

*Especially for practitioners working with young children!* 

# Words All Around Us

*Literacy-Rich Experiences*

One of the most important ways to help toddlers develop speaking, listening, and print-related skills is making use of words that are all around them. Environmental print that is interesting to toddlers helps familiarize them with the various kinds and uses of printed language.

## What is the practice?

Creating a literacy-rich classroom for your toddlers can involve posting lots of interesting, meaningful print around the room and referring to it during your daily routines. Posters, signs, nameplates, lists, displays of children's labeled artwork, and other forms of print 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. As an example, a teacher pointing out the signs for different activity centers and helping a toddler find her cubby by checking nameplates is making good use of environmental print.

## How do you do the practice?

A literacy-rich environment is where literacy learning occurs. Signs, letters, and symbols that a child sees every day are more meaningful and familiar than letters or words seen in isolation. For example, a toddler will often learn to recognize—or “read”—a McDonald’s restaurant sign long before she can decode words. Here are some ideas for using environmental print with toddlers in your classroom.

- Post meaningful signs around the room and refer to them in your regular conversations with toddlers. Use them to introduce the idea that we use printed words to gain and give information. Signs that label different learning centers, a printed daily schedule, and charts printed with the words of newly learned songs or rhymes 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 prominently. Encourage them to dictate some words or labels for you to write on their pictures. For special occasions, help toddlers create banners to hang, talking about what the words will mean to classroom visitors.
- Introduce children to the practical uses of print. Involve them in helping you make a list of needed supplies or taking 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—whether it’s their own cubby, their own space 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?

## Take a look at more words all around us

### *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 regularly 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 the children understand the meaning of classroom signs, even though they can't read yet, because they often point to or refer to them during their daily play and routines.



### *Environmental Print*

In order to engage his toddler class in environmental print, Mark asked parents to help by bringing in signs of familiar places that interest the children. They brought in pictures of street signs, road signs, and 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 and engaging 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 thematic unit also provides opportunities for decorating. Erin involves all the children in the process by providing adapted brushes, markers, and other art materials, and by encouraging children to speak messages into a computer program that prints out their words. Some children make recorded greetings to play during parties. Others help select favorite songs to sing. Erin prints out their dictations and songs and posts them prominently in the room. The children refer to these signs and posters with pride, noting all the ways they've helped prepare for the party.

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