

Child interests—learning starts here

What does research tell us about the effects of interest-based learning on young children's early language and literacy development?

Child interests can lead to a range of positive language and literacy outcomes for young children. This was the central finding of an analysis of 31 studies involving 4,190 toddlers and preschoolers conducted by researchers at the Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL).

The studies selected for examination focused on children's personal or situational interests, or a combination of both. Personal interests include preferences, likes, and favorites that engage a child in desired activities. Situational interests refer to the features of the social and nonsocial environment that invite child attention and engagement in activities. The interests were identified through various methods including parent surveys, investigator observations, and parent or child interviews.

The studies included measures of literacy-related and language-related abilities in the areas of phonological awareness (rhyme detection, alliteration, phoneme recognition, etc.), print-related development (alphabet knowledge, letter-sound awareness, print concepts, etc.), reading-related development (word naming, comprehension, etc.), and language development (vocabulary, receptive and expressive language, etc.).

The CELL analysis found that young children's interests clearly contribute to their literacy and language learning. Parents and early childhood educators can be confident that identifying children's interests and using them as ways for providing learning opportunities and planning learning activities are highly beneficial practices.



For a baby who loves swinging and/or playground time, the activity provides an excellent opportunity to hear and recognize new vocabulary as her mom sings or recites rhymes in time to the movement; to become familiar with directional terms such as *up, down, back, and forth*; to express her enjoyment through babbling or cooing; and much more.



Interest sparked by a passing butterfly might lead to identifying the butterfly with a picture chart, making up and telling stories about a butterfly, finding words that rhyme with *butterfly*, and many other learning opportunities.

This CELLnotes summarizes findings reported in Dunst, C. J., Jones, T., Johnson, M., Raab, M., & Hamby, D. W. (2011). Role of children's interests in early literacy and language development. CELLreviews 4(5), 1-18.

Acting on the Evidence

Download free, two-page CELLpractices guides in versions for parents or practitioners www.earlyliteracylearning.org

Child interests are important building blocks for learning. Using child interests as part of participation in everyday activities is a powerful approach for encouraging a child to learn new skills and competencies. All of the CELL practice guides that have been developed for both parents and early childhood practitioners encourage the use of interest-based learning as part of home, community, and classroom activities. The two-page practice guides listed below are available for free download on the CELL project web site: www.earlyliteracylearning.org. At this web address you can find multimedia practice guides such as videos that illustrate practices supported by this research.



Especially for PARENTS

Infants:

Homespun Fun
Sure Winner Lap Games
Baby's First Games

Toddlers:

Movin' and Groovin' Nursery Rhymes
I Wanna Be a Storyteller
Act Natural

Preschoolers:

Talking Time
Wacky Words
Adventure in a Box

Especially for PRACTITIONERS

Infants:

Literacy-Rich Classroom and
Community Activities
Games Babies Play
Infant Lap Games

Toddlers:

Action Rhymes
World All Around Us
Creating Young Storytellers

Preschoolers:

Talk Is Fun
Fun with Letters
Listen to Me