

WHOLE LANGUAGE MOVEMENT

(An Over-view)

MILIK PERPUSTAKAAN UPT IKIP PADANG	
DITERIMA TOL	11-12-96
SUMBER / AREA	rd /
KOLEKSI	KK1
NO. INVENTARIS	1061/MA/96 w ₂ (2)
KLASIFIKASI	420.7 SYA w ₂

by:

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Disampaikan dalam acara Training of Teachers, Yazid
and Associates HRD, pada tanggal 3 - 4 Februari 1996

MILIK UPT PERPUSTAKAAN
IKIP PADANG

PENGANTAR

“Whole language” merupakan filosofi baru dalam proses reformasi pendidikan di Amerika Serikat dewasa ini. Titik berat perubahan ini adalah pada konsep pengajaran bahasa yang tidak lagi merupakan suatu mata ajaran yang terpisah dari bidang studi lain serta lingkungan dalam komunitas dimana anak didik tersebut tinggal, tetapi terintegrasi dan saling menunjang.

Dalam makalah ini akan diuraikan latar belakang munculnya filosofi ini baik dari segi filosofi pendidikan, ilmu bahasa, dan pendidikan itu sendiri. Kemudian, penulis juga akan mengulas perkembangan dan pengaruh “Whole Language” ini terhadap pengajaran bahasa terutama yang berkaitan dengan proses membaca dan menulis bagi pembelajar pemula.

Melalui makalah ini, diharapkan guru-guru Bahasa Inggris yang mengajar di Children’s English School, yang sehari-hari menangani proses belajar mengajar anak-anak, memperoleh masukan dalam hal pendekatan dan prinsip-prinsip pengajaran bahasa bagi pembelajar pemula ini, terutama, terutama dalam masalah pengajaran Bahasa Inggris.

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WHOLE LANGUAGE MOVEMENT

(An Over View)

I. Introduction

This paper gives a history of the whole language movement. It looks back to the sixteenth century for an early use of the term whole language. Then, beginning with John Dewey, I will explore major influences from the fields of philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and education on the development of whole language. I will discuss earlier educational movement in the United States, such as language experience, individualized reading, and the integrated curriculum, and their influence on whole language.

The most eminent educator of the seventeenth century, John Amos Comenius believed that children can discover new information: by being introduced to what is familiar to them within their life experiences, by being able to manipulate the concrete objects being studied, and by using their native language to talk about what is being learned. These belief are similar to those held by whole language advocates (Allen, 1994).

Philosophical ties to Comenius and advocates of other educational movements must be considered in understanding the evolution of whole language and why it has emerged and flourished. The common ties between

whole language and its antecedents include views of learner, views of the teacher, and views about language.

The view of the learner is reflected in term the learner-centered or child-centered curriculum. Comenius believed that in order to learn, children need to enjoy their learning experiences. The focus of the whole language curriculum is not on the content of what is being studied but on the learner. This does not minimize the importance of content; it represents the belief that can be understood and seriously studied when learners are participating in deciding what will be learned, and are relating what they are learning to what they already know. Learners are viewed as always actively involved in their learning, especially when they are immersed in an environment organized to show respect toward all members of the learning community with the expectation that learning will occur.

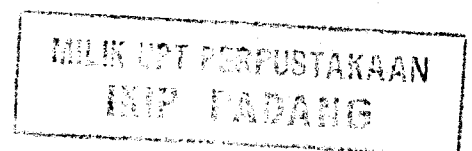
The teacher is viewed as a co-learner with the students. The environment is a democratic one in which the teacher and the learners collaboratively set agreed-upon goals. Teachers are knowledgeable about students as well as content, but their major commitment is to plan learning experiences that build on the background and experience of the learners. Teachers strive to understand the needs and expectations of students, their cultures, and the communities in which they live. Teachers organize a rich, literate environment that invites learners to take part in the social community of the classroom, taking into consideration all that they know about the learners (Goodman, 1986).

Teachers are aware that what they are teaching is not always what students learn. They realize that teaching and learning are not isomorphic but that they are symbiotic, each strongly influencing the other. Recognizing this essential relationship between teaching and learning is one of the major characteristics in whole language and reflects one of the constant battles in education. There is no one-to-one correspondence between what is taught and what is learned. Whole language educators and their predecessors believe that learners ultimately are in control of what they learn regardless of what is being taught (Goodman, 1986)

Whole language seems to be a grass roots movement in America. Many groups of teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and researchers are participating in a network of study and discussion groups, researching, raising questions, writing articles, and coming to conclusions resulting in a dynamically conceived conceptualization and definition of whole language. Actually it integrates the holistic, psychological research of Piaget, Vygotsky, and schema theorist with the social, functional-linguistic research of Michael Halliday.

Whole language tend to become a label for an exciting grass roots teacher movement that is changing curricula in America. It seems as a spirit, a philosophy, a movement, a new professionalism which is leaving its imprint on students, educators, and presents from Australia, to Canada, to USA.

The practice of whole language is solidly rooted in scientific research and theory. While it owes much to positive, child-centered educational



movement from the past, it goes beyond them in integrating scientific concepts and theorist of language processes, learning and cognitive development, teaching, and curriculum into a practical philosophy to guide classroom decision making (Goodman, 1989).

II. The Influence on Whole Language

Whole language takes seriously Dewey's statement about starting where the learner is. It views learners as strong, capable, and eager to learn. It is child centered in that it accepts the responsibility for helping every child to grow as much as possible in whatever directions are most useful (Dewey and Bentley, 1949). Moreover, from this theoretical rationale for understanding the power of curriculum development and the integration of language with all other studies in the curriculum. Dewey's work raises significant curricular questions about the nature of the child in the school setting. He explores the significance and the roles of experience, democracy, and activity as the child inquires into significant issues and problems. Dewey (1943) also discusses the importance of the integration of curriculum, arguing that "we do not have a series of stratified earths, one of which is mathematical, another physical, another historical, and so on All studies grow out of relations in the one great common world. When the child lives in varied but concrete and active relationship to this common world, his studies are naturally unified.... Relate school to life, and all studies are of necessity correlated... if school is related as a whole to life, its various aims and ideas - culture, discipline, information, utility - cease to be variants" Dewey, 1943, p.91).

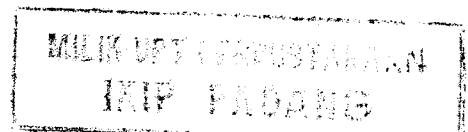
Moreover, Dewey envisioned classroom as laboratories with "the materials, the tools which the child may construct, create, and actively inquire" (p. 32), and he included language as one of the tools. "The child who

has a variety of materials and facts wants to talk about them, and his language becomes more refined and full, because it is controlled and informed by realities. Reading and writing, as well as the oral language, may be taught on this basis. It can be done in a related way, as the outgrowth of the child's social desire to recount his experiences of others" (p. 56). Dewey (1938) was also concerned that students of all ages participate in their own learning by solving real and important problems that they are concerned with at the moment.

While, in whole language classroom - like Dewey's theory - learners are empowered. They are invited to take ownership over their learning and given maximum support in developing their own objectives and fulfilling them.

Then, the work of the epistemologist Jean Piaget has also influenced the whole language movement. Piaget explored a major question with great implications for education: how people come to know concepts, ideas, and moralities. Piaget shows how children are actively involved in understanding their world and in trying to answer their questions and solve the problem that the world poses for them. Children do not wait for someone to transmit knowledge to them, but learn through their own activity with external objects and construct their own categories of thought while organizing their world. Children develop their own conceptualizations, which often are at odds with adults versions of the world (Duckworth, 1987).

Vygotsky (1986), aids whole language educators in exploring the relation between the learning of the individual student and the influences of



the social context. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development emphasizes the important role teachers play in student's learning, even though learners are ultimately responsible for their own conceptual development. The student does not learn in isolation but is supported, and, unfortunately, sometimes thwarted, in language and thinking development by others in the school environment. Vygotsky also explores the important social aspects of the role of peers as well as activity such as play in the development of intellectual functioning, factors that have long been a major concern of scholars in the field of early childhood. "Play creates a zone proximal development of the child. In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in a play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all the developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102).

As conclusion, the professional teachers are one who knows their children, learning, and teaching. Then, they will support learning but they do not see themselves as controlling learning. They reject the definition of teachers as technician administering a fixed technology to learners (Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, and Murphy, 1988). Whole language teachers accept responsibility for facilitating growth in their students but they also expect power and authority to plan, organize, and choose resources.

Moreover, we can say that whole language classrooms are communities of learners. Teachers learn with and from their students. Teachers share what they know with their students but collaborate with them

in defining and solving problems and seeking answer to questions. Whole language teachers reject restrictive models of effective teaching because they view teaching as much more complex and comprehensive than do these models.

Furthermore, Halliday, a systemic linguist, provides ways of understanding the power of the context of situation on learning and on language use. Discussion by whole language teachers about what kinds of instructional experiences constitute functional and natural language use in classrooms are supported by questions explored by Halliday (1975). He has developed a system of functional grammar that relates the study of language to the actions within the situational context and to the relationships of the actors involved.

Halliday contends that, at the same time learners are using language, they are learning language, learning through language, and learning about language. This notion has had a strong impact on the integration of language arts and other subjects in the development of whole language curriculum (Pinnel and Haussler, 1988).

Actually, language is central to human communication and human thought. Language, as Halliday (1978) describes it, is a social semiotic. It is also the medium of human learning and makes human learning quite different from the learning of other species. Humans can share their experiences and insights through language and thus pool their intelligence.

In the other words, Vygotsky (1978) has shown that people internalize language from social interactions. While, Halliday (1975) calls language learning "learning how to mean" because in the process of learning language people learn the social meanings language represents.

Looking back to the word whole language, I found that is difficult to define this two words. Some scholars said that whole language can be defined or described as student centered, meaning focused, and involving real literature. The others states that; "whole language is clearly a lot of things to a lot of people; it is not a dogma to be narrowly practiced. It is a way of bringing together a view of language, a view of learning, and a view of people, in particular two special groups of people; kids and teachers" (Goodman, K, 1986, p.5). Then Weaver (1988, p.44) states that "those who advocate a whole language approach emphasize the importance of approaching reading and writing by building upon the language and experiences of the child".

Anderson (1984, p. 616) said that "whole language is written and oral language in connected discourse in a meaningful contextual setting". "It is built on practical experience and the research of educators, linguists and psychologist. Whole language utilizes all the child's previous knowledge and his/her growing awareness of the aspects of language" (Members of the Southside Teacher Support Group, Edmonton Public Schools, 1985, p.1).

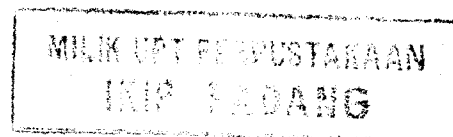
Moreover, Newman (1985, p.1) states that "whole language is a shorthand way of referring to a set of beliefs about curriculum, not just

language arts curriculum, but about everything that goes on in classrooms Whole language is a philosophical stance; it is a description of how some teachers and researchers have been exploring the practical applications of recent theoretical arguments which have arisen from research in linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, child development, curriculum, composition, literacy theory, semiotics, and other fields of study". Then, Bird (1987, p. 4) says that "whole language is a way of thinking, a way of living and learning with children in classrooms".

All those definitions may lack sameness, but they never go outside the boundaries of an acceptable definition of some dimension of whole language. The definitions are diverse because the personal and professional histories of the authors are different. This variety frees those who have studied and practiced whole language to generate their own definition, then to revise their definition again and again.

In addition to theories from psychology, linguistics, and philosophy, many educationists have made major contributions to the field of education in general and have also affected the issues discussed among whole language advocates.

Some of the beginning of whole language are traced to research on the reading process, especially the work of Kenneth Goodman and Frank Smith, from as early as the 1960s, and to the subsequent move to apply the research findings to reading instruction (Smith and Goodman, 1971). Smith and Goodman, working from different perspectives developed the theory and



research that established the notion of a unified single reading process as an interaction between the reader, the text, and language.

Much earlier, Louise Rosenblatt applied John Dewey's concepts to reading and literature in her classic book, "Literature through Exploration" (Rosenblatt, 1938/1976). She was the first who describe reading as a transaction between the reader and the text, establishing the rights of readers to their own meanings. Influenced by an additional work of Rosenblatt (1978), whole language incorporated the term transaction to represent a rich and complete relation between the reader and the text.

The views of reading proposed by Goodman and Smith and the concept of transaction provide a sound rationale for literature and language-experience-based reading programs. These kinds of reading programs were well developed and popular prior to the 1960s. Research and theoretical support for the seemingly simplistic notion that people learned to read through reading helped to explain much of the success of programs that immersed students in reading real books and explained why children were so successful in learning to read when they read materials in their own language based on participation in experiences relevant to their daily lives. At the same time, the theory and the research raised some questions about the direction various programs were taking.

Based on my view, some supporters of the language-experience approach may believe that whole language is simply language experience with a new label because the basic tenets of the two are compatible. The

focus on language learning taking place in relation to a variety of experiences, all language and content experiences being integrated for instructional purposes, and students being excited about and interested in what they are learning are certainly important aspects of both views. However, language experience became a variety of approaches and, for some educators, the original philosophical beliefs about language learning and child development became secondary to the procedures themselves. For others, the approach was reduced to an activity that was done simply to get children to write down something that they could read. As language experience was popularized and often misapplied, some of us believed that the label language experience had lost the power of its original conceptualization.

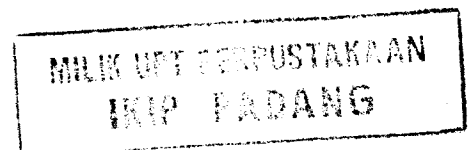
With a holistic and progressive educational policy, New Zealand, influenced by John Dewey, disseminated a view of reading instruction that has had a lasting influence on the teaching of reading in the whole language movement (Penton, 1979). Donald Holdaway (1979) developed the concept of shared book experience and promoted literature based reading programs that were supported by the research of Marie Clay (1972). Teacher produced "Big Books" of children's favorite stories that they asked to have over and over again, a strong focus on reading books to children, and immersing children in reading books and magazines became the common place reading instructional program in New Zealand (Department of Education, 1972, 1985).

Scholars such as Alvina Burrows in "They All Want to Write" cited in Burrows, Jackson, and Saunders (1939/1984) urged that young children

should be able to express themselves in their own voices in writing from the very beginning of schooling. During the first half of this entry, she informed elementary school teachers that kids had to write about their own experiences. Burrows' work was supported in the 1970s by the research of Don Graves (1983), who has clearly documented that children learn to write and that their writing continues to develop when they have opportunities to write in a supportive environment. Graves' work was part of a knowledge explosion in the field of composition that has greatly influenced whole language.

Actually, the focus on writing during 1970s and 1980s was welcomed by whole language advocates and was supported not only by those working in elementary schools, but also by the work of secondary school English teachers and professors of English and English education involved with the National Writing Project, whose head quarters are at the University of California, Berkeley. The National Writing Project has been instrumental in involving teachers in becoming writers themselves, sharing their writing with others, discussing successful ways of teaching writing, and learning about theory and research in the field of composition.

Then, whole language has been enriched by research and writing in the fields of both reading and composition that have taken place since 1960. Although some advocates of these works stressed either reading or writing, whole language educators have organized research and curriculum to capitalize on the integration of all the language areas and to study and understand the relations among them. Questions are being raised about



expanding functions of reading and writing beyond books, narratives, and reports and about the effects this will have on the curriculum. Educators are exploring the authenticity of the reading and writing events themselves (Edelsky, 1987).

Educational influences from England came not only from secondary educators concerned with language matters but also from educators concerned with the school beginners in the British Infant Schools. Early childhood education in the United States was greatly influenced by the British Infant School, which, at the same time, was being influenced by the progressive education of John Dewey (Featherstone, 1967, 1968, 1969). Following the child's lead in planning curriculum, starting where the child is and expanding from that point in order to encourage problem solving, and seeing play as the building blocks of intellectual development are all theoretical notions that whole language advocates and early childhood educators have in common. It is understandable that early childhood educators find easy to support and participate in developments in whole language (Loughlin and Martin, 1988).

Furthermore, the concept of integrated language arts was also influenced by the concept of the integrated day, or integrated curriculum, that was being actively promoted by curriculum theorists during the 1940s and 1950s. Integrated programs were being developed not only for the elementary schools but also for junior high, middle, and secondary through the integration of language arts and social studies, social studies and humanities, and often science and math programs. The artificial isolation of

content, which seemed appropriate for the purposes of research and scholarship in tertiary education, did not seem appropriate for growing children and adolescents.

In the post World-War II years, organizations such as the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) were actively involved in discovering the best ways to organize integrated curricula. With students representing an ever-widening range of race, ethnicity, nationality, linguistic background, and socio-economic status among those entering and staying in schools and moving on to higher education, educators were discussing ways of making education relevant to all students in all walks of life. Hilda Taba (1962, p. 299) expressed this concern: "The problem, then, is that of developing ways of helping individuals in this process of creating a unity of knowledge".

The concern for integration of curriculum was influenced not only from the point of view of the unity of knowledge through the interaction of subject matter but also included a concern for the integration of attitudes and values with the development of knowledge necessary for members of a democratic society. The ties to attitudes and value and the philosophy of John Dewey are again evident. The ACE commissioned a number of educators to debate, discuss, and develop integrated curriculum with a focus on inter group education (Taba, 1950). According to Taba, Brady, and Robinson (1952, p. 51), "a person who knows all the facts but whose feelings are limited is likely to have a "so what?" attitude One who can sympathize ... with others but has neither conceptual framework nor basic facts ... is likely to be a

sentimental idealist Those untrained in sound reasons will not be able to apply knowledge ... (and without skills) be frustrated in practical situations and unable to behave accordingly.”

Additionally, the dynamic activity centered on the integrated curriculum and the concern for the development of the self-actualizing personality in collaborative group settings diminished in 1955 because of a national concern that the United States was lagging behind the Soviet Union in scientific progress. Sputnik was launched, and this important date in history had an equally significant impact on education. The focus in curriculum turned toward improving math and science education, supporting gifted students, and promoting “excellence” and individual competitive achievement (Tozer, 1991).

Within the next decade, however, due largely to the civil rights movement, the focus of schooling once again turned to equal educational opportunity for all students - the development of all human potential. The effects of curriculum development of individual potential could be seen as groups of educators came together to discuss issues such as the integration of curriculum and individual differences, especially those of linguistic and cultural minorities (Tozer, 1991).

Then, in the early 1970s a group of educators formed the Center for the Expansion of Language and Thinking (CELT) whose first president was K. Goodman. Its main purpose was to develop a network of teacher educators and educational researchers to provide a forum for continuous discussion; to

identify ways of informing and involving classroom teachers, curriculum specialists, and administrators in the new knowledge coming from linguistics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics that could be applied to education; and to work collaboratively in various research endeavors. CELT members are actively involved in the development and dissemination of whole language.

In the late 1970s, groups of teachers began to meet together to discuss many issues about the teaching and learning of language, building on the new insights about language and learning. This seemed to be the beginning of the whole language teacher-support groups. Originally there were small groups in California, Arizona, Missouri, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia which have grown to over 100 at the writing and were organized as a confederation of support groups, the Whole Language Umbrella, at a whole language conference in Winnipeg in February 1988.



III. Conclusion

Whole language is a new response to an old argument. In the 1920s and 1930s a movement variously called the new education and progressive schools emerged as a “product of discontent with traditional education. In effect it is a criticism of the later” (Dewey, 1938, p. 18). Dewey expresses this discontent as “the traditional scheme is, in essence, one of imposition from above and from outside. It imposes adult standards, subject matter and methods upon those who are only growing slowly toward maturity” (pp. 18 - 19).

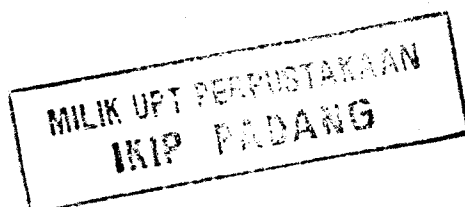
The history of whole language shows that many groups and individuals have made continuous attempts to consider issues such as curriculum; individual differences; social interacting; collaboration; language learning; the relation between teaching, learning, and evaluation; and their influences on the lives of teachers and students. At the core is the belief that decision making must be laced in the hands of teachers and learners.

The development of whole language has been reflected in innovative practice; the collaboration between teachers of math and science working with scientists to help students build conceptual understandings; teachers filling their classrooms with tools such as blocks, easels, Autoharps, and woodworking equipment; teachers and students building replicas of various communities, space satellites, stock markets, and colonial kitchens in order to study their problems and ways of solving them and at the same time

integrating social studies, science, math, and language arts; teachers using photographs, paintings, and literature to help students raise questions and solve problems through discussion and argumentation; English teachers organizing ways to allow students choice in courses and material; and teachers organizing experiences so that students will need to read and write in a wide range of genres in response to real and functional experiences. At the same time, those involved in these developments have been concerned with basing them on research that is compatible with the theory on which whole language is built (Routman, 1991).

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