Words All Around Us

Literacy-Rich Experiences

To help toddlers develop speaking, listening, and print-related skills, make use of words that are all around them. Environmental print that is interesting to toddlers helps familiarize them with the varied kinds and uses of printed language.

What is the practice?

Create a literacy-rich classroom for your toddlers. This involves posting lots of interesting, meaningful print around the room. Refer to it often during your daily routines. Hang posters, signs, nameplates, lists, displays of children's labeled artwork, and other forms of print around your classroom. This will help toddlers make the connection between written words and what they mean.

What does the practice look like?

There are lots of everyday opportunities to use environmental print in your classroom. These include pointing out the signs for different activity centers or helping a toddler find her cubby by checking nameplates. Both of these make good use of environmental print.

How do you do the practice?

A literacy-rich environment is a place where literacy learning occurs. Signs, letters, and symbols that children see daily mean more and are more familiar than letters or words seen alone. For example, a toddler will often learn to recognize—or "read" —a fast-food chain's sign long before she can decode words. Here are some ways to use environmental print with the toddlers in your classroom.

- Post meaningful signs around the room and refer to them when you talk with toddlers. Use them to introduce the concept that we use printed words to gain and give information. Post signs that label each learning center. Print a daily schedule. Display charts printed with the words of newly learned songs or rhymes. All of these can help children see the connection between what is printed and what people say and do.

- Let children help you create print for your classroom. Post their scribbling and drawings where they are easy to see. Ask them to dictate some words or labels for you to write on their pictures. For special events, help toddlers create banners to hang. Talk about what the words will mean to people who visit your classroom.

- Introduce children to the practical uses of print. Involve them in helping you make a list of needed supplies or take attendance. Make these everyday literacy events part of the environmental print with which children are familiar. Emphasizing the practical aspects of printed language helps show its importance.

- Use toddlers' own names to spark an interest in printed language. Toddlers love having their own space. This could be their own cubby, their own spot at a table, or their own coat hook. They are often motivated to begin recognizing their names by understanding that it means something is "all mine!"

How do you know the practice worked?

- Do your toddlers notice and refer to environmental print in the room?

- Have they begun to pair certain signs or labels with their meanings?

- Do they ask about new or different printed language that they notice?

CELL practices
CENTER for EARLY LITERACY LEARNING

Words, Words, Words

Annie has worked hard to make her classroom a literacy-rich space for her toddlers. Writing and drawing materials are kept out in the open. Annie hangs and often rotates all her toddlers' artistic and writing attempts. When she writes lists or takes attendance, she describes what she is doing to the children nearby. She has labeled the centers and objects in the room in the children's home languages. She knows that even though they cannot read yet, the children understand the meaning of classroom signs. They often point to or refer to them during their daily play and routines.

Environmental Print

Mark wants to engage his toddler class in environmental print. He asked parents to help by bringing in signs of familiar places that interest the children. They brought in pictures of street signs, signs from restaurants, schools, churches, and other familiar sights the children saw regularly. Mark and his co-teacher also took the children on a special neighborhood walk to take photographs of signs. They talked about what the signs meant and then displayed the pictures with the others around the classroom. The children began referring to the signs regularly by pointing them out. They engaged their teachers in conversation about the places and signs.

The Word on Decorating

In Erin's inclusive toddler class, many of the children enjoy decorating the room for special events like birthdays and holidays. Each new season also provides opportunities for decorating. Erin involves all the children in the process by providing adapted brushes, markers, and other art materials. She encourages children to speak messages into a computer program that prints out their words. Some children record greetings to play during parties. Others help select best-liked songs to sing. Erin prints out their dictations and songs and posts them in the room where they are easy to see. The children refer to these signs and posters with pride, noting all the ways they have helped prepare for the party.

IDEAs that Work