

1. This film attempts to take a balanced view towards the contentious arena of learning to read. Elena Bodrova and Deborah Leong are well-known promoters of Vygotskian theory, and their developmental-constructivist points of view are obvious. But they do not reject specific training in phonics, nor would not see themselves as whole language advocates. Students who will be teaching literacy skills need to know about these “reading wars” as they will be asked about their position when they are working.
  - Information about Drs. Leong and Bodrova’s “Tools of the Mind” curriculum is available at [www.mscd.edu/extendedcampus/toolsofthemind](http://www.mscd.edu/extendedcampus/toolsofthemind)
2. The report of the National Reading Panel (2000) sparked new controversies. It is available at [www.nationalreadingpanel.org](http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org). A critique of it is at [www.pdkmembers.org...](http://www.pdkmembers.org...), and a more recent is at [www.pdkmembers.org...](http://www.pdkmembers.org...)
3. The book that perhaps started the “reading wars” was Rudolph Flesch’s *Why Johnny Can’t Read*, first published in 1955 and still in print. It very much supports teaching phonics and criticizes whole language approaches. Flesch was born in Vienna in 1911, where he earned a law degree. He came to the USA as a refugee from the Nazis in 1938, and received his Ph.D. in educational research from Columbia University. He continued speaking out about reading, teaching, and writing until his death in 1986. Organizations like the National Right to Read Foundation <http://www.nrrf.org/index.html> have continued in Flesch’s footsteps.
4. Richard Allington, a professor at the University of Tennessee, has been a voice on the other side of the reading wars. His book about the politics of reading is titled *Big Brother and the National Reading Curriculum: How Ideology Trumped Evidence*. More information about him and his work can be found at [www.teachersread.net/about-dr-allington](http://www.teachersread.net/about-dr-allington)
5. We have made several films that have to do with the underlying socio-emotional, linguistic, physical, and cognitive prerequisites for reading.
  - *Growing Minds: Cognitive Development in Early Childhood*, with David Elkind, has to do with the development of perception, reasoning and language before age five.
  - *Concrete Operations*, again with David Elkind, demonstrates the development of the concept of one-to-one correspondence and its importance for academic learning.
  - *Nourishing Language Development*, with Alice Honig, chronicles the development of oral language and illustrates how it can be enhanced by adult intervention.
  - *Play: A Vygotskian Approach*, with Elena Bodrova and Deborah Leong, proposes that very young children best learn self-regulation skills through creative play situations.
  - *Scaffolding Self Regulation Skills in the Primary Grades*, also with Elena Bodrova and Deborah Leong, shows how teachers can help children assume much of the responsibility for their academic learning, even in the primary grades.
6. The concept of the “*communicative aspects of literacy*” may be new to your students. As college students, they have been so immersed in print for such a long time, that they will find it hard to believe that anyone has to be taught that written words convey meaning, books in our culture open on the right, and words go from left to right. It all just seems so natural, but it is not universal. Bringing in books written in Hebrew, Arabic, or Chinese could be interesting way to reinforce this point.
7. There is controversy about whether to stop a story for questions and explanations during the first reading or to read it through the first time without stopping as is put forth in this film. It would seem that there are arguments on both sides, and no one way is the best for all books and all groups of children. Certainly if there are concepts or vocabulary in a book that the reader knows are unfamiliar, they can be discussed before reading the story. But that may not be sufficient for some children who will need more support along the way to understand the story. On the other hand, we as adult readers know the rather satisfying thrill of discovery when figuring out a storyline in novels that start rather

obscurely, “Oh, that’s where this is going...” Denying such to children with some stories that only make sense at the end may be cutting them off from such a pleasure.

8. It seems everyone can agree upon the importance of *phonological awareness*. Playing with sounds is something that caregivers and teachers have done with young children for centuries. (“Fee-fi-fo-fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman...”) It may be interesting to have some of your second language students talk about rhymes and chants that are a part of their culture.
9. *Phonemic awareness* is a somewhat more technical aspect of phonemic awareness, and is not normally a part of early childhood experience outside the school environment. The teaching example we use in this film of the child sounding out a three part word (cup) is based on the work of Daniel Elkonin, who was student of Lev Vygotsky. A good discussion of Elkonin boxes can be found at [http://bogglesworldesl.com/elkonin\\_boxes.htm](http://bogglesworldesl.com/elkonin_boxes.htm).
10. By age four, *letter recognition* has become a part of most children’s educational experiences. The consultants wisely point out that this is not as simple as it sometimes seems. As letters get written in different fonts, an “A” can look very different depending on whether it is capitalized, written in cursive, the lower case “a” used in print, or “a” used in hand writing. Again, this is something your students probably will not have thought about.

There are some who feel that there is an over-emphasis on letter recognition skills in some early education programs in comparison to other aspects of literacy preparation. What is your position?

The development of the alphabet we use is fascinating, and a brief and useful discussion can be found on Wikipedia at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alphabet>.

We get our alphabet from the Romans, although as you will see, they only had 21 letters. “W” was the last in to our alphabet, as a result of the introduction of German words into English.

Original Latin alphabet of the 7th century BCE: [A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [Z](#) [H](#) [I](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [V](#) [X](#)

11. The *alphabetic principle* is probably a new concept for your students. Some languages, such as Chinese, don’t have an alphabet.
12. Attaining *sound/symbol correspondence* is a big step toward reading and writing. Elena Bodrova and Deborah Leong support children’s early attempts to write using “invented spelling.” What is your opinion on this?
13. *Encoding/decoding* necessitates all of the skills previously discussed, and with comprehension, enables literacy. A real gift! The film makes the point that literacy skills continue to develop throughout life. As literate adults, we continue to enhance our literacy skills as we confront complex texts and hone our writing skills. Talk about lifelong learning!

**Related Films Also Available From Davidson Films**

*This is one of seven films in Davidson Films' "Early Childhood" series. The other titles are:*

- ***Growing Minds: Cognitive Development in Early Childhood*** (1996) 25 Minutes
- ***How Children Learn*** (1997) 23 Minutes
- ***Nourishing Language Development in Early Childhood*** (1996) 31 Minutes
- ***Play: A Vygotskian Approach*** (1996) 26 Minutes
- ***Maria Montessori: Her Life And Legacy*** (2004) 35 Minutes
- ***Performance Assessment: A Teacher's Way Of Knowing*** (1993) 21 Minutes

*Other related films are:*

- ***Scaffolding Self-Regulated Learning in Primary classrooms*** (1996) 35 Minutes
- ***Vygotsky's Developmental Theory: An Introduction*** (1994) 28 Minutes