Balanced Literacy: What Traits are Typically Displayed in a Balanced Literacy Classroom?

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Balanced literacy: What traits are typically displayed in a balanced literacy classroom?

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the Department of Education and Human Development State University of New York College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Education

by

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Abstract

This study was designed to understand the components of balanced literacy and to see how these components were utilized within several primary school classrooms.

The study involved nine primary school teachers from a suburban, western New York school district. Four were kindergarten teachers and five were first grade teachers. The school district, as well as the teachers, promoted balanced literacy.

The design of this study helped bring an understanding to the different components of balanced literacy. As teachers were observed and interviewed, the framework of balanced literacy was exposed. A questionnaire also allowed each teacher to share how often she used each component of balanced literacy within her classroom. Furthermore, following these steps helped to establish workable elements of balanced literacy. Each participant modeled balanced literacy instruction, which created the opportunity for the researcher to gain a greater understanding of balanced literacy and allowed for the opportunity of implementation within his classroom structure.
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CHAPTER 1

Statements of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to become familiar with the components of balanced literacy and to see how these components were utilized within several primary school classrooms.

Introduction

Many people question what the best method is when teaching a child to read. One topic that has been highly debated is balance in education.

Even though balanced reading will be mentioned, it is only a part of the program called balanced literacy. The emphasis in this paper will be placed on balanced literacy. This program is geared toward giving teachers a framework to use so that children can feel comfortable about learning. A balanced literacy program concentrates on more than just reading and writing. Four different areas of literacy are closely connected in this program. These areas include listening, oral language, reading, and writing.

Throughout my research I have concentrated on defining the reading and writing components of balanced literacy. Defining these two areas played an integral part toward understanding balanced literacy. After defining the reading and writing components, I realized how listening and oral language could further be developed
and utilized within the reading and writing framework. Throughout this research, the objective was to determine what influences a balanced program within an educational setting.

**Need for study**

Freppon and Dahl (1998) say that the information on balanced instruction is in flux. Many people have different views on what balanced instruction should include. Attitudes vary across research bases, too. This means people are receiving many opinions on how to implement a balanced approach within a classroom.

Fitzgerald (1999) states that among the gravest criticisms of whole language during its inception was that it lacked clarity, that it wasn’t well defined and, consequently, many teachers weren’t sure how to do it. It is possible that the concept of the balanced approach may be subject to similar criticisms and implementation problems.

Within their study, Freppon and Dahl (1998) asked many teachers two questions – What is balanced instruction? And what issues does it raise? In answering the first question one of the teacher’s responses showed a strong awareness of balanced instruction, while the other teacher was vaguely aware. However, in answering the second question both teachers were concerned that some instruction labeled as balanced instruction was not really balanced. One of the teachers in the Freppon and Dahl (1998) study responded:
I think there is an issue about the complexity of creating a substantial, consistent, and accountable program and the lack of the public’s awareness about this method of instruction and assessment. There is also the issue of administrators, teachers, and communities unwilling to change and the requirements of organization, commitment, having proper resources, and having high expectations. (p. 246)

This teacher’s response has valid points. There are reasons for success and reasons for failure. If every individual who is involved in the program is not willing to commit or to participate, results will be subject to fail. To prevent uncertainty and misuse of the term “balanced approach”, Stoicheva (1999) gives teachers this suggestion: Curriculum alignment needs to link instructional content to clearly defined, research-based standards, and to leave creative space for teachers to search and find a balance in their own classrooms.

It is critical to structure literacy in ones classroom so that students can maximize success. Many educators have found value in the balanced literacy structure; however, as stated, others will remain unsure about what balanced literacy should look like if they do not search to define it. It is important to find meaning in the structure so that it can be an effective tool and not just a term that floats around the educational realms with ambiguity.

**Limitations of the Study**

My study focused on instruction and relating it to the reading and writing components of balanced literacy. Throughout my observations I was able to see many of the balanced literacy components put into practice. Unfortunately, I was
unable to observe all of the components in each classroom. Since I observed four kindergarten teachers and five first-grade teachers within a four-day period, it was impossible to see every component within every classroom.

I relied on a questionnaire in asking the educators about their use of the components of balanced literacy. Even though a questionnaire is a helpful tool, nothing can replace observation. Observation allowed me to immediately compare my reading and writing component checklist to what I saw, whereas, using the questionnaire only allowed me to factor what each teacher said was implemented within his/her classroom.

Based on the fact that some people understand the components of balanced literacy more than others, there could be differing views between educators when it comes to each of the balanced literacy components.
CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to become familiar with the components of balanced literacy and to see how these components were utilized within several primary school classrooms.

Balanced Reading

What is balance? There are many opinions in answering this question. Spiegel (1998) says that balance is a decision-making approach through which the teacher makes thoughtful choices each day toward finding the best ways to help each child become a better reader and writer.

Other researchers feel that a balanced reading program consists of a certain structure. A combination of whole language and phonics instruction is often part of this structure. Baumann and Ivey (1997) feel as though a successful program would contain teacher-led strategy instruction within a literature-based framework. Baumann, Ivey, and Jarrard (2000) explained the importance of curriculum balance between literature envisionment [creating meanings and responding to literature] and skills/strategy instruction as well as an instructional balance between teacher-initiated instruction and instruction responsive to students' needs and interests.
There are other researchers who feel balance should be described in other ways. One author suggests, “There is no single, right balanced approach to teaching reading. Rather, balance is a philosophical perspective about what kinds of reading knowledge children should develop and how those kinds of knowledge can be attained” (Fitzgerald, 1999, p. 100). This perspective deals with three categories: local knowledge about reading (sight words, phonological awareness, knowledge of sound-symbol relationship), global knowledge about reading (understanding, interpretation, and response to reading), and love of reading (feelings, positive attitudes, motivation, and desire to read).

**Balanced Literacy**

A more involved approach to a balanced program is balanced literacy. Stoicheva (1999) supports this idea as he argues for focusing not merely on reading but on literacy. Fountas & Pinnell (as cited in Melia, 2000) said to ensure that children are exposed to a variety of reading and writing tasks, teachers have recently adopted a balanced literacy program. This type of program concentrates on more than just reading and writing. Four different areas of literacy are closely connected in this program. These areas include listening, oral language, reading, and writing.

In the study done by Melia (2000), the student writing was more advanced if instructed in using a balanced literacy framework. These students also showed success in responding to a writing prompt. As Melia (2000) concludes, students who
used the traditional instructional program gave brief and simplistic illustrations, with limited writing.

Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (1997) developed a study that dealt with two teachers with two differing literacy belief systems. One teacher was very skills-based, while the other teacher followed a balanced, holistic model. Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (1997) found that in examining children’s understanding of literacy, children grew into literacy as the seeds of literacy were planted. The teacher who used the whole language balanced program expected her students to read and write. Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (1997) noted that with her influence, her students sought out reading and writing as a means of communication and searched for meaning. The students in the skills-based class did not feel comfortable with reading and writing because they saw reading and writing as skills that they had not yet mastered. It is important for students to build up their confidence so that their education can be more meaningful.

**What Teachers Do to Promote Balance**

The purpose of the study by Morrow, Tracey, Woo, and Pressley (1999) was to describe characteristics of six teachers identified as exemplary and combine their practices into one story. These six teachers “based their classrooms on their own philosophies of how children learn” (Morrow et al., 1999, p.474). Their philosophies were formed through classroom experience, educational background, professional conferences, and through reading professional journals. These philosophies were
backed up with positive learning environments geared for literacy development and student success.

Furthermore, as Morrow, Tracey, Woo, and Pressley (1999) explain, the students in each classroom experienced skill development in literacy throughout the day in the following ways: shared reading and writing activities, social collaborative reading and writing, guided reading and writing, and independent reading and writing. Children also took part in oral and silent reading and writing, and mini-lessons modeled by the teacher. All of these things helped to provide a well-rounded experience for children. Appendix A and Appendix B provide an outline of the framework of these reading and writing components of balanced literacy.

Furthermore, to become aware of the levels of support that teachers offer in each component of reading and writing, using this framework, see Appendix C.

Dowhower and Beagle (1998) state that teachers, the opportunities they provide, and the extent to which they allow their students to contribute, determine the “built” literacy environment in the classroom. “The results, we believe, reflect what is valued, honored and cultivated” (Dowhower and Beagle, 1998, p. 183). Teachers have the responsibility to guide literacy and build a community for learning. Routman (1991) states that teachers need to allow themselves time to try out and incorporate the various components while recognizing the importance of moving toward an integrated and balanced literacy program.
Read Aloud (Read Aloud)

Routman (1991) says that reading aloud to children is seen as the single most influential factor in young children's success in learning to read. Even though many teachers do not realize the full value of modeled reading they should look at how it can benefit students. While reading aloud, teachers have the opportunity to introduce a reading strategy or prepare the students for a skill that will be discussed later on. Reading aloud also allows students the opportunity for oral responses. Taberski (2000) explains how she always gives children an opportunity to respond orally, while listening to a book that she reads aloud, because their oral responses get them ready for written responses that they will be asked to make on their own.

Sipe (2002) suggests that reading aloud helps to emphasize and rehabilitate the idea of literary pleasure and playfulness. Fountas & Pinnell (1996) explain that as children are immersed in a variety of well-chosen texts they not only learn to love stories and reading, but they also learn about the written language. Among many other benefits of reading aloud this type of experience can help to mold students toward reading enjoyment and allow them to have common, meaningful experiences that they can talk about.
Shared Reading

Shared reading is a teacher tool that helps to reinforce specific skills. Taberski (2000) states: “I don’t leave what children get out of it to chance” (p. 32). If students are struggling with specific skills, shared reading allows teachers to give them practice within a joint group.

Routman (1991) explains that shared reading is one way of immersing students in rich, literary-level language without worrying about grade level or reading performance. Shared reading is not meant to discourage students who struggle with reading, but instead it is meant to encourage them. Struggling readers can become involved in an atmosphere where many voices are collectively sharing one common text.

Kaufman (2002) explains that during a shared reading lesson the teacher is the expert who models the reading process. This allows the teacher to work on meeting the needs of the students within the class. Since students are at different levels within a classroom, shared reading offers reinforcement, which will hopefully be implemented when each child reads. Taberski (1998) concludes that all the good work we do during shared reading is of little use if the children don’t apply it to their reading.

Guided Reading

Villaume & Brabham (2001) say that too often, we take the wheel and lead students through predetermined lessons. Furthermore, Villaume & Brabham (2001)
state that in contrast, the concept of guided reading challenges us to think deeply about how to help students become independent, strategic, and self-extending readers. One way of doing this is to give them opportunities to succeed throughout the day. Breaking students up into small groups according to their needs does promote success. Here is how Taberski (2000) explains how she works her guided reading groups:

I group three to six readers with similar needs to work on specific strategies and guide them through multiple copies of the same text — one that would be just a bit too hard for them to read on their own. The groups remain together for as briefly as two days or as long as two weeks — depending how long it takes me to effectively demonstrate the target strategy and for the children to practice it. (p. 32)

Implementation into a classroom is key in promoting the success of guided reading. It would be unrealistic, as well as a classroom management nightmare to work with a small group of students, if the remaining students did not have structured responsibilities. “Instruction away from the teacher needs to be as powerful as instruction with the teacher” (Ford & Optiz, 2002, p. 716).

Kane (as cited in Ford & Optiz, 2002) reminds us that classroom structure provides teachers with opportunities to effectively work with small groups of readers, while keeping other readers independently engaged in meaningful literacy learning activities. One very common classroom management tool, as well as a meaningful learning experience for students is to structure different types of independent literacy centers for students to take part in when they are not directly meeting with the teacher. These centers are not a means to take up time, but instead
they provide reinforcement of important skills and provide practice as students learn how to work independently.

Mong (2001) found that a well-balanced reading program with a strong, guided reading focus would improve students reading achievement. This study relied on closely monitored data that reflected student reading levels, based on closely monitoring growth throughout the year. Because the reading levels were so closely monitored, students were able to find enjoyment, as well as feel comfortable, while they grew and developed. Mong noticed that since students were involved and well informed about their reading growth, they grew excited and wanted to continue to grow.

Villaume & Brabham (2001) conclude by explaining that guided reading continues to evolve as we become increasingly aware of the complexity of the reading process and more adept at keeping students behind the wheel during their reading endeavors.

**Independent Reading**

One goal in educating children is to help them to become independent readers. Jonson (1998) says that independent reading is one of the most significant ways that children can spend their time if they are to become fluent, competent readers. Giving students opportunities to read independently is important, but giving them guidance and strategies for choosing books is of equal importance. Jonson (1998) explains how independent reading allows children to begin to view
themselves as readers and to experience the joys of reading. When students select books that are at their appropriate level, they can begin to experience this enjoyment.

Routman (1991) claims that an opportunity for students to read self-selected books is an indispensable part of the balanced reading program. It is important for children to get a wide variety of choice in the books that they choose, but with the support of the teacher children can be led in the right direction. Explaining this to parents is also very important. Taberski (2000) provides this analogy when talking to parents about independent reading:

When I meet with parents to discuss reading, I always emphasize the importance of selecting books that support their child’s development. I joke that picking out books for their child is different than buying him clothes. We choose jackets or pants big enough to last more than one season. But with books that they’ll read on their own, we want a fit that’s just right, right now. (p. 136)

Choosing books that fit the needs of your students is an important guideline, along with giving students the opportunity to use them. “A teacher’s firm commitment to independent reading lends authenticity to classroom reading instruction” (Jonson, 1998).
Writing Components of Balanced Literacy

Modeled Writing

Routman (1991) explains that as students observe teachers in the act of writing, the teacher makes explicit what he is doing. The purpose of modeled writing is to give students an example, which they can follow. Modeled writing gives students the opportunity to realize what they need to do to meet their teacher’s expectations.

Shared Writing

Routman (1991) supports shared writing saying that it is a powerful way to demonstrate to children that their observations, along with guidance and self-questioning, can markedly improve the quality of writing. While the students and the teacher create the text together, there are many opportunities to guide the students’ thoughts and knowledge about a subject. Taberski (2000) explains that she and her students might recount a class trip they took, innovate on a text they read together, or write their own story or poem. Each of these activities would provide support from the teacher, as key points would be highlighted for the student’s benefit.

Seeing that the teacher is guiding the students through the writing process, Fountas & Pinell (1996) explain that shared writing material is much richer than students could write themselves and would be good material to hang up around the room for children to read. As the shared writing text hangs in the room, students will
continue to read and enjoy it, especially as they realize that they were part of creating it. Dowhower and Beagle (1998) share the importance of a teacher to provide a print-rich classroom environment. They suggest that this type of environment will encourage and cultivate young children’s reading and writing development. As students constantly deal with print in most elementary classrooms, they become more aware of their surroundings. With this daily experience, as well as a teacher’s modeling, students will gain independence in learning. This is a skill that is necessary for a child’s future growth.

**Interactive Writing**
(social collaborative writing)

During interactive writing, teachers need to be willing to sit back a little and encourage children to write. Hall (2000) explains that adult correspondents must hide or diminish their power and experience; specifically, they must respond as equal partners in the exchanges, and accord equality to their child correspondents.

Another way of looking at interactive writing is that the student and the teacher “share the pen”. During this opportunity, children take an active role in their own learning. McCarrier, Pinell, & Fountas (2000) explain that even children who can read and write very little independently have a chance to see themselves as writers and readers. While teachers provide an opportunity for students to become involved, they need to realize that “each time they ask a student to come up to the easel to contribute a letter, letter cluster, word, or print feature such as punctuation,
the action is intended to have high instructional value” (McCarrier et. al., 2000, p. 21).

McCarrier, Pinell, & Fountas (2000) further reflect that during interactive writing, students have the opportunity to grapple some of the problems that writers habitually solve. This gives students the opportunity to make connections and gain experience in writing, but more importantly it gives inexperienced writers the opportunity to succeed and become involved.

One common form of interactive writing is the morning message, which allows students to react to a statement that a student or the teacher writes. The goal of this is for students to reply to the statement, hence interact with each other. Hall (2000) states that it is not a child writing a letter that makes interactive writing so meaningful, it is the respondent’s reply. He goes on to explain that at that moment a child is hooked because someone is truly interested in that child as a person.

It is important to know the needs of the students in your classroom. McCarrier, Pinell, & Fountas (2000) state that you can be an effective teacher using interactive writing if you know your learners well and select the activities that suit them best. This means that to be a successful teacher in doing interactive writing, one must constantly evaluate the students in the classroom so that instruction will be relevant to their needs.
**Guided Writing**

Routman (1991) explains that as in guided reading, the teacher’s role in guided writing is to guide students, respond to them, and extend their thinking in the process of composing text. Just like when a student holds the book and does the reading during guided reading, the student holds the pen and does the writing during guided writing.

Guided writing is also known as writer’s workshop. Students will often be placed in a small group together, based on similar needs. Taberski (2000) explains two of the common needs as, having trouble figuring out a topic to write about and having trouble using periods or question marks. Similar to guided reading, if there is a problem, writer’s workshop can allow the teacher to try and solve it with those students who need it while the other students are engaged in other meaningful activities.

**Independent Writing**

Having students write independently can be very beneficial. Routman (1991) explains:

> The purpose of independent writing – like that of independent reading – is to build fluency, establish the writing habit, make personal connections, explore meanings, promote critical thinking, and use writing as a natural, pleasurable, self-chosen activity. (p. 67)

Even though student’s writing can be a beneficial means of assessment and a helpful tool in diagnosis, it does not always have to be used for that. Independent writing
"provides a chance to use writing for different purposes across the curriculum" (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, p. 36). The student is in control during independent writing and takes advantage of the print-rich environment. Routman (1991) states that in independent writing, the student has opportunities, many of which they initiate, to write without teacher intervention or evaluation. This student choice can lend to writing for enjoyment, which can allow independent assessment to be more pleasurable and worthwhile.
CHAPTER 3

Design

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to become familiar with the components of balanced literacy and to see how these components were utilized within several primary school classrooms.

Research Questions

1. What traits are typically displayed in a balanced literacy classroom?
2. How can I build a model classroom based on the balanced literacy definition that I find?

Methodology

Subjects

The study involved nine teachers from a suburban, western New York school district. Participants taught in the primary school grade levels and had a wide range of experience. Four of the teachers observed were kindergarten teachers and five were first grade teachers. One of the teachers taught seven years, two of the teachers taught ten years, four of the teachers had sixteen years of experience, while two of the teachers had been teaching for thirty years. The school district, as well as the teachers, promoted balanced literacy.
The specific school was chosen because the district extensively concentrated on balanced literacy, as well as the fact that the researcher knew the principal and some of the teachers in the school. Both the teachers and the principal welcomed the researcher in to observe.

Materials

Three key elements were used in this study: the reading checklist (Appendix A), the writing checklist (Appendix B), and the teacher questionnaire (Appendix D). A notebook was also used to take field notes for observational purposes.

Procedures

Before starting, the researcher created a reading and writing checklist. Comparing the research that was collected helped in the development of these checklists. Then the researcher established contact with each teacher in the form of a letter. In this letter the researcher asked if each teacher focused on using the balanced literacy framework within her classroom. After making an initial contact with the teachers in the district, the researcher asked each teacher if it would be possible to observe her classroom. The researcher explained to each teacher that gaining a better understanding of balanced literacy was the goal of each observation.

While the researcher observed each teacher's classroom, the researcher noted balanced literacy structure within each classroom. The action research provided a
model of how the participants utilized each of the components on the checklist within her classroom environment.

After each teach was observed twice, for a thirty-minute time period, during their language arts instruction, an informal interview took place. This interview allowed the researcher to ask the participants about aspects of balanced literacy that were not observed. A questionnaire also helped to gather this desired information. In gathering these data the researcher confirmed how frequently the participants made use of each component of balanced literacy within their classroom.

The data from the questionnaire answered the following questions:

1. What is the percentage of teachers using Shared Reading and how often do they use it?
2. What is the percentage of teachers using Guided Reading and how often do they use it?
3. What is the percentage of teachers using Independent Reading and how often do they use it?
4. What is the percentage of teachers using Read Aloud and how often do they use it?
5. What is the percentage of teachers using Shared Writing and how often do they use it?
6. What is the percentage of teachers using Guided Writing and how often do they use it?
7. What is the percentage of teachers using Independent Writing and how often do they use it?
8. What is the percentage of teachers using Interactive Writing and how often do they use it?
The questions from the questionnaire were also supported through observation as well as the informal interview. Each of these data sources contributed to the researchers understanding of balanced literacy.

**Analysis of Data**

The research, observations, and results will identify patterns through the use of a variety of instruments. These instruments include a reading checklist, a writing checklist, a teacher questionnaire, and teacher interviews. This qualitative research explored common trends among balanced literacy instruction. These results will be displayed in chapter four.
CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to become familiar with the components of balanced literacy and to see how these components were utilized within several primary school classrooms.

Analysis of the Data

Each teacher’s use of the traits of balanced literacy was assessed by referring to the reading and writing checklists. While different components were observed through the use of these checklists, the researcher was able to get a general recollection of what balanced literacy looked like in each participant’s classroom. The questionnaire, as well as interviews with the teachers, allowed the researcher to get an even better picture of what components of balanced literacy each teacher used.

Appendix E and Appendix F represent graphs, which show the results of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was anonymous so that the teacher participants would feel like they could openly answer the questions.

According to the results of the questionnaire, the majority of the participants used each of the reading and writing components of balanced literacy within their classroom literacy instruction. Most of the participants used the reading components of balanced literacy on a daily basis. More specifically, eight of the nine participants
used shared reading and guided reading on a daily basis, while all of the participants used read aloud and independent reading throughout the day. Through observing and questioning each participant, it was obvious that each one understood these components and found value in implementing them into their classroom instruction.

The use of the writing components within each participant’s classroom was more widespread. According to the survey, modeled writing was used in all of the classrooms. Two out of nine teachers used modeled writing on a daily basis and two others used it twice a week. The remaining five teachers used modeled writing once a week. Shared writing was not included in one out of nine of the participants’ classrooms, while two teachers used it on a daily basis. Furthermore, shared writing was used in three of the teachers’ classrooms twice a week and the remaining three participants used it once a week. One teacher used interactive writing on a daily basis. Four participants used interactive writing twice a week, while the remaining four teachers used it once a week. Guided writing was found to be used daily in one participant’s classroom and twice a week in three other classrooms. On the other hand, guided writing was used once a week in four teachers’ classrooms and once a month in the final teachers’ classroom. Independent writing was a more frequent part of each classroom. Six participants used it on a daily basis. Two of the participants used independent writing twice a week, while the final participant used it once a week.
Other Observations

Kindergarten and First Grade Classrooms

Each kindergarten and first grade classroom was heterogeneously grouped with fewer than twenty students in each classroom. There were many similarities among the classrooms. One reason for this could be the fact that all of the participants who teach kindergarten and first grade collaborate together on a normal basis.

The kindergarten and first grade classrooms were very inviting. The walls were covered with print-rich material with which the children could interact. This was both teacher and child created material. Individual students, as well as the whole group, interacted throughout the day with the material on the wall. There were also independent centers in which students could work during guided reading time. Each of the teacher created centers were geared toward skills that fostered individual learning. Another important component of each room was the classroom library. Each teacher’s classroom library had a wide variety of books that students could enjoy bringing home and reading throughout the day.

While the researcher visited each kindergarten and first grade classroom, many different characteristics of balanced literacy were recognized. The reading components observed were reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading. During read aloud time children had opportunities to interact with the text before, during, and after the teacher read the material.
Shared reading was given at least a half an hour each day within each kindergarten classroom. The teacher and children in the classroom had many opportunities to interact with the text of a chosen big book. After reading the big book, teachers had opportunities to discuss different skills with the children. The big book was re-visited throughout the week to work on fluency, skill reinforcement, and word study. Bulletin boards with student and teacher work were also used in the shared reading experience.

Throughout the guided reading experience, children had many different opportunities. In each of the classrooms, each teacher had the occasion to meet with a small group of individuals who had similar needs, while the remaining students were engaged in other meaningful activities. These activities included independent centers, independent reading, and partner reading. While some students could read independently, they knew that they needed to choose books that they could read and be successful with during this time. Students were also allowed to revisit big books and do print walks around the room to work on their reading. During this guided reading time the teacher was never interrupted because tasks were well organized and students knew that they could approach the parent volunteers to assist them in steering in the right direction.

The writing components observed were modeled writing, shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing, and independent writing. During the modeled writing time teachers were able to model writing and use strategies like thinking
aloud as a means of guiding students. At this point the teachers observed were in control of the ideas and the writing.

When students took part in shared writing, they began to give the teacher some of their ideas to use within the writing, but the teacher still wrote down the ideas. Even though it is very similar to shared reading, students became even more involved during interactive writing time. I observed several teachers giving students the opportunity to share the pen and take part in the writing process. Throughout many observations of teachers doing the morning message, students enjoyed taking part in the writing process and were eager to write down their ideas for the class to see.

Guided writing time was another opportunity for a small group of students to work with the teacher. At this time I observed teachers encouraging their students through the writing process, but allowing them to come up with most of the ideas and writing themselves. This gave students the opportunity to use their writing strategies, but at the same time have teacher assistance if a major problem was noticed.

Independent writing time was a part of every classroom. If a student was responsible to write independently, he/she needed to sit quietly and try his/her best. Each teacher that I observed expected to see each student’s best attempt at writing at this time. The desired observation was to see what each child had carried over from previous writing opportunities.
All of these observations took place over a four-day period in February. The researcher had opportunities throughout the week to float in and out of different classrooms, with the goal of observing different aspects of balanced literacy. The ultimate reason that the researcher observed each classroom was so that he could gain a better understanding of balanced literacy and develop a balanced literacy framework to use within his own classroom.
CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to become familiar with the components of balanced literacy and to see how these components were utilized within several primary school classrooms.

Conclusions

The prior research and action research were helpful tools, which provided for a better understanding of the components of balanced literacy. The results of this study were parallel to the results that the researcher found in much of the research on balanced literacy. The reading and writing components that were supported in the research were also practiced by the sample of nine educators. Furthermore, a majority of the reading components of balanced literacy were used on a daily basis, while there seemed to be an inconsistent usage of the writing components. Both classroom observation and the use of the questionnaire supported these findings.

One encouraging experience noted with all of the educators was that each of them had drive toward learning and becoming better teachers. All of the participants had well working, supportive environments for children, based on the balanced
literacy framework, but each individual strived toward attaining wisdom based on their educational goals.

**Implications for My Classroom**

The balanced literacy framework offers a structure that gives students an opportunity to succeed. As children listen and learn, practice with their teacher and peers, and independently practice, they can experience going through the reading and writing process step-by-step, so that learning is promoted for each student.

Throughout my research, I have had the opportunity to implement this structure within my classroom and I will now be able to use it on a more consistent basis.

It has been helpful to research and observe the balanced literacy framework before implementing it into my own classroom. Now that I am familiar and comfortable using the framework, I can improve different aspects of my instruction based on my understanding. If other educators are interested in using this framework, first they should gain an understanding of each component, and then they can work on implementation. Willows (2002) warns educators by stating:

For decades, educators have been looking for the “best method” for teaching reading and writing. With such a method, they believe, teachers will simply deliver the program and the problems of literacy education will be solved. However, training teachers to implement instructional methods when they don’t truly understand the underlying rationale is futile. Without understanding, teachers do not have the knowledge to adapt an instructional strategy to address various student needs. Without understanding, teachers become cogs in a machine, with neither the responsibility nor the rewards of being in control. Without understanding, teachers can become inflexible and
dogmatic, unable to integrate new research-supported practices into existing approaches. (p. 30)

Before this study, the balanced literacy framework was just an idea to me that I would have no chance of implementing. After all of my research, this has changed. I have already seen some of the benefits of balanced literacy in my classroom, and I look forward to continuing to use it to strengthen my literacy program.

Implications for Future Research

This study looked at balanced literacy in nine different classrooms. Many aspects of balanced literacy were observed, but it might have been helpful to spend a longer period of time in each classroom. If more time could have been spent, it would be possible to make more observations about each of the balanced literacy traits and arrive at an even better understanding of them.

One area within the study that needs further research is the writing aspect of balanced literacy. The use of each writing component was very wide spread and the school writing program did not show coherence through each grade level. A program such as the six traits + one writing program could complement the balanced literacy framework, while promoting consistency throughout the grade levels.

There were other topics that were utilized within some of the classrooms that were closely connected to balanced literacy. These topics would be worth further researching. Phonemic awareness, word study, independent learning centers, and parental involvement with literacy in and out of school were among these topics.
Gaining knowledge on these topics would further enhance a teacher’s balanced literacy instruction, providing meaningful training that would authenticate students’ needs.
References


Appendices
## Reading Components of Balanced Literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What does each component look like in the classroom?</th>
<th>Read Aloud</th>
<th>Shared Reading</th>
<th>Guided Reading</th>
<th>Independent Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- large heterogeneous group has access to the oral story and the pictures, enriched vocabulary, and/or concepts</td>
<td>- large heterogeneous group of students have access to one common text</td>
<td>- small homogeneous group of students have access to text at their instructional level</td>
<td>- individual students have access to a wide variety of text at their independent level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How does the teacher provide support?</th>
<th>- specific teaching points are evident as the teacher models reading strategies and discusses story elements through think alouds</th>
<th>- specific teaching points are evident as the teacher highlights parts of the text to reinforce teaching points</th>
<th>- specific teaching points are evident as the teacher provides support to students who have similar needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- teacher allows book choice and discusses the story before, during, and after reading</td>
<td>- teacher allows book choice and discusses the story before, during, and after reading</td>
<td>- teacher allows book choice and discusses the story before, during, and after reading</td>
<td>- specific teaching points are evident as the teacher provides support to students who have similar needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why are students exposed to each type of reading opportunity?</th>
<th>- teacher gives students the opportunity to interact and respond to a variety of texts throughout the week, make connections, build background, and build vocabulary concepts</th>
<th>- the teacher and students repeatedly respond to the text as opportunities become available</th>
<th>- the teacher and students respond to the text for a wide variety of teaching points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- to develop higher level thinking through conversation and to model thinking strategies</td>
<td>- teacher gives students the material to interact and refer to during the week, in order to reinforce specific teaching points</td>
<td>- teacher gives students challenges, as well as supports</td>
<td>- so students learn to choose material that is at a level where they can read it independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- model concepts of print and reading strategies</td>
<td>- model concepts of print and reading strategies</td>
<td>- concepts of print</td>
<td>- to consolidate learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- use of word sorts</td>
<td>- use of word sorts</td>
<td>- instruct reading strategies</td>
<td>- to practice on text that is at independent level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- exposure to vocabulary</td>
<td>- exposure to vocabulary</td>
<td>- practice on text that is at independent level</td>
<td>- to develop phrasing/fluency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- exposure to patterns</td>
<td>- exposure to patterns</td>
<td>- practice on text that is at independent level</td>
<td>- to develop phrasing/fluency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When do students respond to each type of text?</th>
<th>- students respond to the text based on whether the selection is appropriate to their age and interest</th>
<th>- the teacher and students repeatedly respond to the text as opportunities become available</th>
<th>- students respond to text by writing or taking part in some other forms of assessment or simply for students enjoyment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How can word study play a role in each type of reading?</th>
<th>- to develop vocabulary</th>
<th>- use of word sorts</th>
<th>- use of word sorts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- use of word sorts</td>
<td>- use of word wall</td>
<td>- use of word wall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- exposure to vocabulary</td>
<td>- exposure to patterns</td>
<td>- exposure to patterns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How can phonemic awareness and/or phonics play a role in each type of reading?</th>
<th>- alliteration</th>
<th>- alliteration</th>
<th>- alliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- onset and rime</td>
<td>- blending/segmenting</td>
<td>- onset and rime</td>
<td>- blending/segmenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- opportunity to play with sounds</td>
<td>- rhyme</td>
<td>- rhyme</td>
<td>- rhyme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- rhyme</td>
<td>- application of phonics during reading through word study to connect phonics with text</td>
<td>- application of phonics during reading through word study to connect phonics with text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- provide sounds of our language</td>
<td>- application of phonics during reading through word study to connect phonics with text</td>
<td>- application of phonics during reading through word study to connect phonics with text</td>
<td>- application of phonics during reading through word study to connect phonics with text</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Many of the definitions on this chart were inspired by an article on the Ohio State University’s website entitled Observing a Balanced Literacy Classroom.)
## Writing Components of Balanced Literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Modeled Writing</th>
<th>Shared Writing</th>
<th>Interactive Writing</th>
<th>Guided Writing</th>
<th>Independent Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What does each component look like in the classroom?</strong></td>
<td>large heterogeneous group has assess to the written story, enriched vocabulary, and/or concepts</td>
<td>large heterogeneous group of students have access to one common written work</td>
<td>small or large group of students have access to one common written work in which they take part in writing</td>
<td>small homogeneous group of students are grouped together based on specific needs</td>
<td>individual students have access to a wide variety of ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How does the teacher provide support?</strong></td>
<td>specific teaching points are evident as the teacher models reading strategies and discusses writing through think alouds</td>
<td>specific teaching points are evident as the teacher provides full support highlighting parts of the text to reinforce teaching points</td>
<td>specific teacher points are evident, but students begin to take more control as they share the pen and help to construct their own writing</td>
<td>specific teaching points are evident as the teacher provides specific instruction and some support to students through conferences or mini-lessons</td>
<td>specific teaching points are evident only when necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why are students exposed to each type of writing opportunity?</strong></td>
<td>this teacher written material presents an opportunity for students to interact and respond to it by using the components of his/her writing program</td>
<td>students are able to brainstorm ideas that are used within the writing that the teacher is modeling</td>
<td>students are able to become part of the writing process</td>
<td>students are encouraged to solve their own problems, but do have teacher support if necessary</td>
<td>students use their skills that they have learned to have complete control of their writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who controls the ideas and writing?</strong></td>
<td>teacher is in control of the ideas, as well as the pen</td>
<td>student can help out with ideas, but teacher controls the pen</td>
<td>student/teacher share ideas and also share the pen</td>
<td>student is primarily in control of ideas and the pen with the help and support of the teacher through a conference</td>
<td>student provides ideas and is in control of the pen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How can word study play a role in each type of writing?</strong></td>
<td>teacher leads students through writing. This allows them to point out different parts of the text that have a common word study pattern</td>
<td>as the teacher leads the students through a writing sample, the teacher can focus on a certain letter pattern to have a word study on. Students may also point out these letter patterns</td>
<td>as the teacher and students interact equally with each other the students or the teacher may point out familiar letter patterns, but teacher should not assume too much power</td>
<td>teacher is able to notice if students are using word study skills. If students are not, the teacher can lead the guided writing group in a word study, but the goal at this level is for the student to recognize the problem themselves.</td>
<td>student’s independent writing can be checked to see if word study skills are being used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How can phonemic awareness and/or phonics play a role in each type of writing?</strong></td>
<td>teacher orally segments words as the words are placed on chart paper</td>
<td>teacher orally segments words as the words are placed on chart paper</td>
<td>teacher and students write words on chart paper</td>
<td>students begin to take most of the responsibility for their writing as they remember specific strategies that they have learned</td>
<td>students have a chance to use the strategies that they have learned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Many of the definitions on this chart were inspired by an article on the Ohio State University's website entitled Observing a Balanced Literacy Classroom.)
This graph shows the amount of support the teacher gives to the student under each component of balanced literacy.
While moving from the left to the right of each graph, the teacher will gradually give less support to the student.
I appreciate your help with this survey. I thoroughly enjoyed visiting each of your classrooms, but it would be unrealistic to see every component of reading and writing in the time that I had. Thank you for your time and thoughts! Jonathan Priset

### Reading Components

(Please mark the components that you use on a regular basis and indicate how often you use each of them.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you use:</th>
<th>How often:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read Aloud</td>
<td>yes no never daily twice a week weekly monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Reading</td>
<td>yes no never daily twice a week weekly monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Reading</td>
<td>yes no never daily twice a week weekly monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Reading</td>
<td>yes no never daily twice a week weekly monthly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Writing Components

(Please mark the components that you use on a regular basis and indicate how often you use each of them.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you use:</th>
<th>How often:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modeled Writing</td>
<td>yes no never daily twice a week weekly monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Writing</td>
<td>yes no never daily twice a week weekly monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Writing</td>
<td>yes no never daily twice a week weekly monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Writing</td>
<td>yes no never daily twice a week weekly monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Writing</td>
<td>yes no never daily twice a week weekly monthly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reading Components

How often is component used?

- Read Aloud
- Shared Reading
- Guided Reading
- Independent Reading

% of teachers who use component