

# **EARLY LITERACY**

## **BIRTH TO THREE**

**Alice Kusmierck, Ph. D**

**ECHO Family Enrichment Program**

**Early Literacy Pretest**

**Social/Emotional Foundation  
Letter Carrier Play Group**

**Language and Literacy  
Bridging the Early Literacy Gap**

**Ten Things Every Child Needs  
Trains and Planes Play Group**

**Decontextualized Language  
Fire Fighter Play Group**

**Integrated Learning  
Restaurant Play Group Lesson**

# SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL FOUNDATION

To foster literacy in young children we must begin by fostering a love of learning. It is a strong parent/child relationship which affirms a child's sense of worth, nurtures a child's curiosity and builds a child's self confidence. When children are securely attached to their caregivers they have a firm base from which to set out on new journeys of discovery. Thus, it is children who feel loved and cared for who are most likely to enter school eager to learn and primed for success.

Attributes critical to developing a love of learning:

- ♥ **Efficacy** - Efficacy is the confidence that you can make things happen and that it is worth trying because it is possible to succeed and that your success will please the people who care about you.
- ♥ **A secure base for exploration** - Children with a secure base for exploration have a safe haven from which to take risks and try new things and a base to return to for reassurance and guidance.
- ♥ **Social referencing** - Social referencing involves looking to people to trust for clues about how to approach new experiences.

B. S. & Segal, M. M. *Building Literacy with Love: A Guide for Teachers and Caregivers of Children from Birth through Age 5.*  
Washington, DC: Zero to Three

# INSIDE-OUT AND OUTSIDE-IN

Children learn to read and write by incorporating two different domains of knowledge. Inside-out units represent sources of information that are within the printed word. This kind of information enables a child to translate print into sounds and sound into print. Inside-out knowledge includes phonemic awareness and letter knowledge. Outside-in units represent sources of information that are outside of the printed word. This kind of information supports the child in understanding the meaning of print. When children have outside-in knowledge they have vocabulary and conceptual knowledge to understand what they read. When children read with understanding they are applying information from both the outside-in and inside-out domains.

Inside-out knowledge includes:

- ♥ Identifying sounds and parts of words
- ♥ Linking the written and spoken word
- ♥ Naming and writing letters of the alphabet
- ♥ Associating sounds with letters
- ♥ Recognizing words that rhyme

Outside-in knowledge includes:

- ♥ Knowledge about the real world
- ♥ Knowledge about words
- ♥ Knowledge about stories and literate forms

Whitehurst, G. (2001, July 26). Address by Grover J. Whitehurst, Assistant Secretary of Education for Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education. White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development

# LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Researchers have found that differences in the amount of language children experience in the early years are linked to differences in educational outcomes for the children. The achievement gap in vocabulary is evident as early as 18 months. By age three children in professional families have a vocabulary of approximately 1,100 words and children in welfare families have a vocabulary of approximately 500 words. In professional families, children hear an average of approximately 2,100 words per hour and in welfare families children hear only approximately 600 words per hour. If these figures are extrapolated to cover four years, the child in a professional family would hear about 11 million words and the child in a welfare family would hear only 3 million words.

Key features of positive verbal interactions:

- ♥ Parents talk and use a wide vocabulary
- ♥ Parents use high rates of approval
- ♥ Parents use few prohibitions
- ♥ Parents tell children about things
- ♥ Parents give children choices
- ♥ Parents listen and respond to what children say
- ♥ Parents do not make demands

Hart, B. and Risley T. (1995) *Meaningful Differences in Everyday Experience of Young American Children*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.

# TEN THINGS EVERY CHILD NEEDS

Researchers have found that a child is most likely to develop his or her full potential if the child receives ten simple things shown to help brain development in the early years. There is a four-year period of human development. This time is from conception until age three. During the time children learn to walk, to talk, how to think and how to get along with others. Many experiences are needed in order to master these skills. In fact, it is the experiences that a child has during the first three years of life that impact on how a child's brain is "wire".

The ten things every child needs every parent can give:

- ♥ **Interaction**
- ♥ **Loving Touch**
- ♥ **Stable Relationship**
- ♥ **Safe, Healthy Environment**
- ♥ **Self Esteem**
- ♥ **Quality Care**
- ♥ **Communication**
- ♥ **Play**
- ♥ **Music**
- ♥ **Reading**

Ten Things Every Child Needs is a videotape produced by WTTW Chicago and was funded by a grant from the McCormick Tribune Foundation as part of its Focus on Quality Initiative.

# DECONTEXTUALIZED LANGUAGE

A feature of language that makes a difference in children's literacy development is whether it goes beyond the here and now to talk about the past or future, about imaginary situations or possibilities, or about abstract ideas. Language that goes beyond the immediate situation or context of the speaker and listener is referred to as "decontextualized language." Researchers found that children who get more experience with decontextualized language in the early years are better learners in elementary school.

Use decontextualized language with children:

- ♥ Talk about the past
- ♥ Talk about the future
- ♥ Talk about imaginary situations
- ♥ Talk about abstract ideas
- ♥ Talk about possibilities
- ♥ Think through problems
- ♥ Make predictions
- ♥ Talk about what might have been
- ♥ Ask open ended questions
- ♥ Share books with children

Dickinson, D. K. & Tabors, P. O. (Eds.). (2001). *Beginning Literacy With Language*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

# INTEGRATED LEARNING

Research consistently demonstrates that the more children know about language and literacy before they get to school, the better equipped they are to succeed in reading. Children need to develop oral language skills, phonological awareness, motivation to learn, appreciation of literate forms, print awareness and letter knowledge. These language and literacy accomplishments are achieved best through activities that are integrated across different development areas. When young children play all areas of development are integrated in a way that is fun and self-motivating for the learner.

Play activities and enhance language literacy

- ♥ **Cognitive development**
- ♥ **Social/Emotional development**
- ♥ **Language development**
- ♥ **Fine motor development**
- ♥ **Gross motor development**
- ♥ **Self help skills**

Burns, M. S., Griffin, P., & Snow, C. E. (Eds.). (1999). *Starting out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success*. Washington, DC: National Research Council.