

Early literacy learning can be promoted through experiences with print and language

What does research tell us about how young children's experiences with print and language affect early literacy learning?

Early literacy refers to the knowledge and skills that young children need to read, write, and communicate. Early literacy learning for children from birth through 6 years of age is made up of print and language (spoken and written) learning. Print-related learning includes recognizing letters of the alphabet, understanding what is read, expressing words in writing, and knowing the rules of writing (for example, that we read from left to right). Language-related learning includes recognizing the different sounds that make up words, being able to use words to communicate, and understanding what is said by others.

Young children learn about print and language by interacting with the people and objects in ways that are interesting and enjoyable. Children often experience formal literacy learning in their early childhood and early intervention programs where early literacy skills are specifically taught. Informal literacy learning experiences occur as a child takes part in everyday family and community life. Both formal and informal learning experiences help to lay the foundation for later literacy development.

Current thinking about early literacy learning was the focus of a research synthesis conducted by researchers at the Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL). These investigators examined 71 published papers, chapters, and books by current literacy experts, literacy centers, and professional organizations to assemble their recommendations for fostering early literacy learning. The researchers found that all sources of information recommended that young children be provided with a rich mix of print-related and language-enhancing experiences. All sources also

identified several print-related and language-related accomplishments that indicate a child has successfully developed early literacy. By providing young children with a mix of print-related and language-related experiences, parents and early childhood professionals will start young children on the path to become successful, competent readers and writers.



This *CELLnotes* summarizes findings reported in Robyak, A., Masiello, T., Trivette, C. M., Roper, N., & Dunst, C. J. (2007). Mapping the contemporary landscape of early literacy learning, *CELLreviews* 1(1), 1-11.

Acting on the Evidence

Download free, two-page *CELL* practices guides in versions for parents or practitioners at www.earlyliteracylearning.org

Child participation in everyday home, family, community, and preschool activities provides young children many opportunities to learn early language and literacy skills. All of the *CELL* practice guides that have been developed for parents and early childhood practitioners encourage the use of everyday learning in home, community, and classroom as sources of child learning 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 research.

Especially for parents of preschoolers!

Adventure in a Box

Literacy Learning Experiences

Have fun creating a special writing box with your preschooler! A box filled with inspiring writing materials can help your budding writer build confidence and skills.

What is the practice?

Writing becomes a special event for children ages 3-5 when they make their own writing boxes. With a writing box, a young child begins to see himself as a writer—one with good ideas to express and all the tools needed to express them. Homemade writing boxes keep writing materials in one place, close at hand, for whenever your child gets the writing spurt.

What does the practice look like?

Fill a box with many materials that your preschool child can use to draw, write, and create. Place the writing box some- where in your home where your child can reach it easily. The box should hold writing tools that interest your child and motivate her to write. For example, have markers or pencils in her favorite colors, or a note pad in the shape of her favorite animal.

How do you do the practice?

Start with an ordinary cardboard box, large enough to hold papers and writing tools. Help your child cover it in whatever way pleases her. Some easy choices are gift wrap, craft paper, plastic shelf liner, or magazine pages.

- After covering the box, encourage your child to decorate it. She can use stickers, stamps, drawings, or whatever else she wants. Fill the box with lots of writing materials: include small packs of crayons, wide-lined paper, construction paper, pencils, small notebooks, washable markers, and diamond-tipped pencils. Add envelopes, a roll of tape, and bright stickers to make pre-writing and writing even more fun.
- Use small sets of pencils, markers, crayons, and paper so that making choices and cleaning up are easier.
- Crayons that don't roll, extra-thick pencils and markers, and child-sized scissors with rounded points work well for preschoolers who are developing fine-motor control.
- Encourage your child to use the box for writing letters to grandparents. She can also use it to make lists and to draw and create stories for you to read together.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child spend time using the materials in the writing box?
- Does she show you books, cards, papers, and other writings that she has created?
- Has your child shown interest in things to write with different tools?
- Is she exploring new uses for writing?

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Especially for practitioners working with preschoolers!

Words Everywhere

Literacy-Rich Experiences

Preschoolers need to be exposed to lots of words and printed language to get them ready for reading and writing. Teachers can help by making environmental print a major part of their preschool students' classroom experience.

What is the practice?

Environmental print can include handwritten labels on furniture, walls, posters, and children's own scribbles or writing, including environmental print in your classroom's most useful when it's read and "used" throughout the class's daily routine.

What does the practice look like?

A teacher writes down a story a small group of five-year-old children. He asks the story, along with the preschool students' drawings, on a bulletin board. The classroom's cubbies and hooks are labeled with the children's names and photos. The children are also labeled to help show where to go. The teacher often refers to the print in the classroom by asking children to "find their names." He also provides opportunities for them to add to the printed messages around the room.

How do you do the practice?

There are lots of ways to include environmental print in your classroom. The main goal is to make it relevant.

- Start with children's names, which are often the first words they are interested in and can point out. Label cubbies, tables and coat hooks. Encourage children to use these labels to make up letters that names on their own work.
- To show the value of environmental print, refer to it. Take the time to point out labels with learning center labels, and handwritten or typed labels on shelves. For instance, when it's cleanup time, say "These are the books where I find 'books,'" or the second day, "During the story, say 'Let's go up in the Reading Corner to look at this book!'"
- Encourage children to add to the environmental print themselves. Let them outside or write stories, write their names on their work, and create classroom decorations for special events.
- Use environmental print during group time by pointing out the words on posters showing songs you're singing. Write discussion words on a whiteboard or large card. Refer to these words when you use them in conversation or future lessons.
- Create a bulletin board of labels and logos. Ask children to find and bring in logos from places they like to go. Use pizza places and food fun spots. Children often are able to point out labels and logos before they can actually read the words. They seem to connect the words in the logos to the place or object itself. This helps focus their attention on characteristics of letters and words.
- Use this sign and their signs in the blocks area. It's an easy way to include environmental print in children's play. The iconic nature of these signs, such as red, right-angled "STOP" signs, makes them easy for children to identify.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Do children in your class attend to environmental print?
- Are they learning to recognize more words and symbols?
- Do they understand the uses of environmental print?

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Especially for PARENTS

Infants:

World of Words

Places To Go and People To See Out and About

Toddlers:

Books and Crayons of One's Own
Playing with Words
Looking at Letters

Preschoolers:

Adventure in a Box
Wired To Read
Word Wise

Especially for PRACTITIONERS

Infants:

Literacy-Rich Classroom and Community Activities

Literacy-Rich Word Activities
Literacy-Rich Outings

Toddlers:

World of Learning
Words All Around Us

Preschoolers:

A Place for Writing
Keyboarding for Kids
Words Everywhere