**A Balanced Literacy Program for Secondary Students in Transition Period**

***(L2 literacy)***

Literacy, traditionally, represents an ability to read and write (Bang, 2008; Fu, D. & Matoush, 2015;Kern, 2000). Some explain that literacy is the integrated language arts, involving a focus on language skills development in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Cooper, 1993; Fu, D. & Matoush, 2015). However, in this research, literacy focuses on linguistic competence (i.e. ability to read and write) in second and foreign language teaching for academic achievement.

***(What is balanced literacy approach?)***

Balanced literacy approach is a new way of teaching how to read and write effectively (Bang, 2008; Kaczanowski, 2008). It is “a philosophical perspective approach about what kinds of reading knowledge children should develop and how those kinds of knowledge can be attained” (Fitzgerald, 1999, p.100). According to Thompson (1999), it started with the belief that you can teach some of the children some of the time with one program or philosophy, but you cannot teach all the children all the time in the same way.

From this belief, there are three major features in balanced literacy approach. First, it is built on a comprehensive view of literacy, which consists of word identification, constructing meaning, and integrating reading and writing (Freppon & Dahl, 1998;Spiegal, 1999) Second, it is flexible, decision-making approach. Teachers understand that there is not only one perfect method of instruction and therefore, present the best instructions or teaching techniques upon given situation. Therefore, sometimes a balanced approach has been referred to as a compromised position (Spiegal, 1999). Third, authenticity is another feature of a balanced literacy approach. It is the most authentic way to enhance literacy development and is based on what goes on in each unique classroom with individual children and real teachers. Students are engaged in meaningful, often self-selected, tasks to enhance their literacy rather than through teacher-prepared interactions (Spiegal, 1999).

The big feature in balanced literacy is comprehensive (i.g. integrating reading and writing). This approach, however, comes down to reading instruction. The questions how to make every child a successful reader among researchers led to the Reading Wars in the 1990s: Whole language vs Phonics instruction (Burns, 2006).

***(Whole language vs Phonics instruction)***

Whole language is a belief about learning language development. Whole language is based on the belief that language (both oral and written) is acquired naturally (Eldredge, 1995), and learners constantly should be exposed to a great deal of authentic language (Bang, 2008). It involves meaning-based, top-down literature-based instruction with an emphasis on teaching reading as a whole (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). On the other hand, Phonics advocates supported that language cannot be acquired naturally but in an explicit manner (Eldredge, 2005). They believed that phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge are prerequisites to conventional literacy, and reading fluency involves skill-based, bottom-up instruction (e.g.. word-by-word), and identifying letter-sound relationships (Burns, 2006).

***(Studies of Balanced literacy approach)***

Since the Reading Wars, reading experts started discussing balanced literacy which embraces a whole language approach and phonics instruction (Burns, 2006). Honig (1996) stressed that a balanced reading program consists of separate, explicit skill instruction and language-rich literature instruction. He also proclaimed that instructions should include shared reading, reading children’s literature, reader response interactions, and the teaching of writing. The aim of the instruction is to achieve the general goal of independent reading.

Some researchers have studied the approach from the minority, at-risk children point of view. Moll (1990) emphasized teacher’s and students’ social mediations and meaning as primary in literacy learning in his research on a second language learners. Au & Carroll (1997) in their book addressed the problems of struggling learners through a workshop and that students’ ownership (i.g. learners feelings for reading and writing), reading comprehension, the writing process, and skills are critical.

Tompkins (1997) addressed the balanced approach from the interactive and reader response perspectives. The author considered the approach as integrating arts with the a focus on children’s literature, also agreed with that alphabetic knowledge and phonics skills are prerequisite for learning to read (Freppon & Dahl, 1998).

From the blending perspectives, Pressely & McIntyre (1996) explained the approach within whole language principles. Some studies demonstrated that a mix of whole language and explicit instruction in strategies and skills (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996)

***(Conclusion)***

There are some controversies and confusion in defining a balanced literacy approach. Some researchers felt that balanced literacy was just another name for whole language. Others believed that it was an attempt to combine the view of phonics and whole language activities, while others believed that it meant holistic activities by some phonics instruction (Eldredge, 2005). Another limitation is that researches have conducted research mainly in an elementary sector or in L1 settings. Further studies on implications in L2, EFL settings, or Junior high schools are needed.

In spite of its ambiguous definition and limitation on research areas, it has concrete, strong points that are beneficial for at-risks, underachieved young learners, especially for beginning readers (Pressley, M., Roehrig, A., Bogner, K., Raphael, L.M., & Dolezal, 2002). For this reason, I have found that a balanced literacy approach is very helpful for my target learners; first year of secondary students who are struggling with academic reading. In addition, it is anticipated to enhance learner’s motivation and improve their basic literacy skills for future successful academic achievement.

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