

Center for Urban Education Research Base

Language Experience in Reading

Core Element	Connections Structure	Basis in Research	Relevant Research
Students learn new concepts by connecting to prior knowledge and experiences through reading, writing, listening and speaking	Structure of lesson begins with reconnection to prior learning. Teacher begins content learning by presenting the content orally and students begin by starting their own glossaries. Students connect prior knowledge with new content and picture and/or write to clarify what they are learning, thereby expanding their language base and knowledge of the topic.	Prior knowledge is a major contributor to student understanding.	Bransford and Johnson, 1972; Townsend & Clarihew, 1989. Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, and Hampston, 1988.

The following research supports the emphasis on the Language Experience in Reading that is integrated into the Connections structure at grades K-8. In the original Language Experience approach primary students dictate and then read what they write; in Connections students picture and/or write what they learn and then “pair and share” to expand each other’s language and experience base.

One of the most powerful and important assumptions under-girding theory, research, and instruction in content area literacy is that prior knowledge, what the learner knows when encountering new information, affects understanding and learning (324).

Bransford and Johnson (1972) found that having prior knowledge is not a sufficient condition; rather, “previous knowledge must be activated in order to facilitate one’s current abilities to understand and learn” (p. 330). Well-developed prior knowledge is so powerful that it affects comprehension more than reading ability (Townsend & Clarihew, 1989).

D. Lapp, J. Flood, and N. Farnan, Content Area Reading and Learning Instructional Strategies, 1996.

At the elementary level, a number of studies have examined curriculum and instruction in classrooms where students have made unusual progress in reading and writing achievement, in contrast with classrooms where achievement is more typical. Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, and Hampston (1988), for example, studied 9 first-grade teachers in New York State who differed in their

effectiveness in promoting literacy. More effective teachers demonstrated instructional balance. They taught decoding skills explicitly and also provided their students with many opportunities to engage in authentic, integrated reading and writing activities. The three most effective teachers extensively used scaffolding to help their students learn (p. 125).

B. M. Taylor, D. P. Pearson, K. Clark, and S. Walpole,
“Effective Schools and Accomplished Teachers: Lessons
about Primary-Grade Reading Instruction in Low-Income
Schools”, Elementary School Journal, 101(2), 2000.