

Developing the literate child



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Introduction

‘ Early-years educators relate what is being taught to what children already know. In order to extend each child’s learning they support and guide children through each new stage of learning. They know that the abilities and attitudes that young children develop in the early years are an important part of a life-long journey during which children will need to acquire all the language skills necessary to interpret, manipulate, control and organize language for their own present and future purposes.’

(Browne 1996, vii)

The above quote neatly summarises the need to ensure that young children’s language development is fostered in the best possible way by educators. What children learn now can have a life-long impact upon how they interact with the world in future. It is the child’s teacher, who has the capacity to greatly influence how a child acquires and uses language, to assess what the child already knows, and to use this knowledge to foster and guide the child through, *‘ each new stage of learning,’* (Browne 1996, vii). It was with this clear intention in mind, with which the following study was undertaken. The aim, to assess one child’s current speaking and listening, reading and writing skills, to analyse any observations carefully, and to use the information gathered as a basis for planning the child’s future learning needs. The child chosen, a female, was aged 5 years and 9 months at the time of the study and does not have any recognised special educational needs. She will, henceforth, be referred to as, ‘ Child A,’ for the remainder of the report.

Reading Analysis

Listening to Child A read on a one-to-one basis was extremely informative. She is starting to use some expression in her voice, and is attempting to make the text sound more like natural language, however, she has little sense of phrase boundaries, and consequently, can often sound stilted. She regularly has to decode words on a word-by-word basis, but is not always successful in her attempts, meaning that the language does not flow. There were frequent extended pauses during the reading of each sentence. On a number of occasions Child A was unable to decode a word but had a limited number of alternative strategies available to her, in order to help her to continue reading.

The miscue analyses showed that Child A's average negative miscue rate was 8.06% for the books chosen from her particular reading 'stage'. It is recommended that when matching a book to a reader the negative miscue rate should lie somewhere between 3% and 8%, with a miscue rate of 10% representing frustration level, (Moon et al. 1994, 116). This evidence may suggest that the text was too difficult for Child A, resulting in a negative effect on her confidence and interest.

Graham and Kelly propound that , *' Surprising insights into children's reading can emerge in the one-to-one conversations which you have with them,'* (Graham and Kelly 1997, 115). I talked at length with Child A and we discussed her reading habits and attitudes towards books. It quickly became obvious that Child A loves books in many forms. She confided that she often imagines that she is the princess in the stories which are read to her. Child A

likes to look at the pictures in books and tell her own stories from these, but feels unable to read the words alone. It became clear that Child A has access to many books at home, and Mum and Dad evidently read a lot. She delighted in recounting her first experience of visiting a library, which occurred recently, and she was given ample time to choose a book to take home. Child A proudly confided that she knew the book by heart as she had read it that often. It was evident that Child A, not only enjoys reading, but also sees herself as a good reader.

Observation of Child A during several guided reading sessions with her class teacher, presented a different picture. Child A frequently became easily distracted, and failed to focus on the text which was in front of her. She appeared to be restless and anxious to move off onto different activities. Child A was confident when attempting to read a word she thought she knew, however, when she came across an unfamiliar word she would not attempt to read it. With prompting she would begin to ‘sound’ a word out, but often gave up before completing the word. Again, Child A seems over-reliant on picture cues and was attempting to tell the story from the pictures. She remained unfocused throughout each guided reading session and while other children were turning the pages of their books, Child A sat with her book shut. She was unable to participate in the group discussion concerning the book and was unable to relate the main points of the story to the teacher when asked.

Child A was also observed during shared whole-class reading sessions. While she did not openly volunteer answers to the questions asked, she did respond once the class teacher asked her a direct question.

In consideration of the above evidence, and in conjunction with the level descriptors provided by the National Curriculum (www.nc.uk.net), it is possible to suggest that Child A is working at Level One in terms of her reading:

'Pupils recognise familiar words in simple texts. They use their knowledge of letters and sound-symbol relationships in order to read words and to establish meaning when reading aloud. In these activities they sometimes require support. They express their response to poems, stories and non-fiction by identifying aspects they like.'

(www.nc.uk.net)

However, it is clear that Child A meets only part of this level descriptor, as she is not yet using her phonic knowledge to read words, and to use the words to comprehend the story.

Implications for Teaching and Learning: Reading

It is clear from the evidence given above that Child A is not a confident or fluent reader. She is working in the early stages of National Curriculum level 1, and will need specific support if she is to begin to work in the later stages of the level, and indeed to start to work towards National Curriculum level 2.

The problems with Child A's use of expression and lack of awareness of phrase boundaries, could perhaps be addressed by adults modelling the reading process. Graham and Kelly suggest that this is a viable way of first introducing a book to a child, before they are given the opportunity to read the book for themselves, (Graham and Kelly 1997, 105). This could give Child

A the confidence she needs and will expose her to the way books should be read, using lots of expression. It will also aid her awareness of phrase boundaries, particularly if the adult traces the text with their finger as they read and makes exaggerated pauses when full stops or commas are encountered.

Child A's reluctance to join in group and class discussion about books could be a result of a lack of confidence in her own abilities, or perhaps she is unsure of how to respond correctly and does not want to 'risk,' getting it wrong. Again, one-one-one reading sessions could be an ideal way to address this problem. Graham and Kelly (1997) suggest that there should be a specific pattern to one-on-one reading sessions with young children, this pattern consists of five separate steps. ' *Warming up the text,*' allows children to look at the book chosen with an adult, handling it and making links with their own experiences, making them feel more comfortable before they begin reading (Graham and Kelly 1997, 105). ' *Reviewing the book,*' is also an important part of the confidence building process, and would allow Child A to give her opinion on the book without fear of failure, (Graham and Kelly 1997, 106). These strategies will hopefully help to build Child A's self confidence and she should then eventually be able to give her opinions in shared and guided reading sessions.

The miscue analyses also indicated that the books from Child A's 'shelf,' were perhaps too difficult for her, resulting in boredom and frustration, this could also have been the case during the guided reading sessions. Child A should be given books from a 'lower shelf,' to read in order to build up her self confidence. In addition to this, being placed with children of a similar, or <https://assignbuster.com/developing-the-literate-child/>

slightly lower, ability for guided reading sessions could also have a positive impact.

Speaking and Listening Analysis

During whole-class, teacher-led activities Child A did not speak unless she was asked a direct question by the class teacher. On such occasions, Child A would sometimes respond accurately, at other times she would not respond at all. When the children were asked to respond to questions by raising their hands, Child A would not put up her hand. During such teaching sessions, Child A was often observed to be very restless, although she was keen to sit right at the front. The children were regularly asked to work with ‘talking partners,’ during the direct teaching, it was observed that Child A never responded to her partner in such situations, simply refusing to speak.

During independent activities, Child A was observed to ignore other children on her table. Often her peers attempted to draw her into their activity or conversation, however, she did not respond to them in anyway, and indeed seemed to ignore them.

Child A was also observed during ‘free-play,’ situations. Generally Child A would remain on her self-chosen task and did not initiate conversation with her peers. The exception to this being conflict situations, where Child A was extremely vocal in expressing her unhappiness to another child. When surrounded by other children, Child A still did not join in with their chatter. During free-play Child A would occasionally respond to a direct question from an adult observer, but at other times would attempt to ignore them. Occasionally Child A would address a direct comment to an adult observer, in

relation to her self-generated task, but did not then become engaged in conversation.

Play-times seemed to present a different view of Child A, in terms of her speaking and listening ability. She was observed on several occasions playing, with another girl from her class, a variety of different clapping and singing games. The two girls demonstrated different games to each other, and were evidently listening and responding to each other.

‘ Pupils talk about matters of immediate interest. They listen to others and usually respond appropriately. They convey simple meanings to a range of listeners, speaking audibly, and begin to extend their ideas or accounts by providing some detail.’

(www. nc. uk. net)

This level descriptor indicates that, although Child A only meets part of the criteria for National Curriculum level 1, she is working at the lower end of this level. The observations made in the playground show that Child A is able, when the opportunity presents itself, to, *‘ talk about matters of immediate interest,’* (www. nc. uk. net).

Implications for Teaching and Learning: Speaking and Listening

The evidence collected suggests that although Child A is confident when speaking to her peers at playtimes, she is not comfortable during class or group situations on and often prefers to remain silent. It is important to develop her ability to, *‘ listen to others,’* and to, *‘ respond appropriately,’* if

Child A is to work towards National Curriculum level 2 for speaking and listening (www. nc. uk. net).

One of the key learning objectives for speaking and listening for children in Year One is, '*to ask and answer questions, make relevant contributions, offer suggestions and take turns,*' (DFES 2003a, 24). The document *Speaking, Listening, Learning: working with children in Key Stages 1 and 2* (DFES 2003a), offers some good suggestions for teaching towards this learning objective, and recommends a great deal of paired work, and teacher modelling of how to ask and answer questions. If Child A was able to observe adults modelling paired work, or some of her peers engaged in discussion work, she may start to feel sufficiently confident enough to join in herself. An additional strategy to help Child A during paired work, might be to try her with a variety of different partners to see if she responds better to a certain child.

' All areas of the curriculum offer distinct opportunities for developing children's speaking and listening,' (DFES 2003b, 11) and consequently it may be possible to engage Child B more fully in speaking and listening activities when linked to a subject she enjoys. The use of paired discussion, could be better suited to a science lesson, for example, rather than confining such discussions to English lessons.

Writing Analysis

Several conversations with Child A led to the conclusion that she does perceive herself as a good writer. She enjoys writing for a purpose, she

explained that she regularly writes lists and stories at home, giving them to her parents to read.

It is clear from examining the writing samples, that while Child A is confidently identifying the initial and final phonemes in words, and writing these down, she appears to be having more difficulty with medial phonemes, as many of these are missing from the words she has written down. For example in Appendix III, the writing clearly shows that Child A has attempted to write the word, ' wonderful,' however she has clearly identified the sounds at the beginning and ends of the word, but the middle sounds have not been clearly audible to her, resulting in the word, ' wunful.'

The three samples of Child A's writing which were examined (see Appendices I, II and III), indicate that she is making phonetically plausible attempts at words as the writing can be clearly read without the aid of the child in most places. Child A does show an awareness of how to use full stops, although these are not consistently in the correct places. She does not yet seem aware that it is necessary to leave a clear space in between her words, and only does so in a couple of places. The evidence listed above, in conjunction with the writing samples contained within Appendices I, II, and III, indicate that Child A is working at National Curriculum level 1:

' Pupils' writing communicates meaning through simple words and phrases. In their reading or their writing, pupils begin to show awareness of how full stops are used. Letters are usually clearly shaped and correctly oriented.

(www. nc. uk. net)

It is clear from the above level descriptor, that although Child A is working at National Curriculum level 1, she does not meet all of the listed criteria and, therefore, should not be assessed for level 2.

Implications for Teaching and Learning: Writing

The evidence given supports the suggestion that Child A is progressing through National Curriculum level 1 and into level 2. There are several things that could be done to support this transition. It could be said that her main development point is to improve her spelling and to start to recognise medial sounds in words. Child A also needs to start leaving finger spaces in between words and to start using full stops correctly.

The publication, *Progression in Phonics: materials for whole class teaching*, (DFES 1999) provides lots of suggestions for improving Child A's ability to hear medial sounds. For example, the game, 'Croaker,' develops the children's ability to hear and identify phonemes in a specified part of the word, using a puppet, (DFES 1999, 26). Such a game could improve Child A's ability to hear and identify medial phonemes with the aim of improving her spelling.

Reid suggests that shared and modelled writing are effective ways of supporting young children's writing development, (Reid in Bentley and Burman et al. 1999, 103-104). This could be a good way of improving Child A's use of finger spaces and full stops. If the teacher models the correct use of full stops and finger spaces, and also makes lots of deliberate mistakes which the children can help to correct, Child A will begin to understand how to use full stops and finger spaces effectively in her own writing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the evidence presented above indicates that Child A is working at National Curriculum level 1 for her reading, writing and speaking and listening skills. It has already been suggested that effective teachers use what children already know as a basis for developing their language skills and facilitating their progression. The evidence collected has been carefully analysed with this aim in mind, and areas for the development of Child A's literacy skills have been identified. Adult modelling of the reading and writing process should play a key part in this development, if Child A is to make good progress towards National Curriculum level 2. Peer modelling could also play an important role, and could also help to foster Child A's self confidence. It is important that all these suggestions are linked to other areas of the curriculum in order to engage and interest Child A, although this should also be of paramount importance when teaching all children. If all these suggestions are put into action, Child A should start to make sound progress and will, in addition, be playing an important part in this progression herself.

Bibliography

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