

APPENDIX 1

Cambourne's Conditions of Learning

An Australian researcher, Brian Cambourne identified the following conditions for oral language development. His conditions also have strong implications for the environment needed for learning to read and write.

Immersion

Humans are surrounded by language from the time they are born. Families talk to infants even though they know the child will not respond with words. As well, they talk and sing in the presence of the child, even if they are not talking to the baby directly. This immersion in language allows the child to observe how language is used by those who have already acquired the skills, and allows them to attune their ear to the rhythm and nuances of language.

In the early years classroom, literacy learners should be immersed in all forms of language, print, and text. The amounts, variety, and quality of the text that students experience have a profound effect on literacy learning. They do not have to be fluent readers before being surrounded by print.

Modelling

Families do not specifically teach children to speak, but they do provide models of how language works, the sounds that make up the home language of the child, why we use language to communicate with others, and how words work together to form ideas.

Literacy learners need continuing models and explicit demonstrations of reading and writing strategies. Children need to understand how successful readers and writers construct meaning from the text. Educators can provide powerful models of what effective readers and writers do and think as they read as well as models of why and how we use reading and writing in our daily lives.

Expectations

Families expect that all children will learn to speak and communicate with others. Unless there is a physical problem, this expectation is realistic. Because of this, families act in natural and relaxed ways as they help infants develop their language but do not set up specific lessons in which to teach the specific skills.

What can we take from this to help our understanding of setting realistic literacy expectations for children? Since all learners are powerfully influenced by expectations, educators must convey the same high expectations to all students. Literacy learners need to know that they are expected to succeed in learning to read and write and that the educator is there to guide them through the process.

Application and Practice

Infants are given time to develop their language skills. They set their own timetable for developing the specific skills related to learning to talk and communicate but families do not generally worry that a child who is late in developing words and sentences will not develop the skills in their own time.

Literacy learners need time and opportunities to engage in reading and writing activities, where they can apply new learning, and practice and extend their developing control of reading and writing. Reading and writing opportunities for young children should be authentic – that is, the child chooses the material and the topics about which to read and write. It is part of a natural learning process.

Responsibility

When infants are learning language, they are given the responsibility to learn at their own pace and in their own way. We do not say to young children, *You will be hearing*

a lot of words in your environment, and these are the ones that you should say first. Children surprise their families with words and expressions that have meaning to them and with the sounds that the young child wants to copy. That is the fun of listening to a new language learner.

Do we do the same for children who are learning to read and write? Children who are surrounded by literacy in their early years classrooms will want to learn how to communicate in written fashion. They will find real purposes for reading and real purposes for writing that make sense to them and to their own environment. It is the educators' responsibility to create appropriate opportunities and an environment for literacy learning. Literacy learners have the responsibility for taking advantage of the opportunities provided to them.

Independence

Young children are not told when and where to babble or talk. They choose when they are ready and those around them simply try to provide the motivation to get that started.

Literacy learners need to acquire effective strategies for reading and writing independently. When young children understand that reading and writing are interesting, useful, and productive activities, we have given a lifelong gift to them. Young children need to have appropriate literacy texts that meet their independent interests and needs.

Approximations

Young children are allowed the freedom to take risks as they learn to communicate with others. We do not expect them to be able to pronounce words accurately but respond to the sounds or proximity to words that they do say. When a young child points to something with which they are familiar and makes a sound that resembles speech, we act as though we know exactly what the child has said and respond accordingly. We demonstrate that those sounds are to be understood by others and form a base of communication. We allow children to form words in a developmental way.

The acceptance of approximations is crucial to literacy learning. Students will have the necessary confidence to take risks or 'give it a try', if they know that their efforts are valued, encouraged, and supported. When young children pick up a book and begin telling the story from the pictures, this is an example of a literacy behavior that should be praised, as it is understood that it is an approximation on the way to traditional reading. Similarly, we should allow the emerging writer to be able to scribble, or write strings of letters that represent ideas to the writer but are not necessarily recognizable by others. This approximation should be accepted by others as a form of writing development and that the child will, with thoughtful teaching, soon be a writer in the traditional way.

Feedback

Babies receive much feedback from others when they attempt to communicate. Families laugh, hug, and respond to the first sounds a baby makes. Then they begin to help them to develop more accurate sounds and simple words by providing the words in simple ways, by stretching out a word or sound and encouraging the child to make that sound. This specific and ongoing feedback allows the child to make tighter and tighter approximations of sounds and words and to develop their language skills authentically.

When given specific feedback to reading and writing attempts, children begin to incorporate new ideas into their set of literacy skills. For example, someone could help a child to stretch out the individual sounds of a word they are attempting to write so that more individual sounds are heard and therefore written. When children are telling a story without actually reading the words of a text, the words they are saying could be pointed out in the text so the children see the connection between their talking and their reading. By receiving helpful feedback children begin to use this knowledge to expand their repertoire of literacy strategies.