

Building Strong Foundations in Language & Literacy



NACFC March 16, 2026
1:00-2:30 P.M.

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Objectives

- Provide an overview of language & literacy skills
- Identify how to foster language & literacy into daily routines & activities
- Identify how to design inviting spaces with purposeful materials.
- Discuss partnering with families to extend literacy activities at home



Welcome

1. Turn to your neighbor and share your hopes for this session.
2. You may also share your favorite children's book, oral story, nursery rhyme, or finger play.



Why Early Literacy Matters



- Early literacy skills predict later reading success.
- Language-rich environments make a difference.
- Intentional teaching and family engagement are key.
- Development is sequential and cumulative.



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Emergent Literacy

- The term **emergent literacy** is used to describe literacy skills as “a developmental continuum, with its origins early in the life of a child, rather than...when children start school”
- “The reading and writing behaviors of young children *before* they become readers and writers in the conventional sense”
(Justice 2006, p. 3)



Framework for Effective Practice



Overview of Language & Literacy Skills



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Early Learning Outcomes Framework

	Central Domains				
	Approaches to Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language and Literacy	Cognition	Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development
Infant / Toddler Domains	Approaches to Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language and Communication	Cognition	Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development
Preschooler Domains	Approaches to Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language and Communication	Mathematics Development	Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development
			Literacy	Scientific Reasoning	



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State Early Learning Guidelines



June 2020

New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines; Essential Indicators with Rubrics*: Preschool to Kindergarten

*Please note: Birth to 36 month rubrics are only to be used to assess preschool children who may have developmental delays and disabilities to show the child's growth and plan for instruction. These rubrics are not intended to be used to assess a child younger than 36 months.



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Language Development

Language skills are **receptive and expressive**.

- **Receptive** - the ability to listen to and understand language.
- **Expressive** - The ability to use language to communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings.



Developmental Continuum – Birth to Age 5

Infant and Toddlers



- Respond to voices, cooing, and facial expressions
- Begin to recognize sounds and patterns
- Rapid vocabulary growth
- Begin combining words and engaging in simple conversations

Preschoolers



- Use longer and more complex sentences, including a wider range of vocabulary.
- Understand and follow multi-step directions.
- Engage in back-and-forth conversations.
- Develop phonological awareness
- Understand print concepts and begin emergent writing.
- Recognize the phonemes or individual sounds of language.

Language and Literacy and Daily Routines



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Big 5 for All



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THE

BIG 5



1. Background Knowledge



2. Oral Language and Vocabulary



3. Book Knowledge and Print Concepts



4. Alphabet Knowledge and Early Writing



5. Phonological Awareness



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Background Knowledge

From birth, children begin collecting information—about people, objects, routines, and places. These early experiences form the building blocks of learning.





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Oral Language and Vocabulary

Receptive language is what children understand—even before they can speak. Expressive language is how they communicate.



Oral Language



Young children begin developing oral language skills before birth, as they process the languages in their environment, distinguish patterns of sounds and storing individual sounds in memory.

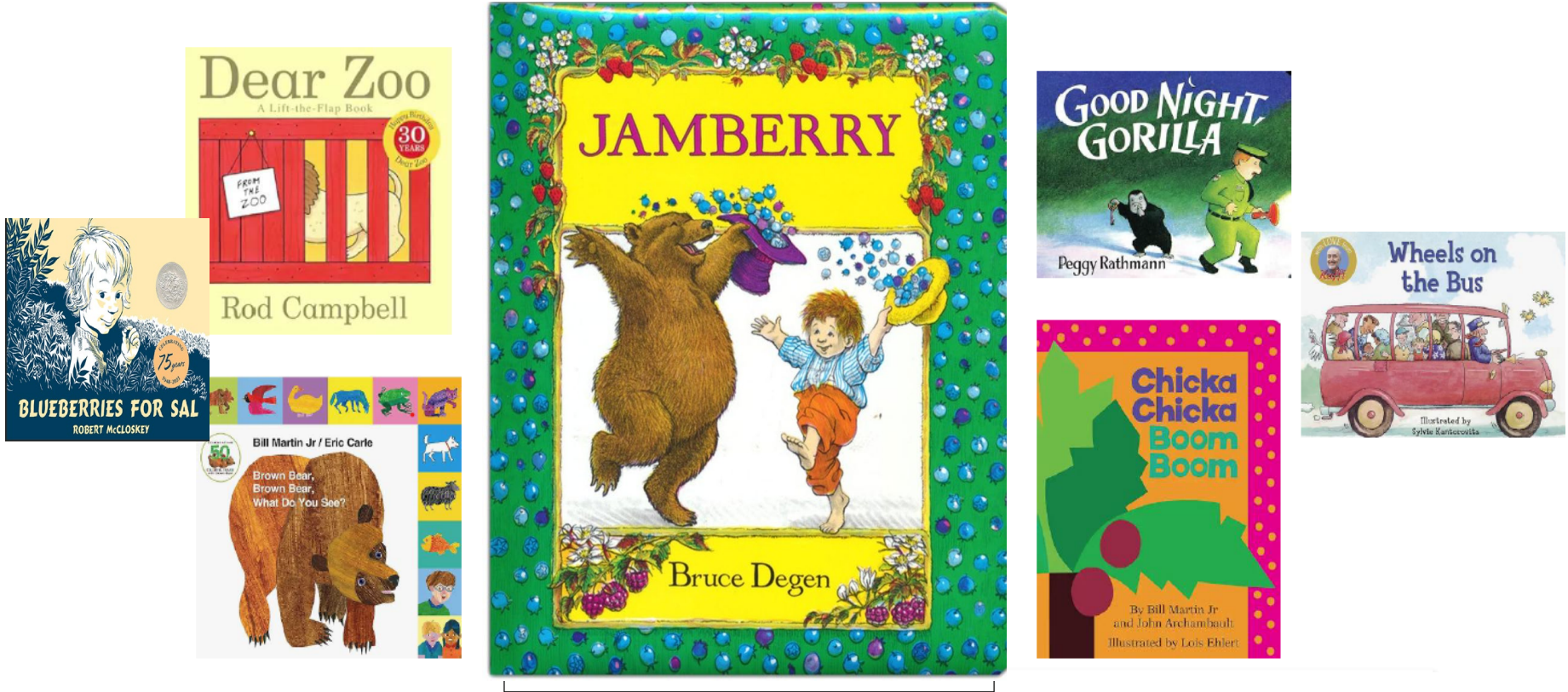


Book Knowledge and Print Concepts

Print is speech written down. Reading with adults helps children learn how books work, and environmental print is often their first step in making sense of written words.



Designing a Language and Literacy Learning Experience



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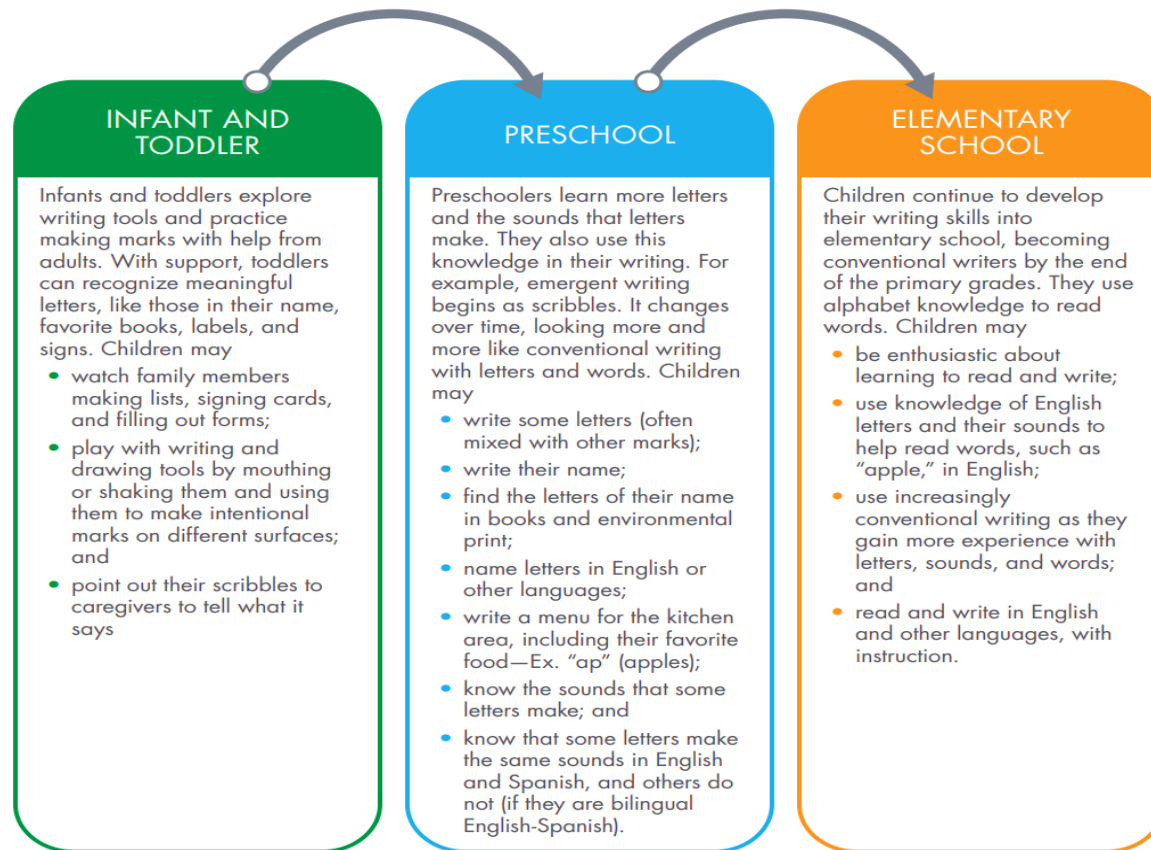


Alphabet Knowledge and Early Writing

Alphabet knowledge begins when children recognize and name letters—both uppercase and lowercase—and connect them to sounds. Early writing starts with making marks and drawings and gradually moves toward forming letters.



Alphabet Knowledge & Early Writing Development



Strategies to Support Language Skills

- Responsive, back-and-forth interactions
- Language modeling and self-talk
- Expansions and recasts
- Varied vocabulary
- Open-ended questions
- Shared book reading
- Songs, finger plays, and rhymes
- Talking during daily routines



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Strategies for Developing Alphabet Awareness



- Talk about the alphabet, point out letters in children's names and other meaningful letters.
- Share alphabet songs and alphabet books.
- Use interesting materials to create letters.
- Provide children with magnetic letters, and other alphabet games.
- Draw children's attention to print in the community (example: stop signs, logos, labels).



Stages of Early Writing



Stages of Emergent Writing		
Stage	Description	Example
Drawing	Drawings that represent writing	
Scribbling	Marks or scribbles the child intends to be writing	
Wavy scribbles or mock handwriting	Wavy scribbles that imitate cursive writing and have a left-to-right progression; child pretends to write words	
Letter-like forms or mock letters	Letters and marks that resemble letter-like shapes	
Letter strings	Strings of letters that do not create words, written left to right, including uppercase and lowercase letters	
Transitional writing	Letters with spaces in between to resemble words; letters/words copied from environmental print; letters often reversed	
Invented or phonetic spelling	Different ways to represent the sounds in words; the first letter of the word or beginning and ending sounds represent the entire word	
Beginning word and phrase writing	Words with beginning, middle, and ending letter sounds; short phrases	
Conventional spelling and sentence writing	Correct spelling of words, generally the child's name and words such as <i>mom</i> and <i>dad</i> ; sentences with punctuation and correct use of uppercase and lowercase letters	



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Ways to Encourage Early Writing



Tools

Strategically place writing materials such as sticky notes, small chalkboards, white boards, envelopes, clipboards, journals, stencils, pencils, markers and various types and sizes around the classroom.

Provide

Provide specific teacher guidance to scaffold children's learning by encouraging them to communicate their thoughts and record their ideas.

Modeling

Model writing for a purpose. Describe what they are doing and why (I'm writing a list so I can remember what to buy at the store)..

Create

Create writing opportunities connected to your current classroom themes or topics of interest throughout the different learning centers.

Encourage children to draw pictures and write a letter, word or scribble to describe the drawing.

Ask Children about their drawing, offer to write what the say.



Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the ability to hear and play with the sounds in spoken words. Children learn that words can be broken into syllables and smaller sounds called phonemes.



Phonological Awareness

Research-Based Practices to Support Phonological Awareness Development

- Talk, sing, and use playful tones throughout the day.
- Use rhymes, chants, and songs.
- Emphasize repetition and rhythm in movement games and fingerplays.
- Play with names, words, and sounds.
- Clap out syllables to familiar songs and words.
- Connect sound play to meaningful routines and contexts.



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Activity: Language & Literacy Stations



**Background
Knowledge**

**Oral Language
& Vocabulary**

Phonological Awareness

**Alphabet Knowledge
& Early Writing**

**Book Knowledge &
Print Concepts**



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Language & Literacy Stations

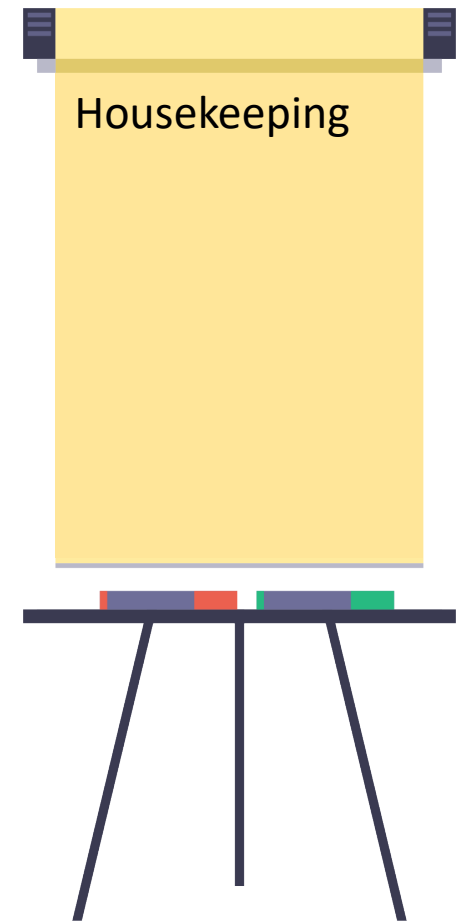
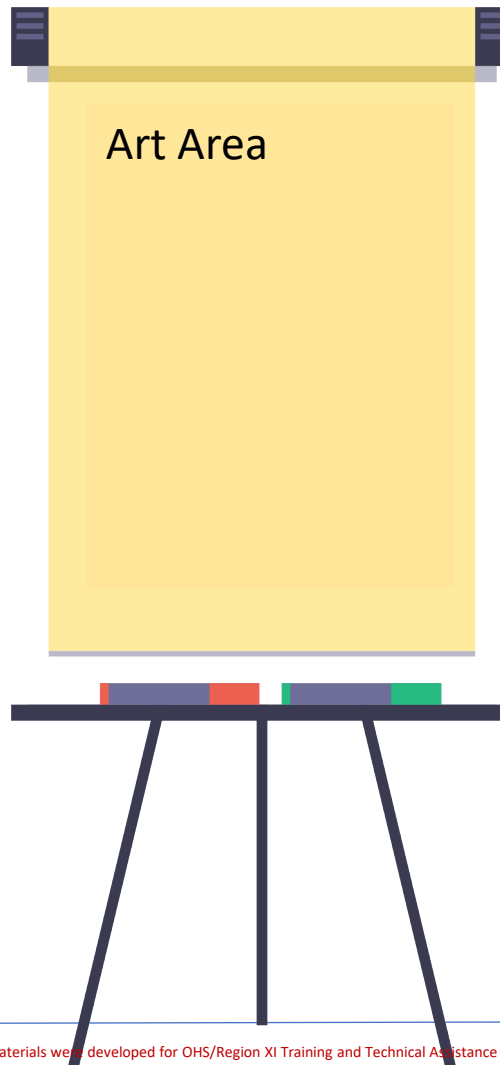
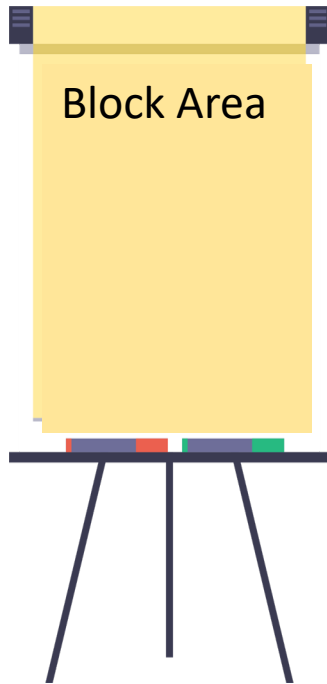
1. Each team start at one station, identify language/literacy focus and explore the materials.
2. Talk with your team about which classroom interest area you may add an activity too.
3. Place your ideas on the interest area charts.
4. When music stops move to the next station.





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Gallery Walk-Explore with Your Team



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Designing Inviting Spaces with Purposeful Materials



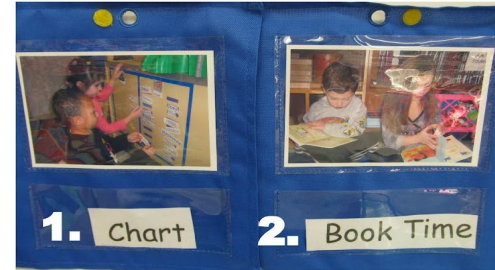
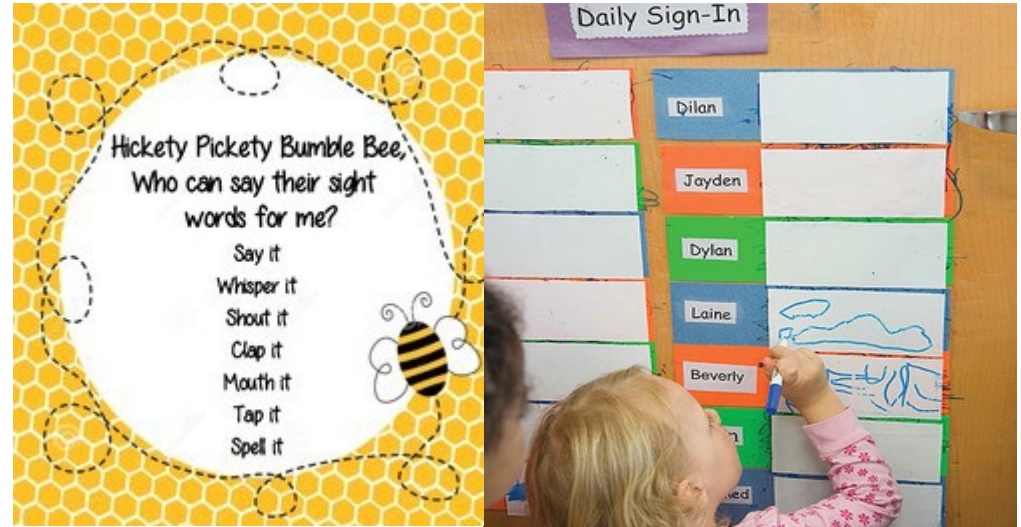
Table Talk

- What learning centers in your classroom could be enhanced with additional literacy materials?
- Where could you include a new routine or revise an old routine to promote literacy learning?



Routines

- Morning Sign In Rituals
- Songs for Transitions
- Visual Schedules



Partnering with Families to Extend Literacy Activities at Home



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Table Talk

Family Engagement: Partnering with Families

How does your program partner with families to engage in literacy activities.

Share your success stories.



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Resources



Planned Language Approach: (PLA) The Big 5 For All



- How Social Interactions build Brains for Early Learning
- The Magic of Music for Infants and Toddlers



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Resources



**Language Modeling and
Conversations Series**
Preschool & Birth to 5

*Scan the QR code and scroll to
Instructional Interactions*



**Emergent Writing
In-Service Suite**
Birth to 5



Thank you



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INFANT AND TODDLER

Infants and toddlers explore writing tools and practice making marks with help from adults. With support, toddlers can recognize meaningful letters, like those in their name, favorite books, labels, and signs. Children may

- watch family members making lists, signing cards, and filling out forms;
- play with writing and drawing tools by mouthing or shaking them and using them to make intentional marks on different surfaces; and
- point out their scribbles to caregivers to tell what it says

PRESCHOOL

Preschoolers learn more letters and the sounds that letters make. They also use this knowledge in their writing. For example, emergent writing begins as scribbles. It changes over time, looking more and more like conventional writing with letters and words. Children may

- write some letters (often mixed with other marks);
- write their name;
- find the letters of their name in books and environmental print;
- name letters in English or other languages;
- write a menu for the kitchen area, including their favorite food—Ex. “ap” (apples);
- know the sounds that some letters make; and
- know that some letters make the same sounds in English and Spanish, and others do not (if they are bilingual English-Spanish).

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Children continue to develop their writing skills into elementary school, becoming conventional writers by the end of the primary grades. They use alphabet knowledge to read words. Children may

- be enthusiastic about learning to read and write;
- use knowledge of English letters and their sounds to help read words, such as “apple,” in English;
- use increasingly conventional writing as they gain more experience with letters, sounds, and words; and
- read and write in English and other languages, with instruction.

THE BIG 5 LITERACY COMPONENTS

The table below provides a brief description of each of the Big 5 skills. The activities to promote the concept, and the behaviors children engage in will vary based on children's age and abilities. For strategies and tips, be sure to review the additional Big 5 resources.



1 BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

From birth, children have daily experiences with people, objects, and places that they store in their memory. Over time, these memories become more complex. This background knowledge is the base for future learning. Children gain background knowledge through their wide and varied interactions with people. Background knowledge includes scientific awareness; cultural norms and expectations; and other information about the world. Background knowledge expands as children connect new learning to background knowledge.¹⁴



2 ORAL LANGUAGE AND VOCABULARY

Oral language is often divided into receptive and expressive language. Children develop receptive language as they begin to understand a language's meaning, even before they can express it themselves. They develop expressive language as they are able to use the sounds, words, and sentences of their language. A key aspect of oral language development is acquiring vocabulary.⁷ Children also use oral language when they participate in extended, complex conversations such as telling a story or sharing a memory.¹⁹



3 BOOK KNOWLEDGE AND PRINT CONCEPTS

When children experience written language in their day-to-day lives, they begin to understand that print has meaning. Print is speech written down.¹⁶ When adults read books to children, they also learn about how books work. Environmental print—which includes street signs, advertisements, logos, and other writing found in a child's everyday environment—is the first way young children gather meaning from print. Children develop print concepts when they begin to understand how written language works.



4 ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE AND EARLY WRITING

As children develop alphabet knowledge, they learn to recognize and name upper and lowercase letters. They also learn that there are sounds associated with each letter. Children's early writing progresses from making marks and scribbling, to drawing, and eventually to forming letters. Children's developing writing reflects their understanding of how written language works.^{15, 17}



5 PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Phonological awareness is the ability to focus on and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. Children develop phonological awareness as they learn to recognize that language can be broken into words, syllables, and smaller sounds. Children are demonstrating phonological awareness when they manipulate sounds by identifying, segmenting, blending, and substituting sounds.¹⁶ Activities such as repeating sounds, making up nonsense words, or saying simple rhymes will develop this skill.

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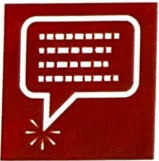
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