IMPORTANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF READING READINESS IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL LIVES

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Abstract:
Learning to read is one of the most important goals of the first school years; reading is the process of understanding speech written down. In other words, the beginning reader must associate written words to their known lexicon of spoken words, must know that each word is composed of letters, and must understand that each letter represents individual sounds utilized within speech. The purpose of this study is to draw parents and teachers attention to the importance and significance of reading readiness for children and to answer the following questions: (1) when does reading begin, (2) how important is it to develop an awareness of print and (3) what are the components of reading.

Keywords: reading, readiness, children, schools

1. Introduction

"Readiness" is a term used by learning theorists and educators to refer to the state of being able to acquire new learning at any level. It also refers to the pre-requisites for any learning in reading. Readiness could be what the child learns prior to the initiation of formal reading instruction, or prior to the acquisition of the ability to read.

Dowing and Thackray offer definitions of both readiness and reading readiness: *"…the term "readiness" for any kind of learning refers to the stage firstly when the child can learn easily and without emotional strain, and secondly when the child can learn profitably because efforts at teaching give gratifying results. Reading readiness is defined as the stage in development when, either through maturation or through previous learning, or both, the individual child can learn to read easily and profitably."* (Hall, Ribovich, and Raming, 1979)

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within speech. In order to become a competent reader, a child has to acquire word reading competence as well as reading comprehension skills (Vlachos & Papadimitriou, 2015).

2. Related works

In Brekke (2012)'s study, conservation has been found to be positively and moderately correlated with reading readiness, and only slightly less correlated with reading readiness than intelligence as measured by the Primary Mental Abilities Test. A moderate correlation also existed between conservation and intelligence. It was suggested that conservation would be worthy of attention by primary teachers as a predictor of the child's readiness for learning to read (Brekke, et al, 2012).

Smith et al. (2008) investigated how self-regulation contributes to the development of reading competence in an at-risk sample of 157 children born to adolescent mothers. It was hypothesized that reading readiness at age 5 would shape self-regulation at age 10, which in turn would influence reading competence at age 14. Based on structural equation modeling, it was concluded that self-regulation partially mediated the relationship between early reading skills and later reading competence. These findings suggest the importance of socioemotional and cognitive self-regulation in the development of reading competence (Smith, et al., 2008).

Saracho (2017) stated that The present period of accountability in the early childhood classrooms with the No Child Left Behind Act, 2001, places a perplexing amount of demands on early childhood education teachers and a transformation in disseminating information, using computers, and social media technologies that have gained access to all segments of society makes this issue essential. She saw that many perceive that the early childhood classroom is a weak substitute for the world of games, chat rooms, virtual worlds, and other electronic media. Social and sociological energies persist to rise from contemporary types of media, diverse cultures and languages, concerns about security, instabilities in the global ecology, unreliable economies, and conflicts. Research motivates early childhood education and other disciplines such as child development, psychology, educational psychology, other related fields, to continue changing. Saracho thought that these disciplines need to sustain their scientific reliability in the constant challenges of the modern time. It is essential that these disciplines examine, improve, and refine theories related to research in young children's language and literacy development. Early childhood education settings are complex, which require them to have an easy stability between the methodological rigour in the research designs and studying children in natural, acceptable, and valid learning settings (Saracho, 2017).

Vlachos and Papadimitriou (2015) aimed to assess the effect of age and gender on second-grade children's reading performance. Two hundred and eighty-seven children aged 7.1–8.2 years were divided into two age subgroups (the younger, 85–91 months and the older, 92–98 months) and were examined in reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension tasks. Results showed a significant effect of age in reading performance, with the older children having better scores than younger ones for reading fluency, reading comprehension, and the total reading performance. Gender was not found to play an important role in reading

performance. The findings are discussed on the ground of functional brain development and the different rates of cerebral maturation (Vlachos and Papadimitriou, 2015).

3. When does reading begin?

When should reading instruction begin? That is one of the unsettled questions in the teaching of reading. In the past, it has been assumed that reading instruction should start in the first grade. Until recently, it was advocated by many persons in the forefront of educational thinking that systematic reading instruction in that grade should be preceded by a so-called reading readiness period. Now educators are seriously questioning the need for a period of readiness for many boys and girls in the first grade (Dalhnan, Rouch, and Chang, 1974).

Reading begins when the first reading book or materials are used with children in an instructional setting, usually in kindergarten or first grade, if we ask when reading begins, we will come up with a variety of answers. For example, reading begins at birth as exposure to the environment begins (when the child observes prints in his environment). Eleanor Gibson states that, "*Reading begins with a child's acquisition of spoken language*" (Hall, Ribovich, Ramig, 1979).

Research suggests that children reading skills progress through developmental stages. Vlachos and Papadimitriou reported that in a recent research report, Kennedy et al. (2012), concluded that "*a comprehensive model of early literacy development during the preschool and early school years strongly supports the view that a range of language and print related skills emerge in a mutually supportive fashion with development in one area promoting and supporting development in others*". Moreover, several studies have confirmed that specific skills that are developed during preschool years could predict the reading performance at the primary school years. Also, given that children are active users of technology in their everyday lives across a range of media, Kora (2010) suggested that well-designed technology tools carefully chosen by parents and teachers can provide young children with an additional efficient and enjoyable learning experience for reading development (Vlachos & Papadimitriou, 2015).

4. The Importance of Developing an Awareness of Print

Development of an awareness of print is important in the reading process. Children are surrounded by print in their environment - on signs, on food packages, on TV, toys, etc. So, young children gradually develop an awareness of print through environmental exposure. Still. any children seem to be hazy about the job and function of reading. I think that a reading readiness program might develop the conception that written language is effective in the real world by using some real-world materials in the beginning stage of instruction.

An incident illustrating environmental exposure to reading occurred as two children and their mother viewed an exhibit of Georgia Folk Art. As the five-year-old boy walked from case, to case, he held (but generally ignored) the information sheet listing each item in the display. A wooden sculpture of Abraham Lincoln particularly fascinated him. At this point he located the number of the item on his sheet and then asked his mother, "*what does this say?*" as he pointed to the number. His mother took the sheet and read the information, adding some additional information. The child then proceeded to go from display to display, finding the

number of each and asking his mother to read the exact information on the sheet to him. While not yet able to read for himself, he was using reading as a source of information and was aware that the print represented ideas. Meanwhile, his three-year-old sister was observing his behavior rather quietly. Finally, she sat on the floor and mimicked loudly, "*what does this say*?" as she waved her information sheet in the air. Although both children were aware that the printed page represented meaning, the five-year-old was focusing on specific parts for specific information, while the three-year-old was responding to the behavior she had observed. The mother replied generally to the daughter's queries that the paper told about all the things in the art exhibit but responded specifically to the older child's request (Hall, Ribovich, and Ramig, 1979).

This incident reflects the parents' function in expanding children's experience background and reacting to children's natural curiosity, as well as illustrating the communication function reading. Vlachos & Papadimitriou (2015) indicated that some studies (Demeis & Stearns, 1992; Dietz & Wilson, 1985, found no significant relationship between age and achievement, while other (Langer, Kalk, & Searls, 1984, found significantly higher achievement of the oldest as compared to the youngest students at age nine but this difference disappeared by age seventeen. As a whole, while some studies (Dietz & Wilson, 1958; Gredler, 1980), found no age effect on academic performance of first graders most, of the relevant studies pointed out that younger pupils seemed to be less ready for school tasks than their older peers and that the younger classmates were shown to be lower achievers in reading, arithmetic, and language skills (Davis, Trimble, & Vincent, 1980; DiPasquale, Moule, & Flewelling, 1980; Donofrio, 1977. As for the relationship between school entrance age and reading performance, Teltsch and Breznitz 1988, found that the oldest first graders surpassed their younger peers in all of the academic parameters examined; i.e. reading comprehension, reading time, and reading decoding skills. Additionally, Trapp, 1995, indicated that late starters scored significantly better than early starters in reading tasks (Vlachos & Papadimitriou, 2015).

They also indicated that gender is another factor that is often reported to affect reading development. Girls are generally thought to perform better than boys in verbal and linguistic functions (Halpern, 1986; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; McCormack & Knighton, 1996). Further, statistics from the US Department of Education indicated that the reading skills of girls are slightly more advanced than those of boys. More specifically, at school entry, 70% of girls could name letters, as compared to 62% of boys, and 32% of girls could associate letters with sounds, as compared to 26% of boys (Nancollis, Lawrie, & Dodd, 2005. Borg and Falzon, 1995, in a study of Maltese primary children in grades 3–5, found that girls outperformed boys in English, Maltese, and math at each of the three grade levels investigated (Vlachos & Papadimitriou, 2015).

For example, gender differences between boys and girls in the perception of the classroom setting, and their relationship to achievement in mathematics and aspects of self-regulated learning skills are the focus for Samuelsson and Samuelsson research, 2015. Throughout the component analysis of answers from 6758 Swedish students we found some differences in how boys and girls perceive their classroom setting and some differences in boys' and girls' relationship to mathematics. According to the classroom setting, they found that boys feel that they use group work more than the girls do. Boys also feel that they have an influence

over the content and are more involved during the lesson than girls. With respect to students' relations to mathematics they found that boys perceive mathematics to be more important than girls do. One implication for teachers from the study points out how different aspects of a perceived learning environment affect students', boys' and girls', achievement in mathematics.

5. Components of Readiness

Some components or factors have an effect on readiness. Here I will talk about some factors that affect readiness as they were cited in the literature and will try to relate them to the teacher's responsibility for each factor.

A. Physical readiness
The teacher has the responsibility to be knowledgeable of symptoms which may indicate a physical problem and to make necessary to the appropriate specialists. Vision and hearing require special consideration, but general health, age, and sex also have a bearing in reading readiness.

B. Vision
Attention to vision is important. The teacher is expected to be aware of symptoms that may indicate a visual deficiency. If the teacher noticed any symptoms, he or she should refer a child to a vision specialist. The following are some symptoms of eye difficulties:
  1) watering, red-rimmed eyes;
  2) an inability to keep the place in the book;
  3) strange position of holding book or head;
  4) frequent looking up from classwork;
  5) rubbing the eyes to brush away the blur; and
  6) holding hand over one eye while looking.

There are many symptoms I have not listed that the teacher should be aware of. However, in a classroom setting the teacher's responsibility is to give an adequate visual situation by a good seating arrangement and lighting and by alternating tasks requiring close visual attention with other types of activities.

C. Hearing
As the teachers should know the vision problems, they should also know the hearing problems. The following are some hearing difficulty symptoms:
  1) complaining of hearing strange noises in the ear;
  2) cupping hand behind the ear;
  3) strained posture;
  4) inability to follow directions;
  5) tilting head;
  6) speech difficulties; and
  7) difficulties hearing what is said in the class by the teacher or a student.

D. General health

Some symptoms of general health problems:

1) lack of energy;
2) poor eating habits;
3) susceptibility to colds;
4) labored breathing;
5) complaints of dizziness and / or headaches;
6) inability to concentrate for sustained periods of time;
7) evidence of much better work at the beginning of the day; (8) complaints of stomach-ache or nausea; and
8) considerably over-or underweight (Ekwall and Shanker, 1983).

E. Sex

Research has shown that boys experience more difficulties in learning to read than girls. Sex differences in reading often are most apartment at the prereading and beginning reading stages. Attention can be directed to motivating them to read and to considering their interests in planning prereading activities (Hall, Ribovich, and Raining, 1979).

F. Perceptual readiness

Perception is defined by Gibson and Levin as "*the process of extracting information from stimulation emanating from the objects, places, and events in the world around us.*"

G. Visual perception

This is the reception and identification of printed stimuli. In prereading the child has to learn where to focus his or her attention in order to make appropriate discrimination between letters and words.

H. Auditory perception

This is the ability to recognize likenesses and differences in sounds in spoken words.

J. Direction perception

This is the knowledge of left and right. Therefore, teachers should concentrate on left-to-right sequence through both direct instruction and informal situations until it becomes natural for a child to approach print with the correct directional orientation.

K. Linguistic readiness

The importance of linguistic readiness for reading is huge as long as the reading process is a language based one. The prereader is already a receiver and producer of messages communicated through language. In this case, teachers should be knowledgeable of the difference between linguistic competence and linguistic performance. Linguistic competence is the individual's ability to learn language, but performance is the actual observed language. Teachers should observe children's abilities to comprehend the oral language of others, to listen to stories, to follow oral directions, and to express ideas.

L. Affective readiness

A child's attitudes toward him or herself, toward others, and toward school have a very important influence in readiness. Poor adjustment to school situations and emotional problems may interfere with learning and cause anxiety, aggressiveness, shyness, withdrawal, and negative attitudes towards teachers and other children.

Some children enter school feeling that they must learn to read, so motivation is another affective consideration is the pressure that children experience when they feel they must learn to read to please their parents and teachers. Therefore, pressure felt by children does affect learning. Teachers have to adjust the learning situation and provide a classroom atmosphere conducive to productive learning. Also, children have to feel comfortable in the classroom, and that depends on the teacher's way of teaching and treatment of children. The following is a list of ways that teachers can help boys and girls develop emotional and social maturity (Dallman, Rouch, Chang and DeBoer, 1974).

1) providing the shy child with opportunities to become increasingly involved in activities well graded for him.
2) helping the overaggressive child take his or her rightful place in the social scene of the classroom.
3) using praise when deserved but resorting to criticism sparingly.
4) adapting the curriculum to the needs of each child so that he is likely to have a maximum of success and a minimum of frustrations.
5) helping boys and girls appreciate the difference between license and liberty.
6) giving responsibilities to all pupils.
7) helping boys and girls in self - education.
8) helping boys and girls become more self - reliant.
9) avoiding much competition with others.
10) placing a child in a group in which he or she is likely to be happy.
11) encouraging the child to do, without assistance, chores that he or she can do alone.
12) encouraging a child to express his or her own opinions.
13) encouraging every pupil to develop his or her special talents.

6. Summary

Reading readiness is a vital Period of time that a child must pass before the stage of reading. Teachers and parents should be careful when a child is experiencing this stage. They effect the child either positively or negatively, depending on their methods and approaches. However, it is strongly stressed that teachers and parents should give a good conceptual view about reading in the period of readiness.

In this study a definition of reading readiness was given, and some light has been shed on when reading readiness begins. Some experts say it begins in the first grade; others say it begins when the first reading book or material is used. The importance of developing an awareness of print was discussed with an example to make the picture clear about the significance of the printed material. Components of Readiness that could affect a child and his

or her performance were provided, such as physical readiness, perceptual readiness, direction perception, and linguistic readiness.

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