milton, 1993, p.157). Although there is disagreement among researchers as to exactly when metalinguistic awareness begins to appear, Rohl and Milton (1993, p.158) suggest most agree that it

begins somewhere between the ages of three and seven; at a time when children begin school. Effective readers use cueing systems in an interactive manner, varying the emphasis as required by the text (Unsworth & O'Toole, 1993, p.111). They selectively use different sources of information to make decisions as the need arises. Teaching of reading must incorporate varied strategies for translating print. There are several different types of information which play a role in the translation of print and beginning readers should not be required to focus on one aspect of processing at the expense of the other types of information about print.

4.3.1 VISUAL

"Children usually read their first words by association" (Rohl & Milton, 1993, p.161). These words are often print in the environment; labels such as K-Mart, and MacDonalds are learnt as a whole word, by the shape, colour and/or location of the word. Children may extend these sight words to include individual words in a favourite book or on a favourite toy. As children learn to visually recognise more words, each new word becomes more difficult to recognise because the word shapes become more alike. Children remember a written word by the features that strike them. Each child has her/his own way of looking and of remembering. While teachers can provide general instructions, children will quickly learn words with distinctive features and words that are important to them.

Visual recall is often an initial strategy for beginning readers (Badenhop, 1992, p.108). However, in time it becomes an inefficient strategy: because of the increasing number of words that must be memorised as the child's written vocabulary increases; and because of the failure to take advantage of the sound-meaning relationships previously stored in the memory during speech acquisition. Andrews (1992) suggests that children who rely too heavily on this strategy will later experience difficulties in reading comprehension.

Clay (1991, p.258) writes that "the visual analysis carried out by a reader is one kind of inner control that seems to be either hard for teachers to observe, or easy for them to ignore". Children do not come to reading equipped to immediately use the visual information in print. The visual perception of print is a specialised task which improves with both exposure and specific learning. To make sense of visual information, the reader creates associations between those visual features which are often seen together. Experienced readers recognise letters instantly. The association between common strings of letters is so strong that readers often are able to recognise words from a few letters. Visual units recognised by young readers may include the following: features of letters; letters; letter clusters; words; repeated phrases; spacing; and punctuation.

The first letter of a word gains prominence when directional behaviour is established. Patterns of letters become recognisable in groups, and the length of a word becomes a clue. Effective readers have learnt to search for different sources of visual cues and make decisions using this information. For beginning readers this learning requires specific effort and attention. "It takes the learner several years to explore all the details in word and letter patterns and locate quickly: the smallest details that make a difference; the patterns within patterns; and the largest patterns that one can operate on without risk of error" (Clay, 1991, p,263). Initially, beginning readers focus much attention on visual information. However, gradually they are able to use the visual information with little conscious attention. Experienced readers seem able to see a familiar word as a total entity rather than as a sequence of individual letters (Department of Education and the Arts, 1992, p.6).

4.3.2 SYNTAX

Syntactic awareness involves knowing about the grammar of language. It has only recently received much attention from researchers. According to Chapman and Tunmer (1991) recent research has shown that syntactic awareness does play an important role in learning to read. Measures of syntactic awareness have been strongly related to beginning reading

achievement. Good readers score significantly better than poor readers in measures of syntactic awareness. Syntactic awareness is as strongly related to beginning reading achievement as phonological awareness.

Most children, by the time they begin school, are able to communicate effectively with adults and other children. Generally, spoken sentences are grammatically acceptable. However, not all children starting school have developed syntactic awareness and the grammatical construction of language is not apparent to them (Rohl & Milton, 1993, p.158). They may not be aware of words as units of meaning. As children become increasingly aware of the syntactic structures of language, they become more able to recognise and correct ungrammatical sentences as they read. However, the process and accompanying benefits is cyclic one. As children learn to read they also become increasingly aware of the structure of sentences. Rohl and Milton (1993) write that several researchers have noticed that this awareness develops throughout the early school years and that good readers are much more sensitive to syntax than poor readers. Children need some early knowledge of language structure to help them predict unknown words as they are learning to read and then, as they learn to read, their understanding of syntax increases.

Syntactic awareness influences reading through ongoing comprehension monitoring. When children are learning to read,

syntactic awareness helps them to make sense of what they read. Children use syntactic cues in two ways. First, if they detect an ungrammatical sentence, they are alerted to a reading error and to the need to re-read the sentence to gain meaning. Secondly, when children read unfamiliar homographic words (that is, words which are spelt the same but are pronounced differently and have different meanings) they can use awareness of sentence structure to help decide the correct pronunciation and so gain meaning (Rohl & Milton, 1993, p.159).

Rohl and Milton (1993) report results of research in analyzing reading progress of year one students. When poor readers were compared with more successful readers it was found they had a lower score in several specific areas of the test. The greatest difference was on the measure of syntactic awareness. Although this finding emphasized the importance of syntactic awareness as a pre-requisite for successful reading acquisition, teaching syntactic awareness would not guarantee success in reading for all children. Poor readers had problems with phonic skills, suggesting that they needed a certain level of both syntactic and phonological awareness to become successful readers. When aspects of the grammatical form of the language are unfamiliar, the reader is forced to rely on other cueing systems.

4.3.3 SEMANTIC

The store of understandings that a reader has about the world is a source of information which the reader is able to bring to the text. This is known as semantic cueing. It will include knowledge of objects and their characteristics and of relationships and behaviours. Whilst children do use syntactic cues in monitoring their comprehension of text, semantic cues are also important. Good readers make use of both semantic and syntactic cues to help them make sense of text more frequently than poor readers.

The ability of readers to make use of semantic cues is dependent on their background knowledge in relation to the text (Clay, 1991, p.292). This background information is important in determining the quality of understanding that emerges from reading a particular text. When this background knowledge is strong, reading can proceed using minimal visual cues. When background knowledge is limited, readers must rely more heavily on cues other than semantic cues. Clay (1991, p.292) explains that "research and practice show that a good introduction of the text to the reader before he attempts to read it will make the task easier for him".

4.3.4 PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND PHONICS

Phonological awareness involves being able to recognise the sound units of language and to manipulate them. This

awareness and skill facilitates the reading process by acting as a self-teaching mechanism. In combination with the ability to use sentence context cues, it helps children to identify words not seen before and to gain levels of practice required for developing speed and automaticity in recognising words. There have been many studies into phonological awareness and Rohl and Milton write that there is "overwhelming evidence that phonological awareness is most important in early stages of reading" (Rohl & Milton, 1993, p.161). Children need to learn about the matches between the sounds of the language (phonemes) and the letters of the alphabet (graphemes). "... Older children with severe reading problems often lack phonemic awareness" (Byrne, 1991, p.134). According to a claim made by the Tasmanian Education Department, some supporters of the 'whole language approach' to teaching incorrectly interpreted the concept (House of Representatives Standing Committee, 1993, p.27). It was suggested that some supporters of this approach diligently discouraged the use of any phonic instruction techniques.

Eventually, in order to learn new words, children have to become able to break words up into sounds so they can use the alphabetic system where twenty-six letters of the alphabet are used to represent approximately forty-four phonemes. "Phonemic awareness emerges as children distinguish the sounds in words, ... Those who do not master this skill do not make good progress in reading because they cannot exploit

the alphabetic principle" (Watson & Badenhop, 1992, p.18). Children who fail to realise that spoken words can be broken up into phonemes and who do not make use of the alphabetic relationships between spoken and written words are forced to rely on a visual strategy whereby each word is memorised individually. It has been suggested that phonemic awareness scores in Kindergarten are an effective predictor of year two reading ability (Andrews, 1992, p.89). Measures of emerging phonemic awareness taken before schooling commenced can be used to predict later reading achievement. A strong link exists between phonemic awareness and progress in reading.

Phonological skills can be developed within the context of whole language programs. For some children these skills can be developed incidentally and through using implicit instruction. For other children, however, instruction will need to be sequenced and taught explicitly (Badenhop, 1992, p.110), although this need not be in complete isolation. Children who make use of the alphabetic relationship between spoken and written words have some of the skills required for independent reading. They match newly encountered written words with known spoken words. Readers then move on to rely not just on single letters but on letter clusters. A developing awareness of word segments is facilitated by games such as "I Spy" and "Choose the Odd One Out". In some texts, such as poems, rhymes and jokes, the meanings are mainly concerned with the playful enjoyment of sound-symbol relationships. In sharing these texts specific attention to

grapho-phonetic relationships can be both functional and enjoyable. However, it may not be appropriate to emphasize this relationship when reading all texts.

By including phonological awareness activities and by developing more complex skills as children's reading ability increases then the possibility of students experiencing reading problems will be reduced. Unless children develop a knowledge of sound symbol associations they will be unable to apply the phonological awareness skill of blending sounds to the task of decoding for reading. Phonic analysis is the main way that readers are able to make connections between a printed word that they do not initially recognise and the familiar, spoken form of the same word (Department of Education and the Arts, 1992, p.9).

Relying on phonics as the only way of teaching reading actively works against many students, and "research has shown that many people with reading difficulties over-relied on the graphonic aspects of print" (House of Representatives Standing Committee, 1993, p.27). Meek (1982) considers phonics to be inefficient and full of problems and believes that failed readers have learned the phonic rules too well and are unable to work outside these rules. When attempting to deal with an unknown or new word the reader finds that it is usually more efficient to ask someone for help, to read on, or to look for a picture clue. An over-reliance on sounding out letters and letter combinations often results in

lack of fluency, loss of enjoyment and limited understanding of purpose and meaning. It must be remembered that the phonological aspects of beginning reading is only one of the cueing systems that a child uses in order to read fluently. Phonological awareness is one part of a complete reading program that encourages the development of phonological, semantic, syntactic and visual systems.

4.4 READING RECOVERY

Teachers face continuing responsibilities at all levels of education for identifying children experiencing reading difficulties. It is considered vital to identify children when they begin to experience problems in reading, whether this occurs in year one, year three or year seven. This identification will, ideally, occur the moment difficulties are experienced by a reader.

It is particularly important to identify children showing little progress in reading during their first two years at school. When a student has been unsuccessful at reading for some time then "erroneous concepts about print and print processing, compounding with the negative cognitive, linguistic, academic and affective consequences of failure to learn reading, have coalesced into erroneous and counterproductive beliefs about literacy itself" (Henderson, 1993, p.121). Some children, regardless of the educational

setting, will experience confusion and difficulty as they begin learning to read (Clay, 1992, p.24). Recently considerable attention has been focused on 'Reading Recovery' as a strategy for early intervention for literacy learning. 'Reading Recovery' was highlighted in a recent report "The Literacy Challenge" (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1993); submissions were received from many primary schools and parents who wrote detailing first hand experience of the program.

'Reading Recovery' is an early intervention literacy program designed to provide a second chance for children who, after one year at school, are experiencing difficulty in learning to read and write. The program provides intensive, daily instruction with the aim of assisting individuals to reach the average classroom reading/writing levels within twelve to twenty weeks. The program was developed by Professor Marie Clay, of the University of Auckland, together with several New Zealand teachers. It has been introduced throughout New Zealand, and in parts of Australia and the United States. The general aim of the program is to reduce substantially the number of children who experience ongoing reading and writing difficulties throughout their schooling. Clay (1985) argues that for these children 'Reading Recovery' is an acceleration program rather than a remedial program.

The program focuses on children who have had opportunity to

learn in the classroom program for about one year, but have not successfully engaged in literacy learning. They are usually six year old children identified as the 'poorest readers' in their school. Teachers identify students who are not making good progress, and these students are then assessed by means of the Diagnostic Survey (Clay, 1985). The focus of the Diagnostic Survey is to provide a running record of text reading. Other assessments conducted as part of the Diagnostic Survey include: letter identification; basic sight word recognition; concepts about print; writing vocabulary; a dictation test; and spelling. Children are selected for assistance in 'Reading Recovery' programs mainly on the basis of their results. "...At least two thirds of those who enter the program can be returned to average levels of performance..." (Clay, 1992).

Children in the program experience daily lessons which include seven activities. These activities, as described by Chapman and Tunmer (1991, p.60), usually take place in the following sequence: re-reading of at least two familiar books that the child can read with success; independent reading of the new book introduced the previous day while the teacher takes a running record; word study and/or letter identification; writing sentences related to one of the books which has been read; re-ordering these sentences after they have been cut up by the teacher; introducing a new book; reading the new book. The emphasis is on adding successful

reading and writing experiences to what the individual can already achieve. The program is based on individual instruction programs of thirty minutes per day, tailored to suit the needs of each child. This is additional to the regular class literacy activities.

'Reading Recovery' teachers liaise with classroom teachers regarding the nature of the work done in 'Reading Recovery' lessons. The work may differ in detail but the goals for the lessons are linked with the goals of the classroom. 'Reading Recovery' teachers make explicit the patterns of behaviour and sources of information that assist young readers and writers with fluency and success.

Decisions regarding the exit of children from the program are based on factors such as: when children reach a reading level near their class average; when there is an appropriate reading group in their class into which they can be placed; when they reach a reasonable degree of independence in reading and; when a certain period of time (usually a maximum of twenty weeks) has elapsed (Chapman & Tunmer, 1991, p.61).

The House of Representatives Standing Committee (1993) claimed that even though there were some concerns regarding the limitations of the research data as to the effectiveness of the program, numerous other programs have gained support with less evaluation. Their report referred to a recent American study, known as the Macarthur study, which analyzed the effectiveness of four different early intervention

approaches for first grade children having difficulty in reading. This study found that 'Reading Recovery' was an efficient approach. The conclusion was based on student outcome data and detailed analysis of video tapes.

Chapman and Tunmer (1991) write that numerous criticisms have been made of the 'Reading Recovery' program. Children were not randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. All children who scored poorly were given a 'Reading Recovery' program; the control group was not a matched group of poor readers. Clay assumed that progress made by poor readers could be explained by their participation in 'Reading Recovery'. This inference might not be correct because children who score poorly on tests often make progress without special treatment. There is also a chance that the results of the 'Reading Recovery' group were because of error in the initial selection process.

Evaluation results have also suggested that while the target children had achieved greater gains than the comparison children, "this positive effect has largely disappeared a year after the target children had left the program" (Chapman & Tunmer, 1991, p.62). This study, however, involved a limited sample size. A more general concern for the apparent limited benefits of 'Reading Recovery' to have lasting effects is that the intensive, one to one program of instruction temporarily increases the rate of reading development, but has little effect on the development of

those reading-related skills that are essential for lasting progress.

Another criticism has been that because children do not enter 'Reading Recovery' until they have had at least one year of schooling, then there has been sufficient time for negative achievement-related beliefs to become established: negative academic self-concept; expectations of low achievement; belief that success is often due to luck, teacher's help or easy tasks (Chapman & Tunmer, 1991, p.67). Further criticism relates to the withdrawal of children from their classrooms. It has been suggested that this model actively works against a more systematic attempt to improve teaching methods in schools generally.

Regardless of whether or not schools choose to implement a 'Reading Recovery' program in their classes, some provision must be made to assist individual readers to acquire the wide range of knowledge and skills that ensures their success as readers. This may require providing extra support and assistance to those students who would otherwise experience ongoing difficulties in learning to read. In the words of Watkins "... it matters little what the programme is called, what are its antecedents and who is responsible. What really matters is that individual schools, groups of schools or systems as a whole, are willing to invest time and resources to ensure that beginning learners are equipped with literacy skills, experience and abilities on which they can

confidently base later learning and their place in society"
(Watkins, 1993, p.23).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

"Children begin school with a great sense of anticipation of the possibilities that stretch ahead" (Meek, 1982, p.58). For most children this sense of anticipation includes an expectation of learning how to read. Parents also assume that their children will learn to read when they commence school. Early childhood classroom teachers establish a number of goals at the beginning of each year. One of these goals is to assist students in becoming competent, assured and discerning readers. Society acknowledges that success in learning to read is necessary for long term success in education and in building a fulfilling life (Department of Education and the Arts, 1992, p.v). Being a reader enables people to function successfully in their daily lives, to consider the thoughts and ideas of others and to stimulate their imagination.

Students do not begin school with a common background of knowledge and experiences (Education Department, 1988, p.11). Reading programs must commence at a stage appropriate to each beginning reader and then continue to support each reader as they acquire knowledge and skills at varying rates. Early reading programs must provide students with activities that enable children to be comfortable with reading and to experience success. Confidence is important to successful learning. The early childhood education years are vital "as it is during this

time that the foundation for a successful education is established" (Education Department, 1988, p.9).

"The most important factor in determining the quality of school reading programmes is the human factor - the teacher's expertise in personalising children's literacy development" (Unsworth, 1985, p.1). Early childhood educators are required to implement quality reading programs which cater for individuals, groups and the class. This requires careful planning, conscientious implementation and accurate evaluation (Hogben & Wasley, 1989, p.13). The reading program should be planned with the intention of identifying specific goals and maintaining continuity throughout the teaching year. Implementation of the program is dependent on planning and on flexibility. The organisation of the learning environment, the strategies employed, the routines established and the materials selected all play a part in implementing the reading program. Evaluation of the program and of students' progress is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. It provides opportunities for development, improvement and quality teaching and learning (Hogben & Wasley, 1989, p.13).

Students are expected to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes through their participation in the reading program provided. This will require a balanced provision of activities and interactions. The features of an effective program, as discussed by Hogben and Wasley (1989, p.15), are outlined below.

An effective reading program provides numerous opportunities for students to learn by observation, imitation and exploration. First hand experiences in real reading situations are highly regarded. Play is a vital part of the experiences provided and students have opportunities to set up pretend situations in which they play out what they understand reading to be.

The learning environment has many resources, specific spaces and interesting items. Careful placement of materials and equipment ensures that they are easily seen and accessible. Children have the opportunity to experience and explore a variety of materials and the time to practise and achieve competence through familiarity. The reading program needs to acknowledge and support the interdependence of listening, speaking, writing and reading. Organisation of the program needs to be sufficiently consistent to provide stability, providing young children with a sense of familiarity and security in the daily routines of learning to read. The program must also offer ways in which parents can become involved in the literacy program.

"Once a child is reading materials that require only childhood commonsense to grasp, he is ready to use reading as itself a way of learning. Having learned to read, he is now ready to read to learn ..." (Dearden 1976, p.9).

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