Chapter 6 Notes

I. Introduction
   a. Author divides language arts into four interrelated areas:
      i. Listening
      ii. Speaking
      iii. Writing
      iv. Reading
   b. Visual literacy is a primary, basic human capacity closely related to the other language arts areas
      i. Increasing the child’s understanding of how language arts combine and overlap in everyday preschool activities helps increase language use and literacy
      ii. Early childhood teachers realize that when children are taught to read or when a few children begin reading on their own before kindergarten, the learning of reading is dynamically concerned with the interrelatedness of the literacy skills of listening, speaking, and print (writing)
      iii. Learning to read with ease happens more readily when young children listen, converse easily, think with and about words, and have rich vocabularies they have used to express their ideas
   c. Unified and balanced approach in which the teacher purposefully shows and stresses connections between areas is recommended
      i. Educators believe that separate, but integrated skill activities can be part of a balanced language arts program
   d. The ages of the children and their past life experiences will decide the literacy activities one plans and presents and the techniques and adult-child interaction one deems appropriate
      i. Classes may include:
         1. Children who have been in group settings for 3 or 4 years
         2. Children with identified disabilities
         3. Children with exceptional abilities
         4. Children who are already independent readers
         5. Children just beginning to acquire some basic literacy knowledge

II. Visual Literacy
   a. Many researchers and experts in the early childhood literacy field believe a fifth language arts area exists—visual literacy, or viewing
      i. Goals of instruction in the visual literacy area involve promoting young children’s visual perception skills, including:
         1. Attending behavior
         2. Discrimination
         3. Identification
         4. Analysis
         5. Classification
         6. Sorting
7. Categorization of visual images
   ii. A conscious noting of differences in visual characteristics would be undertaken
      1. These characteristics include:
         a. Line
         b. Shape
         c. Color
         d. Number
         e. Texture
         f. Movement
         g. Dimension

2. This area of study can be referred to in professional readings as visual thinking, visual intelligence, visual awareness, visual sensitivity, and visual arts

3. Specifically relates to:
   a. A child’s perception of the world
   b. How she reacts to viewed images
   c. How she sees, feels, and interprets emotions evoked
   d. How she arrives at insights concerning visual media

b. Visual literacy, based on the idea that visual images are a language, is defined as the ability to understand and produce visual messages
   i. Believed useful in improving children’s cognitive, reading, writing, and creative skills

c. Visual literacy is currently a field of educator research and study
   i. Has become increasingly important with young children’s growing exposure to television, videos, video games, computers, and other mass media
   ii. Ability to think critically and visually about images is a crucial skill

d. Stieglitz points out that the sense of sight is the most important and basic source of information concerning one’s surroundings
   i. Involves not only the eye but also the brain
   ii. Elements of the visual perception process are:
      1. Light
      2. The visual stimulus and its characteristics
      3. Eye receptors
      4. The individual’s past experiences
      5. Previous knowledge and ideas
      6. The individual’s purposes, interests, and feelings at a particular time

e. Morrow and Asbury believe the visual literacy area should be integrated with writing, listening, reading, and speaking
   i. Also suggest using instruction that:
      1. Is spontaneous
2. Is authentic
3. Involves children in problem solving
   ii. Also recommend instruction that is direct, explicit, and systematic
f. Telling stories using a photograph or drawing, eliciting the children’s ideas about story content after viewing a picture book’s cover, and discussing children’s creative art and the details therein or the emotions they feel give teachers insights into what children are thinking
   i. These activities also reveal children’s ability to read visual cues and symbols
g. When children and adults are in the process of viewing an image or living an event, they are not involved in the process of critical analysis
   i. Instead, they are absorbing those images and events and actively seeking meaning
      1. Accounts for children’s barrage of questions if they are interested in a new classroom animal
      2. Also explains a good number of their other questions
h. When children are encouraged to express their learning through the medium of graphic arts, they are “documenting” their understandings
   i. They are encouraged to do this in the Reggio Emilia approach
   ii. Children trace and revisit their discoveries and actions, making them visible
i. The exercise is an instrument for reflection and language development as the children discuss their creations
   i. Reflection can lead to a refinement of ideas and further search and discovery
      1. Can be likened to a scientist writing the results of her inquiry, which then leads to further questions
j. DeMarie believes that it is only through the process of repeated investigations using many different languages to represent their learning that these children begin to see the world differently and to attain higher levels of thinking about the topic
k. Primary literacy of the twenty-first century will be visual
   i. Pictures, graphics, and images of every kind will be processed
   ii. Children need experience shifting from word to illustration and illustration to word
   iii. Observant teachers have always known that visual images help learners understand and remember complex information and abstract concepts

III. Literacy Goals—Skill and Knowledge
a. Literacy can be defined as demonstrated competence in communication skills which enables the individual to function, appropriate to age, independently of society and with a potential for movement in society
b. Literacy can be conceptualized as a relatively narrow domain of academic inquiry and educational practice
   i. Can alternately be viewed as an encompassing way of being that involves all forms of communication, including mathematical, scientific, and artistic forms
   ii. Literacy definitions change and reflect different historical, cultural, and technological development
      1. New technology enabling students to access the best information in the shortest time, which allows them to identify and solve problems and communicate this information to others
      2. Reading and writing are but the initial layers of the richer and more complex forms of literacy required in Internet use

c. Young children usually progress by developing “a knowledge of literacy,” which includes oral language skill and awareness that written (graphic) marks and words carry meaning
   i. Wells believes that early superficial understandings about picture books and being read to lead to a much deeper understanding of the purpose of reading
   ii. Psycholinguistic theory focuses on the unique nature of human language—humans’ innate search for order, structure, and meaning
      1. Using this theory as a basis, one can see how children will initiate their own first steps toward literacy when exposed to language-rich environments in which positive attitudes develop toward language arts activities

d. Cambourne’s definition of literacy stresses one’s ability to use language in daily life:
   i. “…literacy is a word which describes a whole collection of behaviors, skills, knowledge, processes and attitudes. It has something to do with our ability to use language in our negotiations with the world. . . . Reading and writing are two linguistic ways of conducting these negotiations. So are talking, listening, thinking, reflecting, and a host of other behaviors related to cognition and critical thinking.”

e. Cultural literacy can be defined as the possession of the basic information needed to thrive in the current world
   i. Children from poor and illiterate homes tend to remain poor and illiterate unless educational opportunities are available
   ii. Another definition states an individual needs to be socialized to literacy and also develop behaviors such as:
      1. Knowing how and when to ask questions
      2. How to hold a book or listen to a story
      3. When and how to participate

IV. What is Early Literacy?
a. The term *early literacy* refers to young preschool children’s language arts behaviors, concepts, and skills that precede and can develop into a literacy that includes reading, conventional writing, and a larger body of literary knowledge at later ages
   i. Considers change over time in how the child thinks about literacy and the strategies the young child uses in her attempts to comprehend or produce oral or written language
b. The act of printing shapes with an underlying logic and children’s “pretending to read” behaviors are viewed as early forms of reading and writing
   i. Many educators believe additional research is necessary to understand exactly “what clicks into place” when young children make the transition from early reading and writing to conventional reading and writing
   ii. Instructional strategies and behavioral techniques based on that knowledge and the identification of what children understand, and which skills aided that transition, enhance a school’s planning ability
c. Early literacy learning happens best in an atmosphere of social collaboration with peers and others who are more literate
d. Early home-life activities start children’s literacy development by providing early experiences, including parent models and attitudes
   i. A home environment can be stimulating or drab, rich in literate activities or deficient
   ii. Children actively search for meaning, and many have lives in which print surrounds them and picture books are familiar
   iii. If children have observed and participated in home reading or writing activities, they often enter group care with interest and a positive attitude and an early head start in literacy
      1. They are able to enjoy symbolic dramatic play and eventually attempt symbolic representation in art, block building, and a variety of other preschool pursuits
      2. They communicate ideas, discuss meanings, and probe adults and other children for information
e. Children’s growing awareness and “knowledge of literacy” is evident and can include all language arts areas—reading, writing, speaking, listening, and visual representing
f. Becoming literate is an extension and companion of language arts skill
   i. Most children acquire spoken language without sit-down instruction; they all become speakers, although at different rates, unless disease, illness, or trauma interferes
   ii. Literacy is not attained unconsciously or by all in our society
      1. Requires a shared body of understanding, much of which involves a common exposure to oral and written material and a level of proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing
iii. Currently, there is a national effort to help students who are not proficient readers
   1. Surveys show many children experience literacy problems
iv. Literacy acquisition involves a commitment of time and mental energy plus opportunity
   1. At the preschool level, this commitment is a teacher’s commitment to presenting a program that both promotes language arts skills and furnishes a shared body of understandings appropriate to preschoolers
g. Elementary school reading textbooks in the early part of the twentieth century were collections of classics
   i. Idea of reading levels was not in vogue, but rather the goal was to have every child learn information and skills that were common to the democratic literate public electorate of the time and necessary to the development of a truly educated man or woman
   ii. Literacy today is still seen by some as only referring to reading and writing, but many researchers and early childhood educators are concerned with the taproots of literacy, which may be developed during the preschool period
h. In the age of electronic information processing, meaningful participation is increasingly dependent on literacy
   i. Few researchers deny that millions of adult Americans are severely hampered by literacy problems and that those who are members of minority groups and the poor are disproportionately affected
   i. To be considered functionally literate, one must have knowledge of shared, common information that is neither set down on paper nor explicitly stated in oral communication and that provides the basis for understanding what is heard or read
j. Real access to concepts of cultural heritage comes from:
   i. Extended, personally meaningful conversations with adults
   ii. Books read aloud at home
   iii. Children reading by choice for pleasure
k. In programming, an integrated language/literacy approach that emphasizes child comprehension is suggested by current research

V. Language Arts Instruction—Historical Roots
a. In examining the historical roots of language arts instruction one could start with the seventeenth-century theorist René Descartes, a French philosopher who theorized God was responsible for the innate knowledge in children’s minds, and the English philosopher John Locke, whose contrasting position suggested children’s minds at birth were blank and unfilled
   i. Locke also emphasized the importance of experience in learning
b. In the eighteenth century, Johann Pestalozzi of Switzerland, and Friedrich Froebel of Germany, presented yet another theory based on their personal interactions with young children
   i. Both Pestalozzi and Frobel recommend providing “natural environments” in which sensory experiences produced learning and a natural unfolding
      1. Play, they suggested, was the route to learning and intellectual development, along with social, emotional, and physical development
   ii. Froebel introduced the notion of treating children with kindness, caring, and compassion
      1. Many schools of the day offered sparse, sterile classroom environments, with young children seated in rows or at desks
      2. Teachers required rote memorization, repetition, imitation, and strict adherence to rules

   c. The twentieth century
      i. At the turn of the twentieth century in the United States, schools for very young children imitated primary school practices, which included memorization and recitation by children, or they simply offered custodial care
         1. Disciples of Froebel began to influence educators along the eastern seaboard
         2. In the Midwest, John Dewey began experimenting with young children’s educational environments
            a. His beliefs promoted a curriculum of teacher-selected topics, themed units of study, and theme-influenced play areas
            b. His ideas affected language arts instructional practices
            c. Dramatic play and book (library) areas are still with us today, and theme instruction has not disappeared
            d. Formal skill-building activities were avoided, but on-the-spot recognized learning moments (teachable moments) were capitalized upon
      ii. Gesell was also influential
         1. Suggested that developmental “norms” existed, and he believed child growth and development were based on maturation
         2. For teachers to be effective, they needed to determine children’s readiness for learning on a child-by-child basis
      iii. Maria Montessori, a physician-educator who in 1907 started her experiment by bringing education to children in a deprived area of Rome, captured the attention of some American early educators
1. Ideas concerning children’s learning through sequenced manipulative materials and special teacher-child interactions were recognized.

2. Some group lessons were believed necessary, but primarily, children self-selected from offered activities and decided their own pace, followed their own interests, and worked independently.


4. Activities (tasks) had definite beginnings and endings, which included returning materials to shelves.

5. Many of Montessori’s activities approached learning in a sensory way; some were color-coded.

iv. In the 1930s and 1940s, it was widely believed that early exposure to formal reading instruction should wait until the necessary skills had been achieved, which was believed to be somewhere around the age of six and a half.

   1. These prerequisite skills included auditory and visual discrimination, visual motor skills, and large motor skills.

v. A change occurred in early educational practice during the 1960s and the 1970s.

   1. Children were beginning to be seen as constructing their own knowledge of language from their experiences.

   2. Rather than moving children to higher levels of development, teachers were to match experiences to children’s current levels.

   3. Piaget, a Swiss psychologist noted for his observations of his own children, studied children’s cognitive growth.

      a. Theorized that a child passed through several sequential stages and was unable to move to a higher stage unless she had mastered the stage before it.

      b. Learning took place as the child made sense of her environment through exploration and manipulation.

vi. Chomsky, who was concerned with language development, believed that acquiring language was a matter of the child’s gaining facility with the rules that govern language.

   1. These rules were not learned, but rather ingested as the child matured and interfaced with more mature speakers.

   2. Theorized that the human brain was uniquely equipped with a language facilitator that he called the “language acquisition device” (LAD).

vii. Vygotsky, considered a sociocultural theorist, suggested that learning took place through social contact and the development of what he termed “private speech.”
1. Emphasized the development of socially shared cognition with adults and peers
2. Adults (or others) assist the child to move ahead in development by noticing what the next logical step might be

viii. Morrow and Asbury have listed how different early constructivist approach theorists and philosophers influenced language arts program planning:
   1. Use of prepared and natural environments for learning
   2. Equal emphasis on social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development
   3. Supportive adults who encourage social interaction to aid learning
   4. A focus on learning rather than teaching
   5. Awareness that children must be actively involved to learn

ix. Research in the twentieth century provided educators with additional data focusing on oral language, early writing attempts, development of early reading skills, and alphabet learning and/or alphabet sound learning
   1. Emphasized early reading behaviors, which supported the idea that literacy began at birth
   2. Educators tended to believe children’s natural interests were promoted in a rich literary environment with activities that aided the development of literacy skills rather than direct reading-readiness instruction
   3. The whole-language movement promoted young children’s access to quality literature together with listening, discussion, and active participation in dramatizing, storytelling, poetry, and picture-book times
   4. Early writing and print-related language arts activities gained wide acceptance

x. With the focus shifting to developmentally appropriate practice in the 1990s, and educators becoming aware of instructional strategies to prevent reading difficulties through the development of early skills during the preschool years, early childhood language arts instruction has changed again
   1. Many programs are working toward a balanced approach to programming, combining a developmental environment and appropriate literacy experiences accompanied by research-based, skill-offering activities that purposely aim at equipping children with skills that aid a smooth transition from nonreader to beginning reader to reader

d. In the present
i. At no time in our history has the public eye been more intently focused on children’s reading and writing achievement and classroom instruction in reading and writing

ii. National Reading Panel Report urges an organized and systematic instructional approach with highly qualified teachers
   1. Morrow and Asbury describe a comprehensive approach to early childhood literacy:
      a. “…grounded in a rich model of literacy learning that encompasses both elegance and the complexity of reading and language arts processes. Such a model acknowledges the importance of both form (phonemic awareness, phonics, mechanics, etc.) and function (comprehension, purpose, and meaning) of the literacy processes, and recognizes that learning occurs most effectively in a whole-part-whole context. This type of instruction is characterized by meaningful literacy activities that provide children with both the skills and the desire to achieve proficiency and lifelong literacy learning.”

iii. Teaching literacy skills and providing opportunities for learning literacy skills are appropriate for young children as long as the teaching methods are appropriate to the child being taught
   1. In such a program, teachers provide numerous literacy experiences that include the integration of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing

iv. Early childhood instruction may now include the task of assessing developing skills and making instructional plans based on assessment data

v. In the many early childhood programs that are impacted by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that includes the No Child Left Behind Act, periodic assessment is the rule—not the exception—in kindergartens
   1. Early childhood programs are being asked to be accountable by providing data that show young children’s progress in the language arts
      a. Are also asked to work more effectively with children’s parents

vi. The quest to identify the most appropriate and effective means to promote children’s literacy development has remained elusive for the last half century
   1. New believes the term emergent literacy has been replaced by early literacy
      a. From this perspective, literacy begins at birth, is ongoing, and is influenced and interpreted by the surrounding sociocultural context
b. New suggests that as a nation, we are far from common ground on considering the meanings, means, or purposes of early literacy

2. What we do know is preschool educators will encounter children who arrive with research-identified risk factors including living in poverty, residing in single-parent homes, having a parent with low educational attainment, and having a home language other than English

3. Early childhood educators will face the challenge of providing preschool experiences and activities that prepare children for kindergarten success in the crucial area of language arts

4. Children will especially need a background that ensures learning to read with ease when formal reading instruction begins

5. Goldenberg notes that productive and effective early childhood experiences and instruction must address the interrelated aspects of literacy:
   a. Understanding the functional use of print for reading, writing, and for communication and expression
   b. Understanding and use of the “alphabetic principle”, phonological awareness, letter names and sounds, efficient and automatic decoding
   c. Motivation and interest in using print for a variety of purposes
   d. Language, cognitive skills, and knowledge necessary for comprehension and communication

vii. Although there is no consensus about how much of each aspect should be stressed, a successful literacy program addresses each of these in sufficient depth and breadth to promote literacy growth in the earliest and later years

viii. Goldenberg points out that although there is wide agreement that phonological awareness is an important aspect of being ready to learn to read, there is less agreement about whether children should receive direct instruction and training or whether phonological awareness should be accomplished in “natural language” activities such as poems, chants, songs, and so on

1. Proponents of strong phonics and phonological awareness training recommend a different set of practices than do those who emphasize the more contextual uses of literacy

2. Most early childhood educators search for meaningful and functional literacy activities, but many are introducing phonological skill-developing opportunities that
encourage children to generate rhymes and segment phonemes within meaningful activities

ix. The joint position statement of the International Reading Association and the NAEYC, Learning to Read and Write, serves as a guide for early childhood language arts program development

1. Describes developmentally appropriate language arts activities in infancy through the early primary grades
2. Recommended teaching practices and activities are categorized according to children’s age levels
3. Promotes:
   a. Nurturing adult-child relationships
   b. Print-rich environments
   c. Daily reading and discussion of high-quality books
   d. Oral opportunities that focus on sounds and meaning
   e. Phonemic awareness activities
   f. Play that includes play with literacy tools
   g. Exposure to print, icons, and words in computer games
   h. Firsthand activities that expand knowledge and vocabulary

4. No one teaching method or approach is likely to be the most effective for all children, according to the position paper
   a. A variety of teaching strategies suited to child diversity and individuality is recommended

e. The National Early Literacy Panel
   i. Has studied literacy research findings extensively
      1. Recognizes that building young children’s literacy skill works and recognizes that demands on early educators are greater than ever before
      2. Hopes to identify appropriate early childhood language arts curriculum and discover what additional research may be necessary
   ii. The panel is pursuing answers to many questions, including the following:
      1. What literacy skills and abilities in young children (birth to age five) predict later reading, writing, and spelling outcomes?
      2. What environments and settings contribute to or inhibit gains in skills and abilities and are linked to later outcomes in reading, writing, and spelling?
      3. What child characteristics contribute to or inhibit gains in children’s skills and abilities and are linked to later outcomes in reading, writing, and spelling?
4. What programs and interventions contribute to or inhibit gains in children’s skills and abilities and are linked to later outcomes in reading, writing, and spelling?

iii. The panel has already identified a number of variables that have strong and consistent relationships with later literacy outcomes.

1. After their review of a relatively large number of research studies with a relatively large number of children, the following variables were found:
   a. Strong predictors
      i. Alphabet knowledge
      ii. Concepts about print
      iii. Phonological awareness
      iv. Invented spelling
      v. Oral language (expressive, receptive, vocabulary)
      vi. Writing of name
      vii. Ran (rapid automatic naming/lexical access)

2. In using the predictors, the panel cautions they reviewed only existing research studies.
   a. Other predictors may yet be discovered when additional research becomes available.

f. Putting theories in categories
   i. Binding similar theories loosely together may help language arts program planners realize the theoretical basis for their language program decisions.

   ii. Nativists, those who believe in the natural unfolding of children without direct teaching from adults, include Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel.
      1. Can be conceived as thinkers who led later scholars and researchers to propose maturational theories with ages, stages, and normative behaviors.

   iii. Psychosocial theory stresses stages of human development and is associated with Freud.
      1. Can also be seen as a variant of the nativist tradition.
      2. Erikson’s psychosocial theory stressed specific tasks to be resolved during stages of human development.
      3. Major tasks of toddlers and preschoolers were autonomy and initiative.
      4. Theory, along this line of thinking, may have evolved into a philosophy of child-directed learning such as traditional Montessori.

   iv. Locke’s nurturist philosophy can be seen as a precursor of highly didactic preschool practices, although he also advocated offering children experiences to promote learning.
1. Program models promote teachers as dispensers of knowledge, but activities might also be presented
   a. These programs are based on the theory of behaviorism
v. Interactionists view child development and learning as taking place between children and their environment
   1. Program planners promoting this view subscribe to the constructivist theory, believing in children’s creation of their own internal knowledge as they interact in both social and environmental pursuits
   2. Piaget would describe this interaction as assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration
   3. Vygotsky would emphasize the importance of language and socially shared cognition (social constructivist theory)
      a. Would recommend promoting assisted and scaffolded learning and encouraging children to use private speech to aid them in solving problems
vi. Although theories differ in important ways, they share an emphasis on considering children as active learners who are able to set goals, plan, and revise
   1. Recognize that children’s cognitive development, which is so closely tied to language development, evolves gradually as children acquire strategies for remembering, understanding, and problem solving

VI. Philosophies
a. A variety of approaches to literacy instruction, representing different philosophical positions, have emerged, resulting in practices using widely diverse teaching techniques, materials, and assessment methods
   i. Contrasting points of view will probably continue as they have in the past
   ii. Currently, educators debate the efficacy of academically oriented versus child-initiated curricula
   iii. Whole-language versus teacher-directed phonics instruction has also received considerable ongoing attention
   iv. Out of these debates the “balanced,” “eclectic,” “natural,” and “centrist” philosophical positions have evolved and become often recommended positions
b. A child-initiated model of instruction in which children’s self-directed actions are facilitated by a teacher
   i. A teacher facilitates learning by:
      1. Providing children with a wide variety of experiences
      2. Encouraging children to choose and plan their own learning activities
      3. Engaging children in active learning by posing problems and asking questions that stimulate and extend learning
4. Guiding children through skill acquisition activities as needed
5. Encouraging children to reflect on their learning experiences
c. Staff of each early childhood center drafts a program based on the unique mesh of their staff’s personal theories about what they believe is appropriate and effective
   i. If a language arts program focuses on the correct form(s) of language, such as the planned and sequential learning of letter names, sounds, and so forth, the program could be described as traditional, or conventional
   ii. Author urges an approach to teaching language arts that is meaning-based and functional for children, literature-rich, and taught in a balanced and interrelated fashion
      1. This type of program approach believes child knowledge and skill in language arts is reinforced and made meaningful when the reading, writing, listening, and speaking aspects of daily activities are encountered concurrently
      2. A developmentally appropriate program first considers the unique group of children enrolled, their needs, their abilities, their interests, and their families’ wishes concerning desirable educational outcomes
d. Preschools and child centers have given special attention to developmentally appropriate practice guidelines published by the NAEYC
   i. In designing programs for young children, developmentally appropriate practice has three recognized components:
      1. Age appropriateness
      2. Individual appropriateness
      3. Knowledge and honor of children’s social and cultural contexts
   ii. Many centers depend on developmentally appropriate practice to form a framework for curriculum and adult interactions with children
      1. Deeply embedded in developmentally appropriate practice is the idea that children have a natural disposition toward learning and actively construct their own knowledge through exploration and interaction with materials, peers, and adults
      2. Educators also realize that low-achieving students often need planned and systematic instruction to acquire skills that will enable them to progress and eventually learn to read with ease
e. Developmentally appropriate program planning may aim to strengthen what a child already knows and can do and/or may promote what a child can potentially discover or knows or can newly accomplish.

f. Researchers trying to identify the effect of developmentally appropriate practice on children’s cognitive development, conclude that children’s receptive language was better in programs with higher-quality literacy environments and when developmentally appropriate activities were more abundant.

g. Many educators believe that outdated views, including extensive whole-group instruction and intensive drill and practice of isolated language arts skills, are not suitable or effective with preschoolers.

h. In terms of cognitive development, the use of developmentally appropriate instructional strategies appears to facilitate children’s creativity, is associated with better verbal skills and receptive language, and contributes to higher levels of cognitive functioning.

VII. Federal Legislation Affects Language Arts Curriculum

a. In July 2001, The White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development met and focused on the chain of negative educational events that can result when children are unable to master reading in the lower grades of elementary school.

   i. Increased federal emphasis exists on not only reading instruction but also what prepares young children and precedes their kindergarten enrollment.

b. The federal No Child Left Behind Act sections dealing with guidelines for reading are designed to improve children’s reading in publicly funded schools from kindergarten through third grade.

   i. Early Reading First, the portion of the law aimed at improving pre-kindergartener’s reading achievement, specifies that preschool teachers at publicly funded schools must deliver systematic and explicit instruction to increase children’s:

      1. Oral language development
      2. Print awareness
      3. Alphabet knowledge
      4. Phonological awareness

   ii. Pushing formal reading instruction into preschool classrooms was not recommended and was not the legislation’s intent.

      1. Idea that literacy experiences during preschool years are critical for successful learning during elementary school years was a central concern.

c. Educators worry that testing will label very young children, and they are concerned about assessment validity and unfair judgments of programs working with disadvantaged children or second-language learners.

d. A draft position statement created by the NAEYC and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) lists both (1) a general description of
responsibilities of educators concerning assessment and (2) the indicators of assessment effectiveness:

i. Make ethical, appropriate, valid, and reliable assessment a central part of all early childhood programs
   1. To assess young children’s strengths, progress, and needs use methods that are developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children’s daily activities, supported by professional development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes:
      a. Making sound decisions about teaching and learning
      b. Identifying significant concerns that may require focused intervention for individual children
      c. Helping programs improve their educational and developmental interventions

ii. Ethical principles guide assessment practices

iii. Assessment instruments are used for their intended purpose

iv. Assessments are appropriate for ages and other characteristics of children being assessed

v. Assessment instruments are in compliance with professional criteria for quality

vi. What is assessed is developmentally and educationally significant

vii. Assessment evidence is used to understand and improve learning

viii. Assessment evidence is gathered from realistic settings and situations that reflect children’s actual performance

ix. Assessments use multiple sources of evidence gathered over time

x. Screening is always linked to follow-up

xi. Use of individually administered, norm-referenced tests is limited

xii. Staff and families are knowledgeable about assessment

e. Standardized testing tends to lead to standardized teaching—one approach fits all—the opposite of the kind of individualized diagnosis and teaching that is needed to help young children continue to progress in reading and writing

f. More about the No Child Left Behind Act
   i. Provision that federal grants be contingent on the fact that all enrolled children at primary schools make “adequate yearly progress” in reading created shock waves throughout public educational systems
      1. As a result, regional areas, states, cities, local communities, school districts, and professional
organizations and groups have made attempts to identify age-level literacy characteristics

2. Have also developed standards and goal statements, pinpointing the literacy skills gained in the early years that may ease children’s learning to read
   a. Written standards statements and prescribed curricula can include mandating the time children are to spend in daily classroom literacy-promoting activities

3. Have also developed, refined, or examined testing alternatives;
   a. Initiated teacher training and retraining
   b. Pursued various additional efforts

4. After examining the results of these efforts, researchers believe test scores for elementary-aged children have risen only modestly or not at all, and the reading gap remains large

ii. Early childhood centers attempt to design curricula that are culturally relevant, introduce content and promote varied vocabulary development, instill an enthusiasm for learning, and introduce activities with phonological and phonemic awareness elements

iii. Child observation and documentation activities are now part of the teacher’s responsibility in many preschools as well as elementary schools
   1. Child journals, child portfolios, teacher checklists, testing sessions, recording, and observations are commonplace as teachers struggle to identify the literacy growth of each child

iv. Many educators are involved in debates concerning the wisdom of some or all of the practices that are a result of this federal legislation
   1. Most commonly, they expressed fears and frustrations involving “pushed down” curriculum formerly introduced in higher grades, literacy or academic activities “crowding out” playtime or other curricular activities, bilingual instructional techniques, and “fairness” in testing

v. Farstrup reports teacher organizations such as the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers have made their positions very clear that adequate funding for NCLB has not been made available to support the significant costs of materials, professional development, and required testing programs
   1. International Reading Association, though expressing strong concerns about the No Child Left Behind
legislation’s possibly overly narrow interpretations and applications of research, still supports the goals of NCLB.

2. Farstrup believes five years of NCLB have resulted in important changes in reading instruction

vi. Schickendanz points out that the beliefs of some early childhood educators concerning the code-related aspect of literacy development may create a barrier to their offering literacy instruction (either formal or informal)

1. Code-related components of early literacy consists of:
   a. Phonological awareness
   b. Letter name knowledge
   c. Knowledge of sound-letter associations
   d. Insight that letters function to represent sounds in words (that is, the alphabetic principle)

2. Some factors that may influence teachers’ behaviors include:
   a. Sticking to older, well-known language arts programming activities that ignore new research-based instructional models
   b. Giving a higher priority to other favored daily language arts activities, such as picture book reading, and so on
   c. Receiving teacher training that does not address code-related language development issues
   d. Feeling negative about any “skill” development lessons, whether informal or formal

3. Goes on to point out that among the revisions and clarifications of the original developmentally appropriate practice guidelines, there is a caution against taking to the extreme such things as the importance of children’s play and self-selection of activities and relying on developmental categories as the basis for curriculum and assessment, causing the exclusion of subject-matter content considerations
   a. Early childhood educators are as worried as some families are about skill-and-drill sessions, work sheets, and lessons that have no connection to children’s backgrounds or interests
   b. Many early childhood educators realize that they may be failing the children who need them the most
   c. Multiple studies show many children from low-income families enter kindergarten a year to a year and a half, on average, behind middle-class children in their language development, as well as other cognitive skills
i. This is a gigantic lag that dramatically affects children’s success in the first grades of primary school and perhaps their entire educational future

vii. The field is searching for palatable techniques and strategies to incorporate code-related components of literacy mentioned in the No Child Left Behind Act into language arts program planning, particularly for children most in need

1. Easy part may be intentionally incorporating skill building into daily conversations and daily activities
2. Hard part may be overcoming teachers’ reticence concerning systematic planned skill-based instruction and effectively identifying at-risk children
3. Educators believe that teachers do not need to make children ready for learning; most are quite eager learners

g. Criticism and positive comments concerning the No Child Left Behind Act

i. Some superintendents of urban elementary school districts with large minority and disadvantaged child populations are calling the No Child Left Behind Act the No Teacher Left Standing Act

1. Because these districts include public schools that have been labeled “in need of improvement,” their teachers are struggling and under pressure to show accountable improvement

ii. Other teachers are angry with the “high standards” and believe the standard equates perfection and is consequently unattainable

1. Yet others criticize the federal government’s amount of funding, saying it is inadequate
2. After reviewing research undertaken after 2002, some educators question what they feel to be the “meager” research data underpinning the legislation

iii. Parents seem to be quite supportive of the No Child Left Behind Act

1. Are now being told more clearly how much their children are learning at school and how the school is rated
2. Some families are discouraged by what they feel is excessive homework to attain standards and the amount of required child testing

iv. One elementary school principal views the No Child Left Behind Act as providing a “tough love” approach that works

1. His formula for doubling children’s reading and math scores in her school was to use curriculums proven by research and embrace unpopular testing that prods all students to learn
h. State standards, Head Start performance standards, the Head Start Child Outcomes framework, and other frameworks
   i. There are at least three principal reasons for the development and use of standards, according to Kendall and Marzano:
      1. To establish clarity of curriculum content
      2. To raise expectations for achievement
      3. To insure accountability for public education
   ii. Most states have state initiatives and standards aimed at preparing preschoolers for kindergarten
      1. Head Start is funded by federal and state funds
      2. Under President George W. Bush’s 2003 proposal for improving preschool programs in general and Head Start in particular, states are offered the opportunity to coordinate all preschool programs, including Head Start, in exchange for meeting certain accountability requirements
   iii. States must develop an accountability program that will indicate how well children in individual programs are performing relative to the skills and behaviors identified by the state as prerequisites for effective kindergarten performance
      1. The skills and behaviors should include pre-reading skills, including:
         a. Phonological awareness
         b. Letter knowledge
         c. Vocabulary
         d. Numeracy
         e. Social-emotional competence
   iv. Curriculum planners and developers in early childhood schools and centers keep standards in mind while preparing a school’s program of activities if they receive public funds
      1. Standards adopted at a particular school represent what that school and its teachers expect children to recall, replicate, manipulate, understand, or demonstrate at some point in time—in this case, prior to kindergarten entry
   v. Early childhood programs nationwide, depending on their state’s decision to mandate or recommend their standards, may not be able to design their program of activities, for they may be spelled out in law
      1. Some written standard statements provide examples of child behaviors teachers can observe that indicate child accomplishment or progress toward mastering a particular standard statement
      2. Many state standard statements are in draft or final written form and are available on the Internet or available by contacting a state’s Department of Education
3. National Institute for Early Childhood Research (NIEER) has a directory of states that have downloadable early childhood (preschool) language and literacy standards

vi. Head Start, reauthorized by Congress in 1998, augmented its Head Start Performance Standards, a document that guided language arts program planning along with other curricular areas

1. In 2000, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) issued guidelines for devising and implementing outcome-based education plans
   a. Head Start Child Outcomes Framework (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003) was released

2. Framework involves eight basic learning and development “domains”
   a. Two domains are identified as language development and literacy
   b. Each domain is composed of 27 domain elements and 100 examples of specific indicators of ability
   c. Head Start has shifted from its original focus on social competence and play to literacy and discrete academic outcomes

vii. The framework gives definition to learning objectives for Head Start and Head Start teachers and could be used to guide curriculum planning and assessment

1. The objectives include five federally mandated indicators of learning achievement that were set as requirements for Head Start children graduating their programs and entering kindergarten

2. Framework also emphasizes the importance of parents’ understanding of their vital out-of-school function in promoting language and literacy development
   a. Promotes parents’ understanding that children’s cumulative life experiences and adult-child interactions from birth on affect language and literacy growth

viii. All early childhood educators who wish to can use the Head Start framework as a research-based guide and design program activities that work toward the identified outcomes

1. Individual states may choose to adopt or recognize the Head Start Performance Standards and The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework, in whole or in part, as they endeavor to better coordinate their early childhood programs and also create preschool programs of excellence
ix. The National Association for the Education of Young Children’s Accreditation Performance Criteria for Early Childhood Programs has been developed through a national effort to identify language and literacy standards
   1. These standards provide guidelines for the content that children are learning, the planned activities linked to these goals, the daily schedule and routines, and the availability and use of materials for children

x. Stott has noted the uncertain feelings and fears about accepting standards, whether state, federal, association, or center created
   1. She has attempted to list both standards' advantages and “downsides”
      a. Advantages
         i. Standards may help all entering kindergartners start school with similar knowledge and skills
         ii. Preschool standards align with K–12 education standards
         iii. The same learning expectations are set for all students
         iv. Early childhood teachers are provided with guidelines concerning what children need to learn before beginning kindergarten
         v. The same high standards are used for all children, regardless of geographical area, consequently smoothing child transfer adjustment from school to school
         vi. Standards help preschool teachers put meaningful content into their curricula
         vii. As universal standards, they could guide early childhood educators in curriculum development, including complex grammatical structure and vocabulary
         viii. Standards could specify the knowledge, skills, and competencies
         ix. Greater professionalism may be brought to the early childhood career field
      b. Disadvantages
         i. The specificity of standards may be too broad or too inflexible
         ii. Assessment and accountability could lead to the identification of narrowly defined skills or facts
         iii. Standards could lead to high-stakes testing
         iv. Curriculum may be constructed to match test items
v. Children’s social-psychological development or cognitive and creative thought may be ignored
vi. Less mature children may be labeled failures
vii. Standards may affect children’s self-confidence and motivation
viii. Teachers may know what to teach but may not know how to teach it
ix. Families or caregivers may be affected by academic pressures exerted through their children’s teachers
x. Some educators are concerned about a possible over-emphasis on early literacy and teachers or programs that create and use a curriculum that is too narrowly focused
  1. One that crowds out all domains of children’s development

VIII. Language Use in All Curriculum Areas
   a. Every planned preschool activity uses language in some way
      i. Past experience is basic to all language arts because a child’s success often depends on her understanding of what is happening
      ii. Language helps children learn, retain, recall, and transmit information
      iii. Messages are received through words and nonverbal means
   b. In addition to the center’s planned program, daily sequence of activities, play with peers, and unplanned happenings also stimulate language
      i. Teachers use every opportunity to add meanings in a natural, conversational way during the preschool day
         1. Generally begins with the teacher’s personal greeting or affectionate physical contact as the child enters the early childhood center
         2. The “hello” and comments are part of the rituals in preschools that aim to recognize each child’s presence each arrival time
   c. Daily routines are the regular features of a school’s program that occur about the same time every day—snacks, toileting, and group activities—in which language is an associate function
      i. Small and large group times can range from ones with a short announcement to language to literacy-oriented activities the teacher presents or prepares
   d. Planned activities should have a purpose children can understand and in some way connect to what they already know
Most, if not all, learning can be made applicable to the child’s life.

Early childhood practitioners provide real, hands-on experiences in their classrooms when possible.

1. Secondhand activities are second best.

In an activity planting spring seeds, signs or labels adjacent to planted seeds have a practical purpose.

i. Teacher could read the seed packet instructions to the children to find out about planting particulars.

ii. If individual planting pots are used, the children and/or teacher could print their names to label them.

Educators encouraged to use number and measurement terms in preschool activities in which counting, comparing, adding, or taking away is encountered in planned or unplanned daily happenings.

i. Participation in preschool activities that touch on math knowledge and terminology dramatically reduces the disparities between children from low- and middle-income families.

IX. Language Arts Programming

a. Preplanned language arts programs develop from identified goals: the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that the school intends to teach.

i. Early childhood teachers also base teaching techniques on what they believe is best, right, appropriate, and prudent.

1. This, in turn, is connected to views they hold about how, what, when, and where children learn to communicate and use language.

ii. Views about language learning that are commonly expressed or implied by staff members involved in planning language arts programs:

1. Language permeates all planned and unplanned activities.

2. A dynamic, rich-in-opportunity classroom stimulates communication and exchanges of ideas.

3. Real experiences are preferred to vicarious ones when practical and possible.

4. The reciprocal nature of exploring and discovering together should be promoted by teachers.

5. Play provides many opportunities to learn language.

6. Teachers’ instructional techniques should be skilled and alert to child readiness.

7. Stressing relationships between objects, events, and experiences is a useful teaching technique.

8. Individual planning, as well as group planning, is desirable.

9. Program activities should center on the children’s interests.
10. Literary classics (preschool level) are an important planned-program component

11. The entire teaching staff should be committed to and enthusiastic about their planned program and should understand the stated objectives

12. An integrated approach to language arts instruction helps children experience the “connectedness” of language arts areas

13. Reading and writing is better conceptualized as a developmental continuum

b. The best type of planned literacy-promoting program is one that is:
   i. Captivating enough to hold the imagination
   ii. Engaging enough to sustain active involvement for a period of time
   iii. Stimulating enough to motivate further literacy exploration

c. Early childhood teachers realize that teachers’ goals for attending children may be much different than families’ goals
   i. Rather than telling parents what they ought to be doing, it is the school’s job to support and complement families’ efforts
      1. There is sometimes a need to find community translators to help bridge the gap between home and school

d. One can envision an ideal language arts curriculum starting at birth and continuing throughout the child’s lifetime
   i. Author sees it as a program of home and life experiences supporting learning and self-discovery in which colorful, interconnected strands of language arts knowledge and skill thread through early childhood and come together in an “‘aha’ rainbow” when the child successfully decodes her first word, first sentence, or first book
      1. Child then passes through a door equipped to move on into a vast amount of stored human knowledge, discovery, inspiration, creativity, and fantasy
      2. These milestones in development are hopefully accompanied by understanding, rich personal life experiences, natural inquisitiveness, and a belief in the child’s own ability and self-worth

e. The ideal early childhood curriculum in language arts offers quality child-relevant speaking, listening, early writing, and reading activities in addition to literature opportunities
   i. These activities encourage, sustain, and provide growth, ensuring the necessary foundational knowledge and skill for an easy transition to school and successful kindergarten year and beyond

f. Teacher training
i. Your classes in early childhood education, self-study, and your life experiences will influence the early childhood literacy program you will attempt to offer young children:
   1. Many times, your ideas will be incorporated into a teaching team’s effort to design a planned curriculum.

ii. Your training should have encouraged you to continually improve instructional practice and to analyze what is working and what is not:
   1. Questioning and researching are parts of the joy of teaching and can lead to “new techniques and insights.”
   2. When looking for program ideas, be open-minded and look inside to remember what inspired your own literacy development.
   3. Do not discount your ability to really focus on children and discover their agenda or your ability as an “innovator” of a language arts program that addresses the needs and interests of each child.

iii. Research has identified the following “critical” teacher behaviors:
   1. Using new words with children.
   2. Extending children’s comments through questioning.
   3. Focusing children’s attention on an analysis of books read to them.
   4. Engaging in intellectually challenging conversations.
   5. Placing an importance on child attentiveness during group times.
   6. Obtaining and maintaining children’s attention.
   7. Believing academic and social goals are both important.
   8. Providing literacy-learning opportunities and being intentional in instructional efforts to stretch children’s thinking.
   10. Providing knowledge, promoting phonological sensitivity, and child familiarity with the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading especially to preschoolers with less prior knowledge and skill (at-risk children).
   11. Giving individual children adequate time to speak.
   12. Planning and implementing small group activities.
   13. Engaging in extensive conversations.
   14. Joining individual children or small groups in the library or writing areas.

iv. Literacy-rich classroom environment with accessible materials.

v. Careful organization and management of materials.

vi. Opportunities for children to practice skills taught.

vii. Guidance in structured lessons for acquisition of skills.
viii. Opportunities for children to work independently or in collaborative groups

g. Programs for at-risk preschoolers
   i. U.S. Department of Education defines a linguistically and culturally diverse child (an educational term) as a child who either is non-English proficient (NEP) or limited-English proficient (LEP)
      1. Educators recognize the difficulties many young children may face when entering child care centers or preschools and children’s attempt to learn an unfamiliar language
   ii. High-quality educational programs recognize and promote all aspects of children’s development and learning
      1. Their goal is to enable all children to become competent, successful, and socially responsible adults

h. Culturally diverse musical experience
   i. The songs and music of childhood are a part of our cultural heritage
      1. Folk songs and ballads that have survived to the present day and the regional tunes parents and teachers offer are part of each child’s cultural literacy
      2. Early childhood programs attempt to provide the music of various ethnic groups
      3. Most of these musical experiences give young children the opportunity to form beginning ideas concerning the music and language of diverse peoples
   ii. Musical activities have gained new status and are viewed as language-developing activities
      1. Studies conclude that in cultures where musical play is actively encouraged, children acquire heightened competencies in motor and communication skills at early ages

i. Classroom environment
   i. Classrooms should be designed to reflect the rich literate environments in which children are immersed outside of school
      1. Believes that there needs to be:
         a. Signs that label materials for children to use
         b. Labels for areas where children store their belongings
         c. Books and magazines to read
         d. Various sizes, shapes, and colors of paper that children can write on in appropriate ways in their play, their cooking, and their independent time activities
      2. States that all learning experiences need to be organized so that they invite children to participate in literacy events
3. Believes that authentic literacy events need to become the focus of the school day as children:
   a. Are signed in daily so that the teacher knows who has arrived in school
   b. Put away their materials in an appropriate setting, using the signs in the room or their names on their cubbies
   c. Read recipes and menus as they cook, eat, and learn about healthy nutritional activities; write prescriptions at the play hospital or take phone messages in the house corner
   d. Read story books, write letters, and record observations
   ii. Creating a warm, cozy, friendly environment where children are in a state of relaxed alertness is the goal of educators.

j. Determining program effectiveness
   i. Goals pinpointed through staff meetings and solicited parent input can be finalized in written form to serve as a basis for planning
      1. For one child or many, goals are achieved when teachers and staff plan interesting and appropriate activities for daily, weekly, monthly, or longer periods
      2. In addition to the actual program, materials, and classroom equipment and arrangement, teacher techniques and interactions and other resources aid in goal realization
   ii. Teacher observation and assessment instruments—teacher-designed and commercial—add extra data that help in planning programs
   iii. Assessment may be defined as an ongoing process of gathering evidence of learning in order to make informed judgments about instructional practice
   iv. Carefully planned, recorded, and well-conducted teacher observation is an assessment tool that is hard to beat
      1. Standardized tests all too often do not tell observant teachers anything they do not already know about children
   v. Some assessments attempt to determine ability and accomplishment in a number of language and communication areas
      1. Others may be limited to one language skill
k. Literacy portfolios
   i. A number of centers and programs create individual literacy portfolios in an effort to track individual children’s literacy development and to complement the school’s standardized assessment and reporting methods
1. First step is identifying educational goals and purposes that a portfolio might satisfy
   a. Usually this deals with both school and home language arts activities and opportunities
2. What types of items might be collected is next considered, and then home-school collaboration particulars
3. Often literacy portfolio development is a joint project undertaken by both teachers and families
   a. Items collected over time and are dated.
      i. Can include:
         1. Child work samples
         2. Child dictated text
         3. Art work with recorded comments, photographs of child work or dramatic play
         4. A favorite book list
         5. Adult-child interviews
         6. Child-created stories or other dictation
         7. Early writing attempts
         8. Alphabet related examples
         9. Word lists
         10. Records of child activities with speaking, listening, prereading or reading skill development
         11. Print awareness or other items concerned with child literacy growth
   ii. Portfolio usually travels, at times, from school to home and back
      1. Informs families about what is happening at school and affords a families review and insertion of home-collected items
      2. Often children's portfolios become a special book from which children and their families derive pride and pleasure in a child's accomplishments and progress
   iii. Large, album-sized binders are used to accommodate children's artwork in some programs, and many schools use page protectors or clear plastic kitchen storage bags to protect inserts
      1. Items are filed in chronological order and dated
      2. Reviewing a child's portfolio with the child generates considerable interactive conversation
         a. It is a source of pride and accomplishment
I. Teacher observation
   i. Many child care centers encourage teachers to continually observe the language skills of attending children
1. Each child and group may have different needs, and the center attempts to fulfill needs and offer a language arts program that will be growth producing and enriching.

2. Many different observation methods and instruments can be used
   a. Some may be school-designed and others may be commercially produced

ii. A teacher who is a keen observer and listener gathers information, which guides teacher actions and planning
   1. In their efforts to make an activity relevant, teachers observe attending children’s needs, desires, and interests and make individual judgments regarding children’s already acquired knowledge, attitudes, and language skills.
   2. Educators believe that assessing beyond children’s level of performance by looking at ways children learn and interact provides a much richer portrait of children than just identifying levels of skill
      a. As teachers observe, some try to answer the following questions:
         i. What individual language characteristics are present?
         ii. How can activities be planned that capture and hold children’s interest and enthusiasm?
         iii. How do my actions and behaviors affect the children’s language arts behaviors?
         iv. Which children are interested in which indoor and outdoor areas?
         v. What patterns of language behavior have I noticed?
         vi. What do children seem eager to talk about or explore?
         vii. What can I do to provide experience or exploration just beyond what they already know?
         viii. Which children readily express their ideas?
         ix. Which children are socially adept and learn language in play with others?

iii. Assessment is a continual, ongoing process
   1. Observation information is confidential and often useful in program planning
   2. Running accounts of child conversations are difficult to obtain because an adult’s presence may affect a child’s spontaneity
a. Also, the child’s attention span and mobility make it almost impossible to capture more than a few minutes of speech with preschoolers.

3. Many teachers note a few phrases or speech characteristics on a writing pad they carry with them throughout the day.

4. For many teachers, having time just to observe children is considered a luxury.
   a. However, observation is important and can be considered an ongoing teacher responsibility in all areas of instruction.

iv. To ensure a language program’s quality, plans are changed, updated, and revised based on both the children’s progress and staff members’ evaluations and observations.
   1. Keeping a planned language arts program vital, dynamic, appealing, and appropriate requires continual revision and overhaul.

X. Goal Statements
   a. A particular center may have many or few goal statements, which can be both general and specific.
   b. If standards exist and affect an early childhood program, goals are often identified and listed.
      i. Privately funded early childhood programs in most states may choose to look at standards statements but some schools may not incorporate them into their planned program goals choosing to develop their own.
   c. A good number of program planners use the NAEYC’s widely held expectations listing for three- to five-year-olds when identifying goals.
   d. Writing goals
      i. In the process of literacy development, young children can profit from an understanding of the role of the printed word.
         1. The uses of writing, including recording and transmitting information, recording self-authored creations, and providing entertainment, are important to the quality of human life.
         2. Knowing and understanding how writing is used may lead to a realization of the value of learning to read.
         3. Writing and reading open each individual to the thoughts, creations, and discoveries of multitudes of people, living and deceased.
            a. This discussion is not intended to promote formal early printing instruction but rather to point out that there are basic ideas about writing that must be considered when planning a language arts curriculum that promotes literacy.
ii. There is a strong connection between the child’s familiarity with books (and her book-reading experiences) and literacy
   1. Illustrations of the reasons for writing and how writing can satisfy everyday needs can be incorporated into any center’s goals for promoting literacy growth
iii. Most schools concentrate on exposing children to printed words rather than starting actual writing practice in alphabet letter formation

e. Reading goals
   i. Reads pictures
   ii. Shows an interest in and enjoyment of stories and books
   iii. Is able to arrange pictures in a sequence that tells a story
   iv. Finds hidden objects in pictures
   v. Guesses at meanings based on contextual cues
   vi. Reads own and others’ names
   vii. Predicts events and recognizes letters of own name in other words
   viii. Senses left-right direction
   ix. Guesses words to complete sentences
   x. Chooses favorite book characters
   xi. Treats books with care
   xii. Authors own books through dictation
   xiii. Sees finely detailed differences
   xiv. Recognizes and names alphabet letters at times
   xv. Shows interest in libraries
   xvi. Shows interest in the sounds of letters
   xvii. Watches or uses puppets to enact simple stories
   xviii. Has background in traditional literature appropriate for age and ability
   xix. Develops phonemic awareness

f. Goals that promote early literacy
   i. Preschool teachers planning and conducting programs that promote language development in young children try to provide a “classic” literary experience, featuring appropriate age-level materials collected from many cultures and eras
      1. Such a curriculum would serve as a basis of human cultural understanding and would include a wide range of oral and listening materials and activities:
         a. Books
         b. Poetry
         c. Language games
         d. Puppetry
         e. Storytelling
      2. Most teachers believe that early exposure to and familiarity with literary classics can help the child understand what might be encountered later in literature, media, or schooling
ii. At present, a widely circulated list of classics for preschool children has not been available, but a list of these works has existed in the minds and hearts of individual teachers  
   1. Mother Goose stories are undisputed classics  
   2. Two other agreed-upon classic stories are Goldilocks and the Three Bears and Peter Rabbit  

iii. Whether a story, play, rhyme, or song is considered a “classic,” however, is usually a matter of judgment by individual teachers  

XI. Sociocultural Language Goals  
   a. Are there important goals teachers need to consider in a democratic society?  
      i. Many sources suggest the following:  
         1. Goal #1. All students are able to communicate effectively with all persons within a multicultural, diverse society  
         2. Goal #2. All students learn to value linguistic diversity and celebrate the cultural expressions of those who are different from themselves  
         3. Goal #3. All students see the value of language and literacy for their own lives  
   b. Early childhood educators can lay the groundwork and monitor attitudes and feelings that in any way degrade other-than-mainstream-language speakers  
   c. A language arts curriculum should include language activities that celebrate cultural diversity  
      i. Family and community literacy activities are important considerations  
      ii. Family stories and literacy-promoting activities and events can be included in center planning  
      iii. Collaboration with parents reinforces the unique contributions families and neighborhoods make to child literacy growth  

XII. Language Arts Curriculum  
   a. Many early childhood curriculum models exist  
      i. Some are well known; others are little known  
      ii. Models usually provide well-defined frameworks to guide program implementation  
      iii. Child development theories are their underlying foundation  
      iv. Whether a particular model, a combination of models, or an eclectic model is used, early childhood educators are constantly challenged to examine, reflect, and improve children’s daily language arts experiences  
   b. Schools and centers differ widely in curriculum development, but two basic approaches can be identified  
      i. First a unit or thematic approach emerges from identified child interest and teacher-selected areas, such as families, seasons, animals, and so on
1. Using this approach, some centers use children’s books or classic nursery rhymes as their thematic starting topic.
2. Others introduce a proposed theme (unit) topic to small child discussion groups.
   a. Offers input from attending children and lets teachers explore children’s past experience, knowledge, and interests.
3. Questions children ask and vocabulary used may aid teachers’ thematic unit development.
4. Staff and parent group discussion can also uncover attitudes and resources.
5. Goals are considered, and activities are then outlined and scheduled into time slots.
6. Many teachers believe this type of program approach individualizes instruction by providing many interrelated and, consequently, reinforced understandings while also allowing the child to select activities.
   ii. Second common instructional approach is to pinpoint traditional preschool subject areas, such as language arts, science, mathematics, art, cooking, and so forth, and then plan how many and what kind of planned activities will take place.
      1. Can be done with or without considering a unifying theme.
      2. Some teachers believe that this is a more systematic approach to instruction.
   iii. In both approaches, the identification of goals has come before curriculum development.
   c. Ages of children, staffing ratios, facility resources, and other particulars all affect planning.
      i. After planned curriculum activities take place, teachers evaluate whether goals were reached and modifications and suggestions are noted.
      ii. Additional or follow-up activities may be planned and scheduled for groups or individual children.
   d. Thematic inquiry approach to language instruction.
      i. Imagine a classroom turned into a pizza parlor or a flower garden.
         1. There would be a number of activities occurring simultaneously—some for small groups, others for large groups, and some for individuals.
         2. Teachers would be involved in activities, and classroom areas might be set up for continuous, or almost continuous, child exploration.
         3. Art, singing, number, movement, science-related, health- and safety-related, and other types of activities would (or could) be preplanned, focusing on the two themes mentioned previously.
4. Sensory activities could be included so that children could experience the smells, sounds, sights, tastes, and so on, associated with each theme.

5. Planning language arts instruction using this approach allows teachers to use creativity and imagination.

6. Also requires planning time to gather and set up material that might not be found in the school storeroom or supply area.

7. Easy to see that there could be many opportunities for children’s use of speech, listening, reading, and writing, and the natural connection among these activities might be more apparent to the children.

8. Most teachers believe that using a thematic approach is an exciting challenge that is well worth teacher time and effort.
   
a. They see this approach as one that encourages child-teacher conversations and consequently expands children’s language usage and knowledge.

ii. Teachers should not limit their program to traditional themes but should explore and discover beyond the familiar.

1. Teachers can follow children’s curiosity and their own childhood interests.

2. Many centers believe that real teaching is found when each staff member gives children what she individually has to offer from the heart as well as the mind.

iii. Develop exciting topics by using a planning strategy with three steps:

   1. Brainstorming
   2. Designing a theme’s implementation
   3. Planning specific activities for groups and learning centers

iv. In constructing a theme, the following steps are usually undertaken:

   1. Observe and record a child’s interest and/or teacher drawing from past experience.
   2. Identify a topic (could be a book, poem, drama, or another category).
   3. Try to discover what children know and want to know.
   4. Imagine possible activities (in and out of school).
   5. Decide on attempted goals of instruction.
   6. Pinpoint range, scope, vocabulary, main ideas, and activities.
   7. Discuss room environment, staffing, visitors, and helpers.
   8. Make specific plans for individual and group activities.
   9. List the necessary materials and supplies.
10. Decide on a culminating activity (usually a recap or “grand finale”)
11. Set a timetable if necessary
12. Pinpoint evaluation criteria

v. Williams uses a four-step child-teacher interactive process to jointly plan unit (theme) activities for a group of four-year-olds:
   1. The teacher asks, “What do you wonder?” or “What do you want to know about—(a particular topic, example: the ocean)?”
      a. Then the teacher records each child’s answer or question in a different color on a wall chart that is posted at children’s eye level
      b. Then the teacher adds her own questions
   2. Teacher asks, “What can we do to find out?”
      a. Then the teacher records the children’s ideas on a second piece of chart paper
      b. If no one responded, that is acceptable
      c. Teacher instead develops a list of children’s questions or ideas that might come up while the unit is in progress, and these are added to the chart
   3. Teacher asks, “What materials do we need?” on a prepared third chart
      a. Materials suggested by the children that do not seem directly related are gently probed by teacher
      b. Child may have a connection to the topic of study not readily seen by teacher
   4. Teacher asks, “What will you bring (do)?” and “What would you like me to bring (to do)?”
      a. Teacher checks with parents about objects and materials suggested by their child
      b. A parent newsletter invites parents to share or bring in additional topic-related items to the classroom

vi. To promote literacy, teachers think about how each theme activity involves listening, speaking, reading, and writing and how to logically connect these areas during ongoing activities

   e. Thematic/literature-based instruction
      i. Literature-based instruction, now mandated or recommended in elementary schools in many states, is very similar to what early childhood educators call thematic instruction
         1. Both levels realize the value of literature and its relationship to literacy
         2. A theme in early childhood could be any topic of interest to children
3. A literacy-based approach uses a classic book or informational book as its central core
   a. A preschool educator would have no problem using a book as a starting place and could plan discussions, drama, art, music, puppetry, and other language arts activities to strengthen various concepts encountered

f. Curriculum webs and webbing
   i. The use of curriculum webs (or webbing) in program planning is popular with some preschool teachers
      1. A web can be thought of as a graphic overall picture of what might be included in a theme or unit approach to instruction
      2. Object of creating a web is for the teacher to define and refine the web based on the interests and needs of the particular enrolled group
         a. The plan (web) is then translated into planned daily happenings with children’s active exploring and participation
         b. Goal is to offer activities to engage the students' interest and imagination and to spark their desire to seek out answers, ponder questions, or create responses
         c. One of the rewards of teaching is to present or set up an activity that children eagerly select, and perhaps ask a million questions about

g. Reggio Emilia
   i. Early childhood educators studying the Reggio Emilia approach to program planning are reexamining their curriculum
      1. Gandini states that to know how to plan or proceed with their work, teachers observe and listen to the children closely
         a. Teachers use the understanding they gain in this way to act as a resource for them
         b. They ask questions and discover the children’s ideas, hypotheses, and theories
         c. Then the adults discuss together what they have recorded through their own notes, or audio or visual recordings, and make flexible plans and preparations
         d. Then they are ready to enter again into dialogues with the children and offer them occasions for discovering and also revisiting experiences since they consider learning not as a linear process but as spiral progression
   ii. Gardner identifies how Reggio Emilia curriculum develops
1. States that the educators of Reggio Emilia have developed and continuously improved a set of techniques for taking the ideas and actions of young children seriously
   a. Much thought is devoted to the opening exposure to experiences that might constitute themes to be developed in the coming weeks, but it is not possible to plan such a curriculum in advance
      i. Instead, the particular reactions of particular children to particular experiences become the bedrock, the driving force of the “curriculum”
   b. The activities of next week (sometimes even the next day) grow out of the results, problems, and puzzles of this week
      i. Cycle is repeated so long as it proves fruitful
   c. Children and teachers are continually reflecting on the meaning of an activity, which issues it raises, how its depths and range can be productively probed

h. The project approach
   i. Involves integrated teaching and learning
   ii. Encourages meaningful, firsthand, relevant study of child-teacher–developed and child-teacher–chosen activities
   iii. Valued by teachers for its flexible and creative aspects, which fit diverse child groups and geographical communities
      1. Children are involved in decision making, program planning, implementation, and evaluation through active teacher-child shared discussion, brainstorming, and project outlining
      2. Teachers also plan activities and experiences
      3. Children are urged to explore and investigate and become testers of ideas as individuals and in study groups
      4. Teachers using thematic unit instruction may feel the project approach best suits kindergarten and elementary-aged children
      5. Others have incorporated projects into preschool curriculum

XIII. Commitment to Goals and Objectives
   a. A number of factors determine whether program goals are met:
      i. Enthusiasm and commitment of staff
      ii. Staffing ratios
      iii. Staff ingenuity and resourcefulness
      iv. Methods and techniques used
v. Resources available
vi. General feeling or tone of center
vii. Examination of sequence (easy to complex)
viii. Parental and community support

b. Effort and staff creativity translate goals into daily activities.
c. Daily activity plans
   i. Recognizing children’s interests stimulates activity-planning ideas based on what captures and holds the children’s attention
      1. Part of the challenge and excitement of teaching is finding ways to be creative in daily activity planning
   ii. Although two staff members work toward the same goal, they may approach the task in different ways
      1. Lesson plans are more frequently used in schools using approaches other than the thematic (unit) approach described earlier but can also be used for individual teacher-conducted activities within theme planning
   iii. Lesson plans (or activity plans) enable teachers to foresee needs—settings, materials, and staffing
      1. Time that children spend waiting can be minimized
      2. Some teachers pinpoint exactly what words and concepts will be emphasized or what questions asked
         a. Other teachers prefer a more spontaneous approach
   iv. Some activities in language arts may require teacher practice beforehand
      1. Others may require visual aids or materials that must be gathered in advance
      2. Planning time is time well spent
      3. Preparation reduces teacher tension and results in child activities that run smoothly
   v. Teachers must strive to be always aware of child safety and comfort
      1. Must also try to maintain a reasonable level of stimulation somewhere between not very interesting and overly exciting activities so that children are encouraged to process information in a manner that is both pleasurable and efficient
      2. Experienced teachers know when children are interested and are actively participating
      3. Many teachers say this is one of the greatest joys of teaching
   vi. Group size is an important factor in planning
      1. It is easier for teachers to plan for an entire class group, and sometimes staffing demands it
a. Many teachers have explored ways to keep children occupied and supervised while working with small groups
b. Small groups allow greater intimacy, conversational depth, and opportunity for feedback
c. Research substantiates the idea that both children and adults feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts when in small groups
d. “Instant replays” with small groups can be planned and coordinated
e. Beginning preschool teachers may not have seen many small group activities modeled by other teachers, but the author recommends them

vii. Teachers strive to maintain children’s attention during activities
    1. Teachers realize that attention is mediated by specific parts of the brain and that neural systems fatigue quickly
    2. After 3 to 5 minutes of sustained activity, children need to rest, but they can recover within minutes too
    3. In a familiar and safe classroom, if a child hears factual information for only 4 to 8 minutes and a teacher is not providing novelty, the brain seeks other stimuli
    4. Perry recommends adding “emotional seasoning” like humor and empathy to teacher presentations and linking facts to related child concepts during activities, in addition to taking advantage of the novelty-seeking property of the human brain
        a. Believes this is a challenging task for teachers of all-aged students

viii. Detailed written lesson plans help early childhood students feel prepared and relaxed
    1. After a period of time, most beginning teachers internalize lesson-planning components and discontinue detailed written plans, although they continue to use lists and outlines

ix. Watching the class carefully, keeping a notebook in a handy pocket, and writing down small observations can help a teacher remember the interests of a young group
    1. Good guide to unearthing new subjects of interest for a particular class is to notice what has already captured the children’s attention
        a. What do the children talk about most often?
        b. What do they crowd around?
        c. Does the activity promote children’s interested questions?
        d. What has the longest waiting list?
e. Are children eager to explore a particular object with their hands?
f. Who wants to share something discovered or created?

x. Activities based on teacher enthusiasm for life and growth, skills, talents, hobbies, and pursuits can fit beautifully into language arts goals
   1. Parent and community resources, including borrowed items and field trips, increase the vitality of programs

d. Evaluation
   i. Thinking back over planned activities helps teachers analyze the benefits and possibly leads to additional planning along the same line or with the same theme
   ii. Oversights in planning frequently occur, and activities may develop in unexpected ways
   iii. Hindsight is a useful and valuable tool in evaluating activities
   iv. Often, centers evaluate their planned programs by asking themselves questions such as the following:
      1. Do children share personal interests and learning discoveries with teachers and/or other children?
      2. Can teachers enter conversations without diminishing children’s verbal initiative?
      3. Do children become involved in planned activities and room centers?
      4. Are there times when children listen with interest?
      5. Are language arts areas (speaking, writing, reading, and listening) connected in a natural way during daily activities?
      6. Is child talk abundant?