

LANGUAGE & LITERACY

Charles Temple
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A Lively Approach

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Language and Literacy: A Lively Approach

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In memory of
Frances Nolting Temple
1945–1995

Preface

These are the most exciting times ever to teach the language arts. The past two decades of research in language acquisition and educational psychology have been a time of breathtaking discoveries about the ways children learn to talk, read, and write—discoveries that credit children with active and creative roles in their own learning.

New approaches to teaching—process approaches and whole language methodologies—have come on the scene to help teachers take advantage of these new understandings, to help them work with children to create classrooms that are far more productive and interesting than ever before.

As a result, children are being introduced to the works of popular authors, and are learning to read by reading them. And with the help of critique groups of their classmates, children are writing books on their own.

Many seasoned teachers are getting a whole new grip on their profession: writing articles and books, going to workshops, participating in international exchanges in places like New Zealand and Australia.

Many new teachers, trained in workshop and whole language methodologies from the beginning, find they have much to contribute to their new schools; and they find veteran teachers who are open and enthusiastic about sharing ideas and planning collaboratively.

Both the excitement and the challenge of these new workshop and process approaches to teaching language arts is that teachers must know, and be able to do, more than in the past. Workbooks and scripted lessons are largely gone; it is up to teachers to plan curriculum and teach flexibly. Language arts teaching is based more closely than ever on the children's efforts to use language. Teachers must become "kidwatchers," in Yetta Goodman's term (1985). Workshop and process approaches to teaching language arts have ushered in a new role for the teacher, as teachers demonstrate the crafts of writing and reading, much the same way they would demonstrate throwing a pot in a studio class (Graves, 1982). The new requirements and challenges for teachers can be broadly summarized as follows:

- They should be enthusiastic students of language and they should be aware of its power and its workings; they should know how children naturally come to learn their language and how to help that process along.

- They should be writers, and they should know how children learn to write, and how to set up and manage classroom environments and processes to help children learn to write and to encourage them to write copiously.
- They should be readers, and they should know how children learn to read, and how to set up and manage classroom environments and a curriculum that will help children learn to read. They should encourage them to read widely as an integral part of their daily activities.

In the chapters that follow, we offer an approach to language arts instruction that is thought provoking, informed by current research, and lively. We demonstrate how you can actively engage children in language use, not simply in studying language. You will find here detailed procedures for implementing an exciting language arts curriculum— from storytelling and creative dramatics to managing discussion groups, from setting up thriving writing workshops to integrating literature into the language arts and the language arts into each other.

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Charles Temple
Jean Wallace Gillet

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CHAPTER 1

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What Do You Mean, “ <i>Teaching</i> the Language Arts”?	Metacognition and Strategic Learning
So Why Do We Have a Language Curriculum?	Influences on Language Teaching from Abroad
Reason 1: To Develop Children’s Language Power	Literature and the Language Arts
Reason 2: To Make Children Literate	Diversity and Multiculturalism
Some Benefits of Literacy	The Reading-Writing Connection
Learning and Teaching in the Language Arts	Integrated Language Arts: Whole Language
The Constructivist View of Learning	Whole Language and Systematic Skills Instruction
Discovery Plus Support: Scaffolding	
Scaffolding in Practice: The Classroom as Workshop	Summary
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Reflective Questions

How do you think becoming literate benefits children?

How do you think American language arts instruction has been influenced by educators outside the United States?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, “TEACHING THE LANGUAGE ARTS”?

Children are natural-born language-learning machines. Why do they need to be schooled in language?

By the time they are six years old, nearly all children, from every sort of family, know more than 6,000 words and can speak in just about all the kinds of sentences there are (Loban, 1976). You or I would need years of university study to learn as much German or French as our children know of English (or whatever their first language is) before they have had any schooling at all.

If we stretch our definition of language just a bit, children's early successes in language learning are even more astonishing. If you are willing to agree that communicating messages without using standard words still counts as using language, then you will find children using their voices to communicate joy, impatience, and the thrill of discovery; giving commands, making queries, and even composing poems—while still in their diapers (Halliday, 1975).

If you are willing to count communication through facial gestures as a sort of language use, then you will find children having give-and-take “conversations” with their mothers (or whoever their caregivers are)—responding to the adult's gestures with matching gestures that express interest, delight, ambivalence, or annoyance—all this just six weeks after birth (Stern, 1977). Children express the most basic emotions—anger, fear, sadness, wonder, curiosity, joy, amusement—through facial expressions within their first week in the world (Campos et al., 1983).

Earlier? All right: newborn children can tell the difference between speech sounds as similar as “pit” and “bit” (Eimas, 1985). They even move their whole bodies in synchrony with the rhythms of human speech (but not with random traffic noise) as young as four days (Condon and Sander, 1974).

Earlier? Yes. Children can recognize speech they heard while they were still inside the womb! (DeCasper and Spence, 1986). Children whose mothers have read aloud Dr. Seuss's *Cat in the Hat* during the last month of pregnancy show that they recognize and remember the story when it is read to them after they are born.

SO WHY DO WE HAVE A LANGUAGE CURRICULUM?

If children are so good at learning language on their own, then why do they need a language arts curriculum?

Though they are active discoverers of language, children still need the rich learning opportunities provided by a good school environment for two reasons. One is to develop the range and power of their language, and the other is to develop their literacy. Let's look at both reasons in detail.

Reason 1: To Develop Children's Language Power

Children need a language curriculum so that their language will grow and be able to hold them in good stead in a wide range of situations. Language ability, like all intelligent behavior, is *adaptive*: it rises to the challenges it regularly faces. People who spend most of their time at home or in a single neighborhood surely learn to talk, but they develop a narrower slice of their language potential than those who have to understand and communicate with less familiar people about a wider range of topics.

Scholars have described this difference between narrower and wider ranges of language use in many ways.

To Use Language Elaborately. One way language differences are classified is as *restricted* or *elaborated* codes. The British sociologist Basil Bernstein (1972) noted that people in England who had the most limited social mobility spoke with each other in what he called a *restricted code*. They used expressions that would not have been exact enough to make their meanings clear to someone who did not already know what they were talking about. But it usually did not matter, because they stayed around people like themselves, who had the same experiences.

In contrast, people with more social mobility—who had regular dealings with a wider range of people and media, including newspapers and books—spoke in what Bernstein called an *elaborated code*. The meanings of the words they used were more explicit, as they relied much less on shared background knowledge.

Bernstein did however admit that people with more mobility use restricted code sometimes—just think of the language a person might use when getting a back rub. Now think about someone explaining the metamorphosis of a caterpillar. Back rub talk won't do here.

According to Bernstein, people possessing an education (education being a way of broadening linguistic and intellectual experiences) have a choice that people with less education (and less varied social experience) do not have. They can understand ideas that come to them in a greater variety of forms.

To Use Language for Different Purposes. Bernstein's distinctions between restricted and elaborated codes are interesting, because they show how our