Early Literacy Practices

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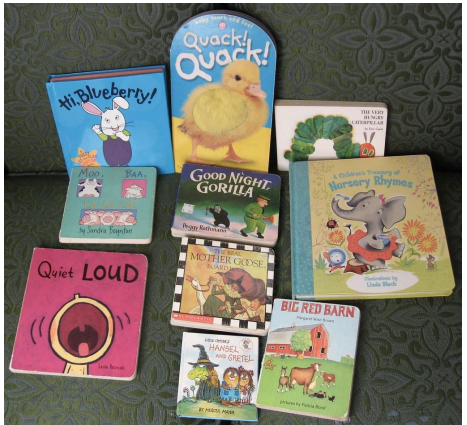
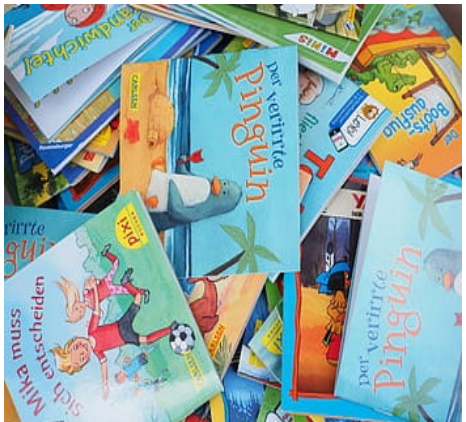




What we know about early language and literacy development

Reading and writing development begins in the first three years of life and is closely linked to a child's earliest experiences with books and stories. The interactions that young children have with such literacy materials as books, paper, and crayons, and with the adults in their lives are the building blocks for language, reading and writing development.

What the research says

This relatively new understanding of early literacy development complements the current research supporting the critical role of early experiences in shaping brain development. Recent studies support an interactive and experiential process of learning spoken and written language skills that begins in early infancy. We now know that children gain significant knowledge of language, reading, and writing long before they enter school.

Literacy experiences

Children learn to talk, read, and write through social literacy experiences such as adults or older children interacting with them using books and other literacy materials, including magazines, markers, and paper. Simply put, early literacy demonstrates that:

- Language, reading, and writing skills develop at the same time and are intimately linked.
- Early literacy development is a continuous developmental process that begins in the first years of life.
- Early literacy skills develop in real life settings through positive experiences.

Early literacy does not mean early reading

Our current understanding of early language and literacy development has provided new ways of helping children learn to talk, read, and write. But it does not advocate "the teaching of reading" to younger and younger children.

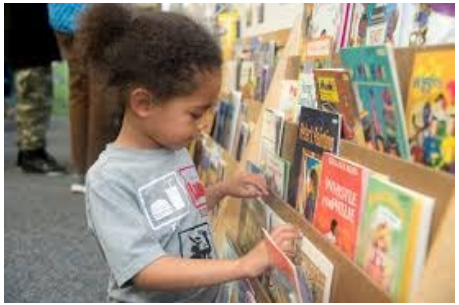
Formal instruction which pushes infants and toddlers to achieve adult models of literacy (i.e., the actual reading and writing of words) are not developmentally appropriate.

Early literacy emphasis

Early literacy theory emphasizes the more natural unfolding of skills through the enjoyment of books, the importance of positive interactions between young children and adults, and the critical role of literacy-rich experiences. Formal instruction to require young children who are not developmentally ready to read is counter productive and potentially damaging to children, who may begin to associate reading and books with failure.

What infants and toddlers can do

Early literacy recognizes that language, reading, and writing evolve from a number of earlier skills. Early literacy skills are essential to literacy development and should be the focus of early language and literacy programs. By focusing on the importance of the first years of life, we give new meaning to the interactions young children have with books and stories.



Early literacy development

Looking at early literacy development as a dynamic developmental process, we can see the connection (and meaning) between an infant mouthing a book, the book handling behavior of a two year old, and the page turning of a five year old. We can see that the first three years of exploring and playing with books, singing nursery rhymes, listening to stories, recognizing words, and scribbling are truly the building blocks for language and literacy development.

Oral language

Oral language is often called a "bedrock" of reading and writing. Students' comprehension of spoken language is a defining factor for their reading comprehension — the ultimate purpose of reading — as well as for writing ability. Oral language has numerous dimensions; two that are particularly important for the development of literacy are vocabulary and syntax. There is no one set time in the literacy block for working on language. Development of language occurs throughout all three components of the literacy block and throughout the school day. Language develops through high-quality interactions between students and teachers as well as through explicit instruction.

Oral language components

The **phonological component** involves the rules for combining sounds. Speakers of English, for example, know that an English word can end, but not begin, with an -ng sound. We are not aware of our knowledge of these rules, but our ability to understand and pronounce English words demonstrates that we do know a vast number of rules.

The **semantic component** is made up of morphemes, the smallest units of meaning that may be combined with each other to make up words(for example, paper + s are the two morphemes that make up papers), and sentences. A dictionary contains the semantic component of a language, but also what words (and meanings) are important to the speakers of the language.

The **syntactic component** consists of the rules that enable us to combine morphemes into sentences. As soon as a child uses two morphemes together, as in "more cracker," she is using a syntactic rule about how morphemes are combined to convey meaning.

Oral language rules

Like the rules making up the other components, syntactic rules become increasingly complex as the child develops. From combining two morphemes, the child goes on to combine words with suffixes or inflections (-s or -ing, as in papers and eating) and eventually creates questions, statements, commands, etc. She also learns to combine two ideas into one complex sentence, as in "I'll share my crackers if you share your juice.

Language acquisition

When children develop abilities is always a difficult question to answer. In general…

- Children say their first words between 12 and 18 months of age.
- They begin to use complex sentences by the age of 4 to 4 1/2 years.
- By the time they start kindergarten, children know most of the fundamentals of their language, so that they are able to converse easily with someone who speaks as they do (that is, in their dialect).

As with other aspects of development, language acquisition is not predictable. One child may say her first word at 10 months, another at 20 months. One child may use complex sentences at 5 1/2 years, another at 3 years.

Natural language development

Teachers can help sustain natural language development by providing environments full of language development opportunities. Here are some general guidelines for teachers, parents, and other caregivers:

- Understand that every child's language or dialect is worthy of respect as a valid system for communication. It reflects the identities, values, and experiences of the child's family and community.
- Treat children as if they are conversationalists, even if they are not yet talking. Children learn very early about how conversations work (taking turns, looking attentively, using facial experiences with conversing adults.
- Encourage interaction among children. Peer learning is an important part of language development, especially in mixed-age groups. Activities involving a wide range of materials should promote talk. There should be a balance between individual activities and those that nurture collaboration and discussion, such as dramatic play, block-building, book-sharing, or carpentry.

Natural language development cont.

- Remember that parents, caregivers, teachers, and guardians are the chief resources in language development. Children learn much from each other, but adults are the main conversationalists, questioners, listeners, responders, and sustainers of language development and growth in the child-care center or classroom.
- Continue to encourage interaction as children come to understand written language. Children in the primary grades can keep developing oral abilities and skills by consulting with each other, raising questions, and providing information in varied situations. Every area of the curriculum is enhanced through language, so that classrooms full of active learners are hardly ever silent.

What infants like in books

Infants 0-6 months •Books with simple, large pictures or designs with bright colors. •Stiff cardboard, "chunky" books, or fold out books that can be propped up in the crib. •Cloth and soft vinyl books with simple pictures of people or familiar objects that can go in the bath or get washed.

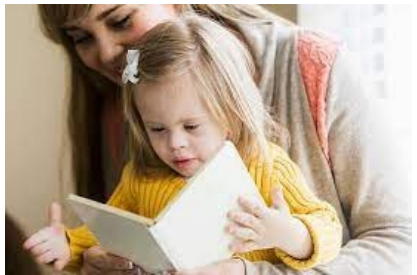
Infants 6-12 months •Board books with photos of other babies. •Brightly colored "chunky" board books to touch and taste! •Books with photos of familiar objects like balls and bottles. •Books with sturdy pages that can be propped up or spread out in the crib or on a blanket. •Plastic/vinyl books for bath time. •Washable cloth books to cuddle and mouth. •Small plastic photo albums of family and friends.

What young children like in books

Young Toddlers 12-24 months •Sturdy board books that they can carry. •Books with photos of children doing familiar things like sleeping or playing. •Goodnight books for bedtime. •Books about saying hello and goodbye. •Books with only a few words on each page. •Books with simple rhymes or predictable text. •Animal books of all sizes and shapes.

Toddlers 2-3 years •Books that tell simple stories. •Simple rhyming books that they can memorize. •Bedtime books. •Books about counting, the alphabet, shapes, or sizes. •Animal books, vehicle books, books about playtime. •Books with their favorite TV characters inside.

•Books about saying hello and goodbye.



More ways to share books with babies and toddlers

- Make the story come alive (Create voices for the story characters and use your body to tell the story).
- Make it personal talk about your own family, pets, or community when you are reading about others in a story.
- Ask questions about the story, and let children ask questions too!
- Use the story to engage in conversation and to talk about familiar activities and objects.
- Let children tell the story children as young as three years old can memorize a story, and many children love to be creative through storytelling.

More ways to share books with babies and toddlers cont…

- Have Fun) Children can learn from you that books are fun, which is an important ingredient in learning to read.
- A few minutes is OK—Don't worry if you don't finish the story young children can only sit for a few minutes for a story, but as they grow, they will be able to sit longer.
- Talk or sing about the pictures You do not have to read the words to tell a story.
- Let children turn the pages, babies need board books and help turning pages, but a three-year-old can do it alone. Remember, it's OK to skip pages!
- Show children the cover page explain what the story is about.
- Show children the words run your finger along the words as you read them, from left to right.

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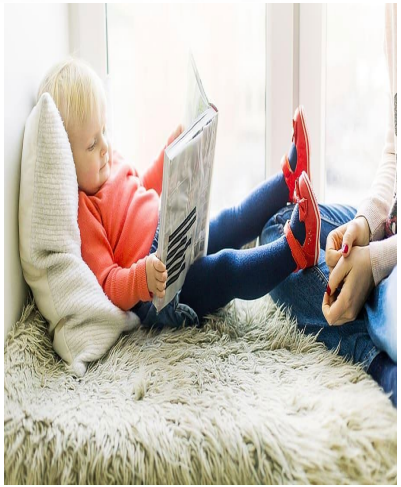

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