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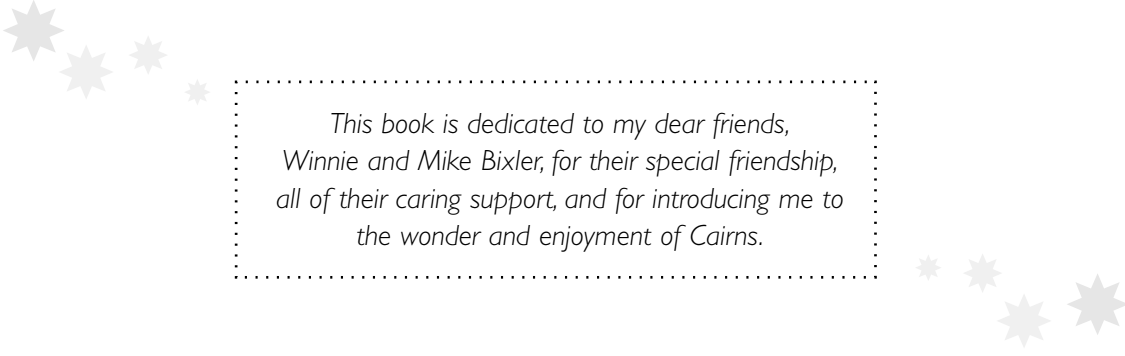
READY-TO-USE

Reading Assessments & Intervention Strategies for K-2

..... by Brenda M. Weaver, Ed.D.
Foreword by Gay Su Pinnell

NEW YORK • TORONTO • LONDON • AUCKLAND • SYDNEY
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Teaching
Resources



*This book is dedicated to my dear friends,
Winnie and Mike Bixler, for their special friendship,
all of their caring support, and for introducing me to
the wonder and enjoyment of Cairns.*

Acknowledgments

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Factors Influencing Literacy Development



In a perfect world, teachers would teach reading and writing to children, and they would learn easily. However, we all live in the real world, where factors beyond our control often impede the development of literacy. Children do not understand why learning is so difficult, but it often is. As teachers, we become frustrated and overwhelmed when our instruction is not successful. This chapter provides some insights into factors that can significantly influence literacy development: brain function, home environment, and school setting (see Figure 2.1). Subsequent chapters provide intervention strategies and activities that can help mitigate the effect of any negative factors and build upon the strengths of positive factors.

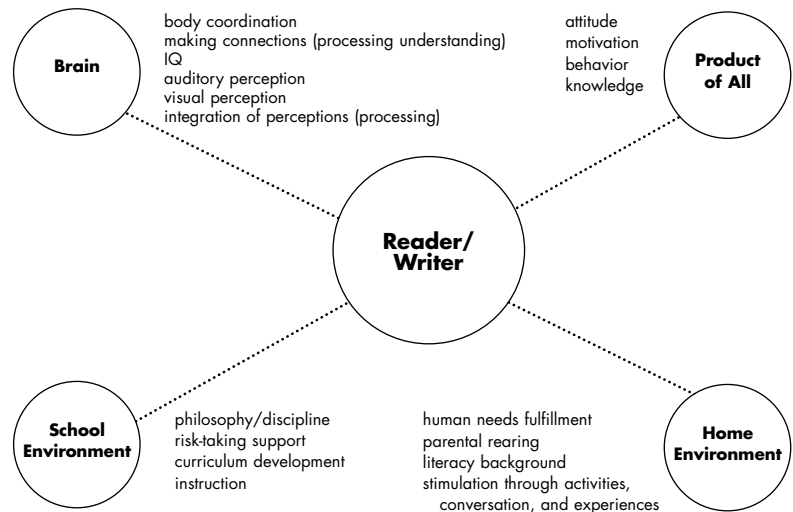


Figure 2.1



Brain Functions

The brain is the most amazing organ in the human body. It gives us the life and breath of our being. The numerous ways in which a brain functions, or the processing rate, can affect literacy development. Some of what we know about brain research tells us that the brain can change physiologically as a result of environmental experiences, that certain periods of time in brain growth influence our acquisition of abilities, and that IQ is not necessarily fixed at birth (Wolfe, Brandt, 1998).



Wolfe (2001) describes the functioning of the brain in this way. The senses are receptors that receive data from the outside world. Using working memory, the brain interprets the sensory information, separating important details from insignificant ones and transferring important data to long-term memory. Trying to get learning into long-term memory is the goal of educators. Wolfe explains that novelty, intensity, and movement can increase the attention of the brain, although meaning and emotion seem to be the controllers of what data makes it into long-term memory. Understanding and using these concepts will help educators design more effective instruction to fit the needs and strengths of their students.

Furthermore, the brain develops lasting connections through concrete experiences, representational or symbolic learning, and abstract learning (Wolfe, 2001). Lasting connections comprise the long-term memory of the brain. The more connections we have, the more we have learned. A variety of real-life or concrete experiences should be encouraged for children at all ages, especially the early years of birth to age five, to build their background knowledge. Representational or symbolic learning means using pictures or graphics in addition to letters (reading/writing) and numbers (math) to convey concepts. Having a rich store of experiences to draw on makes it easier to learn from pictures, graphics, and symbols. Abstract learning is conceptual understanding, such as understanding democracy or evaporation. The development of abstract learning requires the use of a higher level of thinking skills. Abstract learning usually is most difficult for the young child. Through direct instruction using concrete experiences and some representational or symbolic experiences, children can acquire this higher level of conceptual understanding. Therefore, designing instruction using concrete examples, graphic organizers, and higher-level thinking skills will help increase the likelihood of long-term learning.

Gardner's multiple intelligences (1983, 1993) describe how multifaceted intelligence can be. He discusses eight types of intelligences that he researched: linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, musical, logical-mathematical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist. Many of our students have strengths in one or more intelligences rather than a balance among them all. Our awareness of these various intelligences can influence our instruction; we can develop lessons and activities that appeal to various learning styles to build on the strengths of our students. Understanding these various intelligences and capitalizing on students' strengths in these areas will enhance and perhaps increase the connections made by students, which ultimately increases learning.

Wolfe suggests ways to influence learning that harness the brain's power and increase the likelihood that information will make its way to a student's long-term memory. Some of the most effective ways to learn are through real-life problem solving, projects, simulations, role-playing, music, songs, rhymes, chants, writing, hands-on activities, and active rehearsal strategies such as peer teaching.



Instruction should engage the learner in meaningful experiences. Gardner suggests that teachers who use these approaches—which appeal to the various intelligences and incorporate concrete, representational, and abstract experiences—may increase the students’ learning rate. The assessments and interventions described in subsequent chapters utilize these powerful influences on learning.

Home Environment

In addition to the physical makeup of an individual’s brain, we must consider a student’s home environment. Just as every brain functions a bit differently, so does every family. We can use our understanding of a student’s home environment to inform our literacy instruction. The ideal home is warm, loving, and responsive, a place where parents, caregivers, and children join together in challenging, fun activities—including literacy activities such as reading aloud—and participate in various activities outside the home, such as trips to the library, zoo, and grocery store. In this environment, children develop close relationships with important adults in their lives and feel safe and supported, empowered to try new things and take risks. Unfortunately, not all students have the benefit of such an ideal background; we must accept this situation and seek ways to engage students and their families in productive literacy experiences at home to foster their overall literacy development.

You can enhance the home-school connection by providing literacy nights for parents, where parents learn how to develop literacy skills in the home setting. You can also hold read-a-thons, where children read at home or parents read to them to see how many books can be read in a time period. Some schools have literacy centers or parent libraries for parents to take out books to share with their children. In addition, parents and caregivers—who universally want to see their children succeed in school—can participate in some of the practice activities included later in this book to help reinforce their child’s literacy skills at home.

School Setting

Schools should embrace their students and make the school setting the most conducive it can be to meet the learning needs of its population. Ideally, the school should function as a collaborative system that focuses on helping all children learn to read and write. A child study team is essential to problem-solve ways to assist individual children as they develop literacy, especially when they are identified as having difficulty. Comprehensive diagnostic assessments must be a focus for this team, which might include a school psychologist, speech therapist, reading specialist, special education teacher, and the principal. Extra support in terms of additional instruction is often necessary for children who have difficulty learning to



read and write in the typical classroom setting. Reading teachers are a real asset in supporting classroom reading instruction.

In the classroom, you should strive to provide instruction that engages learners, is challenging, has a feedback device, uses a multi-sensory approach, and focuses on students' needs and strengths. Collaborating with other teachers and administrators makes designing a dynamic curriculum exciting and professionally stimulating.

In terms of literacy instruction, you must have a well-rounded and balanced approach to teaching language arts, as described by Mooney (1990). In order to maintain this balance, Weaver (2000) suggests that six teaching components be utilized each day; see the chart below for details.

Read Aloud

Purpose:	To model reading skills and strategies; to introduce or reinforce concepts or content
Instruction:	Read-aloud sessions are approximately 10 to 15 minutes in length and occur daily. In kindergarten, read aloud often occurs twice daily.
Materials:	Classroom library books, library books
Evaluation:	Listening assessments where appropriate. In grades K–2, these listening assessments are often oral discussions about the text read. Depending on the genre read, you might ask questions about the literary elements of the text or about some of the nonfiction concepts or facts.

Shared Reading and Shared Writing

Purpose:	To instruct the whole class in grade-level curriculum; to practice reading and writing strategies with teacher support
Instruction:	I recommend planning shared reading and shared writing together because they both focus on the grade-level curriculum. These instructional sessions are approximately 20 to 40 minutes in length and occur every day. For kindergarten and grade 1, the sessions are usually closer to 20 minutes. Teachers also tend to focus on one activity, shared reading or shared writing, during one session. Often this instructional setting is content related, and may include instruction in spelling and writing mechanics.
Materials:	Shared reading books or classroom books that are on the average reading level for the class
Evaluation:	Quarterly or unit performance assessments. These assessments can be teacher-developed or specific to a publisher.



Guided Reading

Purpose:	To directly instruct students in reading and writing at their instructional level
Instruction:	Guided reading is small-group instruction of not more than eight students. In most classrooms, it takes place every day and is a priority over all other components. To manage a number of groups, teachers rotate them, meeting with three or four groups per day. Group instruction is 15 to 20 minutes long (up to 15 minutes for kindergarten, and up to 20 minutes for grades 1 and 2). In kindergarten, the guided reading groups often focus on language development and readiness skills and are part of learning centers that rotate every 15 minutes. Groups are predominately determined by ability and are evaluated at least every six weeks and adjusted as necessary.
Materials:	Leveled books
Evaluation:	Periodic assessments determine movement in levels and among groups. These assessments can be running records, observations, published assessments, or teacher-developed assessments. This book provides specific assessments for grades K–2. (See chapters 5–7 for grade-level assessments.)

Independent Reading and Independent Writing

Purpose:	To allow children to read and write independently without teacher support, practicing and applying the skills and strategies they've been taught in other settings
Instruction:	Independent reading often involves response journals or some other type of response. Independent writing consists of writing folders with drafts and finished work and/or journals. Independent reading and writing are often scheduled during guided reading time; while the teacher meets with small groups, the rest of the class is reading and writing independently, practicing and applying their literacy skills.
Materials:	Students select their own books and writing topics.
Evaluation:	Teacher-student conferences



Overall Impact

Students' brain function, home environment, and school setting can affect their attitudes and motivation. Attitude can influence how children approach the business of learning to read and write. Motivation is also critical, determining how long children will pursue literacy tasks and what kind of risk-takers they will become. Learning to read and write is a process that requires perseverance and focus. It also requires that children be willing to take risks, to be wrong, and to be problem solvers. School, home, and brain function together affect how children approach the literacy-learning process. As teachers, we can build upon students' innate strengths through a structured, engaging, and balanced literacy program. This book provides tools to identify students' strengths and needs and work with them within the balanced reading framework.