

*Especially for practitioners working with young children!* 

# Words Everywhere

*Literacy-Rich Experiences*

Preschoolers need lots of exposure to words and printed language to get them ready for reading and writing. Teachers can help by making environmental print a significant part of their preschoolers' classroom experience.

## What is the practice?

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

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## What does the practice look like?

A teacher writes down a story dictated by a small group of 4-year-olds and posts it, along with their drawings, on a bulletin board. The cubbies and hooks are labeled with the children's names and pictures, and the shelves are similarly labeled to help show where toys go. The teacher regularly refers to this print by asking children to "find their names" and providing opportunities for them to add to the printed messages around the room.

## How do you do the practice?

There are lots of ways to incorporate environmental print into your classroom. The important thing is to make it relevant and use it as part of a daily routine to familiarize your preschoolers with all the uses of print.

- Start with children's names, which are often the first words they are interested in and recognize. Label cubbies, tables and coat hooks. Encourage them to use these labels as models to write their names on their own work.
- Show the importance of environmental print by referring to it. Take opportunities to point out posters with learning center labels, and handwritten or typed labels on shelves: "Please put the blocks where it says 'blocks,' on the second shelf," or "Let's go sit under the 'Reading Corner' sign to look at this book."
- Encourage children to add to the environmental print themselves. Let them scribble or write stories, write their names on their work, and create classroom decorations for special events.
- Use environmental print in group time by pointing out the words on posters showing songs you're singing, and by writing key discussion words on a whiteboard or large pad. Refer to these words later when you use them in conversation or future lessons.
- Create a bulletin board by inviting children to find and bring in labels and logos from favorite places, like McDonald's, Chuck E. Cheese's, and local fun spots. Children often are able to recognize labels and logos before they can actually 'read' the words. They learn to connect the words in the logos to the place or object itself. This helps focus their attention on characteristics of letters and words.
- Including stop signs and street signs in the blocks area is a natural way to incorporate environmental print into children's play. The iconic nature of these signs—such as red, eight-sided "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?

# Take a look at more words everywhere

## *Focus on Print*

Noelle's preschoolers have helped create their own literacy-rich classroom environment. Noelle invites the 4-year-olds to bring in pictures from magazines, food and beverage labels, and other kinds of environmental print. The children pick their favorites for a rotating bulletin board of labels and signs. They refer to the display at group time. Pictures of signs from the neighborhood, magazine print, etc., are displayed around the classroom where they make sense. For example, street-sign pictures are in the blocks center and a photograph of their public library sign is in the book center. This project has helped Noelle's preschoolers focus on print—even when they are not in the classroom.

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## *Growing Confidence*

In Marco's class of 3-year-olds, he makes a regular effort to engage his children in creating environmental print for the classroom. He encourages them to write or scribble their names on their own work, and to use alphabet stamps, stickers, and sponges to create artwork with letters and words. For special occasions, Marco will often write a simple message on a large piece of paper (i.e., "Happy birthday!" or "Welcome to our class!") and have the children decorate the paper while talking about the words and letters and what they convey. The children in Marco's class enjoy these activities, and have grown in confidence in themselves as writers.

## *Wonderful Word Walks*

Every week, Sarah takes her inclusive preschool class on a "Word Walk" in the school's neighborhood. Some children walk holding hands with each other or the teachers, while others who have limited mobility ride in wagons or wheelchairs. The goal of the walk is to notice all the words they can find. Some children "write" the words down on their clipboards using scribbling and invented spelling, while others sign the words for Sarah's camcorder or speak them into audio recorders to remember for later. The words can be on signs, buildings, even trash. Once they get back to their room, the children use their recorders, video, and clipboards to add to their ongoing list of words that they've seen outside.

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