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# Balanced Literacy Strategies

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**Balanced Literacy Strategies**

by

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

For years the education world has debated the “best” methods to teach reading. What should educators focus on: skills-based approach or meaning based approach (Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass, & Massengill, 2005)? Some research suggests that skills-based approach which focuses on phonics is the best way to achieve reading success for students, while others believe that creating an understanding, or comprehension, of the text leads to reading success for students (Frey et al., 2005). A brief look back in literary history shows the change in reading philosophies over time. In the 1960s and 70s there was a push for skills mastery curriculum models and instruction. Then, reading instruction shifted to a comprehension model in the 80s and then evolved into literature based in the 1980s and 90s. Within that span the Basal Reading Instruction disappeared from some school resources but stayed prevalent in many other schools (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2000).

The best way to conduct literacy instruction has been debated and changed many times throughout history and researchers continue to look for ways to improve students’ ability to read. Recently, more research has been conducted on balanced literacy and its benefits. Balanced literacy is defined for the purpose of this paper as: “A philosophical perspective that seeks to combine, or balance, skill-based and meaning-based instruction in order to ensure positive reading and writing results in children” (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013, p. 15). This new philosophy aims to take the two methods that have been debated for years and combine them to create a literacy framework that focuses on phonics skills and comprehension skills. The purpose of this research was to describe the nature of balanced literacy and to identify strategies that are supported by a balanced literacy framework.

## **Personal Reasons to Do the Research**

My interest in the topic of balanced literacy comes from a student that I had in my second grade class. My first year teaching I had a student named Adam\*. Adam was a problem-solver, an athlete, and loved math. When it came to reading, Adam shut down; it was like he had just given up. It broke my heart to see a young, second grade, student become so removed during reading. At this time I was using a whole group approach where students listened to me teaching for 30-50 minutes. Students completed workbook pages and all students read the same basal reader story. I thought that there has to be some approach that I could use to hook my disengaged readers, like Adam. I began researching Balanced Literacy and wanted to know more about what strategies support and help to engage readers. I wanted to find out what strategies best support a balanced literacy approach.

My interest in this topic stems from Adam, as well as others in my second-grade classroom. The students' enthusiasm for reading, their performance on state standardized tests, and my own love of reading started to suffer and I needed to find a way to bring the enjoyment back to learning. I needed to find a way to mesh together important skills in literacy such as: phonics, comprehension, and fluency to create a balanced approach. Thus began my research into the question: What strategies would be best to implement in my classroom to meet the needs of all students?

In the 2014-2015 school year, the school that I teach at formed a Literacy Leadership Team (LLT) to pilot new curriculum resources and a new way of delivering the learning to students, using a balanced literacy framework. I was a part of the LLT pilot team to determine if balanced literacy is what is best for students. As part of this team I helped in the decision of

which curriculum resources would best fit our students' needs and rigor, began creating curriculum maps, and provided training to staff that were not in the pilot group on ways that they could incorporate small parts of balanced literacy framework into their teaching. In the 2015-2016 school year, our school adopted the new framework and curriculum resources as a building, Kindergarten-Fifth Grade. The new framework proved to be engaging for all students; they performed well in high stakes testing and learned to be independent learners.

The balanced literacy framework is a shift for our staff and students. I am interested in this topic because after teaching out of a basal series and framework, I can see huge gains in students' literacy excitement. This gave me hope for students, like Adam, who had become so disengaged with reading. The shift that students went through to gain independence and ownership of their reading was extensive, but has proved to be successful in test scores and student engagement surveys. My interest in this topic has lead me to research these main ideas, balanced literacy versus basal instruction, the definition of balanced literacy, balanced literacy benefits, and strategies in balanced literacy framework including guided reading.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that I pursued are:

- How has literacy instruction evolved in recent history?
- What is balanced literacy?
- What strategies support a balanced literacy framework?

These research questions will be answered by looking at previous studies and research. The findings from this study will be used to inform educators wanting more information about balanced literacy frameworks and strategies that support a balanced literacy framework. I will

use the findings to share information with Professional Learning Communities in collaboration and discussion. I will also use the information to engage students in literacy instruction. This research will explore the role of the teacher and student during literacy instruction, timeframes for instruction, and assessments. This information will help guide classrooms looking to implement balanced literacy.

Chapter 2 provides a brief history of literacy and how it has changed in concepts and delivery. The next chapter also looks at four main ideas to find strategies that support a balanced literacy approach. The main ideas addressed in Chapter 2 include: balanced literacy versus basal instruction, definition of balanced literacy, balanced literacy benefits, and strategies in balanced literacy framework, guided reading. In Chapter 3, I summarize the research and findings on what strategies best support a balanced literacy approach and recommendations for teaching using a balanced literacy framework.

### **Definitions**

*Balanced literacy:* As defined by Bingham and Hall-Kenyon (2013) balanced literacy is a “philosophical perspective that seeks to combine, or balance, skill-based and meaning-based instruction in order to ensure positive reading and writing results in children” (p. 15).

*Basal reader:* Basal reading is the use of a reading textbook, a basal reader, that has stories at grade level. Students read the stories, learn controlled vocabulary words, and have lessons on specific language skills necessary for reading. Classes can be grouped according to student reading levels. All students in a grade read the same basal reading materials. There could be differentiated instruction based on student levels (Smith, 2015).

*Guided reading:* Small groups of students meet with the teacher during literacy instruction to participate in guided reading. The teacher selects an appropriate level book for the specific group of students. The selection is based on prior assessments. The teacher then teaches the small group of students using the level-appropriate book while focusing on reading strategies. The small group can read silently, aloud, as a group, or with the teacher to have context for the strategy focus. In a guided reading group students do most of the reading while the teacher helps to guide the students. (Frey et al., 2005).

*Whole language:* Whole language is defined as a movement between 1975-1995 where classroom teachers shifted reading and writing instruction to include making meaning out of text (Smith, 2015). Whole language shifted focus to authentic all inclusive (reading, writing, spelling, and grammar) learning (Moore, 2002).

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

The following review of literature explores the balanced literacy framework and strategies that may lead to success. The review explores four ideas surrounding balanced literacy. First, what is the difference between a balanced literacy approach and other reading instruction like Whole Language and basal reading. Next, the definition of balanced literacy and the benefits of a balanced literacy approach to teaching reading instruction. Lastly, the review examined the strategies in a balanced literacy framework, including guided reading instruction in small groups.

### **Balanced Literacy Instruction vs. Whole Language and Basal Reading Instruction**

As education evolves, so does its literacy programs and literacy delivery for students. The history of literacy shows how different strategies and theories have developed. Barry (2008) suggested the recent history of literacy instruction began in 1979 when Goodman published a whole language paper. Goodman (1989) stated the common features of whole language as: integration of curriculum, use of authentic predictable materials for reading and writing, and democratic classrooms. Then, in 1980 Canada began presenting whole language workshops (Barry, 2008). According to Smith (2015), whole language elements were founded on theories that children and adults use similar strategies to process and comprehend. Components of Whole Language include adults modeling reading, recognizing words in context, and phonics skills are acquired naturally through literature exposure. Hornstein (2002) stated that, “The Whole Language Umbrella (WLU) was founded as a language support group which believes that

language is central to human learning. WLU believes that learning is easiest from whole to part in authentic contexts and functional for the learners” (pp. 677-678).

In 1988, California adopted whole language theory and the shift became politicized (Smith, 2015). After California's adoption of whole language theories, more studies and conclusions were drawn by schools and states using Whole Language theory to educate students. California was one of the first states to move away from Whole Language and move toward direct skills instruction to help students gain the skills that Whole Language left out, such as phonics instruction (Smith, 2015). After several other reports emerged. In 2000, The Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read, concluded, “effective reading programs should include instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension” (Barry, 2008, p. 46). Some see the conclusions as controversial because of the study limited what studies were considered. The National Reading Panel conclusion stated that effective reading programs should encompass several strategies to teach children to read. Utilizing many strategies leads instructors to use a balanced literacy approach to teaching literacy. According to Bingham and Hall-Kenyon (2013), balanced literacy is a “Philosophical perspective that seeks to combine, or balance, skill-based and meaning-based instruction in order to ensure positive reading and writing results in children” (p. 15). Throughout the history of literacy, there has been a tug between basal reading, Whole Language, and a balanced approach to literacy.

Basal reading, according to Morin (2016), a school-age child expert, includes skills that help students to learn to read. These skills include: phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and prosody. Basal reading instruction materials include grade-level textbooks

that are produced by an educational publishing company. The textbooks teach using a code-emphasis approach or a meaning-emphasis approach. The code-emphasis, or skills based instruction, places importance on explicitly teaching phonics skills to children (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013). According to Bingham and Hall-Kenyon, this method teaches students skills such as: phonics, grammar, spelling, and alphabetic principle so that they can decipher what they are reading. Contemporary basal reading materials focus on vocabulary, shared stories, and phonics. According to Moore (2002), “Basal readers from the 1930s-60s show a stronger influence from a controlled vocabulary and analytic approach than from synthetic phonics. Workbooks and worksheets dominated the era with a focus on high frequency vocabulary and phonics skills” (p. 46). The holistic, whole language method means that kids have the ability to naturally make sense of reading and writing as they interact with text and print (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013).

Balanced literacy, in contrast to basal reading instruction, uses several texts to engage readers at their level. Students are assessed to determine their reading level. To determine a child’s reading level the instructor can use a leveling kit designed to look at a child’s fluency, decoding strategies, and comprehension and retell ability. Then, the instructor is able to teach strategies using a book at the child’s reading level. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) reported teachers implementing a balanced literacy framework need access to books at many levels for differentiation. Most of the texts are short so teachers can teach a lesson in a short amount of time and work on specific literacy skills. According to Frey et al. (2005), there are several balanced literacy components. The components could include: independent writing, read alouds, independent reading, shared reading, center activities, guided reading, and other. Students are

expected to engage in independent activities while the teacher is working in a small guided reading group. Students work independently on stations while the teacher works in a small guided group.

Balanced literacy includes components from both Whole Language theories and basal reading. Whole Language plays a role in Balanced Literacy, but differs because of the phonics instruction that is used in a Balanced Literacy approach. In Balanced Literacy instruction, similarly to Whole Language instruction, students have reading modeled by adults, construct word meaning in text, and reading authentic texts during independent reading and whole group reading. Also, in Balanced Literacy instruction, similarly to Basal Reading instruction, students focus on phonics skills, phonemic awareness, and fluency.

### **Definition of Balanced Literacy**

Balanced literacy takes several skills in reading and combines them to create a balanced learning opportunity for students. For many years the debate has been, code based or meaning based literacy instruction. Balanced literacy takes both of the methods and combines them, creating a balanced approach to literacy instruction. Bingham and Hall-Kenyon (2013) concluded that, “most educators would suggest literacy instruction should promote the interaction between the skill-based aspects of reading (e.g., phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, letter-sound association) and the meaning-based aspects of reading (e.g., vocabulary, comprehension)” (p. 15).

A balanced literacy framework requires abilities of educators and administrators to effectively create a balance of learning. The teacher is required to organize and run many activities during instruction to meet the needs of all students. To do this, teachers must have a

supportive administration team who trusts teacher decision so that all literacy abilities will be met with the balanced instruction. “This balance includes daily reading and writing activities, independent reading with self-selection of texts, teacher read alouds, writing, oral and literacy responses” (Duffy, Ivey, & Baumann, 2002, p. 43). This balance of instruction creates opportunities for students to meet the demands of learning how to read through multiple learning opportunities.

A balanced literacy approach has historical precedent. Research concludes that there has not been a “balanced era in American literary history” there has been interest by some historically. Some of the interest between 1925-1963 was from William S. Gray, H. Alan Roinson, Mary Austin, and Coleman Morrison, all who concluded that a combination of skills would benefit students greatly (Duffy et al., 2002). A balanced literacy approach was first implemented in California in 1996. California was first to implement this type of reading framework to increase student’s achievement on a national assessment, that had reported low scores (California Department of Education, 1996). After California implemented a more balanced literacy approach, several states made a slow move towards direct phonics instruction (Smith, 2015).

Research has been conducted on what types of strategies and skills create the most effective balance in literacy instruction. According to Frey et al. (2005), there needs to be a balance between teacher-directed instruction and student-centered learning. Research suggests balanced literacy should include principles of effective learning and teaching. Balanced literacy would include both teacher-directed and student-centered learning through a framework where

the teacher would teach for a smaller amount of time than in Basal Reading instruction and then students would practice the skills used with meaningful texts at their level.

According to Asselin and Pearson, literacy programs should include the effective learning and teaching principles: elements of community, authenticity, integration, optimism, modeling, and student-control and connectedness (as cited in Frey et al., 2005). In order to lead students to success in literacy, the teacher must be prepared to effectively manage time during the literacy block. Research suggests, “Effective instructional practices include strategies that maximize the amount of time spent on instruction, student engagement, and opportunities to respond and those that minimize student negative behavior, transition time, interruptions, and time spent talking about unrelated topics” (Stichter, Stormont, & Lewis, 2009, p. 172).

### **Balanced Literacy Benefits**

Benefits of using a balanced literacy framework are: differentiation in instruction, gradual release of responsibility, and balanced instruction. A balanced literacy instructional approach allows for multiple activities to occur to increase student success and to create differentiation in teacher instruction. The students spend time working independently, in small groups, and one-on-one with the teacher. Students who are working independently can work on a variety of literacy based activities. According to Opitz and Ford (2004), students can work on seven centers: class libraries, listening, literature response, poetry, research, spelling/word work, and writing during independent work time. According to Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass, and Massengill, benefits to balanced literacy, “...allow for differentiated literacy instruction and is posited as a way of helping children gain access to developmentally appropriate literacy knowledge skills” (as cited by Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013, p. 16).

The use of the gradual release of responsibility model helps to increase positive outcomes of a Balanced Literacy framework. The Gradual Release of Responsibility starts with teacher directed and modeled instruction. Then, through guided practice, the teacher releases responsibilities to students. This works with the Balanced Literacy model whole group, guided reading, and then moving to independent practice. According to Fisher (2008), there are four components of Gradual Release of Responsibility. The four components include: focus lesson, guided instruction, collaborative learning, and independent work. This model coincides with a Balanced Literacy framework in a classroom. A focus lesson would include a teacher directed whole group lesson where the teacher will model thinking for students to see. Then, the guided instruction could take place in whole group or small group. During guided instruction the teacher will prompt and facilitate lesson and process for students. Then, students participate in collaboration. The collaboration takes place throughout the literacy block by using small groups, partner share, and whole group sharing. Finally, students move into independent work where they are able to practice what they have learned independently in their own texts. Using the Gradual Release of Responsibility allows a teacher to set up a classroom where instruction is balanced.

Balanced literacy includes several components to truly create a balance of instruction. There needs to be a balance of time in a Balanced Literacy framework. Taylor suggested a minimum of 90 minutes of instruction, but 120 minutes of instruction is recommended. The reading block must also include a balance between, classroom management, goals, and a variety of tools (as cited in Houck, 2008). Creating a balance within instruction is important to student learning.

### **Strategies in Balanced Literacy Framework**

**Guided Reading.** To help create student engagement in the classroom, a balanced literacy framework includes a guided reading approach. Guided reading groups are small groups of students at similar reading levels working with the teacher to engage in texts. The purpose of guided reading groups is to give students an opportunity to work at their instructional level using texts that provide for deeper thinking, connections, and interest to the readers. These groups are more likely to provide a positive and engaging opportunity for students to create a sense of life-long learning (Kasten, 2002).

Guided reading groups can be used with all students at all levels. Iaquina (2006) stated: Guided reading is a teaching approach used with all readers, struggling or independent, that has three fundamental purposes: to meet the varying instructional needs of all students in the classroom, enabling them to greatly expand their reading powers; to teach students to read increasingly difficult texts with understanding and fluency; to construct meaning while using problem solving strategies to figure out unfamiliar words that deal with complex sentence structures, and understand concepts or ideas not previously encountered. (p. 414)

Guided reading groups allow teachers to meet the varying instructional needs of all students because the text complexity varies from group to group. This variation allows for differentiation among literacy strategies and teachings.

Guided reading groups students of like abilities together to continue and practice literary strategies. While students work in these small groups, the teacher's job is to prompt and continue to guide the students through the text (Iaquina, 2006). Guided reading is just a part of a

balanced literacy framework that works in sync with Guided Release of Responsibility. The teacher's role in guided reading groups is to help facilitate and guide students as they practice the reading skills and strategies. According to Iaquina (2006), "... a teacher's role is to move from student to student, listening in as the student reads aloud" (p. 414). The goal of guided reading can be reached by the support of an interaction of text reading and good teaching (Iaquina, 2006).

When implementing a guided reading group it is recommended to allow students to read out loud as a group with the teacher or independently. A study conducted with 78 second-grade students in the Rocky Mountain region concluded that a shared reading experience allowed for greater student comprehension, fewer word error, and more language acquisition (Eldredge, Reutzler, & Hollingsworth, 1996). The study took the sample group and divided the students into two groups, round-robin reading, and shared reading. Both groups read the same material but in different ways, round-robin and shared reading. Shared reading meant that the students read the text as a whole, small group, or independently and discussed. Round-robin reading meant that the students took turns reading around the table. The study showed that at the end of the 4-month timeframe the group that was participating in the shared reading grew in the areas of fewer word error, comprehension, and acquisition of vocabulary (Eldredge et al., 1996).

When implementing a guided reading group with students it is recommended that teachers use strategies other than round-robin oral reading. Round-robin reading refers to the practice of one student at a time reading a text selection and the others following along. Then, the student stops at the end of a sentence or paragraph and the next student continues. Many

experts have concluded that the use of this particular strategy is outdated and could make reading harder for students (Flippo, 2002).

### **Teacher and Student Roles**

The teacher and student have roles that help to create a balance of learning in a balanced literacy framework classroom. Balanced literacy uses a guided release of responsibility model by allowing students to gradually gain responsibility of their learning. The role of the teacher is to guide students to understand and comprehend, make meaning of words, and find patterns in words. The students have several jobs that lead to success and progress.

Another part of incorporating a balanced literacy framework is creating routines and “literacy friendly” learning spaces. Stichter et al. (2009) stated: “Additionally, decades of research and a recent meta-analysis indicate that establishing and teaching clear expectations and routines are significantly correlated with positive student outcomes” (p. 172). Frey et al. (2005) found that in 32 schools they studied (463 classroom visits), over 90% of classrooms had classroom/student libraries, centers, literacy displays, large group areas, and books grouped by level. In those classrooms, over 80% had examples of student work posted, criterion charts posted, and small group areas. The role of the teacher is to establish the routines in a classroom to allow for positive student learning. Teachers setup classroom libraries including multiple genre, high student interest, and student appropriate text. The teacher leads the class by setting up these areas prior to students or in partnership with students to create a sense of ownership.

A study by Metsala and Wharton-McDonald (1997) documented nine practices that were seen in 89 regular education classrooms and 34 special education classrooms. The classrooms all provided authentic and diverse opportunities in literature. The study also compared

classrooms that had not been identified as “outstanding classrooms” by their administration with those that were not identified as outstanding. The regular classrooms had less reading and writing than the “outstanding classrooms” (Metsala & Wharton-McDonald, 1997, p. 520). A similar study of effective teachers by Pressley, Rankin, and Yokoi (as cited in Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002) revealed over 300 effective literacy strategies. The study concluded that, “Their teacher reports raised the possibility that the balance model was extremely complicated. Effective curricular balancing is analogous to juggling hundreds of balls in the air. To further complicate this intricate juggling act, the precise balance of balls varies from child to child and situation to situation during the school day” (Pressley et al., 2002, p. 3). This suggests that it is a very delicate and ever changing balance between strategies, set-up, and supports based on the students.

The teacher has a difficult task of managing all of the components and keeping those components meaningful and moving. While students are meeting with the teacher in a small guided reading group, the student roles vary. Students work on different groups or stations depending on the classroom routines that have been put into place. The “Two Sisters” Gail Boushey and Joan Moser, have developed a framework for students to build literacy habits during independent work time. The Daily 5 is a system developed by Boushey and Moser (2012) to engage students in a variety of literacy stations that support a balanced literacy framework. The five stations are: read to self, work on writing, read to someone, listen to reading, and word work. The five stations help students to build their reading stamina and promote independence while lessening the need for constant reminders and redirection in classroom behavior.

Students engage in independent reading during balanced literacy instruction. This means that students are given time to read silently or orally on their own. Research has shown that students achieve higher in literacy when students read independently at home and at school. An example from An Encyclopedia of History, Theory, and Practice entry by Castle (2002) states, “Children’s reading in and out of school will increase their word knowledge, fluency, and reading comprehension. The reason, for example, that if children in grades three through twelve learn the meanings of 3,000 new words yearly, as they seem to do, then it would be impossible to teach all those new words directly” (p. 240). Researchers then argue that most of those new words are learned through independent reading. Incorporating independent reading into daily literacy activities will provide students with time to expand vocabulary.

### **Time**

To create a balanced literacy framework in a classroom, there must be strategies and practices in place. Studies in various schools show the efficacy of implementing a balanced literacy framework. The following studies show the percentage of the time spent on various activities, the classroom setup and supports the schools have in place to support a balanced literacy framework. As stated earlier in Chapter 2, research suggests: “Effective instructional practices include strategies that maximize the amount of time spent on instruction, student engagement, and opportunities to respond and those that minimize student negative behavior, transition time, interruptions, and time spent talking about unrelated topics” (Stichter et al., 2009, p. 172). A balance of skills and time are necessary to ensure that students spend as much time engaged in literacy, minimizing transition time and maximizing learning time.

Frey et al. (2005) studied an Urban district that in its first year of balanced literacy framework implementation, had a balance between activities and strategies in the classroom. The study observed literacy time in 29 elementary classrooms with 467, 20-minute observations. The results were: 20% of time spent on independent writing, 18% time spent on read alouds, 17% time spent on independent reading, 8% of time spent on shared reading, 3% time spent on center activities, 3% time spent on guided reading, and 19% time spent on other balanced literacy activities. The study included information about different strategies and time spent on them. The strategies Frey et al. observed were conferencing, accountable talk, predictions, and pair and share.

A New York found that literacy played a role in almost all instruction that occurred in the classroom (Pressley et al., 2002). A teacher who participated in the study noted: “I would say everything we do in here...is so integrated that, to do any activity in here, they need to read something. So I would say for everything we do in here, there is a reading portion...” (Pressley et al., 2002, p. 4). Classrooms that are practicing balanced literacy instruction and are successful always have a lot of learning happening (Pressley et al., 2002). An urban school district study also found that non-Title 1 schools had more success in continuing to engage students due to more instructional talk, positive transitions and feedback, and fewer students leaving the classroom (Frey et al., 2005).

The above studies and observations show the balance between different literacy strategies that support classroom setup and supports in place to implement and maintain a Balanced Literacy framework in classrooms. The studies conducted in Urban Districts show that there is a balance of instruction that also align with the practice of Guided Release of Responsibility. The

study showed that there was time spent in whole group, guided practice, collaborative work, and independent work which allow students to learn, model, and independently do to gain responsibility of their learning. The Commission on Reading has suggested that students should spend 2 hours out-of-school independently reading by third grade to increase fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and overall reading (Castle, 2002).

A study conducted with 35 teachers and 723 students found that 40% of literacy time is spent on whole group instruction. The rest of time breaks down as such: 32% independent work, and 8% spent in small group work (Stichter et al., 2009). Therefore, the amount of time spent with each guided reading group is important in creating powerful lessons that focus on skills to help students grow as readers. The components of guided reading work together to create a powerful lesson. The components (in order) that will help to build student comprehension are: selecting appropriate text, introducing the text, reading the text (or portion), discussing and revising the text, teaching for processing strategies, extending the meaning of the text, and word work (Iaquinta, 2006). According to Spiegel (as cited by Guastello & Lenz, 2005), “As powerful as the small-group guided reading sessions can be, they must be understood as one part of a comprehensive or balanced literacy program” (p. 145). This part of the balanced literacy framework helps students to take what they have learned in whole group, and practice it with the teacher and a small group of other students. Eventually, they will be released to independent practice with the skills.

## Assessment

A balanced literacy framework allows for student assessment. When students are working in guided reading groups, the teacher is able to listen and observe the student as he or she reads (Guastello & Lenz, 2005). Running records are used to assess students in a balanced literacy framework. Running records are assessed by a teacher listening to a student read then asking comprehension and critical thinking questions following the text. The teacher is also listening for fluency, words read per minute, and expression in the students reading. The International Reading Association said, “62% of their members use running records as an assessment” (Ross, 2004, p. 187). In order to effectively implement running records as an assessment, Ross indicated that there must be professional development for teaching staff as well as administration. Teacher’s in a Canadian study received six, 60-minute workshops with video instruction and modeling with the literacy coach, while principals received three half-day professional development sessions (Ross, 2004).

There are many factors that help shape a student’s literary success. As the focus is shifting toward *Common Core* and career- and college-ready standards, the bar continues to rise for students and their education path (Connor et al., 2014). Research by Connor et al. indicates that more than 30% of fourth graders (in public school) were not able to perform literacy strategies that standards suggest they should be able to. The literacy debate between skill-based or whole language has reached a conclusion for now, a balanced literacy approach to help increase student success in literacy achievement by combining literacy strategies.

### **Chapter 3: Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to determine differences between balanced literacy and past literacy frameworks and teachings, basal readers versus balanced literacy, and strategies that support a balanced literacy framework. In summary, the purpose of this study was to research balanced literacy and strategies that support the framework. The research compared balanced literacy to basal reading and whole language. The research concluded that balanced literacy is a combination of skills-based and meaning-based teaching to provide a balance instruction to reading. Balanced literacy includes both teacher-directed and student-centered learning through whole group instruction, small group instruction, and independent work.

The benefits of a balanced literacy framework is differentiation in instruction, gradual release of responsibility, and balanced instruction in phonics, fluency, and comprehension. This study looked at guided reading groups and effective strategies to incorporate, such as shared reading instead of round-robin reading. After classroom routines have been created allowing for more student independence through stations, outlined by the Daily 5 Sisters.

The role of the teacher was found key by many researchers. Research suggested that to have a successful implementation of a balanced literacy framework the teacher needed to be able to manage all stations, students, and text to provide all students opportunities to succeed. The student roles changed as they moved from one activity to the next during literacy. While still keeping in mind an effective time schedule and assessment tools to ensure growth of students.

#### **Recommendations**

Districts, administration, and teachers looking to implement a balanced literacy framework need to be aware of the research surrounding the concept and how to best support

staff, implement materials, provide professional development time, and resources available prior to implementing. Below are my recommendations for implementation and continuation of balanced literacy.

1. Professional Development: A true balanced literacy framework requires a ton of work by all parties involved: teachers, students, administration, parents, and school staff. There are some researchers who doubt that balanced literacy will bring about positive results. David Pearson and Taffy Raphael have cautioned that balanced literacy simplifies how complex reading is, and instead have said that teachers must exercise a balance of context and curricular factors to provide the balance to instruction (Duffy et al., 2002). That being said, school districts need to provide ongoing professional development to educators. Speigel said (as cited by Duffy et al., 2002), "...teacher decision-making is central to a balanced literacy approach, which helps teachers become reflective when determining how to accommodate students' individual needs through the reading curriculum and instruction" (p. 44). The reflective teacher needs the tools of reflection, planning, and organization to move forward using a balanced literacy approach to teaching. Gerald Duffy and James Hoffman (as cited by Baumann & Hoffman, 1998) argued that the teacher is the key to an effective literacy learning experience. Duffy and Hoffman (1998) believe that balanced literacy depends on the teacher's expertise in teaching individual children and applying that ability to teaching the entire class. The experts agree that this will become an increasingly difficult process when educating current and new teachers to the profession (Duffy et al., 2002). As districts move forward with implementation of

- balanced literacy my recommendation is ongoing and frequent opportunities for professional development.
2. **Scheduling and Trust:** In order to effectively implement balanced literacy research shows that it is best to have a long block of time devoted to literacy learning, preferably un-interrupted. The yearly schedule should be well thought out and agreed upon by several people, administration, teachers, specialists, and support staff, inside a school building. Also, the trust of teachers and that they know their students' needs based on assessment, personal connections, and professional development that was provided to make informed decisions regarding literacy.
  3. **Low Class Sizes:** Class sizes should be kept low so that guided reading groups can stay between the recommended 4-6 students. By keeping class sizes lower the teacher has the ability to meet with the groups more frequently.
  4. **Detailed Plans for Implementation and Resource Availability:** Having a detailed "roll-out" plan for implementation is key to a positive staff understanding and implementation. Providing a clear plan and goal will help get all staff excited and "on board!" Also, making sure that the resources are available for all, such as small group reading books. There are options for availability, school book room, individual teacher resources, or shared resources by one to three teachers.

### **For Future Research**

The research of literacy will continue to form and change over time as the "literacy battle" continues. A balanced literacy framework helps to create a balance between many of the components that teachers, administrators, parents, and students continue to battle. The research

found in this starred paper helps to define balanced literacy, discuss the differences between balanced literacy, basal reading, and whole language by providing a brief history of literacy. The research also outlines strategies and implementation ideas for a balanced framework in literacy instruction.

Next steps in researching balanced literacy may be to further develop literacy groups during independent work time. This research would include teacher led groups, independent reading, partner reading, reading response journals, phonics, and how writing fits into the framework. Researchers would want to research different resources to use in a balanced literacy classroom to best support the students. A research question for future researchers of balanced literacy could be: What materials will the students and school need to successfully implement a balanced literacy framework that differentiates for all learners effectively? The research on resources may lead to curriculum resources, book rooms, classroom libraries, and student leveling kits. Literacy has endless opportunities for continued research as current generations work to help our future leaders succeed in reading by providing them with the best balance!

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