

enable higher-order thinking, as well as invite teachers to inquire along with their students. These techniques need not be the focus of the classroom, but they also cannot be forgotten as life skills as well.

Overall, the book provides wonderful insight into the inquiry-based classroom. Fecho describes his knowledge of instruction with such passion and excitement it is difficult not to want to put this practice into immediate action. Fecho reminds the reader to seek out the needs and the culture of the students in the classroom. The inquiry-based method will allow Catholic school teachers to educate the whole student through intellectual and social risks. Fecho wants “to see inquiry not as a strategy but as a way of life, as a way of knowing” (p. 156). Fecho’s vast positive experience of the highly rewarding inquiry-based learning brings a new meaning to the classroom.

*Meagan Carlevato is a Spanish teacher at Saint Patrick High School in Chicago, Illinois.*

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## **Literacy Leadership in Early Childhood: The Essential Guide**

Dorothy S. Strickland & Shannon Riley-Ayers  
Teachers College Press, 2007  
\$19.00, 113 pages

Reviewed by Margaret M. O’Connor-Campbell

Today’s preschool leaders are asked to do more, know more, and produce “results.” (p. ix)

If you’re not an educator, administrator, or parent you might think the need for a book on literacy for preschoolers is a waste of ink and paper. Is not preschool where you learn how to play, get along, and take naps? Educators know that play is inherent in children and should be an integral part of preschool classrooms, but there is so much more. “Including books, paper, and writing implements in the dramatic play area to encourage children to incorporate literacy in their play activities is just one example of providing opportunities for children to learn literacy through play” (p. 45).

With the legislation for mandatory full-day kindergarten and kindergarten curriculum standards in some states, it should not surprise us that preschool is gearing up to be the new kindergarten. As more is learned about early childhood education, the more will be required of early childhood educators. “Language and literacy is the most prominent aspect of the curriculum for which the public demands high achievement and high accountability. When literacy programs fail, the remaining curriculum is in danger” (p. 1).

Standards have been developed for language and literacy and are required by some states. This is on the heels of more accountability for teachers. As Barbara T. Bowman states in the forward, “statistics tell us that American children who are not on their way to learning to read and write well by third grade are at greatly increased risk of school failure” (p.vii). Educators know that learning the beginning steps to reading and writing is more than giving children a head start; it is necessary for their literacy formation.

This practitioner’s resource is a research-based practical guide for instructors, administrators, and parents. “Early literacy development and its influence on school readiness is a major area of interest among today’s educators and policy makers” (p. 1). There is empirical data that says a child growing up in different environments will increase or decrease the likelihood of their access and performance level in the area of literacy. “The one constant is the need for good teaching. Fast learners, slow learners, rich children, poor children, black, white, and brown children all profit from a good literacy curriculum” (p. viii).

The authors begin their essential guide with five challenges in literacy education and then supply the implications for early childhood leaders. These challenges include the change in the meaning of literacy, the increase in student performance expectations, the increase in teacher performance expectations, accountability for student achievement, and the demographics of the student population. The authors supply two self-reporting surveys to help leaders assess their own skills and the school environment. While the surveys are only for a general overview of leadership and school assessment, using the survey is meant to give an idea of what aspects should be part of your program. In any case, you will garner skill and knowledge about early childhood literacy from this guide.

*Literacy Leadership in Early Childhood: The Essential Guide’s* chapters cover a full range of topics concerning early childhood literacy: early literacy and child development, using early literacy standards, curriculum content and best practices, accountability and assessment, effective professional development, home-school connections, and advocates for children. The authors list a plethora of resources that indicate lengthy research. In addition, they included

a section of topical references that list organizations, books, and periodicals along with a descriptor for each that this reviewer found very helpful for busy teachers and administrators, who need quick, easy access to resources that may answer a variety of questions.

Educators express concern about maintaining the mission of early childhood care and education. That mission addresses the physical, social, emotional, and overall cognitive welfare of children and their families as well as strengthening the academic curriculum. Policy makers caution not to focus too narrowly on the literacy skills and neglect the other domains of development. This guide addresses all areas of development—physical, social and emotional, cognitive, and language—and the association to literacy.

The following are three predictors of reading outcomes for children from birth to age 5:

- Oral language (listening comprehension, oral language, vocabulary)
- Alphabetic code (alphabet knowledge, phonological/phonemic awareness, invented spelling)
- Print knowledge/concepts (environmental print, concepts about print; p. 15)

The authors address each of these indicators with practical applications. Preschool literacy is catching up with the rest of the education field. Standards are being or have been established in several states. As these develop, educators of preschool children will be able to create research-based curriculums to develop their programs fully. Chapter 4 of this guide addresses the curriculum and its focus on content, using the predictors listed above as a guide.

This book is an excellent resource for practical application as programs are implemented, changed, and improved. The authors have used a variety of lists and charts that make the confusing, interrelated topics of education easy to manage. These charts simplify the work for easy accessibility and are instructional for teachers as well. Each chapter is set up with what this reviewer feels is instrumental for leaders in literacy. Each component of the chapter is presented, followed with “Implications for Practice” and “Leadership Strategies.” As advocates of preschool literacy, Strickland and Riley-Ayers realize the importance of understanding why we must push for stricter guidelines and proper standards for preschool literacy.

*Margaret M. O'Connor-Campbell is campus director at St. Andrew and St. Rita Catholic Academy in Indianapolis, Indiana.*