

Part Two

The Essentials of Early Literacy Instruction: Practice

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<http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200303/Essentials.pdf>

Essential Early Literacy Teaching Strategies

Effective early literacy instruction provides preschool children with developmentally appropriate settings, materials, experiences, and social support that encourage early forms of reading and writing to flourish and develop into conventional literacy. These basics can be broken down into eight specific strategies with strong research links to early literacy skills and, in some cases, with later elementary-grade reading achievement. Note that play has a prominent role in strategies 5, 6, and 8. Linking literacy and play is one of the most effective ways to make literacy activities meaningful and enjoyable for children.

1. Rich teacher talk

Engage children in rich conversations in large group, small group, and one-to-one settings. When talking with children,

- use rare words—words that children are unlikely to encounter in everyday conversations;
- extend children’s comments into more descriptive, grammatically mature statements;

- discuss cognitively challenging content—topics that are not immediately present, that involve knowledge about the world, or that encourage children to reflect on language as an object;
- listen and respond to what children have to say.

2. Storybook reading

Read aloud to your class once or twice a day, exposing children to numerous enjoyable stories, poems, and information books. Provide supportive conversations and activities before, during, and after reading. Repeated reading of favorite books builds familiarity, increasing the likelihood that children will attempt to read those books on their own.

3. Phonological awareness activities

Provide activities that increase children’s awareness of the sounds of language. These activities include playing games and listening to stories, poems, and songs that involve

- *rhyme*—identifying words that end with the same sound (e.g., Jack and Jill went up the hill);
- *alliteration*—recognizing when several words begin with the same sound (e.g., Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers);
- *sound matching*—deciding which of several words begins with a specific sound (e.g., show a child pictures of a bird, a dog, and a cat and ask which one starts with the /d/ sound).

Try to make these activities fun and enjoyable.

4. Alphabet activities

Engage children with materials that promote identification of the letters of the alphabet, including

- ABC books
- magnetic letters
- alphabet blocks and puzzles
- alphabet charts

Use direct instruction to teach letter names that have personal meaning to children (“Look, Jennifer’s and Joey’s names both start with the same letter. What is the letter’s name? That’s right, they both start with j”).

5. Support for emergent reading

Encourage children to attempt to read books and other types of print by providing

- a well-designed library center, stocked with lots of good books;
- repeated readings of favorite books (to familiarize children with books and encourage independent reading);
- functional print linked to class activities (e.g., daily schedules, helper charts, toy shelf labels);
- play-related print (e.g., signs, menus, employee name tags in a restaurant play center).

6. Support for emergent writing

Encourage children to use emergent forms of writing, such as scribble writing, random letter strings, and invented spelling, by providing

- a writing center stocked with pens, pencils, markers, paper, and book-making materials;
- shared writing demonstrations in which the teacher writes down text dictated by children;
- functional writing opportunities that are connected to class activities (e.g., sign-up sheets for popular centers, library book check-out slips, Do not touch! signs);
- play-related writing materials (e.g., pencils and notepads for taking orders in a restaurant play center).

7. Shared book experience.

Read Big Books and other enlarged texts to children, and point to the print as it is read. While introducing and reading the text, draw children's attention to basic concepts of print such as

- the distinction between pictures and print;
- left-to-right, top-to-bottom sequence;
- book concepts (cover, title, page).

Read favorite stories repeatedly, and encourage children to read along on the parts of the story they remember.

8. Integrated, content-focused activities.

Provide opportunities for children to investigate topics that are of interest to them. The objective is for children to use oral language, reading, and writing to learn about the world. Once a topic has been identified, children can

- listen to the teacher read topic-related information books and look at the books on their own;
- gather data using observation, experiments, interviews, and such;
- use emergent writing to record observations and information; and
- engage in dramatic play to consolidate and express what they have learned.

As a result of such projects, children's language and literacy skills are advanced, and they gain valuable background knowledge.

Test Questions: (select the most correct option)

1. Effective early literacy instruction provides preschool children with developmentally appropriate settings, materials, experiences, and social support

- a. that will lead to all of these children being able to read before they reach elementary school.
- b. that will encourage correct spelling as soon as the children begin writing.
- c. that encourage early forms of reading and writing to develop into conventional literacy.
- d. that will lead to the children being more effective in their play activities.

2. Phonological awareness activities would include:

- a. the distinction between pictures and print; left-to-right, top-to-bottom sequence; and book concepts
- b. use of rare words, and discussion of cognitively challenging content
- c. repeated readings of favorite books , and play-related print.
- d. rhyme, alliteration, and sound matching.

3. Shared book experience concept would mean:

- a. the distinction between pictures and print; left-to-right, top-to-bottom sequence; and book concepts (cover, title, page)

- b. ABC books, magnetic letters, alphabet blocks and puzzles, and alphabet charts.
 - c. repeated readings of favorite books; functional print linked to class activities; and play-related print.
 - d. use emergent writing to record observations and information' and engage in dramatic play to consolidate and express what they have learned.
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Shared Reading to Learn about Story Plot

Here is how one teacher reads *There's an Alligator under My Bed*, by Mercer Mayer, to a group of four-year-olds.

Before reading.

The teacher begins by saying, "Let's look at the picture on the cover of the book. [Shows a boy in bed with an alligator sticking out from beneath] The boy in this story has a *big* problem. Can anyone guess what that problem is?" After the children make their guesses, the teacher points to the title and says, "The title of this book is *There's an Alligator under My Bed*. So Suzy and Joey were correct in guessing what the boy's problem is. How do you think the boy will get rid of the alligator?" After several children share their predictions, the teacher begins reading the book aloud.

During reading.

After reading the first section of the book, which introduces the boy's problem, the teacher pauses and asks, "Do you have any other ideas about how the boy might get rid of the alligator?" The teacher reads the next two pages, which detail the boy's plan to leave a trail of bait to the garage, and then pauses to ask the children what the word *bait* means.

After reading the next section, in which the boy lays out a trail of food, the teacher asks, "What do you think the alligator is going to do?"

Finally, after reading the rest of the story, in which the alligator gets trapped in the garage, the teacher points to the note the boy left on the door to the garage and asks, "What do you think the boy wrote in his note?"

After reading.

The teacher sparks a discussion of the book by asking several open-ended questions, such as “What did you like best about the story?” and “How would *you* have gotten rid of that alligator?”

Later, the teacher does a follow-up small group activity—to reinforce a sense of story plot, she helps children sequence a few pictures of the main story events.

Guided Play to Explore New Words and Their Sounds

With the teacher’s help, the children are creating a gas station/garage play center as part of an ongoing unit on transportation.

Before play.

The teacher provides background knowledge by reading *Sylvia’s Garage*, by Debra Lee, an information book about a woman mechanic. She discusses new words, such as *mechanic*, *engine*, *dipstick*, *oil*.

Next, the teacher helps the children plan the play center. She asks children about the roles they can play (e.g., gas station attendant, mechanic, customer) and records their ideas on a piece of chart paper. She then asks the children to brainstorm some props that they could use in their center (e.g., signs, cardboard gas pump, oil can, tire pressure gauge) and jots these down on another piece of chart paper. The children then decide which props they will make in class and which will be brought from home, and the teacher or a child places an *m* after each make-in-class item and an *h* after each from home item.

During the next several days, the teacher helps the children construct some of the make-in-class props, such as a sign for the gas station (“Let’s see. . . *gas* starts with a *g*. Gary, your name also starts with a *g*. Can you show us how to write a *g*?”).

The list of props from home is included in the classroom newsletter and sent to families.

During play.

The teacher first observes the children at play to learn about their current play interests and activities. Then she provides scaffolding that extends and enriches children’s play and at the same time teaches important literacy skills. She notices, for example, that the mechanics are not writing out service orders or bills for the customers, so she takes on a role as an assistant mechanic and models how to write out a bill for fixing a customer’s car. She monitors her involvement to ensure close alignment with children’s ongoing activity.

After play.

During small group activity time, the teacher helps children with a picture-sort that includes pictures of people and objects from their garage play. They sort the pictures into labeled columns according to beginning sounds— /m/ (*mechanic, man, map, motor*); /t/ (*tire, tank, top, taillight*); and /g/ (*gas, gallon, garden, goat*). They explore the different feel of these sounds in the different parts of their mouths. They think of other words they know that feel the same way.

After modeling, the teacher gives the children a small deck of picture cards to sort, providing direct supervision and feedback.

Test Questions:

4 *Asking children to guess what a book is about is not a good idea because they will be upset if they guess wrong.*

True False

5. *After a book has been read it is good to ask questions about what might happen next or what something in the book could mean.*

True False

6. *The teacher first observes the children at play to learn about their current play interests and activities. Then she provides scaffolding that teaches important literacy skills.*

True False

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