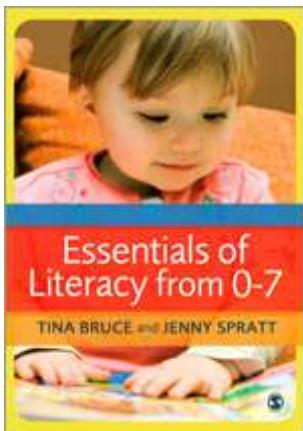


Book Review



Essentials of Literacy from 0-7:

By Tina Bruce and Jenny Spratt
London: Sage Publications Ltd. (2008)

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Review by **Andrew Sinko**

Essentials of Literacy from 0-7 offers practitioners and childminders an approach to supporting literacy development across the modalities of literacy. The primary focus of the book is on speaking and listening, leading to more foundational aspects of supporting and exposing children to reading and writing. Instructional methods used to support the development of literacy are coupled with a multisensory approach to teaching. Such methods further support the development of the whole child. Specific pedagogical techniques are highlighted throughout the book with explanations to help facilitate classroom implementation and the rationale for using such methods. Theoretical underpinnings help further exploit the benefits of using such instructional techniques as 'finger rhymes', 'baby songs', 'poetry cards' etc.

The first chapter offers an explanation of Bruce and Spratt's experience of working with teacher practitioners on professional development in early years education, specifically as it relates to contemporary policy within the United Kingdom. This chapter seems to develop an understanding of credibility and provides a reason for writing a book on early years literacy considering an extensive body of literature already exists. The aim of the chapter seems to be for a contextualized understanding of an existing research project. Overall, the chapter seems to distract from the objective of the book: namely, to provide teachers with specific instructional strategies to support the development of literacy. This could potentially cause confusion for a reader who does not have a background in research or UK educational policy. Chapter two highlights the importance of observing children using a formative approach. Research presented in the chapter is offered to help support practitioners in designing instruction within, what Vygotsky calls, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP), while keeping student interest and engagement at the forefront of lessons.

In the subsequent chapters Bruce and Spratt discuss the different pedagogical techniques that can be employed to support the development of emergent literacy. They start with the benefits of spontaneous talk and conversation during different learning opportunities, highlighting the benefits of developing 'oracy' and aural comprehension through play opportunities. This idea is critical considering children need to have sustained conversations with semantic contingency to support effective oral communication and aural comprehension (Riley, 2006). Proficiency of such skills is foundational for later literacy development and instructional strategies presented by the authors. The use of finger-rhymes is offered as a way to develop motor control that is beneficial for later literacy development. Such instructional practice also supports the development of phonological awareness and listening comprehension. Although the strengthening of motor control can be developed through other

instructional techniques, the use of finger rhymes is multifaceted as they support foundational literacy skills through one, potentially engaging and contextualized exercise.

The importance of writing (mark/meaning making) is discussed in chapter 5 as the authors argue that writing cannot be made separate from learning to read. Value is placed on students making marks that convey messages and how such messages support the development of cohesive, sustained ideas and narrative. Not only is meaning making through pictures stressed within the chapter, but also how writing becomes a time for application of literacy skills that have been previously taught. The authors also bring awareness to the difficulties of writing, especially as it relates to the multilayered understanding students must have when ideas are conveyed in more conventional ways through words and sentences. Such conventional ways support the students in application of previously learned foundational aspects of literacy (i.e. letter names and sounds, phonemic segmentation, grapheme-phoneme correspondences, and blending).

In the final chapter of the book the authors suggest using poetry cards as a way to bring contextualization to skills under the umbrella of phonological awareness. Through poetry cards, practitioners can help students develop an understanding of rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, etc. These skills are essential for later literacy as the ability to hear, discriminate, and manipulate the phonemes of a language is highly correlated with later reading ability (Adams, 1990). The authors discuss how poetry cards can be used to bridge the skills students have learned through phonological actives in prior lessons to authentic connected text thus allowing students to apply the knowledge they have around sounds to written text. This provides students with phonics instruction connected to the greater purpose—reading, while creating enjoyment around literacy.

This book is primarily intended for early-years practitioners, childminders, and caregivers. However, I would caution against recommending this book to the latter two groups as some of the technical language throughout the book, especially in the first two chapters, might distract from the benefits of instructional strategies presented in later chapters. In reading this book practitioners may be able to gain a vast repertoire of activities that supports the young literate in their classroom. This practical guide demonstrates how one might go about teaching the vital sub-skills of emergent literacy development in authentic and purposeful ways. Alongside *Essentials of Literacy from 0-7*, practitioners should opt to read other resources on literacy development to deepen the theoretical basis backing the instructional strategies presented.

References

Adams, M.J. (1990) *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Riley, J. (2006) *Language and Literacy 3-7: Creative Approaches to Teaching*, Paul Chapman Educational Publishing, London.