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The CATESOL Journal REVIEW

The New California English Language Arts Framework

California State Department of Education. 1987.

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A casual look at the new *California English Language Arts Framework* (1987) might lead one to suspect that something different is about to occur in the language arts instruction in California public schools. In contrast to past frameworks, gone is the focus on isolated teaching of bits and pieces of written language. Gone is the emphasis on skill sheets, spellers, and scope-and-sequence charts. Gone is the segmentation of language into its various expressions—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Gone, also, is the notion of developing a series of language arts frameworks, each destined to meet the needs of a particular group of students. In their place, the *Framework* calls for a focus on meaning. The language arts are to be taught in an integrated fashion; core literary works are to be the content of instruction and students are to learn to read and write by reading and writing. The *Framework* addresses the needs of all students: elementary, secondary, gifted, less prepared, language minority, and those who require special education.

We applaud the *Framework*'s shift in emphasis from skills to meaning. We are also encouraged by the *Framework*'s call for high quality literature within the language arts program. And, we are especially pleased to see that students are to spend more of their time reading and writing whole, meaningful texts.

Given these strengths and the overall spirit of the document, we hesitate to say "but . . ." for fear that it will be perceived as a failure to recognize the real accomplishments of the *Framework* and encourage critics of meaning-centered language arts curricula. The purpose of our critique, therefore, is to acknowledge these strengths of the *Framework* while noting areas of weakness and suggesting solutions.

It is clear that the authors of the *Framework* want students to read and write for meaning and that the source for this meaning is to be "great, classic literature" (p. 7). Unfortunately the developers of the *Framework* never come to terms with the relationship among skill attainment, literacy competency, and meaning. Consequently, the

Framework is unclear and at times even contradictory as to how students are to generate this meaning. For example, the section "Learning to Read by Reading" (p. 9) begins with the following quotation from Frank Smith: "Learning to read is a complex and delicate task in which almost all the rules, all the cues and all the feedback can be obtained only through the act of reading itself" (p. 23). Those familiar with Frank Smith's skepticism of the effectiveness of phonic and vocabulary instruction might predict that the *Framework* would reject such instruction and present more viable alternatives.

Surprisingly, not only is a more viable alternative not presented within the *Framework*, but the traditional skills approach is maintained, though certainly in a weakened form. A skills perspective toward literacy teaching and learning essentially advocates that the processes of reading and writing can be broken apart into discrete language skills. Literacy mastery involves the learning of such language parts as sound/symbol relations (phonics), word attack skills, and vocabulary.

Throughout the document, while some mention is made of teaching students to make use of context clues, the directive to teach students to "identify individual words by sounding them out" (p. 9) is clear. In fact, a systematic phonics program for the early grades is mandated in the *Framework*. In Appendix A the traditional skill components of decoding, vocabulary development, and comprehension are listed. Hence, the *Framework* appears to be telling teachers to focus on meaning but to continue to teach the skills. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that many teachers, in their attempts to implement the *Framework*, have taken classic works of literature and taught them as one would a basal story.

In place of a skills approach, we recommend a process approach to reading instruction. In a process approach, reading is goal driven and the focus is on constructing and responding to meaning on a variety of topics. Materials are not fragmented but whole, real, and relevant. Comprehension, while variable, is not an "add-on" but a prerequisite to and a consequence of reading.

Fortunately, the *Framework*'s stance toward writing instruction is a great deal more process oriented. Writing is defined not as a think-it-say-it process, but as the exploration of thought which can promote student learning. Teachers are to engage students in prewriting, drafting, and revising strategies; instructional activities are to promote student response to their own and others' writing; and revision is to move beyond surface level corrections to the clarification and rearrangement of meaning (p. 10).

The *Framework* also advocates the use of all elements of language—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—as students study various literary works. Current theory and research on concept development supports such a stance toward learning. Chapter 4 describes sample lessons which demonstrate the integrated use of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. While the focus of each program and lesson is on the use of various language elements to enhance student comprehension of a piece of classic literature, other characteristics of integration are also exemplified, e.g., literature is integrated with science and social science reading material and language is integrated with art, music, and mathematics.

If the developers of the *Framework* had not had such a concern with building the language arts curriculum around classic works of literature, they might have more fully articulated the concept of integration at which they only hint in chapter 4. From our perspective, integration is best accomplished through thematic units rather than through core literature. In thematic teaching, key concepts which focus on a particular topic serve as the base for the language arts curriculum. All materials and activities are conceptually linked to the topic and come not only from the field of literature, but from science and the social sciences as well. In such a curriculum, conceptual learning is promoted because students repeatedly encounter a set of interelated meanings throughout the unit and language learning is enhanced because students use reading, writing, listening, and speaking to generate meanings related to the themes at hand.

The incorporation of materials from various fields of study into the language arts curriculum has a number of benefits for students. First, it helps them to develop a fuller understanding of the topics and major concepts. In addition, the written materials in each field may also use different organizational patterns. Science materials are often expository in nature while social science materials are frequently time ordered. Literary materials may reflect narrative patterns as well as poetic and dramatic patterns. A curriculum focused primarily on literary texts, as suggested in the *Framework*, not only limits students to a narrow range of meanings, but also limits their ability to develop reading and writing proficiency in different types of discourse.

Thematic curricula also allow for the use of reading materials which reflect various degrees of difficulty. In any classroom there will exist a range of reading abilities. If core literature serves as the base for the curriculum, less proficient students will be automatically excluded because they lack the ability to read particular core texts. While these students might experience the material through other avenues, such as being read to, watching filmstrips, and so forth, the only way they will improve their ability to read is through reading.

We have already seen this exclusion happening in classrooms which are currently using core literary texts. The more capable students are engaged in the reading of the selected work while the less capable students listen to the literature as it is read by the teacher or on audio tape. In many ways, this procedure simply continues established classroom norms: those who read well are allowed to read, while those

who are struggling are excluded from print. In the use of themes, students with varying degrees of reading proficiency can still engage in the curriculum as the focus is on key concepts rather than on key literary works. Students read those materials which are most appropriate to their ability and, because all materials focus on the same themes, increase their conceptual knowledge.

The *Framework* recognizes the increasing number of limited-English-speaking students as one of California's greatest challenges. We applaud the *Framework*'s emphasis on meaning-based second language instruction. However, we are concerned about its unenthusiastic support for the use of the home language for instructional purposes with limited English students. While the California Office of Bilingual and Bicultural Education argues, based on current research, that first language development, including first language literacy, provides the strongest foundation for the academic success of limited English proficient students, the *Framework* views the use of the home language as simply one instructional alternative. The alternative is presented with "the understanding that English instruction should begin as soon as possible" (p. 23).

Ironically, although the *Framework* advocates meaning-based curricula, the frail support it gives to primary language instruction has the potential of closing one of the means by which language minority children can participate in meaning-based curricula. We feel that the *Framework*'s emphasis on a quick transition to English will only provide support to the now discredited notion that maximum exposure to English instruction automatically leads to a higher degree of English achievement.

In its push to minimize the use of the primary language for instructional purposes, the *Framework* fails to define how first and second language development interface and support one another. The *Framework* might have highlighted the fact that language minority students' experiences with one language promote the development of a common proficiency which underlies both languages. Consequently, subject matter knowledge attained via the first language will support the development of both cognitive and linguistic development in the second language.

In selecting materials for the language arts program, the *Framework* endorses the use of core literary works which are to be identified at the school or district level. Core literary works, according to the *Framework*, would "offer students a common cultural background" (p. 7). One of the difficulties we see in the *Framework*'s adoption of the notion of cultural literacy rests in how *culture* is defined. The document vacillates betwen wanting to reflect the Western "high" view of culture and wanting to represent a view which is more pluralistic.

We do not object to a language arts program which concentrates on the "greatest" works of literature. The problem is that many of

the works which offer the viewpoint of racial, ethnic, or language minorities are not often described this way. Such works then fail to find their way into the established canon. The *Framework*, in illustrating the use of high quality literature, often refers to literary examples which reflect the more traditional view of culture rather than one which represents minority cultures.

We also question the notion that simply having students read the same core literature will provide them with a common cultural heritage. Culture, as we define it, is far more dynamic. However, in encouraging a core list development at the local level, the *Framework* has the potential to positively impact the students it seeks to serve. Those involved in the development of core lists at the local level must be conscious of the need to provide experiences which reflect minority as well as mainstream groups.

In summary, we applaud the overall direction of the *Framework*. In promoting a meaning-centered language arts curriculum, the *Framework* moves in a positive direction. A literature-focused curriculum, even though potentially elitist in its conception, is a vast improvement over the literacy instructional practices which traditionally have plagued our schools.

We must, however, beware of the setback which the document represents in terms of the previously won gains for bilingual education. The *Framework* has the potential of limiting language minority students' access to the state's second language educational reform. Moreover, the document, because of its focus on English-only instruction, further removes the possibility of a truly bilingual education for all students, including those whose native language is English.

Rather than a narrow focus on skills, Western literature, and English, we would propose a focus on process, the use of a wide range of written material reflecting diverse cultural viewpoints, and bilingualism.■

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REVIEW

What's Whole in Whole Language

Kenneth Goodman. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986. Pp.79.

Ideas and Insights: Language Arts in the Elementary School

Ed. Dorothy Watson. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1987. Pp. xiii + 243

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What's Whole in Whole Language by Ken Goodman serves as a concise introduction to *Whole Language*. It sets out very clearly what Whole Language is and what it is not. *Ideas and Insights,* edited by Dorothy Watson is a second valuable book, containing a wealth of practical classroom activities consistent with a Whole Language philosophy.

While these two books serve as an excellent introduction to Whole Language, it is important to note that they are just that, an introduction. Teachers wishing to study Whole Language in more depth will need to read other books and articles to develop further insights into the philosophy and application of Whole Language.

Teachers moving toward Whole Language may wish to share these books with administrators, other teachers, or parents as a way of introducing them to new practices, materials, and classroom organization. Many ESL teachers will recognize similarities between the goals of a Whole Language program and the goals of ESL programs, especially ESL programs that reflect current theories of oral and written language acquisition. In fact, many ESL teachers may discover that they have been Whole Language teachers all along.

In the preface to *What's Whole in Whole Language* Goodman states the book's purpose, "to describe the essence of the whole language movement—its basis, its features, and its future" (p. 5). The book covers each of these three areas. The basis of Whole Language, and what makes it particularly relevant for teachers of English to speakers of other languages, is that Whole Language is a view of how oral and written language develop. The Whole Language approach suggests ways that both parents and teachers can help children

develop literacy. The future of Whole Language looks promising. Goodman considers this future by reviewing sucessful Whole Language programs now in operation and suggesting how other schools can develop effective Whole Language programs.

Goodman approaches the basis of Whole Language and language development, both oral and written, by posing this paradox: "Learning a language sometimes seems ridiculously easy and sometimes impossibly hard. And the easy times are outside school, the hard times in school" (p. 7). ESL teachers will recognize this as the same point that Krashen (1981) has made in his distinction between acquisition and learning.

Goodman contrasts factors that make learning hard with those that make it easy. These are outlined in a clear chart on p. 8. For example, language is hard when it is presented in bits and pieces, and it is easy when it is presented in meaningful wholes. Language is hard when it is presented as a sequence of skills to be mastered and easy when skills to be taught are selected as the result of examining student work. It's hard when the focus is on language itself and easy when the focus is on using language to accomplish purposes that have meaning for the learner.

There is a parallel between teachers moving from traditional approaches toward Whole Language and ESL teachers moving from a structural syllabus toward a communicative syllabus or teaching language through content. Whole Language and recent ESL approaches emphasize keeping language whole and meaningful and focusing on language use rather than on the forms of the language itself. The writings of Hudelson (1984), Urzua (1987), Rigg (1981), Rigg and Enright (1986), and Enright and McCloskey (1985, 1988), among others, describe ESL programs consistent with a Whole Language approach.

After examining the factors that facilitate language learning, Goodman considers more directly the process of learning a language. He suggests that learning occurs from whole to part, that function precedes form, and that two forces, convention and invention, are in balance as individuals develop language. He goes on to explain that although oral and written language develop in the same way, they serve different functions and involve different conventions. Written language itself serves a number of different functions. For instance, environmental print provides information such as names of streets and stores while occupational print is needed to complete one's job. He encourages teachers to help students develop control over these different functions of written language and says that students will learn as long as they see a need for using written language to serve their own purposes.

In this section on language development, with its emphasis on function over form, there is a clear parallel between what Whole Language teachers are attempting and what many ESL teachers are doing in their classrooms. ESL teachers are moving away from oral and written exercises that focus on correct forms of language and are moving toward classroom activities in which students use language to accompllish both academic and social goals (Chamot & O'Malley, 1987; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). There is more acceptance of error in this process and a recognition that students' invented forms will begin to approximate conventional forms over time. ESL teachers respond more to what students are trying to say or write before attending to details of how they say or write it.

The next section of *What's Whole* provides a Whole Language view of schools. Goodman outlines the theoretical base for Whole Language teaching by reviewing learning and language theory. He goes on to consider a Whole Language view of teaching and curriculum. Whole Language teachers are knowledgeable professionals who continue to learn and refine their practices in light of current research. These teachers, "keep trying to make the curriculum more relevant, to make language experiences in school as authentic and relevant as those outside school, to reach all children and help them expand their language competence as they continue to learn through language" (p. 30). Whole Language teachers attempt to integrate their curriculum. They provide students with choices and work to help students take responsibility for their own learning. They emphasize language across the curriculum and often organize their lessons around thematic units. It seems clear that these goals for a Whole Language teacher and a Whole Language curriculum are the same goals many ESL teachers have always held and that other ESL teachers are moving toward.

The first half of *What's Whole* ends with a section titled, "Whole Language: What Makes It Whole?" in which Goodman summarizes his key points. He compares what Whole Language is with what it is not, concentrating especially on reading. He claims that a skills-technology view of reading dominates many classrooms. This view is characterized by the use of basal readers and direct instruction, by a concern with readiness and an emphasis on phonics. Goodman urges a shift toward a scientific view of reading and writing instruction in which teachers use authentic materials to help students understand that reading is a process of constructing meaning.

For ESL teachers, this section is particularly relevant because ESL materials are often similar to basal reading programs. Materials for second language learners often lean more heavily toward worksheets, skill packs, and artificial reading selections written to include certain grammatical structures. However, many ESL teachers are rejecting these materials and moving toward the use of real literature and authentic expository text to teach their students. They are also introducing process writing (Graves, 1983) and teaching skills in context rather than depending on workbook pages. This is exactly the sort of shift that Goodman calls for in his book.

The second half of *What's Whole* includes a number of specific suggestions for implementing a Whole Language program. Reading instruction could include the use of predictable books, taped stories, and langauge experience stories. Under writing, Goodman discusses the use of journals and process writing. He also deals with spelling, punctuation and handwriting.

An especially important section for ESL teachers is Goodman's discussion of "revaluing" as an alternative to remediation. He says, "When pupils don't do well in a technologized reading and writing program, it's assumed there must be something wrong with *them.*" (p. 55). As a result of their failure students are often labeled and given instruction designed to cure their disabilities. But, says Goodman, "A whole language perspective is bluntly opposed to all that. Language learning is not difficult. If young humans haven't succeeded in becoming literate in school, something must be wrong with the program: *it* needs remediation, not they" (p. 55). What language learners really need is to revalue themselves and to revalue reading and writing. Until they see themselves as competent learners and until they see reading and writing as activities that will serve their needs, instructional programs will have little effect on them.

The last section of *What's Whole*—"Whole Language: Not Without a Whole Language Teacher"—gives some practical suggestions for how teachers can move toward Whole Language. It encourages teachers to keep communications open with administrators, other teachers, and parents. It recognizes that while there will be more noise in a Whole Language classroom than in a traditional classroom there is still the need to maintain order. It provides ideas for making long-range plans. Goodman ends his book with the reminder that "all kids are whole language learners, but there are no whole language classrooms without whole language teachers" (p. 78).

One area of concern to many teachers that is covered only briefly in *What's Whole* is evaluation. Teachers often ask how students in Whole Language classes compare with students in traditional classes. Recent research indicates that students in Whole Language classes do well. In "The Power of Reading" Stephen Krashen (1985) reviews a number of studies and concludes, "Research appears to support overwhelmingly the hypothesis that reading exposure alone has a strong effect on the development of language abilities necessary for school success" (p. 90). His comparisons of programs show greater test score gains for self-selected or sustained silent reading than for programs with traditional reading instruction. Michael Tunnell and James Jacobs (1989) also review a number of studies, including studies with limited-English students and conclude that literature-based reading instruction typical of Whole Language classrooms results in greater gains in reading than does traditional instruction.

Although recent research documents substantial gains in the kinds of reading and writing instruction consistent with Whole Language,

teachers beginning to use Whole Language will need to do further reading for suggestions on evaluation. One source many teachers have found helpful is *The Whole Language Evaluation Book* with chapters by teachers at different grade levels. Each chapter explains how that teacher attempts holistic evaluation. Included are descriptions of Whole Language evaluation in bilingual classes and classes with substantial numbers of limited English proficient students.

While *What's Whole* provides some practical suggestions for implementing a Whole Language program, the emphasis is on theory—on what Whole Language is and what it is not. A second book, *Ideas and Insights,* edited by Dorothy Watson, provides a wealth of practical suggestions for teachers wishing to launch into Whole Language. ESL teachers should find many suggestions that are appropriate for their classes as well.

The book begins with "An Invitation" to the reader from the many authors to "consider our best teaching ideas" (p. vii). The book is not just a random collection of ideas: "What you will find, . . . are activities that are based on the whole language approach to learning" (p. vii). The activities are anchored in a consistent philosophy. Each one includes a *why* as well as a *who* and a *how.*

The philosophy supporting the book is expounded in the introductory section which comprises three brief essays. Leland Jacobs begins with "Literature: Its Rightful Place in the Curriculum." Jacobs argues that literature has always been central to public education on this continent. He points out that there is a greater wealth of literature for children and young adults available now than ever before. He stresses the need to involve students with authentic literature by getting them to "re-view what has been aesthetically enjoyed" (p. x).

In the second essay, "Readers Detechnologizing Reading," Kenneth Goodman reiterates ideas presented in *What's Whole in Whole Language.* He points out that we have built a technology of reading instruction around basal progams. He calls for rejecting this technology of reading and immersing students in good literature and expository prose instead.

The third essay, by Donald Graves, is titled "Writing to Learn, Learning to Write." Graves, who has taught second language students and who is well-known for his work on process writing, illustrates how a teacher can work with students to involve them in meaningful writing. He stresses that teachers, too, are learners, and the demonstrations of reading and writing that they give their students are crucial and have "the greatest effect on the children's enjoyment of learning and literacy" (p. xiii).

Together, these essays provide a sound theoretical base for all the activities collected in this book. The activities themselves are all presented following the same format. This makes it easy to flip open the book to any page and make sense of the lesson idea being described.

Each activity or lesson idea begins with a section titled "Why." This section may be quite brief. "Why" for the activity "Peek and Describe" states, "To help students make use of the descriptive language they possess but use infrequently" (p. 14). Other "Whys" are more detailed and cover a paragraph or two. The second section, "Who," explains who the activity is designed for. "Peek and Describe" is for "all elementary students" (p. 14). Some activities are specifically designated as appropriate for teachers with ESL students. An example is "The Linguistically Different Child: How to Soften the Culture Clash."

While *Ideas and Insights* doesn't address the needs of adult ESL students specifically, ESL teachers will find suggestions that would be easy to adapt for older second language students. However, these teachers may also wish to consult other sources for suggestions for activities to use with ESL students consistent with Whole Language including Enright (1988), Hudelson (1984), Rigg (1986), and Urzua (1987).

Part 3 of each lesson is titled "How." These sections are succinct but sufficiently detailed so a teacher can read them and then try them out. The activities are all written by classroom teachers who have already used and modified them, so the explanations reflect teachers' experience, not idealized situations. Finally, many of the activities include a "What Else" section in which possible extensions or follow-up activities are included.

The activities in *Ideas and Insights* are organized into five parts. Each part has a particular focus: (a) reading, (b) writing, (c) language across the curriculum (d) students and parents as resources, and (e) assessment. This organizational scheme makes it easy for teachers to locate activities to serve particular needs. *Ideas and Insights* also includes a large bibliography of books, including read-aloud books, wordless books, and predictable books.

For teachers interested in Whole Language, *What's Whole in Whole Language* and *Ideas and Insights* provide an excellent introduction to Whole Language theory and practice. ESL teachers will find that the movement toward Whole Language is consistent with the *California English Language Arts Framework* as well as with current practice in ESL. These are books written for teachers and designed to help teachers help all their students become successful learners. ■

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