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## UNIT 3 CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO TEACHING READING AND WRITING

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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Our understanding regarding how children learn influences how we teach them and this, in turn, influences what they learn. In the previous Unit, we discussed how the maturationist and behaviourist perspectives inform the teaching-learning of reading and writing. These two perspectives have been adopted widely, however, now they are considered as the traditional perspectives.

In contemporary times, the constructivist perspective is highly recommended and adopted by several scholars and educators across the globe. It is because this perspective truly acknowledges and harnesses the natural pattern of a child's learning and development which the other two perspectives fail to do. You would be able to understand this point well as you go through this Unit. We will also discuss two approaches to literacy that draw heavily from the constructivist perspective – the whole language approach and the balanced comprehensive approach.

Strategies and activities to develop children's language skills in light of the constructivist perspective will be discussed in the later Units of this Course.

Further, we will also discuss the meaning and significance of early/emergent literacy which is also informed by the constructivist perspective. Finally, we will discuss how early literacy skills and concepts develop over the first eight years.

## Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the constructivist perspective of learning and its implication for reading and writing;
- list out and understand three major approaches to literacy that draw from the constructivist perspective;
- understand the meaning and significance of early/emergent literacy;
- discuss the implications for language learning in light of emergent literacy; and
- map the development of skills and concepts of early literacy from birth up to eight years.

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## 3.2 COGNITIVE-DEVELOPMENT OR CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE

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This perspective holds that children do not passively receive knowledge from adults, rather they actively construct their understanding of people, events and objects through hands-on exploration and social experiences. It strongly rejects the behaviourist perspective that advocates that a child's learning or behaviour can be shaped without the child playing a significant role in the process. It rather emphasizes sensory learning, i.e., the child learns through looking, touching, listening, and so on. The child constantly interacts with people and objects in her environment and uses her sensory and mental abilities as well as prior knowledge to understand and interpret her experiences.

Children are not viewed as uniform beings who can be trained with a uniform/standard kind of instruction, but as individuals who develop at different rates and have individual differences in their learning.

Jean Piaget was the first scholar to put forth this view of children's knowledge construction. Learning, as per Piaget, takes place in sequential developmental stages in which children actively construct knowledge as they explore and engage with their environment, progressing from a concrete to an abstract understanding of the world around them.

Lev Vygotsky, another famous psychologist further added the aspect of culture in the child's learning and development. You may even recall from Unit 14 of MCD-001 that Vygotsky's theory is called a socio-cultural theory. Zone of proximal development is yet another important concept proposed by Vygotsky, i.e., the distance between what the child can do independently and what the child can do with assistance from adults or more expert peers.

Although Piaget and Vygotsky both agreed that children actively construct their own knowledge, Vygotsky placed a far greater emphasis on the role of language and culture in this process. The social aspect of his theory emphasized that children learn and acquire knowledge by socially interacting with adults such as teachers and parents and more expert peers and siblings. The cultural aspect of his theory is that children do not construct all of their

knowledge on their own, but acquire knowledge from their culture. Children in different cultures acquire knowledge and skills valued by their own culture – weaving, hunting, fishing, farming, reading, writing, driving, cooking or operating computers.

Therefore, constructivism is not equivalent to letting children do whatever they want to do under the garb of active learning. The role of the child in her learning is active, however, it is also mediated by her environment and culture. Children need to engage in their own knowledge construction, but they also need guidance from knowledgeable adults. Effective education is quite impossible without that.

Mary Clay (1967), an educator from New Zealand is yet another known name in constructivist theory. She strongly opposed the maturationist and behaviourist views of language and literacy. She rather advocated for the integrated development of a child's language and literacy. We will read more about it in Section 3.3 of this Unit.

Further, the supporters of the constructivist perspective recognize that children's thinking is qualitatively different from adults' thinking. It becomes more adult-like over some time through biological maturation as well as the influence of life experiences.

Hence, this perspective recognizes that both 'nature' and 'nurture' play a part in children's development and learning. This aspect makes this perspective the most relevant perspective for the teaching-learning of language.

Let us further discuss some of the general implications of a constructivist perspective for language teaching-learning.

### ***Implications of Constructivist Perspective for Language Learning***

- a) **Understanding or meaning-making through one's interaction with the environment is primarily essential to the constructivist perspective of learning.** Therefore, reading and writing are not taught as mechanical skills. To constructivists, there is no reading without comprehension and no writing without expression. Ample relevant opportunities and support are provided to children to explore and practice their language and literacy skills. For example, a constructivist teacher is more likely to encourage a child to draw or write about an experience in her own words and script, than to expect her to copy a poem from the blackboard. It is because, in the former activity, the child gets an opportunity to practice her writing skills by sharing an experience in words/script that holds personal meaning and interest to her, while the latter activity may mean nothing except a reproduction of words that she does not relate with.
- b) **The process of learning language skills is more important than achieving the final product of the learning.** Therefore, children are very much encouraged in their early attempts at speaking, reading or writing. What behaviourists may call 'errors', constructivists view as marks of a child's growth. For example, if a 5-year-old child writes in her self-invented script, the teacher will not 'correct' the spelling but will

rather appreciate the child's attempt. However, this does not mean the conventional script is not introduced or taught at any point. The early scribbles of the child are not dismissed. Instead, these are seen as her initial steps in the process to emerge as a conventional writer.

- c) **Since this perspective acknowledges that the child learns through observing, exploring, and interacting with her environment, the classroom environment is designed to offer several inputs and support language learning.** For example, the teacher models being an effective listener, speaker, reader and writer so that children can learn from her. Classroom talk and co-construction of meaning from stories and texts are encouraged. Relevant textual and visual teaching-learning material such as newspapers, magazines, recipes, maps, pictures are used in classroom instruction. In other words, the child is immersed in an environment that develops and fosters the child's language and literacy development.
- d) **As this perspective places much emphasis on sensory learning, teaching-learning aids or activities in the early years are organized to foster the child's language and literacy development through the same.** For example, creating a sandpit for children to write; using letter blocks and tiles to form words, giving books in children's hands so that they can explore them are some of the activities that are likely to take place in a constructivist language classroom.
- e) **Since peers are seen as a resource for a child's learning, the classroom is set up for several small group activities.** This gives children opportunities to use language for various purposes such as talking to each other, asking questions, responding to queries, arguing, explaining, reasoning, and much more. The use of oral language and talk as the foundation for the development of literacy is emphasized.
- f) **Since this perspective recognizes that children's thinking is qualitatively different from adults' thinking, active learning is planned for supported.** The child's interests and individual needs are taken into consideration. Thus, individualized teaching-learning with a special focus on creative thinking and discovery-learning is emphasized. Language learning takes place in a contextualized manner, i.e., through making use of a child's prior knowledge and experiences.
- g) **The role of a teacher in this perspective is that of a mediator; she offers scaffolding to the child.** Since this perspective believes that the child constructs her own knowledge, the teacher is not the sole repository of knowledge. However, learning is also seen as having a cultural aspect to it; thus, the teacher has a role in shaping a child's learning. She does so by providing support for learning new knowledge and skills within the Zone of Proximal Development (i.e., learning that is just within the reach of the child with additional support). She gradually withdraws this support as the child masters the skill. This way of supporting learning is called 'scaffolding'. In an educational context, all curricular knowledge is selected in a social-cultural context, collectively by those in the dominant position, i.e., the adults.

Over some time, various approaches to literacy have emerged that draw from the constructivist perspective. Let us see what these approaches are and what they propose with respect to the teaching-learning of reading and writing.

### 3.3.1 Whole Language Approach

The very first approach that is informed by the constructivist perspective is the whole language approach. As the name suggests, it advocates familiarizing children with language in its wholeness and not with isolated sound units, as the phonics approach proposes. Let us see how this approach emerged.

By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars began to move away from behaviourist theories to more cognitive-based theories of children's learning and development. As the phonics approach was opposed as a mechanical approach, the whole language approach received educators' attention.

Ken Goodman was the pioneer of the whole language approach/theory. Influenced by Noam Chomsky, who proposed that children have an innate capability of acquiring oral language if immersed in an environment where they hear the language regularly, Goodman advocated that it stands true for learning reading and writing too. If children are immersed in a print-rich environment where they get to see and experience texts as a whole in form of storybooks, newspapers, pamphlets, etc., they are likely to pick up the conventions of reading and writing too. Further, if the adults encourage and support the children's engagement with print, it will help them acquire reading and writing.

As mentioned, under this approach, reading and writing are taught by introducing children to the whole or complete text. Let us understand with the help of an example how the teacher teaches children to read and write while using the whole language approach.

*A preschool teacher decided to conduct a reading session in a class. For this, she made the children sit in a semi-circular manner. As she read the storybook to the group of children, she attempted to place the book at the eye level of the children and placed her finger on each word that she read from the book. She also made use of predictions to invoke children's interest and comprehension of the text. Then, she gave copies of the book to the children and encouraged them to read it on their own. Children were not expected to be able to read it word to word though. For the next two days, she read the book again with the children and asked them again to read it aloud with her. She could see that many children could read a few words, mainly the characters of the story through visual memory of those words. She also encouraged children to narrate or explain what they have read in the book in their own words. She also put up many of the words from the story on chart paper which the children could practice with her orally.*

In this example, you would have seen that while reading, the child is believed to look at the words or even sentences as a whole and read them using a mental image of the words. The teacher made conscious efforts to develop the mental image of words by repeatedly reading the text to the children at

their eye level, putting up words on a chart, practicing them orally with the children, and so on. The teacher did not first teach phonics as a way to engage with the text. It is because since words are treated as the smallest meaningful units in the whole language approach (not sound/letter), the teacher only emphasized the reading of the words without using the letter-sound correspondence. Children are expected to pick up the alphabetic rule naturally as they immerse in and engage more and more with whole texts and reading exercises. The teaching of letter-sound correspondence, decoding and spelling patterns happens upon invitation for help from the learners and always within a meaningful context.

Reading instruction primarily aims at getting students engaged in a variety of whole or complete texts.

Now let us look at some of the key aspects of this approach.

a) **Key Focus**

**The meaning (and not code) is central to the whole language approach.** Whole language learners and teachers primarily focus on meaning and comprehension in language use. We know each text holds a meaning, however, each child is likely to interact with the text differently and have a different meaning of its own. As the child gains new experiences, the range of potential meanings of a text also increases accordingly.

So, under this approach, as comprehension or meaning-making is considered the primary route of interacting with words as compared to the process of decoding words and putting them together to arrive at the meaning, the whole-language approach is considered a ‘top-to-bottom’ or ‘whole-to-part’ approach.

**Word is the smallest meaningful unit** as per the whole language approach. The children learn letters and their sounds by analyzing the sound and letters of the words; explicit phonics instruction is given only upon children’s asking for help with specific words in context. For example, as they read common sounds in a variety of words, they come to understand that a particular sound is represented by a letter.

b) **Understanding of Literacy**

**As per this approach, reading is concerned with creating meaning from print** and not sounding out words into breakable units of sound. The child reads through sight words and predictions and is not expected to and decode every single word, at least in the early stages—as long as she enjoys the text and can locate meaning in the text.

**Writing is meaningful and mostly based on children’s personal experiences.** The focus of writing is not as much on the product as on the process of writing. Early attempts to write are appreciated and supported. Small deviations in spelling or grammatical forms that a child may occasionally show in the process of developing writing skills are not viewed as incapability but as sites to assess her learning process of writing, and thus, offer feedback and assistance for improvement.

c) **Pedagogy**

- Since language is treated as a whole entity, the skills of **listening, speaking, reading, and writing are taught together** and not in isolation or sequentially. Fragmenting language into smaller components (e.g., grammatical patterns, vocabulary lists, phonics, etc.) for the sake of reading and writing is believed to complicate language learning or to even destroy the interest and capability of the child in literacy learning. Thus, each skill is introduced simultaneously and nurtured within an environment that allows children to experience and practice the language naturally.

Learning to read and write is believed to happen as naturally as young children learn to speak and listen. Thus, the emphasis is on language usage in authentic, meaningful contexts and not through imposed, systematic instruction. For this, efforts are made to incorporate real-life experiences and a child's prior experiences in the teaching-learning process. An emphasis is made on making the curriculum and respective activities meaningful, relatable, and also enjoyable to the child. For example, children are encouraged to bring words from their environment that they want to read; words that hold meaning and interest to the child and they wish to learn to read or see how they are spelled. It could be their name, their pet's name, their favourite cartoon character's name, or so on. Or they are asked to write the words that they learned during reading a favourite story, or probably write a note to a loved one in their own words. They are not made to mindlessly note down alphabetic series or two-three letter words over and over in their notebooks.

- **Providing a language or print-rich environment is very crucial for whole language learning.** In order to experience and practice the language in its wholeness, the child is provided with a range of age-appropriate literature and print material. The advocates of this approach suggest that children should be exposed to literature from the early years of schooling itself. Therefore, small book corners or classroom libraries are a critical part of a whole language classroom.

d) **View of Learner**

**Children are viewed as meaning-makers and active participants in their learning** right from their very first attempts to read and write. They are allowed to choose the books they would like to read or listen to, and to write in their words using various symbols, pictures, stick figures, letter-like formations, and so on. Besides, children are also allowed to engage in all language activities regardless of their level of proficiency. In short, children have the agency to select the content they read or write and also how they engage with it.

Who can argue with some of the ideas expressed by the whole language theorists? All of us want children to find what is taught to be meaningful and want to introduce them to a wide range of opportunities for reading and writing. We also want to model good practices for them, and to have them experiment with their reading and writing. However, there are several limitations/criticisms of this approach too, as listed below.

e) **Limitations and Criticism**

- Its assumptions of the reading process and literacy development don't hold up to scientific evidence. This approach shows an over-reliance on immersion, memory, and cues for word recognition while refusing to acknowledge research that finds explicit and systematic methods of instruction to be more effective than such implicit methods of learning. Further, this approach claims that we don't read letter-by-letter and that we fill gaps in the text through intelligent guessing based on several contextual cues and world knowledge. These claims are not supported by the more recent eye movement research that has found that skilled readers process every single letter of the text even at a speed of 200-300 words per minute (Pressley, 2006).
- **The whole language approach is criticized for not taking individual children's learning needs into account.** For instance, it does not acknowledge that many children, especially first-generation literates, or those who come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, or even children with learning disabilities, do not do well in classrooms that follow a whole language approach. They do not understand how the alphabetic code works by simply being immersed in a print-rich environment without any explicit instruction in decoding. In this way, it raises a critical equity issue in access to quality learning for the majority of the children.
- Even if the whole language approach was effective on its own, its success depends upon the kind of experiences and knowledge a child has about language and print. This requires the availability of elements like good children's literature, intensive engagement of teachers with children in rich language, favourable teacher-pupil ratios. However, such rich reading and language opportunities are usually found lacking, especially in the most disadvantaged contexts.

Considering both of these approaches — the phonics approach and the whole language approach — have their own merits and demerits, can a teacher solely rely upon one kind of approach to teach reading and writing to the children? Can elements of both be combined effectively? Let us answer this with the next approach.

**Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

- 1) Write two differences between the phonics and whole language approach.

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- 2) Whole language approach is relevant yet it does not offer a holistic experience of reading and writing to the children. Explain how.

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### 3.3.2 Balanced Comprehensive Approach

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed a strong debate between the advocates of two major approaches – phonics and the whole language approach. They argued about what reading is; how children learn to read; and consequently, how they should be taught to read. This debate between the proponents and practitioners of these approaches is popularly known as the ‘Reading Wars’. While this debate was going on, two influential reports got published at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the United States: ‘*Prevention of Reading Difficulties* (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998)’ and ‘*Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read* (2000)’. These reports summarized a vast body of research on how children learn to read and write in alphabet-based languages. These reports advocated for a ‘balance’ in the language teaching-learning process. They recommended a blend of components from both phonics and whole language approaches. For instance, the report of the National Reading Panel (2000) listed five components of reading that should be taught simultaneously to children – vocabulary, comprehension, phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency. So, the first two components of reading are part of the whole language approach, while the explicit teaching of phonological awareness, phonics and fluency are part of the phonics approach.

This view was supported by other scholars also who suggested that both the phonics approach and the whole-language approaches have certain strengths and limitations; and that neither is complete in itself.

Thus, scholars advocated for a ‘balance’ to ensure an effective literacy programme. However, often at the heart of an argument about learning to read and write is the question – “What does balance include?” or “How to strike a balance?” So let us understand what the concept of ‘balance’ encompasses.

#### ***What is Balance?***

To many, the term ‘Balance’ may invoke a notion of equal proportion, equal allocation of time, equal importance, and so on. Thus, to strike a balance is to blend the best of both phonics and the whole language approach in equal proportions. However, balance is not equivalent to “phonics + whole language” in equal proportions. What aspects should be included in the literacy programme and why should they be included is not decided on the spur of the moment. Rather, it involves a conscious and well-thought

blending of the two approaches with a well-designed strategy. The balance needs to be comprehensive wherein the learning of different language competencies can be addressed simultaneously. A comprehensive understanding of a balanced literacy programme consists of striking a balance in terms of the given aspects:

- a) **What to Teach** (E.g., phonemic awareness, phonics, reading comprehension, etc. You will read more about it in Unit 7, 8, and 9 of Block 2 of this Course.)
- b) **How to Teach** (E.g., Different reading and writing strategies/activities, gradual release of responsibility, etc. You will read more about it in Unit 9 and 10 of Block 2 of this Course.)
- c) **With What to Teach** (A variety of teaching material like children's books, worksheets, letter blocks, etc. You will read more about it in Unit 6 of Block 2 of this Course.)

Thus, the balance should not be concerned with picking up equal proportions of components/competencies from phonics and the whole language approach. Instead, a comprehensive balance should be struck by identifying and applying what a particular set of children need to know about literacy and how they can be supported for the same. Therefore, literacy instruction, under a balanced comprehensive approach may vary from class to class. It is because the needs of literacy instruction for one class may be different from another. A teacher may attempt to strike a balance in her own way keeping the needs and interests of the children. For instance, a teacher may read stories aloud to children during which children listen and make predictions. Or, the teacher may encourage children to read the story in groups with the support of the teacher. They then can discuss the story together, also talking about familiar and new words they came across in the story. The keys to balancing a classroom are not given but are rather discovered or invented by a teacher through continuous planning and practice.

Let us also understand with the help of the given example, what literacy instruction looks like under a balanced comprehensive approach.

*A preschool teacher knew that most of the children in her classroom come from families of migrant labourers with no exposure to print in their home environment. She wrote a story in a big font size on separate sheets of paper and made a book out of it. She made the children sit in a semi-circular organization. She read this story out to the children and while reading, she asked them many questions pertaining to the story such as, "Who do you think must have eaten the banana?", "Why did you think he got a stomach ache?" etc. In the subsequent reading of the same story, she also drew children's attention to some of the words in the story. As she decided to introduce children to the letter and sound of /ka/, she highlighted words such as 'पका', 'कौन', 'किनारा', 'टोका', 'केला'. She then read all these words together to the children and wrote these down on the board too. Here, she encircled the letter 'क' in each of the words and emphasized that the letter 'क' represents the sound of /ka/. She also encouraged children to look for words with the letter 'क' in the word wall she had created in the classroom. She also asked*

*them to think of words that have the sound of /ka/. The next day, she put up all these words on a big chart so that she could practice them orally and visually. She had four copies of the story book and encouraged the children to read the book based on the pictures, their understanding of the story and their visual memory of the words.*

*Similarly, she introduced children to other sounds and their letters and encouraged children to identify these letters in the words on the word wall.*

In this example, the teacher knew about the children's profiles and designed her literacy instruction accordingly. She began by offering a whole reading experience (read aloud) to the children, while also integrating phonics instruction within the context of that familiar text. Instead of making children learn 'aksharmala' (alphabetic series), she rather chose to introduce children to a particular letter (symbol) and its sound. By doing so, she made the children also understand that learning to decode is purposeful: it helps them access meaningful texts. Thus, this approach asserts that reading and writing can be taught through direct phonics instruction while the instruction should take place in a strong print, reading and writing activity-based environment. It ensures that children learn not only to construct meaning from print but also how the writing system works and how letters are used to encode sounds/words. Therefore, a balanced approach to literacy includes multiple elements of reading and writing.

Now let us look at some of the key aspects of the balanced approach below.

a) **Key Focus**

The balanced comprehensive approach **pays attention to comprehension/meaning-making while also helping children to master the alphabetic code.** Both aspects of literacy development are given due importance without prioritizing one over the other.

Having an emphasis on both code and comprehension, this approach **allows the to-and-fro movement between parts and whole aspects of the language.** The balanced comprehensive approach involves engaging with language as a whole, then paying attention to the coding aspect of the language, and then viewing these codes in the wholeness of the language. For this reason, this approach is also called the 'whole-part-whole' approach. To begin with, children are exposed or introduced to the text or presented with various texts in their wholeness (the first whole); then, their focus is brought to discover phonics that makes up the whole text (part); and finally, they assemble the parts into their entirety (the second whole).

b) **Understanding of Literacy**

**Skilled reading** involves fast word identification along with a sound understanding of the text. Hence, comprehension of text works in conjunction with the knowledge of sound-letter correspondence in the process of fluent reading.

**Writing** includes both following the rules of the script along with the ability to express creatively through the written text. Hence, a skilled writer, as per the balanced approach can express her thoughts in written form. While in the early years, children's writing includes the use of self-invented script, as the child grows, she also makes use of the conventional script.

c) **Pedagogy**

- **The reading-writing instruction includes word study, holistic experiences in reading, writing, speaking, and listening and teaching letter-sound correspondence.** Phonics instruction is placed in meaningful reading-writing activities. In other words, whole language activities precede phonics instruction in the initial stage, and later on back and forth between whole and part is practiced. The repeated, varied and expanded exposure to print and whole reading-writing experiences, in turn, increases the need and meaning of phonics and so does the ease and expressiveness of reading for reading and writing.
- **Balanced comprehensive literacy usually includes three levels of instruction:**
  - a) Whole-group (whole-class) instruction wherein the teacher gives exposure and instruction to the entire class.
  - b) Differentiated small-group instruction includes forming small groups with similar or different learning literacy levels and assigning respective reading and writing activities.
  - c) Independent learner work includes encouraging children to explore and practice their reading and writing skills individually.
- **Under the balanced comprehensive approach, a teacher strikes a balance in her literacy instruction on given aspects:**
  - a) **What to Teach: There are four major components in language and literacy instruction - oral language, word recognition, reading, and writing.** These form the four block of language and literacy instruction and all of these should be a part of the classroom learning. The following aspects should be covered under each of these blocks as shared as follows:

**Block 1: Oral Language Development**

Oral language serves as the foundation for the development of child's literacy development. While the child already enters school with a strong oral language development in her mother tongue, it needs to be further strengthened through experiences in school. Strategies such as discussions, storytelling, role play and drama are relevant for the development of child's oral language.

## Block 2: Word Recognition

This includes activities concerned with phonological awareness, letter-sound correspondence (phonics), and sight word reading. Through these activities, children will learn to decode and spell words they will use for reading and writing. Such activities will help children learn high-frequency words which will create an interest in reading and lead to successful reading with comprehension.

## Block 3: Reading

For this, you may conduct read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading sessions. Help children develop the skills to select reading materials that they find interesting. Provide opportunities for learners to share and respond to what they are reading.

## Block 4: Writing

Strategies such as free-handwriting and drawing, modelled writing, shared writing, guided writing and independent writing can be used for the development of children's writing skills. Help children develop the skill of writing by offering them the opportunity to write for real purposes on topics of interest. Interact individually with children about the texts they are composing.

You will read about each of these in the subsequent Units of this Course. While activities for the four blocks may be implemented in an integrated manner, it is important that children spend time working on each of the blocks on a regular basis. While children are learning decoding, they should continue to engage with storybooks e.g., listen to and respond to interactive reading-aloud of storybooks and write or draw in response to the text being read to them.

- b) **How to Teach:** The teacher ensures that the class has a combination of activities for both reading and writing. Children are given opportunities to explore whole texts, and they have engaged in read-aloud sessions, guided reading, free-hand writing, independent reading and writing, etc. (You will read more about these strategies in Unit 9 and 10 of this Course). Successful balanced literacy programmes also attempt to strike a balance by including teacher-directed instruction and learner-led activities.
- c) **What to Teach with:** The teacher includes some material that is based on phonics/alphabetic reading such as decodable books, or alphabet charts or poems from words children already know to read. However, such material is complemented by storybooks, magazines, and other texts for children.

The teaching-learning process combines choice and autonomy for children along with ensuring proper instruction and support from the teacher.

As you adhere to the balanced comprehensive approach, keep in mind that literacy is comprised of, however, not limited to the ability to read and write. While we need not deny that there is a universal agreement that one of the

prime goals of literacy is to be able to read and write, there is indeed much more to the concept of literacy. In this regard, scholars have advocated for two points:

- **The Role of Affect:** The ultimate goal of reading instruction is not only to teach children the skill of reading and writing but also to help them to become lifelong readers and writers. To be a lifelong reader and writer, is to read and write out of enjoyment even beyond school years too. Therefore, an effective literacy programme must ensure that children develop a deep interest, love and appreciation for reading and writing – a love that will continue beyond the school years and remain with children in their adult lives too. Mere developing the ability to read and write is not necessary, however not enough.
- **The Role of Context:** Literacy development does not take place in a laboratory kind of set-up but in a certain socio-cultural context. Therefore, the role of social-cultural factors should be taken into account to ensure an effective literacy programme. The level of exposure to the oral and written language child carries to the child, her everyday experiences and realities, her comfort level in the class with the teacher and other learners; all these factors are to be recognized.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) What does the term ‘Balance’ stand for in the Balanced Comprehensive Approach? Identify from the given statements.
  - a) It is equivalent to “phonics + whole language” in equal proportions.
  - b) There should be an equal amount of time devoted to both phonics learning and whole reading experiences.
  - c) It involves a conscious and well-thought blending of the two approaches with a well-designed strategy.
- 2) Fill in the given table mentioning the four-block instruction for literacy.

Blocks	What to Do
<b>Working with Words</b>	
	Help children develop the skills to select reading materials that they find interesting. Provide opportunities for students to share and respond to what they are reading.
<b>Writing</b>	
	Give children experiences to talk, share their experiences, learning, queries with the teacher and others.

### 3.3 EARLY/EMERGENT LITERACY

In order to understand how children learn to read and write, we adopt the theory and perspectives given by Marie Clay. As mentioned, her theory aligns with the constructivist perspective that emphasizes the importance of the child’s own activity and her environment in learning language and literacy.

When Marie Clay proposed her ideas, the dominant perspective of literacy development supported the concept of ‘Reading Readiness’. As we discussed in the previous Unit, this concept suggests that children learn to read only at a certain age, and that too is a result of formal school training. The skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing were believed to appear sequentially in the developmental journey of the child. However, Clay’s views were the opposite. Can you guess what her views must be? Write your thoughts before you read further.

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In her research, Marie Clay observed and analyzed literacy behaviours of young children as they learned to read and write continuous/whole text over some time. Some of the insights she proposed are given below:

- a) Reading and writing are complex problem-solving processes and cannot be broken down or limited to the ability to decode and form letters and words.
- b) Reading and writing are interrelated processes, i.e., the two processes are simultaneous sources of learning and contribute to each other in early literacy learning.
- c) Literacy learning involves reading and writing continuous text; the child does not just read letters, sounds, or words in isolation.
- d) Children construct their own understandings; they actively work on printed messages using all their current abilities and knowledge while a teacher supports the child as appropriate.
- e) Children come to literacy learning with varying prior knowledge.
- f) Children take different paths to literacy learning.
- g) With several rich opportunities to read and to compose and write messages pitched at an appropriate difficulty level, children extend their own learning.

Her insights highlight that learning to read and write doesn’t happen just after starting formal schooling. Instead, children begin to acquire these skills, as well as behaviours and attitudes toward reading and writing very early in life.

Clay gave the term ‘Emergent Literacy’ to this process – which means that the abilities of language are continuously in a state of emergence. **There are no pre-behaviours that the child needs to learn or show to be able to read and write.** Rather, whatever behaviours the child shows at a particular age are natural reading behaviours in the process of the child becoming literate. It emphasizes the reading behaviours of the child should not be compared with the reading behaviours shown by a mature literate adult. The ability to read

and write fluently like an adult is the ultimate goal but all the behaviours and abilities which lead up to fluent reading and writing are also to be considered as reading and writing. The early concepts and skills related to reading and writing that the child acquires and learns are very crucial for later literacy development, and thus, should rather be seen as foundational in acquiring or mastering the skill of reading and writing later on. Therefore, even when a child moves her finger over the printed text and makes up the words on her own (pretend reads), the child is seen as a reader even though the child is not reading in the conventional sense. This pretend reading is as real and important as the final stage of actually reading the text.

Later, scholars such as Neuman and Roskos suggested the term ‘Early Literacy’ in place of ‘Emergent Literacy’. According to them, the term ‘emergent’ indicates a specific starting point that does not align with the constructivist view of learning. Therefore, the term ‘Early’ was emphasized which suggests that there is not a definite time in the life of the child when literacy begins. Instead, the child is continuously in the process of becoming literate. They further suggested that literacy development includes both spoken and written language, as the former supports the development of the latter. Thus, the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are interlinked.

**Thus, Emergent/Early Literacy** refers to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that a child develops in relation to reading and writing throughout the early childhood period, starting at birth and before the beginning of conventional reading and writing instruction in a literate/print-rich environment.

The following examples will further help you understand the concept of early literacy.

### **Example 1**

*Atharv is a 3-year-old child. Her grandmother reads aloud the story of the lion and the hare from a storybook. Atharv thoroughly enjoys it. The next day, Atharv attempts to narrate the story to his father as shared in the conversation below.*

*Atharv: Papa, main aapko ek kahani sunaon? (Papa, should I tell you a story?)*

*Father: Zarur, Atharv. Aap kaun si kahani sunaoge? (Sure, Atharv. Which story will you tell me?)*

*Atharv: Ruko (Wait)*

*Atharv goes to the bookshelf and looks through the stack of books, recognizes the pictures, and picks up the storybook, and gets back to the father.*

*Father: Kaun si kahani hain? (Which story is this?)*

*Atharv: He shows the cover page and says, sher aur khargosh (Lion and Hare)*

*Father: Accha. Ab mujhe kahani sunao. (Okay. Now tell me the story.)*

*Atharv keeps the book in front of him and opens it. He flips through pages and while doing so he runs his finger over the text and reads out the story.*



*However, he is not reading out the actual words written on the page. Instead, he is making up the sentences and the dialogues based on his understanding of the story narrated by his grandmother the day before and what the pictures on the given page convey to him. He narrates the major incidents of the story with all the expressions and intonations.*

*Atharv: Pata hai....bahutttt purani baat hai... ek jungle mein ek sher rehta tha. Wah bahut badaaaaaa tha. Ek din usne kaha...main tumhe kha jaonga... sab bahut dargaye... fir khargosh aaya. Wo tha bahut chhota lekin usme bahut power thi. Fir usne kueny mein sher ko doosra sher dikhaya. Phir sher darr ke bhaag gaya. Dekha kitna maza aaya. (Do you know, once upon a time, a lion used to live in the jungle! He was very big. One day, he said to everyone "I will eat you". Everyone got scared... however, then the rabbit arrived. While he was very tiny, he was very powerful. Then he showed the lion another living in the well. The lion ran away. Wasn't it fun?).*

In this example, even though the child has not read out the story word to word do you think he is showing some understanding of the process of reading and writing? Now, let us see what literacy skills and understanding of reading he displayed while doing this pretend reading. This will help us to understand why we should consider the child to be an early/emerging reader.

- The child was moving his fingers under the text – this shows he knows that the text conveys meaning.
- The child was aware that a story has a structure. The story he narrated had a clear beginning, middle, and end. For example, Atharv begins the story with the use of sentences such as “ek baar ki baat hai” (“Once upon a time”) and “phir sher darr ke bhaag gaya” (Then the lion ran away) to end the story.
- The child knew that the cover page will have the title of the story and not the entire story. That is why, he opens up the book and starts reading from the first page flipping through all the pages; front to back.
- He moved his finger from left to right while doing pretend reading which showed that he knew that the Hindi language has to be read from left to right and that the book pages should be turned from beginning to end.
- He also modulated the voice when narrating the story.
- Most importantly, the child was not able to identify any of the letters or words as he ‘read’ the book but he could understand (comprehend) and communicate the meaning of the story to his father.

Thus, the child’s story-reading session with the father may not fulfill the criteria of conventional reading but as the child engages in this pretend reading, he is already on the path to becoming literate. His interest in reading has been aroused and he has acquired many reading behaviours shown by successful readers. There is a high likelihood that if given a supportive environment and instruction, he will learn about names of the letters and their sounds and learn to read using letter-sound correspondence as adults do.

Hence, this example suggests that the child has developed various ‘concepts

of print' such as text holds meaning, the direction in which a text is to be read or written, how to hold a book and turn pages, etc.

Let us refer to one more example to understand what early literacy consists of and how it develops in a child.

### **Example 2**

*Nikki is three and a half years old. She loves to draw on paper with crayons. Nikki also sees her grandfather read the newspaper every morning. After her grandpa finishes reading the newspaper, Nikki loves to hold it up the way her grandfather does and 'read' it. One day, when her grandmother was writing something, she asked, "What are you doing grandma?" "I am writing a letter, my dear." her grandmother said. A few days later, when she saw her mother write something, she asked, "Are you writing a letter?" Her mother replied, "No, I have to go to the market, so I am making a list of the things that I have to buy." A few days later, the mother found that Nikki was writing something. She was forming lines; one line under another line. As she was doing that, she was also uttering it. Being curious, she asked Nikki, "What are you doing, Nikki?" Nikki said, "I am writing, Mumma!" She was surprised – when did Nikki learn the meaning of writing? She asked, "Can you read it to me?" Nikki held her copy in front of her face just like a book and started reading it. It was some story that Nikki had made up. The interesting thing was that she was reading it just like a book. She was moving her head from left to right while reading those lines. She also turned the page when all the lines of the previous page were read out.*

Let us list out Nikki's skills and understanding that make her a budding reader and writer.

- Nikki would think aloud while making drawings (her early attempts at writing). Doing so suggests that she was attaching a certain meaning to her drawing, and not making some random scribbles.
- Nikki would engage in pretend reading the newspaper/book suggesting that she understood that the text in the newspaper/book had a certain meaning.
- Her writing was organized in terms of thought and presentation too. For example, when she drew one line under another line, she replicated the conventional script-like pattern in which we write one sentence under another sentence. While doing so, she did not know the letters or words of the language, but she showed an understanding that oral words can be recorded in this pattern.

Thus, Nikki's example suggests that when children are exposed to the processes of reading and writing by seeing others around them read and write, they also develop an understanding of the nature and functions of reading and writing.

You may also have seen similar instances in which children show a growing awareness of print and what reading and writing involves. For example, children can tell you the name written on their favourite chips packet, or they

can identify their favourite TV channel by its logo, or point correctly to some words in their favourite storybooks, even though they cannot identify the individual letters in these words.

Thus, these examples highlighted the behaviours which can be considered the first step toward developing literacy. These behaviours showed that they were forming an understanding of the purpose of reading and writing. It is this understanding which inculcates motivation in the child to read and write and paves the way for developing literacy skills in a child.

Hence, children acquire and develop these early literacy behaviours when:

- a) They see good models of literate behaviour (as in the case of Nikki, grandpa and father modelled reading and her grandmother and mother modelled writing, and in the case of Atharv, his grandmother read with him).
- b) They are exposed to a language-rich environment where they have access to a variety of reading and writing resources (such as books, papers, crayons) and opportunities and encouragement to practice their early literacy skills.

In the absence of a supportive literate environment, the child is not likely to show these behaviours. However, not every child is likely to have this kind of environment.

### **3.3.1 The Critical Importance of Early Literacy**

Children must be given enough and meaningful experiences that develop and foster their early literacy. It is necessary for the given reasons:

- a) Children who are introduced to reading and writing early on tend to read and write earlier and excel in school compared to children who are not exposed to language and books at a young age. Thus, having a solid foundation in early literacy skills is critical to children's future reading and writing performance.
- b) If a child can't read, she can't learn. For a child to advance through subjects like math and science, she must first be able to read and understand that content. Early literacy development begins in the first three years of a child's life and supports her future language development, reading, writing, and overall learning. However, children who struggle to read from these early school years tend to get more and more frustrated when they are unable to understand basic concepts which causes them to lose self-confidence, and interest and fall further behind their classmates. In fact, those who can't read or write proficiently are more likely to drop out of school than those who can. Offering opportunities to develop early literacy can ensure that no child drops her education because of the inability to read and write.
- c) Early exposure to rich literacy experiences helps children understand the world and people around them. The types of books we read may influence how we relate to others; it makes the child a more aware and empathetic person. Being exposed to a rich literate environment allows the child to understand that each person's experiences, thoughts, and feelings are different from the next, encouraging a kind and accepting personality and outlook towards other people.

Therefore, early literacy must be encouraged and nurtured in the space of home and school as much as possible by providing the right kind of input and encouragement to the children.

### **3.3.2 Early Literacy and the Issue of Equity**

In the previous Sections, we discussed what leads to early literacy development and why it is significant. However, many children in our schools come from home environments where they do not get enough exposure and opportunities for the development of early literacy skills. Most of the children are first-generation learners who do not have literate adults or siblings whom they can observe reading and writing – so they have no exposure to models. Neither do the families have the resources to buy storybooks and other reading and writing material. A large number of parents, irrespective of their socio-economic class may also not have the awareness of the importance of providing resources and a print-rich environment at home to develop and foster a child's language and literacy development. Even if they do have this awareness, they probably may not have the skill or even time to narrate stories to their children or engage in conversations. They talk only to give instructions to get things done. For instance, it is very unlikely that the adult would take the child for a walk and point out and discuss the objects they come across on their journey, watch TV together and discuss the scenes and characters of the child's favourite cartoon, and so on.

Children coming from such home environments usually do not develop any early literacy skills or even if they acquire some knowledge of and skills in reading and writing, it is not enough. In short, when children join a preschool, they vary in terms of the early literacy skills they have developed. The teacher in the preschool and the early primary grades needs to be sensitive to this reality and ensure that all children, irrespective of their home experiences, get enough exposure and support in the school to develop and strengthen their early literacy skills. Only then will all children get an equal start in life.

Therefore, these behaviours must be encouraged and nurtured in the space of home and school as much as possible by providing the right kind of input and encouragement to the children.

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## **3.4 LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT OVER THE YEARS**

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Most of us believe that language development starts only when the child utters the first word, which is usually around the first birthday. However, this is not true as the child's language development begins right from birth itself. Recent research indicates that babies respond to language even before they are born. They can hear their mother's voice quite clearly while still inside the womb.

Similarly, many believe that children begin to learn the skills of literacy only when formal schooling begins. This is also not true. The child's oral language development and her early engagement with print in her primary

surroundings help in her literacy development even before she enters school. You may recall from Units 27, 28 and 29 of MCD-001 how a child's language and literacy development takes place from birth up to eight years. The development of various language competencies is gradual and worth paying attention to so that the overall development of the child can be fostered with appropriate inputs and support. Therefore, let us recapitulate these language competencies as they develop over a period of time.

### 3.4.1 Oral Language Development

#### a) Birth to Three Years

An infant (0-1 year) shows the given language abilities/competencies:

- Uses crying, cooing, babbling as the earliest ways of expression/communication.
- Can hear and localize the sound source soon after birth, i.e., they can make out from which direction the sound is coming.
- Responds better to human speech as compared to any other sound. They also show a preference for familiar voices.
- Exhibits turn-taking when the adults talk to her.
- By 4-5 months, the child begins to understand the meaning of many words such as 'No', 'Stop' even though she cannot speak.
- Makes sounds in response to the adults' talk and these sounds lead to words.
- By 10-12 months, the child speaks her first words.

All these abilities of the infant help her to further acquire a language. During toddlerhood (1-3 years), many other language competencies become evident in her speech as discussed below.

- A rapid increase in vocabulary takes place. For instance, the child knows (not necessarily speaks) about 300 words by the second year and 900 words by her third year.
- Use of nouns (names of familiar objects and people); verbs such as 'give', 'go'; negations such as 'नहीं', 'हाँ', 'stop it' in early speech is quite common. These single words work as an entire sentence.
- The child makes substitutions or deletions for the sounds she cannot say yet, resulting in 'ball' being pronounced as 'baw', 'राजू' as 'लाजू', and so on.
- Often, the child also creates/makes up her own words, For example, "rhum-rhum" for bus, "baa" for the goat and "bhow" for the dog, 'छुक-छुक' for 'रेलगाड़ी' and 'मी-मी' for 'मछली'.
- Towards the end of the second year, a child's first sentences appear that are a combination of two words, such as "more milk", "दीदी जा", and so on. These two-word utterances of the toddler are referred to as telegraphic speech. By adding a rising tone at the end of these two-word sentences, the child also conveys a question such as, "Didi go?"

- The child's grammatical understanding develops enormously as her sentences become longer and more complex. Some of the changes are:
  - i) The use of tenses (use of 'ing', 'ed' form of the verb)
  - ii) The usage of the past and the future tenses is visible but not consistent.
  - iii) The use of prepositions is evident too.
  - iv) The use of pronouns is also evident.
  - v) The use of articles becomes quite evident in a child's speech.
- The child overgeneralizes (using a single word/concept to refer to different objects in which they note some commonality) and under-extends (using a word/concept to refer to one particular object only and not to other similar objects) in her speech.

b) **Three to Six Years**

**Vocabulary and Conceptual Knowledge:**

- A child with a reasonably rich home literacy environment experiences a vocabulary increase in her oral up to 12000 to 14000 words; words and the concerning concept represented by the object are understood.
- Words that make comparisons, words to express emotions, words related to the concept of space appear in a child's speech.

**Understanding of Grammar Rules:**

- The child's speech becomes increasingly dependent on words and not only facial expressions and gestures.
- The child's evolved grammatical understanding is evident as she begins to use auxiliary verbs, correct pronouns, complex and compound sentences, negative sentences, sentences that involve what, why, how, when based on questions, plurals, articles, and so on.
- Drops the tendency of overgeneralization and under-extension.
- The child begins to understand figurative speech.

**Phonological Awareness:** This includes understanding/awareness that speech is composed of various sound units. It consists of identifying and manipulating various sound units in speech. There are four developmental levels in phonological awareness.

- Word Awareness
- Syllable Awareness
- Onset-rime Awareness (This is applicable only for English language only).
- Phonemic Awareness

**Listening and Speaking Behaviours:**

- Can hear and follow adult's instructions.
- Ignores distractions and stays focused on listening to the person who is speaking.

- Seeks clarification if she does not understand something.
- Knows how to take turns while having a conversation.
- Shares personal experiences and feelings in her own words.
- Speaks clearly and fluently.
- Understands and uses appropriate body language, e.g. gesture, tone of voice, the volume of speech.

c) **Six to Eight Years**

- Children can pronounce difficult consonants speech sounds like /fa/ (in fifty-five), /va/ /tha/ (in think), /ka/ (in काला) correctly.
- The child's vocabulary increases up to 20000 to 24000 words. Synonyms, antonyms, words with different meanings, words for abstract concepts such as 'enjoyment', 'bravery' and 'cleverness' appear in children's speech. They also come to understand how the meaning of the word 'happiness' changes when the prefix 'un' is added to it and the word becomes 'unhappiness' appears in the child's speech. Her number-based, time-based, money-based, and slang vocabulary also increases during this time.
- The use of complex and compound sentences grows during this time, however, some gaps remain to make correct use.
- The child begins to understand and use hidden or indirect meanings in speech. For example, she can understand and respond to indirect hints from parents if they want the child to do certain things. They also begin to create and use secret or code language to speak with their intimate friends. The understanding and use of humour and proverbs is also quite evident in the child's language developmental journey.
- The child's listening and speaking behaviour evolves as she acquires the ability to use language and express herself appropriately in various social situations by using different body language, words, tone, and so on.

### 3.4.2 Written Language Development

a) **Three to Six Years**

**Print Awareness:** This consists of understanding that print carries meaning; wherein the child comes to understand the link between written language and oral language. It includes understanding:

- Pictures and words carry information.
- There is a difference between words and pictures.
- What a sentence is (a group of words that has meaning).
- What a word is (a group of letters that has a meaning).
- What a letter is (a symbol that represents a sound such as 'a', 'b' etc.).
- Identification of different features of a book and the related terminology such as – the title of the book, cover of the book, spine of the book, name of the author, name of the illustrator, etc.

- Reading a text involves following a direction.

**Reading Comprehension:** This includes the early reading behaviours of the child through which she explores and understands the meaning and joy of reading. These early behaviours are foundational for the child's literacy development and areas as important and natural as conventional reading. Some of these are shared below.

- Showing interest in books (picking up books and looking at them)
- Handling books (holding, turning pages)
- Understanding that pictures and text have meaning (brings you a book to read out to her)
- Beginning to show interest in certain stories and demands being read out from the book (showing preference for some storybooks)
- Beginning to pretend-read — a key milestone in the child's reading journey
- Read using sight words
- Read using prior knowledge

**Phonics (Letter-Sound Correspondence):** It is the understanding of the relationship between the sound and its written representation – the letter. Phonics allows a child to:

- To understand that each spoken sound is represented by a symbol, i.e., the letter. For example, the sound /s/ is represented by the letter 's' in English.
- To identify the written letter by its name and know the sound represented by it.
- To connect letters with their sounds to read and write.

**Writing:** This involves the early attempts of the child at exploring and understanding the meaning and joy of writing wherein she expresses herself (assigns a meaning) through her writing. The child's writing does not resemble conventional writing but serves as a foundation for the same. The child's emergent writing mainly consists of formations such as:

- Straight lines
- Curved lines
- Closed Forms
- Pictures
- Letter-like Shapes

b) **Six to Eight Years**

- The child's reading abilities evolve as she can identify new words or parts of words by using sound-letter correspondence (Phonics).



- Identify several words by merely looking at them; read some texts aloud with ease, and also show increased awareness and sensitivity towards different genres of text.
- The child begins to read aloud with proper emphasis and expression and not in a monotone.
- The child begins to participate in individual independent reading, preferably her favourite stories. You will read more about it in Unit 9 of this Course.
- The child's writing abilities evolve as she can form words using sound-letter correspondence.
- She begins to distinguish between the correct and incorrect letter sequences, e.g., 'pot' versus 'pto' or 'nine' versus 'nien'; begins to incorporate vowels more regularly into their written words. They begin to correctly spell many words.
- The child begins to use new words, phrases, or figures of speech that they've heard.
- The child shows the use of punctuation.
- The child begins to produce more elaborate narratives on topics of interest during this time, including a beginning, a middle part, and an end.
- Different genres of text get reflected in the child's writing too.

**Note:** While oral language skills and behaviours may develop spontaneously without much intervention from the parents and teachers, literacy-related skills and behaviours are not necessarily developmental that will spontaneously happen at the given ages. As a child is offered a rich language-learning environment, engagement and instruction, these behaviours will be evident in her.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) "There are no pre-behaviours that the child needs to learn or show to be able to read and write." Explain!

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- 2) Identify the age group (0-3; 3-6; 6-8-years-old) for the language and literacy development milestones.

- a) The child's speech becomes increasingly dependent on words and not only facial expressions and gestures.
- b) The child makes extensive use of complex and compound sentences.
- c) The child begins to use telegraphic speech.
- d) The child begins to read aloud with proper emphasis and expression and not in a monotone.
- e) The child begins to understand figurative speech.
- f) The child begins to use past and future tenses but not consistently.

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### 3.5 SUMMING UP

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This constructivist perspective holds that children do not passively receive knowledge from adults, but that they actively construct their understanding of people, events and objects through hands-on exploration and social experiences. It strongly rejects the stimulus-response approach of the behaviourist perspective (i.e., providing a stimulus to the child to increase or decrease the likelihood of a response from the child). It rather emphasizes sensory learning, i.e. child learns through looking, touching, listening, and so on. Children are not viewed as uniform beings who can be trained with a uniform/standard kind of instruction, but rather as individuals who develop at different rates and have individual differences regarding learning.

Two major approaches (whole language, balanced comprehensive approach) draw from the constructivist perspective and are accepted and used to teach children to learn to read and write.

The whole language approach suggests that teachers should be developing the skills of reading and writing in children by introducing them to the whole or a complete text. It is not fragmented into various components such as sounds or syllables wherein each component is taught separately without establishing its connection with the larger text.

The balanced comprehensive approach includes striking a balance in terms of 'what to teach', 'how to teach', and 'with what to teach' in terms of literacy instruction. While it draws from both phonics and the whole language approach, the notion of equality is not practiced, i.e. picking up an equal proportion of components of phonics and the whole language approach. Rather, it is a thoughtful blend of phonics and whole language approach in consonance with the child's literacy learning needs.

Early literacy behaviours emerge when children see good models of literate behaviour and when they are exposed to a language-rich environment where they have access to a variety of reading and writing resources (such as books, papers, crayons) and opportunities and encouragement to practice their early literacy skills. However, a large number of children in our schools come from home environments where they do not get enough exposure and opportunities for the development of early literacy. Here, the role of school becomes very crucial to ensure that children from all kinds of backgrounds receive relevant inputs and support for their language and literacy development.

Children's language development begins right from birth. While an infant's language abilities involve expressing herself through crying, cooing, babbling, and using one-word expressions, toddlerhood is a significant period for the child's oral language abilities. Not only does the child's vocabulary, conceptual knowledge, and grammatical structure develop, but the early engagement with print in her awareness also serves as a foundation for the child's literacy development.

During preschool years, the child's oral as well as written language skills develop quite substantially. For instance, the development of phonological awareness, phonics, early reading and writing behaviours marks this period.

During 6-8 years, the child's narrative evolves much more with a wider and more complex vocabulary and longer sentences. The reading and writing at this stage also begin to show the imprints of conventional reading and writing.

### 3.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

#### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) In the whole language approach, the focus is on the meaning of the text; while in the phonics approach, the focus is on decoding the text. While the former emphasizes the development of all four language skills together, the latter is primarily concerned with the development of reading and writing skills.
- 2) This approach shows an over-reliance on immersion, memory, and cues for word recognition while refusing to acknowledge research that finds explicit and systematic methods of instruction to be more effective than such implicit methods of learning. Further, this approach claims that we don't read letter-by-letter and that we fill gaps in the text through intelligent guessing based on several contextual cues and world knowledge.

#### Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) c

Blocks	What to Do
<b>Working with Words</b>	Help children learn high-frequency words needed for fluent, successful reading with comprehension. Teach children the skills required to decode and spell words they will use for reading and writing.
<b>Reading</b>	Help children develop the skills to select reading materials that they find interesting. Provide opportunities for students to share and respond to what they are reading.
<b>Writing</b>	Help children develop the skills to independently write a variety of texts for real purposes on topics of interest. Provide opportunities for teachers to conference individually with children about the texts they are composing.
<b>Oral Language</b>	Give children experiences to talk, share their experiences, learning, queries with the teacher and others.

#### Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) The child possesses and exhibits certain knowledge, skills, and attitudes in relation to reading and writing throughout the early childhood period, starting at birth and before the beginning of conventional reading and

writing instruction in a literate/print-rich environment. She may be supported for the development of the skills of reading and writing (conventional) but she does not need to learn certain pre-behaviours to read.

- 2) a) 3-6 years  
b) 6-8 years  
c) 0-3 years  
d) 3-6 years  
e) 3-6 years  
f) 0-3 years



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