

EARLY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY (NWTC)



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Early Language and Literacy

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Introduction to Literacy Theory, Practices, and Resources

Overview

Early childhood educators must stay informed about key guidelines, practices, and resources because the field of early childhood education is constantly changing and rapidly evolving. This chapter will introduce you to the foundational components guiding early literacy development and assessment of young children.

You will discover NAEYC Position Statements, National and State Early Learning Standards, Language and Literacy Developmental Theory, and resources and assessments essential to support emergent readers and writers in their literacy development

NAEYC Position Statements

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), provides professional guidance to early childhood professionals. NAEYC has several Position Statements offering evidence-based recommendations and principles to promote high-quality early childhood education. This section will help you summarize their significance and how they shape educational practices.

National and State Early Learning Standards

Early learning standards provide a common language and clear expectations for teachers, families, and policymakers to discuss and understand what children should know and be able to do at various developmental levels. Although standards will vary state by state they share common goals of ensuring children are prepared for future academic success. We will examine the Wisconsin State ELA standards, the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards, and the WiDA Standards for Young English Learners.

Language and Literacy Developmental Theory

Early childhood educators must understand how children develop language and literacy skills to create effective learning environments and learning experiences. This chapter explores key language and literacy development theories, and their application to the early childhood classroom, and provides a framework to understand how children acquire early literacy skills.

Literacy Resources and Assessments

Early childhood educators must use high-quality resources and accurate assessments to provide effective literacy education to young children. This part of the chapter will share various literacy resources, including books, digital tools, and instructional materials, to support young children's literacy development. Additionally, we will cover legislation about assessment in Wisconsin.

Purpose and Goals

This chapter intends to provide early childhood educators with an understanding of the critical components influencing literacy education in the early years. Educators can enhance their practice and highly support the literacy development of their young learners when they integrate NAEYC Position statements, align with State and National Early Learning Standards, apply developmental literacy theories, and use appropriate resources and assessments.

Objectives

- Summarize Position Statements from Professional Organizations Related to Early Literacy and Dual Language Learning
- Summarize Standards Related to Language Development and Early Literacy
- Summarize Key Concepts of Developmentally Appropriate Practice and Developmental Theory to Your Curriculum
- Investigate Specific Resources Being Used in Your Community to Support Language and Literacy Learning
- Investigate the Specific Strategies Being Used in Your Community to Support Dual Language Learners and Family Engagement

- Investigate What Specific Assessment Tools are Being Used in Your Community to Support Language and Literacy Learning

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1.1: NAEYC Position Statements

NAEYC Position Statements Supporting Literacy

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has developed position statements on issues relating to early childhood education regarding practice, policy, and professional development. NAEYC's aim in developing these position statements is to:

- take an informed position on issues affecting the education and development of young children;
- promote dialogue on these issues;
- create a shared language for practitioners, policy makers and families may discuss issues in early childhood education;
- influence public policy
- stimulate investment in accessible, affordable, high-quality learning environments and professional development; and
- create better educational and developmental outcomes for all young children.

NAEYC has developed position statements on Equity, Ethical Conduct, Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Professional Standards, and many other issues and topics. These statements are periodically updated to account for current knowledge in the field so for the most up-to-date information please see the [NAEYC Website](#).

In addition to current position statements on language and literacy development, NAEYC also keeps a [historical archive of related statements](#). Position statements that will be of interest to you in your work with children in their language and their literacy journey will be the current [Developmentally Appropriate Practice \(DAP\) position statement](#) and the following archived statements:

- [Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation](#)
- [Supplement on Assessing Young English Language Learners](#)
- [Learning to Read and Write](#)

By reviewing these statements and integrating their practices into your teaching you can improve the quality and effectiveness of your teaching benefiting the children and families you serve.

Early Childhood Educators have a wealth of resources to draw from as they plan ways to meet the developmental needs of each of the children in their care. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is the main professional organization for Early Childhood Educators. The NAEYC defines **developmentally appropriate practice** as “methods that promote each child’s optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning”. It is the job teachers to make sure that our practice meets children’s developmental needs. For example, there has been an unfortunate trend for modern preschools to include formal academic content taught at a level meant for older children. These practices are not developmentally appropriate. Developmentally appropriate practice dictates that any academic content should meet children’s developmental needs first. That means that children are given opportunities to learn academic content that are in keeping with their developmental level – such as learning through play.

For a practice to be developmentally appropriate, it must consider developmental domains and a child’s age, individual needs, and individual culture.

Developmental Domains

To consider development in planning curriculum means understanding what is appropriate at a given age or stage of development. Developmental milestone charts can help with this. It is vital to know what children should be capable of at a given age of development and plan activities accordingly. For instance, we know that young children are concrete thinkers who learn best by using real, tangible items rather than representations of items. If we want a group of 3-year-old children to learn about apples, we will give them real apples to smell, touch, see, and taste. In this way, they can develop a long lasting, deep concept about apples. This is developmentally appropriate. Offering them a book about apples is a useful support and vital for language development, but the book alone will never give them the conceptual understanding about apples. Likewise, well-meaning families often expect early childhood teachers to have children complete worksheets in preschool. From what we know about child development, young children do not have the executive function to allow them to sit in a chair for long periods of time to learn from worksheets.

Further, their bodies are designed to wiggle and move. Sitting at a desk will not help preschoolers learn. That is why many high-quality early childhood programs focus on play-based learning.

Individual Needs

Considering an individual child's needs means knowing what is appropriate for a given child. The way this is determined is through developmental assessments. Curriculum should be tailored to each child's different developmental needs. Perhaps there is an art activity in the classroom in which children cut paper with scissors and glue it onto a larger sheet. If some children do not have strong scissor skills, they may rip paper instead and use glue sticks to glue it down. In this way, children's individual developmental needs are met. They still are able to practice fine motor skills with art, but the activity is not designed to limit children by ability level. This type of planning is the one of the hallmarks of early childhood educators – the thoughtful practice of tailoring activities to meet children's individual needs. This practice is also referred to as **differentiation**, where the teacher understands and implements the idea that “one size does not fit all”.

Cultural Context

To consider culture in developmentally appropriate practice is to keep in mind the context in which the child is raised. Each family's set of rules, way of communicating, neighborhood, history, status, and environment is unique. While there are some universals, what is considered developmentally appropriate for one culture may not be for another culture. For instance, the ways adults talk with children can vary widely depending on the culture. Some cultures rely heavily on verbal communication while others rely more on non-verbal communication. Cultures can also vary on their norms around children's freedoms to move freely around a space. Some cultures allow children to move freely while others expect that children ask permission from an adult. Differences in these norms may mistakenly be seen as behavior issues by teachers.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is the practice of including ideas and artifacts that refer to a child's individual culture. This concept also extends to assessments. When measuring development using assessments, it is important to consider the cultural relevancy of the assessment. Does the assessment allow for children who speak multiple languages or those who do not have a familiarity with classroom materials? Imagine, for instance, that your assessment uses American football as examples. What happens when you have a child in your class who has just moved from India? Will her assessment be meaningful if she doesn't understand the rules of American football? Teachers can be mindful of such differences when assessing children. The best way to stay informed about cultural practices is to develop reciprocal communication and strong relationships with families.

NAEYC Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice

NAEYC has outlined guidelines that help ECE teachers engage in developmentally appropriate practice. These guidelines are summarized below, but for a deeper look please refer to the Developmentally Appropriate Practice Position Statement from the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The guidelines are as follows:

1. Creating a caring community of learners
2. Engaging in reciprocal partnerships with families and fostering community connections
3. Observing, documenting, and assessing children's development and learning
4. Teaching to enhance each child's development and learning
5. Planning and implementing an engaging curriculum to achieve meaningful goals
6. Demonstrating professionalism as an early childhood educator

These guidelines go beyond child development and reach to the larger context of teaching and learning in early childhood settings. Each of the six guidelines plays a role in creating a developmentally appropriate learning experience for children.

Creating a caring community of learners refers to how teachers create respectful interactions, positive relationships, and a supportive environment that focuses on the strengths that each child and family brings.

Engaging in reciprocal partnerships with families and fostering community connections refers to how teachers establish two-way communication with families that respects varying communication styles, create multiple types of opportunities for family

participation, and use families as a source of information for each child. It is important to also consider the community to which the program belongs and develop practices that honor and respect the community.

Observing, documenting, and assessing children's development and learning is how teachers measure how children are progressing in their development. This refers to watching and systematically observing children at play, keeping track of these observations using some type of system or tool, and later using that information to draw conclusions about how a child is meeting developmental goals.

Teaching to enhance each child's development and learning means that teachers use child development principles to foster learning. One main way to achieve this is through play-based learning. It also means that teachers use direct instruction in effective ways that meet children's needs and create learning experiences that are varied in format and complexity.

Planning and implementing an engaging curriculum to achieve meaningful goals refers to taking time to reflect and consider children's individual developmental goals and create learning experiences around those goals. These goals come from the observations and assessments that have been previously carried out. Curriculum should also include all developmental domains (physical, cognitive, emotional, and social) and learning content areas (art, music, math, science, and language/literacy).

Demonstrating professionalism as an early childhood educator is achieved in many ways. One way to demonstrate professionalism is follow the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators from NAEYC.

Reflection

Imagine you are the teacher in a classroom of two- and three-year-olds. What developmentally appropriate considerations would you take when designing read aloud activity?

Final Thoughts

Understanding child development is a vital skill for all early childhood teachers. Knowing the key features of the developmental domains- physical, cognitive, social, and emotional is a good start. Making sure that both typically developing and atypically developing children's needs are met is a requirement of good early childhood education. Implementing developmentally appropriate practice is critical to quality teaching. As with all things, understanding child development and its connection to developmentally appropriate practice takes time. It means seeking new knowledge and staying connected to the children in your care.

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1.2: Early Learning Standards

Early childhood educators use early learning standards to guide their work with young children. Early learning standards provide educators with a framework for what children should know and be able to do at various stages of their early development.

In addition to the early learning standards for your state, you may want to review the entire [Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework](#) paying particular attention to the language and literacy domain. The framework is similar to the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards in that they both refer to guiding principles, developmental domains, sub-domains, and developmental progressions.

The Head Start ELOF has age level indicators showing what a child should be able to do beginning at 36 months and at the end of 60 months. The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards show developmental progressions, but they do not indicate age levels.

? Exercise 1.2.1

Using your state's early learning standards, such as the [Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards](#), can help you plan, implement, and assess high-quality early childhood learning experiences to ensure all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Review your state's early learning standards. Can you identify which standards relate to language and literacy learning?

The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) is divided into 5 interrelated Domains of Learning;

1. Health and Physical Development
2. Social and Emotional Development
- 3. Language Development and Communication**
4. Approaches to Learning
5. Cognition and General Knowledge.

The standards in Domain 3: Language Development and Communication will be the most applicable to language and literacy development.

Other Standards

Other standards early childhood educators must be aware of are the [English Language Arts \(ELA\) Common Core Standards](#) and the [WiDA Standards](#).

The ELA Common Core Standards are for K-12 students and are similar to early learning standards in that they provide a way for teachers to measure students' progress throughout the school year. The ELA standards establish guidelines not only for English Language Arts but also for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. This is because students must learn to read, write, speak, listen, and effectively use language in many content areas. The standards help develop the literacy skills and concepts required for college and career readiness in multiple disciplines.

The WiDA ELD (English Language Development) standards are designed to help support educators who work with multi-lingual learners. WIDA is housed at the University of Wisconsin's Wisconsin Center for Education Research, but it is a consortium of 41 member states, territories, and federal agencies. WIDA has two levels of standards. The WiDA Standards are for K-12 students and represent the language students need to be successful in those grade levels. WiDA The Early Years for children ages 3-5 and provides resources to support language and learning as well as engagement with families of multilingual children in Pre-K

When early childhood educators understand how early learning standards align with Common Core and WIDA standards they can provide for continuity in education as children progress from preschool to kindergarten and beyond.

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1.3: Literacy Model and Theory Overview

Overview

It is important before you move on in this text to understand key concepts and how the text is organized. Read below to gain an understanding of the Nested Literacy Model and an introduction to the 3 developmental theories we will be covering in this chapter.

Nested Literacy

Literacy includes language, reading, and writing, which are interrelated concepts that reflect and support a child's overall thinking. Within these concepts are discrete areas that support the development of the broader concepts listed above. Literacy development is contextual, occurring within the supportive environments of the home and school, where family members and teachers support the development of the child through interactions, location specific opportunities, and relationships. We have developed a model to illustrate how this learning occurs, and we have chosen to organize the book around these central concepts (see Figure 1.3.1).

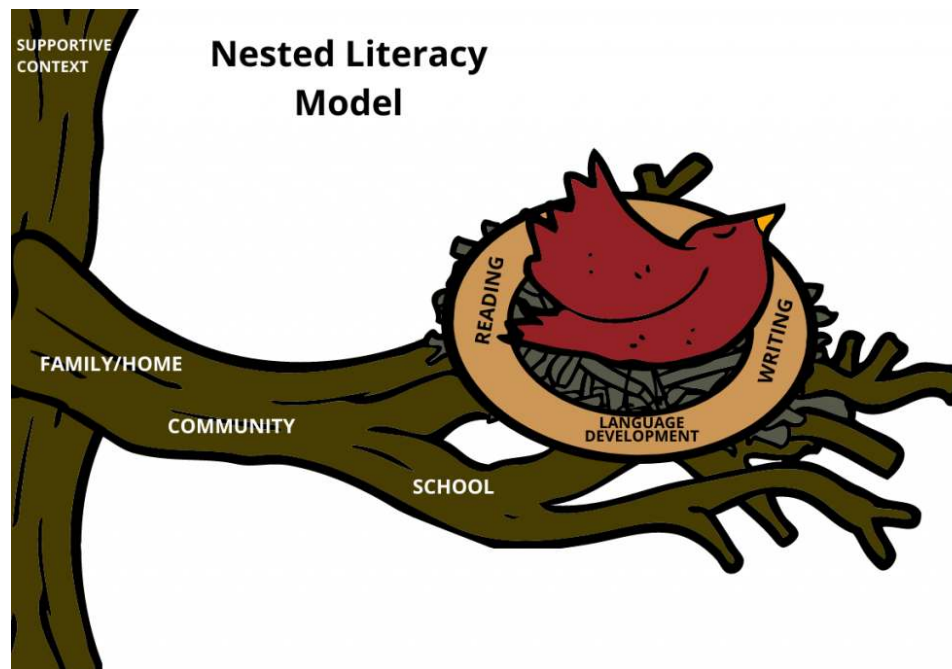


Figure 1.3.1 Nested Literacy Model

Nest

The overarching literacy concepts frame the nest and surround the bird. The three concepts, language development, writing, and reading are interconnected and collectively support the child's literacy development. A child's capacity for developing their reading, writing, and language skills is continuous. In other words, as the child continues to engage in meaningful interactions with others, reading, and writing, they will expand and enhance their proficiencies within each literacy concept. While the overarching literacy concepts are continuous, children bolster their literacy knowledge when they acquire discrete literacy skills as well. Discrete skills (e.g., directionality of text, phonemic awareness, alphabet and word awareness,) support children's literacy progression. In contrast to continuous literacy concept development, once a child acquires a discrete skill, that knowledge is then used by the child to engage in subsequent literacy experiences.

Bird

In the nested literacy model, the child is in the center, represented in our model by the bird. Children bring with them into their learning environments prior knowledge, language experiences, and print knowledge. Their experiences bring opportunities for the child to strengthen the literacy concepts (i.e., language development, reading, and writing) and acquire new knowledge. As the child interacts with their environment and is provided with literacy-rich opportunities, the child's emergent literacy abilities

develop and grow. The child uses these abilities to engage family members, classmates, and others, establishing a continuous and iterative cycle of literacy learning.

Branch

The home/family, community, and school environments are the wider contexts in which the child is quite literally nested. As a child interacts with the environment, they develop expressive and receptive language, reading, and writing skills. The tree branch supports the nest and the child as they continue to grow and construct meaning while engaging in social interactions. The tree branch literally provides a scaffold for the child and highlights the importance of a supportive environment. Rich literacy interactions and cognitive growth are enhanced when the environmental factors and contexts (e.g., school, community, family, health, economic) provide a positive and healthy space for children to explore, interact, and engage. All of these elements will be explored in detail in subsequent chapters and continue to demonstrate the interactions among the child, the emergent literacy components, and the broader environmental factors that enhance children's emerging literacies.

A Teacher's Morning

Ms. Tori entered her three-year-old classroom carrying materials for her dramatic play area, currently presented as an apple orchard shop. There was a puppet stage that could double as a countertop, aprons, a hay bale, tin pie pans, giant beige pom poms that almost looked like peeled apples, felt pieces, and wooden apples and apple pieces. The children had a written list of apple products with a picture next to the words. As Ms. Tori checked the apple orchard center once more, she considered that children learn by engaging with each other and wondered what she might add to encourage the children to play and interact with each other. She considered what songs they might sing in group time this week and what kinds of books would familiarize children with the concept of apple orchards and apple products.

Theory Overview

The understanding of theory enables educators to consider the ways children are exposed to and interact with language. Educators apply this knowledge to enhance teaching ability and support literacy learning. In the vignette above, Ms. Tori carefully considers a variety of ways to stimulate children's language development. She uses picture cues, written words, songs, and books to draw on the children's prior knowledge and introduce new concepts. Ms. Tori considers the age and stage of the children as well as how her practices foster literacy. She considers what the children already know, the concepts they are learning, and the concepts she wishes for them to learn. These practices are based on broader behaviors, skills, and concepts that explain why and how children grow and develop. It is not enough to merely provide experiences for children, we should have a rationale for why we engage them in certain practices. Theory gives us a framework and a logic *for* our practices. Theories help us to organize the knowledge we have, and they help us to make predictions about what might occur in the future.

CONSTRUCTIVIST SOCIOCULTURAL ECOLOGICAL



Figure 1.3.2 Developmental Theories

Some theories focus on the skills reflected by children as they engage with the world and move through developmental stages (constructivist theories). Other theories focus on the broader context of the child (ecological/contextual theories), and some focus on the child's construction of knowledge while also focusing on the immediate surroundings (sociocultural/cooperative theories). Using theory as a framework builds our scientific understanding of how children grow and develop. The major developmental

theories covered in this chapter have been widely used both to verify and refute ideas and to create road maps for early learning environments and practices. Each section in this chapter discusses a broad theory of cognitive development and then a specific theory focused on literacy development. This chapter will explore the following questions:



What theories focus on the child's skills and behaviors?



What theories focus on the child and the immediate environment?



What theories focus on the wider context?

Textbook Organization

We hope that this text will help you understand the wider picture of how emergent literacy develops and provide concrete strategies for incorporating literacy rich opportunities for young children into your classroom. It illustrates development in the early years and the theories that inform best practices for literacy and addresses contexts for learning, environmental supports, and assessment. It also addresses language development, reading, and writing, and presents the progression of literacy development.

To enhance readers' engagement with the book, we include a number of features to promote educators' visualizations of a variety of literacy concepts and practices. Some chapters use **vignettes** to illustrate children's literacy experiences. The vignettes are drawn from collective experiences working with young children and families over the years. Throughout the chapters, we also integrate **Pause and Consider** boxes to provide places for readers to stop and reflect on essential concepts as they are presented. At the end of some chapters, we provide a **Key Take-Aways** box followed by a **Resource** box with links to complementary materials for educators to consider. Embedded within some chapters, icons representing the bird, nest, or branch are also included to support the reader's attention back to the **Nested Literacy Model**. Finally, to provide readers with windows into early childhood classrooms, the book also includes photographs of young children immersed in literacy experiences. Readers will notice that many photos include children and educators wearing masks. Rather than remove these images, we intentionally retain the photos to serve as historical reminders of the essential role early educators played in supporting our youngest children and their families throughout the global pandemic. We value the work early educators do to nurture every child, and we hope this text extends the literature available to early educators in meaningful and personally relevant ways. We hope you enjoy the journey.

Pause and Consider

Language, reading, and writing develop simultaneously from birth. What evidence of early reading, writing, or language do you see with infants and toddlers? What do you see with preschoolers?

Take-Aways

This textbook is organized around the central concepts of language, reading, and writing. As a child develops, these components of emergent literacy are concurrently supported by the other. The textbook also explores theoretical frameworks, pedagogical approaches, and assessment in reading, writing, and language. The early years are profoundly impactful as children grow and develop, nested in their environment and supported by the family and the early learning setting.

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1.4: Constructivist Theories



Constructivist Theories

Constructivism emphasizes the individual child and defines indicators of development as the child continues to grow. Children actively construct knowledge based on their stage of development and previous knowledge. As children engage with their environment, they create internal mental structures to comprehend their experiences (**Piaget, 1962**). Constructivism may also present children's growth and development as a series of progressive stages. **Stage theories** help educators recognize children's accomplishments, anticipate areas of growth, and provide intentional literacy experiences. **Piaget's cognitive developmental theory** examines a child's developmental stage and how they acquire and categorize information internally (Piaget, 1962). Pertaining to emergent literacy progressions, **Frith's theory of reading acquisition** presents stages of development as young readers acquire an awareness of alphabetic systems (Frith, 1985).

Piaget's Cognitive Developmental Theory

Jean Piaget's cognitive developmental theory is a form of **constructivism**. According to cognitive developmental theory, children construct their own learning through interactions and experiences in the environment. Piaget (1962) argued that we are constantly organizing our world by categorizing information and determining ways of applying this information. In the vignette above, Ms. Tori has created an opportunity for children to access the categories of information they have already acquired (e.g., apples are red, green, and yellow) and use this knowledge to engage in discovery play in the apple orchard center.

Several key concepts are important for understanding Piaget's theory.

The units we use to organize our understandings are called schemas. Schemas include not only a concept like "birds fly," but all of the associations used to develop the concept through past experiences.

Piaget believed that we form our schemas through a process called adaptation, which allows us to create categories and subcategories for emerging schemas. There are two types of adaptation: **assimilation** and **accommodation**.

- **Assimilation** means that we take new information and squeeze it into an existing schema. This can happen whether it makes sense or not, such as trying to fit a peg into a hole, whether it is square or round.
- **Accommodation** literally means to make room for something. For example, when most people have houseguests, they accommodate them by altering their sleeping and eating arrangements and their schedules. Assimilation would suggest that hosts told the guests to forage in the fridge for themselves, find a sleeping bag, and figure out where to sleep. Assimilation makes no room—the schema does not change. But accommodation means that there is now room to create or understand something in a new or different way. The process takes place as a result of **disequilibrium**, which reflects the state a child is thrown into when they receive information that is new. Humans generally experience disequilibrium as uncomfortable, so we generally try to stay in a state of equilibrium, a comfortable cognitive state, until or unless we are exposed to new information that does not fit into our existing schema (Piaget, 1962).

Vignette: Broken Birds

Three-year-old Li has developed a schema that birds fly. This is a reasonable schema based on Li's experience seeing birds fly in her neighborhood and places she has visited. Today she visited the zoo with her classmates and saw ostriches for the first time. After observing the ostriches, Li turned to her classmates and said, "The birds are broken." She had noticed that they do not fly. Because Li already has a schema "birds fly" and the non-flying birds have thrown her into disequilibrium, Li has decided that the birds are broken. She has NOT decided that the schema is incorrect. Thus, she has assimilated the ostriches in the "birds fly" schema, with a bit of a footnote that these birds are broken. This allows Li to return to a state of equilibrium as she has assimilated the new information. It takes multiple exposures to a violation of our expectation, or multiple instances of disequilibrium, in order for us to choose to accommodate new information and create new schema. Later that day, Li visited chickens who cannot fly high in the air. Perhaps that second time, she labeled them broken birds or she might have started to

consider that some birds do not fly. The third time, Li visits the penguin house and sees definitive evidence that some animals, who are clearly birds, do not fly. At the point where Li creates a new structure that divides birds into “birds that fly” and “birds that do not fly,” she has engaged in accommodation. This is crucial for all forms of cognitive development and has numerous applications to literacy learning when children must decide on the rules and usage of language in all its forms and when they engage in communication to express themselves about the world around them.

Piaget also developed a set of four stages, with individual substages, to map out a range of expected, observable behaviors for children (1962). The **sensorimotor stage** closely corresponds with infancy and toddlerhood. The **preoperational stage** is associated with preschool years. The **concrete operational stage** covers the elementary years, and the **formal operational stage** applies to adolescence and adulthood. These constructs are outlined in the chart “Piaget’s Stages” (see Table 1.4.1) and help us to formulate ideas about what would be expected for children at particular ages. Understanding the ages and stages delineated by Piaget (see Table 1.4.1) helps us to consider the importance of sensory experiences for infants and toddlers.

Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development

Table 1.4.1 Piaget’s Stages

Stage	Approximate Age Range	Characteristics	Example
Sensorimotor	Birth to about 2 years	The child experiences the world through the fundamental senses of seeing, hearing, touching, and tasting.	Children may put new objects in their mouths (e.g., the parent’s cellphone).
Preoperational	2 to 7 years	Children acquire the ability to internally represent the world through language and mental imagery. They also start to see the world from other people’s perspectives.	Children start using words and phrases to communicate their desires (e.g., “cookie”).
Concrete Operational	7 to 11 years	Children become able to think logically. They can increasingly perform operations on objects that are only imagined.	Children can tell the difference between their own perspective and another person (e.g., “I can see out of the window, but you cannot.”).
Formal Operational	11 years to adulthood	Adolescents can think systematically, can reason about abstract concepts, and can understand ethics and scientific reasoning.	Children can consider hypothetical situations (e.g., What if I need something in an emergency and there is no adult to ask?).

With regard to language development, parents and educators are encouraged to sing, talk, and tell stories to children; we couple that with cradling a child or clapping our hands together. We know that children in the **sensorimotor stage** are learning about their world by touching and being touched, sniffing items, putting everything in their mouths, looking around, and listening with avid interest. Children use these experiences to create schema to apply to the world around them and this fosters their ability to communicate orally and start to perceive symbols. For example, when a child builds a tower of blocks, they start to learn how many blocks can be stacked along with efficient strategies for stacking them. At that point, they can then add blocks to their mental schema for items that can be stacked on top of each other. This knowledge then creates space for a child to use language to express their zeal (or disappointment) in how the block-stacking is going and to beckon others to join in.



Figure 1.4.1 Children construct learning by interacting with their environment, such as when stacking blocks.

Upon entering the **preoperational phase**, children use symbolic thinking—including language—to communicate their thoughts and ideas. They were able to do so during the sensorimotor phase by indicating and pointing and using some language, but in the preoperational phase, they do so with complexity. Additionally, in the preoperational phase, they can use language to express thoughts about objects or people that are not immediately present. An older infant may point at the elephant while at the zoo, but a preschooler may talk about the elephant they saw at the zoo on a previous day. This greater sophistication reflects children's ability to engage in symbolic thinking. Children in the preoperational phase need opportunities to develop their increasingly complex language. Providing opportunities for children to engage in pretend-play, participate in social conversations, and use language to solve tasks promotes children's use of complex language.

Frith Theory of Reading Acquisition

Literacy experts also use a **stage model** to describe children's literacy progressions. Although the various stage models of reading have some distinctions and focus on different elements of reading processes, they all share an approach which focuses on children moving from one stage to another with increasing complexity and include features that build on the previous stage. One literacy model is **Uta Frith's theory of reading acquisition**. In Frith's theory, children acquire literacy by moving through particular stages that are developmental and associated with both age and experience. Frith includes three stages of reading acquisition in her model (see Figure 1.4.2). The **first stage**, the **logographic stage**, is characterized by instant recognition of symbols, images, or words. Children demonstrate emerging logographic understandings when they read out familiar logos like Target's bullseye or McDonald's golden arches. In the **second stage**, the **alphabetic stage**, children begin to use letter symbols to represent the sounds they hear in individual words. Children in this stage demonstrate an emerging understanding of sound and symbol relationships, such as writing /kt/ for cat. The child may hear the beginning sound and ending sound of cat, but the internal vowel sound is not yet recognized. These early approximations demonstrate that they can hear sounds and represent them, but not always completely or correctly. The **third stage**, the **orthographic stage**, involves the internalization of spelling patterns and children begin to recognize and reproduce words with increasing automaticity. In this stage, readers do not need to sound out familiar words, though they pause when confronting new words or letter combinations. For example, a child may quickly read the word "kick" but pause to consider how to read the more complex word "knife" because the /k/ is silent. In each of these stages, children master greater complexities of thought and language and teachers must adjust their approaches in order to best foster the child's growth (Frith, 1985).

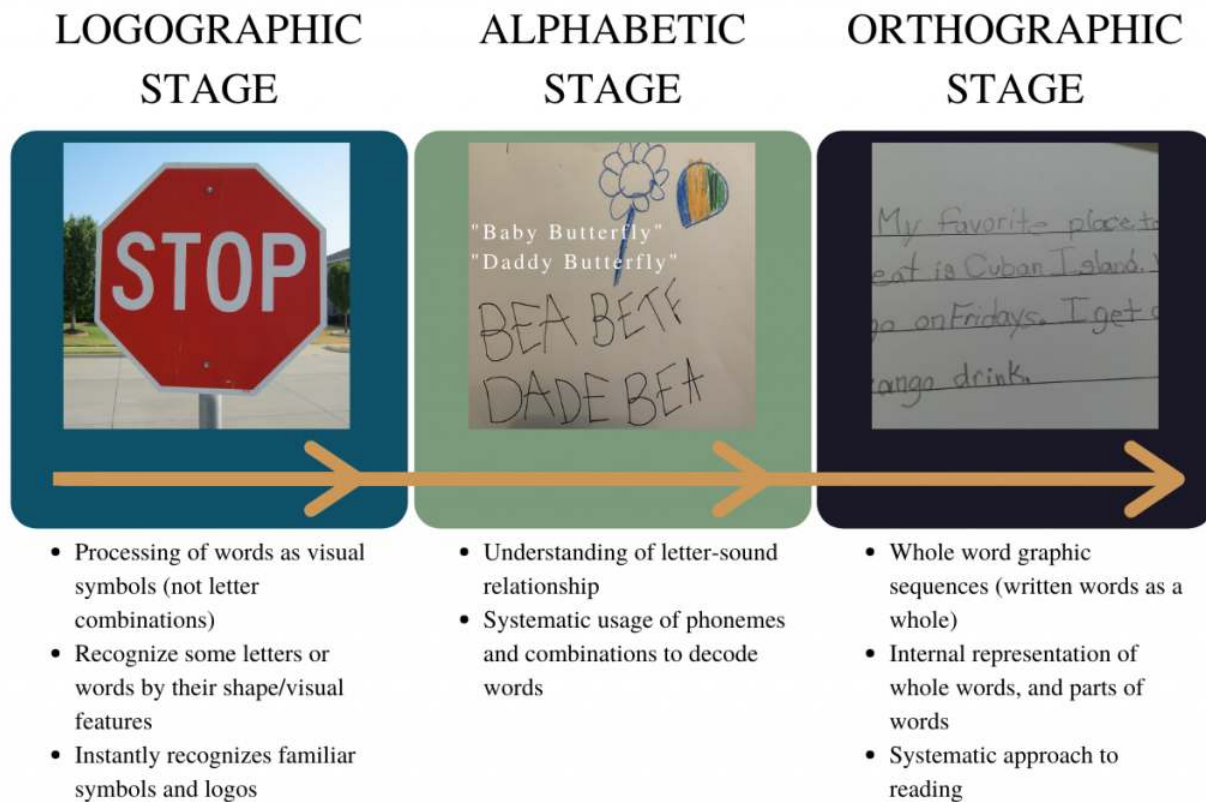


Figure 1.4.2 Frith Theory of Reading Acquisition

Constructivist stage models have many iterations that metaphorically look like stair steps, a spiral, or an increasing sloped line. But, in every case, the image implies that the child is acquiring new and unique skills that capitalize on the previous point and move the child to the next point. The stages are successive and developmental, beginning in infancy. As children master each successive stage, they still retain the skills they attained in previous stages. Literacy stage theories acknowledge that before children can read the list of what is for sale at the orchard, they benefit from repeated exposure to environmental print, letters, letter sounds, and other literacy experiences. This is why intentional educators (like Ms. Tori) use picture cues next to the words on the list of what is available for purchase in the orchard shop. Deliberate actions like this support children's emergent literacy and honor the developmental nature of the process.

Piaget's and Frith's stage theories place an emphasis on seeing the child move forward from one set of capacities to the next more complex set of capacities. Both Piaget and Frith emphasize the process of observing what the child's behaviors and skills reflect about their thinking. **This approach is helpful for educators because it fosters an understanding about where the child is and gives a map for where the child needs to progress next.**

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1.5: Sociocultural Theories



Sociocultural Theories

Sociocultural theories bridge the gap between constructivist approaches and ecological approaches by emphasizing cooperation. These theories emphasize the immediate environment and include educators' analysis of children's observable skills and behaviors to present children with the next valuable learning moment. Children develop language skills individually, but they do so within a cooperative learning context as peers, family members, teachers, and others engage, support, and teach them. **Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory** is notable for focusing on what the child can do, while also suggesting that a child's learning is supported when the right amount of instruction is provided at the right time. **Marie Clay's theories** and definitions of emergent reading provide us with a framework for understanding individual children's prior knowledge and readiness for different literacy experiences. These theories focus on the interactive nature of the child's capabilities, experiences, and interactions with others.

Sociocultural Learning Theory

Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory emphasizes the social aspect of children constructing their learning (1986). Vygotsky believed that cognitive growth was a result of interactions between people, after which a child internalizes learning. According to this theory, children learn most effectively by engaging meaningfully with someone who is more experienced. Vygotsky developed the **concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD)**. He defines it as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by the independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving" (Vygotsky, 1978, p86).

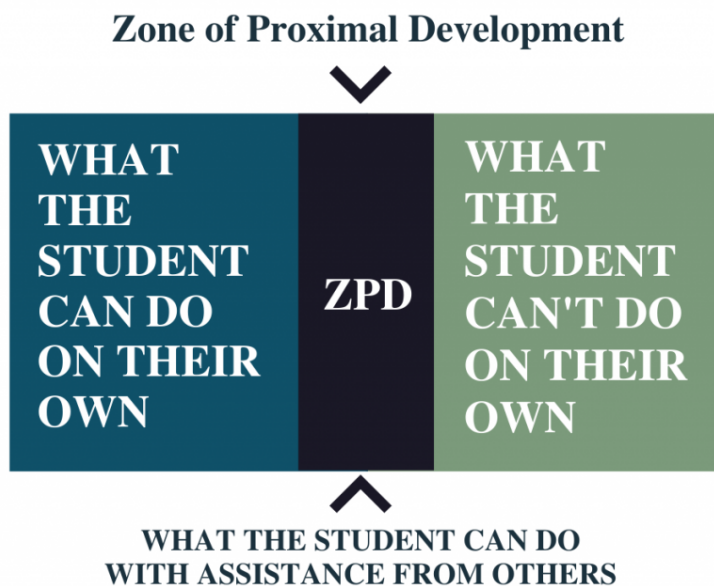


Figure 1.5.1 Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky recognized a **more knowledgeable other (MKO)** could be another child, a family member, a teacher, or anyone who can provide some support for a task. The support itself is called **scaffolding**. Construction workers, painters, and others use physical scaffolds when they work to reach areas beyond their abilities if merely standing on the ground. In this same way, the support of a more experienced peer giving guidance or direction creates a support for the child to be able to construct their own learning. As a child masters a task, they need less scaffolding and eventually the scaffold disappears (Vygotsky, 1978). For example, many young children have help in learning to wash their hands. An adult may show the child how to acquire the soap, rub their hands vigorously, and rinse. Over time, children need less help with the task, and the scaffold is removed as children are able to wash

their hands independently. Children are in progressive zones of proximal development when they are still needing some guidance to wash their hands. Vygotsky **placed great importance on the social experience**, which provides the scaffold. This theory allows for the notion that children construct their learning, but it also emphasizes that construction requires some help from others.



Figure 1.5.2 Children learn through social interaction.

📌 Pause and Consider: Is Speech the Chicken or the Egg?

Read the following passage examining the differences between **Piaget's** and **Vygotsky's** conceptualizations of children's oral language. This creates an interesting chicken-and-egg dilemma with regard to language development. As you read, think about how each theoretical stance resonates with you.

With regard to language, the differences between the approaches of Piaget and Vygotsky can be understood by looking at one aspect of oral language. Children can often be observed engaging in a running stream of commentary as they play and solve tasks. **Piaget** referred to this action as **egocentric speech** while **Vygotsky** termed the practice **private speech**. The difference in naming reveals what each theorist believed about language and cognitive development.

Piaget indicated that egocentric speech was an additional marker of **egocentrism**, a hallmark of the preoperational period (Piaget, 1962). **Egocentrism** means that children's capacity for perspective-taking or understanding another person's point of view is not yet developed. Piaget argued that egocentric speech reflects the developmental stage the child is in. He reasoned children speak aloud to themselves in this stage because they are unable to understand or perceive that another person is hearing them.

Vygotsky indicated it is not merely a lack of perspective-taking that causes children to talk to themselves, but that children do this because they are trying to solve tasks (Vygotsky, 1978). For example, children frequently talk to themselves when they are learning to tie their shoes. **Vygotsky indicated that private speech never truly disappears, but instead goes underground as children grow older.** It is true that while most adults will not talk to themselves in public, many people will refer to speaking out loud when working through a hard task, such as being lost in traffic or trying to create something complex. Both theorists agree that perspective-taking is limited in this stage, but where Piaget says that egocentric speech is merely a reflection of the child's development, Vygotsky says that **private speech is being actively used as a tool.**

Is our language resultant from our cognitive development, or does language lead our cognitive development?

Is it possible that both of these approaches are true?

Marie Clay's Emergent Literacy Theory

Marie Clay's emergent literacy theory recognizes a close relationship between the instructional scaffolds used by educators to promote young children's emerging reading, writing, and oral language skills (Clay, 1991). Drawing on the work of Vygotsky, Clay argues, "The essence of successful teaching is to know where the frontier of learning is for any one pupil on a particular task" (Clay, 1991, p. 65). In this way, **Clay extends the value of understanding where an individual child's zone of proximal development** is so that educators take advantage of learning spaces to enhance a child's literacy learning (p. 65). Clay's emergent

literacy instructional practices underscore the interactions between educators and children and focus on the social supports and contexts children and educators co-create.

Clay recognizes children construct their learning within the **context of their own developmental histories, prior knowledge, and previous experiences with complex tasks** (Clay, 1998). The focus of emergent literacy then is on the *ways* that children process information and the subsequent *strategies* that children learn to use to solve a problem. Moreover, as a member of the early learning community, educators encourage children to share the learning insights they achieve so they, in turn, become valuable literacy resources for their peers (Clay, 1991). Clay embraces **teacher scaffolding as a valuable** support for children's literacy learning and views teaching as an interaction between the child and the educator (or other expert). Thus, it is important to have clear instructional approaches that support the child's ability to discover and use strategies to support their learning with regard to the knowledge that literacy development is unique for each child (Clay, 1998). Understanding emergent literacy approaches means that teachers consider the opportunities that children have had to complete the tasks set before them including their access to previous experiences and prior knowledge. In other words, whether children will choose to replicate creating an apple pie by using beige pom poms, a circle felt crust piece, and a pie tin may depend upon whether they have ever seen anyone create an apple pie from scratch.

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1.6: Ecological Theories



Ecological/Contextual Theories

Ecological theories emphasize the **child's system and context**. Ecological theories of human development focus on the **interrelationships between broader environmental systems and their impact on a child's development**. In contrast to the theoretical approaches presented earlier in the chapter, ecological theories look more **broadly** at the **complex levels of the child's environment** and how this **impacts learning**. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory examines the social resources and relationships that directly and indirectly impact a child's development. Bronfenbrenner focuses on multiple environments of the child, including the contexts of home, neighborhood, community, and culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Friere's critical literacy theory focuses on understanding the social, cultural, and political contexts of learners (Friere, 1985). These theories take an ecological approach as they are focused on understanding the child in the backdrop of time, place, and circumstance.

Ecological Theory of Human Development

The ecological theory of human development emphasizes the contextual interrelationships that exist between individuals, families, the physical environment, the community, and the cultural norms and values of a society. Each of these relationships exerts contextual influence on the individual and is depicted by concentric circles embedded within one another. The nested spheres of influence are represented in the graphic "Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems" (see Figure 1.6.1) and include the **microsystem**, **mesosystem**, **exosystem**, and the **macrosystem**, with each system based on a greater understanding of influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

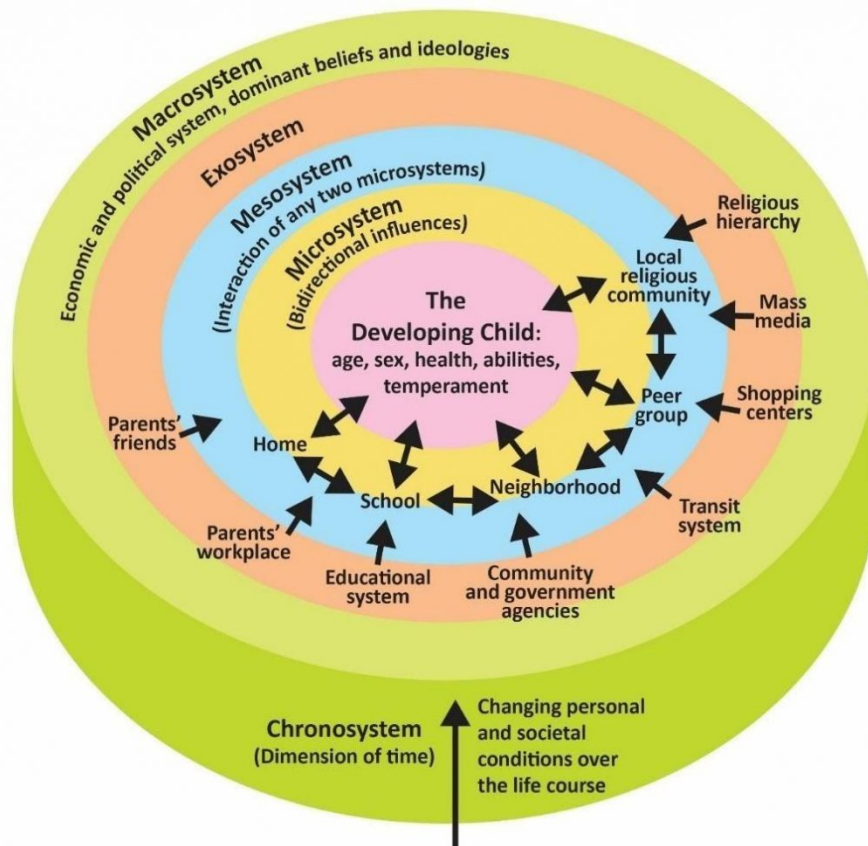


Figure 1.6.1 .Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems

The **microsystem** includes the interaction a child has in their immediate surroundings. This includes the child's home and the early learning setting as well as other environments that are consistent and immediate. The interaction between the parent and the child or the teacher and the child forms a microsystem.

The **mesosystem** brings together two settings containing the child. For example, when the early learning teacher and the parents interact, it is taking place in the mesosystem.

The **exosystem** is external to the child, although it influences the child indirectly. The exosystem consists of areas the child does not enter. Examples of the exosystem include the parent's workplace. Yet, the parental workplace influences the child because it influences the parent, which subsequently affects the interactions between parent and child. Consider, for example, how children and families are impacted differently depending on whether or not the workplace provides access to health care, sick leave, or family leave when needed.

The **macrosystem** consists of the norms and mores that influence culture and customs. These beliefs, expectations, and rules underlie the activities and institutions that constitute our everyday lives. For example, policies around mandatory school attendance were created in the macrosystem and influence jurisdictions (also in the macrosystem) to provide schools for the community (exosystem), for families to enroll the child (mesosystem), and for the child to attend (microsystem). At each of these junctures, there are interactions taking place in the various systems indicated and the systems ripple in and out accordingly. Ripple out occurs as the child has needs, the family responds, the local environment reacts, and social change can occur. In some places, early learning centers open at 5:00 am to accommodate super-commuters. This is an example of how the needs of the child and family create change in the community. Other times, larger policies affect whole communities or families in ways that impact their practices. For instance, when airbags were required in new cars (macrosystem), companies started installing them (exosystem), and families stopped putting car seats in the front seat and instead put the child in the backseat.

As the child interacts with others in the supportive context, the child is exposed to new discrete language skills, such as vocabulary. In the Northern Virginia area, many children are familiar with the word "pentagon" and are aware it has five sides, even before this is introduced as a vocabulary word. The Pentagon, which serves as headquarters for the United States Department of Defense, is an important military, political, and economic presence in the Northern Virginia area (macrosystem). It is also a workplace for some families (exosystem). The Pentagon's distinctive, five-sided shape is visible from several major roads in the area and a child might easily see it from the car, view it on a tour, or hear others speak about it (mesosystem). This regular exposure influences the words that adults or peers use while regularly interacting with the child (microsystem), and this influences a child's likelihood of hearing the word, "pentagon." As a result, children comprehend and use the word "pentagon" earlier than some peers in a different part of the country or state.

The ecological approach, similar to the nested literacy model, looks at the totality of language experience over time. Just as the branch and tree provide the context for the bird in its nest, children's wider backdrop for their experiences influences what they learn to value and what they learn to master. The "Pentagon" example focuses on vocabulary, but the same principle applies for other discrete skills such as phonological awareness and alphabetic knowledge. Each time the child masters a new discrete skill, it ripples out and interacts with the wider concepts of language development (receptive and expressive language), reading, and writing. This builds the capacity to think and understand. Each time a child is exposed to the wider concepts of language, writing, and reading, it helps to foster abilities in the areas of the discrete skills. Indeed our discrete skills and language concepts are connected in much the same way that microsystem interactions are. It is difficult to say that speaking leads to reading or that reading leads to speaking. It is more accurate to say that they are transactional and interactive and develop concurrently.

Our understanding of language development must take into account environmental aspects beyond the immediate situation containing the child. This means that the literacy interactions that a child experiences in their environment influence the family and vice versa, causing influential ripples in and out. Children first learn what is familiar and contextual. Development is influenced by multiple systems, including the family, school, neighborhood, and larger ecologies that encompass more immediate systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). **These systems are the context in which children learn.**

Freire Critical Literacy

Paulo Freire (1985) defined critical literacy as the capacity to analyze, critique, and transform social, cultural, and political texts and contexts by having a thorough understanding of the experience of the student. Freire went on to suggest that in order to truly reach students, one must be aware of their problems, struggles, and aspirations, while also considering the power dynamics implicit

in the ideas and materials they are exposed to and the relationships they develop. Additionally, these understandings should be followed by a reciprocal exchange and a willingness for action in ways that would meet the learner where they are.

Critical literacy acknowledges teachers have the power to send implicit messages about the importance and meaning of some information above others. Teachers as decision-makers determine the value of particular lessons, goals, materials, and the structure of the learning day. Children receive feedback about the relative importance of ideas within teacher and classroom interactions. These differences are contextual and socially constructed, even as they are transmitted back and forth between speaker and listener, between environment and child, and among each of these characters as they move through their day (Luke, 2012).

For example, a critical literacy approach prompts us to stop and acknowledge our decision to choose the apple orchard shop in the opening vignette as our theme for the dramatic play area. We are making choices as educators about the types of play contexts that have value and the types of vocabulary that should be introduced. For example, Ms. Tori may also choose to include a picture card that says “manzana,” the Spanish word for apple, in order to support the home language development that she has already identified in the group of children she teaches. Even more broadly, critical literacy challenges us to question the value of the apple orchard center for learners. Would an apple orchard dramatic play area hold the same relevance for children in south Florida as it would for children in northern Michigan? The answer is, it depends. When answering questions about instructional practices, critical literacy asks us to consider: What is the intended goal? What are the children’s interests and how do they connect to their real-world experiences? If not, what would make these practices relevant and impactful for the children? Are the children given only the materials for apple pie, and might it be relevant to include materials for other types of apple desserts, such as apple empanadas? What types of play would be acceptable in this play area? Critical literacy challenges teachers to always consider whether the educational environment and experiences they choose allow children to feel seen and heard as they acquire knowledge.



Figure 1.6.2 Early childhood teachers plan for instruction.

Using Theory in Practice

Theories matter because they inform our practice. When we stop to evaluate if a literacy activity seems appropriate for the age and stage of the child, we are grounding our practice in a theory (Piaget/Frith). When we set up our classroom with learning stations to encourage children to learn language from one another, we follow a theoretical construct (Vygotsky/Clay). When we stop to ask about the environmental influences on the family and, subsequently, the child’s language development, our practice reflects our understanding of the factors that Bronfenbrenner and Friere spoke about. Understanding the theoretical frameworks that guide our practice helps us to be more effective and intentional in the classroom.

Pause and Consider: Theory to Practice

As you prepare and engage in your learning environment, what do you take into account? How do you think about the ages and stages of the children? How do you think about the wider context? How do you incorporate the voices and influence of children and families? How do you think about ways to foster interaction among children who are very experienced with a concept and those that are less experienced? Are these approaches contextual, cooperative, or constructivist? How can you use theory to understand what is occurring with a child, and how will you apply this understanding to your practices?

Key Take-Aways

Theories help us to understand child development and to plan our instruction and environments accordingly. We must understand the ages and stages that children are in and allow children to construct their own learning. We emphasize children interacting socially because they learn from one another and from themselves as they do so. Teachers should create circumstances for children to learn new concepts and explore with materials, always keeping in mind that they are making decisions about what materials and lessons children will be exposed to. Finally, it is imperative to understand context so that children have every opportunity to make meaningful connections.

Additional Resources

Piaget Society Resources for Students: <https://piaget.org/resources-for-students/>

Critical Literacy: Promoting Equity in Early Childhood Settings: <https://www.hekupu.ac.nz/article/critical-literacy-promoting-equity-early-childhood-settings>

Frith's Model of Reading Acquisition: <https://esol.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/informational-page/Frith%27s%20model%20of%20reading%20acquisition.pdf>

The Importance of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory in the Classroom: http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/J_Tudge_Importance_2017.pdf

Marie Clay's Literacy Processing Theory: <https://readingrecovery.org/reading-recovery/teaching-children/early-literacy-learning/>

Paolo Freire Institute for Learning: <https://www.freire.org/paulo-freire/>

Virginia's Early Learning & Development Standards (ELDS): Birth-Five Learning Guidelines. <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/curriculum/va-elds-birth-5.pdf>

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding: <https://educationaltechnology.net/vygotskys-zone-of-proximal-development-and-scaffolding/>

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1.7: Language and Literacy Resources

There are many language and literacy resources available to help educators inform their teaching, engage with families, and create effective learning environments, etc. Learning standards and curriculum along with web-based resources can be valuable resources to teachers.

Learning Standards

You may be familiar with learning standards such as the:

- Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards
- Common Core State Standards, or
- WIDA English Language Development Standards

Learning standards are a valuable resource to teachers for several reasons.

1. Guide Curriculum Development

Learning standards provide a framework for what children should know and be able to do at various stages of their development, helping teachers develop their curriculum and learning experiences to ensure they are meeting the developmental needs of their students.

2. Ensure Consistency

Standards provide a consistent set of expectations for children's development and learning across different classrooms and settings. Having consistency ensures that all children, regardless of their background or where they are receiving education and care, have access to high-quality education.

3. Assess and Monitor Progress

Teachers may assess and monitor children's progress by using learning standards as a benchmark. When teachers compare a child's performance to the standards, teachers can identify areas where a child may need additional support or added enrichment.

4. Inform Instruction

Standards inform teachers about the key skills and knowledge children should develop. Using standards, teachers can target their instruction to foster development in all domains of learning.

5. Support Professional Development

Learning standards can support professional development. By understanding and implementing these standards, teachers can improve their instructional practices and stay up-to-date with best practices in education.

6. Engage Families

Standards can help teachers communicate with families about their child's development and learning. Standards provide a common language and set of expectations which help teachers and families to discuss a child's progress and how to support learning at home.

7. Promote Equity

Standards set clear, high expectations for children that promote educational equity, ensuring all children, regardless of background, have the opportunity to develop the skills they need to succeed in school and beyond.

8. Facilitate Transition to Kindergarten

Early learning standards such as WMELS, help align preschool education with kindergarten expectations, making the transitions smoother for children. Early learning standards help prepare children for the next steps in their education.

In summary, standards provide a roadmap for high-quality education and ensure that all children have the opportunity to thrive. Standards are a critical resource for all teachers.

Adapted from OpenAI. (2024). ChatGPT [Large language model]. <https://chatgpt.com>

The standards we have reviewed are state or national standards.

Your program and local school district may follow these exactly or the district may have written their own based on these state and national standards.

- Think about the learning standards you are currently using. How do you use them to support learning, development, and the well-being of the children in your program?
- You may wish to contact your local school district. Find out what early learning standards they are using to guide their literacy instruction. How do the standards they use align with the early learning standards used in your program?

Curriculum

What is Curriculum?

Curriculum is the academic content that is taught in a center or school. Curriculum also serves as a language and literacy resource. There are many different types of curricula used in schools and centers, which can be purchased from various online websites and curriculum publishers.

Curriculum is a vital resource for teachers in several ways:

1. Provides Structure and Organization

A well-defined curriculum gives teachers a structured framework to follow, outlining what to teach and when to teach it. This organization helps ensure that all necessary content is covered in a logical and sequential manner.

2. Guides Instruction

The curriculum provides specific learning objectives and goals that guide teachers in their instructional planning. This helps them focus their lessons on key concepts and skills students need to learn.

3. Ensures Consistency and Continuity

A standardized curriculum ensures that all students receive the same quality of education, regardless of their classroom or teacher. This consistency is especially important for maintaining educational equity across different schools and districts.

4. Supporting Assessment

Curriculum outlines the expected learning outcomes, which teachers can use to develop assessments. These assessments help teachers measure student progress and identify areas where students may need additional support.

5. Facilitating Differentiation

A comprehensive curriculum often includes a variety of instructional strategies and resources that teachers can use to differentiate their instruction. This allows teachers to meet the diverse needs of their students by providing tailored support and challenges.

6. Providing Resources and Materials

Curriculum often comes with a variety of teaching resources and materials, such as lesson plans, activities, textbooks, and multimedia resources. These materials save teachers time in planning and preparation, allowing them to focus more on instruction.

7. Aligning with Standards

Curriculum is typically aligned with state or national educational standards, ensuring that the instruction meets the required educational benchmarks. This alignment helps teachers prepare students for standardized tests and future academic success.

8. Supporting Professional Development

Curriculum can serve as a basis for professional development, helping teachers stay informed about best practices and new educational strategies. Teachers can use the curriculum to reflect on their teaching practices and seek opportunities for growth and improvement.

9. Engaging Families

A well-defined curriculum helps teachers communicate with families about what their children are learning and how they can support their education at home. It provides a clear outline of the learning objectives and expectations for students.

10. Promoting Reflective Practice

Curriculum encourages teachers to reflect on their teaching practices, assess the effectiveness of their instruction, and make necessary adjustments. This reflective practice helps improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom.

In summary, curriculum serves as a comprehensive guide for teachers, providing structure, resources, and support to enhance their instructional practices and ensure student success.

Adapted from OpenAI. (2024). ChatGPT [Large language model]. <https://chatgpt.com>

- Now, consider the curriculum you have encountered or used yourself. If you are not currently teaching in a classroom, think back to the curriculum used when you were in preschool or kindergarten. How did it align with NAEYC's recommendations in their position statements for Developmentally Appropriate Practice and Curriculum and Assessment? If and when you have the opportunity to review and select a curriculum for your school or center, it is important to consider recommendations from organizations such as NAEYC.
- You may wish to contact your local school district to find out what type of curriculum they use for early language and literacy learning. How does it align with early learning standards such as WMEELS?
- Visit the [Head Start--Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center](#). Here you may view the many different types of curriculum available Home-Based, Infant and Toddler, Preschool, and Family Child Care programs.

Web-Based Sources

Web-based sources are a valuable resource for teachers in numerous ways:

1. Access to Up-to-Date Information

Web-based sources provide teachers access to the latest research, educational trends, and current events. This ensures teachers have the most recent information to inform their teaching practices.

2. Diverse Learning Materials

Online resources include a wide range of materials such as videos, interactive simulations, lesson plans, and educational games. These resources cater to different learning styles and can make lessons more engaging and interactive.

3. Professional Development

Teachers can access online courses, webinars, and professional development communities. These resources help teachers stay current with best practices, new teaching strategies, and subject matter expertise.

4. Collaboration and Networking

Web-based platforms allow teachers to connect with colleagues, join professional learning communities, and participate in forums and discussion groups. This collaboration can lead to the sharing of ideas, resources, and support. There are many groups for preschool teachers on apps such as Facebook where teachers share wonderful ideas and advice.

5. Supplementing Curriculum

Online resources can supplement the existing curriculum by providing additional information, activities, and tools that enhance learning. Teachers can find materials that align with their lesson plans and address specific learning needs.

6. Access to Educational Tools

There are many web-based tools available for creating presentations, assessments, interactive lessons, and other educational content. These tools can help teachers design more effective and engaging lessons.

7. Student Engagement

Web-based resources can be used to engage students in their learning. Interactive websites, educational apps, and online projects can motivate students and provide them with a variety of ways to explore and understand content.

8. Differentiation and Personalization

Teachers can find resources that allow them to differentiate instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students. Online platforms often offer personalized learning paths, adaptive assessments, and resources tailored to different skill levels.

9. Global Perspectives

The internet provides access to a wide array of perspectives and cultures, allowing teachers to introduce global viewpoints and diverse content into their lessons. This can help students develop a broader understanding of the world.

10. Time Efficiency

Web-based sources often save teachers time by providing ready-made lesson plans, worksheets, and activities. This allows teachers to spend more time focusing on instruction and less time on preparation. Try sites like Pinterest and Teachers Pay Teachers. (Although this is a paid site, there are many free resources available to you on this site as well.)

11. Resource Sharing

Teachers can easily share web-based resources with students and parents through classroom websites, email, or learning management systems. This enhances communication and ensures that all stakeholders have access to the same information. You can try sites like [SeeSaw](#) or Google Classroom.

12. Assessment and Feedback

Many online platforms offer tools for creating assessments and providing instant feedback. These tools can help teachers monitor student progress and adjust their instruction based on real-time data.

In summary, web-based sources provide teachers with a wealth of resources, tools, and opportunities to enhance their teaching, engage students, and improve learning outcomes.

Adapted from OpenAI. (2024). ChatGPT [Large language model]. <https://chatgpt.com>

Literacy Resources

There are many resources available to teachers. Some resources help teachers learn about literacy and others help parents learn how they can support their children as they develop literacy skills. Some websites to explore are:

- [Raising Readers](#)
- [Dolly Parton's Imagination Library](#)
- [Little by Little](#)
- [Reach Out and Read](#)

Other Excellent Sites are:

- [Reading Rockets](#)
- [PBS](#)
- [Zero to Three](#)

Idea Sharing Sites

Websites like Pinterest and Teachers Pay Teachers can also be a great way to find ideas for language and literacy experiences in your classroom. The pictures and ideas on these sites can spark creativity for what to try and use with your students. Often there are

links to free printable materials. Teachers Pay Teachers is a pay site; however they do have many free materials available.

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1.8: Language and Literacy Assessment

It is important to know the assessment tools being used in your community. Each state has its own requirements and recommendations regarding language and literacy assessments.

Review the requirements for literacy assessment in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Act 20

Wisconsin Act 20, also known as the Right to Read Act, is a significant piece of legislation aimed at improving literacy outcomes for students in Wisconsin. Signed into law by Governor Tony Evers in 2023, the act introduces several key measures:

Most important to our learning about assessment with young children in this module will be:

Curriculum and Instructional Materials:

Grants are provided to cover 50% of the costs of purchasing approved literacy curriculum and instructional materials. The act also prohibits the use of instructional methods that include the "three-cueing" technique ([GovDelivery](#)) ([WI CRIS](#)).

Act 20 states that all Wisconsin schools are required to provide science-based early literacy instruction in both universal and intervention settings. Science-based early literacy instruction is defined as the following.

Instruction that is systematic and explicit and consists of all the following:

- Phonological awareness
- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics
- Building background knowledge
- Oral language development
- Vocabulary building
- Instruction in writing
- Instruction in comprehension
- Reading fluency

SEE: <https://dpi.wi.gov/wi-reads> for information on what types of curriculum are currently approved by the state as meeting the requirements for science-based early literacy instruction.

Student Assessments and Interventions:

The act increases the frequency of screening and diagnostic reading assessments. It requires specific interventions for students, including the creation of personal literacy plans that identify skill deficiencies and provide goals and benchmarks for progress ([GovDelivery](#)).

- A single reading readiness screener will be administered to Wisconsin students in 4K through grade 3 beginning in the school year 2024-2025. The assessment must be administered to 4K students twice per year. Once no more than 45 days into the school year and once no more than 45 days prior to the end of the school year.
- A single readiness screener must be administered to students in 5K through grade 3, three times per year. Once no more than 45 days into the school year, once in the middle of the school year, and once no more than 45 days prior to the end of the school year.
- The state has announced [NCS Pearson](#) was selected to supply the statewide reading readiness screener under the requirements of 2023 Wisconsin Act 20.

Other Key Measures of Act 20 include:

Literacy Coaching Program:

The act establishes a literacy coaching program where 64 literacy coaches will be contracted to support administrators, school-based literacy coaches, principals, and teachers in public, charter, and private choice schools. These coaches are expected to

provide science-based early literacy instruction and are prohibited from using the "three-cueing" method ([Wisconsin Legislative Documents](#)) ([GovDelivery](#)).

Teacher Preparation Programs:

The state superintendent is prohibited from approving teacher preparatory programs unless they prepare teachers using science-based early literacy instruction and do not incorporate the "three-cueing" method. Certain educators are also required to undergo training in programs like LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) ([GovDelivery](#)).

Funding and Support:

The 2023-25 biennial budget includes \$50 million in funding to support these literacy initiatives, along with other significant investments in K-12 education. This funding aims to increase the level of state support for school districts and provide resources to help improve reading and literacy outcomes statewide ([GovDelivery](#)) ([WI CRIS](#)).

Overall, Wisconsin Act 20 represents a comprehensive effort to enhance early literacy education through improved instructional methods, increased support for educators, and targeted interventions for students.

Wisconsin Reading Readiness Assessment

[Wis. Stats. 118.016](#) requires each pupil enrolled in 4-year-old kindergarten to 3rd grade in a school district or in a charter school to be annually assessed for reading readiness.

Read more about the reading readiness assessment in Wisconsin by using this link, [Reading Readiness Assessment in Wisconsin](#)

Assessment of English Language Learners

Federal and state laws require students identified as English Learners (ELs) to be assessed annually to determine their English Language Proficiency (ELP) level. This is done to ensure they are progressing in achieving full English Proficiency. English Learners who are also receiving special education services are also included in this mandate.

ACCESS

Learn about the ACCESS test for ELLs using this link, [Overview of ACCESS for ELLs](#).

You may learn about the ACCESS test for Kindergarten students through this link, [ACCESS for Kindergarten ELLs](#)

- You may wish to contact your local school district to find out what assessment they have selected as their Readiness Screener and what other literacy assessments they may use.
- If you are not from Wisconsin, you may contact your Department of Public Instruction or its equivalency to find out what assessment are required in your state particularly for young learners and ELLs.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Emergent Literacy Foundations

Overview

Literacy development begins in infancy. Oral language and play-based experiences are the foundation to learning language and literacy. Children develop language and literacy skills through interactions with caregivers, family members, and older peers. This chapter will explore the connection between strong literacy skills and a solid foundation of language and vocabulary, how vital hands-on play experiences are to the development of language and literacy, and the progression of emergent literacy skills.

Language and Vocabulary Foundation

Strong literacy skills are strongly connected to a solid foundation of language and vocabulary. Language and vocabulary are the building blocks of literacy. Language and vocabulary are the tools children need to understand, interpret, and express ideas through communication, and eventually reading, writing. Children with a rich vocabulary and well-developed language skills are more likely to successfully develop literacy skills.

Hands-on Play

Hands-on play experiences are crucial for language development. Through play, children naturally engage in conversations, storytelling, and problem-solving, which promote language growth. These interactions during play help children expand their vocabulary, practice language structures, and develop communication skills, all of which contribute to literacy development.

Emergent Literacy Skills

Emergent literacy, emergent reading, and emergent writing skills are distinct but interconnected concepts. Emergent literacy encompasses the broad range of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that precede formal reading and writing. Emergent reading refers to the early stages of understanding that print carries meaning and the ability to recognize words and sounds. Emergent writing involves the initial attempts to express ideas through drawing, scribbling, and eventually forming letters and words.

Purpose and Goals

The goal of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the foundational elements of literacy and language development in early childhood. The chapter aims to provide early childhood educators with the knowledge and strategies necessary to support the development of emergent literacy skills in young children, and the understanding of the critical role these early experiences play in shaping future academic success and language and literacy skills.

Objectives

- Summarize how strong literacy skill is directly connected to a solid foundation of language and vocabulary.
- Describe the relationship between hands-on play experiences and language development.
- Differentiate Among Emergent Literacy, Emergent Reading, and Emergent Writing Skills.
- Identify the progression of the development of emergent literacy skills.
- Describe strategies to utilize a variety of approaches to help young children develop phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, concepts about print, developmental writing skills, and fine motor development.

[2.1: Building the Foundation for Literacy - Oral Language](#)

[2.2: The Importance of Hands-On Play](#)

[2.3: Emergent Literacy](#)

[2.4: Emergent Literacy Skills Progression](#)

[2.5: Early Literacy Development Strategies](#)

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2.1: Building the Foundation for Literacy - Oral Language

“The child begins to perceive the world not only through his eyes but also through his speech.” – Lev Vygotsky

Children need to know so much more than the ABCs in order to read books in English (Schickedanz & Collins, 2013). Many caregivers and teachers tend to focus too much attention on letter names and letter sounds when it comes to teaching their children to read. Even in countries where they do not speak English as their first language, they often start with teaching the ABCs to their young children if they want to teach them English as a second language. However, knowing the names and sounds of the letters is just part of learning how to read in English. Let’s say children successfully decode the word *don*, a fairly easy word to decode. It is entirely possible that they do not understand what it means, as it is not a frequently used word among young children. The word *don*, which means “to put on,” is known by fewer than 40 percent of American children by the end of grade six in the United States (Biemiller, 2010). The bottom line of reading is comprehension (Shea, 2016), understanding what you read. The most important foundation for reading is **oral language development** because it can help children make meaning out of reading in English.

The Emergent Literacy Stage

You might observe children pretending to read, even before they start formal reading instruction. Perhaps they might hold a favorite book like *Hush Little Baby* by Sylvia Long upside down while making up their own story. Before children are able to say recognizable words, they might hold a book just like you do while cooing or babbling. These pretend behaviors with books are considered by educators to be part of emergent literacy. Sulzby and Teale, who first used the term *emergent literacy*, explained the concept:

“Emergent literacy is concerned with the earliest phases of literacy development, the period between birth and the time when children read and write conventionally. The term emergent literacy signals a belief that, in a literate society, young children – even 1- and 2-year-olds – are in the process of becoming literate” (1996, p.728).

Therefore, you can observe the process of children’s literacy emerging, including the aspects of **oral-language development**, phonological awareness, the print concept, and alphabet knowledge.

Before reading is taught formally, children have to know the **language** that they are trying to decipher.

Oral language is not just knowing the meaning of words. It involves the grammar that combines the words correctly. It means having appropriate language for different social contexts, such as school or a party. Let alone understanding the meaning of a word, just being able to say its smallest part, like the phoneme /m/ in *Mom*, is something that takes a newborn baby a long time, hearing it repeated by caregivers, siblings, and neighbors. It is a long journey to acquire the sounds used for the first language and learn to distinguish them from foreign-language or animal sounds. **Oral language is an important foundation for future reading development.**

Important terms

These are terms you will see used throughout this text.

- **Alphabet Knowledge:** The knowledge of letter names and sounds. It involves recognizing, writing, and identifying the names and sounds of the letters in the English alphabet.
- **Print Concepts:** The awareness of how print works to convey a message
- **Phonological Awareness:** The awareness of how various sound structures of speech work in a language
- **Oral Language Development:** The development of skills and knowledge used for listening and speaking. It is an important foundation for reading comprehension and writing.
- **Phonemic Awareness:** A subcategory of phonological awareness which focuses on the individual phonemes
- **Phonics:** An instructional approach that teaches the letter-sound relations
- **Fluency:** The ability to read with accuracy, automaticity, natural prosody, and stamina
- **Vocabulary:** The words that are understood and used
- **Comprehension:** The understanding of what is read by decoding and meaning-making

The Importance of Oral Language

- The development of strong **oral language** skills during the preschool years creates an important foundation for later achievement in reading, especially reading comprehension. (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002)
- If children **don't develop strong language skills** during the preschool years they are less likely to be successful beginning readers and they can continue to lag behind their peers throughout elementary school and beyond (Juel, 1988).
- Children who are behind their peers in **language development** are at risk for later reading difficulties (Catts, Fey, Tomblin, & Zhang, 2002)
- The knowledge a child has about **vocabulary is strongly related** to reading proficiency and overall academic success. (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002)
- Research has suggested there is a **relationship between vocabulary and phonological awareness**. Children who “know” a word or have a word in their oral language vocabulary may be able to analyze the sounds in that word more easily than if they do not know or have never heard the word.
- **Vocabulary knowledge** helps children decode words or map spoken sounds to words in print. When a child reads words they already have in their **oral vocabulary**, it will be easier for them to sound out, read, and understand them, and they will be able to comprehend what they are reading. When words are **NOT** in child's **oral language vocabulary**, they will have trouble reading the words, and they most likely will not comprehend the words. (National Reading Panel, 2000)

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2.2: The Importance of Hands-On Play

Using Theories of Play to Orchestrate Intentional Literacy Learning Opportunities

People, materials, and routines/activities shape early childhood classroom environments. The intentional literacy learning opportunities that “float” on top of these ecological dimensions influence children’s emergent literacy practices. In the second part of the chapter, we will focus on how early childhood educators use constructivist and sociocultural play theories, alongside ecological perspectives to prepare, manipulate, and enhance young children’s literacy environments.

Play remains an essential element of the early childhood classroom context. It is through a child’s intentional exploration and engagement in the world around them that they gain important understandings about their communities and build agency as literate members. Saracho and Spodek (2006) explain, “Play experiences provide young children with opportunities for them to use language in literate ways and to use literacy as they see it practiced” (p. 708). Accordingly, during play children reenact stories, simple and complex lived experiences (like going to the store and cooking) and even favorite movie or television storylines; in doing so they use language, reading practices, and writing practices to drive play scenarios forward. Early educators use constructivist and sociocultural perspectives, alongside the ecological perspectives explored in the first part of this chapter, to design relevant and engaging literacy environments for young children to support play experiences. **As we will discover, the three theoretical perspectives are not mutually exclusive, rather their philosophical principles work in complementary ways to support educators’ facilitations of play-based literacy environments.**

Constructivism Literacy Play



Constructivist perspectives emphasize changes in a child's internal literacy understandings.

Figure 2.2.1 Constructivist Perspectives

Constructivist perspectives recognize children gain important insights about how the world works when they are engaged in rich play experiences. Play supports children’s literacy understandings through a process of construction, during which children are acting on the world based on their existing understandings or *schemes* (Roskos et al., 2010). Framed as a stage theory, constructivist perspectives reason children progressively acquire more sophisticated logic patterns as they interact with their environment. As children develop they use memory to engage with their environment in increasingly sophisticated ways.

Play opens important spaces for children to practice emerging understandings about the world (Roskos et al., 2010). During play children use *object substitution* and *meta-play talk* to reenact and reimagine observed events from their own lives. Review the excerpt from the running record captured by Elise, the early childhood educator, who observed Prashant making the naan to see how children reenact literate experiences in their pretend play.

Figure 2.2.2 Running Record of Prashant's Naan (1)

Date: 4/18/2020

Student: Prashant

Center: Home Living

Time: 9:42 – 9:47

Prashant carries the recipe book to the stove singing to himself, “Naan, naan, naan.” He sifts through the pages of recipes with pictures of his friends enjoying their favorite foods until he finds the recipe he is looking for. On his recipe page, Prashant included a hand drawing of his family eating naan together at home. Pointing to text at the top left he says, “First, I have to put in flour.” [...] He picks up a spoon and begins stirring the ingredients in the pot. Then, Prashant scoops the mix into a pan on the stove singing, “Cook, cook, cook.” Prashant pulls naan from the stove top and places the pan on the table. He reaches into a small block basket on the shelf and puts several rainbow blocks on a tray. Taking the platter to the table he calls out, “Naan for sale, come have a piece of naan!” [...]

In Prashant’s case, both object substitution and meta-play talk promote his exploration of important literacy skills. Renaming objects (e.g. “nann” instead of “blocks”) and offering running narrations (e.g. “Naan, naan, naan” and “cook, cook, cook”) bring to life pretend play scenarios, making them “real.” Using other objects to represent items not readily accessible is considered an important first step toward understanding that letters are symbolic representations of oral language. Similarly, meta-play talk provides ongoing narration of children’s actions and propels storylines forward. Indeed, young children frequently narrate and negotiate their play, even when playing independently. Through their oral narrations, children negotiate literacy enriched spaces and use environmental tools to represent their understandings about how the world works.

Additionally, in Prashant’s Naan play scenario, we see examples of how dramatic play affords children opportunities to explore concepts of sequencing, to practice procedural activities, and to recognize text as informative resources. We also see Prashant practicing important language skills such as vocabulary usage, word order, gesturing, and soliciting conversational partners. Prashant strengthens his cognitive skills and practices using his prior knowledge in play. The exact sequence of events for making a naan and the ingredients may be creatively imagined, but it is hard to overlook that Prashant’s focused and intentional reenactments mirror common kitchen and literacy practices. Pretend play opportunities reinforce children’s current conceptualizations regarding how and why people use language and support their emerging literacy skills.

Sociocultural Perspectives Literacy Play



Sociocultural perspectives emphasize learning is grounded in children’s intentional interactions with other learners, educators, and materials.

Figure 2.2.3 Sociocultural Perspectives

Sociocultural perspectives also recognize innovative play exchanges promote children’s emerging literacies. When children play, they use language, gestures, and materials in their environment to sustain play narratives. Play intentions and goals inspire meaningful actions and children embrace flexible representation of objects to drive their play narratives forward (Roskos et al., 2010). For example, Prashant approached his play session with the intention to make bread. He accessed materials to represent real-world items and used language to reenact the preparation process and later sale of the naan.

Play provides a setting for children to use their creative thinking and to communicate their thoughts. Accordingly, sociocultural perspectives encourage educators to consider how children’s interactions with objects and more experienced people, including peers, educators, and parents, promote cognitive development (Roskos et al., 2010). *Thought* and *meaning* support children’s *interactions* with playmates and objects to nurture literacy development. Prashant’s thoughts on making the naan and the meaning of the item he was producing (it should be made and then shared), supported opportunities for Prashant to interact with his

classmates. Vygotskian perspectives consider play “a strong social ‘push’ from the outside” compelling children to develop more sophisticated interpretations of how their world works (Roskos et al., 2010, p. 71). It is within complex sociocultural exchanges that children’s narrative expressions develop and how changes in children’s understandings occur (Nicolopoulou, 2005).

Let’s return to Elise’s running record capturing Prashant’s play episode making naan to understand how children’s literacy development is also nurtured via their direct interactions with people in their environment.

Figure 2.2.4 Running Record of Prashant’s Naan (2)

Date: 4/18/2020

Student(s): Prashant + Desmond

Center: Home Living

Time: 9:42 – 9:47

[...] Prashant pulls the naan from the stove top and calls out, “Naan for sale, come have a piece of naan!” Desmond hears Prashant’s invitation and sits down at the table near the kitchen area. Desmond says, “I would like to buy a piece of naan. What kind of naan do you have?”

End memo

In this case, Prashant expresses his desire to continue his pretend play narrative by eliciting the support of a peer. Enlisting the play of others into the cooking episode will require the two children to work together to nurture the narrative forward. As their play scenario develops, the children will adhere to specific rules to ensure the meaning of their play is maintained. In this manner, pretend play helps children develop an understanding of different points of view. Miss Elise, the educator, takes advantage of the shifting storyline negotiated between Prashant and Desmond to draw the children’s attention to another kind of text people frequently use in restaurants to help them make decisions, a menu. The educator’s casual language prompt provides an intentional literacy scaffold to extend the narrative for the children and supports “meaning-oriented thinking” (Roskos et al. 2010, p. 71).

Ecological Perspectives and Literacy Play



Ecological perspectives emphasize learning is influenced by the opportunities available to children in their environment.

Figure 2.2.5 Ecological Perspectives

Constructivist perspectives focus on the child’s internal mental constructs, and sociocultural perspectives emphasize the interactional exchanges that enhance a child’s understandings; however, ecological perspectives highlight the role the environment plays in drawing a child into literacy. Literacy-rich play environments allow children to explore “literate ways of thinking” with their peers and use their emergent literacy skills to influence evolving play scenes (Saracho & Spodek, p. 711). Dramatic play opportunities encourage children to recreate life experiences and provide meaningful spaces for children to manipulate literacy materials (e.g., books and writing tools) and grapple with foundational skills that promote children’s literacy (Saracho & Spodek, 2006).

In “Prashant’s Naan” play scenario, his incorporation of diverse literacy practices (i.e., reading a recipe and creating a menu) is not surprising when we use ecological perspectives to consider the design of this literacy-rich classroom. Both Prashant and Desmond utilized their environment and their understandings of how people interact in different contexts to support their play narrative. We can readily identify the *routines* (i.e., center time that opened spaces for pretend play and children’s existing schemas of restaurant and cooking rules), *materials* (i.e., books, cooking utensils and kitchen supplies, paper and markers) and *people* (i.e., the children and the educator) that collectively influenced the children’s efforts. Educators can positively enhance children’s literacy understandings when they intentionally analyze the environment for opportunities that promote children’s routine interactions with print-rich materials and language-rich experiences.

As important *people* in the child’s learning environment, early childhood educators should seek opportunities to scaffold children’s expressions and enactments during dramatic play experiences (Morrow et al., 2013). In Prashant’s play scenario, the educator’s decision to encourage children to bring in a recipe, share it with the class, classify the food by category, and add it to a class recipe book throughout the year established an instructional literacy *routine* that became a natural part of the children’s classroom environment. This particular literacy experience allowed the educator to add an additional print rich *material* (i.e., the class recipe book) to the kitchen environment. In this case, the educator recognized the class recipe book would be especially appealing to her learners because it held family and cultural relevance. Experiences like this that strategically blend children’s home and school environments further support children’s literacy development and illustrate how ecological perspectives can be used to highlight the rich literacy practices already supporting children’s understandings in their home environments.



Figure 2.2.6 Developmental Theories

In complementary ways, constructivist, sociocultural, and ecological perspectives invite educators to think strategically about play-filled literacy environments. The perspectives do not need to be considered as competing frameworks, rather each perspective can be used intentionally to consider how we can manipulate the environment to enhance children’s experiences using their oral language, reading, and writing skills. In the following section, we focus on principles and practices educators use to intentionally orchestrate literacy-rich classroom environments for children that are developmentally and contextually relevant.

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2.3: Emergent Literacy

“Children are born with wings. Teachers help them to fly.” -Shelby Stollery

Opening Vignette: Climbing Together

Marvin and Maria, both three-years-old, played with four-year-old John in the backyard outdoor area in a multi-age family home child care. There were five tree stumps of varying heights and a very large piece of a tree trunk lying sideways on the ground. The children scrambled on top of the stumps and the trunk, laughing and occasionally saying, “Watch me!” Maria and Marvin both made several attempts to climb on the large sideways log by bringing up a knee, but John was able to climb atop it more easily. Marvin frustratedly exclaimed, “I can’t do it!” Maria pointed to John, replying, “He is big!” And John said, “Get your leg up,” while demonstrating a maneuver holding the top of the trunk while extending a straight leg. When Marvin made his next attempt, he bent his knee as he had done before. John coached, “No. Like this!” and demonstrated. After trying once or twice, Marvin was able to climb atop the trunk. Maria then made several attempts. Though she used the straightened leg approach that had worked for John and Marvin, she could not climb onto it alone. Marvin walked over as she struggled and nudged her further forward, and she was finally able to sit on top of the trunk.

Introduction

Young children such as Marvin, Maria, and John have diverse abilities and experiences with language. They are each at different places in terms of their physical stage of development, previous experiences, and expectations of what they think they can do. They use language in different ways. At times, they speak, beckon, or make other gestures. They laugh and smile to signal pleasure and cry out in pain, anger or frustration. They use language for enjoyment and for resolution of problems. They are listening and speaking, communicating non-verbally, and developing concepts that support their comprehension and vocabulary. They can share meaning by expressing themselves and understanding language. Young children are beginning to demonstrate that they can communicate a message through writing.

This textbook outlines the connection between different areas of language and literacy and describes strategies for supporting development and promoting instruction. Early literacy includes reading, writing, and language development. Writing includes any early writing attempts and pre-writing behaviors just as reading includes any early reading attempts and recognition of symbols and sounds. Language also includes listening and speaking (oral language) and the use of gestures and signs to communicate. The term *oral language* is commonly used to describe early language development separately from reading and writing. This text assumes oral language is a component of language and embraces the broader term to underscore the communication practices outside of listening and speaking. For example, some children use sign language or a picture board. For these reasons, the textbook will focus on language development in its totality, including oral language. This textbook is focused on birth to age 5 because early literacy development is crucial for future learning and development. This introductory chapter will explore the following questions:

- **Why do we use a strengths-based approach when we consider what literacy development is?**
- **What is emergent literacy?**
- **What is the nested model of literacy?**
- **What definitions and terms of common literacy are important to know?**

Empowering Approaches to Literacy Development

Each child has unique strengths and uses strategies they learn are successful to foster literacy development. It is crucial to start with an approach that emphasizes what children *can* do instead of what they cannot yet achieve. An approach that begins with examining deficits often over-emphasizes what children lack instead of their capacities. Children’s literacy experiences are housed within relationships and opportunities. An integrated approach acknowledges that reading, writing, and language development are connected and contextualized by children’s experiences. Language development, and later reading and writing, are vehicles for comprehension, even as our increasing comprehension helps us to form each of these three areas. The components of literacy develop incrementally and they all foster the development of the other components. Literacy development requires a holistic approach, focusing on understanding the whole child across contexts and time with a strengths-based focus.

This textbook acknowledges the importance of collaboration in a strengths-based focus as it fosters cultural responsiveness and an integrated approach to learning. By starting with the expectation that there are multiple perspectives to be heard and valued, educators are better equipped to embrace and respond to the needs of children and families. Strong communication among all of the adults that make up the context of the child's life promotes the opportunities for children and families to have input and influence in the environment. This, in turn, fosters positive outcomes for children's literacy development.



Figure 2.3.1 Children work with stencils and sticks to explore letter formation.

Emergent Literacy?

Emergent literacy is based on the notion that children acquire knowledge about reading, writing, and language before they have begun any formal education (Clay, 1966, 2001; Sulzby & Teale, 1982; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, 2001). This conceptualization of literacy as a developmental process that begins at birth counters previous early literacy theories that believed readiness for learning to read began with formal schooling (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Many researchers have contributed to our understanding of literacy development in the earliest years. According to Marie Clay (1966), literacy development begins early in life and is ongoing. Teale (1987) explained that children not only have particular experiences before they start school, but they also have developed interests. Emergent literacy is the result of children's involvement in reading activities facilitated by literate adults (Teale, 1982). Sulzby and Teale (1991) define emergent literacy as the reading and writing behaviors that precede and develop into conventional literacy. These early literacy behaviors indicate a child's stage of reading and are particularly revealing in determining the approaches a child will use as they engage in the task of reading. Similarly, Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) define emergent literacy as a "developmental continuum between prereading and reading involving skills, knowledge and attitudes that are the developmental precursors to reading and writing" (1998, p. 484). This underscores that we expect children to acquire skills over time. Additionally, Whitehurst and Lonigan (2001) have clarified that emergent reading develops in an interactive process of skills and context, rather than individual components developing in a linear fashion.

All of these definitions of emergent reading help us understand that long before children are reading books word for word, they are acquiring important literacy knowledge and skills. For example, many young children can point out commonly visited store logos with no prompting. Any adult who has ever heard a toddler in the backseat point to the fast food restaurant and scream, "fry-fries!" has witnessed emergent reading. It is not simply about the quantity of skills a child develops before appearing to be a fluent reader. Rather a child's literacy develops over a long period of time, with early skills supporting the growth or emergence of new skills.

Emergent literacy and early literacy are often used interchangeably, but this textbook will use the term emergent literacy, encompassing everything a child knows about reading and writing before they become proficient. Emergent literacy can be thought of as the totality of the language capacities, knowledge, and skills a child possesses even before developing the ability to turn that knowledge into reading in ways that are measured as conventional skills. Children are developing reading, writing, and language concurrently during their earliest years. All of the key concepts in emergent literacy occur on a developmental continuum and involve stages of learning.

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2.4: Emergent Literacy Skills Progression

Emergent Literacy Areas/Domains

The National Literacy Panel (2010) defined literacy by identifying and defining skills, both in the earliest stages as precursor skills and later stages as conventional skills. We can examine behaviors evident in emergent literacy, including three broad areas of literacy skills: **language development**, **reading**, and **writing**, which can be further broken down into specific indicators.

Vignette: What's on the Menu?

Marvin and Maria are playing in the dramatic play area. Marvin and Maria are both cooking, and Marvin brings a plate of food to the stuffed bear seated at the table. Marvin looks at the bear and says, "Do you want ketchup?" Maria shakes her head and says, "We don't have ketchup." Marvin speaks for the bear and says, "But, ketchup is on the menu." Marvin walks over to the stack of menus that are part of the play area and mimics reading the menu. He then says, "Ketchup is not on the menu." He then scribbles on a small strip of paper and gives it to the stuffed bear saying, "Here is your bill." Maria responds, "K-ketchup! K-ketchup!" in a sing-song voice as they continue to play.

This interaction displays many of the characteristics of emergent literacy behaviors. Marvin and Maria are engaging in conversation and connecting stories to their experiences. They pretend to read and pretend to write as well as use oral language to communicate their ideas. These types of social exchanges provide an opportunity to practice the behaviors that will help prepare children to proficiently read and write.

Language Development

Language development tends to be conceptualized as receptive language, expressive language, and the interaction between communicators.

Receptive language involves receiving, interpreting, comprehending and decoding.

Expressive language is the production or encoding of information. Speaking, listening, and non-verbal communication allow children the opportunity to use words and gestures to express ideas and feelings. Language requires an understanding of vocabulary (choice of words), context (how and when words are used), and language conventions (rules for using words in meaningful ways). For example, a child may use different vocabulary or tone of voice with a sibling than they might with a stranger or a grandparent. Language may also be non-verbal through the use of sign language, gestures, and non-verbal cues (facial expressions and body language). Language development is pivotal to the growth of a child's reading and writing development. In the vignette above, we see that Marvin and Maria are using language to express and receive information as they debate whether or not ketchup is on the menu.

Pause and Consider: Attunement

As you interact with young children, how attuned are you to their facial expressions? Do you notice their gestures such as pointing? Do you review their non-verbal reactions such as squeals and eye gaze? Children "speak" in many different ways even beyond the use of words. What strategies can we use to make sure we are listening to what they need us to know?

Reading

Reading is a complex process. It requires readers to continually decode and comprehend a written message. Decoding requires the reader to connect letter symbols and sounds, while comprehension involves understanding the meaning of written text. The report of the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) identified five key components of reading. These five areas are (a) phonemic awareness, (b) phonics, (c) fluency, (d) vocabulary, and (e) comprehension. While these five components are important, the original report did not address emergent reading practices in birth to five-year-old children. A more expansive definition of reading would include a variety of observable behaviors and skills exhibited before a child is able to connect sound-symbol relationships or become fluent readers. Children are engaging in many prereading tasks and preparing for conventional reading in their earliest years. The report of the National Early Literacy Panel indicated that **preconventional reading skills include**

- **print concepts**,

- **alphabet knowledge,**
- **print knowledge,**
- **phonological awareness,**
- **vocabulary, and**
- **oral language** (National Institute for Literacy, 2008).

When Marvin picks up the menu to “read it,” he is engaging in emergent reading behaviors.

Writing

Writing progresses in stages and in a **bidirectional** fashion with reading. While reading is a manner of receiving communication, writing offers a way to visually represent and produce communication. Sulzby and Teale (1991) indicate that scribbling as **intentional writing** can be observed in children as young as **18 months**. They go on to say that scribbling represents the beginnings of writing for most children. Eventually children will move from scribbling to increasingly sophisticated markings in order to communicate meaning to themselves or others. In the example with Marvin and Maria above, Marvin acts out this expectation of shared meaning when he hands the teddy bear a bill. These emergent writing behaviors help prepare children for conventional writing later.

Additional Resources

National Association for Education of Young Children: <https://www.naeyc.org/>

Virginia’s *Early Learning & Development Standards (ELDS): Birth-Five Learning Guidelines*. <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/curriculum/va-elds-birth-5.pdf>

Zero to Three: <https://www.zerotothree.org/>

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2.5: Early Literacy Development Strategies

There are many strategies educators and families can use to help children learn language and literacy skills. Throughout this text, we will share strategies for teachers to help children develop literacy skills for the different components of literacy. In this chapter, we will review some very simple strategies to help children develop one of the earliest skills of literacy and that is oral language. Using these strategies will also help children develop knowledge and skills in other early literacy skills as well.

Every Child Ready to Read

The Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) Program was developed through the joint collaboration of the [Public Library Association](#) (PLA) and [ALSC](#) Association for Library Service to Children). They developed the ECRR Program to help assist librarians in educating and empowering parents in helping their children become ready to read. Although these strategies are designed to help parents with developing emergent literacy skills in their children, they will also be useful to early childhood educators in their work with emergent readers and writers.

Five Early Literacy Practices

The Five Early Literacy Practices are the very things we do with children every day.

1. Talk
2. Read
3. Write
4. Sing
5. Play

The [Colorado Libraries for Early Literacy](#) website is a great source of information on early literacy. Visit the [Five Early Literacy Practices](#) page to explore how the practices help to develop each of the Six Early Literacy Skills.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Culturally Responsive Language and Literacy Practices

Overview

Language and literacy acquisition in early childhood is a complex and intricate process impacted by cultural, socioeconomic, and familial influences. This chapter explores the progression of oral language development and key components such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. The chapter emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive practices in fostering language and literacy development and acknowledges the role families play in their child's literacy development.

Oral Language Progression

First, the chapter will explore the progression of oral language development, explaining the key components such as listening, understanding, speaking, phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Understanding these elements is essential for supporting children's communication skills at every stage of their development.

Factors Influencing Language and Literacy Development

The chapter will examine how ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and family culture play a crucial role in shaping how children develop oral language skills. Recognizing and understanding these differences is critical for educators to provide equitable and effective learning experiences for all children.

Culturally Responsive Strategies

The chapter will explore ways to support family cultures and dual language learners while involving all families in their child's language and literacy development.

Purpose and Goals

This chapter strives to provide educators with the knowledge and tools needed to create inclusive, responsive, and supportive learning environments that honor and enhance the language and literacy development of all children.



Objectives

- Recognize language and literacy acquisition differences across ethnic, socioeconomic, and family cultures.
- Identify the progression of oral language development (including listening, understanding, speaking and communication skills, phonology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics).
- Examine language and literacy development practices that develop awareness, understanding, respect, and valuing of differences in our society (oral storytelling traditions, vocabulary building).
- Outline strategies to support dual language learners.
- Describe methods to include families in their child's language and literacy development.

3.1: Language Development

3.2: Developmental Patterns of Language Skills

3.3: Components of Language Overview

3.4: Language Acquisition Differences

3.5: Understanding and Valuing Home Literacy Environments

3.6: Engaging Families in Early Literacy Strategies

3.7: Literacy Instruction for Diverse Learners

3.8: Supporting Families in Promoting Literacy

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3.1: Language Development

“Language is the most powerful instrument of human progress.” -Maria Montessori

Opening Vignette: Block Tower

Eighteen-month old Mark settled into a day of learning after being dropped off. He greeted his teacher, Ms. Claudia (quick hug), and said “Hi” as he looked expectantly at his classmates in the block area. At one point, he put his hand out, clenching and unclenching as he reached for a large rectangular block. When Mark was finished with his block tower, he said, “Look!” and pointed to it, smiling proudly while looking at the teacher. As Ms. Claudia looked and smiled, he said, “I did it” and knocked the blocks to the ground while laughing.

Introduction

Speaking, listening, and communicating are vital to our ability to connect with the world. A baby’s first words are often cause for celebration. Pointing and gesturing create opportunities for adults to meet a child’s needs and see the resulting satisfaction on the child’s face. In addition to verbal words, there may be sign language, and important pragmatic gestures such as kissing on the cheek when greeting, or raising or lowering one’s eyes. These language exchanges not only foster understanding, but they are also social interactions that may create or strengthen bonds. Unquestionably, the ability to communicate rests upon the ability to express oneself, receive information, and to negotiate the social aspects of communication. In the example of Mark and Ms. Claudia, we see several components of language displayed. We see that Mark is using some words and phrases (hi, look, I did it) as well as communicating his wishes nonverbally through pointing and motioning toward the blocks. Mark also communicated using facial expressions and eye contact. This chapter will explore the following questions:



How is language conceptualized?



What are the components of language?



How does children’s language progress on a continuum of development?



How do individual differences influence language development?



What can early childhood educators do to promote children’s language development?

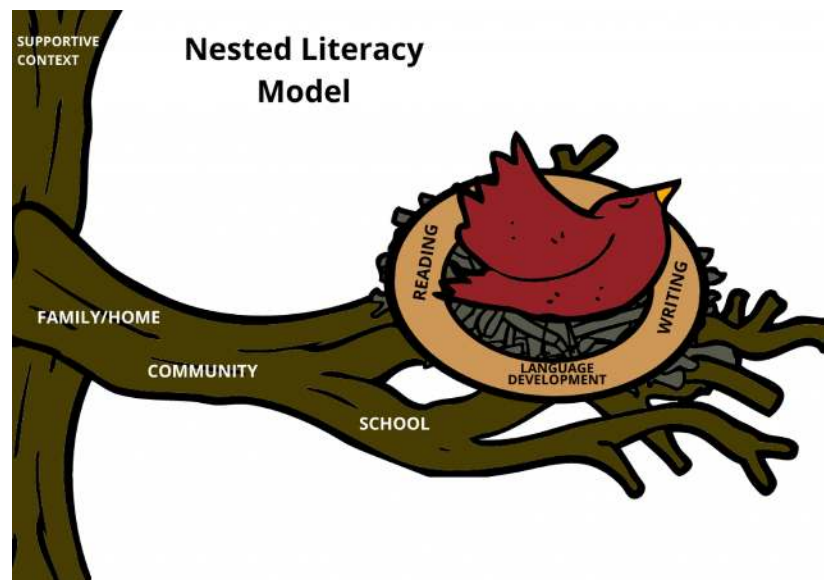


Figure 3.1.1 “Nested Literacy Model”

Conceptualizing Language Development

Language can be understood as a **series of meaningful exchanges to communicate information**, including sounds and sign language (Vygotsky, 1986). Toppelberg and Shapiro (2000) indicate language is comprised of sounds, the way these sounds are organized into words or parts of words, the organization of concepts being communicated, and language usage. This definition can be expanded to include expressive and receptive signals and the exchange between language partners.

Receptive language reflects what a child is taking in as information is passed to them.

Productive and expressive language are terms that are used interchangeably to indicate that the child is creating their own signals to communicate.

Finally, there is a **transactional component** to language that includes not only the speaker’s intent, but also the receiver’s ability to comprehend what is being said, and the signals that indicate that the information has been received. Language is verbal and non-verbal, developing before a child is even born. Theoretically and practically, language is a reflection of our cognition and a mechanism that helps us solve problems. Language emerges from our environment, and we use it as a medium both to understand (other people and ourselves) and to be understood. It is cultural, nested in our context, and because it fosters our ability to connect with others, deeply profound. Researchers and theorists explore a variety of questions when considering how language develops in children.



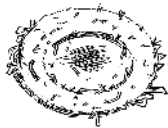
Is Language Innate?

Nativist theory suggests that we are prewired to learn language through an invisible framework, acting as an internal map. **Noam Chomsky** (1968), who invented this theory, believed that human language is complex and we could not learn it unless we already had a **pre-existing physiological structure to prepare us**. In effect, Chomsky is suggesting that we have an inborn structure for language, in the same way that we have a skeleton providing structure for our physical growth and development. Chomsky called this the **“Language Acquisition Device.”** As evidence for his theory, Chomsky points to the fact that all over the world, humans develop language patterns with similar features such as verbs and nouns, called *universal grammar*. When children are exposed to language, it activates the language acquisition device, but our propensity for language is pre-existing. In fact, Chomsky describes language development as one would describe physical growth, as opposed to how one would describe learning. Chomsky is essentially saying that although the environment is important, it is only strengthening something that already exists. This theory of language development is heavily focused on the **biological**, or **nature**, part of development.



Does Language Have Stages?

According to **Piaget's Cognitive Developmental theory** (Piaget, 1962), as the child grows and develops, they moves through normative, or predictable stages of growth. This growth process allows and compels children to build their own internal categories and rules of language. These internal structures, called *schemes*, become more complex as children interact with their environment to construct their knowledge. One illustration of this is that a child's understanding of the rules of language change and become more sophisticated as the child develops cognitively. For example, young children have a tendency to *overregularize* a word, such as calling all four-legged animals, "doggie." Eventually, as their cognitive schema becomes more complex, they recognize that four-legged animals have other distinguishable characteristics and can differentiate animals using this knowledge. **Language then, is a display of the child's cognitive understanding.** Language development reflects a complex interplay of opportunities and experiences. Accordingly, there are wide ranges in when children acquire or demonstrate particular language skills.



Does Social Interaction Create Language? (NEST)



Figure 3.1.2 Children learn language through social interaction.

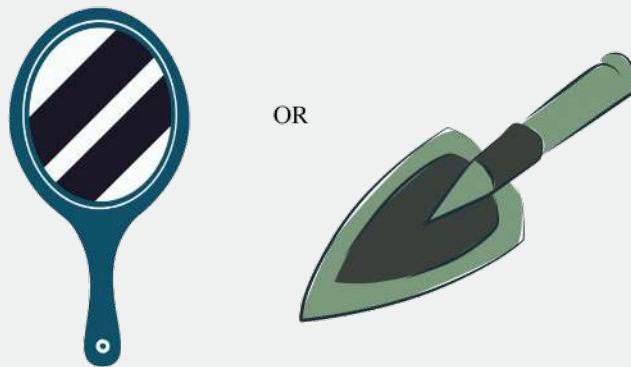
Language helps us to connect with others and communicate our thoughts and purposes. Language is a series of social transactions. Lev Vygotsky (1986) described this process in his seminal work, *Thought and Language*, where he indicates that children have social exchanges of meaning that help them to unite their ideas and speech, termed *verbal thought*. In this series of cooperative exchanges, adults support children by preparing, creating, and providing environments and events. These transactions become pivotal to how children construct their learning with the helpful support of a conversational partner. Children may be serving as the more experienced partner as they engage in transactions with less experienced peers or learn new expressions from their interactions with others. Vygotsky might argue that using "doggie" to describe all four-legged animals creates opportunities to hear other animal names through social interaction. Indeed the act of conversation itself might help the child learn to self-correct and expand their understanding over time. Vygotsky also indicates that this language learning takes place in a social context, influencing how and where children learn to apply their verbal thoughts to interactions. In the Vygotskian view, language is less a *reflection* of learning, than a **tool for solving problems, socialization, and completing tasks.**



How Is Language Reinforced In The Environment?

Behaviorism theory of language development (Skinner, 1957) suggests that children learn about communication through a series of interactions where the sounds they make, the words they produce, and the gestures they use, are resultant from imitation and subsequent reinforcement. This reinforcement, whether positive, negative, or neutral, directs the language a child values and replicates. Children may produce utterances at random, but when we give children positive cues, it strengthens the likelihood that the child will repeat those utterances intentionally (Menn & Stoel-Gammon, 2005). For example, a babbling infant who says, “mamamamama” may be reinforced by an enthusiastic mother who smiles and becomes animated as she says, “That’s right! Mama!” In other words, the feedback cues in the child’s environment influence their language development.

Pause and Consider: Is Language a Reflection or a Tool?



Five-year-old Hassan sat on the floor with both feet pushed into untied shoes. As he handled the laces, he said aloud, “First you loop the bunny ears, and then you fold them over. Pull it...Ah! I have to try again.” The teacher came over and asked Hassan, “Do you want help?” He replied, “I can do it.” The teacher then encouraged Hassan to keep trying. After several iterations of trying to make bunny-eared shoelaces into tied shoes, Hassan was successful. Upon noticing Hassan’s tied shoes, his teacher exclaimed, “You did it! Great job hanging in there. You kept trying until you did it.” As you consider Hassan’s words, can you see ages and stages reflected in his vocabulary? In this instance was the language being used as a *reflection* of Hassan’s thoughts? Or was it a *tool* that helped Hassan to complete the task? What was the role of the social interaction between Hassan and his teacher?

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3.2: Developmental Patterns of Language Skills

Developmental Patterns of Language

Children acquire language at their own pace, mastering the components of language as they develop. The entirety of their developmental journey is filled with cues that they give to and receive from others. Children's individual development has biological, environmental, and contextual influences. This voyage is profoundly different for each child based on their language experiences, which impart meaning to their attempts at communication. Even with individual differences, there are some predictable patterns. Language development occurs as children develop receptive and expressive language in ways that foster social communication, and there are identifiable stages or windows of growth.

Receptive Language

Receptive language can be defined as “how we receive information and understand words and their meaning” (Virginia Department of Education, 2021). For the purpose of this textbook, receptive language is the ability to understand information transmitted by others. This includes understanding the words or sentences one hears as well as the meaning of what is communicated through gestures or signs, or in written form. **Receptive language implies comprehension of the material being received, and it develops prior to expressive language** (Bloom & Lahey, 1978). We generally understand more words than we use. All humans have more receptive than productive vocabulary, whether using their home or a new language (Cleci-Murcia & Oshtain, 2001). Receptive language requires knowledge of the meaning of the gestures or words being communicated (McGuiness, 2005).



Figure 3.2.1 Children develop receptive language prior to expressive language.

There is some evidence that we do respond to sounds prenatally, indicating that receptive language begins before birth. Babies in utero may sometimes respond to a loud noise, suggesting that they can hear (Marno et al., 2016). In addition to sound, there is evidence that babies are learning patterns of speech and react in the womb by kicking or demonstrating elevated heart rate (Karmiloff & Karmiloff-Smith, 2001). This early exposure results in a preference for language or native tongue of the mother in a newborn (Marno et al, 2016). Babies show a change in their heart rate when a speaker uses their mother's native tongue compared to a speaker using a different language (Minai et al, 2017). Newborns even change their thumb-sucking rhythm and pattern in response to the language and the speakers they hear (Karmiloff & Karmiloff-Smith, 2001).

Parents engage infants in language that differs from other points in the life cycle. They speak to babies using high-pitched voices with exaggerated pronunciation and movements (Koester & Lahti-Harper, 2010). This *child directed speech* is also referred to as *motherese* or *parentese*, although it is used by other adults besides parents. Hearing infants respond to child directed speech with greater alertness and exclamatory sounds. Parents who use sign language also demonstrate a form of child directed speech with exaggerated movements and facial expressions (Masataka, 1996). Child directed speech is purposeful, and demonstrates attentiveness toward the infant (Koester & Lahti-Harper, 2010), but it is impossible to truly say if it is occurring because the parent initiates or the child elicits the exaggerated response. Either way, it is clear that there is something innate about our desire and

capacity for connection which is reinforced in our early communication attempts. In other words, we bring our preadapted language capacity into the world, and the environment in turn shapes our development in these areas.

During infancy the child amasses an understanding of the sounds required for the language they are exposed to. Children are born with the capacity to produce and distinguish the sounds required for all languages, though they prefer their home language (Marno et al, 2016). Within one year, their brains begin to strengthen the connections they need to support their home language, and prune away or disuse the connections that do not help them meet their communicative goals. By 10 months of age, their ability to distinguish among sounds that are not in their home language has diminished (Conboy & Kuhl, 2011), though this loss does not occur in their native tongue. This process of distinguishing the sounds of one's native language strengthens the ability to learn language overall (Kuhl et al, 2005). Receptive language is developmental, and benchmark timeframes overlap each other as seen in the tables below.

Developmental Progression: Receptive Language

Refer to the early learning standards in your state to see the progression of receptive language skills. To review early learning language standards for receptive language in Wisconsin, visit [Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards](#).

The table below represents the Virginia Early Learning & Development Standards.

Table 3.2.1 “Developmental Progression: Receptive Language” Content is from Virginia’s Early Learning & Development Standards (ELDS): Birth-Five Learning Guidelines. It is used with permission of the creators and is not an open education resource covered by a Creative Commons License.

Developmental Progression	CLLD1.2 Using Vocabulary and Nonverbal Cues to Communicate
Early Infancy 0-8 months	• Responds to speaker by turning head or shifting eye gaze (CLLD1.1a) • Responds to tone or voice changes (CLLD1.1b) • Directs attention to sounds or object pointed at/to (CLLD1.1c) • Responds by looking when name is called (CLLD1.1d)
Later Infancy 6-14 months	• Follows simple requests paired with gestures (CLLD1.1e) • Begins to respond through sounds or gestures to others' questions (CLLD1.1f) • Makes different sounds to get attention (CLLD1.1g) • Understands and responds to simple commands and gestures (e.g., shared eye gaze/contact; may be influenced by cultural expectations) (CLLD1.1h) • Recognizes common objects when named (e.g., cup) (CLLD1.1i) • Begins to show understanding of approximately 50 words (CLLD1.1j)
Early Toddler 12-24 Months	• Uses sounds or nonverbal cues to respond to oral reading (CLLD1.1k) • Responds to simple requests (CLLD1.1l) • Identifies familiar people, animals, and objects (CLLD1.1m) • Begins to understand nouns (CLLD1.1n) • Begins to understand action words (e.g., hop, jump, press, go, stop) (CLLD1.1o) • Completes a task in response to a request (e.g., pick up your cup, go find your coat) (CLLD1.1p) • Identifies familiar people, animals, and objects (using gestures, words, or sounds) (CLLD1.1q) • Begins to recognize some body parts (CLLD1.1r) • Understands and responds to some pronouns (mine, you, me) (CLLD1.1s)
Later Toddler 22-36 Months	• Listens to and attends to spoken language and read-aloud texts (CLLD1.1t) • Follows simple and short directions for routine practices (CLLD1.1u) • Understands and responds to several hundred words or more (CLLD1.1v) • Understands and responds to basic attribute word differences such as personal (I/me/you/it) and possessive (my and mine) pronouns (CLLD1.1)
Early Preschool 34-48 Months	• Demonstrates understanding by answering questions (CLLD1.1x) • Follows two-step unrelated directions (CLLD1.1y) • Understands and responds to spatial concepts (e.g., in/out, under, front, behind) (CLLD1.1z)
Later Preschool 44-60 Months	• Answers questions and adds comments relevant to the topic (CLLD1.1aa)

Developmental Progression	CLLD1.2 Using Vocabulary and Nonverbal Cues to Communicate
	• Begins to demonstrate understanding of implied messages based on speaker's tone and/or gestures (e.g., finger on lip and saying "shhhh" means be quiet) (CLLD1.1ab) • Understands and responds to words for descriptive concepts (e.g., hard, square) (CLLD1.1ac) • Follows 2-3 step related directions and some new directions related to familiar and daily routines (CLLD1.1ad) • Demonstrates understanding of communication that includes a variety of complex sentences related to familiar stories, learning activities, and events (e.g., After Clifford the dog came home, he played with Emily Elizabeth.) (CLLD1.1ae)

Productive or Expressive Language

Productive or expressive language is how we use vocabulary to describe objects, actions, and events. In this textbook, expressive language includes the language we produce to communicate our meaning and messages to others. This can occur through the use of verbal or non-verbal sounds, gestures, words, or written language. Expressive language and productive language are interchangeable terms that imply that the child is expressing or producing language for the purpose of having their intent understood. Expressive language develops later than receptive language (Celci-Murcia & Oshtain, 2001) and one's expressive or productive vocabulary is less than receptive vocabulary. As Celci-Murcia & Oshtain (2001) point out, expressive language usage implies receptive language mastery, but the reverse is not necessarily true. Infants show recognition of common daily words long before they produce their own first words. Children turn their head at hearing their own name before they can say it, and they will eagerly clasp and unclasp their hands upon hearing that they are about to eat a preferred familiar food.

Preverbal stages of language development. Language development occurs along a trajectory that begins with preverbal expression. Productive/expressive language evolves through stages that move from early sounds to word formation. Stark (1986) created a framework for describing expressive language, outlined in the table below.

Stark's Five-Stage Framework

Table 3.2.2 "Stark's Five-Stage Framework". Content is based on Stark R. E. (1986). Prespeech segmental feature development. In Studies in Language Acquisition, Fletcher P, Garman M (eds). Cambridge University Press:149–173.

Stage	Stage Name	Age of Onset	Characteristics
Stage 1	Reflexive crying and vegetative sounds	At birth	• Crying • Sneezing • Burping
Stage 2	Cooing and laughter	6-8 weeks	• Noises
Stage 3	Vocal play	Between 17 and 30 weeks	• Consonant sounds from front of mouth such as muh, puh, nuh, buh, duh, • Some presence of vowel sounds • Noises with mouth such as blowing raspberries or clicking the tongue
Stage 4	Canonical/reduplicative	7-9 months	• Syllables in consonant-vowel combinations (ma-ma-ma)
Stage 5	Non-reduplicative babbling	10 months	• Various consonant-vowel combinations • Takes on rhythm and pitch of conversation

Our first vocalizations are cries, beginning at birth, and reflect our preverbal language production. While it may begin as an instinct, these early cries let a caregiver know that a baby is distressed and requires care. This certainly is an early form of communication. Over time, children add other types of sounds to their collection whether accidental, such as a sneeze, or intentional such as a grunt. The first stage *reflexive crying and vegetative sounds*, includes vocal cord vibrations, burping, and blowing, and other sounds made accidentally or on purpose (Stark, 1986).

The **second stage begins** between 6 and 8 weeks and includes *cooing and laughter*. Children in this stage sound a bit like owls as they repeat these vowel sounds over and over (Menn & Stoel-Gammon, 2005). During this stage, children begin to laugh and signal their pleasure through use of the social smile that emerges sometime between 4 and 8 weeks.

The **third stage**, *vocal play*, emerges when children are between 17 and 30 weeks old. In vocal play children make vowel sounds and other sounds including consonants or friction sounds, such as by blowing raspberries or clicking their tongue. In this stage, children also add consonant sounds to their cooing, called *babbling* (Fagan, 2015). These preliminary attempts, called *marginal babbling*, see children producing some consonants with vowel sounds, but without true syllables. A child may produce consonants at the front of the mouth, such as “buh”, but might not necessarily produce the vowel sound in a clearly distinguishable way.

The **fourth stage**, *canonical or reduplicative babbling* emerges when children are between 7 and 9 months old, and is distinguished from the previous stage by distinct syllable sounds. Babbling becomes more complex over time, taking on closer approximations of words, and the rhythms and pitches of the home language (Lipkind et al, 2013). This more complex version of babbling is called *variegated babbling* (Gratier, et al, 2015) or *canonical babbling* (Vihman & Greenlee, 1987).

The **fifth stage**, *nonreduplicative babbling* is the production of sounds that sound very much like language, even if the words do not match. Children use distinctive consonant combinations, and the rhythm and pitch of the language sounds like speech. In addition, parents and children engage in communicative exchanges called *protoconversation* (Gratier, et al, 2015). Protoconversation occurs when the baby coos or babbles and the parent responds to the baby. Even though the conversation may not communicate a particular meaning, or could appear to be nonsensical, it is actually very helpful as children are hearing language sounds, learning about conversational turn taking, and learning that someone will listen to them.

Holophrases/single words. Holophrases/single words appear as children move from babbling to producing more organized and familiar sounds. The sounds that children use for babbling, may be sounds that they hear in language and can mimic, but may also represent their first words (Menn & Stoel-Gammon, 2005). This may occur even if it is hard to recognize the word from an adult perspective. Examples of this may be a sibling's name that is hard to pronounce such as "La-la" for "Greta" or "Go" for the more difficult to pronounce "John." In addition, a child may use a word to denote a whole phrase or intention they are meaning to communicate. For example, "Fue-da" (an approximation of "afuera" which means "outside" in Spanish) may communicate that the child wants to go outside. In a seminal study of parents and children from three cities, Bates et al, (1994), project that children may utter their first word as early as eight months, increasing to a vocabulary of approximately 10 words at the end of the first year, and 312 words by the time they are at the end of the second year. Productive language includes signs and gestures, and as with receptive language development, has a trajectory that allows for individual differences.

There are substantial individual differences in language development over time. Some children show evenly distributed growth in vocabulary, while other children exhibit a vocabulary "burst" (Bates et al, 1992). Just as physical development has a range of normativity (e.g., walking between 10 and 16 months) language development also has ranges for demonstrating communication skills, as outlined in the chart below.

Two-word phrases. Two-word phrases emerge as children master single words, then start to put them together in combination, "Me Cookie!" The developmental range for this is approximately 14 to 24 months with 20 months reported as the mean age (Bates, et al, 1992). There is a strong relationship between the development of words and word combinations, however there are variations in how children combine words to use language. In previous research, approximately 20% of children produced combinations of words with vocabularies under 50 words, while another 15% of children were not producing any word combinations even though their vocabularies were between 100 and 300 words (Bates, et al, 1992). Children typically add words to the two word combinations in phrases that first appear without grammar elements (Fenson et al, 1994). For example, when Imani said, "I no like it: go-fish (goldfish)," this demonstrates how a child uses short phrases to communicate their ideas without following grammatical rules.

Expressive Language

Refer to the early learning standards in your state to see the progression of expressive language skills. To review early learning language standards for receptive language in Wisconsin, visit [Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards](#).

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Developmental Progression	CLLD1.2 Using Vocabulary and Nonverbal Cues to Communicate
Early Infancy 0-8 months	• Uses sound, inflection, and gestures to communicate needs, desires, or emotions (CLLD1.2a) • Cries, coos, babbles, and makes other sounds (CLLD1.2b) • Reaches and points to communicate (CLLD1.2c)
Later Infancy 6-14 months	• Imitates actions of others as nonverbal communication (CLLD1.2d) • Makes vocal or non-vocal protests/demands (CLLD1.2e) • Vocalizes or gestures (e.g., pointing or using sign language) to communicate or to direct adult attention (CLLD1.2f) • Participates and initiates communication with family members or familiar others by using consistent sounds, gestures, and some words CLLD1.2g)
Early Toddler 12-24 Months	• Repeats words heard in conversations (CLLD1.2h) • Makes simple one-word requests such as saying or signing “milk’ or “leche” when asking for a drink (CLLD1.2i) • Uses vocabulary for familiar items and events (e.g., hat, ball) (CLLD1.2j) • Begins to combine words, verbally or through signing (e.g., making requests through two- and multiword use/utterances such as “eat- or comer- ‘nana’/banana”) (CLLD1.2k)
Later Toddler 22-36 Months	• Asks short questions and requests clarifications (CLLD1.2l) • Speaks in or signs short sentences, and some expanded sentences, and is understood by familiar peers or adults most of the time (CLLD1.2m) • Begins to use more diverse types of words, such as color and quantity words (all, some, more, and including numbers) (CLLD1.2n)
Early Preschool 34-48 Months	• Begins to use complex sentences and ask simple questions (e.g., “After the gingerbread man ran, he swam on the fox’s back.”; “What happened to the gingerbread man?”) (CLLD1.2o) • Answers questions from unfamiliar people including some open-ended questions (CLLD1.2p) • Uses adjectives to describe people, objects, or environments (CLLD1.2q) • Begins to use prepositions (e.g., in, on) (CLLD1.2r)
Later Preschool 44-60 Months	• Uses age-appropriate grammar in conversations and increasingly complex phrases and sentences (e.g., uses irregular past tense verbs such as came, ran, fell, broke, went, told, did) (CLLD1.2s) • Answers open-ended questions comfortably (CLLD1.2t) • Retells stories and events in sequence with multiple details (e.g., retells The Three Bears noting three chairs, three beds, etc.) (CLLD1.2u)

Social Language

Language cannot be considered outside of its social role as the purpose of language is to understand and be understood. This carries with it the weight of expectations, hopes, needs, and wishes. How we use sounds, gestures, and actions to communicate are social in nature. Conversations after all, must eventually have conversational partners. Vygotsky emphasized the transactional nature of language as he considered the influence of the social world on our cognitive development. Vygotsky emphasized that language was a tool for learning, rather than merely a reflection of what the child knows (1986). In fact, the conversational style of those nearest the child influences their language development as they mimic those around them. Adult behaviors such as expanding children's utterances, and recasting and commenting on these utterances, is helpful for growth. Parents also differ in their conversational style, and so do siblings. Social language indicators include things like responding and turn-taking, or other signs of pragmatic language. Children's language develops when they have experiences with conversational partners who engage with them and nurture their growth.

Learning and Engaging in Conversational Interactions

Table 3.2.4 "Learning and Engaging in Conversational Interactions"

Developmental Progression	CLLD1.3 Learning and Engaging in Conversational Interactions
Early Infancy 0-8 months	• Responds and engages with an adult or older peer (CLLD1.3a) • Reacts to facial cues and eye contact (CLLD1.3b) • Engages by babbling (CLLD1.3c)
Later Infancy 6-14 months	• Takes turns in "conversation" or vocal play with adults (CLLD1.3d) • Turns, smiles, and begins to speak when name is spoken (CLLD1.3e) • Begins to follow adult pointing or gaze to establish joint attention (e.g. looks across the room when adult points or gazes) (CLLD1.3f)
Early Toddler 12-24 Months	• Responds with facial expressions, vocalizations, and/or gestures to engage in conversation with others (CLLD1.3g)
Later Toddler 22-36 Months	• Uses simple verbal responses and nonverbal gestures (CLLD1.3h) • Uses words, gestures, signs, and phrases to converse with others (CLLD1.3i) • Begins to ask and respond to questions (CLLD1.3j)
Early Preschool 34-48 Months	• Continues a conversation through several exchanges with or without adult help (CLLD1.3k) • Alternates between speaker/listener roles (CLLD1.3l) • Asks and responds to questions (CLLD1.3m)
Later Preschool 44-60 Months	• Begins to match language to contexts (e.g., voice volume, inflection/rise and fall of voice in speaking, and parting/greeting rituals) (CLLD1.3n) • Engages in multiple back-and-forth conversations with adults in ways that can be goal directed (such as solving problems) (CLLD1.3o) • Asks and responds to questions with accurate information (CLLD1.4p)

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3.3: Components of Language Overview

Components of Language

Language can be broken into five domains: phonology, morphology, semantics, grammar, and pragmatics. These five areas refer to the sounds of language (phonology), how the sounds are put together (phonology and grammar), first words and how words are put together (morphology), the meaning/content (semantics), and the use of the language (pragmatics) (Bloom & Lahey, 1978). Each of these domains includes the expectation that the language users will produce, receive, and comprehend the language.

Phonology

Phonology is the ability to distinguish and create the sounds of language (Bloom & Lahey, 1978). Phonemes are the smallest units of language, representing individual sounds. For example, the word “chip” has three phonemes: /ch/ /i/ /p/. Each of these three sounds is a phoneme. A phoneme focuses on the sound only, without regard for the letter or letter combinations. It is simply the components of sound that we hear in language. Children display phonemic awareness by attending to these sounds, demonstrating the ability to hear and isolate them. Phonics is the area of phonology that emerges last, as children match sounds to letters and groups of letters.

Morphology

A morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning in a language. When it comes to a child's first word, the morpheme represents the simplest form of meaningful communication. For example, a child's first word might be “mama” or “dada,” where each of these words is a single morpheme because they cannot be broken down into smaller meaningful units.

In early language development, a child's first words are typically simple, consisting of one morpheme. These words are often nouns or verbs that are meaningful in the child's daily life, such as “milk,” “dog,” or “up.” Each of these words represents a whole idea or concept with just one morpheme, illustrating the beginning of the child's ability to use language to express thoughts and needs. As children grow and develop their language skills, they begin to use more complex words that may contain multiple morphemes, such as adding “-ing” to a verb to indicate an ongoing action (e.g., “playing”).

Grammar

Grammar is the combination of how individual words and sounds are combined to express meaning (Bates et al, 1992). Grammar rules guide how words are combined to communicate information. Grammar includes *morphology* and *syntax*. Morphology focuses on the structure within the word, and allows for the creation of complex words and phrases. For example, many words can be made plural by adding “s” to the end of a word (e.g., bird and birds). *Morphemes* are the smallest units of language that contain meaning. Some prefixes and suffixes of words contain their own meaning, such as “un” or “ing” in the words, “undo,” “untie,” or “doing,” “tying.” Young children frequently make mistakes in this area by applying a morphological rule in all instances (Bates et al., 1992). For example, a child might say, “I saw the deers” (plural /s/) or “I wented there” (past-tense /ed/). These rules are complex and numerous and children apply these rules as best as they can given the constraints of what they have already learned. *Syntax* governs our grammatical structures such as word order and phrasing. The meaning of “Mommy feeds Brother” is different than “Brother feeds Mommy.” Infants show recognition of word order changes (Karmiloff & Karmiloff-Smith, 2001), and eventually learn to express word order differently to vary their message. A child may say, “Mommy phone” to simply indicate that the phone belongs to mom, or may say, “Phone Mommy” to indicate the phone is lighting up or ringing. A father volunteering in a room of four-year-olds will find that he is universally addressed by his child's classmates as “Isaiah's dad.” The use of the /s/ to indicate possession on the end of Isaiah is a morpheme. “The child's understanding that the order of the two words is ‘Isaiah's dad’ as opposed to “dad Isaiah's” is a usage of syntax.

Semantics

Semantics is the study of meaning, including vocabulary (Bates et al., 1992). Semantics may focus on the significance of an individual word or the meaning of particular words in the context of an entire sentence. As an illustration, the word “friend” may be a noun, as in “I have a friend.” Friend may also be a verb when speaking about social media, “I will friend you.” The meanings have some similarities, representing a connection to another person, but the usage creates a difference in whether we are speaking about the actual person or speaking about the connection to the person. Semantics also include nonverbal aspects of words such as

intonation and gestures. For example, “whatever” can be an innocuous answer denoting many possibilities, “What can I eat from the snack table?” “Whatever.” In this case, it indicates that the child is welcome to eat anything from the table. With a change of pitch and emphasis and tone of voice, “whatever” can signal strong disapproval. “I didn’t know I was not allowed to have that.” “Whatever!” Vocabulary building is a crucial part of learning and understanding semantics. Infants will not comprehend everything that they hear in the early months and weeks, but they will notice the way that words are delivered and the corresponding content. Exposure to rich opportunities normalizes the use of the words introduced, which are of course, entirely contextual. For example, three-year-old Alyssa was given the choice between naptime with her bear and her blanket, or her book and her blanket. In response, she told her mother, “I want another ‘ternative.” Alyssa has learned that the vocabulary word, “alternative” is used to indicate a choice, and she can use the word “alternative” even when she cannot pronounce it. The variety of words that children are exposed to, and how they are drawn into conversations, influences individual differences in the rates at which children learn words (Karmiloff & Karmiloff-Smith, 2001). The quantity and quality of opportunities matter deeply. All children are exposed to the language the adults around them choose for them, which is why it is important that early learning settings provide rich and varied opportunities for children to be exposed to word meanings and word usage.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the social or transactional use of language, including context of the conversation. It encompasses not just what we say, but how we say it and to whom (Bates et al, 1992). Pragmatics includes rules of courtesy, turn taking, and the practical aspect of communication. Knowing that you should answer a question when a question is asked, is an example of pragmatics. Another instance would be knowing that one should stay silent in particular situations or stay on topic during a conversation. Using different communicative styles that suit different language partners is a key component of pragmatics. One may greet a friend by saying, “Hey!” But, one greets a boss by saying, “Good morning.” Pragmatics can also be non-verbal, such as in the use of eye contact. Children may learn at an early age that an appropriate greeting would be to kiss someone once on each cheek or to nod politely. These expectations include an understanding of culture and of conversational role. For example, a child may recognize over time that family members or others with a shared heritage should be greeted with the cheek-kiss greeting, but that someone outside of this would be greeted differently. Essentially, pragmatics includes the ability to predict and notice cues from the other person, including words, gestures, and non-verbal cues, and to react accordingly.

Pause and Consider: I no like it: go-fish.

Two and a half year old Imani wandered over to the table, where snack was being prepared. She noticed orange goldfish-shaped crackers being poured out onto a paper napkin. She wrinkled her nose, shook her head and emphatically said, “I no like it: go-fish.” She walked over to the teacher, put her hand on the teacher’s arm, and protested, “I no like it: go-fish!” The teacher acknowledged Imani and said, “You do not like goldfish. We have pretzels too.” Imani shouted, “Petzas! Petzas!” The teacher then replied, “I will give you pretzels.”

Imani’s manner of expression is dictated by her relationship with the teacher and the pragmatic conversational patterns that they have already established. When Imani placed her hand on the teacher’s arm, she was signaling the importance of her message. The meaning of “Petzas” denotes a semantic understanding about what Imani wants. As you consider Imani’s language exchange, how is phonology reflected in Imani’s pronunciation? How is her understanding of grammar evident in her word choice and order?

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3.4: Language Acquisition Differences

Language Differences in Children

Developmental language progression tables show typical patterns of language acquisition. However, many children's language abilities develop according to different timelines. Common areas of language differences might include children who are multilingual learners, children who are deaf or hard of hearing, and children who have autism. Some children may exhibit language delays or speech delays and show marked differences in how and when they communicate. Understanding the typical developmental patterns allows educators to recognize when additional intervention service providers may need to be engaged. While early childhood teachers should not be expected to diagnose language delays, familiarity with language development does help teachers to determine when to suggest a referral for an evaluation and how to contextualize children's language attempts and proficiency.

Children Who Are Multilingual Learners



Figure 3.4.1 Multilingual children learn to think in more than one language.

Children who begin learning more than one language prior to the age of five are defined as dual language learners (McManis, 2012). This text uses the term multilingual learners because it is more inclusive and recognizes that some children may speak more than two languages across their home, school, and community environments. Some children are exposed to more than one language from birth, and others are introduced to a new language upon entry to an early learning setting (Castro, Garcia, & Marcos, 2013; Genessee, 2010). English Language Learner is another term used to describe a child who is immersed in English at formal school entry or later and whose home language is not English (Halle et al, 2012). In other words, when the exposure to a different language occurs during the preschool years and younger, we would define them as multilingual learners. Once they enter the K-12 education system, they may be identified as English Language Learners. Recognizing that some children will come to classroom contexts with more than one language is important because when children are learning more than one language, their trajectory of development differs from that of monolingual children.

Receptive language in multilingual children. Young children have a pre-wired or innate capability of learning more than one language from birth, and young children may become proficient in more than one language if multiple language exposure occurs in quantity, and with quality (Espinosa, 2013). Infants who are bilingual develop two separate but connected linguistic systems (Conboy, 2006). Because bilingual children must develop neural pathways and connections that are different from monolingual children, their cognitive development will also look different from that of monolingual children. Research demonstrates that acquiring multiple languages influences cognitive and linguistic learning mechanisms (Espinosa, 2013) and results in advantages that are evident in cognitive development (Bialystok, 2009).

Productive/expressive language learning in multilingual children. As children enter new language environments or negotiate multiple languages, educators may notice differences in expressive language. Listening and comprehension tend to develop first.

Educators may notice a child appears reticent to engage verbally in a new language environment preferring to silently observe and listen to their peers and educators talking around them. Frequently referred to as the *silent period*, it is an important learning space for children as they are internalizing the common phonological and grammatical patterns of the new language. During this time, a child's expressive language may seem to be lagging behind, particularly at school, and even at home. But, it is important to remember children are using this time to develop their vocabulary across languages. The younger a child is, the longer the silent period might last, thus it is commonly observed in early learning settings (American Speech, Language and Hearing Association n.d.).

While multilingual children may present differently than monolingual children in terms of literacy development, it is important to consider their whole language context; failure to do so might result in an early childhood educator interpreting perceived differences as a language delay (Espinosa, 2013). For example, multilingual children may appear to have smaller vocabularies if only one language is assessed. However, when educators evaluate a child's combined vocabulary knowledge across language contexts, the true depth of their language knowledge is recognized. Similarly, multilingual children may take a little longer to articulate their ideas when speaking because the child is working to determine which language to use in the current situation. The process multilingual children use to move from language to language is called *code switching* and it is an additional processing task for children (Castro, 2013). The additional cognitive challenge of moving between two languages is positively associated with executive function and cognitive flexibility (Espinosa, 2013). Therefore, it is important for educators to allow children who speak multiple languages more time to communicate their ideas and provide additional wait time when completing word retrieval vocabulary assessments (Espinosa, 2013).

In addition to code switching, some children might also blend the languages in a process called *code mixing* (Peterson, 1988). A child may start out speaking one language and switch to the other or insert vocabulary from one language into a sentence that begins with the other language. For example, a child may say, "Quiero cookie" to indicate the desire for a cookie instead of completing the entire phrase in English, or the entire phrase in Spanish. Parents, teachers, or other adults may perceive code mixing as evidence of a delay or a problem (McManis, 2012). However, children who are code mixing sometimes do so within a context where they might be expected to be understood. A child who says, "more leche" can reasonably anticipate that adults will discern the desire for milk. Even when vocabulary words are inserted, children retain the larger set of language rules for each of their languages internally (McManis, 2012). Thus, code mixing should be an indicator that children are still building vocabulary and progressing with their language development while creating their internal maps for each language.

Young children are in an ideal window, or sensitive period, for mastering the functions and structures of language (Conboy & Kuhl, 2011). While there may be differences in how quickly children who speak multiple languages communicate, there are no apparent differences between multilingual and monolingual children's phonological awareness or decoding skills (Espinosa, 2013). The same is true for the developmental window of first word occurrences. The early language skill development of multilingual children, including semantics, syntax, phonological awareness, and morphology, provide a child with the ability to think about their language understanding. Moreover, the ability to both comprehend and think about language will be applied to both languages (Lopez & Greenfield, 2004).

The long-term gains for multiple languages are compelling—they are evident in cognition and culture and may have economic implications for the child later on (Bialystok, 2009). Some teachers may worry that if a child is not speaking English now, they will have difficulty with English later on. In fact, children do eventually learn English. Learning more than one language does not ultimately hamper the ability to learn English or to perform well on academic tasks when home and school languages are supported (Barnett et al, 2007). Children who are English Language learners keep pace or surpass native English speakers if they are proficient in English by Kindergarten (Halle et al, 2012). Therefore, allowing children to communicate across languages is a valuable practice for educators to encourage.

Pause and Consider: Pumpkin, Pumpkin

Ms. Katrina held 22-month-old Sebastian on her lap, reading to him during the quiet morning in her two-year-old classroom. She pointed to the pictures in the board book and said, "pumpkin." Sebastian looked back at her with shining eyes and pointed to the picture and smiled. He did not reply. Repeatedly through the book, Katrina pointed out pumpkins and prompted Sebastian to say, "Pumpkin." Not only was Sebastian unwilling to repeat the word, "pumpkin," while book-reading, but Ms. Katrina noticed that Sebastian had very little to say at school. Ms. Katrina asked the family if Sebastian talked at home, and

mom immediately expressed her worry. Mom said that at home he pointed to items and would say, “Mama” or “Daddy,” but he was generally very quiet. Mom indicated that she was worried Sebastian would “not learn English.” The parents and Katrina worked together to refer Sebastian for an evaluation for early intervention services to determine if there was a language delay. Later that same week, the classroom went to a pumpkin farm for a field trip. Sebastian walked over to a very large pumpkin in the front and loudly said, “Cabasasa,” an approximation of the Spanish word for pumpkin, “calabaza.” He then started to giggle and put his hands on many of the large and small pumpkins right around him, each time calling out “Cabasasa!”

What assessments could the teacher make about Sebastian’s language development? What questions could the teacher ask the family that would have provided more helpful information? What assumptions should the teacher avoid? What should the teacher’s orientation be to this student’s needs?

Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Oral language and listening are dependent on the auditory system, and when there is hearing loss, language development is altered. Hearing loss varies from complete deafness to partial hearing. When hearing loss ranges from severe to profound, there are substantial barriers to oral language development (de Oliveira Sobreira, 2015). This is particularly true in children who lose hearing soon after birth or are deaf from birth (de Oliveira Sobreira, 2015). Deafness and hearing impairments do not prevent a child from communicating. Early diagnosis and intervention is important, so that children may experience a full range of possibilities for developing language, external to speech and hearing.

Receptive language in children who are deaf and hard of hearing. Acquisition of language for children who use sign language has structural similarities to the development of oral language in hearing children (Schlesinger & Meadow, 1972). In fact, children who learn sign language demonstrate an onset of *first sign* earlier than hearing children demonstrate spoken words (Schlesinger, 1978). Bonvillian and colleagues (1983) found that deaf children in their study showed earlier attainment of additional milestones. Early first sign production often occurs with the first word at approximately 8.5 months with a range of 5.5 months to 12 months. Children acquire sign language vocabulary quickly, demonstrating an average size of 10 signs at the age of 1 year, and 50 words at 18 months (Bonvillian et al., 1983). The average for putting two signs together is 17 months with a range of 12.5 to 22 months. This is consistent with what we know about young children’s capacity to use sign language. Schlesinger and Meadow (1972) suggest that all children would learn to sign before learning to speak, if exposed to sign language.

The desire and effort to communicate is universal; parents, family members, and other adults wish to engage in social language transactions with children (Marschark & Wauters, 2008). Parent interaction has some features that are the same with all children. Deaf parents demonstrate a version of child-directed speech, emphasizing their signed communication with infants using large movements, incorporating repetition, and holding signs longer than usual (Koester & Lahti-Harper, 2010). This is similar to how hearing parents use exaggerated vocal input, changing pitch, and melodic contours when they engage in child-directed speech (Koester & Lahti-Harper, 2010). Deaf infants show greater attention and responsiveness to infant-directed signs (Masataka, 1996). Whether parents are communicating vocally or through sign language with their babies, they are doing so in a way that is more dramatic and exclamatory, accompanied by exaggerated facial gestures. For all children, gestures are among the first experiences of receptive and expressive language, and these are precursors to developing more complex language through speech or sign language (Volterra et al., 2005).

Productive/expressive language in children who are deaf and hard of hearing. Infants and toddlers who are deaf or hard of hearing engage in symbolic play as part of their expressive language experiences and in doing so, practice using gestures and sometimes oral sounds or words. The development of gestures and the numbers of words and phrases understood or produced is related to specific attainments in symbolic play (Yoshinaga-Itako et al., 1998). Children who demonstrate higher expressive language levels make more attempts at utterances, words, and word combinations. All manifestations of expressive language, including spoken language and signed output, are strong predictors of speech outcome, suggesting ample opportunities for practice supports the development of speech skills (Yoshinaga-Itako et al., 2020). Therefore, opportunities to engage in social play strengthen productive language with children who are deaf or hard of hearing.



Figure 3.4.2 Some children use sign language to communicate.

Speech ability is impacted by the severity of hearing loss (de Oliveria Sobreira et al., 2015). Some children are hard of hearing with mild to severe hearing loss, and some children are deaf with profound hearing loss, or have both hearing and visual loss. All of these possibilities impact the trajectory of how the child learns to communicate and how educators and families structure learning opportunities for children. Children who have early cochlear implants may have improved auditory-linguistic abilities (de Oliveira Sobreira et al., 2015). However, cochlear implants are not always sufficient to solve hearing loss, and results are variable (Peterson et al., 2010). The speech ability of children with mild to severe hearing loss becomes more similar as children reach adolescence, but the speech ability of children with profound hearing loss is less well developed. A child's success may also be impacted by the frequency of signs along with speech, coupled with one's level of hearing (Marschark & Knoors, 2012, Yishinaga-Itano, 1998). Approaches for communication may include sign language, tactile sign language, cued speech, hearing aids, and cochlear implants. Decisions about which strategies to use are determined by the child's needs, the family preferences, and the availability of services or early learning settings.

Pause and Consider: Rainsticks and Picture Cards

It is six weeks into the school year, and Ms. Noora has noticed that 3-year-old Deon tends to be the last child to leave centers and to join the group for activities. Deon does not usually sing along in circle time, though he does the hand motions and joins in some words in the chorus. Deon does respond to language, but it is inconsistent. Sometimes he seems to be in his own world instead of responding, until after the other children have already done so. Ms. Noora had thought that this might be a temperamental or developmental trait of Deon's. However, this morning, Deon's parents told Ms. Noora that they are worried about his hearing and are having him evaluated. Ms. Noora thinks about her routines this year. For transitions, she has mainly been using short special songs to indicate what is coming next and sometimes a rain stick. If Deon is hard of hearing, this might not have been as useful as a picture card or puppet. Ms. Noora immediately starts to pay attention to Deon's patterns and observes that he looks at other children when there is a transition. Later, Ms. Noora decides to take the children outside to play during a break in the rain. As Ms. Noora begins singing the recess song, she holds up the picture card from the daily schedule and waves it. She notices that Deon looks at the card and immediately goes to grab his coat.

Accessibility in our classrooms means that we use strategies to include all children. What are some transition routines that can capture children who have language differences?

Children with Autism

The number of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder has steadily increased over the last few decades. One in every 54 children is identified with autism spectrum disorders (Maenner et al., 2020). Autism, or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), refers to a broad range of conditions, usually evident before age 3, causing challenges in a child's speaking or nonverbal communication (IDEA, 2004; 34 C.F.R. § 300.8 [c] [1]). ASD is also characterized by difficulty with social skills and changes in routines and unusual responses to sensory experiences. Autism is considered to be the fastest-growing childhood disorder (Gonzalez et al., 2017). The median age at which a child is first evaluated ranges from 29 months to 46 months (Maenner et al., 2020) and often results from questions about the child's language development. Language deficits are often an early impetus for parents to seek answers and begin the process of evaluation. Children with autism display a wide range of language performances. Some children may be considered non-verbal or use limited verbal speech. While other children with autism may follow typical language patterns. Additionally, some children have speech, but might have trouble with specific forms of language, such as pragmatic cues. Language development in children with autism, like all children, is not fixed. A child who has no speech may later develop speech

(Boutot, 2016). All children can grow and develop in their ability to communicate with supportive instruction and early intervention.

Receptive language in children who have autism. Receptive language may be affected in young children with ASD. For example, toddlers with autism may have difficulty hearing words when the referent (person or object) is absent (Fitch et al., 2018). In other words, referring to a dog if the dog is not actually there, might be a receptive language task that could be harder for a very young child who has autism. Learning semantics, the proper usage of language in varying social settings, is a difficult task for all young children. It requires a utilization of receptive language that is interpretive. For example, a child in an examination setting was given a set of dolls and told by the adult, “We are going to play with my family.” The child was perplexed at how the adult’s family could be a set of dolls (Boutot & Myles, 2017). Very young children with ASD may have trouble incorporating new information on the basis of verbal cues alone, without visual support (Fitch, 2018). However, with opportunity for repetition of verbal input and a low-demand task, young toddlers with ASD can be successful in acquiring newer mental representations (Fitch, 2018). It is valuable to remember semantics can be taught and learned through intentional opportunities and experiences.

Children with autism may also have difficulty interpreting components of nonverbal communication, such as facial expressions and proximity (Boutot & Myles, 2017), and might need coaching or instruction so that they acquire knowledge of social reactions. Children with autism might also find it more challenging to process language when immersed in settings with distracting visual and auditory stimuli (Marco et al., 2011). It is helpful to consider the environment, especially if you are trying to help the child with an area of language. Generally speaking, the social-communication impairments associated with ASD are particularly impactful for the development of receptive language (Reinhartsen et al., 2018). Teachers need to pursue multiple approaches in order to make sure that a child with ASD is understanding what is being communicated.

Productive/expressive language in children who have autism. Many diagnostic tools focus on screening for expressive language. For example, eye contact and pointing are important indicators of productive language or potential. Other markers include orienting to name, imitation, social smiling, and social interest (Zwaigenbaum et al., 2005). While orienting to name is a receptive skill, imitation, smiling, interest, and name orientation are productive expressions of language. Children who are diagnosed with ASD by 24 months tend to display fewer phrases and gestures by 12 months, and diagnosis of autism often occurs between 12 and 24 months (Barbaro & Dissanayake, 2012). Parents and other adults expect to see children become more communicative and start using speech between the first and second year. Some examples of expected productive language include shaking and nodding the head in response to a question or pointing to communicate that they want something. Children may also hold up their arms to be picked up, which is an expressive language gesture. In addition, we expect to see transactional language such as giving items to another person and showing or demonstrating something they find interesting (Mitchell et al., 2006).

Children with autism sometimes exhibit productive language called *echolalia* where a child repeats or echoes what they have heard. You might ask a child if they would like to go outside and instead of replying with a yes or no, the child may repeat “outside, outside.” Echolalia is sometimes present with typically developing toddlers and becomes more visible in children with autism as they age. Additionally, pragmatics is an area that is of particular interest when working with children with autism. When a child has other functional language areas mastered, such as word meaning and order and pronunciation, they may still struggle with understanding the rules and social components associated with language (Boutot & Myles, 2017). Pragmatics dictates that it might be appropriate after naptime at a family home child care to say, “okay, up.” But at home, a child has the freedom to say, “I want to sleep!” Children with autism may struggle with these contextual distinctions, which vary based on the demands and structure of the social environment (Boutot & Myles, 2017). In early childhood, all children seem to struggle with pragmatics to varying degrees, thus difficulty with pragmatics would be more pronounced as the child with autism ages.

Pause and Consider: Circle Time

Ms. Tina called the students over to circle time in her young fives classroom. At circle time, the children start with a hello song where every child says their name. This leads into the next song for the week, which includes clapping and movements to practice rhyming words. During the circle time experience, Andrew walks around the room. He is verbal, but he does not say his name when it is his turn, and he does not join in any part of circle time. Ms. Tina knows from interacting with him at other points of the day that Andrew does not like it when the room gets “loud.”

The next group prompt gives every child the opportunity to think of a word that ends in the same way that the book emphasized. Should Ms. Tina call Andrew over to offer him a turn? Are there strategies she could use so that it would not seem

so loud for Andrew that would still allow him to participate?

Strategies to Support and Promote Language Development

Because language is social, development is driven by the quantity and quality of interactions between a child and their adults. Sensitive care promotes healthy development of a child overall, but language is innately social. Communication between young children and adults includes eye-gaze, sounds and symbols, and often tactile sensations as a baby is held or a toddler clasps the knees of a seated adult. *Attunement*, or being aware and responsive to a child's needs, sends messages to the child about their worth and whether those needs will be met. As children grow and begin using more words, they are constantly reaching out for our cues on their proficiency. The serve and return interchange is not only building language, it is building a social understanding, which then builds language.



Figure 3.4.3 Attunement to children's needs creates opportunities for language.

Eliciting Language Through Conversations and Questions

Adult-child interactions give opportunities to observe, learn, and practice language skills. Even simple language conversations foster this growth. Consider the example of Imani's exchange with her teacher. She said, "I no like it: go-fish." Her teacher responded by acknowledging, "You do not like goldfish." This strategy, known as *expansion*, fills in missing words and provides a model of language rules. A similar strategy, *recasting*, fills in what is missing, while also extending the child's idea or changing the sentence structure. A child might exclaim, "Water, Cold!" The teacher may recast by asking a question, "Is the water cold?" Further recasting might cause the teacher to say, "You do not like this cold water on your hands!" With recasting, the child's initial utterance may be changed from a statement to a question, or ideas extended and lengthened. Expansion and recasting provide language models for children who are multilingual and engaging in code-mixing to communicate their ideas. For example, a child may say, "Quiero milk." The teacher may then respond by saying either "¿Quieres leche?" or "Would you like some milk?" Recasting provides a language model without overtly correcting the child. More importantly, it sends a message that the child is understood. These supportive interactions provide the cognitive stimulation, sensitivity, and responsiveness to help foster language (Hamre & Pianta, 2005) and support cognitive gains over time (Siraj & Asani, 2015).

The quality of the interaction is also a relevant component to consider. Interactions that emphasize close-ended or one-word responses reduce a child to answers that are brief and minimal (Pianta et al., 2012). "Did you go outside yesterday?" yields a shorter conversation than asking, "What did you do this weekend?" When children have opportunities to have longer back-and-forth conversations with open-ended questions, it naturally creates more opportunities for children to practice their conversational

skills and to expand their thoughts (Pianta et al., 2012; Scull, Paatsch, & Raba, 2013). This approach is not merely helpful for individual children in each conversation, but there is a positive impact on the quality of the classroom environment (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Sustained conversations promote enhanced language and literacy practices in the classroom overall (Justice et al., 2008).

One way to promote extended conversation is to use a model of Shared Sustained Thinking (Siraj & Asani, 2015). In Shared Sustained Thinking adults intentionally start teacher-child dialogues designed to expand answers and keep children engaged in conversation. Supportive shared conversations include solving problems together, clarifying concepts, evaluating activities, and the conversation extends as parties are thinking about their own ideas and knowledge. Helpful strategies for fostering supportive shared conversations are outlined in the table below, with verbal examples and non-verbal examples proposed by Siraj-Blatchford (2015) and expanded by the authors of this textbook.

Supporting Children's Sustained Shared Thinking

Chart 3.4.1 "Supporting Children's Sustained Shared Thinking." Content is based on Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2015). Quality Interactions in the Early Years Keynote Address at the TACTYC Annual Conference, Cardiff, 5 November – Birth to 8 Matters! Seeking Seamlessness – Continuity? Integration? Creativity?" http://www.tactyc.org.uk/pdfs/2005conf_siraj.pdf [Google Scholar]

Strategy	Verbal Example	Non-Verbal
Tuning In	Greeting the child and listening	Body oriented toward child, bending over to near eye level to child
Showing Genuine Interest	Verbal affirmation	Maintaining eye contact, smiling, nodding
Respecting children's own decisions and choices by inviting children to elaborate	Saying things like, "I really want to know more about this."	Listening and engaging in the response
Re-capping	"So you think that..."	Drawing picture together or as a depiction that you understand the conversation
Offering the adult's own experience	I like to...	Sharing photos or pictures
Clarifying ideas	"So you think that this stone will melt if I boil it in water?"	Use facial gestures, such as a questioning expression
Suggesting	"Could we try doing it this way?"	Pointing to item while smiling
Reminding	"Don't forget that you said that this stone will melt if I boil it."	Tapping forgotten item
Using encouragement to further thinking	"You have really thought hard about where to put this door in the palace. Where will you put the windows?"	Give your brain a kiss (kiss hand and then touch hand to head)
Offering an alternative viewpoint	"Maybe Goldilocks wasn't naughty when she ate the porridge."	Showing another way to solve a problem (e.g., a different way of stacking blocks)
Speculating	"What do you think the three bears would do if Goldilocks knocked on their door and invited them to go on a picnic?"	Act out pretend play and dress up scenarios
Reciprocating	"Thank goodness that you were wearing boots when you jumped in those puddles! Look at my feet. They are soaking wet!"	Mirroring child's gestures Varied, animated facial expressions
Asking open-ended questions	"How did you...?" "Why does this...?" "What happens next...?" "What do you think...?" "I wonder what would happen if...?"	Using drawing for communication and indicating questions
Modeling thinking	"I have to think hard about what I will do this evening. I need to take my dog to the vet because he has a sore foot, take my library books back to the library, and buy some food for dinner tonight. But I won't have time to do all of these things."	Demonstrating thoughtful examination of items or drawings by pausing first

Instructional Opportunities That Support Language Development

Dramatic play creates opportunities for children to engage with their peers and act out real life scenarios. Many early learning settings have dramatic play areas, including home living/kitchen, puppet stages, flannel sets, and temporary thematic spots, such as an apple orchard or mechanic's garage. These types of activities foster opportunities for children to practice dialogue, use different voices, and experiment with conversational rhythms. Teachers may or may not join in, but having a richness of materials available in the environment can help children to engage in discussions with one another.



Figure 3.4.4 Dramatic play helps children practice language skills.

The ability of children to discriminate sounds and perceive rhythm and rhyme is associated with early reading ability. Nursery rhymes are particularly effective. They are short verses, making them easily repeatable. Children's exposure to nursery rhymes is connected with spelling success in early grades (Dunst et al., 2011) and are particularly effective with English Language Learners (Prošić-Santovac, 2015). For example, "Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack jump over the candlestick!" is easier for children to master and repeat than a longer poem. Even short poems allow for practicing tone of voice, inflection, grammar, and figurative language. These early attempts help build a foundation for language development. Hearing the sounds at the beginnings and endings of words helps children explore connecting these sounds to letters and prepares children for early reading (Rasinki & Zimmerman, 2013). As teachers introduce poems of different styles, they create opportunities for the children to enhance their vocabulary knowledge and to engage with their peers in addition to enjoying and celebrating language.

Language Accessibility and Differentiated Supports

Assistive technology includes devices or services that help children with disabilities to engage in learning and social interactions (Lohmann et al., 2019). Common examples include sign language, picture communication boards, adapted books, and voice output communication devices (Lohmann et al., 2019; Skau & Cascella, 2006). Sign language provides a visual or tactile demonstration of spoken words and is used not only for children who are deaf or hard of hearing, but hearing children as well. A common strategy is to have parents and children learn 20 to 30 words that are useful for the child and their environments (Skau & Cascella, 2006). This approach allows children to be able to communicate and understand some of the most basic and fundamental concepts. In the same way, picture boards allow children to touch or point to words they hear or wish to say. These can be used at home or school and can be relatively easy to produce or reproduce by using computers and cardstock or poster boards. For example, a picture of clothing, toothbrush, breakfast, then a car can highlight the order of routine for a young child. This also allows the possibility for the child to ask for or about a portion of the routine as it is occurring by pointing to that same board. Story and song boards create opportunities to point to pictures as a story or song is being shared. This generates space for a non-verbal child to respond, repeat, and participate fully in a classroom environment. Using a communication board might also be effective for a verbal child that is bothered by noise, as a child could wear earphones to manage the noise, and still participate by pointing to a board. It works best to include interesting textures or even real objects attached to the board (Skau & Cascella, 2006). As an example, an educator telling the story of *The Three Little Pigs* enhances children's understandings with the storyboard by affixing to the board a picture of a brick, a small stick, and a bit of straw or raffia. Teachers can also point to storyboards as an aided language simulation for all children by pointing to words and pictures to emphasize meaning while telling a story, "The first little pig built his house out of STRAW."

Vocal output devices produce pre-recorded messages when children press a button or otherwise trigger a word (Lohmann et al., 2019, Skau & Cascella, 2006). The child activates the device to answer questions, prompt others to action, or otherwise communicate. A vocal output device could be used in the classroom to record phrases or lines from poetry, story, or song. When the class joins in the story or song, the child with the vocal output device can then also join in.

Use of tablets and smartphones for assistive communication purposes has increased more recently as these items have become more readily available (Lohmann et al., 2019). Smart devices can easily be used in a classroom as a way of helping to create vocal output for a story. For example, classmates or teachers could record voices on the phone or tablet, "And I will huff and puff and blow your house down!" The child using the technology could play it at the cue when everyone joins in. The voice recording could be the child, teacher, classmates, or even family members with some planning ahead. Use of smart technology for assistive communication is most effective when adults have positive beliefs about the use of these devices (Zajc et al., 2018). Similarly,

teachers' use and comfort integrating assistive technologies develops as they gain more experiences using adaptive technologies within young learners .

Key Take-Aways

Children's language development depends on ample meaningful language experiences with peers and adults. These experiences allow children opportunities to express themselves and be understood. When educators and parents provide these opportunities they support children's language development. Understanding typical language trajectories allows educators to anticipate children's language needs and enrich language environments accordingly.

It is also important to understand differences in the developmental trajectories. Children who are English Language Learners might have some initial delays as they navigate a silent period of receptive language before becoming more expressive/productive. Home language retention and multilingualism results in cognitive gains and maintains important cultural ties. Children who are deaf and/or hard of hearing may have language delays depending on the severity of the hearing loss and the type and timing of intervention. All children with hearing loss benefit from social play opportunities as this strengthens productive language. Children who have autism may struggle with receptive and expressive language. Nonverbal cues may be particularly difficult for a child to master. Early intervention is helpful, not only for language development itself, but for the social transactions that take place. Shared conversations help to elicit growth in listening, speaking, and nonverbal communication. Assisted technology can help to bridge the gap when children need communication support.

Intentional educators promote children's language development by attending to children's individual differences, remaining culturally responsive, providing context and environmental supports, and using adaptive technologies that enhance children's engagement. Children have a desire to communicate and a right to be understood. Language in its many forms allows this process to unfold.

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3.5: Understanding and Valuing Home Literacy Environments

“Every child needs one adult that is crazy about them”.

-Urie Brofenbrenner

Opening Vignette: A Tale of Two Teachers

Head Start teachers, Jane and Mallory, are attending a professional development workshop. The first session of the day, “Early Literacy and the Home Environment,” presents the attendees with strategies to support families’ home literacy environments. The presenters encourage the participants to utilize tools such as a home literacy screening inventory to determine which families might need additional support. During the discussion they highlight the value of literacy rich home environments where parents or caregivers regularly share books with children. The presenters conclude the workshop by emphasizing the implications of early home environment on a child’s language and literacy development.

After the workshop, both Jane and Mallory have time to reflect on the content and their own literacy experiences. Jane experienced a very traditional middle-class upbringing. Her mother was a stay-at-home mom and she has vivid memories of her mother and father sharing books with her. Their home was filled with literacy materials and her parents often read for pleasure. She even remembers the excitement of the day she got her first library card.

Mallory had a very different early literacy experience. Mallory spent most days with her grandmother. Their days were spent baking treats and tending to the garden. Mallory has memories of her grandmother telling her stories. The stories were sometimes based on their faith, and at other times they were full of magical creatures in far away lands. As a teenager Mallory learned that her grandmother could not read. This explained why her grandmother filled their days by telling stories, rather than reading books.

Introduction

It is well-known that parents and caregivers, and the home literacy environment they create, directly impact a child’s emergent literacy development (Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006; Waldrep, 2005). Beginning at birth, children acquire language and emergent literacy skills within social contexts. The opening vignette demonstrates the beauty of language and literacy development in different homes and family environments. Emergent literacy skills are shaped by the home and preschool literacy environment (Saracho, 2017). Children enter school contexts with a wealth of language and literacy experiences from the home and community contexts they experience. It is important to use a strengths-based perspective when considering the differences in family literacy practices. In doing so, educators guard against deficit perspectives that may privilege some literacy experiences over others. In the opening vignette, it might be easy to conclude that Mallory entered school with vulnerabilities based on family structure and her grandmother’s literacy level. Yet, Mallory’s family’s rich oral storytelling practices supplied her with a wealth of knowledge about narrative styles including plot, theme, and character development. In addition, Mallory has learned a great deal about how to create dialogue in a way that captures a listener’s attention. Jane’s experiences in a book rich environment also provided her the opportunity to see reading as a source of pleasure. Although Jane and Mallory had very different early experiences, both children entered school with a love and eagerness for literacy. Both educators realized that the workshop had presented an incomplete view about how home environments can support children’s literacy development. Early childhood educators are tasked with the responsibility of celebrating the individuality and strengths of each child and their family. Partnering with families promotes a strong foundation for successful literacy learning. In order to do this, educators must recognize there are many contexts and methods in which families transmit and share in literacy experiences.



Figure 3.5.1 Early childhood educators collaboratively plan literacy activities.

This section will explore the following questions:



What role does a child's family play in literacy development?



How do families' social contexts differ?



How can educators in early learning settings work with families to promote literacy?



Family Role in Literacy Development

Family literacy development refers to parents and their children using literacy practices and strategies together at home. These literacy experiences are usually informal and occur within the context of the normal family routine (Wasik, 2012). These experiences, compounded daily, support the influence of the family on a child's literacy development. Many decades of research support the vital parental role in nurturing a child's literacy development. Consider the literacy-rich moments illustrated in the exchange between Ava and her father getting ready to go to the store.

Vignette: Grocery Store Trip

Two year-old Ava is happily drawing a picture while her father is creating a list for the grocery store. Her father mentions that he is planning to buy grapes at the grocery store. Ava proceeds to scribble across the paper and exclaims, "I added grapes to my list, too."

This scenario demonstrates the value of an everyday interaction that takes place in many homes. The daily conversations and interactions between children and adults in the home provide models of how people use reading, writing, and language to engage with the world. Every day parental interactions create opportunities for adults to model literacy skills. Early childhood educators have the responsibility to honor the language and literacy expressions present in families' daily lives. When early educators focus on developing partnerships with families and champion the role of the family as a vital space for meaningful literacy interactions, they help promote family literacy.

Home Literacy Environment

The home literacy environment is ordinarily defined as activities facilitated by family members at home that relate to literacy learning, and literacy resources in the home combined with parental attitudes towards literacy learning (Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006). Home literacy environments include practices such as shared picture book reading, storytelling, conversations and singing songs. Literacy contexts reflect multiple variables and include a child's interests, library experiences, and how parents and children enact a variety of literacy practices in the home (Myrtil, Justice, & Jiang, 2019). Bronfenbrenner's human ecological theory suggests that children must be understood in the context of their families and communities (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The ecological environment is a set of nested structures, each couched inside the subsequent one, similar to a set of Russian dolls where each doll of decreasing size fits inside the next. The innermost setting would include the developing child and their immediate setting, likely home and classroom. **Bronfenbrenner's approach closely matches the nest model**, where not only is the child considered, but also the immediate environment and the wider context.



Figure 3.5.2 Sharing books with children is an important way to promote literacy in the home.

More recently, the concept of **funds of knowledge** (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) acknowledges the influence of the household and community. Funds of knowledge encompass families' traditions, experiences, information, and practices. When educators and supportive adults establish a relationship founded on the common goal of successful and healthy development of the child, it supports the aims of cultural responsiveness, equity, and inclusion. For example, when a child shares their enthusiasm for a television program their family is watching together, it draws upon many of the child's own funds of knowledge. While the child is drawing on a shared family and cultural experience in the show itself, the child is also engaging with notions of occupations and outings, values, chores and activities and vocabulary. A child's experience shopping at the grocery store is another example of funds of knowledge. A child may learn about quantity, money, shopping practices, cultural norms around food, and patterns of interacting, all while learning and practicing signs and symbols. Drawing on socio-cultural perspectives, educators embrace the funds of knowledge children possess utilizing these resources and skills to build productive pedagogy. In this way, educators acknowledge that every child comes to school with previous experiences that influence their interactions with language and support their emerging literacies.

The home environment of each family is complex and personal, and includes economic, social, and cultural influences. The complexity of home and community environments explains the diversity we see amongst school readiness nationwide. The home literacy environment, parental expectations for their child's literacy success, and parental characteristics are influencing factors in literacy development (Senechal & Lefevre, 2002). Ideally, prior to entering kindergarten, children have the developmental precursors for reading well-established. This includes skills children learn from shared book reading and oral storytelling experiences, exposure to rhyming structures, and opportunities exploring alphabet material. Literacy development is "rooted" in experiences young children have prior to formal schooling. These informal literacy experiences take place daily in the home environment and involve interactions with caregivers. Examples include caregivers reading to children and an emphasis on environmental print. The caregiver might point out a word or sign to the child. It could also sound like a family member singing a familiar song with a child, making up silly words that rhyme, or saying the letters in the child's name.

Literacy Materials and Experiences

There are many ways families engage in early literacy experiences in the home. Research studies demonstrate the strong relationship between school success and early literacy exposure. Children who enter school with foundational literacy skills will likely have success in formal schooling. Children's access to diverse literacy materials in the home encompass a range of resources that promote children's interactions with print. Literacy materials include children's access to print-based materials such as books and magazines as well as access to a variety of writing and drawing materials that children can use to generate print. The influence of technology is also situated in this arena. Digital media offers children additional ways to interact with text and acquire literacy as they read, play, or otherwise explore words and sounds. Children's interactions across a variety of literacy materials supports their emerging knowledge about literacy practices.

Reading aloud has long been touted as an important practice to encourage literacy development. Educators and parents have long known the positive impact of sharing books with children. Positive interactions between children and caregivers that include picture book reading promote language skills and vocabulary development (Wells, 1985). Additionally, research suggests the way in which children are read to is related to their language gain. If children are given opportunities to be actively involved in the reading experience, for example, asking questions about the pictures, children show greater gains than when an adult simply reads the book (Whitehurst, et al., 1988). While this finding is valuable for educators to consider, the mere value of reading to a child should not be understated or undervalued. Providing children opportunities to engage with books in various ways and settings, including school settings, encourages positive feelings related to literacy.

Books offer children and families intentional and focused opportunities to share, discuss, and experience reading together. It is important to note the emotional connection that is facilitated by sharing a book with a child. This connection is valuable for development, but also for the pure joy of learning to love books and the experiences they create. Books are also used to teach young children skills and to provide understanding of topics that may be difficult to discuss. Shared storybook reading provides an avenue for language learning, offering exposure to new concepts, ideas, and vocabulary that might not be encountered in everyday conversation. This learning occurs both through the text and the talk that is facilitated around the text by the caregiver and child (Brannon & Dauksas, 2014).

Sharing books is not the only way to support literacy development for young children. People use stories to learn about curricular concepts, share life experiences, and capture the imagination. Culture and history are, in part, transmitted through story. Storytelling is frequently described as an oral language activity, but the presence of gestures and physical expression are also an important part of storytelling. Moreover, storytelling can also take place through the use of signing, gestures, picture cards or props, and assistive technology. Storytelling is an important expression of symbolic thought as children or adults use language to convey information beyond the present moment or situation. Additionally, it allows children to gain insight into the world of communicating ideas to an audience. Children's response to stories is both social (Alexander & Levine, 2008) and cognitive (Lehne, et al, 2015). Speakers practice story concepts such as sequence and structure, dialogue, and vocabulary. Storytelling allows children to process emotions and find their voice.



Figure 3.5.3 Sharing books with children provides a strong literacy foundation

In addition to reading aloud, sharing books, and storytelling, families can also build strong literacy experiences through everyday conversations. Chapter two introduced the idea of “serve and return” and the five steps in facilitating serve and return interactions with young children. Engaging with children regularly using these steps is an integral component of supporting language development. Children successfully acquire language through consistent experiences and opportunities with adults they love and trust. When a young child babbles and an adult responds appropriately, connections are built and strengthened in the child’s brain that support the development of communication. Much like a game of volleyball, the back and forth interaction is both rewarding and capacity building. Responsive caregivers provide an environment rich in serve and return experiences to build language and literacy knowledge and skills.

Pause and Consider: How Does Our Own Literacy Background Influence Us?

Our early literacy experiences influence how we think about children’s home literacy environments. This includes previous experiences with family members, teachers, friends, and how our time and physical space were structured. Whether it is conscious or not, we are accessing our own memories. Did you have a family member who was a great storyteller at family gatherings? Did you have access to books? Were you read to? What was your own pathway to reading like? Our personal literacy journey is shaped by these early and formative experiences. Take a moment to consider the following questions: What were your personal home literacy experiences? How do you think these experiences supported your literacy development? How do your previous experiences impact your perception of what you believe families should provide to the children you are educating today?



Understanding Families’ Diverse Social Contexts

Early childhood educators must recognize the uniqueness of all cultures, languages, and communities by embracing the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of our society. All classrooms should be seen as multicultural and inclusive, and promote equity by valuing and celebrating each family represented. This includes understanding the influence of multiple languages and dialects. These culturally responsive practices engage children and families through authentic home-school connections. As educators recognize and understand diverse social contexts, they are strengthening the effectiveness of instructional delivery. Academic progress takes place within the context of a child’s ecosystems and their development is maximized when these ecosystems are considered and respected. Diversity of social contexts is an asset to educators, rather than a barrier to appropriate development, when culturally responsive practices are implemented in the classroom.

Language development is influenced by exposure and influence within a broader regional and social environment. When considering our nest model, this means not only the bird itself, and the nest, but also the tree and even the forest. This illustration illuminates the continual theme that language development is complex and influenced by many factors. Language experiences build a foundation of thinking and understanding upon which knowledge can grow. Educators strategically craft language experiences which draw upon the life experiences of students and add to their understanding of the world. Language experiences that connect to the broader regional and social environment bring life into the classroom and make what is learned at school relevant and real.

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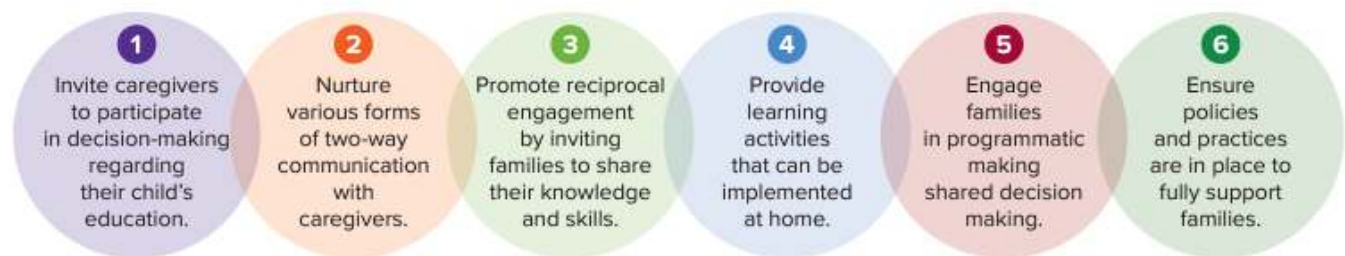
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3.6: Engaging Families in Early Literacy Strategies



Research demonstrates that family/caregiver engagement leads to improved student academic performance (Wasserman & Sabater, 2018). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has identified six principles that demonstrate successful caregiver engagement practices (NAEYC).

Six Principles of Successful Caregiver Engagement Practices



Deliberate exposure to language and immersive encounters with literature within the school setting, at home, and in the broader community, are pivotal elements in nurturing proficient readers among children. Engaging children and families in activities such as singing songs, reading and discussing books, and participating in writing and drawing to tell stories actively foster the development of oral language skills.

The following activities may be useful in engaging teacher candidates as they build this asset-based lens.

Using An Asset-Based Approach

In the pursuit of educational equity, an asset-based or strengths-based approach plays a pivotal role. This approach focuses on harnessing the inherent strengths within students, families, and communities, and values the funds of knowledge they possess (Garven, Pattoni, McLean, 2016 & González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). More precisely, an asset-based approach is a collaborative exploration of individual abilities and circumstances that enables the individual to meet their needs and achieve their goals. The table below provides guidance on how to engage with families/caregivers and their children using an asset-based approach.

Strengths-Based Attitudes	Guidance
All families/caregivers have strengths.	Look and listen for strengths as families/caregivers interact with their children.
Families/caregivers are the first and most important teachers of their children.	- Listen to families/caregivers' knowledge about their children. - Remember children come to you during a snapshot of their development, but they spend a lifetime with their families/caregivers.
Families/caregivers are our partners with a critical role in their child's development.	- Pay attention to what families/caregivers tell you about their children at each developmental stage. - Build on what you learn from families/caregivers to help you partner with them to support their children's learning and development.
Families/caregivers have expertise about their child and family.	- Listen carefully to what families/caregivers share about their children, family, and culture. - Honor and value families/caregivers' expertise by listening to and using their suggestions on how to best care for their children.
Families/caregivers' contributions are important and valuable.	- Be open to families/caregivers' suggestions and requests. - Adopting an open mind will help you learn from families/caregivers about their children and what is happening.

Funds of Knowledge

Leveraging Funds of Knowledge provides valuable insights for enhancing effective teaching strategies and practices for diverse student populations (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). To gain a deeper understanding of students' lives and backgrounds, it is imperative to center attention on the daily routines and practices within households. This approach emphasizes discovering "what is," rather than dwelling on "what is not." Moreover, it entails engaging directly with individuals rather than relying on preconceived assumptions and stereotypes (Hogg, 2011).

When leveraging Funds of Knowledge to enhance learning accessibility for children, consider the following:

- Funds of Knowledge/Cultural Asset Mapping
 - Identify and chart the cultural assets within the classroom community, including students' interests, extracurricular activities, and skills beyond the school setting.
 - Create a mapping system that connects external interests and skills to content area standards, thereby acknowledging and leveraging student strengths and backgrounds.
- Parent/Caregiver Expertise
 - Actively involve parents and caregivers in the educational process by inviting them to share their expertise with both teachers and students.
 - Facilitate scheduled events where parents can contribute their knowledge, fostering a sense of agency for parents and their children in the classroom.
 - Utilize parental knowledge to inform instruction, creating a collaborative and supportive learning environment.
- Parents/Caregivers and Students as Storytellers
 - Encourage students and their families to share meaningful stories, traditions, and skills, promoting a sense of community and belonging.
 - These storytelling sessions can occur during family nights or within the classroom, reinforcing a collective sense of efficacy in the academic setting.
- Project-Based Learning
 - Empower students to apply their Funds of Knowledge to learning and problem-solving.

- Offer students choices in how they learn and how they share their acquired information.
- Encourage students to infuse their unique skills and perspectives into project-based learning activities, fostering creativity and individuality in the learning process.

A Look Inside Myths and Assumptions



There are common myths about families that lead to assumptions about children and families that influence engagement with families and the learning environment. These include:

 Myth	 Reality
 Aligned with most media's frequent references, a typical American family has one type of family structure.	 Historically, America has been composed of many different family structures including the traditional nuclear, single, and multi-generational or extended families.
 Each family member experiences "the family" in the same way.	 Men, women, children and adults often experience family in different ways due to socially constructed gender roles.
 All family members have common needs, interests, and common experiences.	 Children may have different family experiences due to economic, parental and/or marital stressors, birth order, and type and level of disability.
 Family life is congruent, even, and somewhat predictable, and operates on the principle of harmony and love	 The power relations and competition intrinsic to families, creates an atmosphere where families must balance feelings of both love and antagonism.

Assumptions can be described as unexamined beliefs or thoughts that may go unnoticed, but which shape our interactions in diverse contexts. When we examine our assumptions before engaging with children and families/caregivers, interactions are more meaningful and beneficial for academic and social development. The following questions provide a mechanism to reflect on our assumptions and foster self-awareness and constructive engagement when working with families/caregivers.

Pause and Reflect

What might we unintentionally take for granted when it comes to collaborating with diverse families?

What assumptions may we possess that could potentially affect our interactions with diverse families?

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3.7: Literacy Instruction for Diverse Learners

“We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams.” – Jimmy Carter

“We should all know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.” – Maya Angelou



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Imagine a class with diverse kids – some with invisible or visible disabilities, different ethnicities, and nationalities – who feel a sense of belonging and whose cultural capital, customs, traditions, and languages are valued in the classroom space. The teacher focuses on building relationships with each child to scaffold and enrich their learning as s/he has an undaunted belief in their capabilities and strengths. In this nurturing environment, every child could blossom and reach for the stars. This is the class every child deserves, no matter where they come from or where they are going!

Diversity and Children's Books

Diversity and social justice are two key themes in literacy-education research today. This research focuses on teaching children to understand the diversity within human beings in this world and injustice issues associated with diversity. In this context, scholars use “multicultural children’s literature” as the term for children’s literature that deals with diversity and social justice (Cai, 2002). In many early childhood classrooms, multicultural picturebooks from different countries are considered to be the main resources for diversity education. However, the use of international picturebooks may not be sufficient to reduce our children’s cultural biases and develop their ability to make social changes. Helping our children become aware of injustices perpetrated because of cultural differences and to actually act on the issues should be an ultimate goal when exposing them to multicultural picturebooks. Botelho and Rudman’s (2009) critical multicultural analysis of children’s literature gives us some ideas about how to use multicultural picturebooks in attaining this goal. Introducing the topics of race, gender, and social class, they emphasize that understanding who exercises the power in our society, where these three aspects of humanity are intertwined, is a key consideration when deciding which picturebooks to read with our children and what conversations we will have with them.

Facilitating critical reading

In addition, **critical reading** is something we should promote during read-alouds with our children, after selecting culturally sensitive, high-quality multicultural picturebooks for our classroom library. High-quality texts do not overly explain the story, to invite readers to “draw their own conclusions without being told precisely what to think ” (Young et al., 2020, p. 32). Quality multicultural picturebooks do not necessarily tell the systemic factors regarding social inequity but show the issues. In addressing them, the adults’ role in facilitating critical conversations around the readings with the children is significant (Quast & Bazemore-Bertrand, 2019).

Last Stop on Market Street, written by Matt de la Peña and illustrated by Christian Robinson, is a multicultural picturebook that stands out in my mind. This book is frequently discussed in the recent literacy-education literature that focuses on diversity and social justice. It deals with economic inequality portrayed in an urban U.S. context. The main storyline follows CJ's bus rides with his grandmother. He usually takes the bus with his grandma after church, even on rainy days. Although in the early part of the story he questions why he needs to take the bus but his friend rides in the family's car, he and his grandma find real beauty around them during their bus rides.

CJ needs to ride the bus because they don't own a car. CJ asks his grandma, "Nana, how come we don't got a car?" Grandma responds, "Boy, what do we need a car for? We got a bus that breathes fire, and old Mr. Dennis, who always has a trick for you" (De la Peña, 2015). In the United States, the use of public transportation is often associated with poverty. Cities and towns there have been built primarily for people with personal vehicles. Therefore, except for metropolitan areas such as New York and Chicago, the use of public transportation is an inconvenience that mostly people on low incomes end up needing to bear. Rather than complaining about the situation, however, CJ's grandma and he talk about enjoyable things. They focus on people that they enjoy seeing and being with – from the bus driver to a guitar player.

While deficit views and devaluing the cultures of people in poverty are prevalent in society (e.g., they are lazy; something's wrong with them), *Last Stop on Market Street* supports the counter-narrative. The last stop, which CJ and his grandma get off at, is a soup kitchen where they volunteer weekly. They are not lazy. They are helping others.

Race is not explicitly spoken of in this book, although readers can see CJ's skin color is dark. This is where we can have a critical conversation about how people with certain racial backgrounds tend to experience poverty more often than others, and about "how people from all different racial, ability, and cultural backgrounds might share similar poverty experiences" (Quast & Bazemore-Bertrand, 2019, p. 221). As the book does not speak about the reasons for CJ and his grandma's current economic condition either, more critical conversations between the teacher and the children will be needed for the children to become aware of systemic factors contributing to inequity.

Last Stop on Market Street speaks about the Blind culture (capitalized to indicate that this person belongs to the Blind culture, not just that they do not see) a little more explicitly than racial issues. Another rider on the bus is Blind. When CJ sees the man, he asks his grandma, "How come that man can't see?" A conversation among this man, CJ, and his grandma ensues in which it is revealed how the Blind culture has a rich appreciation of their world because of their enhanced olfactory and auditory senses. The man tells CJ's grandma that he even closes his eyes to feel music.

Last Stop on Market Street is a rare picturebook, earning a Newbery Medal, an award that is not for the illustrations but for the quality of the writing. Considering that most of the books receiving the Newbery Medal are chapter books, the accomplishment of this picturebook is remarkable. It is also notable that Matt de la Peña is one of only three Latin-background authors to have won the Newbery. This talented author also won Pura Belpré Honor Book Awards for both this book and his young-adult novel *The Living*, in 2014. The Pura Belpré Award was founded in 1996 to celebrate the work of Latinx writers and illustrators. Christian Robinson, the African-American illustrator of *Last Stop*, won the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor Award; Coretta Scott King Book Awards have gone to one African-American author and one African-American illustrator annually since 1974. Last but not least, this book won the Caldecott Honor in 2016.

The urban atmosphere as depicted in Robinson's paintings and collages can make us feel some human warmth, rather than seeming merely cold, sterile, and industrial. His illustrations effectively delineate a remarkable level of diversity among the characters through the many different shades of people's skin color, hair texture, clothing, gestures, props that the characters hold or use, and whatnot. This quality is also evident in Robinson's more recent wordless picturebook titled *Another*, which was published in March 2019. In both of the books illustrated by Robinson, he only uses dots for people's eyes, although the colors of the dots vary. By doing so, the illustrations avoid potentially stereotypical eye shapes (e.g., thin slanted eyes).

In conclusion, we should reiterate that there are many things that are not explicitly articulated in *Last Stop on Market Street*, while it delineates an unexpected beauty in the experiences of people who live in poverty. Children's literature scholars suggest that quality multicultural children's literature should "avoid the single story or allowing one story to speak for an entire group of individuals" (Young et al., 2020, p. 81). This book does not attempt to speak for an entire group of people in poverty, people of color, or people with (dis)abilities. Still, it vividly depicts cultural specificity, which makes it a high-quality multicultural

picturebook (Sims Bishop, 1992). Picturebooks like this can foster our children's intercultural understanding and the development of empathy.

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3.8: Supporting Families in Promoting Literacy

Working with Families to Promote Literacy

Bronfenbrenner's model demonstrates the strong influence and implications of a child's family and home environment. This is especially true when considering literacy development for young children. Early childhood educators have the opportunity to build relationships with families, support families, and engage families in their child's early childhood experience.

Building trusting relationships with families happens over time and through a series of positive interactions. Trust, empathy, and time are necessary components of building positive relationships. When educators work to get to know families personally, culturally relevant and powerful funds of knowledge are revealed and can be used to enhance children's literacy experiences. For example, an educator may discover in conversations with the family that a child frequently cooks with her grandmother and enjoys measuring ingredients and following the recipe. The grandmother reads the recipe and asks guiding prompts like, "Okay, let's see what's next." This small insight into the child's literacy experience allows the educator to draw the child into meaningful conversations, play experiences, and cooking experiences that build on the procedural literacy knowledge the child already knows about how recipes "work."

Addressing Vulnerability

Some children from vulnerable communities are less prepared for the academic language tasks of school (Rivalland, 2004). Research often associates low socio-economic status with poor school achievement, including literacy abilities (Garrett-Peters et al., 2016).

Children from vulnerable communities might need additional scaffolding to bridge their home literacy experiences to expected school literacy outcomes. Poverty can create stress for young children and their families. Conditions such as food insecurity, unemployment, community violence, and inconsistent access to healthcare can impact one's capacity for attentive parenting (Manz et al., 2010). These variables potentially affect the health and well-being of the family and (the or a) parent's ability to consistently provide enriching language opportunities. However, it is negligent to say that living in poverty equates to poorer academic outcomes. Parents who interact sensitively with their children positively impact language development (Raviv et al., 2004). Additionally, access to high-quality early learning experiences with strong family/educator relationships supports literacy development for this vulnerable population. Adults in early care settings nurture a child's language development by engaging in verbally stimulating interactions (NICHD Early Care Network, 2000).

When a child's early experiences with language are limited, educators may need to develop intentional interventions to mitigate literacy gaps that, if left unattended, might result in negative academic outcomes for the child in the future. Success in educational environments is connected to strong language and literacy in the early years (Hirsch-Pasek et al., 2015; Hoff, 2013; Huntsinger, Jose, & Luo, 2016).

For children who have not participated in rich language experiences, there are long-term implications related to language competency and overall school readiness (Merritt & Klein, 2015). For example, parents who are engaging in abusive or neglectful behaviors tend to speak less frequently to their children and do not draw out conversations (Christopholous et al., 1988; Eigsti & Cicchetti, 2004). This might result in a longer lead time for children to feel comfortable or competent in expressing themselves. Linguistic deprivation may also occur with children who are hearing-impaired and do not have adequate supports, and who lack access to methods of communication (Humphries et al., 2012). Deprivation of language creates other learning problems as children might not follow typical developmental trajectories in other areas, such as mathematical reasoning (Humphries et al., 2012) and memory tasks (Newport, 1990). Any hindrance to a child's ability to communicate impacts the child's literacy development.

More recently, the influence of technology has broadened the definition of the literacy environment and further diversified children's literacy experiences. During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, this diversification became keenly apparent. The 2020 pandemic demonstrated how access to technology and use of technology influences the ability of children to acquire literacy concepts within virtual settings. Some teachers held synchronous video-conference sessions, reading a story to the students in their classroom. Certainly, a familiar face reading a story fosters a social connection, provides a forum for discussing books, and creates an opportunity for developing children's literacy. Yet, accessibility to the literacy experience for children was not equitable. Some children may not have had the opportunity to participate in the synchronous sessions with their classmates and viewed recordings

of the read aloud experience. Other students might not have access to an appropriate device or wifi. A family's economic capacity to mitigate and successfully utilize technology varied greatly, and resulted in uneven access to educational opportunities throughout the pandemic. For example, some students may have access to a device, but might be sharing this access with siblings or other family members who also need them. Parents might be able to allow a child to use their cell phone for a portion of the day, but few adults can navigate a whole day without access to their own cell phone. The younger the age of the child, the less likely they might be to have access to their own device.

Even when children had full access to technological resources, the impact of Covid-19 greatly diminished children's opportunities to develop their literacy understandings in collaboration with their peers in play-based spaces. While read-alouds can be done via video-conference, hands-on literacy activities cannot. In-person school contexts allow early educators to extend read alouds with sensory rich literacy activities to support literacy development; these same experiences are not readily transferable to online platforms. In attempts to replicate the sensory experience at home, educators sent families recipes to make playdough at home. However, a solitary literacy activity is not the same as a social literacy activity. In this particular example, educators' efforts were further thwarted, as there was a flour shortage during the pandemic, making a key ingredient for playdough inaccessible. This brief discussion of some of the inequities experienced by families living through the pandemic provides an example of how the use of technology can certainly be a contributor to literacy development. But, it also provides an important illustration of how context is individual and connected to the people and materials a child has access to.

As early childhood educators interact with families, they have the opportunity to make profound impacts. Children and families might have past experiences or current situations that complicate development; the educator has the opportunity to partner with the family and work towards a successful future. In order for the child to reach their optimal development, they need strong social relationships and interactions that enhance their emotional well-being. This in turn, prepares the child to grow cognitively, and enhances language development. Families benefit from community support as they engage in these tasks. Positive and consistent interactions with their child's teacher provide an avenue of support for families. In this way, early learning settings play a vital role as community assets and resources to the family; and, they have a direct impact on children. As a greater goal, early childhood programs should work to build adult capabilities and strengthen families as they support the needs of their children.

Strategies for Promoting Diversity and Equity in Language Learning

Working with families is an integral part of being a quality early childhood educator. The profession requires us to approach families in an unbiased manner. It is important to understand what a bias is and our own "lens" or perspective from which we make decisions and draw conclusions. Implicit bias refers to unconscious attitudes, reactions, stereotypes, and categories that affect behavior and understanding (Chin, 2020). Some examples of implicit bias that might be relevant to language and literacy are the teacher discounting the language used in the home environment or the expectation to make eye contact when speaking. Both of these examples are a result of cultural bias and are sometimes prevalent in early childhood classrooms. No one is immune from a bias; however, as a professional, there are many resources available for exploring possible bias.

Being aware of our own biases can ensure that we approach all families from a strengths-based posture and restrain from judging situations and environments that are different from our own experiences. This is an important first step in creating a climate that promotes equity and diversity. Further work should always center on continually seeking to understand how others are different and valuing differences as they relate to supporting language and literacy development. The key to promoting equity and diversity in early childhood spaces is to appreciate and respect children's home languages, cultures, and traditions. See the figure below for additional strategies to support families.

Strategies to Ensure Linguistic and Cultural Diversity

- Involve families in your classroom
- Educate families on the benefits of mastering more than one language
- Honor family's values and norms
- Assist families to ensure children stay connected to their home language
- Support the home language
- Provide children with many ways to demonstrate mastered skills

Culturally responsive instruction begins with getting to know our students – their home lives and cultures. Having an appreciation and respect for each child and their cultural and linguistic backgrounds and leveraging them in classroom instruction in reading and writing lets the children know that they belong in the classroom community. A positive self-concept and self-esteem are crucial for learning and engagement to occur. Therefore, it is the teacher's job to embrace and welcome each child's cultural and linguistic identities to foster a culturally inclusive learning environment.

Teachers should build relationships with parents and students and welcome parents as volunteers and guest speakers into the classroom space. Invite parents to read a folktale, fable, myth, or legend from their culture to the class. Have "Show and Tell" days where children can bring cultural artifacts to show their peers and take pride in who they are. During reciprocal teaching, they can teach a peer some expressions from their native language or a song from their culture. Also, ensuring that the child sees themselves in the literature they read is vital for their self-concept. Therefore, having books that are mirrors, windows, and sliding doors (Sims Bishop, 1990) will ensure that all children see themselves in literature and media.

To get to know your students and their families, learn about their family literacy practices. Some children come from an oral storytelling tradition where they grow up listening to stories from grandparents, uncles, and aunts or learning family arts and crafts such as quilt making and basket weaving; these are all valid family cultural practices that contribute to building the children's native language and cultural literacies, upon which school literacies are built.

Begin with family cultural literacy practices

Alma Flor Ada (2003) reminds us: "Students live in two worlds: home and school. If these two worlds do not recognize, understand, and respect each other, students are put in a difficult predicament (p.11)"; and very little learning can occur. [The Global Family Research Project](#) emphasizes that literacy begins at home.

Culturally and linguistically diverse parents value literacy and see it as the single, most powerful hope for their children's future (Ordonez-Jasis & Oritz, 2006)

Researchers who study diverse learners say that teachers must talk with families to understand their lives outside of school. Teachers will see a complete picture of the families' socio-cultural contexts, and they will also recognize the wealth of stories, history, motivations, and cultural information, or "funds of knowledge" (Moll & Gonzalez 2004), that the parents contribute to their children's literacy learning. These funds of knowledge become the building blocks for a comprehensive literacy program. Positive early literacy experiences in families – reading with a parent, grandparent, or aunt, visiting the library, or enjoying books with other children at their childcare prepares them to learn to read at school. Here are seven research-based ways families contribute to the child's literacy development:

1. Creating a literacy-friendly home environment.

- a. The number of books in the home is a predictor of the children's success in reading.
- b. Reading to children and asking questions about the story builds vocabulary, letter knowledge, and comprehension.

2. Having lots of conversations.

- a. Children need to hear a lot of language from birth in order to grow the neural networks that are the basis of their language development.
- b. The number of words children hear by age 3 strongly predicts kindergarten readiness.

3. Having high expectations for the children's learning.

- a. When parents believe their children will succeed in school, their children have greater success than the children of parents who do not believe it.

4. Making reading enjoyable.

- a. When families nurture encouraging interactions, the children are interested in reading, which helps their literacy skills grow.
- b. Adults benefit too – these enjoyable experiences help reduce stress!

5. Families use their home language.

- a. Around 25% of young children in the U.S. are learning two languages at the same time.
- b. Using the home language helps the children build vocabulary and have a healthy self-identity.

6. Families and teachers communicate.

- a. Research clearly shows that when parents are involved with a child's schooling, the children's learning is enhanced.
- b. Schools/childcare centers can invite the parents into the classroom and share information so they can support their children.

7. Visiting the library.

- a. Kindergartners who visit libraries with their families score higher on assessments of reading, mathematics, and science in third grade than those who rarely visit.

It is important for teachers to connect with families and validate their roles in their children's learning. After all, children only spend around 25% of their waking time in school! (Wherry, 2004).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Interactive Reading Strategies

Overview

Interactive reading is a powerful strategy for fostering language and literacy development in all children. It nurtures children's ability to understand, enjoy, and engage with language. This chapter will guide you through the principles and benefits of interactive reading, exploring how these strategies can be adapted to meet the needs of children at various developmental stages.

Benefits and Principles of Interactive Reading

The chapter identifies the benefits and principles of implementing interactive reading with children of various ages. Whether working with infants, toddlers, or preschoolers you will discover how interactive reading supports cognitive, social, and emotional development. This approach enhances vocabulary development and comprehension skills. The bond between the child and the reader is strengthened in this enjoyable approach.

Progression of Dialogic Strategies

As children grow and develop so will their ability or ways they engage in shared and dialogic reading. This chapter will explore the progression of dialogic strategies, examine ways to implement them with young children, and how to adapt your reading techniques to align with the developmental needs of the children.

Applying Dialogic Strategies

You will be introduced to specific techniques, such as conducting a 'cover walk, and posing questions using "CROWD" prompts to engage children with the text. These strategies are designed to transform passive listening into active participation, encouraging children to think critically and express their thoughts.

Purpose and Goals

This chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of how to effectively use interactive reading to foster early language and literacy skills. Using interactive reading strategies allows teachers to create enriching, developmentally appropriate learning experiences that lay a strong foundation for children's future success in reading and writing.

Objectives

- Identify the principles and benefits of interactive reading with children at different developmental stages.
- Explore the progression of shared and dialogic reading strategies as children develop from infants through age 8 and with individual, small, and large groups of children.
- Apply strategies embedded in the dialogic approach to reading while reading to children out loud including a 'cover walk' or similar introduction, questions to engage children in the book, and reading with fluency and expression.
- Apply the components of the shared or dialogic reading strategy.
- Identify resources to enhance language and literacy learning.

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[4.2: The Power of Early Literacy](#)

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4.1: The Importance of Interactive Reading- Making Meaning

“The fire of literacy is created by the emotional sparks between a child, a book, and the person reading. It isn’t achieved by the book alone, nor by the child alone, nor by the adult who’s reading aloud—it’s the relationship winding between all three, bringing them together in easy harmony.” –Mem Fox, from Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever.

Opening Vignette: The Favorite Book

One morning a young 2-year-old named Adelyn was sitting with a favorite book from home, “Dora and the Rainy Day.” Ms. Faith, Adelyn’s home care provider, watched on as Adelyn flipped back and forth between the pages of the well-loved boardbook. She repeatedly came back to a page in the beginning and pointed to the words and the pictures and said, “It’s time to come inside now. It’s raining.” Then she would flip to the middle of the book and stop. Clearly mimicking the intonation of an adult who had read the book before, she said, “We are making hot chocolate...need to wait for the cookies to bake!” Then she moved to a page at the end of the book and pointed to the characters in the picture saying, “That’s the mom...there’s the dad....it’s raining.” Then she closed the book and announced, “THE END!”

Ms. Faith walked over to the child and commented on what a good job she did reading the book. Ms. Faith also asked Adelyn to show her some of the parts of the book, noting that this child was clearly showing signs of print awareness. For instance, she observed that Adelyn was holding the book right side up, she turned the pages from right to left (even though she skipped some), and she was able to use known words and concepts from the story in her retelling. It was clear to Ms. Faith that Adelyn was developing a sense for story structure and how to use pictures and words to understand text. And best of all, Adelyn was finding great joy and pleasure in rereading this book on her own.

Introduction

Watching a young child, like Adelyn in the opening vignette, begin to understand how reading works is such an exciting time for both families and early childhood educators. As has been discussed in previous chapters of this textbook, there are many interwoven elements that create proficient readers and many things adults can do to support reading development. Through continuous exposure to a variety of text, repeated readings of favorite books, and conversations between adults and children about text, children like Adelyn learn that reading is ultimately about making meaning and communicating a message. Even though this particular child has not yet learned to read in the formal sense, she knows a lot about print and how books work. These emergent reading skills are critical to future reading success and an ability to ultimately “crack the code” and recognize that letters and symbols connect to sounds and meanings (Scarborough, 2002). Knowing that text conveys a message supports children’s developing abilities to understand and eventually decode that message independently.

For some children, it might seem that reading starts to happen “like magic” but learning to read is not intuitive. This differs from how children acquire language. The human brain is wired for language and children naturally gain language skills as they develop (Chomsky, 1968; Geary, 1995; Snow, 1983). Some researchers refer to language as “biologically primary” because it is found across cultures and needed to help people survive (Geary, 1995). However, this is not the case for reading the printed word because what we read—our alphabetic script—is an invention, only available to humankind for the last 3,800 years (Dehaene, 2009). As a result, our brains have had to accommodate new pathways for translating the squiggles that are letters into the sounds of the spoken words they symbolize.

The seemingly simple task of reading is, in actuality, a complex feat. Reading skills require a complex interplay of various regions of the brain working together simultaneously (Wolf, 2007). Reading skills are considered “biologically secondary” because they do not develop without specific experiences and instruction (Sénéchal et al., 2001). Children need intentional and explicit opportunities to learn skills and strategies to become proficient readers. In this chapter, we will use a Framework for Developing Emergent Literacy (Puranik & Lonigan, 2014), including conceptual knowledge, procedural knowledge, and generative knowledge, to unpack the complex elements of reading.

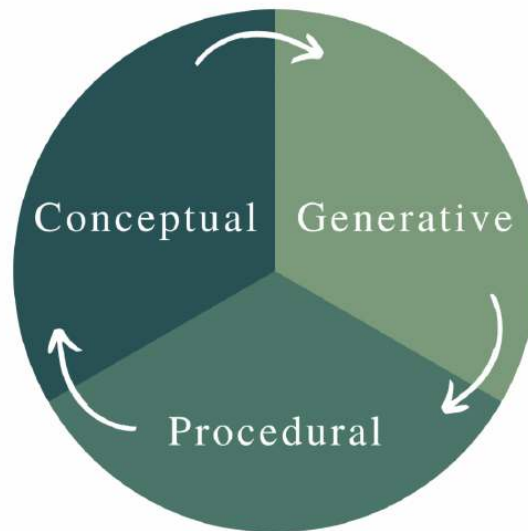


Figure 4.1.1 “Framework for Developing Emergent Literacy”

This framework was designed to explain the dimensions of emergent writing. But in this textbook, we will use the framework to parallel both the reading and writing processes. The first dimension, *conceptual knowledge*, will focus on the functions of reading, such as learning new information, completing a task, or reading for enjoyment. The second dimension, *procedural knowledge*, will focus on the mechanics of reading, such as decoding, print orientation, and story structure. Lastly, the third dimension, *generative knowledge*, will focus on application of skills, such as understanding the author’s meaning and applying information or ideas in the real world. Using the Framework for Developing Emergent Literacy, this chapter will answer the following questions:



How do young children develop an understanding that reading is about making meaning?



How do emergent readers progress on a continuum of development?



What can early childhood educators do to support emergent readers using effective instructional strategies and literacy assessments?

Reading is Making Meaning

Children at a very young age begin connecting print and other symbols to meaningful ideas. Anyone who has seen a child “read” a sign on the side of the road for their favorite restaurant or store has witnessed this process of making meaning. Children know that when they see the familiar sign, it is marking something meaningful and letting people know what they can find inside. The processes of “learning to read” and “reading to learn” develop concurrently in an incremental and symbiotic fashion. A 3-year-old looking intently at a picture book with characters wearing hats is reading to learn about hats. At the same time, that toddler is hearing sounds /hat/ that match the symbols on the page. They are seeing and hearing it as a whole word, which helps build a foundation for learning to read. Conceptual knowledge about reading can and should happen well before formal reading instruction or the process of “learning to read” begins. Before children can independently read words on a page, they need to know that print conveys a message. This conceptual knowledge about the basic functions of reading is fostered by experiencing print in a variety of meaningful contexts.

Text and text features (e.g., charts, headings, and captions) in books work similarly to signs on the road. When children have guided and supportive experiences in text, they begin to make connections between elements of print and its meaning. Adelyn, in the opening vignette, could not read the words “cookies,” “hot chocolate,” and “raining” but she could point to the text and indicate

that she understood that the words on the page talked about important elements of the story she had heard before. Likewise, children also understand that they can learn from print well before they can formally extract a message themselves. It is not uncommon to see young children locate resources that they know contain information they want or need. In early childhood classrooms, children will often bring a book to their teacher and ask them to read the part about their favorite animal. At home, children may ask a caregiver to read the next step of the recipe so they know what to add to the cake batter. These are all early markers that children are connecting reading with making meaning. There is no arbitrary line when children learn to read and then can learn from reading. When exposed to print and text messages, children are in a continual process of both learning the skills needed to read and learning new information from text.

In this textbook, we are positioning early childhood teachers' first, and arguably primary, responsibility around reading instruction to be *fostering meaning-making experiences to ensure that children see reading not just as isolated skills, but as a process that ultimately shares a message*. Early childhood educators support students' conceptual knowledge about reading and help children understand the purpose of text when they (a) connect spoken words to print, (b) share various types of text, and (c) guide comprehension of text. Later in this chapter, we will discuss a variety of instructional strategies and assessments educators can use to build specific emergent literacy skills, but here we will discuss how to develop a conceptual understanding about print.

Connecting Speaking to Print

We discussed the critical role that oral language and vocabulary play in literacy development. Early childhood educators can build an understanding about reading by connecting children's language skills to print. This can be as simple as stating a student's name and then pointing to the name on a chart or having children say or echo read the letters that make up the special friend's name. Educators also show children how oral words are represented in print when children dictate captions that go with their illustrations or create collaborative morning messages about the day's events. Even if the children can't read all of the words being written, the educator is reinforcing that their words can be marked using symbols. Educators can also ask students to orally share their background knowledge on a topic and then turn to a written text to see what the author has to say about the topic. Ultimately, we want children to know that what we think and say can be written down and what we write can later be read and discussed.



Figure 4.1.2 Adults can use words to note the child's description of their artwork to promote literacy.

Sharing Various Types of Text

Helping children see that text is part of our world and all around us is a big piece of the early childhood educator's role in reading development. Using environmental print, familiar signs, logos, and brands to show children examples of text they know can be a powerful learning experience. Educators can also intentionally choose a variety of books to share with children. Ensuring that children have access to various types of books and text, such as board books, cloth books, pop-up books, magazines, posters, labels, etc., helps children see the various forms that print can take. It is also critical that educators read daily to children from books of varying genres. Finding picture books that share engaging fictional stories is just as important as finding non-fiction books about topics of interest. Reading poems and comic books as well as recipes, directions, and lists shows children that text shows up in a plethora of ways for different purposes.



Figure 4.1.3 Children learn about text features when they share books with educators.

Once children have been immersed in text and see its prevalence all around them, they are ready to have guided discussions about understanding various types of books. Early childhood educators can begin thinking aloud about what they notice as a story unfolds and what they are wondering as new events and details emerge. Helping children develop an awareness of basic story structure (e.g., problem and solution; beginning, middle, and ending; setting and characters) primes them for future independent reading and unlocks some of the mystery around storytelling. These opportunities for guiding comprehension and understanding of books support children's developing knowledge that reading is an active process. In order to understand the message, they need to engage with print in various ways. Similarly, educators can point out various text features of non-fiction text (such as photographs, captions, headings, charts, etc.) to show children that important information can be found in many places. Comprehending text is a continuous skill that deepens and matures throughout the reader's life, but the initial keys to understanding text can be nurtured from the earliest years.

Emergent Readers Progress

Emergent literacy acknowledges that literacy development is an emerging process that begins well before children demonstrate proficient reading abilities. When a child sees a sign for a favorite restaurant along the road, looks at a box of cereal while eating breakfast, or flips through a magazine looking at the pictures while waiting at the doctor's office, they are benefiting from ongoing exposure to print materials. Similarly, when hearing proficient readers share stories, like when a family member reads before bed or an educator shares a picture book at circle time, children are learning about reading. These everyday experiences support children's emergent literacy skills and contribute to their future reading proficiency.

Because of the emergent nature of literacy development and its dependence on the experiences, exposure, and environment of the child, reading skills progress in an individual fashion. A child's chronological age will not automatically tell us what a young reader will need; however, young children's reading abilities typically develop in stages along a continuum. Having an understanding of these stages of reading helps early childhood educators recognize where children are in their development, regardless of age. The stages of reading development give educators a road map to know what children need to know next to continue on their literacy journey. Stage criteria or indicators show educators the procedural knowledge, or understanding of the mechanics of reading, needed to effectively build upon young children's reading abilities.



Figure 4.1.4 Children acquire knowledge about reading before they are able to decipher individual words.

Emerging Readers

Researchers use a variety of models to represent the progressive skills and proficiencies children acquire over time (Chall, 1996; Clay 1991; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002). As children internalize specific reading skills they use the skills in an integrated manner to interpret and respond to text. There is an age range that can be considered “typical” or expected for each of the stages. For instance, we typically see children in the preschool years developing emergent reader skills. However, these stages are not always age specific and sometimes children move more slowly or quickly than would be expected. Some children under age 5 begin showing signs of early reading skills while some kindergarten students are still developing emergent skills. It is important that early childhood educators use appropriate assessment techniques to observe children’s current stage and level of functioning.

There are a number of descriptors within each of the stages of reading. These literacy behaviors give early childhood educators information that describe a student’s current literacy abilities as well as identify what they need to learn next. This textbook is focused on the first stage, emergent reading, but the final chapter delves into the changes you will see as children begin moving into the early literacy stage. If we think about Adelyn, from the opening vignette, it is clear that she is demonstrating many emergent reader behaviors.

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4.2: The Power of Early Literacy



Reading a storybook with a child provides a window to new experiences. It boosts brain development and provides an opportunity for children and caregivers to bond while cultivating early literacy. Early literacy can be broadly defined as one's knowledge, skills, and disposition that precede learning to read and write in the primary grades (Roskos, 2003). Caregivers might be surprised at how easy it is to develop early literacy skills in young children.

The importance of family involvement in a child's development of early literacy skills has been well documented in the literature (Dail & Payne, 2010, Kirby & Hogan, 2008). One simple way to begin developing these skills is through storybooks. Reading to a child is one of the most important things a caregiver can do to build many important early literacy skills that support a child's academic success. The interactive experience between a caregiver and child when reading supports literacy development such as oral language development, letter recognition, letter sounds, and later reading and writing skills.

All children benefit from being read to. For children whose home language is not English, reading storybooks in their home language as well as in English can be beneficial in numerous ways. Doing so helps the child maintain familial ties, culture, and community while also developing English language fluency.

There are multiple misconceptions surrounding bi/multilingual language development in children. It is important to note that exposing young children to more than one language does not cause delays in language development, confuse the child, or lead to future academic problems. In fact, research has found multiple neurological and academic benefits of bilingualism that span all life stages (Mehmedbegovic, 2017).

The U.S. Department of Education (August, et al., 2009) reports that early literacy instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension all have clear benefits for students who are bilingual – no matter what primary language is spoken in the home. Consequently, educators and families need to understand that it is not the language used, but the types of literacy rich activities, such as storybook reading, which make the difference.

There is a need for early literacy teacher preparation programs to help teacher candidates understand the influence that families have in a child's early literacy development. This includes increasing candidates' understanding of the funds of knowledge students, their families, and their communities possess. Additionally, knowledge of universal screeners, evidence-based literacy instruction, and effective interventions also impact a child's early literacy success. Literacy preparation programs must address

these areas and provide teacher candidates with the opportunity for purposeful practice to ensure proficiency in high quality literacy instruction.



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4.3: Dialogic Reading

Dialogic Reading improves early literacy skills. This evidence-based practice engages children as active participants in the storybook reading process (Noble et al, 2020). In Dialogic Reading, the caregiver becomes an active listener by “asking questions, adding information, and prompting the child to increase the sophistication of his or her descriptions of the material in the picture books” (Whitehurst, 2023). Dialogic Reading increases print awareness and assists preschool children in making gains in print knowledge, alphabet knowledge, and language development (Barrow, 2018. Parra et al, 2016). Dialogic Reading strategies also help children demonstrate progress in expressive abilities, vocabulary development, and inferential and narrative comprehension skills (Kim, 2021. Grolog et al, 2020).

Implementing Dialogic Reading Strategies

Implementation of Dialogic Reading strategies begins with coaching stakeholders in three key areas: text selection, concepts of print, and foundational components of Dialogic Reading strategies, which are detailed below. The coaching includes providing teachers, teacher candidates, caregivers, and community stakeholders multiple opportunities to practice selecting text, asking questions, and engaging in meaningful and impactful dialogue about books.

Selecting Texts for Dialogic Reading

Text selection is pivotal when implementing Dialogic Reading strategies. Well-chosen texts serve as a catalyst for engaging learners and facilitating interactive discussions to help children develop language, critical thinking, and comprehension skills. Several factors should be considered when selecting narrative and expository texts for the explicit implementation of Dialogic Reading strategies:

- **Appropriateness:** Select texts that align with children’s ages, interests, and developmental levels. Ensure that both picture books and wordless picture books are relatable, compelling, and engaging to foster meaningful interactions. Picture books should provide predictable and clear storylines to support narrative comprehension and narrative production skills. Wordless picture books positively impact narrative comprehension, vocabulary skills, and the acquisition of oral language skills (Grolog et al, 2020).
- **Authentic Language:** Choose texts that showcase natural and authentic language usage and conversational patterns, including idiomatic expressions.
- **Bilingual Texts:** Select bilingual texts to support language development and cross-cultural understanding. Look for texts that are available in both languages that maintain similar content and themes.
- **Cultural Relevance:** Choose texts that reflect children’s cultural backgrounds and heritage language, enriching their connection to the content and enabling meaningful conversations.
- **Language Demands:** Choose texts that match the language needs of the children. For English Language Learners, when the focus is on developing English language proficiency, consider texts with simple vocabulary and sentence structures and gradually progress to more complex text as language proficiency increases.
- **Rereadability and Interactive Potential:** Prioritize books with high levels of repetition and fanciful elements to encourage meaningful interactions, facilitating discussions, making predictions, asking questions, and making connections (Phillips, 2022).

Curriculum Alignment: Select books that align with the various reading development aspects:

- **Phonological Awareness:** Highlight skills like word and syllable counting, rhyming, alliteration, phoneme manipulation, and wordplay.
- **Concepts of Print:** Focus on word and print awareness, directionality, functions of print, and effective book usage.
- **Alphabetic Knowledge:** Foster discussions about the alphabet and letter recognition.
- **Comprehension and Vocabulary:** Prioritize narrative and expository books where illustrations and text clarify characters or people, objects, and actions (Texas Education Agency, 2002).

Concepts of Print During Dialogic Reading

Concepts of Print are the awareness of the forms and functions of printed language (Urbani, 2020). During Dialogic Reading, adults introduce and review predetermined Concepts of Print with children prior to reading as a part of a daily routine (Whitehurst

et al, 2023). Print awareness begins with recognizing letter shapes, names, sounds, words, features, and functions of print, and subsequently the understanding that oral and written language are related. Explicitly teaching the Concepts of Print helps children to recognize print around them and understand that print carries a message for both enjoyment and learning new information. The Concepts of Print are skills that children acquire during Dialogic Reading and while interacting with predictable and patterned books. Below are questions or requests that adults can ask children during the Dialogic Reading process to develop their understanding of the Concepts of Print.

Concepts of Print

Concept of Book • Show me the cover (back, front) of the book. • Where is the title (author, illustrator)?	Concept of Text • Show me where the book tells a story. • Can you point to a word (two words, letter)? • Point to each word as you read. • What are the names of some of the letters?
Directionality • Where do we start (finish) reading the book? • Which way do we go when reading? • Show me the top (bottom) of the page. • Where do we go at the end of the line (page)? • Which way do we turn the page? • Show me the first (last) word on the page.	Mechanics • Show me a capital (lowercase) letter. • What is this (period, comma, question mark, exclamation point, quotation marks)? • What does this mean (period, comma, question mark, exclamation point, quotation marks)

Foundational Components of Dialogic Reading

The foundational components of Dialogic Reading include **PEER** (Prompt, Evaluate, Expand, and Repeat) and **CROWD** (Completion prompts, Recall prompts, Open-ended prompts, Wh-prompts, and Distance prompts). These components work together to ensure that children are prompted to respond to questions and to interact in conversations about texts that support comprehension development. The PEER sequence sets the framework for how to encourage extended discourse while using the CROWD question types.



PEER Sequence

Dialogic Reading extends beyond the act of reading a book aloud to children. Through the application of the PEER sequence technique, children are prompted to actively engage with the book and take on the role of the storyteller (Whitehurst et al, 1994). In this process, the adult assumes the roles of the questioner, active listener, and responsive audience. In the PEER sequence strategy, the adult prompts the child to talk about what is on the page, evaluates the child's response, expands on the response, and repeats the prompt to ensure the child has learned from the expansion. The PEER sequence is incorporated on each page of a picture book

following the initial reading of the book. This approach, shared below, stimulates significant language and vocabulary development.

Prompt the child to say something about the book or name an object on the page.	Say: "Tell me what happened on this page." Ask: "What is this?" (while pointing to a picture of a cow)
Evaluate the child's response.	After the child responds, confirm the correct responses, or share the correct response. Say: "Yes, that is correct. That is a cow." or "Great try. However, that is actually a cow."
Expand the child's response by rephrasing and adding information to it.	Say: "It has four legs and a tail like a dog, but a cow is bigger than a dog and a cow says, 'moo.'"
Repeat the prompt to make sure the child has learned from the expansion.	Ask: "What is this (while pointing to the picture)? What does the cow say?"

Source: Whitehurst et al 1994.

CROWD

Dialogic Reading has five distinct types of prompts, or question types to initiate the PEER sequences previously shared. These prompts are categorized under the acronym CROWD (Whitehurst et al, 1994).

The following chart provides specific details about each question type and includes prompts or questions tailored for adults to use during the implementation of CROWD. The example below uses the illustrative children's book Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? to model focused and explicit discussions using the CROWD strategy through the framework of Dialogic Reading.



Prompt/ Question Type	Details	In The Classroom/Home/Community
Completion Questions	Leave the end of the sentence blank for the child to fill in while reading a repetitive book with rhyme and/or rhythm. These questions/prompts support students with the development of syntax, and the structure of language.	• Adult: I see a yellow duck looking at me (The adult shows the child the next page and has them complete the repetitive and rhythmic phrase). • Child: Yellow duck, yellow duck, whot do you see?
Recall Questions	Ask questions throughout the reading of the book that require students to retell what was read in fiction or informational books. Children's retelling should include an understanding of the story elements(characters, plot, etc.) and facts from the story.	• Adult: What did the purple cat see? • Child: The purple cat saw a white dog looking at him.
Open-Ended Questions	Ask questions that provide children the opportunity to use detailed illustrations as well as the text in picture books to respond. With practice, children will improve expressive fluency and attention to detail.	• Adult: Tell me what is happening on this page. • Child: Responding by sharing what they notice in the pictures and words read aloud.
"Wh" Questions	Ask questions while reading picture books that begin with who, what, where, when, why, and how. The questions should focus on the story elements, key details, and questions about new vocabulary and literary phrases.	• Adult: What color is the frog? Where does the story take place? • Child: (Responds based on the text and the illustrations).
Distancing Question	Ask questions that allow students to relate to the words and pictures in the book. Distancing questions encourage vocabulary growth, verbal fluency, focused extended discourse, and the ability to relate literary text to real-life experiences.	• Adult: What does...remind you of? Have you ever...? • Child: I remember when... This makes me think about...



Reading Strategies to Support Dialogic Reading

Once there is comfort with asking CROWD question types using the PEER Sequence, adults can use the reading strategy question types to support comprehension development. Text comprehension can be fostered by helping children use specific reading comprehension strategies while engaging with a book (Whitehurst et al, 1994). Reading strategies that support emergent readers' interaction with the text include making predictions, answering and generating questions, summarizing text, making connections, and making inferences. Research also supports additional strategies like comprehension monitoring, using graphic and semantic organizers, recognizing story structure, and visualizing (Armbruster et al, 2003).

The table below highlights these reading strategies and the significance of each for nurturing emergent readers' capacity to delve deeply into texts during read aloud and Dialogic Reading sessions. The children's book titled, "Snowy Day," serves as a model text for the reading strategy questions identified in the chart below.



Reading Strategy	In The Classroom/At Home/In the Community
MAKING PREDICTIONS asks students to use the information from the text and personal experiences to “predict” what will happen next. ASKING QUESTIONS gives students a purpose for reading and focuses their attention on what they are to learn. There are four types of questions that can be asked: 1. right there; 2. think and search; 3. author and you; and 4. on your own. Teaching students to GENERATE QUESTIONS while reading improves their active processing of the text. It also teaches children that they can ask themselves questions to better understand what is being read.	• What do you think will happen to the snowball in Peter’s pocket? Why? • What will Peter do next? • Right There: These questions are found directly in the text and usually begin with “Wh” questions ◦ What is Peter doing? He is sliding down the hill. ◦ What did Peter do with the snowball? • Think and Search: These questions are in the story, but the answers are across different pages. ◦ What caused Peter to be sad? ◦ How did... • Author and You: These questions require students to use their schema or prior knowledge to make inferences. ◦ What will happen to the snowball if Peter takes it into the house? ◦ Predict what will happen... • On Your Own: These questions require students to use their schema and share their opinions. ◦ How would you feel if your snowball melted? ◦ Have you ever?
SUMMARIZING requires students to identify the central or main ideas and to remember what they have read. In early literacy, students will “retell” the story in their own words.	• Tell me about Peter’s adventures in Snowy Day. • Tell me what happened after Peter put the snowball in his pocket.
MAKING CONNECTIONS helps students make use of PRIOR KNOWLEDGE to improve comprehension. Students connect the text to self, to other text, and to the world.	• What happens to ice when it sits out? • What do people do on snowy days? Have you seen a movie or read a book about people playing in the snow?
MAKING INFERENCES enables students to draw conclusions from textual evidence or clues and prior knowledge. It helps students learn when information is not directly stated in the text but is only implied.	• Do you think Peter will be sad when he realizes that the snowball melted? • How do you know that?



This toolkit serves as an evidence-based resource for improving early literacy skills. The student-centered strategies engage emergent readers

as active participants in their own literacy learning journey through print and alphabet knowledge, listening and reading comprehension development, and most importantly oral and expressive language development. By implementing the strategies in this toolkit, teachers, teacher candidates, families/caregivers, and community partners can engage in meaningful conversations about books with emergent readers that will make a lasting impact on their future academic and social emotional growth.

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4.4: Dialogic Reading with Toddlers

Dialogic Reading

Imagine you are sitting down to read a book with a toddler. You open the book and Figure 4.4.1 shows what is on the first page. Take a moment to look at the page in Figure 4.4.1 and consider how you would read this page with a toddler.



In front, swings a long trunk.

Figure 4.4.1: A page from a children's book. ^[1]

For many of us, we read books with children by focusing on the text. Reading the words on the pages is a great start, but there can be so much more to discuss! Variation in how books are read and discussed has been found to be important. Ninio (1980) examined interactions between Israeli caregivers and infants between 17 and 22 months of age. Caregivers tended to use one of three interactional routines, asking one of two types of questions "What's that?," "Where's that?," or simply naming objects. A large study of the reading approaches of 126 caregivers found variability in how they read to children at age 7 and 24 months (Britto, Brooks-Gunn & Griffin, 2006). Caregiver reading style was related to language growth, with children showing greater language growth when they were encouraged to participate in the reading and supported in their understanding; however, this reading style was found in only 30 of the 126 caregivers. ^[2]

One of the most common methods to improve caregivers' reading with young children is dialogic reading as it is not commonly implemented when caregivers read with infants and toddlers (Huebner & Meltzoff, 2005). To encourage caregivers to see that reading should be about more than just the words on pages, reading with infants and toddlers is best perceived as an interaction between the caregiver, the child and the book. Perceiving book reading as more of an interaction is oftentimes referred to as dialogic reading. Dialogic reading uses techniques that encourage the caregiver to be responsive to the child with conversations that follow the child's interest and lead. Dialogic reading typically involves recasts, expansions, and open-ended questions, all of which have been shown to have a positive impact on a child's language development (Baker & Nelson, 1984; Cleave et al., 2015; Farrar, 1990; Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002; Huttenlocher et al., 2010; Nelson, 1977). A meta-analysis of dialogic reading found that it loses its value with the older children (Mol, Bus, De Jong & Smeets, 2008). It may be that the method is best suited to book reading with infants, toddlers, and younger preschool children. ^{[2] [3]}



Figure 4.4.2: Caregiver reading with two toddlers. (^[1])

One reason dialogic reading is so beneficial for children's language development is because it involves quality language-boosting practices. For example, the child-directed speech delivered during interactive shared book reading contains higher levels of syntactic and lexical diversity than the speech children are exposed to during play-based activities (Cameron-Faulkner & Noble, 2013; Demir-Lira, Applebaum, Goldin-Meadow & Levine, 2019; Noble et al., 2018; Salo, Rowe, Leech & Cabrera, 2016), and high levels of syntactic and lexical diversity in speech directed to children are linked to higher levels of syntactic and lexical diversity in children's speech (Huttenlocher et al., 2002). Interactive shared book reading has also been shown to foster higher levels of joint attention, responsiveness, and contingent talk, all of which have been shown to support language development (Carpenter et al., 1998; Farrant & Zubrick, 2013; McGillion, Pine, Herbert & Matthews, 2017; Tomasello & Farrar, 1986). It also encourages the caregiver to use additional language-boosting practices, which have all been shown to support children's language development, including expanding, recasting, and asking open-ended questions (Baker & Nelson, 1984; Cleave et al., 2015; Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002; Huttenlocher et al., 2010).^[1]



Figure 4.4.3: Caregiver reading with an infant. (^[4])

Many studies that have trained caregivers in dialogic reading strategies report positive gains in young children's language outcomes (Chacko, Fabiano, Doctoroff & Fortson, 2018; Grolig, Cohrdes, Tiffin-Richards & Schroeder, 2020; Kim & Riley, 2021; Lonigan et al., 1999; Opel, Ameer & Aboud, 2009; Purpura, Napoli, Wehrspann & Gold, 2017; Simsek & Erdogan, 2015; Towson, Gallagher, & Bingham, 2016; Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992). For example, Valdez-Menchaca and Whitehurst (1992) trained teachers to read using a dialogic reading style that involved asking more open-ended questions and responding to children's attempts to answer these questions with low-income Mexican toddlers. Children who received the dialogic reading intervention scored significantly higher on measures of both expressive and receptive language than children in the control group.^[3]

Many studies have found that asking basic comprehension questions during shared reading increases the effects on oral language skills in comparison to reading story books aloud without asking questions (Flack, Field & Horst, 2018; Wasik, Hindman & Snell,

2016). Asking such literal comprehension questions both serves to attain joint attention and to establish a fundamental understanding of concepts and events. Discussing the meanings of new words in the context of the story and in other contexts facilitates a deeper word understanding (Coyne et al., 2009).^[5]

By implementing the PEER sequence, the caregiver:^[3]

- prompts the child to say something about the book,
- evaluates the child's response,
- expands the child's response, and
- repeats the prompt to help the child learn from the expansion.

A fundamental element of dialogic reading is the use of prompts to begin the PEER sequence while reading with a child. The acronym CROWD stands for five recommended prompts:^{[3] [6]}

- Completions
 - Example: “Five little monkeys jumping on the ____”. The child fills in “bed” to participate in completing the thought.
- Recalls
 - Example: What happens after the wolf huffs and puffs? The child recalls the story and puts that into their own words.
- Open questions
 - Example: “Tell me what is happening in this picture.” The child practices putting their own thoughts into words.
- Wh-questions
 - Example: What is that? Why is that happening? At many different levels children can put their thoughts into words.
- Distancing questions
 - Example: What happened when we made your birthday cake? Children remember past events and relate them to the present and future.

Let's take another look at the page from a children's book presented earlier. Imagine creating an interaction with the child about this page using the PEER and/or CROWD dialogic reading strategies. After imagining what you might say using the dialogic reading strategies, reflect on how the quantity and quality of your language was impacted.



In front, swings a long trunk.

Figure 4.4.1: A page from a children's book. (^[1])

^[1] Haathibhai by Pratham Books is licensed under CC by 4.0

^[2] Dickinson et al., (2012). [How reading books fosters language development around the world](#). *Child Development Research*. CC by 3.0

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^[4] Image from [Head Start ECLKC](#) is in the public domain.

^[5] Grolog (2020). [Shared storybook reading and oral language development: A bioecological perspective](#). *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1818. CC by 4.0

^[6] “Using Mariposa, Mariposa (Butterfly, Butterfly) to promote dialogic reading: A powerful way to encourage language development in one or more languages” from [Head Start ECLKC](#) is in the public domain.

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4.5: Fluent Reading and Comprehension Strategies

Strategies to Promote Fluency

When reading stories aloud to children we want to model fluent and expressive reading for children and develop their comprehension of the stories. We also want to provide opportunities for children to practice fluent and expressive reading in developmentally appropriate ways. Below are strategies for actively engaging children in reading fluently and expressively and developing comprehension.

Echo reading

Echo reading is when the teacher models reading a line expressively, and the students repeat it after the teacher. The teacher reads a line, and the students repeat it, echoing the teacher. Therefore, this reading approach is called “echo reading.” Echo reading develops fluency as the teacher models reading with expression for the students.

It is the most scaffolded approach for guiding the cadence (musicality of the language) of the language and developing reading fluency. Every language has a different rhythm and cadence, with unique intonation and stress patterns. Echo reading is beneficial for English Language Learners to familiarize them with the pronunciation of words and the intonation/stress patterns of the language.

To implement echo reading, the teacher generally reads the text, pointing to each word in the line to reinforce the one-to-one correspondence between the written and spoken words, and has the children repeat. Shared reading experiences such as echo reading also reinforce the concepts of print and sight-word recognition for young learners.

Sometimes, the teacher claps and sways to the rhythm while reading a sentence, and the children repeat each sentence while copying her movements. Having the children repeat just by listening without the print has the benefit of developing phonological awareness and listening skills. Each teacher needs to consider their own contextual needs and make their own judgment calls about how to implement a particular strategy.

Choral reading

Choral reading is when the teacher and student read together in chorus. To do that, the teacher must first model reading and then have the printed text available at each student’s desk.

You can use poems in reading practice sessions to develop fluency. Have the students pair up with one another to practice choral reading together, thereby scaffolding each other’s reading attempts, then bring the whole group together for a class choral reading.

Another technique is to have the students join at repeated refrains in a book. For example, in the book *5 Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*, the children can read in unison: “*No More monkeys jumping on the bed!*” Choral reading makes for an enjoyable reading experience.

Repeated reading

Repeated reading builds fluency. Children’s favorite books make the best texts for repeated reading experiences. Each time the child reads it, they may notice something they didn’t see before, enhancing their comprehension. Repeated reading also improves sight-word recognition and oral reading skills. Ensure that your students have access to easy books during independent reading time. They need consistent independent-reading time, as it allows exploring books based on their interests while re-reading their favorite books for enjoyment develops their fluency.

Repeated reading enhances children’s confidence in reading. The children may record reading their favorite book on Flipgrid after a few repeated reading sessions with peers or family. Encourage them to read to their teddy bear (or plush toy), siblings, peers, guardians, and relatives.

Lack of access to books can be addressed by various initiatives such as [book deserts](#) through various [statewide programs](#) in which you may get involved. The disparity in book access can be addressed by neighborhood little-library initiatives. Bring a book, take home a book, and spread community and home literacies!

Recorded reading

Recorded reading materials can be listened to anytime and anywhere as long as children can access a device. There are several celebrity read-aloud programs available. [Storyline online](#) is a platform that offers virtual read-aloud by celebrities. They update their collection of books periodically to attract kids. There are recorded reading videos by [characters](#) from children's TV shows on the Internet.

Read-aloud (reading to students)

[Read-aloud](#) provides modeling for fluent, expressive reading while instilling joy and comfort in the reading experience. Children develop listening comprehension while listening to read aloud. Read-aloud has innumerable socio-emotional and cognitive benefits. This [NPR article](#) and podcast provide parents with guidance about making reading aloud to their kids a warm, bonding experience while making them better readers.

Reading aloud enhances phonemic awareness, one of the literacy building blocks in young children. Teachers and guardians model expressive reading while reading aloud and facilitate building children's vocabulary. Additionally, reading aloud provides access to a text that children might not be able to read on their own and helps them process life and difficult issues through dialogic conversations. With the help of adults, children negotiate meaning. Further, reading aloud builds children's background knowledge. Through think-aloud and pertinent thought-provoking questions, read-aloud scaffold meaning-making. [This PBS article](#) provides the beneficial effects of reading aloud.

Reading aloud involves planning and preparation. First, consider how you would like to introduce the book, author, and illustrator: how would you connect the children's prior knowledge to the topic? At what points would you ask strategic think-aloud questions without interrupting the story? What are some relevant questions focused on predicting, visualizing, monitoring comprehension, summarizing, and/or evaluating? What story elements (characters, setting, plot, and theme) would you discuss and how? How would you make text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections? You may choose to discuss certain aspects of the book in depth depending on the cognitive and affective development of the children.

Shared reading (reading with students)

As the name suggests, [shared reading](#) involves a reader sharing a text with an audience. A teacher, for example, reads from a "big book." In PreK-2, the children sit on a rug while the teacher reads and points at words with a pointer. Pointing demonstrates the one-to-one correspondence of written and spoken words. Shared reading also improves students' sight-word recognition and concepts about print, such as reading moves from left to right and return sweep to the left to continue reading.

Shared reading builds fluency by modeling [expressive reading](#) with voice changes for different characters. It cultivates joy from reading by making it a pleasurable experience where children participate by chiming in at certain spots.

It also supports story comprehension by building a schema for the story structure, with beginning, middle, and end, highlighting the story elements of character, setting, plot, and theme through strategic, thought-provoking questions.

Independent reading (reading by students)

[Independent reading](#) by students supports fluency. Motivation plays a huge role in creating independent readers. The students can be motivated by bringing in a variety of texts based on their interests and providing them with choices in reading and writing. There is no follow-up activity or book report to be written on books the children read. Children engage in independent reading for fun and enjoyment. Research (Cunningham & Allington, 2016) shows that the significant motivators of students for reading are teachers' read-aloud and the students having an independent reading time with books of their own choice. Having multiple copies of books the class has read repeatedly allows the children opportunities to read the books on their own during centers.

The purpose of independent reading is the enjoyment of the text. Students should get a consistent independent reading time of at least 20 minutes each day. Teachers must consider how to implement independent reading in their classrooms, including logistics such as when students would select their books for the independent-reading time. What procedures are there already in place to make independent-reading time efficient?

Rasinski (2003) and (Rasinski & Padak, 2013) recommend developing fluency through fluency-development lessons with the following instructional routine. This routine can be completed within 15-20 minutes:

1. **Read aloud** a short poem or interesting passage several times. Help the children comprehend difficult words during the discussion. Teachers can write the words to a poem on tagboard or on sentence strips and display the poem in a pocket chart.
2. Do a **choral reading** of the poem or passage as a class several times, assigning different parts for the children to take. The children should have copies of the text. The children can put these in folders and have poetry notebook which they can read during free choice times. The children may illustrate the text.
3. Do at least three **partner readings** of the poem or passage, taking turns reading.
4. Ask for **volunteers to read** the poem or passage to the whole class.
5. The children take home the text. They are encouraged to **share their reading with a parent or guardian**. If the children make poetry notebooks, they can bring the notebooks home to share with their families and bring them back to continuing filling with new poems.

Strategies to Promote Comprehension

Early print awareness reflects children's understanding that print conveys meaning as they explore it in their environment with parents and guardians. Toddlers and preschoolers depend on social clues and physical context to read print (Goodman, 1986). Gradually, they learn directionality, letter names, and the correspondence between letters and sounds to make meaning of the written symbols and words.

Adults play a considerable role in promoting understanding of the text by reading aloud and having children interact with the print in their daily lives. Children develop a story schema through read-aloud with a beginning, middle, and end. They also get exposed to different text structures and features through consistent, shared reading experiences. Furthermore, read-aloud develops vocabulary and prior knowledge to enhance linguistic comprehension.

Guardians and teachers can promote reading comprehension by:

- Reading a variety of narrative and expository texts aloud.
- Choosing books that introduce children to unfamiliar topics, complex syntax, and sophisticated words (Paratore et al., 2011).
- Encouraging children to elaborate, clarify, and reason as they discuss stories (dialogic reading).
- Engaging children in various reading experiences, such as independent reading, shared reading, guided reading, and read-aloud.
- Making consistent time for a daily read-aloud or shared reading and independent reading.
- Building children's vocabulary by exploring word meanings: Have children illustrate the vocabulary ([sketch to stretch](#)), write synonyms, antonyms, and a sentence, or draw a graphic organizer like the [Frayer model \[PDF\]](#). The Frayer model can be modified to have a combination of words and pictures. Children can also explore vocabulary in their surroundings.

Understanding vocabulary supports children's comprehension.

Understanding Narrative Text Elements

Teachers can help students develop comprehension by helping them to understand different types of texts (narrative and informational), story elements, and text features.

Narrative texts have a story structure with a beginning, middle, and end. Narrative texts have the following story elements:

Setting

Setting indicates when and where a story takes place. To develop an understanding of the setting, explore how the **illustrations** and **word choices** in the story contribute to the feeling of the place and time.

Characters

There are major and minor characters in a story. Students can analyze and describe the **traits** or qualities of the characters through their appearance, words, and actions; they can compare the characters using a Venn diagram or examine how the characters evolved from the beginning to end in longer texts such as chapter books.

Plot

The plot involves the **problem**, **sequence of events**, and **solution** of the story. A plot diagram looks like a horizontal line where the story is introduced. Then the problem is introduced, followed by an escalation of conflict, also known as the sequence of events, until the climax of the action. Finally, the graph looks like a downhill line, representing the release of tension as the problem is

resolved. There may be **person-to-person** conflict, **person-to-society** conflict, **person-to-self** conflict, or **person-to-nature** conflict. Story mapping helps in developing an understanding of the plot.

Theme

Theme indicates the main idea. Themes are generally written as sentences. For example, “slow and steady wins the race.” Have your students identify the story’s main idea while guiding them with questions.

Comprehension Strategies for Narrative Texts

Strategies for helping students comprehend texts include reviewing, predicting, activating prior knowledge, setting a purpose, think-aloud, visualizing, inferring, summarizing, and evaluating.

Before Reading

Before reading the story, the book is introduced through the 4 Ps: Preview, Prior knowledge, Prediction, and Purpose.

- **Preview:** Previewing consists of examining the title, author, and illustrator and taking a picture walk through the book. It can be done with chapter books as well as picturebooks.
- **Prior knowledge:** Students are encouraged to think about the book’s topic through think-aloud or a question.
- **Prediction:** To promote active reading, the students are asked to predict something related to the book based on their preview.
- **Purpose:** Set the purpose of their reading the text. Generally, it is to find information based on the reader’s prediction.

While Reading

While reading, the students are encouraged to think about the **5 W’s and H’s: What, Where, When, Why, Who, and How?** The placing of strategic questions at points throughout the book will help the children to comprehend the story. The [Iowa Reading Research Center](#) recommends using the **CROWD+HS** questions and **PEER+PA** dialogue to encourage [dialogic reading](#) to promote reading comprehension and oral language development.

Throughout the story, active readers make predictions, they think aloud (“I wonder..., I think..., I feel...”), visualize (“I can vividly see the action happening through the use of descriptive language by the author”), self-monitor (“I don’t understand why...”), summarize (“So far in the story...”), and evaluate (“My favorite part is...”). The ability to infer develops over time as children gain experience with reading and learn to make connections using their background knowledge and information from the text to draw conclusions.

After Reading

We make text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections during and after reading. Students can summarize stories by story mapping to showcase their understanding.

Story Mapping

Story mapping is a visual representation of the various elements of a story. Different graphic organizers can be explored online, such as concept maps, story maps, and others. The elements to consider when mapping the story are setting, characters, problem, sequence of events, solution, and theme (main idea).

Compare and Contrast

Teachers and students may use Venn diagrams to compare and contrast characters from the same book or different books. This allows them to examine the similarities and differences between the characters.

Writing a Bilingual Story.

Dual-language learners can write with Rebus (a combination of words and pictures) or a bilingual story using two languages.

Retelling Using Bob Prost and Kylene Beers’ BHH Framework (2017)

Developing the skill to retell stories after hearing them in read-aloud, shared-reading experiences, or guided-reading times reinforces the students’ grasp of the beginning-middle-end structure of stories. Retelling skills can be improved over time and made more specific. BHH stands for:

- What is in the **Book**?
- What is in your **Head**?
- What did you take to **Heart**? (The personal connections you made with the story.)

Comprehension Strategies for Informational Texts

Informational text is text that is nonfiction. Newspapers, encyclopedias, and nonfiction books are examples of informational text. The comprehension strategies for informational text are similar to those for narrative text in terms of **visualizing, summarizing, and evaluating information**. The text features of informational text and content-specific vocabulary require close reading, figuring out or looking up vocabulary words, and paying attention to tables, captions, and headings.

Sketch noting and various **graphic organizers** can be used to help visualize the information. **T-charts and double-entry journals** are also great ways to organize the information, with significant points on the left and associated connections on the right. **Tree diagrams** (Cunningham & Allington, 2016) can summarize the text, with the trunk, branches, and twigs representing the main topic, subtopics, and examples/details.

Scavenger hunts and other gamified learning activities with incentives are excellent methods for comprehending informational text.

The Second Life uses a **simulation platform** to teach content areas, and [Wondropolis](#) uses children's natural curiosity to teach informational text in a multimodal manner. [Newsela](#) provides articles on various informational texts, and you may modify the text difficulty by adjusting for the grade level.

Cunningham and Allington (2016) suggest a “Guess Yes or No,” or “**confirm or correct**” framework where students first predict and then read to check their predictions. False predictions are corrected with the correct information. For this activity, students can be given anywhere from 10-15 informational statements to make predictions about, read, confirm, or correct.

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4.6: Felt Stories

Flannel Board or Felt Stories are a Wonderful Storytelling Technique

Felt stories are an excellent tool for sharing stories with young children. They help children to connect the words to the images and can be used to develop oral language and comprehension skills. After the children have heard the story several times, teachers can leave a copy of the book and the felt story pieces in the reading area for the children to practice retelling the story during center time.

Getting Started

Choosing a felt story or song can be daunting. My tip for beginners, especially if you are new to storytelling in general, is to start with a simple song. Already have a favorite storytime song? Try making felt pieces to go along with it and incorporate them before or during singing. Here are some examples: (The names of the stories are links to more information about the story.)



[Zoom, Zoom, Zoom](#)



[Baby Shark](#)

Create these to act as a visual guide for toddlers and preschoolers as we sing the songs. You don't have to learn anything new in this case – you already know the song!

If you want try a felt story, choose something with a **basic plot**, a **manageable amount of felt pieces** (sorry, Very Hungry Caterpillar) and **repetition**. The felt pieces themselves act as a trigger to help you remember what to say, though you can also have a printed copy of the story on your lap or beside you as a guide. Sometimes I highlight the key words on the paper to help me remember the order of things. The great thing with felt stories is that you don't have to tell a story word-for-word. You can use the pieces as your guide and make it your own.

Here are some examples of simple stories that are easy to learn. All of the pictures are from [Storytime Katie](#).



[Go Away Big, Green Monster](#)



[It Looked Like Spilt Milk](#)



[Dear Zoo](#)

These three examples are based on books. Just like with books, it's important to practice felt stories ahead of time. Grab your felt board and let's get started!

How To Use

There are a few things to do to set yourself up for success when using felt or flannel stories. First, practice, practice, practice. Consider the following:

- Do all of the pieces fit on my felt board? Do I need to arrange them in a certain order for them all to fit or make sense?
- What color is my felt board? If it's black do I have any pieces that are hard to see?
- Where will I store my felt pieces when I'm not using them during the storytime? Do I have a place on an easel, a table behind me, a special storytime bag, etc? Are they easily accessible to little hands?
- Do I have the words to the story printed or have I memorized the story?

Before every storytime I take the time to put all of the pieces I'm using in order. Trust me, you do not want to be scrambling to find the next felt piece in the middle of the story! Once the pieces are in order I find a secure place to store them until I need them during storytime. My felt board easel has a tray on the inside where I can tuck away my felt story until I'm ready to tell it. Out of sight is better for little ones who will be tempted to come up and grab it if they spy it!

Introduce Vocabulary

One way to use felt pieces is to introduce the vocabulary in a song or story. For example, before we sing *Zoom, Zoom, Zoom* I put up the rocket ship. Then I ask kids if they are ready to go on an adventure. How will we get there? I point to the rocket ship and we say it together. Where should we go? I put up the moon and get kids to tell me our destination. Next we warm up our engines (rub our hands together). All of that vocabulary frontloading is done with the felt pieces before we sing the song. After a few weeks the kids instantly know what song we are about to sing as soon as I pull out the rocket ship. You can easily do the same for a story with unique vocabulary.

Practice Early Numeracy

Flannels are a natural fit for incorporating early counting and number skills with kids because they provide a visual aid that helps little ones see numbers. Flannel Friday has a [Pinterest board](#) filled with counting ideas and Storytime Katie has a list of her [Five Little Whatsits](#) if you need inspiration. My favorite counting story to use with felt pieces or puppets is [Dog's Colorful Day by Emma Dodd](#). If you use a counting rhyme take some time to put all of the pieces up first and ask the kids about them – what are they wearing, how are they different, how are they the same, what do you notice? This encourages the early literacy practice of talking and incorporates math and scientific thinking in a fun way. Here are two I've shared on Jbrary:



5 Little Snow People



5 Little Pumpkins

Simple Games

Don't feel like singing or telling a story? Try playing a game with your felt pieces! My all time favorite is any variation of **Little Mouse, Little Mouse**. See how it's done:



Access video at <https://youtu.be/z0zcXeXLauA>

[Video Transcript](#)

There are so many **game ideas** out there though! If you have a small group and can give kids the chance to take turns to come up and interact with the felt pieces that's even better. Some librarians leave the pieces up after storytime too so that kids who really want a chance to play get access to the story. Here are some other game ideas:



Have kids build a castle using shapes by [Mel's Desk](#)



Key Shadow Matching by Felt Board Magic – shapes, colours, similarities, and differences!



Create a Car by Flannel Board Fun

Using flannel pieces as games is a low stress way to integrate them into your storytime. You don't have to memorize anything, there are endless options, and there is no one "right" way for kids to interact. It also encourages lots of open-ended conversations where you can model the serve-and-return model of talking to kids.

Making Felt Pieces

You do not need to be an artist or a crafty person to make some awesome felt pieces. Trust me. Here are some tips and resources for building up your collection.

- Clipart and Google Images are your friend – you don't even need felt! Printing some nice pictures and taping them or clipping them up for the kids to see still provides that visual cue which is so helpful in toddler language acquisition.
- Bigger is Better: I love how Mel makes [oversized flannel pieces](#) for her babies and toddlers. It makes so much sense – they can actually see them and manipulate them better. If you have a big group I also recommend going large over small if you're board can fit them.
- [Keep Calm and Use Clipart](#): In this post by Storytime in the Stacks, she walks you through how she uses clipart to create her felt pieces. She includes a list of websites where you can get clipart for a fee or for free.
- [How I Made This: Little Mouse](#): Hey There Library shows you how to use templates from Canva to create beautiful pieces.
- [Flannel Friday](#): This online community has myriad felt stories arranged by theme. They link back to the blog post where the flannel was shared.
- [Flannel Board Fun](#): If you do have some money to invest I HIGHLY recommend checking out [Wendy's shop](#). Colourful, well-made, and she shares ideas for how to use each set on [Instagram](#)!

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4.7: Puppets

Puppets for Retelling

Puppets are also a great way to involve children in stories, develop their oral language and comprehension skills. This section will cover how to use puppets in different ways without having to become a voice actor. If you're looking for ideas on how to make puppets, please read [Miss Mary Liberry's post](#) which has fantastic suggestions for how to make a variety of cheap puppets.

Benefits of Using Puppets

Playing with puppets offers significant developmental benefits for young children, extending beyond simple entertainment to foster language skills, social awareness, creativity, and more. Puppets provide a medium for children to improve communication, express emotions safely, enhance motor skills, and develop self-confidence and listening abilities. To read more about the benefits of using puppets with children, visit <https://best-start.org/blog/the-amazing-benefits-of-playing-with-puppets-in-early-childhood->

Tips and Tricks

Practice Beforehand

Just like practicing [reading aloud your storytime books](#), you also want to practice with your puppets. Here are some questions to consider once you decide to use a puppet:

- Does it fit your hand comfortably? A too big or too small puppet may not work.
- Do you have to put fingers in certain places for it to fit (I have an octopus puppet that can be a bit tricky!)?
- Can you move the mouth open and shut allowing you to make the puppet speak? Or will this puppet mostly move around?
- Will the puppet have a particular voice and if so what will it sound like? Is it comfortable pitch for you to sustain?
- Where will you store the puppet during storytime when it's not in use? Does it have a special home like a basket or box? Will the kids be able to reach it?

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, but the answers will influence how you use the puppet and how well you are prepared.



Sometimes you will end up dressed exactly like your puppet and that's okay.

Introducing the Puppet

Think about how you want to introduce the puppet to the group. This will largely depend on how you plan to use the puppet. If the puppet is a mascot who comes out every week and has a name and personality, then you can make their appearance a special moment. Sometimes I'll pretend that I hear something and it ends up being whatever the mascot was doing before I brought it out such as baking a pizza, playing basketball, etc. It's really fun for the kids to get to say a special hello.

Most of the time, and especially when I was just starting though, I used puppets in a less formal way during songs and rhymes. For this purpose the puppets didn't talk; they acted as a visual cue for kids to help them understand what we were singing about. I fill a large bag with puppets and then dramatically pull them out one by one as we sing each verse. Sometimes I'll pause and we'll talk about the color, texture, and shape of the puppet to model the early literacy practice of talking.

Manipulating the Puppet

Even if you don't have the puppet speak, the eyes and mouth are important features. Slightly bend the puppet downward so that kids can see the puppet's eyes. If you do have a puppet speak, even just to sing a song, open its mouth on the accented syllable. If it's talking, look at the puppet as if it were alive. Kids will follow your gaze and watch the puppet too. Similarly, when you speak have the puppet face you. Even if I'm using puppets in an informal way during songs and rhymes I still try to treat it tenderly so that kids know they are special. This also preserves the illusionary aspect of a puppet if you use it as a character.



I love grabbing a bunch of farm animals and then throwing in a random dragon, octopus, or other unusual creature to sing classics like Old MacDonald Had a Farm.

Storytime Examples

Here's some examples of how to use puppets in storytime in a simple way.

Songs and Rhymes

My [Toddler Storytime: Using Puppets](#) blog post is chock full of easy examples of using puppets in a non-intimidating way. Have a favorite storytime song that includes animals? Try adding a puppet to help you sing a verse. I created a [Puppet Songs and Rhymes playlist](#) on YouTube as well with tons of ideas. If you've got a random assortment of puppets, try something like "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" or "When Cows Get Up in the Morning" as you can customize the verses based on what you have available. And trust me, the weirder the animals the better! If you have a small storytime group you could pass out a puppet to each child and have them "lead" the verse by coming up to the front.

Reciting Poems or Jokes

I love bringing out a puppet to share a poem or a joke. That way I don't have to memorize anything because the puppet reads it for me! If it's a big poetry book I will prop it up on my easel and then have the puppet read it aloud. This is a great way to introduce a concept or theme of the day. If you've given your puppet a personality then having them tell a joke at the beginning or end of a storytime is fun. It doesn't have to last long – they make an appearance, read the poem or joke, we thank them, and then they go away. This can be a great way to interact with families as they are gathering or leaving too. I've had many kids offer their own jokes to the puppet (but not to me!).

Further Learning

If you are ready to go above and beyond the basics of puppetry, you can learn how to tell puppet stories and put on puppet shows. The ALSC Blog has a great post on [Puppet Shows at Storytime](#) which gives an example of how a library used a series of puppet shows to address common childhood concerns.

There is also a 5-week online course offered through ALSC called [Storytelling With Puppets](#) that dives deeper. This course is taught by the same person who does the [Storytelling with Puppets YouTube channel](#) which is full of videos demonstrating how to tell picture book stories with puppets.

Lastly, if you are able I highly recommend shadowing someone else's storytime who uses puppets or sharing ideas at a staff meeting. I've gotten so many ideas from seeing others in action!

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Phonological Awareness

Overview

In this chapter, we will explore the foundational concepts of phonological and phonemic awareness, which are critical for young children's language and literacy development. Phonological awareness encompasses the broad skill of identifying and manipulating units of oral language, such as words, syllables, and rhymes. Phonemic awareness, a subset of phonological awareness, involves recognizing and working with individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. Understanding these components and their progression is essential for fostering early literacy skills in children.

Progression of Phonological Skills

This chapter examines how these skills evolve, starting from broader phonological awareness and narrowing down to the more specific phonemic awareness. Understanding this progression is vital for educators and caregivers as they support children's literacy growth.

Phonological Awareness Teaching Strategies

We will explore a variety of strategies that educators can use to help young children develop phonological awareness. These strategies include engaging activities that highlight sound recognition, segmentation, and manipulation, all of which are key to building a strong foundation for reading and writing.

Family Involvement in Fostering Phonological Awareness

Recognizing the crucial role of families in supporting their child's literacy development, this chapter will also provide methods to actively involve families in the learning process. By engaging families in activities that reinforce phonological awareness at home, we can create a more cohesive and supportive learning environment for children.

Literacy Materials for Teaching

Additionally, this chapter will guide you in creating materials specifically designed to teach phonological awareness. These materials, such as games, songs, and hands-on activities, will be instrumental in making learning interactive and enjoyable for young learners.

Language Experience Plans

Finally, you will learn how to design language and literacy learning experience plans that promote child development and learning. These plans will integrate the concepts of phonological and phonemic awareness, family involvement, and creative materials, offering a comprehensive approach to early literacy education.

Purpose and Goals

By the end of this chapter, you will have a comprehensive understanding of phonological skills, their progression, and the practical strategies to support them in early childhood education.

Objectives

- identify the components and progression of **phonological** (broad skill including identifying and manipulating units of oral language) and **phonemic** (individual sounds) **awareness**.
- describe strategies to utilize a variety of approaches to help young children develop **phonological awareness**, alphabet knowledge and concepts about print, developmental writing skills, and fine motor development.
- describe methods to include families in their child's language and literacy development.
- create materials to support emergent readers and writers (i.e., finger plays, puppets, flannel boards)
- Create language and literacy learning experience plans that promote child development and learning for children.

[5.1: Phonological Awareness](#)

[5.2: Phonological Awareness Continuum](#)

[5.3: Teaching Phonological Awareness](#)

[5.4: Explicit Phonological Awareness Instruction](#)

[5.5: Considerations for English Learner Students and Students with Disabilities, and Additional Resources](#)

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5.1: Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness provides the essential support or foundation upon which other literacy skills, such as reading and writing, are built. It is a fundamental skill that is necessary for the development of more advanced literacy abilities. It starts with basic sound recognition in early language development and progresses through phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, and early reading and writing. By ensuring that phonological awareness is integrated at each stage of the continuum, educators can support a strong foundation for literacy development, leading to successful reading and writing outcomes for children.

Emergent Literacy Continuum of Skills

When examining what is happening during the emergent reading stage, it is helpful to recognize the elements of procedural knowledge that emergent readers need. Emergent reading elements can be identified as either a **constrained skill** or a **continuous component**.

Constrained skills include **phonological awareness**, **concepts of print**, and **alphabetic principle**.

Continuous components include comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency.

Constrained skills are considered finite, meaning that once a child has acquired the specific understanding it does not need to be relearned. Examples of constrained skills include knowing the names of the 26 letters of the alphabet and recognizing common sight words.

Continuous components include knowledge that is acquired over time, such as vocabulary. Both constrained skills and continuous components are important emergent literacy qualities of the first 5 years of life. The figures in each section span from birth to age 5 and are separated into six stages, including early infancy, later infancy, early toddler, later toddler, early preschool, and later preschool. These stages are used to highlight typical developmental time frames and demonstrate complexity as children progress. The Continuum of Emergent Reading Development is part of the Virginia Unified Early Learning and Development Standards for All Children Ages Birth-5 and serves as a resource to help early childhood educators more effectively support student learning. To view all of the Virginia Unified Early Learning and Development Standards for All Children Ages Birth-5, go to <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/sh...90605072570000>

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is a **constrained set of skills**, but critical to the developing reader's ability to understand language and eventually print.

Phonological awareness is a broad term encompassing an awareness of various-sized units of sounds in spoken words such as rhymes (whole words), syllables (large parts of words), and phonemes (individual sounds). Sometimes referred to as a metalinguistic skill (Goswami, 2002), phonological awareness involves the ability to hear and distinguish the auditory components of spoken language.

Rhyming is usually the easiest and earliest form of phonological awareness that children acquire. Being able to break the spoken word “teacher” into two syllables is a form of phonological awareness that is more sophisticated. Additionally, we may hear another child say, “*Cat* sounds like my name, *Caroline*!” This child was able to recognize that the word “cat” starts with the same sound, or phoneme, as her name. Phonemes are the smallest individual units of sound in a spoken word. Phonemic awareness, the ability to hear and register phonemes, is the most advanced level of phonological awareness. Upon hearing the word “sleigh,” children with phonemic awareness will recognize that there are three separate speech sounds—/s/ /l/ /ā—despite the fact that they may have no idea what the word looks like in its printed form and despite the fact that they would likely have difficulty reading it. It is important to understand that all of these phonological skills are focused on auditory and verbal feedback and are not connected to visual symbols or letters.

In the table in the next section, indicators for phonological development are listed under each of the six age bands. You will see that children move from listening to familiar words to imitating sounds. Eventually, children begin playing with language in ways that demonstrate an understanding of rhyming words, segmenting individual sounds, and blending sounds in words. For instance, we may hear a young child playing with language and saying, “bad, fad, cad, sad, mad, wad” as they are starting to recognize that some words rhyme, or end with that same sound.

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5.2: Phonological Awareness Continuum

Phonological awareness is an overarching term that is used to explain several levels of the sound structure of language. These levels of phonological awareness overlap in terms of when children are able to manipulate units of sound within each level. The levels can be thought of as a continuum of learning. Importantly, phonological awareness is not sequential, where children must master one level before moving to the next level. Rather, children's skills at multiple levels of the phonological awareness continuum may develop at the same time (Anthony, et al, 2003).

Figure 5.2.1 illustrates the phonological awareness continuum; see <https://youtu.be/k0IDVed9dUU> for an animation with details.

Phonological Awareness Continuum

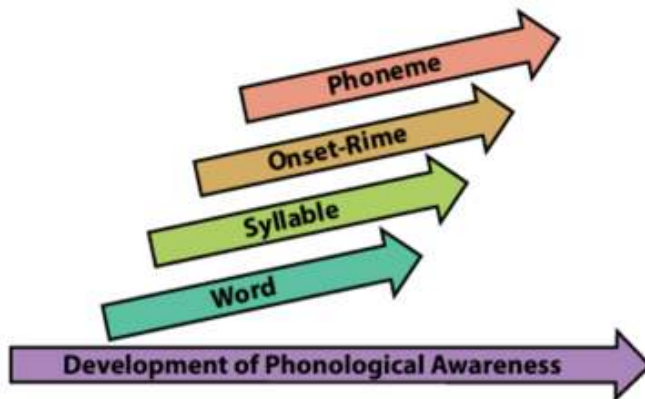


Figure 5.2.1

Children's Abilities Vary Across the Phonological Awareness Continuum

At the beginning of preschool, most children will already be somewhere on the phonological awareness continuum. For example, some children may be able to identify initial sounds in words while others are still working toward hearing different sound structures within words. Regardless of where children are on the continuum, phonological awareness instruction can begin. With the appropriate support from teachers, all children can make progress along the phonological awareness continuum, and all children can improve their sensitivity to sounds and skill at manipulating them.

Teaching and Learning Along the Phonological Awareness Continuum

Since children enter preschool with diverse developmental levels of phonological awareness, teachers first need to determine where each child is on the continuum. Instruction does not necessarily need to start at the beginning of the phonological continuum for all children, nor does the entire continuum need to be taught in preschool. For example, children who begin preschool already proficient at blending and segmenting compound words likely do not need to spend a lot of time practicing with those larger units of sound. Growth is key when it comes to the phonological awareness continuum. So, no matter where a child starts, it is important only that he or she make adequate movement during the preschool years. To be most effective, phonological awareness instruction needs to be explicit and delivered primarily in small groups.

Continuum of Emergent Reading Development: Phonological Awareness

The chart below shows a general developmental progression of when you can expect to see these phonological awareness related behaviors or skills appear.

Developmental Progression	CLLD 2.3. Learning Spoken Language is Composed of Smaller Segments of Sound
Early Infancy 0-8 months	• Listens and attends to culturally and linguistically familiar words (including rhymes and songs) (CLLD2.3a) • Begins to create speech and non-speech like sounds (e.g., babbling) (CLLD2.3b)
Later Infancy 6-14 months	• Begins to imitate sounds they hear in their everyday environment (CLLD2.3c)
Early Toddler 12-24 Months	• Orally repeats a few words of culturally and linguistically familiar rhymes and repetitive refrains in stories or songs or directions/ requests from adults or peers (CLLD2.3d)
Later Toddler 22-36 Months	• Orally produces or reproduces simple culturally and linguistically familiar rhymes or sings favorite songs (CLLD2.3e) • Imitates most sounds of language using familiar words (CLLD2.3f)
Early Preschool 34-48 Months	• Imitates and enjoys rhyme and alliteration (e.g., Jalisa jumped) (CLLD2.3g) • With instructional support, distinguishes when two words rhyme and when two words begin with the same sound (e.g., boy/toy, dog/dad) (CLLD2.3h)
Later Preschool 44-60 Months	• Begins to rhyme and produce rhymes of simple words (CLLD2.3i) • Begins to orally segment and combine compound words (e.g., lunchbox segmented is lunch box; when combined it is lunchbox) (CLLD2.3j) • Begins to segment and combine syllables (e.g., purple segmented is pur-ple; when combined it is purple) (CLLD2.3k) • Begins to identify the initial and final sound in words (e.g., /b/ in bat) (CLLD2.3l)

Table 5.2.1 A Continuum of Emergent Reading Development: Phonological Awareness. Content is from Virginia's Early Learning & Development Standards (ELDS): Birth-Five Learning Guidelines. It is used with permission of the creators and is not an open education resource covered by a Creative Commons License. <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/sh...90605072570000>

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5.3: Teaching Phonological Awareness

Playful Teaching Promotes Playful Learning

For children to be engaged in active, playful learning, teaching needs to be active and playful. Examples of phonological awareness activities that engage children in playful learning are provided in this textbook.



When Does Phonological Awareness Develop?

Early language experiences at home and in preschool play an important role in developing children's phonological awareness. Although speaking and listening may seem unrelated to learning to read, being aware of sounds in words is actually very important to reading. Before learning to read, children need to be aware of sounds in words without relating those sounds to print. Children demonstrate phonological awareness through their speaking and listening skills. Singing nursery rhymes, silly songs, and making up silly words or poems are ways to enhance preschool children's awareness of sounds. These skills are fun to practice because many children love to play with sounds in words. However, for most children, engaging only in these activities is not enough to build phonological awareness.

Because phonological awareness does not come naturally to all children, it needs to be explicitly taught and practiced (Philips et al., 2008). Difficulties with phonological awareness are at the heart of most children's reading challenges. Therefore, a key goal in preschool is to provide a strong foundation in phonological awareness so that children can benefit from reading instruction later in school (Philips et al., 2008).

Why Is Phonological Awareness Important?

Phonological Awareness Is Directly Related to Reading Ability

Phonological awareness is directly related to reading ability (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Foorman et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 1994). If phonological awareness is strong, reading ability is likely to be strong (Share & Stanovich, 1995; Wagner et al., 1997). Even though reading is not formally taught in preschool, critical foundational skills and instruction are provided that will directly support children when they are introduced to formal reading instruction. Phonological awareness is one of those skills—and teaching it in developmentally appropriate lessons is very important. It is also important for preschool teachers to know the developmental sequence of how having phonological awareness supports learning to read. This knowledge will help you fulfill your critically important role in teaching these skills to children.

Phonological Awareness Builds Children's Capacity to Learn Phonics

The goal of phonological awareness instruction in preschool is to build children's capacity to hear and manipulate sounds in spoken words. For example, children can learn to blend sounds together, to make words, and to delete sounds from words, leaving other words or parts of words. Children's capacity to manipulate the sounds in spoken words, especially the smallest units of sound (phonemes), will be important in formal reading instruction later. This capacity will directly relate to their new understanding of phonics, which is the understanding that there is a predictable relationship between the sounds of spoken language and the letters and spellings that represent those sounds in written language. Children who have acquired phonological awareness and print knowledge can quickly understand the connections between sounds and letters. Those children, who also more readily use those connections to identify words in print, almost invariably become better readers than children who have difficulty acquiring these skills (Share & Stanovich, 1995).

Phonological Awareness Is a Foundational Skill for Reading

Phonological awareness is one of the core foundational skills in the development of early reading abilities. Children with strong phonological awareness also benefit more from phonics instruction in kindergarten, grade 1, and beyond, so they acquire better decoding skills to sound out and read words. Think about the feedback that elementary school teachers often provide when students are trying to read or write an unfamiliar word, such as “Sound it out.” This cue makes sense only to a child who has a strong foundation in phonological awareness, letter names, letter sounds (Philips et al., 2008), and who has been taught a process to sound out, or **decode**, a word. Decoding skills then support the development of reading fluency, and reading fluency promotes reading comprehension. So, without a foundation of phonological awareness, a child is unlikely to develop the word-reading skills needed to understand text, which is the goal of reading (Lane & Pullen, 2004). The literacy trees represent the importance of emergent literacy skills to later reading development; see <https://youtu.be/dTzdfHqKh00> for an animation elaborating on this relationship.

Levels of Phonological Awareness

When teaching phonological awareness and providing opportunities for practice, have a good supply of pictures for common words that your children know. Picture cards and puzzles are often used in phonological awareness instruction and practice. In each of the levels and tasks described below, pictures of commonly known words are used as prompts and as manipulatives. Each level in the phonological awareness continuum is described next. Even though you are selecting words the children likely know, it is always good practice to begin every activity by verbally labeling each picture.

Word Level

The simplest level of phonological awareness is the word level. This often involves manipulating individual words in **compound words** (by **blending**, **segmenting**, and **deleting**). A compound word is a word made up of two or more words such as doghouse, cupcake, and airport. The activities in Table 5.3.1 illustrate opportunities for children to demonstrate their word-level phonological awareness. In general, tasks are listed from simple to more complex—that is, most children find blending easier than deleting.

Table 5.3.1 Word-Level Phonological Awareness Activities

Task	Teacher Prompt	Child Response
Blending (putting together)	Show one picture puzzle piece at a time (<i>dog</i> and <i>house</i>). “I’ll say a word, one part at a time. You put the parts together to make the whole word. <i>Dog</i> (pause) <i>house</i> . What word?”	The child puts the two puzzle pieces together and says <i>doghouse</i> .
Segmenting (breaking apart)	Show a picture of a <i>cupcake</i> and be sure the child can correctly identify it. “What two words make up the word <i>cupcake</i> ?”	<i>Cup-cake</i>
Deleting (removing one or two words from a compound word and determining what word remains)	“I will give you a word and ask you to remove one part of it, and you tell me what part is left. Say <i>sidewalk</i> .”	<i>Sidewalk</i>
	“Now say <i>sidewalk</i> without saying <i>side</i> .”	<i>Walk</i>
	Repeat by deleting the other word in the compound word. When the child grasps the idea, switch roles and the child can become the teacher!	

Syllable Level

The syllable level of phonological awareness involves the ability to **blend**, **count**, **delete**, and **segment** parts of multi-syllabic words. A multi-syllabic word is a word with more than one syllable, such as *tiger*, *hamburger*, and *hippopotamus*.

The activities in Table 5.3.2 illustrate opportunities for children to demonstrate their syllable-level phonological awareness. When practicing phonological awareness at the syllable level, it is important to note that oral syllabication and written syllabication are not always the same. In some cases, there may be multiple, acceptable oral syllabications. So, be consistent from day to day with the same words when orally blending, segmenting, and deleting syllables. To be consistent, we used the Merriam-Webster oral syllabication rules for the syllable level tasks.

Table 5.3.2 Syllable-Level Phonological Awareness Activities

Task	Teacher Prompt	Child Response
Blending (putting together parts of a word to create a whole word)	"I'm going to break a word into parts, and you say the whole word. <i>To-ma-to</i> ."	<i>Tomato</i>
Counting (counting the syllables in a spoken word by clapping or tapping each syllable)	How many syllables in (pause) <i>hamburger</i> ?"	(Clapping for each syllable) <i>Ham-bur-ger</i> , three!
Segmenting (hearing a word and breaking it into syllables)	"I'm going to say a word and you say each part you hear in the word. <i>Paper</i> ."	<i>Pa-per</i>
Deleting (saying a given word without a specific syllable)	"Say <i>pencil</i> ."	<i>Pencil</i>
	"Now say <i>pencil</i> without <i>cil</i> ."	<i>Pen</i>

Onset-Rime Level

The onset and rime are smaller units within a syllable. The onset is the part of the syllable that comes before the vowel, and the rime is the vowel and everything after it. For the word *run*, the onset is /r/, and the rime is /un/. For the word *stop*, the onset is /st/, and the rime is /op/. Some types of words do not lend themselves to onset-rime activities. Words that begin with a vowel (a, e, i, o, u) are not used in onset-rime activities because they do not have an onset. Also, words with open syllables—that is, words with a vowel at the end of the syllable, such as *be* and *go*—are not used in onset-rime activities. The following chart shows a variety of words divided into their onsets and rimes.

Word	Onset	Rime
sit	s	it
put	p	ut
thin	th	in
spot	sp	ot
street	str	eet
spoil	sp	oil

The onset-rime level is a transitional level between phonological awareness and phonemic awareness. Children can demonstrate onset-rime-level phonological awareness by engaging in the activities described in Table 5.3.3.

Table 5.3.3 Onset-Rime Level Phonological Awareness Activities

Task	Teacher Prompt	Child Response
Rime matching (determining whether two words rhyme)	Show a picture of a fox and a picture of a box. “Do these words rhyme: <i>fox, box</i> ?”	Yes
	“These words rhyme because they share the same rime: -ox.” (You can explain to children that fox and box rhyme because they sound the same in the middle and the end.)	
	(You may find that it helps children to hear three words-- two rhymes and one word that does not rhyme.) “Which two words rhyme: <i>cat, mop, hat</i> ?”	<i>Cat, hat.</i>
Onset matching	“Which of these words have the same first sound: toy, man, toad?”	<i>Toy, toad.</i>
Onset-rime blending	“What word do these sounds make: /f/ /an/?”	<i>Fan</i>
Onset identity (beginning sounds) (saying the first part, or sound, of a word that is shown in a picture and heard)	Show a picture of a boat, and say the word without an article such as <i>a</i> or <i>an</i> , which can be confused with the beginning sound. “This is (pause): boat, what is the first sound you hear in (pause) boat?”	/b/
Alliteration (saying a word that begins with the same onset as a word that is heard)	Show a picture of a dog. “Tell me another word that begins with the /d/ sound.”	If the child produces a real word like <i>duck</i> or a nonsense word like <i>dak</i> it is considered correct.
Onset-rime segmenting	“I’m going to say a word and you tell me the first sound you hear and then the rest of the word. <i>Doll</i> .”	/d/ /oll/
Deleting onsets and rimes (saying what is left after removing the onset or the rime)	Show a picture of a coat. “Say coat without /k/.”	<i>Oat</i>
	“Say coat without /oat/.”	/k/
Generating rhymes (saying a word that rhymes with a word that is heard)	Show a picture of a frog. “Tell me a word that rhymes with frog.”	If the child produces a real word like <i>log</i> , or a nonsense word like <i>mog</i> , it is considered correct.

Manipulating sounds using onset-rime can be more difficult because the sounds can become distorted, or sound wrong. For example, if you use onset-rime to blend the word *pat*, it is difficult to say /p/ without it being distorted or sounding like /puh/. This then makes blending the word sound like, /puh/ /at/, *puhat*—but there is no such word. So, when teaching these lessons, take care to pronounce the individual sounds correctly.

Now that you understand more about onsets and rimes and how to manipulate them, let’s take a moment to think about rhyming. Silly rhyming songs, books that include rhyming, and nursery rhymes may be children’s first exposure to the idea that words have characteristics other than semantic meaning. That is, children often start to mimic rhyming words such as *cat* and *hat* rather than think about what a cat is or what a hat looks like on someone’s head. So, rhymes may be the first aspect of phonological awareness that children learn to copy after they hear it in a song, or a book read to them. However, manipulating rhymes can be challenging

because rhyme manipulation is actually onset-rime manipulation. Words that rhyme share the same rime, as in the words sun and run (they have the same rime, -un). Children need to be able to segment, or separate, the onset from the rime. Rhyming activities can be a playful way for children to engage in word manipulation but should not be considered a sufficient single method of phonological awareness instruction.

Phoneme Level

The phoneme level of phonological awareness is when children become able to manipulate individual phonemes, or sounds, in words. The phoneme level of phonological awareness is called phonemic awareness. Although some children will develop the capability to manipulate phonemes during the preschool period, this level generally emerges in kindergarten. As with the other levels, picture cards and other manipulatives such as small counters are often used in phonemic awareness instruction and practice. These tasks are considered part of phonological awareness and not phonics because they are completed orally, without using letters. Children can demonstrate phonemic awareness by engaging in the activities described in Table 5.3.4.

Table 5.3.4 Phoneme Level Phonological Awareness Activities

Task	Teacher Prompt	Child Response
Isolating and producing phonemes in one-syllable words at the initial, final, and medial (middle or vowel) position.	“What is the first sound you hear in <i>sun</i> ?”	/s/
	“What is the last sound you hear in <i>mat</i> ?”	/t/
	“What is the middle sound you hear in <i>sit</i> ?”	/ɪ/
Blending	“I’m going to say each sound in a word and you tell me the word. /s/ /ʊ/ /n/.”	<i>Sun</i>
Segmenting	“Tell me each sound you hear in the word <i>mat</i> .”	/m/ /ă/ /t/
Deleting	Say, “ <i>Meat</i> .”	<i>Meat</i>
	“Now say <i>meat</i> without /m/.” (This same task is used at the onset-rime level, using <i>coat</i> ; there can be overlap between tasks at the onset-rime level and tasks at the phoneme level.)	<i>Eat</i>
Substituting (making a new word by replacing one phoneme with another phoneme)	“The word is <i>fun</i> . Change /f/ to /r/. What’s the new word?”	<i>Run</i>

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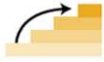
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5.4: Explicit Phonological Awareness Instruction

Systematic Instruction



Systematic instruction is carefully thought out, moves from the simple to the complex, builds on prior learning, and is delivered in manageable steps. The goal of systematic instruction is to ensure that whenever children are asked to learn a new skill or concept, they already possess the appropriate knowledge and understanding to efficiently learn it (Adams, 2001).

The first place to look for guidance on how to be systematic when teaching phonological awareness is your curriculum, if you have one. Verify that the phonological awareness instructional plan in your curriculum incorporates the features of effective instruction that are taught and practiced during these PLC sessions. If your curriculum does not provide clear guidance on how to teach phonological awareness, the information provided here can guide you in developing a systematic plan for doing so throughout the year.

A key component of systematic instruction is the order in which skills are introduced. Determining this order allows you to plan a scope and sequence of instruction.

Scope and Sequence



Although there is no one right way or order in which to teach phonological awareness, the phonological awareness continuum included in these PLC sessions makes sense developmentally. Children enter preschool with a wide range of phonological awareness abilities, so children are at different points on the phonological awareness continuum. Some children may not be able to blend two words together to create a compound word (the word level); others may already be able to blend and segment syllables in spoken words (the syllable level). So, a developmentally appropriate scope and sequence is recommended for phonological awareness instruction. If your curriculum does not have this, the phonological awareness continuum from this Module can be used as a guide.

It is not necessary to teach the entire continuum to every child or to teach the same content to all children, but effective instruction includes a clear scope and sequence for all children. The goal is to use informal and formal assessment to determine where each child is along the continuum and then form small, homogeneous (same-ability level) groups so that you can focus instruction on the appropriate level of the continuum to meet children's needs (Lonigan et al., 2009; Rashotte, MacPhee, & Torgesen, 2001).

Small groups are flexible, so children move in and out of different groups as they progress at different rates.

Explicit Instruction



Small-group explicit instruction is an effective instructional practice for teaching phonological awareness. Small-group phonological awareness instruction is a short part of each day for preschoolers. In fact, brief (10- to 15-minute), interactive, small-group or individual daily sessions using evidence-based instructional methods is all that children require (Ehri et al, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). This instruction can be embedded into a curriculum that simultaneously supports the development of children's language, math, social skills, motor skills, and their general knowledge and interests (Philips et al., 2008).

Explicit instruction involves the I Do, We Do, You Do instructional routine when introducing a new skill or concept. For phonological awareness, a small-group explicit lesson might involve a game in which children match pictures of words that begin with the same onset, or beginning sound. Cumulative practice is also an important part of small-group explicit instruction because children need to have opportunities to practice the same phonological awareness skills on multiple occasions. For example, when introducing a new phonological awareness skill during small-group instruction, also review a few examples of the phonological awareness skill previously taught.

After phonological skills have been explicitly taught and have been practiced through cumulative review, implicit instruction is used to provide review and practice to enhance those phonological awareness skills. **Implicit instruction** is the opposite of explicit instruction. It is used to provide practice opportunities for skills previously introduced using explicit instruction. Implicit instruction typically involves less scaffolding than explicit instruction does. For example, you may have a syllable dance party in the classroom, where you point to an object and name it and the children rock their hips as if they are dancing as they say each syllable in the word. For the syllable dance party the word table is said, ta-ble, while rocking hips to the right one time (ta-) and then to the left (-ble).



Activity Selection

The order in which children are introduced to activities at different levels of the phonological awareness continuum is an important part of a systematic instructional plan. It is also important to carefully consider the specific tasks that children will complete within and across phonological awareness levels for one

lesson. Descriptions of these tasks are provided in the previous section on levels of phonological awareness. Keep in mind that for many children:

- Matching and blending activities are easier than segmenting and deleting activities.
- Activities with visual supports and cues, such as pictures of the words, are easier for children than tasks that do not include visual supports.

The levels of the phonological awareness continuum are not discrete stages—where mastery of one stage precedes the beginning of the next—but are instead overlapping. Making the task features of an activity more difficult may make the lesson harder for children than a simpler task at the next level of the continuum. For example, children may find it easier to complete a blending onset-rime activity than an activity asking them to delete syllables from words.

The key is to understand how the phonological awareness level, the task, and the visual supports all independently relate to an activity's difficulty.

The key is to understand how the phonological awareness level, the task, and the visual supports all independently relate to an activity's difficulty.

Focus on One or Two Teaching Points



A small-group explicit instruction lesson should be brief and focus on no more than two skills at a time. In each small group it is important to minimize the number of tasks and manipulation of different unit (of language) sizes. Too many tasks or phonological awareness levels in one lesson could be confusing to the children. For example, asking children to blend compound words, segment and blend syllables in spoken words, and identify the first sound in words involves too many tasks (blend, segment, and onset identity) at too many levels (word, syllable, and phoneme). High-quality phonological awareness lessons often include just one or two tasks at a single level, where one task is a new one and the other task is a review.

Scaffolded Instruction



While teaching phonological awareness lessons, it is important to scaffold instruction. **Scaffolded instruction** provides feedback to children's responses to help them demonstrate a skill or concept when they could not otherwise have done so on their own. In other words, it gives children the support they need toward greater understanding. Scaffolded instruction includes:

- Providing prompts, cues, and gestures.
- Breaking down the problem into smaller steps.
- Using visual aids.
- Providing an example.
- Offering encouragement.

For example, if you ask a child to say each part in the word *purple*, and the child says, "*purple*," then a scaffold might be to model the answer you were looking for, saying "I'm going to say each part of the word *purple*, *pur-ple*," while clearly emphasizing the pause between the parts. Using hand gestures to represent each syllable also can be helpful. A different scaffold for this same error might be to tell the child that there are two parts in the word *purple* and ask him or her to say each part with a clear pause in between.

A visual is another scaffold to use for this same error. For example, if you ask a child to say each part in the word *banana* and the child says, "*banana*," use a picture of a banana with three dashes under it, and explain that there are three syllables, or parts, in the word (*ba-na-na*).



Differentiated Instruction



Differentiated instruction involves implementing different activities for each group based on that group's instructional needs. For example, you may explicitly teach one group skills at the word level of the phonological awareness continuum, and another group might be ready to blend and delete words at the syllable level. Another way to differentiate is to teach two small groups at the same level of the continuum but to include more challenging activities for one group and simpler activities for the other. Lessons that address each group's needs should be carefully selected.

Part of differentiating instruction includes pacing and the speed with which children move through the continuum. Multiple small groups might engage in the same level of phonological awareness instruction, but the pace of the lesson for each small group may be different. One group may need more opportunities to practice and receive your feedback, so those children would spend more days in small-group instruction working on a particular skill.

Examples of Effective Phonological Awareness Instruction

The instructional examples presented below incorporate the features of effective instruction.

Example of Lesson On Onset-Rime Blending

The instructional examples presented below incorporate the features of effective instruction.

- The lesson is explicit because it was preplanned by the teacher and uses the I Do, We Do, You Do instructional routine.
- The goal of the lesson is for children to blend onsets and rimes in spoken words.
- This is a task at the onset-rime level of the phonological awareness continuum.
- Two visual props are included to support children's understanding. Each child receives an activity sheet that has a grid. Each box on the grid has a picture that represents a word: dog, book, table, bears, car, apple, boat, pig. Counters are also provided for each child. The grid with pictures assists children by providing a visual representation of the units the children manipulate, or blend, into words. However, the printed word is not presented on the picture because this activity is designed to be spoken, not written.

	Explain and Model The teacher explains the objective of the lesson: "Before we begin our lesson, let's name each picture." • The teacher points to each picture as the children name it. The teacher provides the name and description of unknown pictures. The teacher continues, "Now, we are going to put sounds together to make a word and then we'll find our word on our paper. Listen. What word do these sounds make: /d/ /og/? <i>Dog</i>. Now, I'll find <i>dog</i> and put my counter on it." The teacher continues, "Listen to another example. What word do these sounds make /b/ook/? <i>Book</i>. Now I'll find book and put my counter on it."
	Provide Guided Practice with Scaffolding Teacher: "Now, together, let's practice blending sounds to make a word: /t/ /able/. What word?" The teacher and children say, "<i>Table</i>." Teacher: "Good! Put your counter on the picture of the <i>table</i>." Teacher: "Nice job putting sounds together to make a word! Let's do another one together: /b/ /ears/, what word?" Everyone: "<i>Bears</i>." Teacher: "Great job! Put your counter on the picture of the <i>bears</i>." • The teacher continues guiding the children with blending the onsets and rimes of <i>car</i>, <i>apple</i>, <i>boat</i>, and <i>pig</i>. • The teacher provides scaffolding when children make an error. For example, if a child says a wrong word, the teacher might say, "Listen. The parts of this word are /p/ /ig/, while sliding forward one counter for the onset and another counter for the rime. The teacher would then ask the child to try again with her. Or, if the child puts his counter on the wrong picture, the teacher might say, "That is /c/ /ar/, <i>car</i>. Can you find /p/ /ig/, <i>pig</i>?"
	Independent Practice The teacher provides several segmented words for each child, one child at a time, in the small group. • The teacher encourages other children in the group to listen and think about the answer when it is someone else's turn. • Each child has the opportunity to listen to the segmented prompt and provide the blended, whole word. • During this time, the teacher provides immediate corrective feedback and scaffolding, such as repeating the onset and rime using hand gestures.

Repetition and Patience

As a review and for next steps for the lesson just described, the teacher will provide ongoing opportunities to practice blending onsets and rimes to make words. For example, when children are sharing their stuffed animals during show-and-tell, the teacher may say, "Oh, I see a /d/ /og/. What do I see?" The children respond, "*Dog*." Other examples include /m/ /ouse/, *mouse*; /k/ /at/, *cat*; /f/ /oks/, *fox*. During a later small group lesson for children who mastered the activities with simple onsets, the teacher may implement the same lesson but use words with more complex onsets like /st/ /op/ and /sl/ /ug/. For blending, you will want to, eventually, remove the picture support so you know that children can blend the spoken words without the use of the pictures.

Small-group explicit instructional activities will likely need to be repeated numerous times with the same and different words before children master the task. Be patient. These activities often challenge children, but they show steady progress when provided recurrent practice and consistent scaffolds.

Learn and Then Practice (A Lot)

It is important to provide multiple explicitly taught lessons when introducing a new skill. Once children are ready for independent practice, they benefit from multiple opportunities to practice the skill. These review activities—called implicit and incidental instruction to differentiate them from the more intentional and systematic, explicit instruction described above—work well when embedded in ongoing instruction and during transitions. Implicit and incidental instruction reinforce new skills but on their own are not as likely to support initial learning. Each time a new element is introduced in phonological awareness instruction, such as a new task or a smaller unit of language size (for example, going from words to syllables), begin with explicit instruction.

Implicit instruction is typically designed to feel authentic and contextualized (built in). It is unstructured in that it does not include the I Do, We Do, You Do instructional routine. It assumes that children already have some background knowledge or understanding of the skill. An example of implicit instruction is reading an alphabet book about farm animals and asking, “Which farm animals were on the D page?” (for example, *duck, dog, donkey*) and then asking, “Can you name another animal that begins with /d/?” In this example, it is assumed that children already can identify the first sound in a word and match on the shared onset of words rather than having to think about what a *duck* and a *dog* look like. You could also call children to line up by the first sound of their names: “Please line up if your name begins with /s/.” This example also assumes that children already can identify the first sound in their own name.



Incidental instruction provides unplanned opportunities to seize the moment. For example, when a child draws a cat and a bat, and the teacher says, “I see you drew a cat and a bat...hey! *Cat* and *bat* rhyme! What else rhymes with *cat* and *bat*?” In this example, the teacher assumes that the child understands rhymes.



Examples of Explicit, Implicit, and Incidental Instruction for One Skill

Below are examples of how explicit, implicit, and incidental instruction can be combined and implemented to teach children to delete syllables from spoken words.

- **Explicit instruction.** The teacher implements systematic, small-group instruction using the I Do, We Do, You Do instructional routine to teach children how to delete syllables from spoken words. For example, “The word is *teacher*. Now, I’ll say *teacher* without saying *tea*. *Cher*.” Five words are used to model (*teacher, chil-dren, mar-ker, re-cess, sing-ing*) and time is provided for individual practice with scaffolding. The teacher repeats this explicit activity multiple times with the same and different words.
- **Implicit instruction.** During whole-group instruction the teacher leads the I Spy game with two-syllable objects around the classroom. Children say the whole word, the teacher identifies one of its syllables to delete, and then the children say the real or nonsense word that remains. For example, “I spy *paper*. Say *paper* without saying *per*.” The children say, “*pa*.”
- **Incidental instruction.** During a read-aloud of *Secret Seahorse*, the teacher asks the children to say *secret* without *cret*. The children say, “*se*.”

Phonological Awareness Instruction in Action

You may wish to watch these videos to see examples of phonological awareness instruction in action.

Title	Link	Duration
Video 1: The Literacy Tree: A Representation of Foundational Literacy Skills	https://youtu.be/dTzdfHqKh00	2:43
Video 2: Phonological Awareness Continuum	https://youtu.be/k0IDVed9dUU	4:56
Video 3: Small Groups in Action	https://youtu.be/YXaF5qjnSLQ	6:15
Video 4: Word Level Phonological Awareness Lesson	https://youtu.be/LSF1AZjTAqc	4:38
Video 5: Syllable Level Phonological Awareness Lesson	https://youtu.be/CmwMYcQmRG0	5:55
Video 6: Onset-Rime Level Phonological Awareness Lesson	https://youtu.be/FHxs4YiB0ZI	4:23
Video 7: Phoneme Level Phonological Awareness Lesson	https://youtu.be/GJQkPrhspBU	6:36
Video 8: Phonological Awareness Throughout the Day	https://youtu.be/5jicN0F12t0	8:06
Video 9: Phonological Awareness and Considerations for Intensive Instruction	https://youtu.be/YiZMBP9ap50	5:40

✓ Example - Phonological Awareness Instruction in Action: Ms. Warner's Classroom

Daily Literacy Routines

Ms. Warner implements small-group explicit instruction as part of literacy instruction in her preschool class. Each day, she works with small groups of three or four children for 10–15 minutes. Each homogenous (similar-ability) group is flexible, so children move in and out of different groups as needed based on assessment and teacher observation.

Ms. Warner sits at the teacher table facing the rest of the class, so she can monitor as needed. While the small group works at the teacher table, the rest of the class engages in other classroom activities with a teacher assistant or at independent literacy learning centers practicing skills and concepts that have already been explicitly taught. They might also engage in group activities led by a teacher assistant, such as shared reading, math and science activities, or art projects.

Careful Planning

Ms. Warner does not have a preschool literacy curriculum that addresses phonological awareness, so she needs to determine the scope and sequence of skills to be taught. She also needs to find or design the lessons to teach the skills explicitly and obtain and prepare the materials to support the lessons. Ms. Warner plans to use the phonological awareness continuum and information that was discussed in her PLC sessions to inform her scope and sequence. She understands that children enter the classroom with varying levels of phonological awareness and do not need to master all levels of the phonological awareness continuum but make consistent growth. Even though most of her children need to begin at the word level, she still forms small groups for explicit instruction so that the children receive more practice opportunities and immediate corrective feedback and scaffolding from her.

At the Teacher Table

Ms. Warner explicitly teaches a syllable-blending lesson to a small group of four children. She knows, based on prior assessment and her observations, that these children are at the syllable level of phonological awareness. The goal for this lesson is for the children to hear a word segmented by syllables and then blend the syllables to say the word. The instructional materials include a list of multi-syllabic words, objects around the room, picture cards, and a puppet.



Explain and Model



First, Ms. Warner introduces Sam the puppet to the children, allowing each child to say hello to Sam. Then, she explains and models, “Sam says words one part at a time. He needs your help to put the parts of the word together to say the whole word. Sam will look at three pictures and say the name of one picture, one part at a time. Then you will put the parts together and say the whole word as you point to the picture of that word. Watch and listen.” (Three picture cards are in front of Sam: lion, table, window). Mrs. Warner says, “Sam, please name one of these pictures.” Sam says, “*Ta-ble*.” Ms. Warner responds, “*table*” as she points to the picture of the table. When saying the words broken apart (in Sam’s voice), Ms. Warner is sure to have a clear pause between the syllables; in contrast, she makes sure not to pause when saying the complete word. Mrs. Warner shows Sam three picture cards (tiger, elbow, kitten) and provides another example, “Sam, please name one of these pictures.” Sam, says “*Ti-ger*.” Ms. Warner responds while pointing to the picture of the tiger, “*Tiger*.”

Guided Practice with Scaffolding



Next, Ms. Warner provides guided practice and scaffolds instruction as the children practice blending syllables. Ms. Warner says, “Now it’s your turn. Listen as Sam says the name of one of these pictures.” Three pictures sit in front of the children. Sam says, “*El-bow*.” Mrs. Warner asks, “What word?” The children point to the picture of an elbow and say, “*Elbow*.” Ms. Warner says, “Nice job putting el-bow together to say the word, *elbow*!” Ms. Warner continues with guided practice (li-on, tur-tle). She scaffolds instruction as needed. For example, one child responds *tur-tle*, instead of *turtle*. Ms. Warner says, “Sam says the word in two parts, and you put the parts together to say the word. Listen to Sam: *Tur-tle*. (In teacher voice) *turtle*. Now you try, *tur-tle*.” All the children say, “*Turtle*.”



Independent Practice with Cumulative Review



Ms. Warner then provides individual turns for each child. She continues to use two-syllable words to ensure that each child can blend syllables. She provides immediate feedback and scaffolding, repeating directions and modeling again as needed. Once children master blending with the support of pictures, Ms. Warner eventually uses only spoken words and no pictures. She ends the lesson by thanking the children for helping Sam put parts of words together to say the whole word.

Differentiating Instruction to Meet Children's Needs

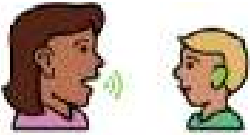
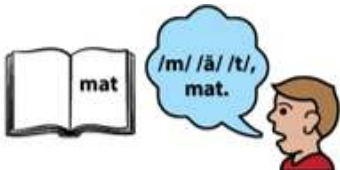
In a later, small-group explicit lesson, Ms. Warner teaches the same skill using different two-syllable words. Once some children have mastered blending two-syllable words, Ms. Warner increases the challenge for these children. She regroups all the children so that the ones who have mastered two-syllable words are together and can move on to three-syllable words. She uses the same activity but increases its complexity by using three-syllable words such as computer and exercise. Again, Ms. Warner eventually uses only spoken words and no pictures, so children practice and master the skill without the support of a picture.

Follow-Up with Implicit and Incidental Instruction

Later each day and throughout the next several weeks, Ms. Warner provides opportunities for the children to practice blending syllables. During snack and lunch time, she uses food words to segment and asks the children to say the word (for example, *rai-sin*, *coo-kie*, and *sand-wich*). She also pauses during a read-aloud to segment a word into syllables and asks children to put the parts together to say the word.



Phonological Awareness: Key Terms and Definitions for Teachers.

Key Term	Definition
Phonological Awareness 	The understanding that spoken language can be broken down into parts and the ability to manipulate those parts at the word, syllable, onset-rime, and phoneme levels.
Phonemic Awareness 	The ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words.
Phoneme 	The smallest unit of sound in spoken words. Mat has three phonemes: /m/ /ā/ /t/.
Print Knowledge 	Knowing letter names (M), letters sounds (/m/), and concepts of print.
Phonics 	Using printed letters and letter-sound relationships to read words
Alphabetic Principle 	The understanding that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds.

✓ Reproducible Activities

Review these [reproducible activities](#) including the lesson plan for Syllable Graph (with the instructions, graph, and picture cards) and Compound Word Search (instructions and picture cards).

Shared from Kosanovich, M., Phillips, B., & Willis, K. (2020). Professional Learning Community: Emergent Literacy: Participant Guide—Module 2: Phonological Awareness (Sessions 4–6) (REL 2021-045). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

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5.5: Considerations for English Learner Students and Students with Disabilities, and Additional Resources

This section describes general principles and strategies for teaching phonological awareness to English learner students and students with disabilities. These children may need more time to practice with teacher feedback, more explicit instruction, or another modified strategy. Teachers working with students who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) should consult the plan and work in concert with a specialist (preschool special education teacher or speech-language pathologist). If a teacher suspects a child should be screened for a possible disability or delay, they should consult an administrator.

Making Instruction Accessible to All Children

It is important to approach teaching with the goal of meeting the needs of every child in the classroom. If you design instruction from the start to be responsive to all children's needs—including those with a wide range of cognitive and sensory abilities, those with limited prior exposure to phonological awareness concepts, and those with developmental disabilities and delays—you will need to make fewer on-the-spot adaptations later when you implement it. In other words, you can build features that support all children directly into material selection, activities, and the manner in which you interact with children while guiding their learning during those activities.

For example, if there are children in your classroom who have difficulty using their fingers to pick up small objects or picture cards, you can add magnets to these items; then, during the activity, these children can fully participate by using a magnet wand to manipulate the objects or picture cards. As another example, if there are children in your classroom who have hearing impairments, you can select a location for small-group instruction that is quiet, so that those children can better hear you and their peers model saying words and sounds and can get the most out of the instructional opportunity.

Planning ahead to enhance accessibility can make all the difference. Of course, this does not mean that you will not need to monitor how children are engaging with your instructional activities—being responsive in the moment is very important, too.

Providing regular feedback is an important aspect of accessible and adaptive instruction. The discussion below describes some aspects of instruction that you should consider when designing accessible instruction that you can adapt to different children's needs. Many of these will look familiar because they have been already described as part of high-quality, explicit instruction.

Scaffolding



Scaffolding is a key element in accessible, differentiated instruction. Providing feedback to a child's incorrect response—in other words, providing cues so that the child can successfully complete the task—is scaffolding instruction. One way to scaffold instruction is to provide supportive verbal prompts and more modeling. For example, if a child who is asked to say the two parts of the compound word *popcorn* responds, “*Popcorn*,” that response needs to be scaffolded. The teacher might say, for example, “The word is *popcorn*. If the first part is *pop*, then the second part is _____?” An example of a non-scaffolded response is “Try again” or “Listen again; the word is *popcorn*.”

Do you notice the difference in the two examples? In the first example the teacher provided a cue to the child by providing the first part of the word, *pop*. In the second example the teacher is simply asking the child to try again, which is not helpful. An important part of scaffolding is immediate corrective feedback, so children do not practice or get reinforced for incorrect responses to a task, which can confuse them. Providing frequent positive feedback for even partially correct responses or good efforts is especially important for children's motivation and attention.

Accept Nonverbal Responses

Although verbal responses should be encouraged, children can demonstrate knowledge of phonological awareness with nonverbal responses. You can elicit nonverbal responses in a variety of ways. For example, to determine whether children can segment syllables in words, you can ask them to clap each word part. You can also use pictures during phonological awareness instruction—for example, showing a child a picture of a *bird*, a *cat*, and a *dog* and asking children to point to the picture that begins with /b/. For

children with very limited oral language, you may stay with pointing activities for a long time. However, always encourage children to talk. In the previous example, you might ask the child to repeat, “Bird starts with /b/. Say it with me, *bird*.” For other children, you can change expectations from accepting nonverbal responses to encouraging verbal responses as instruction progresses.

Use Pictures and Prompts

Using pictures to support understanding is an excellent strategy for all children, even those who readily give verbal responses. However, it is especially important to ensure that children with language impairments or English learner children know the names of pictured objects or actions before you ask them to use it in a phonological awareness activity. Take a minute to briefly point to each picture or item and clearly say its name before continuing with the planned activity. Have children repeat it to you so that they hear themselves say it. This will ensure that children with less advanced English language skills are not confused.



Adjust Pacing and Scaffolding

During small-group instruction, one way teachers differentiate is by changing the pace of instruction. You can move faster for groups that are completing tasks successfully and slower for groups that need more practice and feedback. More scaffolded instruction, or more support, is provided for groups that need it and fewer scaffolds for groups that do not.

Simplify Instruction

You may have some children who are progressing slowly in mastering phonological awareness. For these children, in addition to providing consistent scaffolding and a slower pace, it can be helpful to further simplify the instruction. For example, you may typically conduct small-group activities using four or six different words in a lesson. For children having difficulty understanding the specific phonological awareness task, try simplifying to just two different words at a time. That way, you can scaffold by asking children a forced-choice question that can be easier for them to answer correctly.

For example, if your task is to blend compound words, you might show pictures of a football and a birdhouse. Label the two pictures, and then say, “Listen, *bird* (long pause) *house*....is that *football* or *birdhouse*?” Once children can master this version of activities, you can slowly scale up to using more words at a time and asking children to produce the correct responses themselves. Young children frequently repeat the last word heard. So, vary the placement of the correct response (first, second, or last).

Accelerate When Needed

You may also have children who are progressing more quickly across the phonological awareness continuum than others. Providing more complex phonological awareness activities at different levels (moving to syllable, onset-rime, and phoneme level skills) is appropriate for those children. Children who demonstrate skill at tasks using onset-rime, for example, may be ready for phonemic awareness activities such as blending and segmenting phonemes, or individual sounds, in two- or three-phoneme words. For example, “I’m going to say a word one sound at a time, then you tell me the word. Listen. /m/ /ē/. What word?” The children respond, “*Me*.” A slightly more complex task is asking children to say each sound they hear in the word *am*. The correct response is /ā/ /m/. Notice in the first example, the children blended, or put together, the sounds they heard in the word *me*. The second example is more complex because the children were required to segment, or take apart, the sounds in *am*.

Another way to accelerate learning is to include some activities that bring together the letter name and letter sound knowledge children have been gaining in their print knowledge lessons with the phonological awareness skills they have been gaining in separate lessons. Using letters for which children already know the sounds, you can ask children to complete onset segmentation or deletion activities, onset-rime blending activities, or phoneme blending activities using letter tiles or magnets. For all of these

activities use only simple consonant-vowel-consonant words such as *sat*, *mug*, and *pin*. Avoid words with complex consonant clusters at the beginning or end such as *drip*, *throw*, *milk*, or *duck*.

The Importance of Sound Pronunciation

Children can struggle to develop phonological and phonemic awareness because they have learned incorrect ways to pronounce letter sounds. It is important to correctly pronounce sounds and avoid common mistakes such as adding /uh/ (the schwa sound) after a consonant. For example, in an effort to ensure the whole class can hear her saying each sound, sometimes a teacher will say /suh/ instead of /s/ for the letter sound for S, and /tuh/ instead of /t/ for the letter sound for T. This distortion of letter sounds may confuse children when the teacher says, “I’m going to say each sound in a word and you tell me the word: /suh/ /ă/ /tuh/. What word?” Most of the time, children will respond, “*suhatuh*,” and it is unlikely that they will say “*sat*.” Instead, the teacher should say, “I’m going to say each sound in a word and you tell me the word: /s/ /ă/ /t/. What word?” The idea of pronouncing sounds clearly and correctly applies to every level of phonological awareness. For example, at the onset-rime level, say /f/-/ast/ instead of /fuh/ /ast/. So, when children blend the onset and rime, they will say *fast* as opposed to *fuhast*.

To effectively teach phonological awareness skills, teachers must pronounce letter sounds correctly and understand that there are two ways that sounds can be categorized: continuous/stop sounds and voiced/unvoiced sounds.

A **continuous sound** can be pronounced for several seconds without any distortion. For example, the letter sound for M is /m/. You can hold /m/ for several seconds, and the sound will remain the same. Continuous sounds are the easiest sounds for children to produce and blend. A **stop sound** is a quick sound that can be correctly pronounced for only an instant. For example, /b/ or /t/. It is very important not to say /buh/ or /tuh/, adding the schwa sound.

A **voiced sound** is one that makes the vocal cords vibrate, such as /v/ or /j/. Place your hand on your throat at your vocal cords and say /v/. Do you feel the vibration? An **unvoiced sound** is one that does not make the vocal cords vibrate, such as /s/ or /f/. Place your hand on your throat at your vocal cords and say /s/. There is no vibration, so it is an unvoiced sound. Learning the differences between these sounds will help you become more conscious of the way phonemes sound and feel.

Review the sound pronunciation guide in the table below and practice accurately saying sounds.

Table 5.5.1 Sound Pronunciation Guide

Sound	Key Word	Continuous or Stop	Voiced or Unvoiced
/b/	big	stop	voiced
/a/	apple	continuous	voiced
/p/	park	stop	unvoiced
/t/	top	stop	unvoiced
/d/	dog	stop	voiced
/v/	van	continuous	voiced
/e/	Ed	continuous	voiced
/f/	fan	continuous	unvoiced
/g/	go	stop	voiced
/k/	cat	stop	unvoiced
/i/	it	continuous	voiced
/z/	zoo	continuous	voiced
/s/	sell	continuous	unvoiced
/o/	octopus	continuous	voiced
/m/	mat	continuous	voiced
/n/	net	continuous	voiced
/r/ not /er/	run	continuous	voiced
/u/	up	continuous	voiced
/l/	log	continuous	voiced
/y/	yes	continuous	voiced
/w/	wet	continuous	voiced
/h/	hat	stop	unvoiced
/qw/	quit	stop	unvoiced
/j/	jump	stop	voiced
/ks/	fox	continuous	unvoiced

Spanish

Some teachers may choose to also complete phonological awareness activities using Spanish words. There are a few key considerations to note when planning for these activities. First, compound words are much less common in Spanish than in English, so it can be more challenging to find words to use in activities. There are certainly some to try such as *lavaplatos* (dishwasher), *cortacésped* (lawnmower), *saltamontes* (grasshopper), and *girasol* (sunflower). Second, in general, Spanish has fewer monosyllabic words than English. This means that the types of words selected for use in phonological awareness activities will typically have more syllables and more phonemes than the words one would usually select in English.

Additional Resources

This section includes additional evidence-based instructional resources and articles to enhance phonological awareness instruction and extend knowledge about effective early childhood instruction. The resources and articles in this section were free and readily available when this document was finalized.

Phonological Awareness Instructional Resources

- *Voluntary Prekindergarten Learning Center Activities* developed by a team of teachers and researchers at the Florida Center for Reading Research. Under the title Phonological Awareness, you will find activities that address rhyme, syllables, compound words, and onset and rime. <https://fcrr.org/student-center-activities/pre-kindergarten>
- *Reading Rockets* ([readingrockets.org](https://www.readingrockets.org)) creates and disseminates free, evidence-based resources and information about reading.
 - **Letters vs. Phonemes** - Reading researcher Dr. Louisa Moats explains to a kindergarten teacher why it is critical to differentiate between the letters and sounds within a word when teaching children to read and write. <https://youtu.be/J608Dbhs6J8>
 - **The Importance of Visual Input** - Reading researcher Dr. Louisa Moats demonstrates to a kindergarten teacher how modeling the making of sounds helps children firmly establish letter sounds. https://youtu.be/k-28Mdl0I_M
 - **Development of Phonological Skills** - Moats, L., & Tolman, C. (2009). *The development of phonological skills*. This resource describes the milestones for acquiring phonological skills. <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/development-phonological-skills>
 - **Six Syllable Types** - Moats, L., & Tolman, C. (2009). *Six syllable types*. This resource describes the six types of syllables, why it is important to teach syllables, and the sequence students learn about spoken and written syllables. <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/six-syllable-types>
 - **Importance of Phonological Awareness for Later Reading and Spelling** - Moats, L., & Tolman, C. (2009). Why phonological awareness is important for reading and spelling. This resource helps describe the link between phonological awareness and later reading success. <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/why-phonological-awareness-important-reading-and-spelling>
 - **Targeting Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Problems** - Learn some of the ways phonological and phonemic awareness problems articulate from a child, parent, and teacher perspective. <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/whyphonological-awareness-important-reading-and-spelling>
- *Colorin Colorado!* ([colorincolorado.org](https://www.colorincolorado.org)) creates and disseminates free, research-based information and activities about supporting English learner students.
 - **Supporting English Learner Students** - Describes early literacy instruction in dual language preschools (Spanish/English). <https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/early-literacy-instruction-dual-language-preschools-spanishenglish>

Related Articles

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: Concepts of Print

Overview

In this chapter, we will explore the foundational elements of Concepts about Print, an important aspect of early literacy development that helps young children understand how printed language works. Concepts about Print refer to the basic principles governing how print is organized and used, including understanding that print carries meaning, knowing the directionality of text (left to right, top to bottom), recognizing the difference between letters and words, and understanding the function of punctuation and spaces.

Identifying the Components of Concepts about Print

We will begin by identifying the key components that make up Concepts about Print. These components include:

- **Print Awareness:** Recognizing that print has meaning and can be used to communicate information.
- **Directionality of Text:** Understanding that we read from left to right and top to bottom.
- **Concept of a Word:** Knowing that words are made up of letters and are separated by spaces in a sentence.
- **Punctuation Awareness:** Recognizing the role of punctuation marks in guiding how we read sentences.
- **Book Handling Skills:** Understanding how to hold a book, turn pages, and recognize the parts of a book such as the cover, title, and author.

Strategies for Developing Concepts about Print

Next, we will delve into a variety of strategies that educators can use to help young children develop these essential print concepts. These strategies include:

- **Interactive Read-Alouds:** Engaging children in shared reading experiences where the teacher points out and discusses the features of print.
- **Print-Rich Environments:** Creating classroom spaces where children are surrounded by printed words, labels, and signs that encourage print exploration.
- **Hands-On Activities:** Using tools like letter tiles, word cards, and sentence strips to help children interact with and manipulate print.

Involving Families in Learning Concepts about Print

Families play a vital role in reinforcing Concepts about Print at home. This chapter will describe methods to include families in their child's literacy development by:

- **Sharing Books and Print Materials:** Encouraging families to read with their children and point out features of print in books and the environment.
- **Providing Print-Focused Activities:** Offering families simple activities, like labeling household items or creating a family book, that emphasize print concepts.
- **Communication and Support:** Providing resources and guidance to families on how to support their child's understanding of print through everyday interactions.

Creating Materials to Support Learning Concepts about Print

Lastly, we will guide you in creating materials that support emergent readers and writers as they learn Concepts about Print. These materials might include:

- **Print-Referenced Games and Activities:** Creating games that focus on letter recognition, word boundaries, and punctuation.
- **Custom Books and Labels:** Designing books and labels that highlight print concepts and encourage children to explore and interact with text.

- **Interactive Storyboards:** Developing storyboards or flannel boards that allow children to arrange and rearrange words and sentences, reinforcing their understanding of print structure.

Purpose and Goals

This chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of concepts about print. You will learn about practical strategies and materials to support young children in developing this important early literacy skill. When children have a strong understanding of print concepts, they will be better prepared to engage with written language, providing the foundation for successful reading and writing experiences.



Objectives

- identify the components and progression of **Concepts about Print**.
- describe strategies to utilize a variety of approaches to help young children develop **Concepts about Print**.
- describe methods to include families in their child's language and literacy development.
- create materials to support emergent readers and writers (i.e., materials for concepts about print)

[6.1: Concepts of Print](#)

[6.2: Concepts of Print Continuum](#)

[6.3: Explicit Print Knowledge Instruction](#)

[6.4: Print Referencing](#)

[6.5: English Learner Students and Students with Disabilities](#)

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6.1: Concepts of Print

Concepts of Print are fundamental to the Emergent Literacy Continuum of Skills. They provide the building blocks for understanding how written language operates, which is crucial for the development of both reading and writing abilities. By integrating Concepts of Print early and reinforcing them throughout the literacy journey, educators can help children develop the skills they need for successful reading, writing, and overall literacy. These concepts form a bridge between early language experiences and more advanced literacy skills, making them an essential part of the continuum.

In Chapter 5 we learned phonological awareness is a constrained skill, meaning once you learn the skill, you do not need to relearn it. Another category of constrained skills are **concepts of print**, or print concepts. **Concepts of print** refers to an awareness that print has an orientation (how to hold the book to see the text and pictures) and directionality (text moves from left to right). **Concepts of print** also include an awareness of the distinction between pictures or photographs, sentences, words, and letters. As young children are developing an awareness about print they begin turning a book over until it is “right side up” and can point to the pictures and words. Eventually, children understand that words are made up of individual letters grouped together and then groups of words form sentences. They might not be able to read all the words independently, but they can track the words left to right with a proficient reader in familiar text.

Print Knowledge Terms

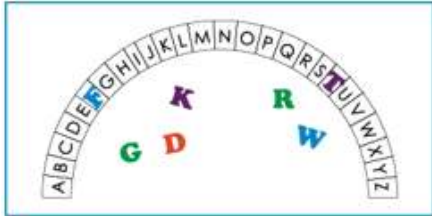
Key Terms	Definition
concepts of print	The basic understandings of how print works. It includes knowing the difference between letters and other symbols, knowing we read from left to right, and knowing that the words on the page—not the pictures—convey the meaning.
emergent literacy	The skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing.
letter name knowledge	Letter name knowledge is the ability to recognize and name letters. In this guide, letter names are shown as A, D, M, for example.
letter sound knowledge	Letter sound knowledge is matching a speech sound to its letter(s). Typically, letter sounds are written with forward slashes. For example, the letter M says /m/.
print knowledge	Knowing letter names, letter sounds, and concepts of print. Print knowledge does not include sounding out printed words, whereas phonics does.
print referencing	A strategy teachers use, typically during read-alouds, to increase a child’s print knowledge by emphasizing the forms, functions, and features of print. It involves focusing children’s visual attention on print by explicitly commenting on, asking questions about, pointing to, and tracking text that is being read aloud.

What is Print Knowledge?

The goal of **emergent literacy** instruction in preschool is not to teach children to read **connected text**—words that are linked, as in sentences—or even whole words. The goal is to teach the building blocks that will, in later grades, provide children the foundation needed to become proficient readers. One of those essential building blocks is **print knowledge**, which includes **letter names**, **letter sounds**, and **concepts of print**. It is important to understand each of these skills in order to effectively teach them when it is developmentally appropriate

M Letter Names

Letter-name knowledge is the ability to recognize and produce letter names. Letter-name *recognition* is a bit easier than letter-name *production*. Letter-name recognition is demonstrated when a child is asked a letter name, and he or she points to, or recognizes, the letter. For example, a child who is shown several letters and asked “Which letter is the letter M?” points to the letter M. Letter-name production is demonstrated when a child names letters that he or she is shown. For example, a child who is asked, “What is this letter name?” sees the letter S and says S. Naming letters and matching them to a letter arc can be a fun way for children to practice recognizing and producing letter names.



/m/ Letter Sounds

Knowledge of letter sounds is the ability to look at a letter and tell you the sound it represents. For example, when you point to the letter M and ask what sound the letter makes, a child with knowledge of letter sounds will say, “/m/.” Children are often motivated to learn letter names when they begin with identifying the letters in their names. After being explicitly taught a few letter names and letter sounds, children can work in pairs to practice using plastic letters or letter cards. For example, one child in the pair selects a letter (that has been previously taught) and says the letter name, S, and then the other child says the letter sound, /s/. Children take turns selecting the letter and saying the letter name and the letter sound.

Concepts of Print

Concepts of print are the basic understandings of how print works. When children know concepts of print, they understand such things as:

- The difference between letters and other symbols.
- That in English, we read from left to right.
- That the words on the page—not the pictures—convey the meaning.



Read-aloud activities with engaging text help build children’s knowledge of concepts of print. For example, during a read-aloud, you can point out the difference between a letter and a word. You can demonstrate, by pointing, explaining, or both, where to begin reading, which direction to read, and where to go at the end of a line. You can also ask a question (that the picture does not answer) and read the words that provide the answer to the question. This will show children that words convey the meaning.

Why Is Print Knowledge Important?

Print Knowledge Is a Precursor to Skilled Reading

A child must have print knowledge to be a skilled reader (Hammill, 2004; Lonigan & Shanahan, 2008; Stahl & Murray, 1994; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). Many children who enter preschool can sing the alphabet song, which may help them learn letter names and letter sounds. But not all children who have learned the alphabet song will actually know the names or sounds of specific letters. At-risk children—children from backgrounds of poverty, children with disabilities, and children with genetic risk for reading disability—may struggle with learning print knowledge (Boudreau & Hedberg, 1999; Bowey, 1994; Chaney, 1994;

Fernandez-Fein & Baker, 1997; Justice, Bowles, & Skibbe, 2006; Justice & Ezell, 2001; Lonigan, Burgess, Anthony, & Barker 1998; Pennington & Lefy, 2001).

Although all children in preschool benefit from instruction in print knowledge, without early intervention, many children who lag behind at the beginning of schooling will be significantly behind their peers in later reading outcomes (Catts, Fey, Zhang, & Tomblin, 2001; Pennington & Lefy, 2001). Measures of preschool and kindergarten children's print knowledge are associated with achievement in **decoding**, spelling, and **reading comprehension** outcome measures in kindergarten or later (Hammill, 2004; Lonigan et al., 2008; Lonigan & Shanahan, 2008).

Understanding concepts of print can help young children in later reading instruction. For example, when teachers use the term letter or word during a lesson, children who understand concepts of print better understand the lesson (Mason & Kerr, 1992). In kindergarten, children who understand concepts of print will also know, for example, where on the page to begin reading, which direction to read, and where to go at the end of a line or a page to continue reading.

Print Knowledge Helps Children Understand the Alphabetic Principle

Children's reading development depends on learning the alphabetic principle—the understanding that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds. Children learn these relationships and apply them during the process of reading and writing words (Ehri, 2002; Phillips & Torgesen, 2006; Share, 1995). While children are learning letter names and sounds, their phonological awareness (the understanding that speech can be broken down into parts and the ability to manipulate those parts) also continues to develop.



Print knowledge and phonological awareness intertwine to allow children to learn the alphabetic principle. Children receive more-formal literacy instruction in kindergarten that builds on and strengthens their print knowledge, phonological awareness, and understanding of the alphabetic principle.

Print Knowledge Is Included In State Standards

Each state addresses print knowledge in its early learning standards. Locate and review your state standards to see how your state has included print knowledge as a key learning goal for children. If you work with 3- and 4-year-old children, become familiar with your state's learning standards for both age-ranges. In fact, since children's learning and development are not uniform, it is helpful for all teachers to be familiar with learning progressions so they can build upon the individual and developmental characteristics of each child. When reviewing your state's standards for 3- and 4-year olds, you may find that they are located within different documents. For example many states include 3-year-old standards within early learning guidelines for children birth through three. In addition, it can be helpful to familiarize yourself with the kindergarten standards related to language and literacy in your state. These are likely in separate documents as well.

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6.2: Concepts of Print Continuum

Continuum of Emergent Reading Development: Concepts of Print

The chart below shows a general developmental progression of when you can expect to see these concepts of print related behaviors or skills appear. See the specific early learning standards for your state. In Wisconsin see: <https://www.collaboratingpartners.co...5thedition.pdf>

Developmental Progression	CLLD 2.1. Paying attention to print as meaningful
Early Infancy 0-8 months	Explores a book by touching it, patting it, or putting it in mouth (CLLD2.1a)
Later Infancy 6-14 months	Holds books, turns pages, looks at the pictures and uses sounds, signs, or words to identify actions or objects in a book or other written material (CLLD2.1b)
Early Toddler 12-24 Months	- Recognizes and engages with print and pictures, or braille in their environment (e.g., points to words and images; touches with fingers) (CLLD2.1c) - Demonstrates interest in written forms of language, such as print in books or signs on building (CLLD2.1d) - Distinguishes print from pictures (CLLD2.1e)
Later Toddler 22-36 Months	- Attributes meaning to some symbols, such as a familiar logo or design (CLLD2.3f) - Identifies common words in the environment (e.g., name, exit, stop) (CLLD2.1g) - Points to and names some letters or characters in their names when seen in other words (CLLD2.1g)
Early Preschool 34-48 Months	- Begins to select books for reading enjoyment and reading related activities including pretending to read to self or others (CLLD2.1i) - Demonstrates an understanding of the conventions of print (e.g., directionality of print and texts) (CLLD2.1j) - Understands that the print communicates the message in stories or other texts (CLLD2.1k)
Later Preschool 44-60 Months	- Distinguishes among a variety of texts and their purposes (e.g., books, shopping lists, etc.) (CLLD2.3l) - Begins to track individual words in text by pointing or touching (CLLD2.1m)

Table 6.2.1 “A Continuum of Emergent Reading Development: Concepts of Print”. Content is from Virginia’s Early Learning & Development Standards (ELDS): Birth-Five Learning Guidelines. It is used with permission of the creators and is not an open education resource covered by a Creative Commons License.

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6.3: Explicit Print Knowledge Instruction

Teaching Print Knowledge

What Do I Teach?

Over the course of a school year, preschool teachers should plan to teach all 26 letter names and many letter sounds. Additionally, children should be taught:

- Print concepts—specifically, the difference between a letter and a word (and other symbols).
- That in English we read text from left to right.
- That the words (not the pictures) convey the meaning of what we read.



All children, including those who come to preschool knowing some letters and those who do not know any letters, benefit from effective instruction. It is important to use the features of effective instruction when teaching print knowledge. Those features include using systematic instruction, following a scope and sequence, teaching explicitly, using scaffolding, and differentiating instruction.

Where Do I Teach?



Scope and Sequence

Research has not yet demonstrated one “right” scope and sequence to teach letter names and letter sounds. But there is some evidence to guide your instructional decisions. For example, it is effective to focus on just a few letters per week, including cumulative review, or practice that builds on skills you have already taught (Lonigan, Purpura, Wilson, Walker, & Clancy-Menchetti, 2013; Phillips & Piasta, 2013).

Children learn best when they have frequent exposure to letters and plenty of repetition (Justice et al., 2006; McBride-Chang, 1999; Treiman, 2006). Letter names and letter sounds should be introduced, practiced, and revisited multiple times as needed during the school year. For example, when the letter sound for T is explicitly taught one day, that letter sound is referenced multiple times across the school day and reviewed in future lessons. It does not drop out of the scope of instruction. This allows time for children to master their learning goals (Byrne, Fielding-Barnsley, & Ashley, 2000), which vary depending on the child and his or her prior learning opportunities (Hatcher, Hulme, & Snowling, 2004; Hindson et al., 2005; Xue & Meisels, 2004).

When planning your sequence for teaching letter names and letter sounds, it is beneficial and motivating to begin with the letters in children’s names (Gibson & Levin, 1975; Treiman, Cassar, & Zukowski, 1994). During high-quality letter-name and letter-sound instruction, it can be helpful to make connections from specific letters to children’s personal experiences. For example, when teaching M, mention to a child that his cat’s name, Mittens, begins with M.



Research also shows that knowing certain letters’ names can help children learn their sounds (Treiman et al., 1994). This is because the names of many letters contain the sound that the letter typically represents. For example, when you say B (/b/ /ee/), the first sound that you say is the sound /b/ which is also the letter sound for B. Other examples like this include P and K—and there are several more. Knowledge of these letter names can help children learn their letter sounds. Conversely, when you say the letter “H”, the letter-sound for H, /h/, does not contain any sound that is said when the letter is named. This makes it harder for some children to learn the sounds of letters like H and W.



How Do I Teach?

Print knowledge is essential for learning to read and write, so it is critical that teachers use effective instructional practices for teaching letter names, letter sounds, and concepts of print. Teachers who practice **intentional**, effective instruction include explicit, pre-planned lessons and follow up with implicit instruction for children to practice skills, as well as incidental instruction when they seize teachable moments. Together these learning opportunities can accelerate development of print knowledge (Justice & Ezell, 2002). The remainder of this session focuses on the first of two evidence-based instructional practices for teaching print knowledge: small-group explicit instruction.

Using Small-Group Explicit Instruction

Small-group explicit instruction is an effective instructional practice for teaching children letter names and letter sounds. Explicit instruction typically includes the I Do, We Do, You Do instructional routine when introducing any new skill or concept. Cumulative review is an important part of small-group instruction because children need to have opportunities to practice with the same letters many times. Children also need to be able to go back to earlier taught letters and keep practicing so that they can maintain mastery and build fluency.

The next section provides a breakdown of the components of a sample small-group explicit lesson for introducing the letter M and reviewing previously taught letter names.

✓ Breakdown of a Sample Lesson with Small-Group Explicit Instruction

Objective: Learn the letter name M and review previously learned letters.

Materials: Puppet and letter cards or magnetic letters, including multiple M, m, and various other previously taught letters.

	1. Explain and model - The teacher uses a puppet named Max and letter cards or magnetic letters to explain and model the objective and why the skill or concept is important to learn. - She shows or writes the uppercase and lowercase letter M, m and points to each letter as she names them. - She restates the name of the letter multiple times and encourages the children to name the letters with her. - She explains that Max likes to eat letters and today, Max wants to eat as many uppercase and lowercase letter M's as possible. - She feeds Max an uppercase M and lowercase m as she names each letter. Max refuses to eat letters that are not Mm.
	2. Provide guided practice with scaffolding - The teacher asks the children to practice naming the letter as she points to it. This is repeated at least three times for both the uppercase and lowercase forms. - She holds up an M, asks the children to say, "M," and feeds the letter to Max. She also holds up previously taught letters that are not M for the children to practice letter discrimination (differentiating one letter from another). - When the children name the letter, she provides feedback like, "Yes, this is an uppercase T" and tries to feed it to Max. If the letter is not M, Max "spits it out" and says, "I'm only eating uppercase and lowercase M's today, not uppercase T's." If the children make an error, she provides scaffolding, "This is an uppercase A. Say A." The children repeat the letter name and she tries to feed it to Max who spits it out and says, "Yuck, that is an A not an M!" This provides the children another opportunity to hear letter names and match them to letters.
	3. Allow for independent practice and cumulative review The teacher provides each child within the small group opportunities to identify the letter M and feed it to Max. She scaffolds each child's response and encourages the other children in the group to continue to watch and listen when it isn't their turn to see whether Max is eating M's or not.

It is important to include all the components listed above in your explicit instruction. High-quality, explicit instruction ensures that:

- Children are given the appropriate amount of responsibility in their learning. The responsibility gradually shifts from the teacher to the child.
- Each child is given the appropriate amount of support needed to succeed.
- The teacher and child are clear on the lesson's objective.

Providing Opportunities for Practice

After small-group explicit instruction, it is important to provide ongoing opportunities for children to practice identifying the newly learned skill or concept and to reinforce skills and concepts that have previously been explicitly taught. These reinforcement activities can be completed as small-group explicit instruction, whole-group instruction, at learning centers, or independently. In the sample small-group explicit instruction above, children can engage in a variety of activities to reinforce both the new letter name taught, M, as well as other letter names that have been previously been explicitly taught. For example, ask children to:

- Search through magnetic letters to identify target letters at a learning center
- Search for and name target letters in a text previously read aloud to them.
- Find and name target letters in the classroom.

The next section shows instruction of print knowledge in action in a sample classroom. It discusses how the teacher, Ms. Scott, structured her day to support small-group literacy instruction. As you read, think about the components of explicit instruction and how Ms. Scott's lesson leads to opportunities for implicit instruction later.

✓ Instruction of Print Knowledge in Action: Ms. Scott's Classroom

Daily Literacy Routines

Ms. Scott implements small-group explicit instruction as part of her literacy instruction in her preschool class. Each day, she works with small groups of 3–4 children for about 10–15 minutes. Each homogenous (similar ability) group is flexible, so children move in and out of different groups as needed based on assessment and teacher observation. Ms. Scott sits at the teacher table facing the rest of the class, so she can monitor as needed. While she teaches a small group at the teacher table, the rest of the class engages in other classroom activities, such as center time or in independent literacy centers practicing skills and concepts that she has explicitly taught. Children might also engage in group activities led by an assistant teacher, such as shared reading, math and science activities, or art projects.

Literacy Curriculum

Ms. Scott uses a preschool literacy curriculum that includes a detailed scope and sequence for teaching letter names. The curriculum includes letter cards with the uppercase and lowercase letter and a commonly known picture. If your curriculum does not provide a clear scope and sequence for how and when all letter names and many letter sounds will be taught, you will need to develop your own plan.

At the Teacher Table

Ms. Scott explicitly teaches a print knowledge lesson with a small group of four children. These children have previously learned the letter names for uppercase and lowercase H and A. Ms. Scott knows, based on prior assessment and her observations, that these children do not know the letter name D.



Explicit Instruction



Explain and Model

First, Ms. Scott explicitly explains and models the skill they are learning, naming the letter Dd and the activity: Recognizing D and H in print. She shows the letter card for D, which has the uppercase and lowercase D on it. She holds up the letter card and says, “Today, we are going to learn a new letter name. This letter’s name is D.” She points to the uppercase and lowercase letters saying, “This is uppercase D, and this is lowercase d. Notice the uppercase D has a straight line down and then a curve from top to bottom. Let’s write an uppercase D in the air. Now, look at the lowercase d. How many straight lines? How many circles? Let’s draw the lowercase d in the air. Begin with a straight line and then go to the middle of the straight line and draw the circle. Each time we see this letter, we will say D. Say D with me.” (Children respond.) Ms. Scott continues, “So, remember when we see this letter, we will say D.”



Provide Guided Practice with Scaffolding

Next, Ms. Scott provides guided practice and scaffolds instruction as needed. She says, “Now I’d like you to practice. When I point to a letter, say the letter name.” Ms. Scott alternates pointing to the uppercase and lowercase D as the children chorally say, “D.” When she hears a child say, “L,” Ms. Scott says, “This letter’s name is D; say it with me. (They say the letter together.) Now what is this letter’s name? (Children respond, “D.”) Great job of saying D!” Then, she asks the group to respond as she points to the uppercase and lowercase D one more time.

Then, Ms. Scott provides discrimination practice by pointing to different letter cards as the children name them. The letters are those that have been taught explicitly before (Dd, Hh, Aa). She says, “Now, when I hold up a letter card, you tell me the letter name.” She holds up one letter card at a time, and the children chorally respond. When the children are correct, Ms. Scott moves quickly to the next letter card. If an error is made, Ms. Scott provides scaffolding by saying, “This is the letter D. Say it with me. What letter?” This provides the children another opportunity to practice.



Allow for Independent Practice and Cumulative Review

Next, Ms. Scott gives a copy of the nursery rhyme, Humpty Dumpty, to each child for independent practice and cumulative review. She holds up the nursery rhyme and points to the words as she reads it out loud. Ms. Scott discusses the poem’s meaning and laughs about what might happen if an egg really sat on a wall. She says that there are many upper and lowercase letters in the nursery rhyme and tells the children that their job is to use a highlighter to highlight each uppercase and lowercase D and H, which they already learned. She tells the children to say the letter’s name each time they highlight it. She displays the D and H letter cards as a support for their search. Children select their favorite color highlighter. As the children work independently, Ms. Scott monitors and provides scaffolding for any errors or questions: “Nina, you have found two uppercase H’s—great job—and there are four in this nursery rhyme. Can you find two more?” She also provides specific positive feedback: “Nathan, you really know your upper and lowercase D’s! I see that you found them all already! Now you can find the H’s!” Ms. Scott helps each child find any letters that may have been missed.



Implicit Instruction

Later that day and throughout the next couple of weeks, Ms. Scott provides opportunities for children to practice identifying D and H. During snack time, she asks them to look for specific letters on food wrappers. She lines them up for recess by pairs of children who search for and tell each other where they see the letters D and H in the classroom. She also provides a literacy center where partners practice naming D and H and tracing those letters in sand.

Videos of Print Knowledge Instruction in Preschool Classrooms

You may wish to watch these videos to see examples of print knowledge lessons in a preschool classroom.

Title	Link	Duration
Video 1: Letter Knowledge and Decoding Connection	https://youtu.be/D6HoPAqepws	2:29
Video 2: Small-Group Explicit Instruction Using Sound Bags (M and S)	https://youtu.be/CIOfy8WBaIg	6:00
Video 3: Implicit Print Knowledge Instruction in Multiple Contexts	https://youtu.be/5os00QtRgkg	7:00
Video 4: Small-Group Explicit Instruction Using Letter Sound Spinners	https://youtu.be/CNUmqyZBSu8	5:10
Video 5: Whole-Group Instruction Using Letter Sound Spinners	https://youtu.be/DqNuragK3nw	6:40
Video 6: Scaffolding During Small-Group Explicit Instruction	https://youtu.be/muPUFun3tes	7:23
Video 7: Print Referencing During Read-Alouds	https://youtu.be/6-375dF6rHw	5:56
Video 8: Small-Group Explicit Instruction for the Letter M	https://youtu.be/rWAltYgEKc0	4:13

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6.4: Print Referencing

Print Referencing During Read-Alouds

What is Print Referencing?

Conducting read-alouds with **print referencing** is an effective way to teach print knowledge (Justice & Ezell, 2001, 2002). Print referencing during read-alouds is focusing children's visual attention on print by explicitly commenting on, asking questions about, pointing to, and tracking text that is being read aloud in order to teach print knowledge. For example, you can explicitly teach the difference between a letter and a word by pointing to both in the text and explaining the difference.



Why is Printing Referencing Important?

Print referencing increases visual attention and print knowledge. When adults read to children while using explicit verbal and nonverbal print referencing, the children's visual attention is significantly increased (Justice et al., 2008). Even more important is that using print referencing is an effective way to increase children's print knowledge, including alphabet knowledge and concepts of print (Mashburn, Justice, McGinty, & Slocum, 2016).

Print referencing also increases attention to print. Typically, when adults read a story, children do not focus on the print on the page (Ezell & Justice, 2000; Hammett, van Kleeck, & Huberty, 2003; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990; Shapiro, Anderson, & Anderson, 1997). Instead, they usually focus on the pictures or the concepts of the book (Evans & Saint-Aubin, 2005; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002). Additionally, when being read to, children ages 3–5 typically do not ask questions about the print (Yaden, Smolkin, & Conlon, 1989), make comments about the print (Ezell & Justice, 2000), or look at the print (Evans & Saint-Aubin, 2005; Justice & Lankford, 2002; Justice, Skibbe, Canning, & Lankford, 2005). In fact, eye-gaze research shows that preschool children typically look at print less than 5% of the time while being read to (Justice et al., 2005). Without explicit references to print, just reading aloud to a child is not the most effective way to develop print knowledge. Incorporating print referencing into read-alouds can increase children's attention to print and thus their print knowledge.

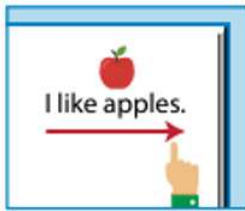
How Do I Use Print Referencing During Read-Alouds?

Print referencing during read-alouds is a way of reading and teaching that adults do not typically use when reading to children, but it can be easily learned. Using print referencing during read-alouds includes explicit verbal print referencing and explicit nonverbal print referencing (Justice et al., 2008).



Explicit verbal print referencing includes questions and comments about print. For example, a teacher asking, “Can you find the letter S on this page?” Another example is the teacher pointing to the word pretend and stating, “This word is pretend.”

Explicit nonverbal print referencing includes reading aloud while tracking, or running your finger under the words, as you say them.



It is important to carefully select books to use for print referencing read-alouds. Books with large and eye-catching letters, including alphabet books and other books with oversized text, can be especially helpful. Look for books with thought and speech bubbles, lists, and enlarged punctuation marks to use during read-alouds. In addition, the front covers and title pages of children's books often have enlarged print that children can readily see. Big books can also be helpful in implementing print referencing because they are large and eye catching.

Print Knowledge: Key Terms and Definitions for Teachers

Print Knowledge

Knowing letter names, letter sounds, and concepts of print.

Letter Names

M S O

Letter Sounds

/m/ /s/ /ö/

Concepts of Print



Letter-Name Knowledge

Ability to recognize and say the names of letters.

Recognition

Child recognizes (sees) the letter.

Teacher: Which letter is M?

S T M

Child points to M.



Production

Child produces (says) the letter.

Teacher: Tell me these letter names.

S T M

Child points to these letters and says, "S, T, M."



Letter-Sound Knowledge

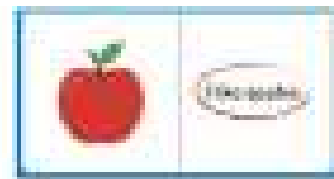
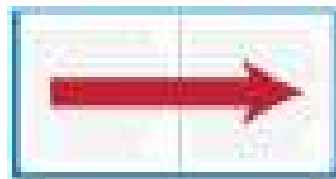
Knowing the spoken sound a letter represents.



Concepts of Print

Understanding how print works (e.g., knowing the difference between letters and other symbols or pictures, knowing to read left to right, understanding that the words convey meaning).

A B C ? !



Print Referencing

A teaching strategy to increase children's print knowledge that includes focusing attention on print and print features (e.g., commenting on features of print, pointing to and tracking text as it's read aloud).

Verbal print referencing

questions and comments about print

Nonverbal print referencing



tracking

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6.5: English Learner Students and Students with Disabilities

This section describes general principles and strategies for teaching print knowledge to English learner students and students with disabilities. These children may need more time to practice with teacher feedback, more explicit instruction, or another modified strategy. Preschool teachers who possess the knowledge and strategies to implement effective teaching techniques for English learner students and students with disabilities can teach all children print knowledge and other important concepts and skills needed to build a strong foundation for literacy.

Teaching English Learner Students

Research has identified several instructional practices that promote language and literacy among English learner students (August & Shanahan, 2006; Gersten et al., 2007; Slavin & Cheung, 2005). High-quality early childhood practices are just as important for English learner students as for other children. But these practices do not always support the same level of academic achievement for English learner students. Because of this, instructional enhancements can be helpful to support the language and literacy development of English learner students.



Use Visual Aids and Gestures

Using visual aids and gestures as you teach print knowledge can support English learner students' understanding of letter names, letter sounds, and print concepts (Dickinson & Tabors, 2002). Visual aids can include letter cards when teaching in a small group and posters of the alphabet when teaching the whole class. Other examples of visual aids are name puzzles, materials for letter tracing, and letter and word tiles. Visual aids such as magnetic letters placed at learning centers can offer support to English learner students as they engage in center activities. Gestures include pointing to the letter card or letter on a poster as you teach it as well as pointing to, or referencing, the letter, word, sentence, or punctuation you are teaching during a read-aloud. These types of visual aids and gesture supports are beneficial for all children.

Transfer Skills Across Languages

Many literacy skills can **transfer** across languages. Therefore, another consideration for English learner students as they learn about print knowledge is transfer, or helping them make a connection between what they know in their first language and what they need to know in English. In other words, similarities between an English learner student's first language and English can be used as a foundation for instruction (Helman, 2004). Children have the most difficulty with sounds that do not occur in their first language, so they may have difficulty producing those sounds (Bear, Templeton, Helman, & Baren, 2003; Helman, 2004). If a child's first language has some of the same sounds as English, you might begin instruction using those sounds. The familiarity will help children learn those sounds more efficiently.



Since Spanish and English are both alphabetic languages, the process of learning to read is essentially the same in both languages. That is, children develop the foundational reading skills of print knowledge and phonological awareness and then learn to apply those skills as they learn how to decode text. Some letters in Spanish, such as b, c, d, f, l, m, and n, represent sounds that are very similar to those in English, so they may easily transfer to English reading for many children. If these letters transfer and are learned more efficiently, then more time can be spent on letters that may be more difficult to learn. For example, vowels (a, e, i, o, u) look the same in Spanish and English but have different names and sounds (Perego & Boyle, 2000).

Children's families may be from all over the world. Keep in mind that children who speak a first language that is non-alphabetic, such as Chinese, will also need to learn the concept of letters and an alphabet while learning the names and sounds of individual letters. These children may need extra support when learning print knowledge.

Increase Exposure to Print

Increased exposure to print is another way in which to support English learner students during instruction of print knowledge. That is, in addition to engaging these children in the explicit instruction of print knowledge provided to all children, intentionally find ways to give English learner students, and any children who need extra support, additional opportunities to interact with you around print.

Intentional instruction allows you to create independent and teacher-directed opportunities for children to enhance their print knowledge. For example, make print referencing or a quick prompt-and-response exchange involving letter recognition a regular part of transitions during the day. A prompt-and-response exchange occurs when you ask a question and the child responds.



For example, as you transition from center time to snack time, point to a letter on the wall and ask, "What letter is this?" Find a few moments each week to work one-on-one with some children, by helping them identify the letters in their own names and then eventually other letters and sounds.

The materials provided for children's independent exploration during center time can also increase children's exposure to print. Using magnetic letters, letter puzzles, letter cards, and child-led activities at a print and writing center can facilitate learning of letter names and letter sounds, two of the foundations of print knowledge. Encourage children who need extra support for print knowledge to spend time in this center, and remember to spend time there with them yourself!

Teaching Students With Disabilities

This section discusses general principles and strategies for teaching print knowledge to students with disabilities. The instructional strategies for supporting English learner students can also be used to support children with disabilities or developmental delays. Teachers working with students who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) should consult the plan and work in concert with a specialist (preschool special education teacher or speech-language pathologist). If a teacher suspects a child should be screened for a possible disability or delay, they should consult an administrator.



Provide Individualized Instruction

Students with disabilities and those not making expected progress in print knowledge may need even more intensive instruction on a daily basis (Gersten et al., 2007). Individualized instruction—that is, one-on-one explicit instruction—can be an effective practice for enhancing outcomes for students with disabilities (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012; Kirk, Kirk, & Minskof, 1985). One-on-one instruction is an effective way to maximize the intensity of instruction because it provides children more opportunities to practice with immediate, individualized feedback from the teacher (Gillon, 2000; McMaster, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2005; O'Connor, Jenkins, & Slocum, 1995). Differentiated instruction in small groups is effective for many children but not sufficient for others (Slavin & Madden, 1989). Partnering students with disabilities and peer tutors and using apps that offer immediate feedback can complement individualized instruction.

Use Mnemonic Clues



Mnemonic clues are a teaching technique that can help students with disabilities learn letter sounds. A mnemonic is something intended to assist in memory. Using mnemonic clues when introducing new letter sounds helps children link the abstract sound to something concrete (Allor, Mathes, Champlin, & Cheatham, 2009). For example, when introducing the letter sound /s/, which is abstract to children, you can associate it with the picture of a sun, which is concrete. You could then use a letter card that illustrates an uppercase and lowercase S and a picture of a sun. Pointing to the S, say something like, “This letter is S. Its sound is /s/. Here is a picture of a sun to remind us the letter sound for S is /s/. Ssssun. Do you hear the /s/ at the beginning of the word sun? Say /s/.”

Incorporate Manipulatives

Incorporating manipulatives is another strategy that can help students with disabilities learn letter names, letter sounds, and concepts of print. Manipulatives are physical objects that allow children to learn skills and concepts in a developmentally appropriate and hands-on way. Manipulatives also provide teachers materials with which to explain and model skills and concepts (Lonigan, Farver, Phillips, & Clancy-Menchetti, 2011). For these reasons manipulatives are also effective for instruction of print knowledge for all children.

Examples of manipulatives for teaching print knowledge include magnetic letters, picture cards, pocket charts, dry erase markers, and white boards (Lonigan et al., 2013). Because children often love to play with objects, the use of manipulatives may also increase motivation and engagement.



Videos of Phonological Awareness Instruction in Preschool Classrooms

You may wish to watch these videos to see phonological awareness instruction in action.

Title	Link	Duration
Video 1: The Literacy Tree: A Representation of Foundational Literacy Skills	https://youtu.be/dTzdfHqKh00	2:43
Video 2: Phonological Awareness Continuum	https://youtu.be/k0IDVed9dUU	4:56
Video 3: Small Groups in Action	https://youtu.be/YXaF5qjnSLQ	6:15
Video 4: Word Level Phonological Awareness Lesson	https://youtu.be/LSF1AZjTAqc	4:38
Video 5: Syllable Level Phonological Awareness Lesson	https://youtu.be/CmwMYcQmRGo	5:55
Video 6: Onset-Rime Level Phonological Awareness Lesson	https://youtu.be/FHxs4YiB0ZI	4:23
Video 7: Phoneme Level Phonological Awareness Lesson	https://youtu.be/GJQkPrhspBU	6:36
Video 8: Phonological Awareness Throughout the Day	https://youtu.be/5jicN0F12t0	8:06
Video 9: Phonological Awareness and Considerations for Intensive Instruction	https://youtu.be/YiZMBP9ap50	5:40

Additional Resources

This section includes additional, evidence-based instructional resources and articles to enhance print knowledge instruction and extend knowledge about effective early childhood instruction. The resources and articles in this section were free and readily available when this document was finalized.

Print Knowledge Instructional Resources

- **Voluntary Prekindergarten Learning Center Activities** developed by a team of teachers and researchers at the Florida Center for Reading Research: Phonological Awareness <https://fcrr.org/student-center-activities/pre-kindergarten>
 - **Letter Names / Letter Arc** - https://fcrr.org/sites/g/files/upcbnu2836/files/media/PDFs/student_center_activities/vpk_alphabet_knowledge/AK1_Letter_Arc_color.pdf
 - **Letter Names / Letter Sort** - https://fcrr.org/sites/g/files/upcbnu2836/files/media/PDFs/student_center_activities/vpk_alphabet_knowledge/AK4_Letter_Sort_color.pdf
 - **Letter Sounds / Sound Placemats** - https://fcrr.org/sites/g/files/upcbnu2836/files/media/PDFs/student_center_activities/vpk_alphabet_knowledge/AK11_Sound_Placemats_color.pdf
- **Reading Rockets** (readingrockets.org) creates and disseminates free, evidence-based resources and information about reading.
 - **Print Awareness: Guidelines for Instruction** - Guidelines for how to promote print awareness and a sample activity for assessing print awareness in young children. <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/print-awareness-guidelines-instruction>
 - **Consonants** - Reading Rockets Research Director, Dr. Joanne Meier, demonstrates the sounds that the consonant letters make. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Le9KrUfwmFk>
 - **Vowels** - Reading Rockets Research Director Dr. Joanne Meier demonstrates the long sound and short sound of each vowel. <https://youtu.be/YGMmZx1fQZQ>
- **Colorin Colorado!** (colorincolorado.org) creates and disseminates free, research-based information and activities about supporting English learner students.
 - **Supporting English Learner Students** - Describes some of the ways research has proven effective in preparing young English learner students for kindergarten. <https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/8-strategiespreschool-ells-language-and-literacy-development>

Related Articles

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: Alphabet Knowledge

Overview

In this chapter, we will explore the concept of alphabet knowledge, a cornerstone of early literacy development. Alphabet knowledge encompasses an understanding of the names, shapes, and sounds of letters and their role in forming words. This foundational skill is crucial for young children as they progress from recognizing letters to using them in reading and writing.

Components and Progression Alphabet Knowledge

Alphabet knowledge develops in a series of stages, each building upon the previous one. Understanding these stages helps teachers support children at their current level and guide them toward greater mastery. This chapter explores the skills involved in learning alphabet knowledge and how these skills progress.

Strategies to Support Alphabet Knowledge

This chapter will explore various strategies for developing alphabet knowledge that are engaging, interactive, and developmentally appropriate.

Involving Families in Supporting Alphabet Knowledge

Families play an important role in reinforcing and extending the alphabet knowledge that children acquire in educational settings. This chapter explores ways educators can support this involvement.

Purpose and Goals

Alphabet knowledge is a critical component of early literacy and is the foundation for reading and writing. By understanding the components and progression of alphabet knowledge, using effective strategies for teaching these skills, and involving families in the process, educators can ensure that children develop strong alphabet knowledge that will support their future literacy success. This chapter provides the information needed to guide young learners on their journey to mastering the alphabet.

Objectives

- identify the components and progression **alphabet knowledge**.
- describe strategies to utilize a variety of approaches to help young children develop **alphabet knowledge**.
- describe methods to include families in their child's language and literacy development.

[7.1: Alphabet Knowledge and the Alphabetic Principle](#)

[7.2: Alphabet Knowledge Continuum](#)

[7.3: Alphabet Knowledge Instruction](#)

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7.1: Alphabet Knowledge and the Alphabetic Principle

The next constrained skills are **alphabet** or **letter knowledge** and understanding the purpose of the **alphabetic code**, or the **alphabetic principle**. The two are related, but distinct concepts in early childhood literacy. Both are constrained skills because there is a they have a limited number of elements to learn and can be mastered in a short amount of time and once they are learned, you do not have to relearn them.

Alphabet knowledge is the knowledge of individual letter names, sounds, and shapes. This skill involves identifying the letters of the alphabet, their printed shapes, and the sounds they make. Children usually start developing this skill before they start school and can master it by the end of first grade. The components of Alphabet Knowledge are:

- **Letter Recognition:** Identifying and naming letters.
- **Letter Formation:** Writing letters correctly.
- **Visual Discrimination:** Differentiating between similar letters (e.g., "b" and "d").
- **Letter-Sound Correspondence:** Understanding the basic sounds associated with individual letters (**this is a bridge to the alphabetic principle**).

The Alphabetic Principle is a knowledge of the names of the alphabet letters and their associated sounds. We know that a child has mastered the alphabetic principle when they are able to name all of the letters automatically when they see them in print and then say the sound that the letter typically makes. Children don't typically develop an awareness of alphabet letters and the connection to their sounds until after 2 years of age. Children can't apply the alphabetic principle until they can recognize and name a number of letters. Once this knowledge is developed, it will enable children to develop a more complex understanding of the sounds that groups of letters typically make in words. The components of the alphabetic principle are:

- **Letter-Sound Correspondence:** Knowing that each letter or letter combination corresponds to a particular sound. For example, "b" represents the /b/ sound.
- **Decoding:** Applying letter-sound knowledge to read words. For instance, blending sounds together to read "cat" (/c/, /a/, /t/).
- **Encoding:** Using letter-sound relationships to spell words. For example, writing "dog" by matching sounds to letters.
- **Alphabetic Understanding:** Recognizing that letters are used systematically to represent spoken words and that this system is consistent across different words.

How are the Two Related?

Letter Knowledge is the Foundation: Letter knowledge provides the foundational skills necessary for understanding the alphabetic principle. Recognizing and naming letters is a precursor to understanding that these letters represent specific sounds.

Alphabetic Principle Development: Once children grasp letter knowledge, they build on this to understand that letters correspond to sounds and can be combined to form words. This understanding is crucial for both reading and writing.

Letter knowledge supports the development of the **alphabetic principle**, and mastery of the **alphabetic principle** enables children to use their letter knowledge to read and write effectively.

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7.2: Alphabet Knowledge Continuum

Continuum of Emergent Reading Development: Letter Knowledge and the Alphabetic Principle

There are 4 components of developing letter knowledge:

1. **Letter Recognition:** The ability to recognize a letter and differentiate it from other letters when asked. ("Can you find the letter Aa?")
2. **Letter Naming:** The ability to recognize that a letter shape is associated with a letter name. ("What is this letter?")
3. **Letter Sound Knowledge:** The ability to determine the sound that corresponds to a letter shape or name. ("What is the sound for this letter?")
4. **Letter Writing:** The ability to trace or write the letter.

The chart below shows a general timeframe of when you can expect to see alphabet knowledge skills and behaviors. Refer to your state's early learning standards. In Wisconsin see <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/earlylearningstandards.pdf>

Looking at the chart below or your state early learning standards, try to identify when the different components of letter knowledge generally develop.

Early Infancy 0-8 months	
Later Infancy 6-14 months	
Early Toddler 12-24 Months	
Later Toddler 22-36 Months	• Begins to recognize a few upper or lowercase letters (if taught) (CLLD2.4a)
Early Preschool 34-48 Months	• Begins to recognize more upper, and lowercase letters if taught (CLLD2.4b) • Identifies sounds and recognizes letters associated with beginning of first name and last name (CLLD2.4c) • Begins to connect alphabet letters and corresponding sounds (e.g., connecting letters and sounds of common letters/words) (CLLD2.4d)
Later Preschool 44-60 Months	• For many, with instructional support, matches the sound with the corresponding letter (CLLD2.4f) • For many, with instructional support, matches the letter with the corresponding sound (CLLD2.4g) • Recognizes many upper and lowercase letters (CLLD2.4h) • Will use a combination of letters and symbols to represent words (CLLD2.4i)

Table 7.2.1 "A Continuum of Emergent Reading Development: Alphabetic Principle". Content is from Virginia's Early Learning & Development Standards (ELDS): Birth-Five Learning Guidelines. It is used with permission of the creators and is not an open education resource covered by a Creative Commons License.

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7.3: Alphabet Knowledge Instruction

Fostering Children's Alphabet Knowledge

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Association (IRA) stress that meaningful and fun activities best enhance children's alphabet knowledge.

Memorizing letters is neither fun nor meaningful, and consequently doesn't teach children to read.

Alphabet knowledge is related to print concepts. You may wish review Chapter 6, especially [6.1: Concepts of Print](#), [6.3: Explicit Print Knowledge Instruction](#), and [6.4: Print Referencing](#), paying particular attention to the parts referencing letter names and letter sounds.

Letter recognition

Start letter recognition with words familiar and meaningful to children, like their names! Where do you have children's names in your classroom? For example, one teacher puts names on objects that are related to each learning center. She put children's names on paint stirrers in the art center and on rulers in the math center.

Think about using puzzles in your classroom. How could you make puzzles out of children's names for them to play with at centers?

Video: Using Names During Circle Time

Here's an [example](#) (1:27) of an educator dismissing children from circle time to centers. As you watch the video, think about ways the educator is increasing children's alphabet knowledge. Have you used similar strategies in your own early learning setting?

Alphabet Toys and Books

Many alphabet toys and books can be placed in relevant and accessible locations around children's learning environments both at school and at home. Include all the languages the children speak. For children who may need more support, consider having children work in small groups so peers, siblings, or friends can play together with alphabet toys and books.

If toys aren't available in a child's home language, teachers can partner with families to make similar ones using the letters or characters of their language. Again, represent all languages children in the classroom speak. This causes children to feel more welcome, comfortable, confident, and included.

How have you, or can you, incorporate alphabet toys in your own classroom?

Letters

In addition to alphabet toys, you can display letters for children to reference and manipulate throughout the classroom. In this classroom letters are readily available near the writing center. Consider using glue and fabrics to create tactile images and letters children can feel and trace with their fingers. You can use tactile picture books and create labels in Braille.

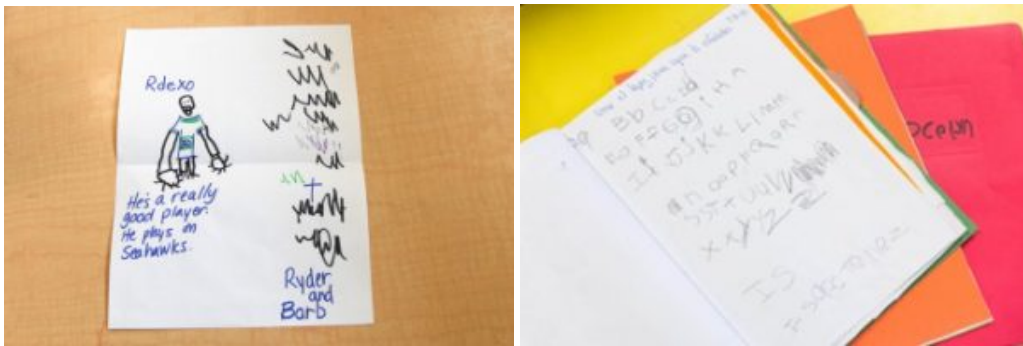


In this set-up, letters are always available to point out when talking with children.

Early Alphabet Knowledge

Early alphabet knowledge is also closely related to writing. Look at these examples of a child's early writing.

The example on the left was obtained early in the school year and the sample on the right after the winter holidays.



- What does this child know about the alphabet?
- What does the child know about literacy? How do you know?
- How might this child have learned about the alphabet and literacy?

If you see a child who is a multilingual learner creating letter-like forms and scribbling, make sure you share it with the child's family. They may recognize letters and words in their language, so then the child's home language skills can be documented and built upon in the classroom.

Writing Centers

Because of the close connection between writing and alphabet knowledge, early education centers can benefit by adding writing centers as one of the daily choices in the classroom. For example, educators can place a booklet of the children's pictures with their names and a booklet of words that are targets in the current theme-based curriculum at the writing center.

For children who may need additional support, consider using adaptive seating or positioning to make sure they are comfortable and stable when drawing or writing. Use tape or Velcro to stabilize paper. Make writing tools easier to manipulate. Add large foam grips or wrap masking tape around crayons, markers, and brushes so they're easier to hold. Use letter stamps or magnetic letters.

Infants and toddlers should also have access to non-toxic drawing and writing instruments so they can explore them through their senses and learn to make marks with them.

Crayons and markers can be placed in clothes pins that have been hot-glued on the sides of toys for fun and function so that children can easily access them and write whenever they feel inspired.

Writing to Make Center Choices

Here is an example of encouraging children's alphabet knowledge through writing when it comes to center choices. Ask children to write their name beside their choice of centers. It's helpful for children to see their names, but they learn even more when they get to write it and think about the letter names and shapes.



When a center is full, you can also ask children to write their names on waiting lists. Giving children many opportunities to see and write their names throughout the day will help them develop alphabet knowledge in fun and meaningful ways!Pause and Consider

Pause and Consider

What do you think about the idea of giving children an opportunity to write their names on a list at different centers to indicate they want a turn?

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

8: Writing Development

Overview

Chapter Introduction: Writing Development in Early Childhood

Introduction

Writing is a fundamental aspect of early childhood education, playing a crucial role in children's cognitive and language development. As young learners begin to explore writing, they progress through various stages, each marked by specific developmental milestones and skills. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of writing development, focusing on the components and progression of writing skills, strategies to support developmental writing and fine motor skills, and methods for involving families in the writing process.

Components and Progression of the Sequence of Writing Development

Understanding the sequence of writing development is essential for supporting young learners as they acquire and refine their writing skills. The progression of writing development can be broadly categorized into several stages. This chapter will explore the progression of writing development from pre-writing skills like drawing and scribbling to emergent writing skills ending with conventional spelling.

Strategies to Support Developmental Writing Skills and Fine Motor Development

This chapter will explore effective strategies to support writing development and fine motor skills in young children such as creating an environment that supports writing, integrating writing into play, and infusing writing into the curriculum.

Involving Families in Writing Development

Families play a vital role in supporting their child's writing development. A child's home language and home experiences greatly influence their writing development. This chapter will explore effective methods for involving families.

Purpose and Goals

Writing development is a complex and dynamic process that unfolds over time. Educators can create a supportive environment that fosters children's growth as confident and competent writers by understanding the components and progression of writing skills, utilizing effective strategies to support developmental writing and fine motor skills, and involving families in the process. This chapter aims to provide educators with the knowledge and tools to support young learners in their journey toward becoming proficient writers.



Objectives

- Identify the components and progression **the sequence of writing development**.
- Describe strategies to utilize a variety of approaches to help young children develop **developmental writing skills and fine motor development**.
- Describe methods to include families in their child's language and literacy development.
- [8.1: Introduction to Emergent Writing](#)
- [8.2: Progression of Writing Development](#)
- [8.3: Strategies for Writing Development](#)
- [8.4: Instructional Practices for Emergent Writers](#)
- [8.5: Involving Families](#)

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8.1: Introduction to Emergent Writing

“The writer is an explorer. Every step is an advance into a new land.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Opening Vignette: Young Writers

Mr. Jenbere and Ms. Daryl combine classes for most of the school day. Mr. Jenbere’s class is a federally funded prekindergarten classroom with 18 students. Two of Mr. Jenbere’s students have Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and one of them uses a wheelchair. Ms. Daryl’s preschool class is for children who are identified as deaf and hard of hearing. All six of her students have IEPs. The students in these classes range in age from 2- to 5-years-old. Mr. Jenbere and Ms. Daryl believe that their co-teaching and inclusive practices strengthen the school experience of the children in both classes. Each of these classes has a paraprofessional and support from a variety of specialists, which gives these children a team of dedicated educators working towards their healthy development.

Mr. Jenbere and Ms. Daryl provide meaningful opportunities for writing throughout the day, including a specific time designated for writing instruction. They make an effort to connect writing instruction with all aspects of the curriculum in authentic ways. Today, the children are writing thank you notes to the assistant principal, who read them a story this morning. The children are gathered around tables with educators who are considering each child’s strengths and needs as they support and guide children during their writing time. They know that the unique abilities of individual learners must be considered in addition to the goals that they have for all of their children.

At Mr. Jenbere’s table, six children are engaged in writing using a variety of materials, including white unlined paper, colored construction paper, cardstock, markers, and crayons. Three children are using markers to draw pictures of the story the assistant principal read. They are talking to each other about the story as they draw. Arzu is using a crayon to scribble and is talking to herself as she writes. Mr. Jenbere helps Hasan identify the sounds in a word and then turns his attention to Richelle who reads her thank you note aloud. After listening to Richelle, he jots down an anecdotal note that documents not only the writing skills she used but also insights related to her comprehension of the story. Later, Mr. Jenbere and Ms. Daryl compare their anecdotal notes as they make plans for tomorrow’s writing instruction. They understand that assessment during writing instruction provides a window into the children’s learning and development.

Introduction

Like emergent reading, emergent writing provides a critical foundation for future literacy development (NELP, 2008). When young children, like the children in Mr. Jenbere’s and Ms. Daryl’s classes, are provided opportunities to draw, scribble, and write, they gain understandings of the role print plays in their lives and the way writing is used to communicate ideas (Kidd et al., 2014). Through these experiences, young children learn they can write to express their thoughts, share stories, communicate information, and convey opinions. Like Richelle, they begin to view writing, including their drawings and scribbles, as symbolic representations that enable them to communicate with their classmates, family members, teachers, and others. They also develop an understanding that writing can be used to make notes for themselves, such as play plans and reminders. As they write, they gain insights into writing as a process and develop a sense of ownership of their writing. In addition, like Hasan, they start to develop understandings of written conventions, including sentence structure, spelling, grammar, and mechanics. At the same time, children’s fine motor and handwriting skills also begin to develop.

Literacy processes are reciprocal and symbiotic in nature. When young children are engaged in activities that foster their emergent literacy skills, they begin to see the interrelationship among language, reading, and writing and are able to draw upon their emerging knowledge to enhance their literacy development (Goodman & Goodman, 1983). Conceptually, children at a young age begin to understand that reading and writing are communication processes. When children write, these processes are integrated as they read and reread their written message (Sulzby & Teale, 1985). This is seen with a child, like Richelle, as she listens to a story, writes a thank you note, and reads the thank you note to her teacher. At the same time, children are developing emergent literacy skills, such as phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, and concepts of print. These emergent reading skills influence skill development in writing and vice versa. For example, a child like Hasan, who is writing letters and words by listening to the sounds

in a word and writing down the corresponding letter, is using his emerging understanding of letter-sound correspondence. As he strengthens his skills in letter-sound correspondence in writing, he enhances his ability to apply these skills when reading. Similarly, as he reads and develops his abilities to decode (read) words, he will develop his abilities to encode (write) words. By engaging in activities that develop these skills, he will become more proficient at generating text as he writes and generating meaning from text as he reads.

Discussions that situate emergent writing within the broader context of literacy development and acknowledge the interrelationship between reading and writing are important to understanding children's literacy development. However, too often, writing is not given the time and attention that is needed in early childhood education classrooms (Pelatti et al., 2014). Therefore, in this chapter, we will focus specifically on understanding children's writing development and how to use this knowledge to assess, plan, and implement meaningful writing experiences throughout the school day and at home. We will also examine factors that influence children's emergent writing development. Developing these understandings is critical to ensuring that writing instruction is an integral part of the instructional day and multiple opportunities for writing are provided across the school day as well as at home.

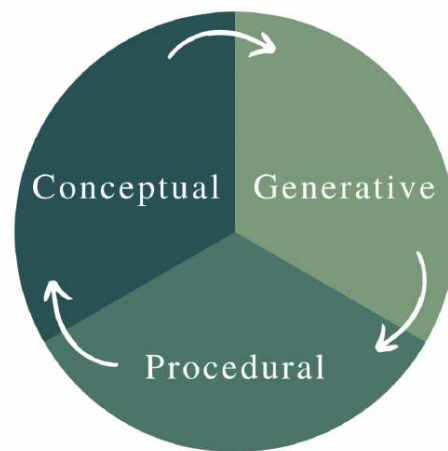


Figure 8.1.1 Framework for Developing Emergent Literacy

In this chapter, we will use the Framework for Developing Emergent Literacy (see Figure 8.1.1) to explain the dimensions of emergent writing (Puranik & Lonigan, 2014). The first dimension, *conceptual knowledge*, focuses on the conventions and functions of writing, including children's understandings of how print works and that print conveys meaning. The second dimension, *procedural knowledge*, focuses on the mechanics of writing, such as knowledge of the alphabet, name writing, letter writing, spelling, and handwriting. Lastly, the third dimension, *generative knowledge*, focuses on composing phrases and sentences that communicate meaning. For very young children, generative knowledge includes the emerging ability to communicate intentionally with others using drawings, scribbles, and symbolic representations. Using the Framework for Developing Emergent Literacy, this chapter will answer the following questions:



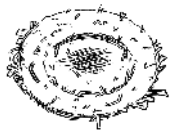
How do young children develop an understanding that writing conveys meaning and they can write to communicate their thoughts and ideas?



How do emergent writers progress on a continuum of development?



What can early childhood educators do to support emergent writers using effective instructional strategies and literacy assessments?



Writing is Communicating

Children learn at a young age that people use writing to express their thoughts, share stories, communicate information, and convey opinions. Within their homes and in the community, young children have opportunities to observe the functions of writing in their day-to-day lives. For example, children might see family members write a grocery list and then observe their dad read the list and cross off items while walking down the aisles of the grocery store. Or perhaps, they notice their mom write a note for an older sibling and then watch as the sibling later reads the note and takes fruit out of the refrigerator for a snack. Likewise, they may witness their sibling's efforts to lobby for a new game by posting notes at strategic places around the home. As they sit on the couch next to an uncle, they could have an opportunity to watch him take out his phone, type in a text, and send the message to a friend. Out in the community, they might notice the server writing down their family's order and then bringing the items requested to their table. Likewise, they could observe an auto mechanic writing down their family's phone number and promising to give a call when the car is ready. These types of interactions in the home and community develop children's conceptual knowledge of writing and their understanding of writing as a way to communicate.

Learning about writing continues to take place as children engage in writing activities not only in the home, but also in the classroom. For example, the children in Mr. Jenbere's and Ms. Daryl's classroom in the vignette above are developing their writing abilities and practicing their writing skills as they write their thank you notes. This activity provides an opportunity for children to draw pictures and talk about the story the assistant principal read as they write their thank you notes. Through their pictures, they record thoughts that are important to them with the understanding that these ideas can then be shared with others. At the same time, an activity like this allows children, like Arzu, to capture their thoughts through scribbles. Likewise, children, like Hasan, use their growing knowledge of letters and sounds to add words to their notes. This type of activity also enables children, like Richelle, to develop their understanding of the permanency of writing and to see themselves as writers with an audience. The children's emerging understandings of writing are apparent in these efforts.

The Framework for Developing Emergent Literacy presented above provides educators with a way to think about children's writing development. This framework recognizes the interrelationship between reading and writing and organizes emergent writing into three dimensions: conceptual, procedural, and generative knowledge (Puranik & Lonigan, 2014). These dimensions are important to consider when assessing children's writing and planning and implementing instruction.

As writing is utilized in children's everyday lives, their **conceptual knowledge** of writing develops and they gain insights into how print works. Puranik and Lonigan (2014) define conceptual knowledge as skills that "represent knowledge about the conventions and functions of writing" (p. 465). At a young age, children learn that writing is a means for communicating thoughts. They gain insights into the purposes or functions of writing and recognize that they can write to express ideas and feelings, tell a story, share information, and present an opinion or point of view. They also develop concepts of print specific to writing, such as writing in English occurs from left to right. In addition, they begin to understand writing as a symbolic representation of ideas as they recognize and assign meaning to logos, markings, and symbols they encounter (Byington & Kim, 2017).

At the same time, young children develop **procedural knowledge** of print. Puranik and Lonigan (2014) define procedural knowledge as "knowledge of the specific symbols and conventions involved in the production of writing" (p. 456). These skills are important to children's future ability to use predictable letter-sound relationships to read and write fluently. As children develop procedural knowledge, they gain understandings of the alphabetic principle. As noted in Chapter 8, the alphabetic principle involves learning letter names and the sounds associated with them. Young children apply these principles as they begin to write letters and words, including names. As children gain an understanding of letter-sound relationships, they use this knowledge to help them spell words. Developing children's fine motor skills and handwriting is also important in the early years (Byington & Kim, 2017).

Children's **generative knowledge** of writing develops as they apply their conceptual and procedural knowledge of writing. Puranik and Lonigan (2014) define generative knowledge as "children's emerging ability to compose phrases and sentences in their writing" (p. 456). Initially, young children use inventive markings to express ideas and convey important messages. Often, when we ask children to "tell us what you wrote," they will hold up their drawing and point to the markings and orally state the phrases

and sometimes sentences they composed. Even though these children may not be able to form letters yet, they are still applying their understanding about how writing communicates a message that can be shared. Over time, children begin to use letters as symbolic representations that are organized to signify meaning (Bialystok, 1992). Experiences during the early years provide a foundation for children's later ability to use particular strings of letters to represent specific words and to use these words to compose phrases and sentences that communicate meaning (Puranik & Lonigan, 2014). In the early years, a foundation for generating meaningful text is laid as children use oral language and writing, including drawing and scribbling, to communicate (Byington & Kim, 2017).

Understanding how conceptual, procedural, and generative knowledge of writing develops in young children helps educators assess children's writing and plan for differentiated instructional experiences that develop children's emerging writing abilities. In the next section, we describe how emergent writers progress. Educators use this knowledge of writing progressions to inform the decisions they make when planning and implementing assessment and instruction.

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8.2: Progression of Writing Development



How Emergent Writers Progress

As children interact with the world around them, their writing abilities develop along a continuum from emergent to more conventional writing. This pathway is not exactly the same for each child because children develop differently due to a variety of factors that will be discussed below. This was apparent in Mr. Jenbere's and Ms. Daryl's classroom with Arzu who was scribbling and Hasan who was using his knowledge of letters and sounds to write. Both were 4-year-olds writing a thank you note. However, procedurally, they were at different places along the continuum in terms of the writing they produced.

Although children's developmental pathways vary by individual child, understanding children's writing progressions can help educators as they assess children's writing abilities, plan instruction, and provide a variety of learning experiences. In this section, we use the framework from *Virginia's Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS): Birth-Five Learning Guidelines* to frame our discussion (see Table 9.2.1). In this framework, emergent writing skills are organized into three categories: writing to communicate, developing writing habits and skills, and handling writing tools. In each of these categories, the development of specific skills is broadly organized by age ranges. These age ranges are intended to provide a general understanding of typical progressions and are not to suggest that there is a simple linear progression of writing abilities. In actuality, children's writing progresses as they increase their use of more advanced writing strategies and decrease their use of less advanced writing skills (Rowe & Wilson, 2015). For example, as children begin to use conventional letters, they may continue to scribble and use letter-like forms. Over time, they will decrease their use of scribbles and letter-like forms and will increase their use of conventional letters. For this reason, it is important to keep in mind that, although writing is a sequenced progression, there will be variability among children, as well as within children, as they are progressing along the continuum (Rowe & Wilson, 2015).

Writing to Communicate

As was evident in Mr. Jenbere's and Ms. Daryl's classroom, young children begin to understand that writing is a means to communicate thoughts, stories, information, and opinions. At an early age, children realize they can create drawings and make scribbles that they can then read to others (Bruyere, 2020). They come to understand that writing is intentional and is used to convey meaning (Rowe & Wilson, 2015). As their writing becomes more intentional, they begin to write for a variety of purposes and audiences and become more aware of the need to write so others can read their writing (Bruyere, 2020; Rowe & Wilson, 2015). They also become more cognizant of how the content of their writing varies depending on social expectations (Rowe & Wilson, 2015). For example, they learn what to include when they write a birthday card for a classmate or a story about a walk their family took in the park. Young children also develop a sense of ownership over their writing and begin to develop their identity as a writer (Bruyere, 2020; Kissel & Miller, 2015; Rowe, 2018).

Continuum of Emergent Writing Development: Writing to Communicate

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See your state's early learning standards. In Wisconsin see <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/...itionfinal.pdf>

Developmental Progression	CLLD3.1 Drawing, scribbling, and writing to communicate
Early Infancy 0-8 months	
Later Infancy 6-14 months	• Makes scribbles or marks on writing materials (CLLD3.1a) • Understands that marks on a page can communicate meaning (CLLD3.1b) • Uses writing instruments to make distinct marks (CLLD3.1c)
Early Toddler 12-24 Months	• Begins to use controlled marks like swoops, circles, and waves to represent their ideas (CLLD3.1d) • Writes in a linear fashion and connects marks with repetitive up/down or looping motions (CLLD3.1e) • Begins to use scribbles or intentional marks to represent objects (CLLD3.1f) • Attempts to “read” their writing or drawing to others, including their name (CLLD3.1g)
Later Toddler 22-36 Months	• Begins to use distinct letter-like symbols and letter formations with curves, lines, circles, and dots to represent words, ideas, phrases, sentences, and stories or events with or without drawing (CLLD3.1h) • Begins to draw/write for a variety of audiences (e.g., family members and teachers) (CLLD3.1i) • Begins to draw/write for a variety of purposes (e.g., grocery lists, invitations, birthday cards) (CLLD3.1j)
Early Preschool 34-48 Months	• Begins to use letter strings or a group of letters to represent words, ideas, phrases, sentences, and stories or events (CLLD3.1k) • Begins to use print in the environment as part of their writing (e.g., attempts to copy a sign or poster in room) (CLLD3.1l) • Begins to copy or write letters or numbers (CLLD3.1m) • Begins to represent all letters in their name (CLLD3.1n) • Begins to recognize name as separate from other pictures or writing produced (CLLD3.1o) • Begins to distinguish print from images or illustrations (CLLD3.1p)
Later Preschool 44-60 Months	• Begins to use initial letter sounds to represent a whole word (e.g., /f/ for fish) (CLLD3.1q) • Begins to represent the initial and final sounds to represent a word (e.g., ‘dg’ for dog) (CLLD3.1r) • Retells or reads their writing to others (CLLD3.1s) • Represents all letters in their own name, with sequencing, positioning, and reversals still evidenced (CLLD3.1t) • Begins to produce a correct representation of their name using capital letters, lowercase letters, or a combination of both moving from left to right (CLLD3.1u) • Begins to copy names of familiar people and objects (CLLD3.1v)

Initial markings. Young children’s journey as writers begins at an early age when they move from making accidental markings with little to no motor control to moving their forearm to make large intentional scribbles (Rowe & Wilson, 2015). As children’s

fine motor skills develop, they use their hand and wrist movements to make more refined scribbles (see Figure 8.2.1). These scribbles initially represent objects and then begin to represent ideas, words, and phrases. As children's writing progresses, they scribble in a more linear manner using spaces between their scribbles, up-and-down looping motions, circles, waves, swoops, and zig zags. Over time, they add letters, which may be written backwards or upside down, to their scribbles and letter-like forms. Scribbles are eventually replaced with conventional capital and lower-case letters; however, there is no correspondence between letters and sounds (Rowe & Wilson, 2015).

Pause and Consider: Scribbles, Letter-Like Symbols, and Letter Formations

In Figure 8.2.1, there are three preschool writing samples. Use the writing continuum above to analyze the children's writing. Consider the following questions:

- What do you notice about these writing samples?
- What aspects of the descriptions about scribbling and letters do you see in these samples?
- What do you notice about the drawings?
- What does their writing show about what they know?



Butterfly



The big red monster said, "I will chase you." I said, "You can't get me because I run fast."



My mom is at the store.

Figure 8.2.1 Scribbles, Letter-Like Symbols, and Letter Formations

Moving toward using letters. Children also start to write their name and other words or phrases they have memorized (Rowe & Wilson, 2015). They learn to write their full name in English, for example, using capital and lowercase letters written from left to right. They also recognize their name as separate from their writing and that their name indicates ownership of what they produced. In addition, they begin to use conventional letters to write words and phrases they have memorized, like family members' names, and phrases, such as, "I like cake." They also begin to copy numbers, letters, and words from the environment into their writing.

Eventually, children start to write letters and groups of specific letters to represent their ideas as they use their growing knowledge of letters and sounds to write words, phrases, and sentences (Rowe & Wilson, 2015). This practice is often referred to as invented spelling. Initially, children tend to represent words using the initial letter sound (see Figure 9.2.3). For example, they might use "k" to represent "car" or "b" to represent "ball." As children progress, they may write the initial and the final sounds (e.g., bk for bike) and eventually add middle consonant sounds (e.g., ktn for kitten). They add vowels (e.g., babe for baby) and begin to use correct spelling of some words (e.g., sat) as they move toward more conventional spelling.

Children are also developing understandings about **directionality** as their writing progresses (Rowe & Wilson, 2015). During the early years, children are learning how print is positioned on a page and the direction that print is written and read. For example, in English, children learn to write from left to right, move to the next line, and begin on the left again. Initially, children may place marks and scribbles anywhere on the paper. As they start to develop an understanding that writing is presented in a linear format,

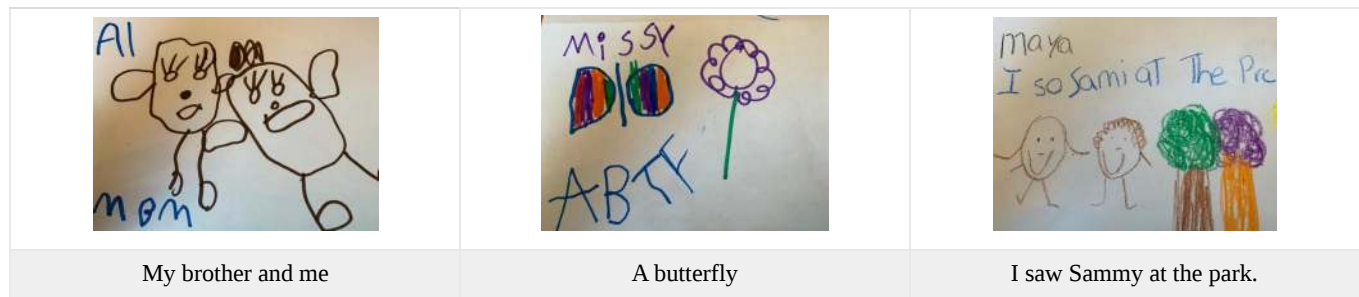
they may write from right to left horizontally or from top to bottom vertically. As children gain writing experience, they will begin to show more conventional directional patterns as they write.

Pause and Consider: Letter-Sound Correspondence

In Figure 8.2.2, there are three prekindergarten writing samples. Use the writing continuum above to analyze the children's writing. Consider the following questions:

- What do you notice about these writing samples?
- What aspects of the descriptions about letters and words do you see in these samples?
- What do you notice about the drawings?
- What does their writing show about what they know?

Figure 8.2.2 Letter-Sound Correspondence



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Figure 8.2.2: Julie Kidd. "Letter-Sound Correspondence." [CC BY 2.0](#).

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8.3: Strategies for Writing Development

Developing Writing Habits and Skills

As children develop their ability to communicate through writing, they also develop writing habits and skills (see Table 8.3.1). These writing habits and skills initially include showing interest in writing and experimenting with writing tools, such as crayons, markers, and touchscreen tablets. In addition, children begin to share drawings and writings with others as they become more aware of their audience and begin to see writing as a socially negotiated act between the writer and the audience (Kissel, 2018). They also develop their identity and voice as writers and gain greater insights into the power of writing (Kissel & Miller, 2015). Initially, they may orally label or explain the objects they draw. Over time, they begin to use their writing to represent and communicate ideas, stories, information, and opinions.

Continuum of Emergent Writing Development: Developing Writing Habits and Skills

Table 8.3.1 “Continuum of Emergent Writing Development: Developing Writing Habits and Skills”. Content is from Virginia’s Early Learning & Development Standards (ELDS): Birth-Five Learning Guidelines. It is used with permission of the creators and is not an open education resource covered by a Creative Commons License.

See your state’s early learning standards. In Wisconsin see <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/...itionfinal.pdf>

Developmental Progression	CLLD3.2 Developing Writing Habits and Skill
Early Infancy 0-8 months	
Later Infancy 6-14 months	Shows interest in exploring writing by watching others write and experimenting with writing tools (e.g., tries using crayons, markers, etc. to make marks) (CLLD3.2a)
Early Toddler 12-24 Months	Begins to share drawings/writing and explains the meaning of the illustrations/text (e.g., says circle is a ball) (CLLD3.2b)
Later Toddler 22-36 Months	Shares writing with others as a way to represent their understandings and ideas (CLLD3.2c)
Early Preschool 34-48 Months	- Begins to revise writing in the moment based on interactions with peers and adults (CLLD3.2d) - Begins to modify and expand their drawings/writing to meet personal ideas and include others’ ideas (e.g., several children begin drawing rainbows and unicorns after one child narrates their work) (CLLD3.2e)
Later Preschool 44-60 Months	- Continues to revise writing in the moment based on interactions with peers and adults (CLLD3.2f) - Begins to revise by adding details to drawings/writings to express their ideas (CLLD3.2g) - Begins to make a plan for the writing they will produce (e.g., creates picture to tell story and then writes) (CLLD3.2h)

As children represent their ideas in writing, they develop an understanding of writing as a process (Kissel et al., 2011). They become aware that they can plan, draft, revise, edit, and share their writing (Kidd et al., 2014). They learn that planning involves selecting a topic and generating ideas. As children talk, listen, and observe, they gather topics and ideas for writing. Children also

plan what they want to write through their drawings. As children draw and add details to their drawings, they generate ideas that they can convey orally as well as through scribbles, letter-like forms, letters, words, phrases, and sentences.

Young children gather ideas for their drawings and writing from their own lives. They draw and write about their everyday and special activities, family and friends, stories that have been read to them and/or that they have seen on media, and content they are learning at home and in school (e.g., plants, weather, recycling, etc.). They are also influenced by the thoughts and interests of their peers. As they see their friends draw and write about trucks, they, too, might become interested in drawing and writing about trucks. In addition, adults may have an effect on what children draw and write. For example, children whose family members write letters or emails to friends might decide to write their own letter or email. Likewise, children whose teachers model writing about the plants growing in the classroom might develop an interest in writing about the plants.

As they write and share, interactions with their peers may prompt children to revise their plans. For example, one day, Richelle decided she was going to write about swimming and had started to draw a picture of a swimming pool. As she drew, she noticed Arzu was busy writing invitations to a party. This new idea intrigued her. After a brief conversation with Arzu, Richelle decided to revise her writing plans to include writing an invitation for Arzu to go swimming with her.

Young children also revise and edit as they write (Kidd et al., 2014). Revisions can occur while writing or can be details that are added, deleted, or changed at a later time. For example, a child might add more details to a story as he looks at his picture and realizes there is more to say or might decide to take his sister out of the story because he remembered he was mad at her. A child could also change her mind and decide that the ball is blue rather than red or that there are two balls rather than one. Children's revisions are often influenced by their peers and adults as they interact with the writing. For example, once Richelle decided to write an invitation, she added Arzu to the picture of the pool. Using letter-like forms and some letters, she wrote, "Will you go with me?" After looking at her picture, she added additional writing to include "to the pool." As she read her invitation aloud, Hasan interjected that he wanted to go, too. He then said that she needed to say which day or they would not know when to go. Richelle added "on Saturday" to her writing and added a picture of Hasan in the pool with them. After she shared the invitation, Ms. Daryl mentioned that an invitation usually includes what time she wants her friends to meet her. Richelle added a time to her invitation. Through these interactions, Richelle gained important insights into revising her writing.

Young children also learn about editing as they write and interact with others. Edits occur as children make corrections to their writing. This might happen when a child notices that he drew two cars and then adds an s to the label "car" to convey that there is more than one car. Editing also occurs when a child, like Arzu, remembers that her name begins with a capital letter and changes the lowercase a to a capital A. Interactions with peers and adults can also prompt children to edit their writing. For example, a child who is applying his knowledge of letter-sound relationships to sound out words might notice one of the words in his writing is posted on the wall. When he realizes that he is missing a letter in one of his words, he might add the missing letter to the word or may cross out or erase the word and copy the correct spelling. As children make edits to their writing, they gain understandings about the conventions of writing as well as come to understand editing as an important process in writing.



Figure 8.3.1: Using writing tools helps children develop writing proficiency.

As young children interact with their literate world, they begin to explore a variety of writing tools, including paper, crayons, markers, pens, and digital writing tools such as phones and touchscreen tablets (Rowe, 2018). Their handling of writing tools becomes more proficient as their fine motor skills develop. Initially, young children have limited motor strength and control and, therefore, tend to grasp writing tools with their whole hand to make marks (see Table 8.3.2). As their motor skills develop, they may use their whole arm in an effort to control and direct their markings, scribbles, and drawings. Eventually, they use their fingertips to grasp the writing tool but their grip may be too high or too low. Likewise, it might be too loose or too tight. As they show increased fine motor strength and control, they are able to use three fingers to grip their writing tools to produce letters, words with invented spelling, and memorized words.

Handling Writing Tools

Table 8.3.2 Continuum of Emergent Reading Development: Handling Writing Tools. Content is from Virginia's Early Learning & Development Standards (ELDS): Birth-Five Learning Guidelines. It is used with permission of the creators and is not an open education resource covered by a Creative Commons License.

Developmental Progression	CLLD3.3 Handling Writing Tools
Early Infancy 0-8 months	
Later Infancy 6-14 months	• Begins to grasp writing tools to make random marks on a paper with limited control over results (CLLD3.3a) • Begins to use a whole hand grip to manipulate the writing tool (CLLD3.3b)
Early Toddler 12-24 Months	• Uses the whole arm to control and direct the scribbles, marks, drawing, and writing intentions (CLLD3.3c)
Later Toddler 22-36 Months	• Attempts to use their fingertips to grip writing tools, finger grip may be loose or too tight and finger positioning may be too high or too close to the tip (CLLD3.3d)
Early Preschool 34-48 Months	• Begins to show increased fine motor strength in writing (CLLD3.3e) • Becomes more skillful with a variety of writing tools (e.g., markers, pens, pencils, crayons, chalk) (CLLD3.3f)
Later Preschool 44-60 Months	• Begins to use a comfortable and efficient three-finger grip to control a variety of writing tools (CLLD3.3g) • Uses a variety of digital tools to write or draw (CLLD3.3h)

Similarly, many children are able to point and use their forefingers to make marks, draw, and scribble when using a touchscreen tablet (Crescenzi et al., 2014). As their fine motor skills develop, children use their fingers or a stylus on a touchscreen tablet to write letters, words with invented spelling, and words that are memorized (Rowe & Miller, 2015). Young children also learn to produce typewritten text, including their names, repeated letters, and words with invented spelling (Rowe & Miller, 2015). Digital tools also allow children to draw, use photographs and imagery, and record oral stories as they write (Eutsler et al., 2020).

As children experiment with and use a variety of writing tools and engage in daily opportunities to write and interact with peers and adults, they gain valuable insights into writing as a way to communicate ideas, stories, information, and opinions. At the same time, they develop important writing skills as they progress from making marks to using invented spelling and memorized or copied words to writing words, phrases, and sentences. As can be seen by the children in Mr. Jenbere's and Ms. Daryl's classroom, development along the continuum is individual. Accordingly, educators play an essential role in shaping an environment that promotes young children's writing.

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8.4: Instructional Practices for Emergent Writers

Instructional Practices for Emergent Writers

The early years are an important time for educators and families to provide young children with experiences that develop not only letter-sound correspondence and handwriting skills, but also their understanding that print is read and writing is a way to communicate their ideas (Gerde et al., 2012). As discussed in previous chapters, there are many ways adults can support children's literacy development, and specifically, their writing development. Through intentional and explicit opportunities to develop children's writing knowledge and skills throughout the school day and at home, families and educators support children as they become proficient writers. These opportunities are provided when educators (a) create an environment that supports writing; (b) build on children's prior knowledge, experiences, and interests; (c) integrate writing into play; (d) infuse writing across the curriculum; and (e) provide diverse instructional writing experiences (see Table 8.4.1).

Table 8.4.1 "Instructional Practices That Support Writing"

Instructional Practices That Support Writing



Create an Environment That Supports Writing

- Create uncluttered places with plenty of room for children to write and move around, keeping in mind that children are learning to regulate their bodies and are developing motor skills.
- Have tables and chairs that are the appropriate size and include space for children in wheelchairs and other positioning equipment.
- Provide a variety of writing materials and tools, including paper, dry erase boards, chalkboards, markers, crayons, pencils, chalk, tempera paint, water colors, finger paints, touchscreen tablets, styluses, and computers.
- Place writing materials and tools in places that are easy to reach and easy to put away, such as carts, shelves, tables, bins, and cubbies at the children's level.
- Display meaningful print with pictures or braille around the room, including name strips, labels, posters, word cards, sentence strips, morning messages, and daily schedules.
- Position print and braille so it is visible and easy to reach.
- Include print and braille materials and writing tools in centers (e.g., children's literature and magazines in the library, menus and writing pads in the restaurant, envelopes and writing paper in the post office, paper and crayons in construction areas)
- Display children's drawings and writings.

Build on Children's Prior Knowledge, Experiences, and Interests

- Engage families in children's writing experiences.
- Encourage children to use their home languages and write about their home culture and family experiences.
- Ask children to draw and write about what they already know about topics of interest.
- Provide experiences that children can include in their writing, such as nature walks, field trips, hands-on experiments, class visitors, and experiences with community helpers (e.g., talking with firefighters and seeing a firetruck).
- Provide choice of writing tools and topics.

Integrate Writing Into Play

- Include accessible spaces for writing and writing materials and tools in each center.
- Model and explain how writing materials and tools may be used in the center.
- Remind children periodically to use writing materials and tools in the centers.
- Introduce new writing materials and tools into centers regularly.
- Include examples of different types of writing in the writing center, such as models of birthday cards or "I love you" notes to family members.
- Post theme-related and frequently used words in the writing center and around the room.

- Encourage children to copy words posted around the room and words written on cards or sentence strips in the writing center into their writing.
- Encourage children to write play plans that not only indicate where they plan to play (e.g., the kitchen center) but also how they plan to play (e.g., how they plan to share toys and props with classmates or what toys, props, and materials they plan to use).
- Provide intentional, child-specific scaffolding and reinforcement of writing knowledge and skills when interacting with children in centers.
- Follow the child's lead when interacting with the child to provide scaffolding and instruction.

Infuse Writing Across the Curriculum

- Provide opportunities for children to write about what they are learning across the curriculum, including in mathematics, reading, science, and social studies.
- Incorporate writing activities that activate children's prior knowledge (e.g., asking them to write about a topic, such as spring or fall, before instruction).
- Encourage children to draw and write about curricular content to foster their learning (e.g., documenting the growth of a plant, writing about sharing, comparing concepts such as hot and cold).
- Use children's drawings and writing to assess their content knowledge (e.g., examining children's drawings to assess their understanding of shadows or their writing to assess what they know about recycling).
- Provide opportunities for children to share and talk about their drawings and writing with adults and peers.

Provide Diverse Instructional Writing Experiences

- Schedule time for writing instruction and provide opportunities throughout the day to write independently and with support.
- Encourage children to use a variety of writing materials and tools when writing, including digital tools such as touchscreen tablets and computers.
- Provide authentic writing experiences that develop children's understanding of writing as a means to communicate with an audience (e.g., a story to share with classmates, a card to share with a family member, a note to persuade a parent to not make cooked carrots for dinner, an invitation for a community helper to visit their classroom).
- Include opportunities for children to identify and write their name by signing in for attendance, signing off when completing a task like toothbrushing, or signing up for a responsibility on the jobs chart.
- Model writing by engaging in shared writing experiences.
- Scaffold children's writing through intentional interactions that develop their writing knowledge and abilities.
- Accept and encourage all forms of writing (e.g., scribbles, letter-like forms, letters, invented spelling).
- Encourage children to use letter-sound correspondence to write words with invented spelling.
- Ask children to read their writing or dictate their story and write down what they read.
- Promote children's interactions with peers as they write.
- Provide opportunities for children to share their writing with others.

When educators create environments and provide instruction that foster young children's emergent writing, children develop valuable knowledge and skills that prepare them for future success in school as well as in their daily lives. Assessment and instructional practices, like the ones listed in Table 8.4.1, are examples of the types of experiences educators provide to support young children's writing development. As educators make decisions about curriculum, assessment, and instruction, it is important that they consider each child's unique culture, languages, interests, and abilities. By being mindful of the diversity children bring to the classroom, educators provide an inclusive environment where each child feels valued and capable of learning.

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8.5: Involving Families

Factors That Influence Writing Development

Although developmental trajectories like those presented in the three tables representing the continuum of emergent writing development help educators understand how children develop their writing knowledge and skills, there are a number of factors that influence a child's specific developmental pathway that must also be considered. As noted in previous chapters, children's literacy development is shaped by (a) their home, community, and school environments; (b) the experiences children have with oral and written language within these contexts, including the languages they hear and speak; and (c) individual differences influenced by their unique abilities, developmental delays, and disabilities. The multiple influences on children's development, including their literacy development, are important to keep in mind when examining individual children's writing development and planning for appropriate assessment and instruction.

Similar to previous discussions about children's language and emergent reading development, children's prior knowledge, experiences, and interests contribute to variances in children's writing development (Burns & Kidd, 2016). Children learn a lot about how print works as they interact with their world. Therefore, children's experiences at home, in the community, and at school influence their writing knowledge and skills. Children interacting with a language- and print-rich environment will have different experiences with print than children who have limited access to print in their everyday lives. For example, children immersed in an environment with rich traditions of oral storytelling and/or daily storybook reading may have well-developed vocabularies in one or more languages and valuable understandings of story structures that they can apply to their own writing. Likewise, children who observe and take part in written communications at home, in their community, and at school develop insights into the functions of writing that help them understand that there are different purposes and types of writing as well as different audiences for their writing. In addition, children who are provided opportunities to explore writing tools and are encouraged to integrate writing into their play may develop an interest in writing and may be motivated to use writing throughout their day.

Children's writing development is also influenced by the language or languages used in their home, community, and school. Children who are monolingual and those who are acquiring two or more languages may progress in different ways (Soltero-González & Butvilofsky, 2020). Young children who are acquiring two or more languages develop understandings about how print works as they encounter print in more than one language. For example, children who are simultaneous bilinguals are acquiring two languages at the same time and are learning about print in both languages. As their understandings of print emerge, they use what they know about print in one language to inform their understanding of print in the other language. This means that, when they begin to write, their understandings of print across both languages inform their writing in both languages (Soltero-González & Butvilofsky, 2020). Because patterns of development may differ by language or languages spoken, it is important to recognize there may be differences in writing trajectories among children who are monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual. Differences among languages and children who speak one, two, or more languages are especially important for educators to recognize when children begin to use their vocabularies and knowledge of letters and sounds to write.

Educators must also be aware of the effect that children's abilities, developmental delays, and disabilities may have on children's emergent writing development. Differences in how young children interact with and explore the world can affect the experiences they have to develop writing knowledge and skills. For example, young children with developmental delays and disabilities often have numerous doctors' visits, therapy appointments, and other routines that take the family's time and energy. The challenges and stress families may face as they navigate their child's care and appointments may affect the opportunities children have to engage in literacy experiences (Hanser, 2010). Similarly, the nature of the developmental delay or disability may have an effect on how the child is able to engage in literacy-rich opportunities. For example, children who are sensitive to touch may not want to experiment with writing tools or children with short attention spans may not sit long during storybook reading (Hanser, 2010). In addition, children who use a wheelchair might be limited by what is in their line of sight and might not see environmental print that others might see (Hanser, 2010). Likewise, children with visual impairments can also be affected by how easy or challenging it is for them to access print in the environment (Guerette, 2014).

The type of developmental delay or disability may also have an impact on children's emergent writing development. Children with specific language impairments, developmental delays, learning disabilities, or high-functioning autism might develop writing skills at a different pace (Burns et al., 2010). Children who are deaf and hard-of-hearing often begin school with less fully developed

emergent writing skills than children who are hearing (Werfel, 2017). In addition, children with specific writing disorders might have challenges performing the motor activities required to hold a writing tool and write (Burns et al., 2010).

Because young children come to school with varied backgrounds and experiences, it is important for educators to recognize the writing knowledge and skills children bring with them to school. They must understand that children's experiences with oral and written print differ from child to child. Many children come to school with rich experiences that foster their emergent writing knowledge and skills. Other children may come to school having had limited opportunities to hear stories, observe writing, and explore writing in their daily lives. In addition, children might have developmental delays and disabilities that influence their access to oral and print language or affect the pace at which they develop and learn. Recognizing the differing experiences and abilities children bring to the classroom allows educators to build on existing knowledge and skills to promote positive writing outcomes.



Nurturing Emergent Writers

Educators play an important role in nurturing emergent writers, especially when they work closely with family members to engage children in meaningful and relevant writing experiences. By getting to know children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds and tapping into their prior knowledge and experiences, educators can implement culturally responsive assessment and instructional practices that promote children's writing development. Therefore, educators support young children's writing development by engaging families, assessing and monitoring young children's writing, and providing developmentally and culturally appropriate writing instruction.

Engaging Families Through Writing

Working with and learning from children's families helps educators understand and capitalize on the diversity children bring to the classroom. When educators have deep understandings of their children's cultures, languages, and abilities and disabilities, they are able to design inclusive environments and engage children in culturally responsive writing assessment and instruction (Kidd & Burns, in press). By valuing each family's unique experience and each child's interests and abilities, educators create equitable opportunities for learning. Educational equity occurs when differences as well as similarities among children and their families are celebrated and children's lives are reflected in positive and authentic ways in their learning experiences (NAEYC, 2019). Authentic writing opportunities that encourage connections between home and school and promote respect for children's unique experiences foster a positive learning environment in which children's development is optimized. When educators integrate authentic writing into the classroom and encourage children to write about their families and their everyday lives, they gain deeper understandings of children's cultural and linguistic experiences.

Collaborating with families also ensures that the learning experiences in the classroom build upon and connect to children's prior knowledge, experiences, and interests (Burns & Kidd, 2016). When educators tap into home writing practices, children are able to connect new learning to what they already know. For example, when educators know the types of writing that occur at home (e.g., grocery lists, notes to other family members, emails, text messages), they can incorporate opportunities to engage children in similar types of writing during instructional lessons and play experiences. Likewise, when children and families share stories about their family members, traditions, and their daily activities, the richness of their family and cultural experiences emerges. Their stories provide educators with insights that ensure children's families, cultures, and languages are valued and recognized in the classroom.

In addition, by engaging families in writing activities that bridge home and school, educators provide opportunities for children to write about topics that are familiar to them. Young children are proud of their family and culture and love to share their experiences through their writing. Educators build on children's natural interest in their family by creating opportunities to write about their families both at school and at home. In the classroom, educators often prominently display family photos taken during home visits or sent in by families. These photos encourage children to talk and write about their family. When the writings are taken home, they are shared with family members. Likewise, children and families may engage in writing projects at home and then bring their writing into school to share with their classmates. These home-school connections strengthen authentic bonds among children,

families, and educators, which contribute to an inclusive learning environment and culturally responsive assessment and instruction practices.

Key Take-Aways

Young children develop understandings about writing as they experience the world. At home, they gain valuable insights into how writing is used to communicate. They also begin to develop writing habits and skills and learn to handle writing materials and tools. Young children bring these understandings and skills with them as they enter early care and education settings. When educators and family members work together, they use what they learn from each other to provide opportunities for children to continue to develop their writing knowledge and skills. This relationship between educators and families helps educators build on children's prior knowledge, experience, and interests as they provide culturally responsive and individually appropriate instructional writing experiences. As educators plan assessment and instruction, they recognize that understanding typical writing progressions is important, but are also mindful that children's development varies. Therefore, educators consider the diversities children bring to the classroom when they create an environment that fosters writing development and integrates writing opportunities across the school day. When writing is an important part of their everyday lives, children develop writing knowledge and skills that prepare them for future literacy experiences. These experiences also give children a voice as they engage in writing as a way to navigate their world.

Additional Resources

Promoting Preschoolers' Emergent Writing: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/nov2017/emergent-writing>

Virginia's *Early Learning & Development Standards (ELDS): Birth-Five Learning Guidelines*. <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/curriculum/va-elds-birth-5.pdf>

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

9: The Literacy Environment

Overview

Creating effective literacy environments is essential for fostering young children's language and literacy development. These environments serve as the foundation for children's exploration of reading and writing. This chapter focuses on designing literacy-rich and print-rich environments, with a special emphasis on integrating critically responsive literature that reflects the diverse experiences and identities of young children.

Designing the Literacy Environment

The chapter identifies key components of designing a literacy environment such as an intentional layout, ensuring that every aspect of the space supports literacy learning, and creating an inviting and accessible space with many opportunities for children to interact with various forms of print.

Print-Rich Environment

A print-rich environment immerses children in written language, helping them make connections between spoken and written words. Essential elements of a print-rich environment include labels and signs, interactive displays, and diverse print materials.

Critically Responsive Literature

Critically responsive literature is essential in promoting inclusivity, cultural awareness, and social justice within the literacy environment. By selecting and integrating literature that reflects the diverse experiences, identities, and voices of young children, educators can foster a sense of belonging and respect for differences.

Purpose and Goals

By thoughtfully designing the environment and thoughtfully selecting the literature within it, educators can foster a love for reading and writing while ensuring that all children see themselves reflected and valued in the stories they encounter. This chapter provides a guide to creating literacy environments that are rich, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all learners.

Objectives

- Explore guidelines for developing an effective literacy-rich environment
- Examine elements of a print-rich environment.
- Identify the importance of culturally responsive literature in the early childhood classroom.

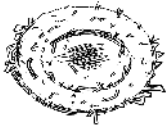
9.1: Designing Literacy Rich Play Environments

9.2: Print Rich Environments

9.3: Critically Responsive Children's Books

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9.1: Designing Literacy Rich Play Environments



Designing Literacy-Rich Play Environments

Optimal learning environments are designed with intentionality. When considering how to orchestrate effective literacy-rich environments for young children, educators strategically reflect on how the physical environment invites children to actively use language in personally relevant ways. The principles of *universal design* guide educators' decisions about how to establish literacy routines that support all learners within a particular learning environment. Originally, architects used the concept of universal design to ensure people with diverse interests, abilities, and needs were able to successfully navigate a particular space with ease (e.g., curb cuts, flexible seating, wide pathways, and automated doors and lights). Educators use concepts of universal design to ensure all children are able to meaningfully take part in and access the learning environment (Dinnebee, Boat, & Bae, 2013). When educators use concepts of universal design, they not only think critically about the physical spaces children occupy, they also think about how the learning experiences they create engage and support learners with diverse background experiences.



Figure 9.1.1 Teachers use elements of the environment to engage students, such as light play with shapes.

Universal design principles encourage educators to (a) develop curricular routines and classroom spaces that meet the needs of all children, (b) recognize learning pathways for children are unique, (c) appreciate learning differences as a natural part of classroom communities, and (d) use open-ended learning opportunities that allow children to represent their understandings in diverse ways (Dinnebell et al., 2013). As described, these principles advocate for learning environments that are inclusive, flexible, and open for all learners as opposed to making modifications for individual children. The universal design principles ask educators to consciously attend to both the physical aspects of an environment that define learning spaces as well as the intangible classroom experiences that engage children emotionally, socially, and cognitively.

Physical Literacy Learning Environments

At the most basic level, the physical environment refers to the design and layout of the classroom. The decisions educators make about how to arrange the physical environment within a classroom has implications for the types of activities, behaviors, and learning routines children and educators experience. While there are elements of the physical environment that are beyond an

educator's control, (e.g., the overall size of the space and design details like sinks, bathroom accessibility, and electrical outlets) educators enjoy control over the learning spaces found in early childhood classrooms. Effective learning environments use a combination of visual cues (e.g., signs and pictures to identify learning spaces or processes) and structural features (e.g., rugs, low shelves, beanbags, play furniture, and tables) to divide the classroom into distinct learning spaces. The visual cues and structural features work together to guide children's behaviors, engage learners, and inspire literacy explorations.

To meet children's learning preferences and needs, classroom designs include flexible individual and small group learning spaces. Classrooms also need a space large enough for a whole group of children to come together for shared experiences. The whole group space may actually prove to be the trickiest of all to "fit in." The space needs to be large enough and situated so all children are able to share in the learning opportunity. Children's sight-lines need to be clear and they need to be able to sit comfortably. For some children, this means providing wiggle cushions or small chairs, others need room to safely extend or bend their legs as needed to ensure they are comfortable. Traffic flow in and around this space needs to be flexible and open as well. An open design will allow guests, teachers, and children to enter and move around the space more easily and enhance children's engagement.



Figure 9.1.2 Whole group space works well for read-aloud time.

Establishing the primary learning areas first will help divide the room into distinct activity zones. When initially designing classroom spaces for children, educators stop to identify the *types* of learning opportunities they want young children to experience and *where* these experiences will take place. Common early learning areas include, but are not limited to, library nooks, home living corners, STEM centers, art exploration stations, and construction zones. The names of the learning areas suggest the types of learning activities children will experience and promote different kinds of play and explorations. Thoughtful arrangement of learning centers and activity zones within a classroom supports positive literacy behavior patterns.

Pause and Consider: Establishing Effective Classroom Climates

Take a moment to read Table 9.1.1 "General Guidelines for Establishing an Effective Classroom Environment." As you read, consider how each suggestion might impact children in the learning environment. After reading the selection, make a mental list of characteristics of a literacy rich classroom, or use materials to create a mock map. One possible app for classroom design can be found at: <http://classroom.4teachers.org/>

Table 9.1.1 "General Guidelines for Establishing an Effective Classroom Environment"

- Divide the classroom into quadrants (wet, dry, noisy, quiet)
- Ensure wet areas are separated from dry areas and noisy areas are separate from quiet areas
- Design flexible whole, small group, and independent learning spaces
- Use furniture and materials to provide boundaries and define learning spaces
- Carpets, low shelving, front-facing book shelves, tables, chairs, open storage bins with writing tools and material, and easels inspire children's engagement within particular spaces
- Create soft and hard literacy play and learning spaces by offering flexible and moveable seating options, diverse writing surfaces, and cozy spots for reading, writing, and conversing

- Organize materials for easy accessibility to support literacy practices and make clean-up easier
- Label classroom spaces, shelves, and storage bins with words and pictures to guide children's patterns of behavior and infuse the classroom with meaningful print

Building Areas for Literacy-Rich Play

Intentional learning areas invite children to engage in hands-on, minds-on explorations of their literacy worlds. During play children use and develop critical thinking skills while increasing their oral language and other emergent literacy skills and understandings. As Heath (1983) explains,

In their play, the children tell stories to each other or they monologue their creations. They frame parts of the whole drama of adulthood in sandboxes, corners of the playroom, or the play yard. But there they also declare themselves members of the world of children and members of a community which does not let its members ever go too far or too long away from the constraints of reality (p. 162).

Literacy-rich play spaces and learning experiences encourage children to explore their understandings of the world. To inspire children's active incorporation of diverse literacy practices in play, educators need to take time to reflect on (a) the amount of time children engage in dramatic and guided play experiences, (b) the accessibility of intentional materials that inspire creative literacy play opportunities, and (c) the language they use to scaffold children's understandings and support literacy-rich play experiences. Through their interactions with purposeful materials, educators, and peers, children manipulate and use language in flexible ways to learn about and influence their world. Literacy-rich play areas strategically infuse literacy tools (e.g. books, writing paper, pencils, stamps, envelopes, etc.) and props (e.g. mailboxes, puppet theatres, recipe boxes, lab coats, aprons, etc.) to increase children's incorporation of play scenarios that use their emerging oral language, reading, and writing skills (Walfersberger et al., 2004). "Literacy Enriched Learning Areas" provides examples of how educators enrich learning areas to intentionally promote children's literacy explorations.

As you review Table 9.1.2, consider how the materials invite children to engage meaningfully in literacy rich spaces and nurture children's literacy understandings.

Table 9.1.2 "Literacy Enriched Learning Areas"

Literacy Enriched Learning Areas

Learning Area	Emergent Literacy Purpose	Examples of Relevant Literacy-Rich Materials
Library	- Connects young children to books - Promotes print awareness - Supports children's comprehension and interpretations of text - Extends children's oral language opportunities and enhances children's vocabulary through story telling	- Books on a range of topics - Books from multiple genres - Books with diverse representations of children and families (i.e., culturally, ability, socio-economically, geographically, and children and families with diverse gender and sexual orientations) - Puppets/Stuffed animals for children to read to and engage in story retelling - Soft materials (i.e., pillows and cushions) - Puppet theatres - Felt boards
Writing	- Encourages children to understand letters combine to represent words in a written form - Develops children's letter formation - Supports letter/sound connection - Expands opportunities for children to write in personally meaningful ways	- Various types of paper - Writing utensils (pencils, colored pencils, pens, markers) - Clip boards - Hole punch/stapler for making books - Envelopes - Ink pads and stamps - Magnetic letters - Chalk and chalkboards - Dry erase boards and markers
Dramatic Play	- Inspires children's oral language and supports vocabulary development - Invites children to manipulate text in diverse ways - Promotes creative expression	- Themed props to encourage imagination and discovery - Bakery theme: recipe cards, cake boxes, cake pans, spatulas, etc. - Animal shelter: animal name cards, adoption certificates, veterinarian health charts, etc. - Post office: envelopes, mail boxes, stamps, boxes, labels, scales, etc. - Restaurant: menus, note pads, welcome signs, etc. - Writing utensils - Paper
Math	- Encourages children's oral language fluency with mathematical and scientific concepts - Extends children's vocabulary in personally relevant ways - Promotes mathematical literacy - counting, - Cardinality (the total number in a set), - Mathematical operations (adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing)	- Manipulatives - Counting bears - Snap cubes - Blocks - Cars - Collections of "things" - Paper - Graph paper - Tape measures - Rulers

	• Algebraic thinking, • Measurement, • Data collection, and • Geometry (shapes, lines, dimensions, etc.)	• Writing utensils • Weights
Art Exploration	• Extends children's voices by providing opportunities for children to use multiple mediums to express themselves and represent their ideas • Nurtures creativity • Promotes higher order thinking skills, including planning, designing, experimenting, and examining • Develops fine motor skills and eye hand coordination for detailed work with their fingers and hands	• Construction materials (know your learners—safety first as always) • Glue • Tape • String • Staples • Magnets • Hammer and nails • Scissors • Recyclables (boxes, cardboard tubes, cans etc., • Paper all kinds, sizes, and colors • Natural items (boards, sticks, rocks, slates, etc.) • Paint • Clay • Playdough • Crayons • Markers • Pastels • Pencils • Colored pencils
STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)	• Promotes inquiry-based thinking • Encourages children to ask questions about how their physical world works • Supports children's documentation of their thinking and wonderings using words, print, pictures, drawings, diagrams, videos, etc. • Domain specific vocabulary • Scientific method (e.g. investigation, hypothesis, research, inquiry) • Physical science (e.g. volcano, earthquake, ocean) • Biology (e.g., chrysalis, hive, stem) • Chemistry (e.g. reaction, dissolve, combine) • Technology (e.g. coding, streaming, cloud)	• Natural elements (leaves, shells, snake skins, dirt, water, ice, seeds, etc.) • Physical elements (ramps, marbles, wheels, magnets, pulleys, ropes, etc.) • STEM inquiry tools • Magnifying glasses • Graph Paper • Markers • Tape measures • Rulers • Scales • Science Logs • Measuring Cups

As the *Literacy Enriched Learning Areas* table demonstrates, once foundational structures are decided upon, educators can enrich the learning environment with a variety of materials to scaffold children's literacy interactions. Classroom environments that are predictable support intangible, emotional elements that impact the nature of instructional literacy play experiences, children's learning progressions, and educator-child interactions (Reutzel & Jones, 2013). Intentional design strategies help educators create places where children feel comfortable exploring their environment and empower children to modify learning spaces to meet their play goals and preferences.



Figure 9.1.3 Children extend their play and build on their language with each other at the sensory table.

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9.2: Print Rich Environments

Print-Rich Environments

Print-rich environments promote classroom cultures that value literacy explorations. Literacy rich contexts intentionally display children's own writings, drawings, and pictures alongside a variety of children's books, writing materials, and engaging charts, diagrams, and signs. Print-rich environments present children with a wealth of reading and writing materials and encourage children to see that print has meaning (McGee, 2007). In print-rich environments children observe adults using printed materials in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. In turn, children are guided by educators to use printed materials for their own play purposes. Therefore, careful attention to both the placement of print and the amount of print found within the environment is important.

Images, symbols, and text designed to cue children's interactions with text need to be strategically placed to draw children's attention and encourage sustained engagement. Writing materials, children's books, and other items that support children's literacy enactments (e.g., puppet theatres, construction signs in the block center, alphabet stamps in the art center) need to be both visually and physically available so that children instinctively use classroom resources to support their learning explorations. When educators place print-rich classroom literacy materials, including signs, materials, and books, within children's natural sight lines the literacy materials remain child-centric. This increases the likelihood that children will use the resources in personally meaningful ways. Print that is placed for intentional and functional purposes in "just right spaces" allows children to meaningfully engage and interact with the print. Conversely, print materials positioned in a space "too high" for children to visually or physically access, will not be easily incorporated by children into their play scenarios or learning experiences.

In addition to deciding where to position print-rich material, educators also need to consider the amount of print in the classroom. Classroom environments with *too much* print can be overwhelming and distracting to young learners. Environments that overload children's sensory capacities may impact how children interact with peers and adults and undermine children's literacy enactments. Ultimately, the print displayed within the classroom should be done so in an intentional manner with children's literacy interactions in mind. For example, in a veterinarian dramatic play center thematic word and picture charts (e.g., bird, snake, dog, cat), scales for weighing animals, record forms for the children taking care of the animals, and relevant labels (e.g., water, food, check-in) support children's literacy play experiences.



Figure 9.2.1 Children's verbal statements and a photograph next to their artwork enhances the print-rich environment.

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9.3: Critically Responsive Children's Books

Children's books offer a rich foundation for children's literacy explorations. However, the quality of literature children are immersed in matters. Emergent readers, writers, and speakers need consistent opportunities to engage in texts they find compelling. Educators can use books to spark and provoke children's interests. Intentional literature experiences encourage children to consider multiple perspectives and allow children to vicariously experience worlds beyond their immediate classroom environment. Narrative texts (fiction texts) invite children to problem solve along with central characters, explore places beyond their own communities, and listen to lived experiences of other people. Expository texts (nonfiction or informational texts) promote children's inquiry and encourage children to use texts as mediums for learning about how the world works and consider how people influence our communities. Educators play a critical role in determining children's access to print and their intentional selection of compelling children's texts is essential.

Children need to see themselves represented in the books embedded within their early learning spaces. In 1990, Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop published a seminal article titled, "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors." Dr. Sims Bishop explains,

Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. (p. ix)

Children's early literacy experiences offer the opportunity for children to learn about new worlds or ideas. For example, in the book, *Bilal Cooks Daal*, the main character, Bilal, cooks daal with his friends who have never had it or made it before (Saeed & Syed, 2019). Daal is a term used throughout India and South Asia to broadly identify a variety of spiced lentil and bean-based soups. The dish is described in the book along with the cooking process and serves as a window for children who have never heard of daal, a sliding glass door for children to walk through and experience new cultural practices (such as how daal is served in the bowl and the preparation practices), and a mirror for children who regularly eat daal with their friends and family.

Daal is frequently served with rice or flatbread like naan. So, for Prashant, *Bilal Cooks Daal* serves as a mirror, reflecting the familiar food items his family prepares at home. At the same time, the story offers windows and sliding glass doors for his peers and educators who may not be as familiar with Indian or South Asian cuisine. The story invites all children to vicariously experience the rhythm of cooking daal and can subsequently be used to extend the play scenarios Prashant and his friends create. Diversity rich classrooms encourage conversations and offer children opportunities to learn about people and families that are different from themselves (Baker, 1990).

NAEYC's 2019 *Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education* underscores the intentional infusion of literacy opportunities that reinforce the dignity of each child, stating "children of all genders, with and without disabilities should see themselves and their families, languages and cultures regularly and meaningfully reflected in the environment and learning materials" (NAEYC, 2019, p.7). Educators must always be mindful that in selecting materials, they are exercising power to choose which windows, mirrors, and sliding doors children will be exposed to. Accordingly, it is important for educators to infuse children's literature that show children and families of color as the central characters even if the classroom demographic appears to be predominately white. When selecting texts, educators need to "remember that the learning environment and its materials reflect what [they] do and do not value by what is presented and what is omitted" (NAEYC, 2019, p. 7). With this power comes a responsibility to use a critically responsive lens when selecting children's texts. Diverse texts allow children to celebrate and honor cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, ability, family, and gender diversities. It also creates opportunities for educators to challenge storylines that stereotype, misrepresent, and marginalize.

Pause and Consider: Diverse Children's Texts

Looking for Diverse Children's Texts?

If you are currently in an early learning context, take a moment to review the children's texts available to your young learners. Alternatively, take a moment to reflect on the diversity of children's text you read as a child. Mentally tally how many texts included children and families of differing ethnic, economic, ability, linguistic, and regional backgrounds. Then consider,

whose voices were underrepresented or not represented in the mental evaluation you conducted? Consider if generalizations, stereotyping, or misrepresentations are present. How might the texts you reviewed serve as windows, sliding glass doors, or mirrors for children?

Developing literacy opportunities and class libraries that meaningfully infuse books with children and families that bring diversities to the classroom takes planning. Fortunately, there are a number of resources educators can access to support their efforts in acquiring diversity rich texts. Take a few moments exploring some of the resource sites in Table 9.3.1 “Finding Exemplary Children’s Books.” Then, make a plan for enhancing children’s access to a wide variety of texts with multiple cultural, familial, and ability representations.

Finding Exemplary Children’s Books

Table 9.3.1 Finding Exemplary Children’s Books

Resource	Description	Web Link
American Library Association (Coretta Scott King Award Books)	The Coretta Scott King Award recognizes African American authors and illustrators capturing the African American experience.	https://bit.ly/3Au2L23
American Library Association (Pura Belpré Award Books)	The Pura Belpré Award is presented to a Latinx author or illustrator capturing the Latinx cultural experience.	https://bit.ly/3yyY2ff
American Library Association (Schneider Family Book Award)	The Schneider Family Book Award recognizes authors and illustrators presenting stories of the disability experience for children.	https://bit.ly/3s2gURf
Learning for Justice	Learning for Justice is a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center that published guidelines to support educators’ considerations of children’s texts. The free resource guides educators to use a critical lens when selecting text for children.	https://bit.ly/3lM9kcv
The National Museum of the American Indian	The National Museum of the American Indian online bookstore presents a selection of texts that show children contemporary experiences of Native Peoples and challenge stereotypes that continue to marginalize tribes.	https://s.si.edu/2VwcV3J
National Council for the Social Studies	The National Council for the Social Studies Carter G. Woodson Book Award also honors a few children’s texts each year “that depict ethnicity in the United States” (NCSS)	https://bit.ly/3s3s5ch
We Need Diverse Books	WNDB provides a platform for curating “literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people” (WNDB, 2020).	https://bit.ly/3yDhg3o

Key Take-Aways

Educators’ intentional interactions with children engaged in play experiences support children’s emerging literacies (Saracho, 2004). In early childhood education contexts, play-filled experiences occur throughout the school day and are influenced by the decisions educators make when designing instructional spaces for young children. Children’s diverse background experiences also

provide rich funds of prior knowledge that educators use to extend children's literacy worlds and engage children in personally relevant play scenarios. As observed in the opening vignette, educators play an important role in guiding children's attention toward literacy rich materials and scaffolding children's language explorations. Early childhood educators are essential guides for children as they learn to use the power of language to speak, read, and write their own literacy journeys.

Additional Resources

Early Childhood Inclusion Joint Position Statement: National Association for Education of Young Children and Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/ps_inclusion_dec_naeyc_ec.pdf

Literacy-Rich Environments, Reading Rockets <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/literacy-rich-environments>

Language and Literacy Environments in Preschool, Reading Rockets <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/language-and-literacy-environments-preschools>

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

10: Language and Literacy Experience Plans

Overview

This chapter focuses on designing language and literacy learning experience plans that foster the holistic development of young children. These plans are pivotal in supporting children's growth across multiple domains—physical, cognitive, language, and social/emotional. The chapter will guide you through planning learning experiences that are not only relevant, meaningful, and appropriately challenging but also developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate. Additionally, the chapter emphasizes the importance of aligning these plans with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) Framework and following the Teaching Cycle to ensure that all learning experiences are grounded in best practices and promote comprehensive child development.

Learning Experience Plan Components

This chapter reviews the following components required in learning experience plans as required by the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS).

- Incorporate relevant developmental domains (physical, cognitive, language, social/emotional),
- Relevant, meaningful, and appropriately challenging.
- Developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for the age group.
- Includes effective transitions.
- Incorporates the WMELS Framework.
- Reflects the Teaching Cycle.

Purpose and Goals

This chapter provides a review of writing learning experience plans following the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Framework.

Objectives

- **Review** Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) learning experience plan components.
- **Review** Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) Framework.

[10.1: Relevant Developmental Domains](#)

[10.2: Appropriately Challenging](#)

[10.3: Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate](#)

[10.4: Effective Transitions](#)

[10.5: Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards Framework](#)

[10.6: The Teaching Cycle](#)

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10.1: Relevant Developmental Domains

Create language and literacy learning experience plans that promote child development and learning for children.

Criteria: Plan incorporates relevant developmental domains (physical, cognitive, language, social/emotional).

In this chapter, we will look at the components of a learning experience plan. You will review developmentally appropriate practice, developmental domains, individual and cultural appropriateness, the use of effective transitions, the WMELS Framework and the Teaching Cycle. First, let's review developmentally appropriate practice.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

When planning curriculum for children we must be sure the activities are developmentally appropriate. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Position Statement, "The core of developmentally appropriate practice lies in... intentionality, in the knowledge that practitioners consider when they are making decisions, and in their always aiming for goals that are both challenging and achievable for children." In order to do this they must use developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). DAP includes three areas of knowledge:

1. **Age-Appropriateness** – using what is known about child development and learning in general. More specifically this means: What is known about child development and learning: Knowledge of age-related human characteristics that permits general predictions within an age range about what activities, materials, interactions, or experiences will be safe, healthy, interesting, achievable, and challenging to children.
2. **Individual-Appropriateness** – using what is known about each child as an individual to be responsive to each child. More specific examples of this include: What is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group: [Necessary] to be able to adapt and be responsive to inevitable individual variation.
3. **Social- and Cultural-Appropriateness** – using what is known about the social and cultural context in which children live^[1]. This means: Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live: [Necessary] to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families. (Bredenkamp & Copple 1997, 8–9)

Head Start has **Guiding Principles** that reflect developmentally appropriate practice by an intentional teacher.

1. Each child is unique and can succeed
2. Learning occurs with the context of relationships.
3. Families are children's first and most important caregivers, teachers, and advocates.
4. Children learn best when they are emotionally and physically safe and secure.
5. Areas of development are integrated, and children learn many concepts and skills at the same time.
6. Teaching must be intentional and focus on how children learn and grow.
7. Every child has diverse strengths rooted in their family's culture, background, language, and beliefs.^[2]

Relevant Developmental Domains

Course Competency Criteria **Plan incorporates relevant developmental domains (physical, cognitive, language, social/emotional)** aligns with Developmentally Appropriate Practice Area of Knowledge number **1. Age-Appropriateness** and the Head Start Guiding Principle **5. Areas of development are integrated, and children learn many concepts and skills at the same time**. From our work with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards, we know children learn in multiple domains through one activity. It also aligns with Head Start Guiding Principle **6. Teaching must be intentional and focus on how children learn and grow**.

The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards reflect 5 Domains of Learning

- I. Health and Physical Development
- II. Social and Emotional Development
- III. Language Development and Communication

IV. Approaches to Learning

V. Cognition and General Knowledge

Each of those domains is further divided into 3 Sub-Domains. Below you will see how the Language Development and Communication Domain is sub-divided. Please see the [Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards](#) for detailed information on each of the 5 domains.

DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAIN

III. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION

A. LISTENING AND UNDERSTANDING

B. SPEAKING AND COMMUNICATING

C. EARLY LITERACY

Observing the children in our care and looking at the developmental continuum and sample behaviors in the WMELS book will help teachers to be sure they are planning learning experiences and activities that are age-appropriate, individual-appropriate, and social- and cultural-appropriate.

References

[1] National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2009) Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8. Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/PSDAP.pdf>

[2] Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is in the public domain

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10.2: Appropriately Challenging

Create language and literacy learning experience plans that promote child development and learning for children.

CRITERIA Plan is relevant, meaningful, and appropriately challenging

Course Competency Criteria **Plan is relevant, meaningful, and appropriately challenging** aligns with Developmentally Appropriate Practice Area of Knowledge number **1. Age-Appropriateness**. Remember, this is knowledge of age-related human characteristics that permits general predictions within an age range about what activities, materials, interactions, or experiences will be safe, healthy, interesting, achievable, and challenging to children. It also aligns with DAP Area of Knowledge number **2. Individual-Appropriateness**. Remember, this is using what is known about each child as an individual to be responsive to each child. More specific examples of this include: What is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group: What is necessary to be able to adapt and be responsive to inevitable individual variation.

It Aligns with the Following Head Start Guiding Principles:

1. Each child is unique and can succeed.
2. Learning occurs within the context of relationships.
3. Children learn best when they are emotionally and physically safe and secure.
4. Areas of development are integrated, and children learn many concepts and skills at the same time.
5. Teaching must be intentional and focused on how children learn and grow.

For more information see the [Interactive Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five](#)

Once again, by observing the children in the group, teachers can plan learning experiences and activities that are individually appropriate for the group of children and individual children in the group by noticing their interests and developmental levels. Remember the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) from Vygotsky. Children learn best when the activities and learning experiences are just slightly above their current level of development and they have the guidance and support of a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), meaning we don't want the activities to be too easy or boring for them or overly difficult or too challenging for them.

To begin to understand how to plan effective, developmentally appropriate curriculum for children, we must look at the context in which that planning should happen. Planning everything, from the flow of the day, to how teachers design and stock the classroom environment, to the way the spontaneous (unplanned) experiences of children are recognized and valued, to the experiences teachers thoughtfully plan and intentionally implement, happens in a continuous cycle. As we will discuss in this chapter that cycle begins with observing and continues through documenting what was observed, reflecting on what it means and how to plan to best support children, and then implementing those plans, before returning back to observing.^[1]

Planning curriculum for young children begins with teachers discovering, through careful listening and observation, each child's development. Observation is an essential skill for a teacher. When teachers mindfully observe, they discover how individual children make meaning in everyday moments of play and interactions and how to deepen their relationships with children. Observing for the purpose of assessing individual children's learning means carefully watching and listening, with thought and reflection. In doing so, teachers find the knowledge, awareness, and strategies that individual children have formed during their experiences. It may be evidence that pertains to individual children's emotional, social, cognitive, or physical development. If the evidence is clear and significant, teachers can preserve it through, for example, a note, a photo, or a sample of a child's work.

Consider this example in which a teacher plans a relevant, meaningful, and appropriately challenging language and literacy activity.

Vignette

[Language and Literacy Vignette Example](#)

Scenario:

Ms. Thompson, a preschool teacher, is planning a language and literacy activity for her diverse classroom of 4-year-olds. She aims to create a learning experience that is relevant to the children's interests, meaningful to their lives, and appropriately challenging for their developmental stages.

Planning:

Ms. Thompson knows that her students are currently fascinated by animals, particularly the ones they see around their community, such as birds, dogs, and squirrels. She decides to create a literacy activity centered around the theme of "Animals in Our Neighborhood." The plan includes a storytime session, a follow-up discussion, and an art project that incorporates writing.



Relevance and Meaningfulness:

During circle time, Ms. Thompson reads a book called *"Our Neighborhood Animals,"* which features familiar animals and settings similar to the children's own environment. The story includes simple, repetitive phrases that the children can easily anticipate and join in on, such as "The dog barks, woof-woof! The bird sings, tweet-tweet!" This engages the children because it reflects their real-world experiences, making the story relevant and meaningful to them.

After the story, Ms. Thompson invites the children to talk about the animals they've seen around their homes. She asks, "Who has seen a dog or a bird near their house? What sounds do they make?" Each child excitedly shares their experiences, connecting the story to their own lives. This discussion helps the children relate the new vocabulary and concepts to what they already know, deepening their understanding.

Appropriate Challenge:

For the follow-up activity, Ms. Thompson presents an art project where each child creates a picture of their favorite neighborhood animal. She provides a variety of materials—crayons, markers, construction paper, and glue—to allow for different levels of fine motor skill development. She encourages the children to label their drawings with the animal's name, offering help with writing the letters as needed.

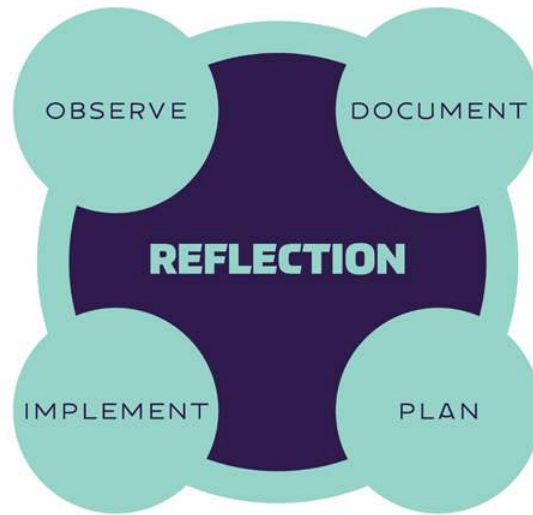
Ms. Thompson differentiates the challenge based on each child's ability. For children who are more advanced, she suggests they write a short sentence about their animal, such as "The bird sings." For those still developing their writing skills, she encourages them to trace or copy the animal's name from a model she provides.

Throughout the activity, Ms. Thompson circulates the room, offering guidance and support tailored to each child's needs. She praises their efforts and gently challenges them to try new things, such as adding more detail to their drawings or trying to write a new word. By doing so, she ensures that the activity is appropriately challenging for each child, pushing them to develop their skills without causing frustration.

Summary:

Ms. Thompson's language and literacy activity is a strong example of creating learning experiences that are relevant, meaningful, and appropriately challenging. By choosing a topic that reflects the children's interests and everyday experiences, she makes the activity engaging and personally significant. The structured art and writing project is adapted to suit the varying developmental levels of her students, ensuring that each child is both supported and challenged in a way that promotes their language and literacy growth.

Visual representation of the Curriculum Planning Cycle



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10.3: Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate

Create language and literacy learning experience plans that promote child development and learning for children.

Course Competency Criteria **plan is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for the group** aligns with:

the Developmentally Appropriate Practice Area of Knowledge number **3. Social- and Cultural-Appropriateness** – using what is known about the social and cultural context in which children live^[1].

This means: Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live; [Necessary] to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families. (Bredekamp & Copple 1997, 8–9)

It aligns with the following **Head Start Guiding Principles**:

3. Families are children’s first and most important caregivers, teachers, and advocates.

7. Every child has diverse strengths rooted in their family’s culture, background, language, and beliefs.^[2]

Curriculum in Multicultural Classrooms

The term culturally responsive practices has been used to refer to the implementation of effective teaching practices in diverse early education settings. Culturally responsive practices are teaching to the individual needs of children who are culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse. This term implies the integration of assessment and curriculum practices: program staff must learn about the individual abilities and preferences of each of the children enrolled in their program, and then find ways to plan and implement a curriculum that is based upon each individual child’s needs and interests. For example, teachers can use home visits to learn about the child, to observe ways that families interact with their child, and to begin a dialogue with families about their goals for the child.

Classroom Materials

In her 1995 book, *The Right Stuff for Children Birth to 8*, Martha Bronson offers detailed suggestions for selecting play materials that are safe, appropriate, and supportive of play and development. It is relevant to note here that classroom materials can potentially depict people in stereotypical ways or only contain simplified or inaccurate images of culturally diverse people. Therefore, the challenge is to provide classroom materials that reflect all children, families, and adults in the program, and to eliminate stereotypical or inaccurate materials from daily use. For example, books and dramatic play materials should reflect diversity of gender roles, racial and cultural backgrounds, special needs and abilities, and a range of occupations and ages. Books and environmental print should also represent the different languages of children in the classroom.



Figure 10.3.1: What diversity is represented in this image of children and dolls? ^[50]

The challenge for programs is to establish systems and procedures that take the cultural and linguistic contexts of the children into account. Once in place, these classroom materials should be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that the classrooms reflect all enrolled children without stereotyping. Programs are encouraged to seek information from families and knowledgeable members of the community for their input in equipping classrooms to reflect cultures and languages in respectful ways.

Finally, encouraging children’s language and cognitive growth does not preclude the responsibility to support each child’s sense of wellbeing, the formation of his or her identity, and feelings of security. A consensus within the research is that effective environments for children support all domains of development, and that environments associated with learning outcomes should

also provide strong support for social–emotional development (Hart & Risley 1995, 1999; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin 1998).

With this in mind, the developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate environment mirrors the ideas, values, attitudes, and cultures of the children it serves (Gestwicki 1995). The following are some specific strategies suggested by Derman Sparks (1989):

✓ Suggested Strategies

1. Use images in abundance that represent all children, families, and staff in your program.
2. Use images of children and adults from the major ethnic groups in your community and in U.S. society.
3. Use images that accurately reflect people's current daily lives in the U.S. during work and recreational activities.
4. Offer a balance among different cultural and ethnic groups.
5. Provide a fair balance of images of women and men doing "jobs at home" and "jobs outside home." Provide images of older people of various backgrounds doing different activities.
6. Provide images of differently abled people of various backgrounds at work and with their families.
7. Use images of diversity in family styles, such as single mothers and fathers, and extended families that are multiracial and multiethnic.
8. Use images of important individuals, past and present, and that reflect diversity.
9. Exhibit artwork—prints, sculpture, and textiles—by artists of various background

✓ Vignette

Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Read-Aloud in Preschool – "Animals in Our Neighborhood"

Setting: A preschool classroom in a multicultural neighborhood where children come from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Context: It's storytime, and Mr. Kim, the preschool teacher, has chosen a book called "Animals in Our Neighborhood." The book features illustrations of different animals commonly found in urban, suburban, and rural areas, along with descriptions in multiple languages, including English, Spanish, and Korean.

Activity: Mr. Kim gathers the children on the rug, holding up the book so everyone can see the cover. "Today, we're going to read about the animals we might see around where we live," he begins. "But this book is special because it includes words in different languages, just like how we all speak different languages at home."

He opens the book to the first page, which features a squirrel sitting on a tree branch. The text reads, "This is a squirrel. It's called 'ardilla' in Spanish and '다람쥐' (daramjwi) in Korean." Mr. Kim reads the English text first, then pauses and repeats the words in Spanish and Korean.

"Does anyone here know what we call a squirrel in another language?" he asks. A boy named Mateo raises his hand and says, "In Spanish, we say 'ardilla!'" Mr. Kim nods approvingly, "That's right, Mateo! And in Korean, it's '다람쥐' (daramjwi). Let's all try saying these words together."

The children repeat the words after Mr. Kim, some giggling as they practice pronouncing "daramjwi." Mr. Kim smiles and encourages them, saying, "It's fun to learn new words, isn't it?"

As they move on to the next animal, a raccoon, Mr. Kim points out that raccoons are common in many neighborhoods, and he asks if anyone has ever seen one. A girl named Amara shares, "I saw one in my backyard last night!" Mr. Kim asks if anyone knows another name for a raccoon, and Amara adds, "My grandma calls it 'mapache' in Spanish."

Mr. Kim reads the description in the book, highlighting that "mapache" is the Spanish word for raccoon. He then asks if anyone knows what it's called in another language. A child named Jisoo says, "In Korean, it's '너구리' (neoguri)."

Throughout the read-aloud, Mr. Kim integrates these multilingual connections, inviting children to share the names of animals in their home languages. When they come across a deer in the book, a child named Fatima eagerly shares that in Arabic, it's called "غزال" (ghazal). Mr. Kim appreciates each contribution, helping the children feel proud of their linguistic heritage.

Reflection: After finishing the book, Mr. Kim leads a discussion about the animals in their own neighborhoods. He asks, "Which animals have you seen near your home? What do you call them in your language?"

The children take turns sharing their experiences, with Mr. Kim making sure to include and validate each child's language. He also encourages the children to ask their families about more animal names in their home languages and bring them back to share with the class.

Outcome: The read-aloud not only helps the children learn about the animals in their neighborhood but also celebrates the linguistic diversity in the classroom. By incorporating multiple languages and encouraging children to share their own, Mr. Kim fosters an inclusive environment where every child's culture and language are valued. The children leave storytime with a sense of belonging and excitement to learn more about their peers' languages and experiences.

OpenAI. (2024). *ChatGPT* [Large language model]. <https://chatgpt.com/c/09df4c43-f4d5-...1-8a828d822ff7>

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10.4: Effective Transitions

Create language and literacy learning experience plans that promote child development and learning for children.

CRITERIA: Plan includes effective transitions

Effective Transitions

Transitions that are effective will:

1. Make your day flow smoothly.
2. Gain the children's attention or interest.
3. Help you to give directions about what is coming next or how the children should do something.
4. Help you move the children from one activity to another in an orderly fashion.
5. Transitions can also help you to assess what they children have learned.

Types of Transitions for Your Learning Experience Plans

1. Gaining Attention and/or Interest: You will want to plan a transition for your introduction to your activities that will gain the children's attention and entice them to want to do the upcoming activity. Some ideas for this include songs or fingerplays related to the activity, surprise boxes or bags, puppets, drawing their attention to previous learning and helping them make a connection to the new learning that will occur in the activity.

An effective transition gains their attention and focus. It is interesting and helps the children to be excited about the upcoming activity. This is an example of what an effective transition is **NOT**. Telling the children "Ok, we are going to read a story", or "We are going to do this activity.", or "Who wants to...."

2. Dismissal Transition: You will be planning a dismissal transition from your activity to the next activity in the day or from the directions part of your activity to the area they will go next to complete the next part of the activity.

You can use this as a time to assess what the children have learned by asking them a question. You will ask the children a question, one at a time. Once the child answers, they are dismissed to the next activity.

Please be thoughtful and intentional in your transition activities. It is best when you can connect them to the learning or theme of the activities they are doing.

Transitions

It is important to focus on creating and managing smooth transitions between activities in the classroom. Reasons to address transitions between activities in early childhood classrooms include:

- Transitions take up a great deal of time in preschool classrooms.
- During transitions, children often spend a lot of time waiting (e.g., waiting until everyone has finished their snack, waiting for everyone to clean up before beginning large group time). All of this time waiting with nothing to do can lead to unrealistic expectations and challenging behaviors.
- Some children (and adults) have stressful and frustrating experiences during transitions between activities (e.g., children arguing over who took out what toys and who should put them away; children not knowing where to put certain toys when they are done with them; children not knowing what to do, children not knowing expectations for the transition).
- Many preschool teachers and other caregivers consider children's ability to independently make transitions between activities one of the essential skills needed in group contexts such as preschool and kindergarten.[1]

Supporting Successful Transitions

There are numerous strategies that can be used to ensure well-organized transitions between activities. These include strategies you use before the transition, during the transition, and following the transition.

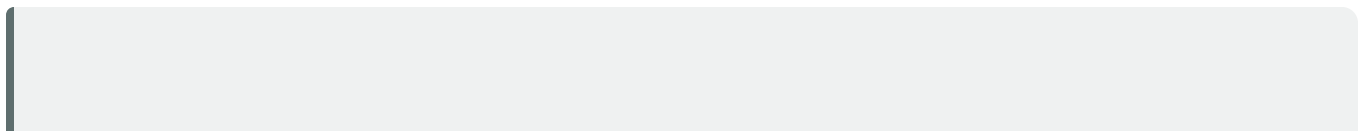
- **Before the Transition**

- Plan your daily schedule to include the minimal number of transitions that occur over the course of the day. Minimize the number of transitions in which all children have to do the same thing at the same time (e.g., Do all children have to go to the restroom at the same time? Can some children come over to the rug and sing a song or read a book, while other children finish an activity?).
- Plan for what adults will do during transition times (e.g., Which adult is responsible for greeting the children? Who will begin looking at books on the carpet with children?).
- Teach children the expectations for the transition routine. Teaching children how to clean up and how to line up will reduce the length of transition times. By reducing transition times, more time is available for children to spend in other learning activities. As children become familiar with the expectations, problem behaviors are less likely to occur.
- Provide verbal and nonverbal cues before transitions (e.g., “Five minutes ‘til snack. It’s almost time for clean-up,” show pictures of the next activity, beat a drum). Once a transition cue has been established, the cue should be used consistently to signal the transition.
- **During the Transition**
 - Engage children in transition activities (sing songs, play word or guessing games, recite rhymes, organize finger plays). Transition activities provide children with an activity to complete while other children are still transitioning. These activities also encourage children to finish their previous task, so that they can play the game or sing the song. During these activities, skills related to the transition can also be taught (e.g., setting the table for snack or lunch, sorting toys during clean-up time).
 - Allow children adequate time to finish projects or activities so they do not become frustrated by activities ending too soon. Give them a warning that it is about time to change activities.
 - Plan something to engage those children who finish an activity quickly, so they are not waiting without anything to do (e.g., if some children finish cleaning up and getting to large group quickly, they might look at books while waiting for other children to finish cleaning up).
 - Individualize support to accommodate individual children’s needs.
 - Photos to help anticipate what activity is next.
 - Directions given in a child’s home language or sign language.
 - An individual warning to a child that it will soon be time to clean up and begin a new activity.
- **Support may need to be individualized** (i.e., one child may need an adult to provide a five-minute, three-minute, and one-minute warning before clean up while the rest of the class might need only a three-minute warning).
- **After transitions**
 - Provide positive attention and feedback to children following transitions.
 - When children pick up toys without much prompting, share with them how this shows how well they take care of the classroom materials.
 - When children are working together to accomplish the task more quickly, let them know how much you appreciate their teamwork (e.g., “Nicholas and Jorge did a great job cleaning together and moving to the carpet”).

You can also work to promote independence during transitions by

- Allowing children to move individually from one area to another area when they complete an activity (e.g., as children finish snack, they are encouraged to go to the carpet and choose a book; as children finish putting away their coats and backpacks, they are encouraged to get a puzzle).
- Teaching children to help others (e.g., have children move as partners from one activity to another, or ask one child to help another child gather his/her backpack).
- Helping children self-monitor during transitions (e.g., children can be asked to think about how quietly or quickly they moved from one activity to another).

The following vignette offers an opportunity to watch and listen for the learning that occurs during a transition routine and to reflect on the planning that had to occur in order for this experience to play out as it did.



Vignette

Ms. Cone had used the children's name tags in transition activities for quite some time, at first pointing out and naming the first letter in each name as she called children to go wash hands or to get their jackets before going outside. Somewhat later, she held up each of the nametags and pointed to the first letter as she asked the child to name it. Today, she is using the first sounds in names to send a few children at a time from the circle time area to wash hands for lunch: "If your name starts with /k/, you may go wash your hands. Yes, Connie and Carolina, you may go to the sink. Both of your names start with the /k/ sound." Cindy sees Connie and Carolina stand up, and she stands up too. Ms. Cone explains that Cindy begins with the /s/, not /k/ sound, and that she'll get a turn soon. Cindy says, "I'm a C too!" Ms. Cone says, "Oh, you are right. Your name begins with the letter c like Connie and Carolina, but it starts with a different sound. We hear /k/ at the beginning of Connie and Carolina—/k/ Connie, /k/ Carolina. We hear /s/ at the beginning of your name—/s/—Cindy. I'm going to say that sound next: 'If your name starts with /s/, you may go wash your hands.'" Sabrina stood up, joined hands with Cindy, and they walked to the sink together.

[2]

Built into this large-group gathering is a dismissal ritual that takes full advantage of young children's interest in their names and the names of their friends. As part of this dismissal ritual, the teacher invites children to use their emerging skills in distinguishing the distinct sounds of language, described in the language and literacy foundations as phonological awareness. She embeds this learning in the context of a game, one that inspires children to listen carefully to the sounds spoken in instructions for inviting small groups of children to wash hands. The transition from large group to the sink area goes much more smoothly as a result, and in the process, children get to use an important emerging skill.

References

[1] [Guide to Presenting Managing the Classroom: Classroom Transitions](#) by the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#) is in the public domain

[2] [The Integrated Nature of Learning](#) by the [California Department of Education](#) is used with permission

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- [5.8: Temporal Environment - The Daily Schedule](#) by Jennifer Paris, Kristin Beeve, & Clint Springer is licensed [CC BY 4.0](#).

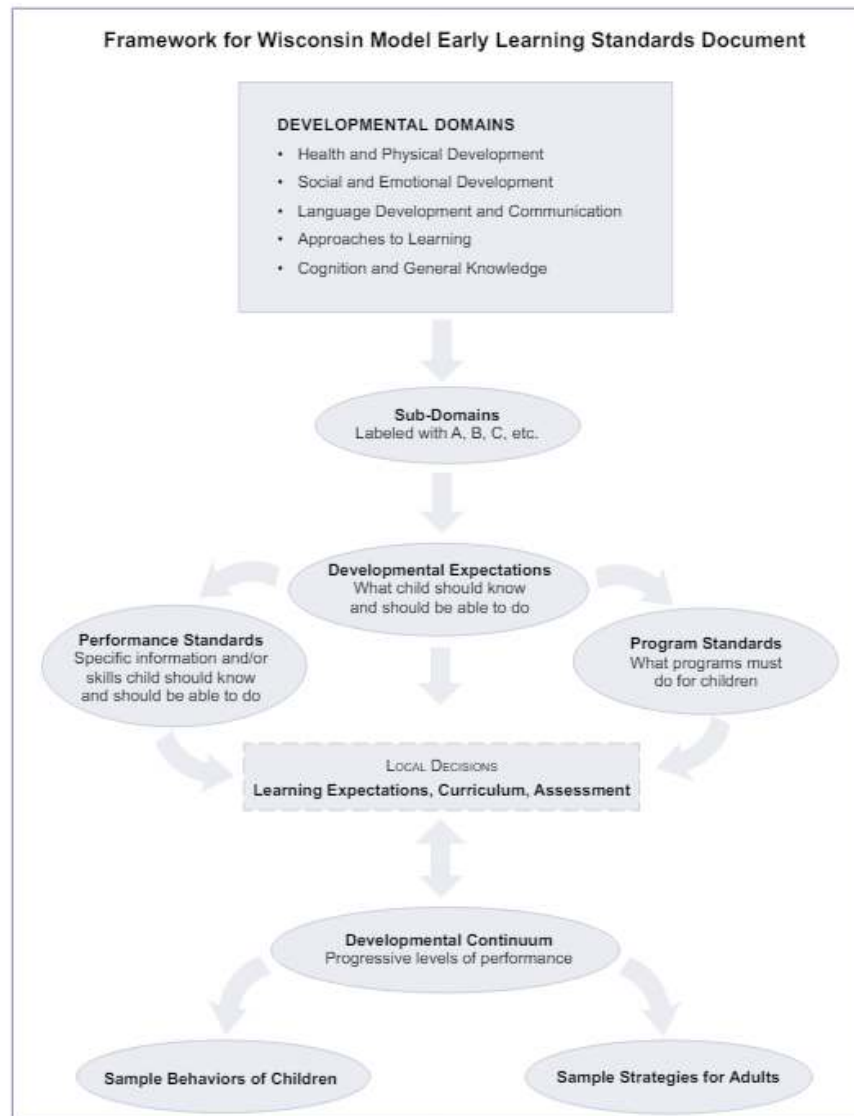
10.5: Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards Framework

Create language and literacy learning experience plans that promote child development and learning for children.

CRITERIA: Plan incorporates the WMELS Framework.

WMELS Framework

Please see page 2-3 of the [Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards](#) to learn more about the framework.



The WMELS Framework is built in to your lesson plan form for your learning experiences. You will be including:

1. The Domain
2. The Sub-Domain
3. The Performance Standard
4. The Developmental Continuum
5. Sample Behaviors of the Children and how they align or relate to your activity.

You will also be including the Relevant Developmental Domains for your activity as we know children develop in multiple domains at once. See [10.1 Relevant Developmental Domains](#) to review.

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10.6: The Teaching Cycle

Create language and literacy learning experience plans that promote child development and learning for children.

CRITERIA: Plan reflects the teaching cycle.

In section [10.2: Appropriately Challenging](#), we were introduced to one type of teaching cycle that is similar to the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards Teaching Cycle. Both cycles start with observation. Teachers want to know the skill levels and interests of the children to plan their curriculum. Teachers observe and document interests and skill levels. Teachers then review their observation data to intentionally plan learning experiences that meet the developmental needs and interests of the children. Once they have planned and developed the learning experiences, they implement the activities with the children and the entire cycle begins again. As teachers implement the learning experience with the children, they observe and document to see how the children are developing and what they may need extra experience or practice in. Teachers use their observations to plan additional learning experiences to meet the needs of the children.

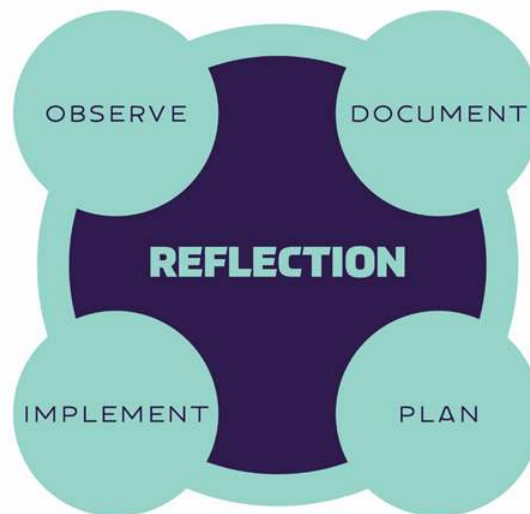


Figure 10.6.1: The California Curriculum Planning Cycle.[\[4\]](#)

Let's explore each part of the cycle.

Observe

Observation means being present with children and attentive as they play and interact with others and the environment. This mindful kind of presence is different from participating in children's play or directing their play. Whether for one minute or five, an attentive, mindful presence means waiting to see what unfolds in order to gain a complete picture of children's play. A teacher who observes children as a first step in supporting learning discovers small scientists at work—experimenting, comparing, making assumptions, evaluating assumptions through their actions. Over time, children build mastery of a wide range of concepts and skills. The vignette about the snail exploration illustrates the role of the teacher as observer:

During small-group time with the snails, the teacher noticed a child who had been reluctant to hold a snail. This child had a visual impairment. As the teacher gently placed a snail on this child's hand, two children watched and listened as the teacher commented, "He's sticking his head out now, and he's turned toward your fingers. Can you feel him crawling toward your fingers?" The other children who had been watching intently began to repeat the teacher's encouraging words, saying, "He's sticking his head out. He's going toward your fingers!"

The teacher wrote down her observations and added an interpretive note that the children's behavior may be a growing sign of empathy as measured by the DRDP, and the other child's willingness to hold the snail, a growing sign of curiosity and initiative, also a DRDP measure.[\[5\]](#)

Observation Happens Through Lenses

It takes practice to become a good observer. An important aspect of being a good observer involves becoming aware of what is noticed and how observations are interpreted. Children may be influenced by many things. Culture, temperament, personal experiences, professional knowledge, and even community values and messages in the media affect how teachers see and experience children. These “lenses” through which teachers observe and interpret are at work even though they may not always be conscious of them.[6]

The Importance of Accuracy

Observations about children should be factual and objective to be useful and meaningful. Teachers should document only what they see and hear (the facts) and avoid using words that communicate judgment about a child’s feelings, intentions, and motivations; are ambiguous and open to interpretation; or describe an opinion. One way teachers may think about their own objectivity is to ask themselves: Am I describing this child’s behaviors and interactions in the same or a similar way that someone else observing this child would describe them?

Interpreting the meaning of children’s behaviors and interactions is important, and impressions, feelings, and insights about children are extremely valuable to the individualizing process. However, teachers first need accurate, factual information in order to draw conclusions later on about children’s skills, behavior, interests, and needs.[7]

Pause to Reflect

Think about yourself as an observer. What do you think will come most easily to you? What do you think will be more challenging?

Document

Documenting means gathering and holding evidence of children’s play and interests for future use. A common form of documentation in early childhood settings is a written note, often referred to as an observation anecdote. Anecdotal notes, along with other forms of documentation, in particular photos, video recordings, and work samples, serve a dual purpose. First, they preserve a teacher’s observations of children’s expressions of feelings, their thinking, and their learning. These documentations are guides to the next steps in day-to-day curriculum planning. And second, anecdotal notes and other evidence can be used to support a teacher’s periodic assessment of a child’s progress. An episode during "Animals in Our Neighborhood" lesson highlights the dual purpose of documentation:

Observation:

During morning circle time, Juan was highly engaged in the "Animals in Our Neighborhood" storybook activity. As I read the book aloud in both English and Spanish, Juan showed great enthusiasm when he recognized familiar words in Spanish. He eagerly pointed to the picture of a dog and proudly exclaimed, "Perro!" Juan's face lit up with excitement when I acknowledged his contribution and encouraged him to teach the word to his classmates. This interaction boosted his confidence, and he continued to participate actively throughout the reading session.

After the story, Juan transitioned smoothly to the art project. He chose to draw a picture of a bird, using crayons to create a colorful image. When I asked him to write the word "bird," he first said "pájaro" in Spanish and then successfully copied the word "bird" from the model I provided. Juan appeared focused and determined as he carefully traced each letter, pausing occasionally to compare his work with the example. He completed the task with minimal assistance, displaying significant progress in his fine motor skills and early literacy development.

Interpretation:

Juan demonstrated strong language skills in both English and Spanish, showing confidence in using his home language and a willingness to engage with new English vocabulary. His ability to connect the story to his personal experiences and share his knowledge with peers highlights his growing linguistic and social abilities. The activity was appropriately challenging for Juan, as he successfully completed the task of writing in English while also reinforcing his understanding of the Spanish equivalent. His enthusiasm and focus suggest that the activity was meaningful and relevant to his interests.

Next Steps:

- Continue to incorporate bilingual activities that allow Juan to use and expand both his English and Spanish language skills.
- Provide more opportunities for Juan to teach his peers words in Spanish, fostering his confidence and leadership abilities.
- Encourage Juan to practice writing both English and Spanish words in future activities, gradually increasing the complexity of the words and sentences he works with.

Notes:

Juan's engagement and success in this activity demonstrate his readiness for more complex literacy tasks. He benefits from bilingual instruction and positive reinforcement, which should be consistently included in his learning experiences.

Documenting What is Observed

Teachers must be intentional about capturing and recording what children do and say by setting up a system for carrying out observations. There is no one right way to do this. Systems will look different from program to program, and even classroom to classroom. Additionally, observation systems are not static; they should be revisited as teachers become more proficient in observing children and as children grow and develop. However, there are some general strategies that should be considered when developing a system.

- Plan times to observe each child regularly and over time. This should include observing children
 - Across settings (e.g., indoor and outdoor) and times of the day (morning, afternoon)
 - During routines (e.g., mealtimes, naptime, arrival/departure, transitions)
 - As they engage in spontaneous play experiences and planned activities and experiences
 - As they interact with other children and adults.
- Plan for spontaneous observation opportunities, too.
- Have materials at hand to capture unexpected, but valuable observations of children.
- Decide how to organize and store observations with the system that works best for the individual teacher or teaching team. For example:
 - A file folder for each child kept in hanging files in file cabinet, large box, or crate
 - Index cards in file box with a section for each child
 - A 3-ring binder notebook for each child
 - An accordion folder for each child

- Hanging shoe bag, with pockets labeled for each child
- Decide how often to review observations. A system for using the valuable data from observations is an important part of the curriculum cycle. Some curriculum planning may be easy to implement based on just casual observation. But deeper analysis of observation of individual and groups of children will likely lend valuable insight in what teachers can plan to support optimal development.
- Include families in this process. Invite them to share what they observe about their children verbally, through pictures and photographs, or in writing.

Reflect & Plan

As teachers reflect on children's play, they discover possibilities for designing curriculum to sustain, extend, and help children's play to be more complex and, consequently, support the children's continuing learning.^[13]

Teachers ask themselves questions about what the information they have documented in observations of children says about the children's development, interests, and needs. The answers to these questions lead to individualizing care and learning. There are many questions that teachers may ask themselves. For example:

- What developmental skill or activity does the child appear to be working on?
- What strategies does the child use to play with different toys?
- Does the child engage with objects or people differently than a month ago? What has changed? What has not changed?
- Do my actions/the actions of other adults who interact with the child affect the outcomes of the child's experience? How so?
- How does the information relate to goals for the child? The family's goals? The program's school readiness goals?
- What other information do I need?
- What questions do I have for the child's family?

It is during the reflective process that interpreting the meaning of children's behaviors and interactions becomes important. These interpretations and insights give rise to each child's story. Each child's story informs responsive practice.

Teachers use what they know about each child to

- Adapt the environment
- Modify the daily schedule and/or routines
- Make decisions about how to guide the children's learning based on what the child knows and can do as well as what the child is ready to try.^[14]

That process of reflections then informs possible next steps in the curriculum. Possible steps might include adding materials to interest areas, books to read with large or small groups, activities to do in small groups, or a topic to investigate over time with the children. With clear ideas or objectives in mind, teachers plan curriculum that includes strategies to enhance the learning of all children in a group, as well as strategies to support the learning of individual children. Here is how reflection, discussion, and planning worked in the snail exploration:

While the children were exploring snails, teachers met each week to reflect and plan for the next steps in the children's explorations. They decided to schedule time for small groups of children to explore the snails in a more focused way, hoping to extend the children's learning and add complexity. The teachers planned a series of walks that would allow all the children to find snails in natural habitats.^[15]

Pause to Reflect

Think back to something in your childhood that you were passionately interested or engaged in that someone observing you could have documented. What questions could your teachers have asked themselves about your experiences? How could they have planned?

(If it's easier or more relevant, you can think of a child you know and consider what you can ask yourself and plan around what you know about that child.)

Implement

Once a plan is written, teachers implement it. While implementing a plan, teachers observe, reflect, and document. The curriculum-planning cycle begins again (or continues) as teachers watch to discover how children respond to the planned curriculum and how children show evidence of their development during the planned learning encounters. Teachers often approach this step with a sense of wonder, for they may be surprised and amazed by the children's responses.

To hold the responses in memory, teachers may record notes, take a photo, or label, date, and keep a work sample, all of which they can later review to assess the impact of the curriculum plans. The evidence collected will help teachers to come up with ideas for supporting and assessing the children's learning. Teachers might ponder the following questions:

- Are children responding as predicted, or were there surprises?
- What do the children's responses tell us? How might we name the children's interest(s) or intention(s)? What concepts and ideas are the children forming within their play?
- How might children who are English learners and children who speak English collaborate in small groups to learn from one another?
- Are children showing evidence of progress on any of the measures of the DRDP?

Here is what happened when the teachers implemented their idea of going on walks with the children to find snails in natural habitats:

Before going on their snail hunt, a small group of children gathered on a blanket with the teacher. Each child was provided with a clipboard with paper for taking "notes" while the teacher explained how the walk would be a way to find snails that lived outside their classroom. Some children pretended to write while the teacher talked, while others drew pictures of snails. In this group, teachers included two children who were fluent in Spanish and learning English. The teachers anticipated much conversation among children during the search for the snails and wanted to give these children a chance to converse in their home language as well as to share experiences with peers who spoke only English.

Before heading off on the hunt, the teacher suggested, "Let's estimate. How many snails do you think we will find? Each of you can guess." On a large sheet of paper that the children could easily see, she wrote each child's name, saying each letter as she did so, and next to each name, the number guessed by that child.

Armed with magnifying glasses, the children went off to collect snails. There were many discoveries along the walk, not just snails. As children found snails, they carried them to a large examination tray set up on a table. Some children took a break from their snail search to examine, touch, and draw the snails already collected. At the end of the hunt, the children lined up the snails on a small log and counted them. The teacher suggested that they compare the number they counted with their estimates.

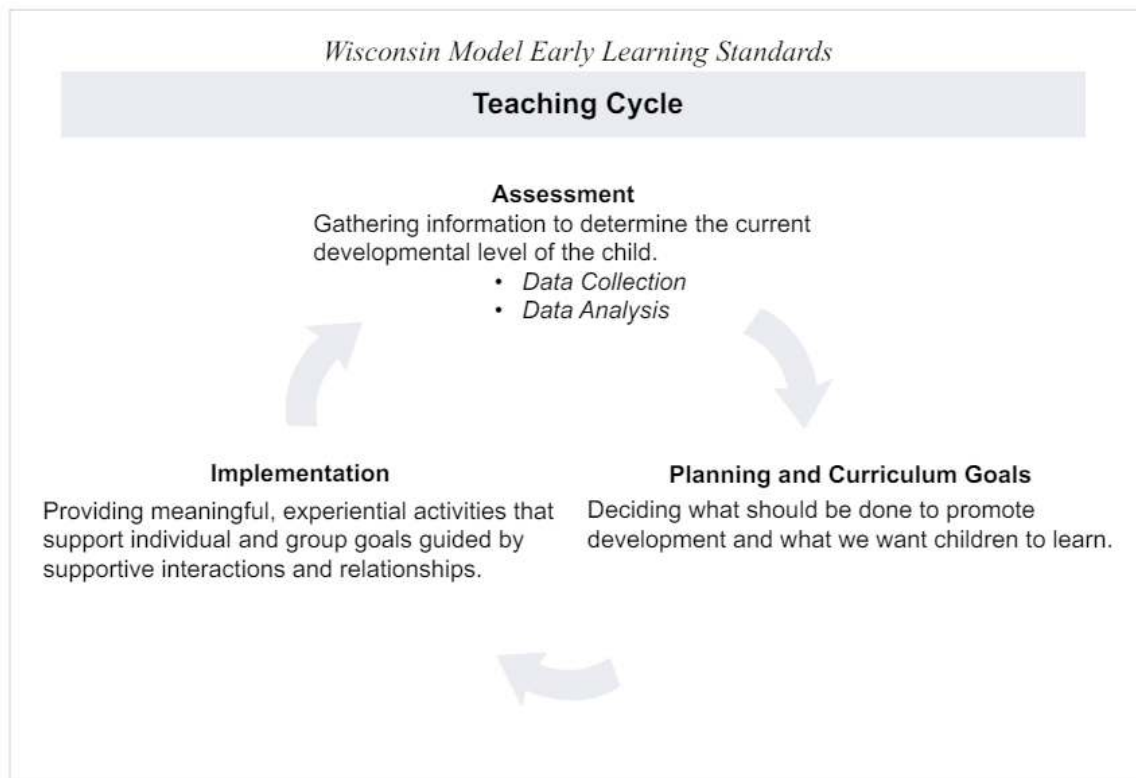
Before returning to their classroom, the children put the snails back into their natural habitats. The children were excited about sharing their experiences with other teachers and peers when they returned.

The teachers examined and reflected on what they saw in the children's writings and drawings on the clipboards. They decided that some of the work samples were significant in showing how individual children were developing an idea, concept, or skill. They filed those samples in the children's portfolios as evidence of developmental progress.^[18]

Pause to Reflect

What happens when implementation goes differently than expected? What would have happened if the children had discovered and become fascinated with dandelions on their hunt for snails (and subsequently lost interest in the snails)? Does curriculum have to go as planned? Why or why not?

The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards Teaching Cycle



You will notice that the WMELS Teaching Cycle is similar, however, it only has three parts: Assessment, Planning and Curriculum Goals, and Implementation.

The first stage of the WMELS Teaching Cycle, **ASSESSMENT**, correlates to the first two stages of the California Curriculum Teaching Cycle: Observe and Document.

The second stage of the WMELS Teaching Cycle, **Planning and Curriculum Goals**, correlates to the third stage of the California Curriculum Teaching Cycle: Plan.

The third stage of the WMELS Teaching Cycle, **Implementation**, correlates to the fourth stage of the California Curriculum Teaching Cycle: Implement

See page 9 of [WMELS](#) for more information

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