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**From Phonics Training to Literacy Enculturation**

**A comparative analysis of theory and practice in two reading paradigms**

**Abstract**

*In this article, I question the relevance of direct reading instruction in developed Western cultures. An alternative in better accordance with these cultures would be literacy enculturation, which means an informal use of written language together with the young child at home, in day-care, kindergarten and preschool as an everyday social practice. Today all the adults around the child can read and write themselves, but this potential has not been educationally recognized and utilized because of the claim that a detailed knowledge of the letter-sound system is necessary to help beginners read and write.*

*First, I trace the origins of phonics. Then I analyze a number of incompatible pairs of principles in the two paradigms in order to shed light on differences in theory and practice and on the advantages of an informal social-communicative practice in early childhood as the gateway to reading and writing. Finally, I look at some results that speak in favor of literacy enculturation, and suggest brief guidelines for implementing this paradigm.*

**The origins of phonics**

The use of phonics dates back to the time of ancient Greece and Rome two thousand years ago. At that time, there was no space between words in a written text. The scribe wrote a coherent line of letters for each sound from left to right, which was called *scriptura continua* and would look like this, had the language been contemporary English: WITHNOSPACEBETWEENWORDSTHEREADERWOULDHAVETOREADALOUDTTOGETHOLDOFSYLLABLESANDWORDSANDSUPPORTHISUNDERSTANDINGOFTHEMEANINGBYMEANSOFHISAUDITORIALMEMORYORSOMETIMESFELLOWREADERSWHISPEREDTHETEXTTOGETHERTOHELPEACHOTHERUNDERSTANDTHEMEANING

When the Roman reader looked at a text like this, he [sic] had to manipulate the row of discrete phonetic symbols within his mind to form properly articulated and accented entities equivalent to syllables and words, sound them out from left to right, and then by listening to his own voice, try to grasp the meaning of the text. Does this tedious and difficult job seem familiar to you? Then you have probably heard it in school when children were learning to read the phonics way, eight hundred years after space between words had become standard in European writing in order to loosen the burden of reading.

In ancient Greece and Rome there was only the auditory way to understanding a text because the alphabetic writing system *with no space between words* had only one code (table 1), the letter-sound code, generally known as the ‘alphabetic code’. However, reading this way was difficult, and in the early Middle Ages space between words became more and more common (Saenger, 1997). This was a revolution in the history of reading because separate words now made it possible to spot visual entities of meaning, and thus provided the alphabetic writing system with an additional code, the word-meaning code (table 2).

Table 1

**The code of coherent alphabetic writing:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Code of pronunciation** | **Letter-sound** |

Table 2

**The two codes of separate alphabetic writing:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Code of meaning** | **Word-meaning** |
| **Code of pronunciation** | **Letter-sound** |

When there was no space between words, understanding a text was a process so complicated and abstract that written language was a matter for clergymen, royal servants and scribes only. Later school took over; and still for many years, social and cultural conditions were not favorable to literacy enculturation, should anyone have suggested it! However, this has completely changed now.

Today written language used at all levels of modern societies makes literacy enculturation both possible and needed. *Possible*, because everybody around the child can read and write. *Needed*, because of the insufficient reading and writing abilities: ‘American students are not meeting even basic literacy standards and their teachers are often at a loss for how to help them’ (Graham and Hebert, 2010, p. 2).

**Two sets of incompatible principles**

We will now have a closer look at the two paradigms by pointing out pairs of incompatible principles from theory and practice in the two approaches (A-K in table 3). What I write below about the principles of literacy enculturation refers to numerous studies, including my own research, of ‘early childhood literacy’, ‘early reading’, ‘emergent literacy’, ‘family literacy’, ‘whole language’, and ‘young readers’. They show how children can learn to read and write before school in a social-communicative manner by being involved directly in a meaningful use of written language without previous instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics.

Table 3

**Key principles in the learning process of reading and writing according to the two paradigms**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Phonics training** | **Literacy enculturation** |
| **A** | **Formal instruction** | **Informal social practice** |
| **B** | **Child as object of teaching** | **Child as agent of own learning** |
| **C** | **Different from learning to speak** | **Similar to learning to speak** |
| **D** | **Learning a technique** | **Learning a language** |
| **E** | **From simple to complex** | **From known to unknown** |
| **F** | **Orthographically regular texts** | **Authentic and relevant texts** |
| **G** | **One code** | **Two codes** |
| **H** | **Auditory-phonetic reading** | **Visual-semantic reading** |
| **I** | **From phonemic awareness to reading/writing** | **From reading/writing to phonemic awareness** |
| **J** | **Tests and drills are useful** | **Tests and drills are harmful** |
| **K** | **Literacy is a culturally neutral skill** | **Literacy is a culturally sensitive practice** |

**A Formal instruction vs. informal social practice**

Although nowadays all the adults in a family can read and write, schooling is still being considered the best and only way for the child to learn literacy. This situation is due to the historical tradition of reading and writing being a subject in school, based on the belief that teaching the beginning reader presupposes an expert knowledge of the phonetic system that most parents do not have.

In contrast to this, emergent literacy studies have convincingly documented numerous cases of preschool readers who have joined actively in their family’s literacy practices. They have been encouraged to use written words meaningfully in playful and practical activities, and in this way, they have gradually learnt to use letters and sounds in real writing and reading. Such an introduction is completely different from direct instruction in phonics. Early readers in family settings convey and decode meaningful visual messages, using written language as a language and not as assembling a jigsaw puzzle of abstract pieces. An informal and social-communicative practice like this is what I call literacy enculturation (Cairney, 2006/2003; Clarke, 1976; Cohen & Söderbergh, 1999; Fast, 2007; Goelman, Oberg, Smith, 1984; Kjertmann, 1999, 2002, 2015; Korkeamäki, 1996; Lancy, 1994; Liberg, 1990; Smith, 1988; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Söderbergh, 1976, 1977, 2000, 2011; Teale, 1995; Thorsjö, 2006; Öjaby förskola, 2004).

**B Child as object of teaching vs. child as agent of own learning**

According to the phonics paradigm, learning to read takes direct instruction in phonemic awareness, letters and sounds. To benefit from this approach, it is necessary for the child to have reached the threshold of concrete operations, which then, for proponents of the phonics approach, gives the ground for direct instruction as the only possible way.

Contrary to this, adults who want to help the young child become agent of its own literacy learning, start with words familiar to the child, by writing them or pointing to them in a text. Written words can be a meaningful, visual language to young children, provided they are well known and positive to the child. No one should try to take three-year-old Ann’s word card *mom* away from her as long as her mother has not come home yet! The card makes her feel safe, and she squeezes it in her hand. Word cards fit well into Ann’s visual and sensory-motor approach to the surrounding world. If she has several word cards she will soon recognize most of them, and gradually she will begin to notice letters used repeatedly in different words, and talk to her family about these observations. This self-initiated exploration of the alphabetic code, in corporation with close ones who can read and write, commences her start as agent of her own learning.

**C Different from learning to speak vs. Similar to learning to speak**

According to phonics proponents, learning to read implies phonemic awareness, which the child cannot acquire without assistance, and that is why learning to read and write is fundamentally different from learning to speak and takes direct instruction. What this argument fails to take into account, however, is that our brain has constantly been developing new connections through human evolution concurrently with the need for new intellectual and physical skills required by the technological, cultural, cognitive and social development. Our innate ability to walk upright on two legs (once a new skill!) does not mean that we cannot learn to ride a bike and move forward this way. On the contrary, biking and reading are culturally developed superstructures of the two biological talents walking and talking that allow us to move and communicate in new ways. So, why is reading considered more difficult to learn than speaking? Apart from the obvious fact that speaking after all is the basic mode of human communication, there are two major reasons:

1. Phonics practitioners *make* learning to read more difficult than it had to be by separating the written language from what it stands for, using visual and auditory bits and pieces for training purposes;
2. Adults keep written language away from infants and young children on the ground that young children need not have access to print because they are too young to benefit from it. Glenn Doman, brain specialist and founder of The Institutes for the Achievements of Human Potential, Pennsylvania, opposes this view:

It is almost impossible to make the print too big to read. But it is certainly possible to make it too small, and that’s just what we’ve done. The underdeveloped visual pathway, from the eye through the visual areas of the brain itself, of the one-, two-, or three-year-old just can’t differentiate one word from another. ‘But isn’t it easier for a child to understand a spoken word rather than a written one?’ Not at all. The child’s brain, which is the only organ that has learning capacity, ‘hears’ the clear, loud television words [in commercials] through the ear and interprets them as only the brain can. Simultaneously the child’s brain ‘sees’ the big, clear television words through his eyes and interprets them in exactly the same manner. (Doman & Doman, 2006, pp. 4 f.)

Glenn Doman has found undiscovered learning potentials in children at an early age, and his results imply that learning to read gets more difficult the later the start, and easier the earlier the start. This fits very well into the notion of literacy enculturation. When the young child is being gently involved in the use of written language as a meaningful, visual language, learning to read has much in common with learning to speak.

**D Learning a technique vs. learning a language**

Phonics instruction teaches the child the techniques behind reading and writing, whereas literacy enculturation involves the young child directly in a meaningful, functional use of written language in real-life social situations, which implies the use of written words whenever they are communicatively helpful and meaningful. This is similar to what we do when we talk to the baby and use words appropriate in specific situations no matter how difficult they may be for the infant to understand or pronounce. Otherwise, how could we ever start talking to the baby?

Gradually the infant grabs the meaning of spoken words and phrases because we use them repeatedly in face-to-face contact to express feelings and needs and exchange information for practical purposes. If we use written language the same way in everyday life to convey messages, the child can take part in writing and reading: invitations, text messages, postcards, letters, notes on the refrigerator, shopping lists, recipes for joint cooking and baking, plans for sharing domestic duties, labels for indicating the place for toys etc. This way the child gets accustomed with the natural use of written language as a helpful tool in everyday life, rather than as a secret code for adults only.

**E From simple to complex vs. from known to unknown**

If we teach the child the letter-sound mechanisms of the alphabetic code before using writing and print in social-communicative practice, it is obviously easier to go from words simple in spelling-sound structure to more complex words, than from well-known words, complex in structure, to unknown, simple words. Of course, known words might be either complex or simple. However, if a well-known, useful and fascinating word is complex, phonics practitioners will not use it, because it is considered too complicated as long as the beginner masters only basic auditory-phonemic strategies. In literacy enculturation, however, the functional use of written language in a real-life use takes words and names the child is familiar with, whether complex or simple.

**F Orthographically regular texts vs. authentic, relevant texts**

As we have seen in comment E, phonics instruction follows the simple to complex principle, which means that the learner proceeds from words of simple spelling-sound structure, whether known or unknown, to complex ones. Consequently, phonics-based primers and textbooks are orthographically regular texts, whether relevant or not, interesting or not, whereas textbooks in literacy enculturation must be relevant and significant to those who are going to read them, whether orthographically regular or not.

**G One code vs. two codes**

Phonics proponents consider the alphabetic code, letter-sound, the fundamental and only educationally relevant link between speech and writing system, and therefore choose this code as the starting point of instruction. This approach seems to make teaching phonemic awareness a necessary start, before the child even sets eyes on print:

Phonemic awareness … is not necessary for speaking and understanding spoken language. However, phonemic awareness is important for learning to read. In alphabetic languages, letters (and letter clusters) represent phonemes, and in order to learn the correspondence between letters and sounds, one must have some understanding of the notion that words are made up of phonemes. This insight is not always easily achieved. Phonemes are abstract units, and when one pronounces a word one does not produce a series of discreet phonemes; rather, phonemes are folded into one another and are pronounced as a blend. Although most young children have no difficulty in segmenting words into syllables, many find it difficult to segment at the phoneme level (Williams, 1995, p. 185)

Certainly, this sounds more like trouble than a joyful and warm welcome to literacy! So, why is it that this hard way of introducing the child to reading and writing is so widely used in Western schooling? It is probably due to a number of famous studies, e.g. Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley, 1989 who found a lasting effect of improved reading skills if phonemic awareness had been a precursor to beginning reading instruction. However, it is worth noticing that the subsequent reading instruction in both groups was phonics, so what the studies actually showed, was not that phonemic awareness is a universally necessary precursor of any beginning instruction, but that it is beneficial when *subsequent reading instruction is phonics*. After all, this is no surprise considering the emphasis on letter-sound strategies in phonics. So, if conversely the young child’s first reading and writing takes place, say, in literacy supporting settings as an informal social practice, the Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley-studies say nothing about the prospects of success, with or without phonemic awareness as a precursor, to this kind of literacy learning.

The smallest independent part of a language that has the same qualities and characteristics as language is the word, whereas letters and phones (sounds) do not have this quality, even though they are a necessary part of any language. This is similar to e.g. a molecule of water being the smallest possible amount of water. If this molecule is split-up into its component parts, two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom, these elements have nothing in common with water. Nonetheless, phonics-based instruction introduces beginners to reading by drawing their attention to the ‘atoms’ of the language instead of to the molecules, the written words. By this constant cognitive focus on the non-linguistic elements from the very start, there is a risk that the technical aspect of reading will continue to dominate the reader’s mind at the expense of attention to content. In my Ph.D. study the experimental group more consciously searched for meaning than did the phonics trained control group who discovered significantly fewer own misreadings (p < 0.01). (Kjertmann, 1999, pp. 188 ff.)

The critical point is the order in which we introduce the two codes to the beginner. In literacy enculturation settings, the children see and hear meaningful written words before single letters and sounds. Written and spoken words, being the lexical and grammatical meaning units of the language, form one code. Letters and sounds, being the visual and audible elements of the words, form another. Two codes, different in function, but equally important:

*Code 1*: The written word is a two-way transmission link between spoken and written language at meaning level.

*Code 2*: Letters and letter clusters are a two-way transmission link between spoken and written language at pronunciation level.

If code 1 is the child’s first entry to literacy, written language can be used for the same purposes people have always used writing since the dawn of human civilization; i.e., real-life literacy. If conversely, code 2 is the child’s gateway to literacy, it takes quite a while before the child can read and write for meaningful, communicative purposes.

**H Auditory-phonetic reading vs. visual-semantic reading**

Phonics teaches the child to recode printed matter to spoken language and then understanding it by ‘using exactly the same mechanisms which he or she would bring to bear on its spoken equivalent’ (Gough & Tunmer, 1986, p. 9). So, according to phonics, reading comprehension is achieved by listening to your own spoken version of the text, aloud or silently, i.e., a purely auditory and phonetic strategy. One common way to practice the recoding technique is to read orthographically regular non-words like *clard, plim* or *stenk.* This, however, easily gives the child an impression of successful reading being a question of sounding out letter strings, rather than comprehending the coherent meaning and message of a text. Since a young reader in phonics settings relies more on his ears and hearing than on his eyes and seeing, it makes sense to call this way of reading *auditory-phonetic*.

Contrarily to this, a young child in literacy enculturation settings primarily *sees* relevant and meaningful written words that supportive adults or peers point out and demonstrate for the child. Such an early visual approach serves four purposes:

The development of

1. Meta-linguistic awareness
2. Semantic awareness
3. Reading and spelling strategies at word level
4. Reading strategies at text level
5. *Meta-linguistic awareness*

Children, who grow up in literacy settings with easy access to seeing familiar words in print or writing, soon learn that words have both a visible and an audible appearance. They also realize how these two reflect one another; i.e., how the meaning and pronunciation of a spoken word correspond to a certain letter string, and vice versa (Kjertmann, 2002, pp. 107 ff.; Söderbergh, 2011, pp. 97 ff.).

This mechanism of two senses, seeing and hearing, reciprocally activating one another, has a great potential for developing the learner’s linguistic awareness: The visual image of the written word activates the auditory image of the equivalent spoken word; and likewise, the spoken word activates the mental image of the equivalent written word. This way the child becomes conscious of the verbal unit ‘word’, both in writing and talking.

An observation I once made in Öjaby Day-Care Center in Sweden (age 1-6), can illustrate this mechanism. Since 1988, the staff have invited the children from age 1-3 to take part in the use of written language as an informal social practice in all daily routines; i.e., literacy enculturation based on the studies and theories of Swedish professor Ragnhild Söderbergh (*Söderbergh, 2000, pp. 7 f.*; Öjaby förskola, 2004, pp. 10 ff.). My studies in Öjaby were part of my Ph.D.-research:

One day I observed a girl of four who was eagerly watching a conversation between a six-year-old boy and one of the staff. Suddenly the girl grabbed hold of the teacher’s pants and exclaimed enthusiastically:

* There you said OCH [*and*]. That one I have in my word box!

What does this little incident tell us? Considering the modest role of the Swedish word ‘och’ in natural conversation, the girl’s attention and excitement is most surprising. There is only one explanation possible. In her visual memory, she had stored the mental image of ‘och’, and then the sound of ‘och’ triggered the mental image. In that split second, *her focus jumped from the content level of language to the structural level*, forgetting anything else but the word ‘och’. This would surely not have happened without the mental visual image of ‘och’ in her mind.

This mechanism also works the other way round; i.e., a written word activates its spoken equivalent. A participant at one of my lectures once told me the following incident:

Her family was on a peaceful Sunday’s drive in their car, when suddenly the two-year-old son pointed eagerly out of the window and exclaimed:

* Look! There’s the WEATHER!

They all looked out without understanding. Then one of them suddenly caught sight of a billboard saying DANICA, and then they remembered that *Danica* was sponsor of the weather report on the local tv-channel, so every day the boy had *seen* the word DANICA in big, nice letters on the screen, while at the same time he *heard* a loud and clear voice say:

* ‘And that was the WEATHER’

Thus, the connection between the spoken word WEATHER and the image of DANICA had become a conditioned reflex that activated the spoken word WEATHER, when he saw DANICA on the billboard and spontaneously exclaimed WEATHER! Imagine for a second that the word on the television screen had not been DANICA, but WEATHER! Then you realize the loss of learning in today’s mainstream reading education!

During my observations in Öjaby Day-Care Center, I heard the children spontaneously make comments on language they heard or saw. Their ability to distinguish the word from its object was surprising; only until I realized that by seeing the children’s names written everywhere to indicate ownership or duties, they were used to seeing big strong boys having short, humble names like *Bo*, or conversely, little shy girls having long, impressive names like *Anne Margrethe Louise*. To these children *eel* was not a long word just because the fish is long. Frequent and easy access to words in print or writing had shown them that words are of different sizes that have nothing to do with the size or shape of the object they stand for. This is contrary to the normal assumption that we must deal orally with the word-object problem before reading instruction. Rather, it seems to be the other way round.

1. *Semantic awareness*

Children in literacy enculturation settings like those in Öjaby Day-Care Center are used to connecting the sight of a written word with meaning. They know the word stands for something, even if they do not immediately remember the meaning or cannot read it on the spot; in other words, they have developed *semantic awareness*. This is due to written language never being introduced *just for learning or training purposes.* This meaningful start accustoms the child to written language as something worth dealing with because it may prove useful or joyful to him or her. The effect of this on the reader’s future reading and writing strategies is crucial. If this harmonious literacy development is not interrupted in school by phonics instruction, the child’s search for meaning and content will continue to go hand in hand with code 2 as a spelling-sound assistance tool.

1. *Reading and spelling strategies at word level*

The children in Öjaby Day-Care Center were accustomed to noticing and handling written words that interested them. They squeezed the word cards, copied them in writing, kept them in their personal word boxes, played with them in word games, and happily recognized them in children’s books. Their copying adult-written well-known words provided a solid ground for the further exploration of letter-sound relationships. The correct spelling of the adult-written words seems to help the child notice single sounds in consonant clusters. This, *writing as the visual entrance to phonemic awareness,* supports the child’s future spelling.

When looking at written words the young child catches sight of letters, letter groups and ‘hidden’ words, and gradually learns to recognize and pronounce these letter clusters. This way he or she builds a visual vocabulary of word images and frequent letter groups that is activated whenever the child wants to read or write a new word familiar in spelling-sound structure with well-known sight words. In Söderbergh, 1977, pp. 77-98, there is an impressive linguistic study of a young reader’s use of this strategy.

1. *Reading strategies at text level*

In Öjaby I heard children age 5-6 reading aloud this way, markedly different from the mechanical sounding-out normally heard in grade 1. What struck me was how the reader was one hundred percent preoccupied with rendering the content, and how the necessary sounding-out, never broke the narrative cohesion. This kind of reading I call *visual-semantic*. What characterizes visual-semantic reading is the *semantic awareness at utterance level from early age*.

The meaning of a text does not appear at word level, but is the result of a mutual syntactic and semantic contribution by phrases, clauses, and sentences. In order to understanding a text properly, it takes overlooking more than one word in a fixation. This is easier for children who have been accustomed to look at words as meaning units. The Öjaby-children I studied read fluently along the words, while at the same time monitoring whether the reading made sense. When looking for a misread word, their strategy was top-down, from utterance level to word level. They corrected the error by sounding out letter groups and letters in search for auditory clues to the word. When resuming the reading, they had not lost track of the semantic context. Worth noticing, the books were ordinary, authentic children’s books, not adapted editions (Kjertmann, 1999, pp. 198-200).

Unlike the Öjaby-children, phonics-trained beginners look for letters in the words as their main key to the spoken version of the text. They read word by word and stop if a word is difficult to decode. This one-by-one word reading makes monitoring the semantic coherence difficult, as meaning appears at the level of phrases and clauses. When resuming the reading after correcting an error, the reader has no inner voice to remind him/her of the immediately preceding events in the story. This can probably explain why phonics-trained beginners often lose track of the coherent meaning. When comparing with the Öjaby-children’s semantic awareness at utterance level from early age, there seems to be a gap between the two paradigms in the prospects of a future successful reading.

**I From phonemic awareness to reading/writing vs. from reading/writing to phonemic awareness**

It appears from comment G and H that in phonics instruction phonemic awareness precedes reading and writing, whereas reversely in literacy enculturation, the first writing and reading leads to phonemic awareness, which then supports further writing and reading.

**J Tests and drills are useful vs. tests and drills are harmful**

According to the language theory and learning theory behind phonics, learning to read and reading is a composition of sub skills. In order to develop satisfactory reading comprehension, these sub skills must be trained and mastered one by one (Perfetti, Landi & Oakland, 2005). This view of how to learn to read not only in the technical sense makes it natural and useful to exercise and test each of these sub skills. Consequently, phonics proponents fully support the notion of drills and tests at all stages of the process of learning to read.

Conversely, proponents of the enculturation paradigm consider drills and tests more harmful than useful. I quote two researchers expressing this view:

The danger in using the word skill in conjunction with reading and writing is that it can justify teaching blindly through instruction and drill. Literacy is a matter not of honing skills but of increasing confidence, familiarity, and understanding, all the consequences of meaningful use. A better metaphor for learning to read and to write than the acquisition of skills might be a growing acquaintance with a wide expanse of countryside or of a city neighborhood. And for such an acquaintance it is clear that experienced and collaborative guides are required, not drill exercises, and tests. (Smith, 1988, p. 103).

School can either encourage or discourage the development of a reading habit. The overemphasis on testing, a disease that seems to spreading world-wide, inhibits intellectual development by not allowing time or opportunity for students to develop their own interests by reading widely. (Krashen, 2011).

**K Literacy is a culturally neutral skill vs. literacy is a culturally sensitive practice**

British researcher Brian Street distinguishes between an ‘autonomous’ model of literacy; i.e., literacy being taught as a universal technique, independent of the local linguistic, social, and cultural context; and an ‘ideological’ model of literacy that takes into account local literacy, social, cultural and linguistic conditions (Street, 1984). These two models correspond respectively to the phonics and enculturation approach, apart from the enculturation view that learning how to read is not primarily a matter of schooling.

A striking likeness is the ideological model building on the local literacy practices and culture, which is precisely what literacy enculturation aims at, too; and the autonomous model being formal schooling and instruction in the techniques of alphabetic reading, irrespectively of the local language and culture, which is just the way phonics instruction works. The latter kind of isolated learning culture, separated from local literacy practices in community and families, has created the problem of differences between home literacy and school literacy that have a negative impact on literacy learning both at home and in school. (Fast, 2007; Heath, 1983; Hull & Schultz, 2002).

**Visions, implications, and results**

Compared to nowadays’ reading instruction a change to literacy enculturation will result in a completely new view of literacy before school. This is my vision: in future generations, the adults will feel responsible for inviting and guiding the young child to join ‘the literacy club’ (Smith, 1988). In literacy enculturation, anyone who can just read and write for everyday use is qualified to assist the child in daily literacy activities. Knowing the child well, will be a qualification more important than knowledge of phonics. Of course, there will be a need for advice and ideas, as long as this approach to literacy learning is new; but the general idea is to include written language in the adult-child relationship whenever this seems relevant and natural to do, and never just for learning or training purposes. This goes for literacy enculturation at home as well as in day-care, kindergarten or preschool.

In future literacy enculturation a key goal will be to coordinate the literacy practices in preschool and school in order to make the transition from preschool to grade 1 as smooth as possible. In Sweden and Denmark, children even experience two such transitions with changing approaches and attitudes to learning literacy: from day-care to preschool-class in school, and from preschool-class to grade 1. In fact, this created problems for the Öjaby-children when the teachers in the local primary school at first completely disregarded their high level of reading and writing, and just instructed them the usual phonics way. Only until one day, the head of the day-care staff invited the schoolteachers to see how they worked and what the children achieved. From being skeptical, the teachers soon became more interested and finally allowed the Öjaby-children to write and read their usual way. Today school and day-care cooperate in joint projects, like a vision come true.

In 2005, a review of six years’ observations of the six-year-old children who would be starting school after the summer holidays, showed that out of 187 children, 60% had been able to ‘write words that others could read and understand’, and ‘to decode new words, understand them and talk about what they meant’. In school, out of six years of students, grade 1 through 6, not one child from Öjaby Day-Care Center had been in need of remedial reading. In a national spelling test, the Öjaby-children, as a group, scored ‘a bit higher’ than children from other day-care centers. (Thorsjö, 2006, pp. 93 f.).

Considering the heavy burden of phonics-based teaching to the test in USA (Shelton & Altwerger, 2015), there seems to be a desperate need for a change in the collective attitude to literacy learning from being a state and federal responsibility to being a socially expected process of literacy enculturation in early childhood like the one in Öjaby Day-Care.

In preschool and grade 1, the enculturation perspective implies a new way of planning work; i.e., to coordinate the classroom work to the highest possible degree with literacy events and practices the children are familiar with from their everyday life in the local community.

In general, literacy enculturation in school implies the use of written language in accordance with what are its key functions; i.e., as a means of genuine, meaningful communication, in reception as well as in production. Typical activities will be reading authentic out-of-school books rather than primers, and writing and reading in IT-based real-life communication, the so-called new social practices and new literacies, rather than in worksheets and drill exercises (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003).

Kenneth Goodman’s description of a whole language classroom and a whole language teacher (Goodman, 2005) fits well into the notion of literacy enculturation in school, and so do Hull and Schultz, 2002 who emphasize the importance of bridging out-of-school literacies in the local community with classroom practice. Furthermore, Buckingham, 2003 is an excellent book on media education, including the new digital technologies, which will also be a natural part of contemporary literacy enculturation in school.

**Afterword**

Unfortunately, the only literature in English on Öjaby Day-Care Center is Söderbergh, 2000, which is precisely why I wrote this article. However, for those who would like to work with literacy enculturation, most literature on early childhood literacy, early reading, emergent literacy, family literacy, the literacy club, whole language, and young readers will be helpful, with Smith, 1988 and Söderbergh, 2000 as my personal favorites.

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