Introducing Lakeshore’s Complete Infant and Toddler Resource Kits!

Developed under the guidance of Dr. Pam Schiller, and designed to support “The Complete Resource Book for Infants,” and “The Complete Resource Book for Toddlers and Twos,” Lakeshore’s collections contain engaging materials that help children from birth through 36 months build key developmental skills.
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Are we winning the battle but losing the war? Consider Zachary’s story, which is true.

Zachary is happy, healthy, and turned 5 years old this winter. He is the only child of a very loving family. His parents want only the best for him.

A few weeks ago when Zachary and his dad stopped in our office to talk to his grandmother, it was hard to tell who was more excited about the day they had gone to register Zachary for kindergarten. Dad was beside himself with pride and Zachary couldn’t wait to tell his grandmother about all the things he was going to get to do in kindergarten this fall. It was such a delight to see the enthusiasm they both had for school.

But that all came to an abrupt end when Zachary’s dad returned him to his preschool classroom. As the two shared their excitement, the well-meaning teacher commented that they were really going to have to get to work if Zachary was to be “ready” for kindergarten this fall, because he wasn’t making any progress on knowing his letters and he wouldn’t be ready to go to kindergarten if he didn’t know them.

Zachary’s dad left deflated but determined to do all he could to help Zachary “get ready.” He and Zachary’s mom immediately bought everything they could find to help with letter recognition and proceeded to “teach” Zachary his letters. They took away his video game privileges and used every spare minute practicing. The teacher “helped” by sending home ditto sheets of letters for Zachary to identify and color.

Zachary tried to please his parents but it was very hard and there were so many letters. Zachary’s mom and dad were not feeling very successful either. What if Zachary couldn’t go to kindergarten? What if he flunks out and has to repeat? What if he NEVER learns his letters? They want him to be successful, but was this “cramming for kindergarten” really helping?

Zachary became so overwhelmed by it all that he “ran away.” He refused to leave his grandmother’s house to go home with his parents. Zachary also created a new friend, “a big chicken” who could protect him from anything. The chicken began to go everywhere with Zachary. Zachary also began acting out at school, choking and hitting other children. Everyone in the family was stressed to the max, and Zachary still didn’t know them.

Fortunately, Zachary’s grandmother works in early childhood and knows a lot about child development. After some discussion with Zachary’s grandmother about how children grow and learn and some intervention from a resource teacher with the preschool teachers, the homework ditto sheets stopped, and Zachary’s parents began to relax and stop worrying. Zachary was allowed to get back into his normal routine. Miraculously, when the stress faded, so did the Big Chicken and Zachary’s acting-out behaviors. Zachary and his family are not talking about kindergarten and although everyone is less stressed, the
How can teachers support young children, all of whom are English language learners? Play is a wonderful way to help ALL children gain the confidence and skills they need to succeed in school and life!

Creative Play: Building Connections With Children Who Are Learning English

Sara J. Burton and Linda Carol Edwards

Learning English: Opportunities for Everyone

English language learners (ELL) are learning to listen, speak, read, and write (Silvaggio, 2005). When speakers of other languages begin to acquire English, like all children, they develop at different rates. Teachers may encounter situations such as these with English language learners who already speak Spanish:

- Some children experience a silent period of 6 or more months.
- Other children practice learning by mixing or combining the two languages or use a form of “Spanglish.”
- Some children may have the skills (appropriate accent, vocabulary, and vernacular) but they are not truly proficient.
- Other children quickly acquire English-language proficiency (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995).

Language acquisition is a very complex developmental process and it may take some students “a minimum of 12 years” to master a new language (Collier, 1989). Even when children seem to express themselves correctly, they may not have mastered the true complexity of the language.

Educators realize that children who are English language learners come to early childhood programs and schools with their own knowledge of the language used in their homes (NAEYC, 1995). Teachers of young children are encouraged to view the inclusion of children who are learning English as an enrichment opportunity for everyone: children who are learning English as a second language, the English-speaking students, and even themselves. Wise teachers embrace classroom diversity and create an atmosphere where all children can thrive and progress.

This article primarily considers children who come from homes where Spanish is spoken, but the premises

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and suggestions hold true for any of the “nearly 3 million ESL students” in the nation’s schools (Shore, 2001). What better way to involve and encourage all children to learn than through play?

What Are the Benefits of Play for English Language Learners?

Play is the primary vehicle through which children learn about themselves and others and about the world in which they live and interact. Through play, children actively explore their world, build new skills, and use their imaginations. Best of all they do it for the simple joy of doing it.

Educators are well aware of the lasting benefits of play, but the idea of “playing with language, oral and especially written language, during dramatic play is not nearly as common as it ideally should be” (Korat, Bahar, & Snapir, 2002, p. 393).

Play is extremely beneficial in overcoming communication challenges between English speakers and speakers of other languages (Little, 2004-2005; Reeves, 2004-2005; Oliver & Klugman, 2002). For children who are learning English, self-directed play establishes an informal, non-threatening atmosphere that is one of the most valuable ways of learning.

When children are engaged in the process of play, they usually care very little about an end product. They are free to figure out what they want to do and when they want to do it. They engage in spontaneous activity. In other words, children are in control. Play is a hands-on activity in which children choose their own learning adventures. They learn while doing something they have decided to do. What are children learning through play?

- Children increase the size of their vocabularies and their ability to comprehend language.
- They develop skills in cooperation by sharing and taking turns.
- Play helps children to develop empathy and strengthens their ability to express emotions (Oliver & Klugman, 2002).
- Play enables children to develop patience and tolerance (Dorrell, 2000).
- During play, children feel comfortable enough to take risks. As they gain self-reliance and feel successful (Edwards, 2002) they begin to function more independently and eventually take more risks outside of the play environment.

Play is essential for the sound development of all children, but it is especially important in the growth and development of children who speak English as a second language.

How did Ana Belen and Malik benefit from playing? They interacted in the block section, primarily with nonverbal communication, and both learned a new vocabulary word. After resolving their initial lack of knowledge about the Spanish and English words for block, they played together in such a way that both students felt comfortable.

Children who are learning a language benefit from play in several ways (Silver, 1999). Play helps establish bonds of friendship among children who do not communicate well in English (p. 67). During play, children who are learning English may exhibit independence and self-assurance that is not otherwise evident.

For example, Silver noted that children who were learning English tended to engage in solitary play when painting or doing cut-and-paste activities. As they got used to the routine, they became involved in play with rules and games. One child was very shy and used mostly telegraphic speech (see sidebar).
After engaging in play, he gradually built up his confidence to volunteer to go first when playing a game. Silver concluded that only during periods of play was this child on “equal footing with the others in the class” (1999, p. 67).

**Telegraphic speech:** Use of only the words necessary to communicate. For example, “I want to be picked up,” might be verbalized as “pick up.”

### How Can Teachers Support English Language Learners?

Teachers have a critical role in organizing their classrooms, structuring activities, and planning the use of materials in order to maximize all children’s participation in play. Early childhood educators can celebrate children’s strengths and allow them many ways to express their own interests and talents.

Many children born in the United States speak English at school, but speak their native language elsewhere. Speaking Spanish at home and among friends is one way that families cherish their ties to their home country. Silvaggio (2005) notes that children need adult help to negotiate this new world. It is not an easy task for teachers, who often lack resources to work with English language learners. As Shore (2001) explains, there are simple and practical ways that educators can help ESL children succeed. These are a few possibilities.

**Assess needs.** Find out where students’ skill levels are, not only in English but in other areas of development as well. Families’ perspectives, previous child care providers’ insights, and regular observations are essential resources for understanding children.

**Empathize.** Imagine how overwhelming it is to walk into a classroom where you only understand part of what you hear. The first author of this article remembers studying in Spain during her college years and being truly scared during the first few months there. Even though she had studied the language for a number of years, she felt helpless, insecure, and disconnected. How much more difficult it must be for a young child!

**Foster a sense of belonging.** Make sure all children feel welcomed by being patient. Use body language and pictures to communicate while learning welcoming words in their languages. Take care to pronounce children’s names correctly. Be aware of children’s needs for personal space and privacy, too.

**Assign buddies.** All children yearn to feel important and included. English-speaking children can be terrific resources to those who speak other language by making sure they can find the way around school, count money at lunchtime, understand directions, and more.

**Keep track of language progress.** Maintain a portfolio of each child. Save photographs, recordings, artwork, and writing samples. Review records with the child (and family) to see progress over time. This is an important way to acknowledge children’s strengths and accomplishments.

**Encourage family involvement.** Encourage parents of children who are learning English to feel like they are a part of the community and classroom. If needed, arrange for an interpreter at meetings and conferences. Learn more about each family’s culture so that interactions with each other are always respectful. Study the language and learn important words and phrases.

**Learn key words.** Make sure all staff and children quickly learn basic vocabulary words in both languages, such as restroom, clock, teacher, and bus. Picture cards and labels with words are an excellent tool to use with children who are beginning to learn about written language.

**Foster an appreciation of cultural diversity.** Diverse cultures are an asset for any classroom. Respect
each culture’s customs, make and taste a variety of foods, learn vocabulary words, create maps, talk with family members, and encourage all children to share their traditions.

Ask and observe to find out how children prefer to be encouraged and supported to succeed—these strategies vary by culture and custom. “Children with high motivation, self-confidence, and low levels of anxiety are more successful second language learners” (Szecsi & Giambo, 2004/2005, p. 104).

In an ideal environment, children play independently, at their own pace, in their own unique way, and have the necessary materials to facilitate their play. “We need to play in English, not just speak English at school,” said one student (Reeves, 2004/2005). Learning centers provide unique opportunities for all children to participate in free play, and this puts children who are learning English on “a level playing field” with their peers (Silver, 1999).

**Dramatic Play Enhances Language Development**

A dramatic play center is especially useful for children who are English language learners. Pretend play enables them to communicate in an informal setting and gather information that will be helpful to them, even beyond the classroom.

For example, during pretend play, children explore activities and relationships important to them in the real world. They typically investigate the role of family members, community helpers, and health care professionals (Texas Workforce Commission, 2002). Children bring their own knowledge into their play as they cooperate with one another.

In the dramatic play center, children build language and literacy skills. English language learners soon begin to communicate in effective and appropriate ways with both children and adults. They have many opportunities to “practice their language skills with peers” (deAtiles & Allessaht-Snider, 2002) in a “language-rich environment” (Szecsi & Giambo, 2004/2005).

A language-rich environment is essential in any early childhood classroom. Include props such as telephone books, magazines, and restaurant menus for dramatic play. By labeling items, teachers expose all children to print in both languages. This enables children who are learning English to encounter reading and speaking while they play and gives them a “multisensory approach” (Gasparro & Falletta, 1994) to language acquisition.

For example, Luis Jose and Sophie are pretending to go to the subway station. The props are labeled with text and pictures of a train, ticket, money, a caution sign in both languages, so each child knows each object in his or her language. Even though they speak different languages, they are able to recreate what happens at the subway station.

Unscripted role play is a valuable way for children to interact informally and gain the confidence they need to speak aloud. Similarly, playing restaurant is efficient and helpful for children as they read menus, practice ordering, interact with a waiter, and use table manners. For children, it seems less important that they can engage in English or Spanish conversations. What does appear to matter to them is that they can interact and understand each other.

Teachers can choose relevant, diverse themes for dramatic play and provide props for each theme. Stock the area with tickets, pretend money, many types of groceries, tools, and toy animals. By using

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**A Few Book Choices for Reader’s Theater**

*Juego de dedos (Finger Games)* by Pablo Serrano. This rhyming book contains creative photos, illustrations, and text to help children learn the names of their fingers.

*La gallina hambrienta (Hungry Hen)* by Richard Waring. What happens when a greedy fox watches a chicken getting bigger every day?

*La hora del baño (Bath Time)* by Jeanne Ashbé. An easy-reading board book that includes simple texts and foldouts showing a toddler and his teddy bear getting ready to take a bath.

*Un pez dos peces pez rojo pez azul (One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish)* by Dr. Seuss. This well-known humorous story incorporates rates counting, colors, and many other early concepts.

*Los Meros Meros Remateros (Grandma and Me at the Flea)* by Juan Felipe Herrera. A Mexican American boy bounds from booth to booth, visiting fellow flea market vendors in order to collect churros, chiles, and healing herbs. Includes side-by-side Spanish and English text.

*The Desert Is My Mother (El Desierto Es Mi Madre)* by Pat Mora. Mora invokes the grand powers of the desert, as she shouts thunder and flashes lightning.

*iSalta, Ranita, Salta! (Jump, Frog, Jump!)* by Robert Kalan. A tale of a frog who chases a fly then is chased by a fish, a snake, a turtle, a net, and then a group of children.
mostly familiar items, children find creative ways to play. Playing with real-life materials helps children feel more comfortable.

Teachers can also create a Reader’s Theater. Children perform dramatic representations of a story read to them in class or by a friend (Szecsi & Giambo, 2004/2005). The list in the box contains a sample of books that may be helpful in working with Spanish speakers. These books can be integrated into many themes. Some books are also available in English so that children can “read” together.

Teachers who want children to feel at ease in the classroom must “reach past psychological and cultural barriers that lead students to prefer the safety of silence to the danger of speaking” (Reeves, 2004/2005). When children feel comfortable and relaxed, they will speak up and show what they have learned. “Drama places learners in situations that seem real,” (Gasparro & Falletta, 1994) so when students use the goal language (English) for a specific purpose, the language is more easily internalized and remembered.

Through a variety of play experiences, children who are learning English become more prepared to engage in everyday interactions with English speakers. They eventually gain the confidence to participate in the community.

### What Role Do Families Play?

Parents and extended family members play a large role in helping children learn a new language and successfully adapt to the culture in which they live. Many families who speak another language and value their own culture face a difficult challenge when it comes to maintaining that culture and wanting their children to learn English as quickly as possible (Giambo & Szecsi, 2005). Share these suggestions with families, who can help their children thrive in two cultures and languages.

Many school-related skills that parents teach their children in their native language transfer to their new language and classroom. Translators and resources in other languages are increasingly available in many communities. Families and teachers are urged to work together to facilitate each child’s growth in language and in life.

### Outlook for the Future

“Young children are just beginning to learn about the world, and because they are still amateurs, they make mistakes, they get confused, and they do not always get things just right. They need a positive reaction from the adults around them, and they need to be recognized for their own individual value” (Edwards, 2005, p. 2).

This challenge is true for teachers and their interactions with all children, including those who are learning another language. Young children construct knowledge by building on familiar experiences. Educators provide young children with an extensive array of meaningful experiences.

When children learn new vocabulary words and practice pronunciation and language conventions, they are gaining skills for life. Taking the time to help children learn English as well as key words in other languages enables them to succeed in their learning environment. They will gain the confidence and abilities to succeed in the diverse culture in which they live.

Hispanics are the largest minority population in the United States, with 39.9 million people as of July 2003 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Hispanic youth also have a high

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<th>How Families Help Children Adjust to a New Language and Culture</th>
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<td>• Read aloud in both languages to your children. Many reading</td>
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<td>skills transfer between languages.</td>
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<td>• Get involved in community activities with your children. Go</td>
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<td>on local history tours, visit nature centers, and attend library</td>
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<td>story times. Link up with groups with similar interests, such as</td>
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<td>recreation departments, faith communities, and heritage festivals.</td>
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<td>• Play board games. This will enrich skills such as counting,</td>
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<td>using money, and learning new words.</td>
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<td>• Watch a few English-language children’s educational television</td>
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<td>programs together such as Reading Rainbow or Zoom! The language</td>
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<td>is easy to understand and the characters are real. Talk about</td>
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<td>children’s ideas afterwards, too.</td>
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<td>• Become active in sports. Choose sports suitable for children’s</td>
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<td>ages. These welcoming social interactions enable children to</td>
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<td>are likely to gain new friendships. (adapted from Giambo &amp;</td>
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<th>Celebrate children’s strengths.</th>
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<td>Keeping children’s fluency and</td>
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dropout rate: “Nearly one in three students fails to graduate from high school” (Clearinghouse on Urban Education, 2000). Solutions are urgently needed to help children who speak Spanish become fluent in the language and gain skills they need to become productive, healthy adults.

Almost every teacher works with one or more English language learners every year. The education challenge is to make every situation a truly beneficial “teachable moment.” Partnerships with children (and their families) will benefit children’s language and literacy skills and build the confidence they need to succeed. After all, “People who can communicate in at least two languages are a great asset to the communities in which they live and work” (Cutshall, 2004/2005, p. 23).

Summary

As leaders and mentors, teachers can best help culturally and linguistically diverse children and families by respecting the importance of each child’s home language and culture. Educators who embrace, respect, and preserve the many ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of students will enable them to increasingly contribute to this diverse culture.

References

Clearinghouse on Urban Education. (2000). School practices to promote the achievement of Hispanic students. ERIC Digest Number 153.
Put These Ideas Into Practice!

Creative Play: Building Connections With Children Who Are Learning English

by Sara J. Burton and Linda Carol Edwards

What children learn through play

- Children’s vocabularies increase.
- Sharing and taking turns improves cooperation.
- Children develop empathy and express emotions.
- They develop patience and tolerance.
- Children gain self-reliance and feel successful.
- They become more independent.

Enrichment experiences for young children

Focus on the dramatic play area. Add familiar props such as clothing, flowers, restaurant menus, pretend money, foods and tools, toy animals, magazines, and real-life materials. Label items in both languages for older preschoolers and primary children. Encourage informal, language-rich play.

Create a Reader’s Theater. Offer age-appropriate and culturally relevant books, puppets, and dress-up clothing. Encourage role play of the stories in both English and children’s own languages.

Offer everyday opportunities to use English. Pair an English language learner with an English-speaking student. Ask older English-speakers to read to younger ELL students. Encourage ELL students to read to younger peers.

Enrich learning opportunities. Ask older ELL students to interview a teacher, another student, or a member of the community. Students create their own interview questions, take photos, record the answers, and share the experience with classmates.

Ways teachers support English language learners

- Find out their skill levels in all areas. Ask parents and previous child care providers to share their insights.
- Imagine what it is like to be in a group where you only understand part of what you hear.
- Be patient.
- Make sure children and families feel welcome. Learn a few words of their languages.
- Ask classmates to help each other during classroom routines.
- Regularly observe children and record progress. Keep a portfolio of photos, recordings, art, and (for older children) writing samples.
- Help families feel part of the community and classroom.
- Appreciate diversity.

Suggestions to share with children’s families

- Read aloud in both languages to your children.
- Get involved in community activities with your children. Go on local history tours, visit nature centers, and attend library story times.
- Play board games. This will enrich skills such as counting, using money, and learning new words.
- Watch a few English-language children’s educational television programs together. Talk about children’s ideas afterwards.
- Become active in sports. Choose sports suitable for children’s ages.

Adult learning experiences that build on these ideas

- Start learning children’s languages. Perhaps a child’s family member would like to tutor YOU.
- Get to know children’s cultures. Shop in ethnic stores their families frequent. Attend community events. Read about diverse families to gain a better understanding of their strengths and challenges.
- Engage staff in a cultural immersion experience. Find a meeting moderator who speaks the chosen language, such as Spanish. Show a clip from a Spanish-language film. Each teacher receives a handout, in Spanish, about the film. After viewing the film, small groups discuss feelings, thoughts, reactions, and realizations as a result of this cultural experience.
- Ask an ELL parent attend a staff meeting, with a translator, to talk about issues within the school and broader community.
- Identify translators who can attend parent meetings, translate written materials, and otherwise facilitate communication with families.

Note: Dimensions of Early Childhood readers are encouraged to copy this material for early childhood students as well as teachers of young children as a professional development tool.
Call for Manuscripts
for
Theme Issue of Dimensions Fall 2007

The Fall 2007 issue of Dimensions of Early Childhood will be a theme issue. Members and friends of the Southern Early Childhood Association are encouraged to submit proposals for manuscripts to be published in this issue. The topic is:

Gateway to Lifelong Learning

During the early years of life, the foundations are laid for school success and lifelong learning. This theme issue will address how infant and toddler experiences impact development and education at all levels. Topics may include:

- Social and emotional development for future success
- Primary caregiving opportunities
- Building relationships
- Physically and emotionally healing environments
- Brain development research and applications
- Keeping infants and toddlers healthy and safe
- Collaboration with families of infants and toddlers
- Transitions to preschool classrooms

The Guest Editors ask that authors interpret current research findings and theories for use in a practical manner for early childhood educators. Each author will be expected to develop a 1- to 2-page practical handout summarizing the key points and offering enrichment experiences for children and adults.

Guest Editors for this issue are Nancy Cheshire and Janie Humphries. Please submit questions and proposals by email to:

Nancy Cheshire  ncheshire@fairmontstate.edu  or  Janie Humphries  humphries@ans.latech.edu

Proposals must include:

- 2-page detailed outline
- 200- to 400-word summary
- list of pertinent sample references
- indication of the author's expertise

All proposals must be submitted by October 1, 2006. If accepted for the theme issue, final manuscripts (8 to 16 pages) will be due by January 5, 2007.

To review author guidelines for publication in Dimensions, please go to www.SouthernEarlyChildhood.org.

In Memory of Erin Oglesby, son of Beverly Oglesby
The Virginia Alliance of Family Child Care Association
Virginia Association for Early Childhood Education
Ann Levy
Martha Garne
Susan Noel
Texas Association for the Education of Young Children

In Memory of Mr. Robert Bunce, Mrs. Evelyn Aarant and Mr. Arvid Schon
by Dr. Pam Schiller

Donations to the Hurricane Relief Fund
Children First Preschool
Anna P. Traudt
In Honor of the Content Team at Binney and Smith
Sewanee Children’s Center
Increasing numbers of young children who have severe forms of physical disabilities are enrolled in early childhood programs. Rethinking how children are assessed—and how the results become the basis for planning individualized learning experiences—is imperative for early childhood teachers.

**EVALUATE Children With Disabilities: Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators**

John J. Vacca

Early childhood educators are teaching increasing numbers of children who have challenging and unique forms of special needs. Educators, in conjunction with specialists, are expected to design inclusive programs for children of all abilities (Brown & Barrera, 1999; Hosp & Reschly, 2003). Teachers in inclusive programs typically face challenges such as these:

- Many children with disabilities cannot respond to traditional teaching methods, and therefore teachers must develop innovative strategies to support children’s learning and behavioral development.
- Normative assessment measures are ineffective when used with many children who have disabilities.
- Resources to assist providers, especially those whose professional preparation may not have included children with disabilities, are limited.

### Concerns About Assessment Approaches

A review of related literature reveals a variety of limitations in the sole use of the normative approach to testing very young children with disabilities (Browder, et al., 2005; Campbell, Milbourne & Silverman, 2001; Fabio, 2005; Noyes-Grosser, et al., 2005; Ratcliff, 2001). These include:

- **poor reliability of scores** due to variability in rates at which children with disabilities reach developmental milestones established for typically developing children.
- **restricted predictive validity**, given the dynamic nature of children’s development when they have disabilities.
- **lack of adequate representation** of children with special needs in the normative group with which children are compared.

### Standard scores alone do not accurately reflect a child’s abilities.

National initiatives such as The No Child Left Behind Act and The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act involve high-stakes accountability. Schools must document that all children have access to the general education curriculum, and that children are afforded equal opportunities to interact with their same-age peers as much as possible (Browder, et al., 2005).

As a result, there is a critical need for additional resources and assessment approaches to assist teachers with planning and teaching children with developmental differences (LaParo, Olsen, & Pianta, 2002). This article reviews some of the most pressing issues and offers solutions for better addressing the needs of children with disabilities.

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levels of specialized training needed to work with children younger than 3 years of age who have identified disabilities.

limited availability of qualified trained professionals to assess and interpret test results.

Bruder and Dunst (2005) interviewed representatives of 449 undergraduate and master’s programs in eight disciplines (nursing, nutrition, occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychology, social work, special education, and speech-language pathology) to investigate the breadth and depth of early intervention content covered in their training programs.

None of these specialized disciplines indicated satisfaction with the level of professional preparation to work with young children. While most reported high levels of knowledge about normal child development and developmental differences, few identified extensive training in actually working with young children and families. Furthermore, hands-on skills in assessment and intervention were not fully addressed in their curricula.

In addition to general issues identified here, there are specific limitations in implementing traditional assessment approaches with young children who have more significant forms of disabilities such as cerebral palsy, autism, or mental retardation as a result of a genetic syndrome. Early educators are encouraged to work closely with specialists when assessing and using the results to draw implications for practice and working with families.

Lack of Personalized Information

The information that is generated from normative testing—and thus any diagnoses—often tells specialists, teachers, and families nothing about the individual child, such as interests, strengths, learning styles, or abilities to participate in activities and handle transitions between activities (Campbell, Milbourne, & Silverman, 2001).

If early educators and other members of the child’s caregiving team had this information, they could develop individualized, functional outcomes for the child and family that suit them. Providers would be able to better anticipate the reactions of children and could plan accordingly to help children remain engaged in classroom activities. For example, concrete statements like these would be helpful when planning interventions:

- Luis sits for longer periods of time when he plays with a toy or a small book.
- Felicia separates easier from her mother with less crying when she can hold a small picture of her mother in her hand while walking into the room.

Dunst (2000) points out that when children are viewed and treated with respect for their individual talents and interests, as opposed to focusing on their deficits, efforts to include children with disabilities with their peers are more likely to be successful, and everyone involved benefits.

Need for Observational Context

A second limitation of traditional approaches is the lack of formally including observations of children’s behaviors during the testing situation (and in the natural environment) along with the scores.

For example, scoring credit is given when a child can name two colors, regardless of the child’s
behavior while answering this question (e.g., jumping around the testing room, standing on one's head, hand flapping, or head banging). In another situation credit may be given to a child for stacking six one-inch cubes, but ignores any atypical movements in the child's arms, hands, and mouth (e.g., fisting of the right hand and tongue protrusion) while doing so.

Many young children with augmentative communication devices are also limited by the commands, phrases, and picture symbols that are programmed into their devices. Thus, they are limited in how they answer questions. Often, they are penalized because the exact wording of the response generated by their device does not match that of the acceptable response as indicated in the test manual.

In situations such as these, the standard score does not accurately reflect a child's abilities. Test results typically fail to make a clear distinction between capability and performance.

- **Capability** refers to the child's abilities in a defined situation apart from real life.
- **Performance** refers to what a child does in everyday settings (Tie- man, Palisano, Gracely, & Rosenbaum, 2004).

As a result of this distinction, and the over-reliance of traditional assessments on capability, educators are not provided with a clear picture on how the child's performance in testing will translate to what the child will be able to do in the classroom or at home.

**Overemphasis on Motor Functioning**

The third limitation in assessing young children with disabilities is the overemphasis on the relationship between motor functioning and cognitive abilities. Contemporary theories of how infants and young children learn highlight the important role of motor development and play (Case-Smith, 1996). Constructivist theories, such as Piaget's theory of cognitive development, view young children as active explorers in their world. The assumption is that children must be active and able to use their bodies so that exploration can lead to learning and self-discovery.

With each major motor milestone, there are accompanying sets of developmental skills that emerge. For instance, as children are able to lift their heads and prop themselves up on their forearms when placed on their stomach, they can look around their environment and locate objects of interest. Each time they are given a chance to view objects in this position or other positions, infants start making attempts to move toward the preferred object.

Infants move from propping themselves up on their forearms to purposefully reaching out with one arm, while propping with the other to obtain the desired object. Over time, propping leads to sitting up, which then leads to getting on hands and knees, to crawling, to cruising, to walking, and so on.

Each motor milestone that is achieved successfully brings young children closer to the objects they want. This independent exploration enables children to learn about concepts such as texture, shape, and size. It fosters social development by making children more visible to adults and children who encourage interaction with them, which leads to communication development (Jones, Horn & Warren, 1999).

The relationship between motor development and cognitive development is automatically expected and therefore dominates the types of activities very young children are exposed to on normative measures. What happens when infants are not able to use their hands, arms, legs, eyes, or ears, to explore the world around them? Can one assume that delays in motor development coexist with delays in cognitive development?

Weikle and Hadadian (2003) cite research on the use of technology with children with disabilities and conclude that:

> Decreased solitary play, increased pleasure (positive affect), involvement in interactive social activities, and attention to communication (social cues) all can help promote autonomy, accomplishment, and trust, thus building children's motivation, self-confidence, and self-esteem/self-efficacy.

Conversely, when a child is unable to verbalize, sit up, reach for toys, or move about to secure favorite objects, these impaired interactions with the environment sometimes can produce a learned helplessness approach to daily living. (p. 183)

**Why Focus on Process?**

Early childhood educators are in the forefront of changing how assessment is viewed and recom-
mended for use (Noyes-Grosser, et al., 2005; Romanczyk, et al., 2005). The focus has moved from a product orientation to a process orientation when evaluating young children’s development.

The current view is that it is important to not only assess the final product of children’s abilities, but it is equally important to document the process children went through to create those products (Ratcliff, 2001). The premise for this perspective is that much can be learned about children’s learning by observing and documenting what they do and how they do it.

The Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA) supports this premise by stating that assessments should benefit children and enhance their development and learning. Furthermore, a blend of formal and informal assessment methods provides a broader picture of child growth, development, and learning from which wise decisions regarding meeting the needs of individuals can be made (SECA, 2005).

Through ongoing documentation of what children do and how they do it, early childhood providers are better able to:

- **Plan** and **individualize** meaningful experiences on a daily basis
- **Identify** goals and objectives that are developmentally, culturally, and exceptionality appropriate
- **Link** content, teaching, and learning through implementing child-initiated activities
- **Monitor** the progress of children with respect to the outcomes of the curriculum and standards for early learning and school readiness

In its position statement on assessment, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) also recognizes the central role of the family in the assessment process. Not only should assessment information come from multiple sources and environments, but it should also reflect the hopes and expectations children’s families have, the overall family needs for caring for the child, and the inherent demands in children’s daily environments.

**Broaden the Definition of Intelligence**

Along with the recommendation to move beyond the scope of traditional testing, specialists recognize that the definition of intelligence could well be broadened, especially when applied to children with complex disabilities (Guerette, Tefft, Furumasu, & Fabiola, 1999; Hughes, Dote-Kwan, & Dolendo, 1998).

A broader definition of cognition (i.e., brain functioning as it relates to problem solving) for children with disabilities usually includes basic physiological functioning (i.e., breathing, eye blinking, eye tracking, interview families.

Not only should assessment information come from multiple sources and environments, but it should also reflect the hopes and expectations children’s families have, the overall family needs for caring for the child, and the inherent demands in children’s daily environments.
and head turning) as well as higher skills.

The idea of intelligence in early childhood is the subject of much debate (Chen & Siegler, 2000; Loranger, et al., 2002). At the root of this debate are key questions:

- Can the results from tests of early cognitive abilities be extrapolated across older ages to predict later functioning?
- Can intelligence be reliably measured in children under age 5 years?
- What are the components of early intelligence?
- How can early intelligence be accurately defined?
- In what ways can early intelligence be identified?

The two pillars of developmental assessments of very young children with more severe and/or challenging forms of disabilities are parent report and observation. Parents of young children must be recognized not only as their children's first teacher but also as their children's informants, historians, and advocates. Interviewing families about the abilities of their children can yield valuable information and insights (Alvares, 1997; Hendriks, DeMoor, Oud, & Savelberg, 2000). Examples of key questions to ask include:

- How does your child let you know he is hungry?
- How does she let you know that she wants something?
- What are your child's favorite types of toys to play with?
- When your child becomes upset, what are some things you do to soothe him and help him calm down?

Answers to such questions provide insight into how children communicate, respond to interactions with others, and use their bodies to reach and grasp objects.

Observation of children in a variety of settings provides similar information. It is important to document information about children's capabilities by simply noting what they do in response to various activities and interactions (Zascavage & Keefe, 2004). Observations such as these are invaluable:

- Eliazor uses his eyes to horizontally track turning pages in the book his mother is reading to him.
- Sarah grimaces and tenses her neck and upper extremities when jazz is played.

Proper positioning of the child and testing materials is vital.

Design Specialized Services

For many children with challenging disabilities, the focus of assessments is typically not on finding them eligible for early intervention. Rather, it is on determining the types of specialized instruction and related services needed to support children's development (Mayes, 1999). Therefore, a thorough assessment process must consider the cognitive principles of input and output.

- With input, the focus is on how children respond to environmental stimuli (e.g., child uses vision to look at pictures and eye-gaze to communicate needs; child turns head when his or her name is called; child moves wrists in a back-and-forth motion to indicate desire to be picked up).
- With output, the focus is on how children demonstrate their knowledge and/or receipt of information (e.g., child smiles in response to a familiar person entering a room; child opens mouth in response to offering a spoon; child arches back and turns head when overstimulated; child uses eye gaze to identify needs from pictures; child hits a switch with an outstretched arm and hand to make choices with an augmentative communication device).

This focus benefits educators because they can observe the many ways a child is responsive to interaction and anticipate how these responses might be repeated in similar situations in a classroom (Fabio, 2005; Tieman, et al., 2004).

Properly Position Child and Materials

Young children with severe forms of physical disabilities tire and frustrate easily. Most of this is due to the energy displaced as a result of abnormal positions. For example, children with a severe form of cerebral palsy can appear as if they are stuck in a position and cannot move. Most often this is a reflex pattern that appears as children move their bodies. Many children with this condition sweat a lot while doing simple tasks and they are quick to cry or whine after participating for a short time.

When properly positioned, however, children can use their energy to focus on the task at hand rather than to maintaining abnormal postures that are the result of a reflex. During assessment, proper positioning of the child and of the testing materials is vital. The 90-90-90 principle is a strategy for placing a child in an optimal position for any type of activity. In this position:

- the child is seated upright, with her hips placed firmly back in
the chair (90 degree angle)
- her knees bend at the edge of the chair seat (90 degree angle)
- her feet are placed on a firm surface so that the ankles bend (90 degree angle)

Many children, because of their physical disabilities and medical status, may not be able to be fully placed in this position. However, in consultation with an occupational therapist and/or physical therapist, attempts should be made to get the child in the most optimal position to participate in the assessment.

Proper positioning also refers to the placement of learning materials. The mere presentation of materials can affect the quality of responses and motor movements that a child makes. For example, the asymmetric tonic neck reflex (ATNR) is seen when a child turns his head to one side. The child’s arm on the same side his face is turned is typically outstretched in front of him and the other arm is bent (this position is commonly referred to as the fencer position). In this reflex, the child’s mouth and facial muscles are typically tight.

If testing materials are presented to children’s immediate right or left, this could elicit the ATNR, and thereby compromise their ability to reach and grasp an object in front of them or open their mouth to answer a question. Given this knowledge about positioning, early childhood educators can arrange the assessment environment to encourage optimal interaction.

**EVALUATE Children With Disabilities**

Early childhood educators are urged to carefully select assessment strategies and teaching approaches that embrace children for their unique talents and skills, and do not penalize them for their motor deficits. Individuals working with children with disabilities also can benefit from extensive training and education in motor development.

One word that is helpful to remember when working with young children with complex disabilities is E-V-A-L-U-A-T-E. When broken down by each letter, key words can describe important principles to follow.

**E (eye contact/eye movements)**

Given the fact that many children with severe forms of disabilities have restricted movements of their arms and legs, all efforts should be made to determine how they can respond to questions and directions. Oftentimes, a child’s abilities to use eye contact, eye movements, or head nodding can be a start in helping to determine what they know and what their interests are.

**V (vitals and overall appearance)**

The definition of cognition for children with severe disabilities must be extended to include basic physiological functioning. For some children, this may be the only observable cognitive act (or brain activity) that can be reported. This acknowledgement reflects a more sensitive and family-centered approach by commenting on what the child can do. It also curbs the tendency to call any child “untestable” because of severe limitations.

**A (awareness)**

Awareness refers to higher cognitive skills that reflect children’s sensory capabilities. Early childhood educators assessing young children can carefully observe how children respond to stimuli in the environment. Observe how children respond to familiar people. Information from these observations is critical in documenting children’s overall awareness of the world around them.

**L (language)**

Along with a broadening of the definition of cognition, early childhood educators are aware that language and communication is not limited to speech only. Language refers to all possible means of expressing oneself. Therefore, thorough assessments document the ways that children with physical disabilities express their wants, needs, and interests.

**U (understanding)**

Cognitive assessments routinely examine children’s understandings of materials. For young children with severe disabilities, that understanding can be carefully described. It is not enough to report an age equivalence or standard score as the sole indicator of understanding. It is far more important to describe how the child approaches tasks and answers questions, handles demands in daily activities, interacts with peers and adults, and follows through on directions.

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**EVALUATE**

E—eye contact/eye movements
V—vitals and overall appearance
A—awareness
L—language
U—understanding
A—attention
T—time
E—emotions
A (attention)
Attention is another component of cognition to be documented during assessment. Record how long children are able to look at and participate in activities that are presented to them. Additionally, identify what types of activities seem to help them pay attention the longest. This information helps to shape intervention programs by incorporating strategies that support children’s abilities to attend for long periods of time.

T (time)
Children with physical disabilities often need longer response times. They need ample time to organize their bodies and plan body movements appropriately in order to manipulate materials or answer questions. To help children show what they know, allow sufficient time for their responses.

E (emotions)
Finally, assessment of children with physical disabilities must include social and emotional development. Teachers are encouraged to collect information from parents about the range and types of activities their children find entertaining. Observe children during these activities to note the quantity and quality of their motor movements and communication outputs (Zascavage & Keefe, 2004).

* * *

All of this information is essential to design developmentally appropriate practices for children that reflect their skills, talents, interests, and needs—not just their weaknesses. Furthermore, it can lead to improvements in the assessment process that support parent-child relationships. Families, teachers, and children who can read and interpret each other’s behavioral cues are far more likely to develop and maintain the high-quality attachment necessary for optimum development.

References
Research in Developmental Disabilities, 21(6), 455-468.

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SECA expresses its appreciation to these content experts who reviewed the articles that appear in this issue of Dimensions of Early Childhood.

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Early childhood professionals who are interested in becoming SECA volunteer manuscript reviewers are encouraged to request an application. Send your request to editor@southernearlychildhood.org.
Problems With Current Testing Practices

When very young children with disabilities are tested using only measures that compare them with other children, the results may not give a true picture of a child’s true functioning capabilities. Some limitations include:

- Test scores are less reliable — children with disabilities reach developmental milestones at different rates than typically developing children.
- Results may not predict children’s true potential — again because children who have disabilities develop at unpredictable rates.
- Children with special needs are less likely to be included in the group to which they are being compared.
- Few professionals are qualified to assess and interpret test results.
- Specialized training is needed to work with children younger than 3 years of age who have identified disabilities.

It is also more difficult to use traditional assessments with young children who have more significant forms of disabilities such as cerebral palsy, autism, or mental retardation as a result of a genetic syndrome. Many young children who use devices to communicate are also limited by the commands, phrases, and picture symbols that are programmed into their devices. Their answers to questions may differ from those expected.

Why Keep Records?

Daily records of what children do and how they do it is essential. With written observations, early childhood caregivers are better able to:

- Plan and individualize meaningful daily experiences.
- Identify goals and objectives that are developmentally, culturally, and exceptionality appropriate.
- Link content, teaching, and learning through child-initiated activities.
- Monitor children’s progress in achieving curriculum goals and meeting standards for early learning and school readiness.

Proper Testing Position

When properly positioned during a test, children can use their energy to focus on the task. In the 90-90-90 position:

- The child is seated upright, with her hips placed firmly back in the chair (90 degree angle).
- Her knees bend at the edge of the chair seat (90 degree angle).
- Her feet are placed on a firm surface so that the ankles bend (90 degree angle).

Suggestions for Interviewing Families

Families can provide many insights about their children’s abilities. Key questions to ask include:

- How does your child let you know he is hungry?
- How does she let you know that she wants something?
- When your child becomes upset, what are some things you do to soothe him and help him calm down?

Suggestions for Improving Assessment Practices

- Find out which tests were used to evaluate children in the program. Were they normative assessments? If so, what other evaluations might be necessary to get a clearer picture of each child’s strengths? Confer with specialists to determine next steps.
- Work as a caregiving team to decide which questions to ask each family. What information will help teachers better plan for each child?
- Design convenient, accurate record-keeping methods to track children’s growth and achievements. Consider each point of EVALUATE.
- Observe in high-quality programs that serve children with similar disabilities. Meet with staff and exchange information about best teaching practices.

EVALUATE Children With Complex Disabilities

E — eye contact/eye movements
V — vitals and overall appearance
A — awareness
L — language
U — understanding
A — attention
T — time
E — emotions

For More Information


Note: Dimensions of Early Childhood readers are encouraged to copy this material for early childhood students as well as teachers of young children as a professional development tool.
Family Fun Day: Make a Difference in Your Community

Laurelle Phillips and Pamela Evanshen

Family Fun Day
Saturday, April 4, 10 am to 1 pm
East Tennessee State University
Gymnasium

Signs all over town announce the community event. What is Family Fun Day? How did it get organized? Why do it? This is the story of early childhood education students, members of East Tennessee State University’s Student Association for Young Children (SAYC), who wanted to make a difference in the lives of children. In the process, they grew professionally (Robinson & Stark 2002). Their success story is one of action, advocacy, and professional growth—and it could be repeated in any community.

Planning the Day

Family Fun Day began in 1991 on East Tennessee State University’s campus. The original idea was to celebrate The Week of the Young Child. The day continues to be an annual April event involving professors, students, local child care centers, various community agencies, and of course families and their young children.

The main focus is for college students to organize a fun-filled morning where families can experience developmentally appropriate activities with their children. Students plan the event, schedule activities, arrange set up and clean up, participate with the children and their families, and evaluate the process at the conclusion of the event.

Who Are the Organizers?

Sponsors for Family Fun Day are SAYC and two child care centers, both of which are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

- Little Bucs Center provides child care for students’ children while they attend classes. Children from ages 3 months to 8 years are cared for in this unique full-day child care center. Because many families attend classes at the university 5 days a week, there is a high attendance rate for all age groups.
- Child Study Center is a full-day child care center that is open to students, faculty, and the public, serving children 3 months to 5 years of age.

The centers are located on campus and function as practicum and field placement sites for education students. Both centers have student workers, graduate assistants, and full time staff, all of whom are interested in young children.

Together, SAYC and the child care centers sponsor the Family Fun Day as an opportunity to share activities appropriate for young children from ages birth through 8 years. Information about parenting techniques and

Laurelle Phillips, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at East Tennessee State University and the Program Coordinator for Early Childhood Education. She has participated and led the Family Education Information component of the Family Fun Day event for the last 6 years.

Pamela Evanshen, Ed.D., is Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at East Tennessee State University and the Faculty Advisor for the Student Association for Young Children. She has been a member of the SAYC Executive Committee and faculty chair for the Family Fun Day event for the past 5 years.

Both authors encourage participation in the fundraising, planning, and implementing of the event though the student organization and through courses that they teach as a step toward becoming a professional in early childhood.
resources, child services, literacy development, and other topics of interest within the community is also provided.

**How Is the University Involved?**

The event takes place on the college campus in a gymnasium. Specific spaces in this large open area are identified for conducting the many children’s activities.

Staff from the campus child care centers and professors from the university volunteer their time to support this annual event. For example, one professor has painted children’s faces with balloons, flowers, and other popular designs for several years. Staff from both of the campus child care centers, Child Study Center and Little Bucs, host an infant and toddler area full of sensory experiences for both young children and their families. Exploration of torn paper and various sensory stimuli excite all who dare to explore!

**How Do Students Participate?**

Participating in Family Fun Day is one path on the journey that students take toward the goal of becoming a professional (Hyson 2003). When early childhood education students and SAYC members participate in this event, they solidify their identity with the early childhood profession. By taking part in planning, implementing, and evaluating this event, students gain real-life experiences that they can apply throughout their careers.

Students create posters and display panels to line the entrance to the gymnasium. These attractive presentations provide information to families on a variety of popular topics such as literacy, nutrition, developmental milestones, and activities in the local community for families of young children. Approximately 30 undergraduate and graduate students choose a learning center to plan for, set-up, and facilitate during the event. They not only guide children in the center, they interact with the adults accompanying the children. They typically talk about the importance of play, sharing time with family, and the many learning opportunities that result from these experiences. SAYC was

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<th>Family Fun Day Activity Ideas</th>
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<td><strong>Drawing</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Painting</strong></td>
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<td>Fingerpainting</td>
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<td>Easel &amp; brush painting</td>
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<td>Squirt painting with colored water</td>
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<td>Textures (sand, salt)</td>
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<td>Printmaking (sponge)</td>
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<td><strong>Science</strong></td>
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<td>Weights &amp; balances</td>
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<td>Earth (soil, minerals, rocks)</td>
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<td>Animals (observe &amp; pet)</td>
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<td>Insects</td>
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<td>Water (sink &amp; float, bubbles)</td>
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<td>Goop in a bag/homemade dough</td>
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<td>Magnets</td>
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<td><strong>Music/Movement</strong></td>
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<td>Make/play musical shakers</td>
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<td>Fingerplays</td>
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<td>Building blocks (large, table, cardboard)</td>
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<td>Dolls, dress-up, mirrors</td>
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<td>Puppets &amp; puppet shows</td>
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<td>Toys, cars, trucks</td>
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<td>Musical instruments</td>
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<td>Puppets (paper sacks, stick, face)</td>
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<td>Bowling</td>
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<td>Hopscotch</td>
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<td>Tumbling on mats</td>
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<td>Balance beams</td>
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<td>Running races (sack, track, obstacle)</td>
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<td>Throwing (Frisbees®, rubber)</td>
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<td>horsehoes, balls, bean bags</td>
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Students plan, implement, and evaluate the event.
presented a campus award for the Best Educational Program in 2005.

**How Is the Event Organized?**

In the fall semester, SAYC students hold a silent auction to raise funds for Family Fun Day. Many local businesses donate items or services that are silently auctioned off during a 3-day period each November. SAYC students venture out into the community to collect items and/or gift certificates. The students set up the auction in the entrance of the College of Education. Faculty, staff, students and other visitors in the building bid on items displayed. The highest bidder at the end of the 3-day auction wins and pays the bid to SAYC in order to collect the item. Approximately $1000 is raised at the fundraising event.

In winter and early spring, as students study early childhood development, literacy, creativity, learning centers, and other aspects of programs for young children, they are encouraged to implement some of their new knowledge by participating in Family Fun Day. During SAYC meetings, students generate a list of possible activity centers or other experiences for the upcoming event (see box).

Invitations for participation in this community event are sent to all local child care centers and agencies providing services for young children and their families. Invitations usually go out by early March. Groups are invited to set up a center, activity, or information station to publicize their place of business or service. For example, Tennessee Early Intervention System, a statewide intervention system for infants through 3-year-old children with special needs, sets up an information booth providing parents and educators with valuable resources and ideas.

At the same time, student volunteers sign up to lead specific activities. SAYC then purchases the materials needed for the student-run centers and activities.

Radio spots, signs at local businesses, and newspaper announcements publicize the event. In addition, flyers are included in the invitations sent to local centers and agencies. These organizations are urged to copy and distribute announcements to families throughout the community. Everyone is invited!
Coordinating Family Fun Day

On the morning of the event, SAYC members and other early childhood teacher candidates, professors, Child Study Center and Little Bucs staff, and community participants gather bright and early to set up.

- Items such as child-sized tables and chairs, small plastic swimming pools, easels, balls, and parachutes may be among the items transported from the campus child care centers to the gym for children's activity areas.
- SAYC executive board members bring the materials and supplies, bought with money donated from the silent auction, to the gym to distribute to designated areas. Early childhood students and other SAYC members quickly and creatively set up their stations.

Within 2 hours, all is set and children and families arrive. Families with infants and toddlers especially enjoy the sensory activities provided by the staff of the Child Study and Little Bucs campus centers. What could be more fun than goop, torn paper in swimming pools, sensory bottles, and calming music?

Preschool and primary-age children rush to the face painting station for their favorite design to be placed where everyone can see! While waiting for this most popular event, there are paper hats to make, seeds to plant, T-shirts to decorate, books to create, art materials to experience, clothes to dress up in, blocks to build structures, and gross motor equipment to explore.

Growing as Advocates and Professionals

With its emphasis on advocacy for young children, the East Tennessee State faculty encourages early childhood students to participate in Family Fun Day through sharing information with families and helping involve those families in their children's learning. This adds another level of participation for emerging professionals (Kagan & Bowman 1997).

Students in classes on literacy and parent involvement create posters and brochures for families. Some tips they typically include:

- different ways to interact positively with your child
- reasons to read with your child
- ways to handle biting and other difficult behaviors
- how to become involved in your child's care and education

The final aspect of this event is for college students to comment and reflect on its successes and areas for improvement in the future. Reflection within a group and self-reflection both lead to higher learning (Tertell, Klein, & Jewett, 1998). SAYC members reflect on and evaluate the experience each year and begin planning for the following year based on their assessments.

Early childhood education students typically express excitement about participating in the Family Fun Day. One commented, “It is great to be able to share with families the information that I have learned in classes, especially about what is appropriate for young children. Not every parent knows these things.”

Another student said, “This was a great experience. I talked with parents in ways I had not had the opportunity to before. For example, one parent asked me about why the poster suggested you read to babies. I was able to answer and we had a conversation about it!”

It is hard physical work to set up and tear down the event, but SAYC students, especially the executive board members, state, “It is worth the work to see so many families together experiencing good times with one another, engaged in developmentally appropriate activities.”
The entire process is a learning experience for early childhood students and SAYC members. It is a valuable lesson in responsibility, collaboration, and advocacy. What better way to grow professionally then by getting involved in the lives of young children, right here and now!

Since the first Family Fun Day, the response from the community has been gratifying. Collaboration continues, with professors, students, campus and local child care programs, community agencies, and, of course, families and their young children all involved along with the SAYC organizers. All participants discover new ways to interact and connect with each other to make a difference in the lives of children.

References

Family photos with dress-up props are always a hit!
Put These Ideas Into Practice!

Family Fun Day: Make a Difference in Your Community

by Laurelle Phillips and Pamela Evanshen

Planning Your Own Family Fun Day

Potential organizers
- early childhood students
- child care providers
- college/university faculty
- Head Start
- early childhood professional organizations

Possible sites for a Family Fun Day
- gymnasium
- volunteer fire house
- library
- elementary school
- YMCA/YWCA
- recreation center

Funding sources
- auction donations
- pancake breakfast
- student time and talents
- board members
- university facility
- faculty volunteers
- area businesses

Community groups to invite
- early intervention organizations
- community child care centers
- Health Department
- Fire Department
- Police Department
- pediatric dentist
- local children’s museum and attractions
- Department of Children’s Services
- library
- community colleges
- university nursing students
- other university student groups
- boys and girls clubs
- Head Start

Publicity ideas
- signs placed around town
- radio spots
- newspaper articles
- parent flyers
- TV community listing
- store signs

Suggested planning timeline for an April event
- early fall semester—assign student committee chair
- mid-fall semester—fundraising event
- February—meeting to explain event to students and solicit their participation
- February—secure site
- early March—mass mailing to local child care centers/organizations
- late March—final assignments for centers; gather and purchase materials for centers
- evening before April event—sort materials; create a map of the center locations for inside and outside area; tag child-size furniture from campus child care centers to be used in the centers
- morning of the event—put out balloons to mark location; 2 hours before, set up all centers and direct organizations to their spaces
- during event—document with photographs; survey parents and participants; enjoy the event
- after the event—clean-up (approximately 2 hours); enjoy pizza with students, faculty, child care centers and organizations that participated
- 1 week after the event—distribute certificates of participation to students

Tips for a smooth event day
- review NAEYC Week of the Young Child materials kit, see www.naeyc.org/about/wyc
- fundraise 6 months before the event
- plan centers and materials needed early to allow adequate time to purchase
- recruit an abundance of student volunteers (approximately 30 students for every 100 families expected)

Note: Dimensions of Early Childhood readers are encouraged to copy this material for early childhood students as well as teachers of young children as a professional development tool.
For the greater part of the past 40 years, I have been studying Sylvia Ashton-Warner’s work in New Zealand, and since 1989, have been learning about what they do in schools for young children in Reggio Emilia, Italy. While it would be delightful to explore both of these wide worlds in depth, this brief discussion will be confined to sharing the highlights of each of these approaches to teaching and the ways in which they reinforce each other.

Similarities in Approach: New Zealand and Italy

How strange it must have been for Ashton-Warner, a woman from New Zealand, working with her headmaster husband in the years before World War II, raising Pakeha (white) children in Maori communities. She learned te reo (the Maori language), and came to see at least some of the strengths of Maori culture, which is a “we” culture, rather than the “I” culture in which she had been raised. The Maori culture values carving and weaving and song and dance movement, and like many indigenous cultures, makes no separation between art and the rest of life.

The Italians, too, have valued the arts for many, many generations. While the arts take different forms in Italy than they do in Aotearoa (New Zealand), their primacy in the education of young children was plain to Ashton-Warner, and to the people in the schools for children younger than age 6 in Reggio. Interestingly, Sir Herbert Read’s 1943 book on educating children through the arts was important to the school system in New Zealand in the period when Ashton-Warner was trying to figure out how to teach.

Ashton-Warner’s own education hadn’t prepared her to successfully teach young Maori children in New Zealand. Her own observations and reflections, as she taught these children, helped her realize the importance of harnessing the content to be learned to children’s deep emotions. It would be the artist in her, who needed to keep a journal, make drawings and paintings and sculpture, and play music, which would connect with the artists in the children.

Ashton-Warner’s approach to teaching reading using “key words” can not be thoroughly described in a short fashion, but one social critic wrote:

Consider...the method employed by Sylvia Ashton-Warner in teaching little Maoris. She gets them to ask for their own words, the particular gutword of fear, lust, or despair that is obsessing the child that day; this is written for him on strong cardboard; he learns it instantaneously and never forgets it; and soon he has an exciting, if odd, vocabulary. From the beginning, writing is by demand, practical, magical; and of course it is simply an extension of speech—it is the best and strongest speech, as writing should be. What is read is what somebody is importantly trying to tell.

(Goodman, 1964, p. 26)

Halfway around the world and at about the same time, in Reggio Emilia, Italy, the idea of translating investigations the children make from one of the arts are fundamental in the education of young children.

Sydney Gurewitz Clemens

Sydney Gurewitz Clemens, M.A., has been an early childhood teacher for more than 20 years. She is a widely recognized author and workshop presenter on the topic of hot cognition—children learning through things about which they are passionate. She is author of two books and has been a speaker in New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and the United States. Her current focus is on supporting caregivers of children who have a parent in prison, as well as promoting children’s creativity through the arts. She can be reached at sydney@eceteacher.org or through her Web site www.eceteacher.org
hundred languages into others, informed those adults who sought to connect with children. These investigations are driven by what Oken-Wright and Gravett have felicitously called “big ideas” (2002).

Encourage authentic, culturally salient learning.

They are the same kinds of resonant ideas that Ashton-Warner found were captured by single key words Maori children would learn at a glance... words that unlock important meanings for them. And Paley (1981), too, with her idea that children need to act out the stories they invent, calls upon this same fountain within children, what Ashton-Warner called “the creative vent.”

Neither Ashton-Warner nor the Italians treat children as if they were all alike. Each is a subject, worthy of attention, study, and thoughtful response, never an object to be passed through a mechanized set of activities. Neither approach could survive in schools dominated by test-driven curricula.

Who Was Sylvia Ashton-Warner?

Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1908-84) was a British white (pakeha) woman born in New Zealand. Her mother was a teacher and her father, who was very arthritic, stayed home to mind the nine children.

The family was very poor, and Sylvia was perceived in the family to be an unremarkable middle child. Not so in her own fantasy. From an early age, Sylvia saw herself as an artist, played piano, painted, drew, and sculpted. Today she would be considered to be right-brained.

She worked as a teacher, in the segregated Maori school system, usually in very rural, underpopulated areas. There she was intrigued by the intelligence of the Maori children, and their inability to learn to read from English reading books about characters named Janet and John. Paying close attention to the children’s passionate interests led her to develop what she called “organic reading” or “key vocabulary.”

From her youth, Sylvia kept a journal, which was the foundation for all her book writing. She became widely known after the 1959 publication of her first book, Spinster, a novel that presented her teaching ideas. Her fame spread with the publication of Teacher in 1963. Her first books were published while she taught Maori children. Sylvia retired from teaching in her fifties, to write more books.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner Bibliography

the senses, with intelligence, and most of all with the heart. She writes:

For both adults and children, understanding means being able to develop an interpretive theory, a narrative that gives meaning to the world around them. For us, in Reggio, these theories are extremely important in revealing how children think, question and interpret reality, and their own relationships with reality and with us.

These theories are provisional and can be continuously reworked. To be useful and to meet our needs, they should offer us satisfactory explanations that are pleasing and convincing. Theories should also please and be attractive to others. They need to be listened to by others. Expressing our theories to others transforms a world which is not intrinsically ours into something shared.

Sharing theories is a response to uncertainty. This is the reason why any theory, in order to exist, needs to be expressed, communicated, and listened to by others. Herein lies the basis for the “pedagogy of relationships and listening” which distinguishes the work in Reggio Emilia.

...Listening is emotion. It is generated by emotions; it is influenced by the emotions of others; and it stimulates emotions.

...Listening is not easy. It requires a deep awareness and a suspension of our judgments and prejudices. It requires openness to change. It demands that we value the unknown, and overcome the feelings of emptiness and precariousness that we experience when our certainties are questioned.

Listening is the basis for any learning relationship. Through action and reflection, learning takes shape in the mind of the subject and, through representation and exchange becomes knowledge and skill.

Listening takes place within a “listening context” where one learns to listen and narrate, and each individual feels legitimized.

The Reggio Emilia Approach

Reggio Emilia is an Italian city of about 130,000, located in the north near Parma and Modena. Following the declaration of peace after World War II, the mothers of Reggio began to build a school for their young children. It grew into a system that now has two dozen child care programs for children ages 3 to 6 and about 20 programs (none is bigger than about 100 children) for infants and toddlers to age 3.

From the outset, the best academic minds of the city (and beyond) and the parents and teachers in the schools have devoted great energy, time, and resources to developing excellent programs for their very young children. In the 1960s the city of Reggio Emilia took on the management of the schools, so they went from being essentially co-operatives to being the publicly funded municipal child care system.

The Italians have given their teachers and parents new glasses through which to observe children, and unaccustomed ways to listen to what children and parents bring to the school. They have brought teacher research to every classroom, expecting that teachers would regularly observe and document what is going on, and, working with colleagues, analyze data found in their observations. Everyone in the classroom is encouraged to represent their experiences using classroom media, to make and test hypotheses, and to use technology, from the copying machine to the computer.

The Reggio Emilia approach changes what adults in the school ask of children, changes the depth to which young children are willing to dig into what interests them, and broadens their capabilities to express themselves...especially in the graphic arts.

Reggio Emilia Bibliography


to represent and offer interpretations of her or his theories through action, emotion, expression and representation, using symbols and images (the hundred languages). Understanding and awareness are generated through sharing and dialogue.

Observation, documentation and interpretation are woven together in spiral movement which merges them into each other. And while each part results from our subjectivity, we can bring the traces we collect to others, and coconstruct and enrich our theories with their contributions. (Rinaldi, 2001, pp. 1-4)

What has this to do with Ashton-Warner? She also documented children’s work, identified their stumbling blocks, and confronted the areas in her work that were unsuccessful. This led her, against the “rules” for teaching at the time, to experiment with basing her work on what the children cared about, not upon the curriculum package that she was expected to teach.

Rather than use the British Janet and John readers, she wrote down the words that mattered to each child. This process is illustrated in the sidebar, which is a fantasy that Ashton-Warner wrote about interactions between a teacher (herself, under her married name, Henderson) and Maori children.

Ashton-Warner illustrates her desire to avoid the impossible choice between either violating the child’s culture or her employer’s. This surreal story depicts her longing to reconcile what she perceives to be respectable teaching with what she perceives to be authentic, culturally salient learning. She tells it brazenly,
Ashton-Warner’s canoe story is reminiscent of the way the Reggio approach encourages teachers to catch the ball thrown by the child, and then return that ball to the child.

as if it were what actually happened, relieving herself of the colonial burden and showing future teachers the way.

This canoe story is reminiscent of the way the Reggio approach encourages teachers to catch the ball thrown by the child, and then return that ball to the child. Ihaka’s ball was his familiarity with canoes, and his unfamiliarity with trains, and Ashton-Warner made herself look at the harm caused by teaching him to read train, whereas canoe, that concept was just the thing!

Ashton-Warner emphasized listening, too. She could never have seen Rinaldi’s analysis, but she said, many times: “All I did was listen.” She saw that European-style schooling was intended to “correct” Maori children and make them less passionate, less immediate, less colorful. She developed a different idea:

With no opportunity for creativity they [Maori children] may well develop, as they did in the past, with fighting as their ideal of life. Yet all this [violence] can be expelled through the creative vent, and the more violent the boy, the more I see that he creates, and when he kicks the others with his big boots, treads on fingers on the mat, hits another over the head with a piece of wood or throws a stone, I put clay in his hands, or chalk. He can create bombs if he likes or draw my house in flame, but it is the creative vent that is widening all the time and the destructive one atrophying, however it may look to the contrary. And anyway I have always been more afraid of the weapon unspoken than of the one on a blackboard. (Ashton-Warner, 1963, p. 94)

Perhaps what strikes visitors most about Reggio children is their flooding creativity. Every day, children draw, paint, or sculpt in clay. The adults there know the importance of what they call the hundred languages, for children’s ability to live in a difficult world, and live well.

About 50 years ago, two distinguished, skeptical visitors observed young readers in an Ashton-Warner classroom in Hawkes Bay, New Zealand. Their enthusiasm parallels that of visitors to Reggio today.

Dr. Arthur Fieldhouse, Victoria University

We went to the two-teacher school...98% Maori. There was a great buzz of activity going on but it was a meaningful buzz—you can always tell the difference between the meaningful buzz and the riotous one. We were introduced to [Ashton-Warner] and she behaved most strangely. She took off into a corner of the room and we were left there abandoned....

They were lovely children. They were involved in reading and they came up and wanted to read to you, but my hat! What they were reading would rock you.... They could read like mad. I was a bit suspicious and wondered whether it was just learned off by rote. I isolated the words but they knew them all. It was incredible. It was hard and fast proof that the theory works.

(Fieldhouse’s comments were graciously forwarded to Clemens by Dr. Helen May, then of Hamilton Teacher’s College.)

Professor Colin Bailey

It was the intensity of life in the classroom that appealed to us. Those little Maoris could read like mad. Their stories were full of violence and four-letter

Violence can be expelled through the creative vent.

Similarities Between Ashton-Warner and Reggio Emilia

- Children do their best work and learn most if it is creative, powered by their deepest emotional interests and relationships.
- Images are strongly at work in children, who need many languages to express these images, and elaborate on them.
- Listening for deep meaning is powerful and important and makes the difference between good teaching and ineffective teaching.
- Children have the right to schooling that validates their own cultural experience and expression.
words.... But it seemed to us that the colorful words were part of the youngsters' natural expressiveness which [Ashton-Warner] was anxious to nourish. The basic principles of her work were sound, ... she was tapping the most dynamic source of real teaching—[telling her] quite strongly that no reading books published in advance, and lacking the immediacy of the children's freshly remembered experiences and feelings, could take the place of her own method. (Hood, 1988, p. 143)

For a recent example of a Maori child who has been educated in cultural context, readers are invited to view the beautiful motion picture, Whale Rider, based on New Zealand author Witi Ihimaera's book (1987, 2003).

Shared Beliefs About Learning

Ashton-Warner and followers of the Reggio Emilia approach both believe that teachers must reflect on their work, and keep records to study and consider what happened in discussion with other adults. Ash-

In summary, it is clear that both Ashton-Warner and the Italians at Reggio Emilia agree that

- children do their best work and learn most if it is creative, powered by their deepest emotional interests and relationships
- images are strongly at work in children, who need many languages to express these images, and elaborate on them
- listening for deep meaning is powerful and important and makes the difference between good teaching and ineffective teaching
- children have the right to schooling that validates their own cultural experience and expression

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Learning to read is one of the most definitive markers of children's growth and learning. Families and early educators alike can promote children's interests in and love for literacy in a variety of ways. By understanding the process of learning to read, adults can encourage young children's literacy.

Reading is an interactive, multifaceted, complex process that involves the reader, the text, and the situation (Bond, Tinker, Wasson, & Wasson, 1994; NAEYC, 1998; NRP, 2000). The reading process requires readers to take an active role in constructing meaning from text. In other words, while reading, readers make connections between the known and unknown.

Reading involves several thinking processes, ranging from call up and connection to imaging and self-monitoring (see sidebar), so it is important that children have a good start on the reading challenge (Moore, Moore, Cunningham, & Cunningham, 2003).

Research indicates that children who appear to learn to read “naturally” often do so because of positive literacy experiences in their homes (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). When children are in a literacy-rich environment, they become aware of the importance of reading and writing and begin to develop an appreciation of oral and written language (Hill-Clarke & Cooley-Nichols, 2002).

Effective Ways to Support Early Literacy

Families spend great amounts of time with young children before they begin formal education, so parents and siblings have an enormous impact on children's early literacy development (International Reading Association, 1998; NAEYC, 2002).

Leichter (1984) identified three ways in which families affect children’s literacy development:

- interpersonal interaction (literacy experiences shared with children)
- physical environment (availability of literacy materials)
- emotional and motivational climate (family members’ attitudes toward literacy)

**Early Reading Processes**

- **Call up:** When reading text, readers activate or call up prior knowledge.
- **Connection:** Readers try to make connections between known and unknown information as they read.
- **Imaging:** Readers create images as they read, which helps them to think more fully about ideas and concepts presented in the text (Moore, Moore, Cunningham, & Cunningham, 1998).
- **Self-monitoring:** Readers monitor their reading, constantly checking their understanding of the text.
- **Literacy-rich environment:** Children's homes and early childhood programs offer an abundance of reading and writing materials (books, newspapers, paper, pencils, crayons, children's magazines, environmental print) that stimulate an interest in reading and writing (Morrow, 2001).
- **Picture walk:** The adult reader guides children to explore and discuss pictures in a book before reading it.

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Because families play an integral role in children’s literacy development, it is important for them to understand their role in helping to develop and strengthen young children’s reading and writing skills (Bond et al., 1994; Cline, 2001).

Early childhood educators can share ideas for specific strategies and activities, such as those described here, with families in their programs and communities. These ideas can easily be carried out at home using everyday resources to support children’s literacy development, including fluency, writing, phonemic awareness, and oral language acquisition.

Read Aloud for Enjoyment

Learning to read is like learning to ride a bike. The more you practice, the better you become. This same principle applies to learning to read. In order for young readers to develop literacy skills, they need opportunities to practice reading and writing.

When young children engage in reading and are read to on a regular basis, they are able to explore oral and written language, develop positive attitudes toward reading and writing, and enhance their oral language skills (Fox, 2001; Morrow, 2001; Combs, 2002).

Why Read Aloud?
The educational benefits of reading aloud to children are priceless. Reading aloud to young children

- fosters independent reading and develops positive attitudes toward reading. It is one of the most beneficial activities families can do to support literacy development (Fox, 2001; Gipe, 2002; Trelease, 2001).
- helps to develop children’s understanding of story structure, basic concepts, and expands word knowledge (Heilman, Blair, & Rupley, 2002).
- develops phonemic awareness skills, as well as concepts about print (Griffith & Olson, 1992; Opitz, 2000). Children have an opportunity to manipulate sounds and to see that print is read from left to right, top to bottom, and that words carry meaning.

Many parents and educators agree that reading aloud with young children is best done in a comfortable, natural environment (NAEYC, 1998). Children seem especially interested when they sit in a friendly lap, form a small group with friends, attend story time at a familiar library, or hear bedtime stories while snuggled with a stuffed animal, for example.

Families have an enormous impact on children’s early literacy.

In a study that analyzed the effects of a story read-aloud program, Vivas (1996) found that preschoolers and first graders increased their language comprehension and expression when listening to stories during read alouds at
important literacy skills in addition to fostering a love for reading.

**How to Engage in a Read Aloud**

When selecting books for a read aloud, choose books that are familiar and predictable. These stories empower young readers to “take risks, enjoy reading more, and have an easier time learning how to read” (Lamme, 2002). Informational books, another good choice, introduce young children to expository text, which helps them build their background knowledge (Gunning, 2002).

Read alouds are most successful when adults take these steps.

- Choose a book that both the reader and child will enjoy. Often these books are predictable or pattern books, such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, *Is Your Mama a Llama?* by Deborah Guarino, or *Brown Bear Brown Bear* by Bill Martin.
- Point out the title and author/illustrator names. Talk about the art materials used.
- Take a picture walk through the book, encouraging the child to make predictions about what happens. This creates a purpose for reading.
- Read with enthusiasm and have fun!
- Reread the book again and again, as long as children remain interested. Children enjoy the familiarity. Rereading helps to increase fluency and enhances comprehension skills.

**Set aside a literacy play space.**

Children become aware of the significance of reading and writing when they see family members engage in reading and writing (Hill-Clarke & Cooley-Nichols, 2002). Whether children observe a sibling reading a favorite magazine or a parent reading a recipe to prepare a meal, they see the importance of reading and writing as well as the different purposes for both skills.

These are a few examples of ways that families can engage young readers in meaningful and purposeful reading and writing activities.

- **Read the comics** from the local newspaper. Cut them out and arrange them in sequential order. Or use the pictures to create a new story. Cover the text and ask the child to dictate or write in original thoughts and dialogue.

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*Children become aware of the significance of reading and writing when they see family members reading and writing.*
Watching television can become a great learning activity. Before watching a favorite family program, a family member and the child read the television guide. Discuss how the listings are used. After watching the show, both talk about why they enjoyed the show, how their family is similar to and/or different from the characters, or other ideas that identify connections (or potential disconnections) with real life.

To increase the quality of family time, ask young children to help with daily household activities. Children can help write grocery lists, prepare a favorite meal, or send letters and e-mail to family and friends.

Together, families can write a fun story. Take turns writing a sentence to contribute to the plot and character development.

Ask young children to dictate their own stories. The adult can write it or offer spelling assistance, and then together they can read the child-generated story. Also, the child can draw an illustration that supports the story. Record the story for independent listening at any time.

Place Print Here, There, and Everywhere

Reading is “a message-getting, problem-solving activity which increases power and flexibility the more it is practiced” (Clay, 1991). Because children make sense of their world through exploration, observation, and practice, they need to engage in relevant and meaningful literacy experiences (Galda, Cullinan, & Strickland, 1997).

In order for young readers to become effective readers and writers, they benefit from opportunities to practice and engage in purposeful reading and writing. For example, families might label a few important items around the house (e.g., door, chair, computer, table, bed). Labeling items in the home provides young children with exposure to print and helps young children make connections between words and concrete items (Gunning, 2002).
Families might also set aside a space for young children to use as a literacy play area. Equip it with pencils, pens, paper, markers, children’s books, magazines, and other forms of print. Children eagerly and freely write, read, color, and play with print. Playing with print provides children with opportunities to explore and practice reading and writing without feeling stressed, frustrated, and pressured.

In addition to creating this type of literacy-rich environment, parents are encouraged to engage in meaningful conversations with young children. These exchanges foster oral language development and vocabulary acquisition and promote healthy adult-child interactions (Neuman & Dickinson, 2001).

Another way families can participate in meaningful literacy experiences is by taking rides or walks around the neighborhood, engaging in word play to see how many words and logos their children can recognize.

Reading print found in the child’s everyday environment is a natural part of the learning-to-read process and can assist young readers in learning these words in formal print (Cronin, Farrell, & Delaney, 1999). By reading print in the child’s surroundings, families encourage their children to experiment with words. Through interaction with the print that’s all around, children observe that words are everywhere.

These are a few activities that actively engage children in reading, writing, listening, and speaking to help them to develop a love of reading.

- Create an environmental print book using familiar store and product logos, such as toy brands or fast food restaurants. Words such as these are some of the first words children learn to read from their environment (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Richek, Caldwell, Jennings, & Lerner, 1996).
- Create a family conversation board with written reminders or questions (Richek, et al., 1996). Post it on the refrigerator, a mirror, or other convenient place. Family members leave messages, draw pictures, write words to describe how they are feeling, and leave other notes. It is a great way to communicate while supporting literacy development.
- Hold family reading nights where family members share information about their favorite books. At family gatherings, invite a family member to read a favorite children’s book or poem or share a storytelling.
- When learning alphabet letters or new words, suggest that children trace the shapes of the letters in sand or fingerpaint. Provide young readers with magnetic letters or letters from alphabet cereal so they can move the letters around to create new words.

Offer Support and Encouragement Along With Fun

Young children are sensitive to their families’ enthusiasm and disappointments, so it is important for families to value children’s approximations when engaging in literacy activities at home (Richek, et al., 1996).

By recognizing children’s efforts and providing words of encouragement when engaging in reading and writing activities, families help young children develop a sense of security and confidence (Gordon & Williams-Browne 2000; Gunning, 2002; Ollila & Mayfield, 1992; Richek, et al., 1996). Comments such as these encourage children’s interest in reading and writing.

- “Let’s look at the pictures in the book to see if we can figure out what the story is going to be about.”
- “You figured it out, Maggie. MacDonald’s starts with the same sound as your name, /m/.”
- “We would be delighted to hear you read us your favorite story.”
- “Yes, a cat makes the sound ‘meow,’ and a dog makes the sound, ‘woof, woof’.”
- “Mark, let’s make a book of your favorite words.”

While engaging in literacy activities with young children, families can have fun and make their time together an enjoyable experience (Fox, 2001; Machado, 1997).

By being made aware of strategies and activities that can be easily implemented at home, families can enhance their children’s literacy development. The activities outlined here provide families of young readers with specific literacy activities that not only foster positive early literacy experiences but also facilitate a love of written and oral language.

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Encouraging Young Readers: A Family Affair

by Kantaylieniere Y. Hill-Clarke

Ideas to Encourage Young Readers

Key Early Literacy Practices
- Read aloud to young children
- Make reading meaningful
- Create a literacy-rich environment
- Offer support and encouragement along with fun

Ways to Encourage Children’s Literacy
Provide meaningful and purposeful feedback and encouragement. Ask family members to offer encouragement, such as these examples, during reading and writing experiences.

- “Let’s look at the pictures in the book to see if we can figure out what the story is going to be about.”
- “The title of this book is ___________. What do you think this story might be about now? The picture on the front cover may give us some clues... Let’s read the book to see whether we figured out what this story is about.”
- “You figured it out, Maggie. MacDonald’s starts with the same sound as your name, /m/.”
- “Grandma would be delighted to hear you read your favorite story.”
- “You used the other words in the sentence, along with the pictures, to figure out the meaning of the word, aphids.”
- “Yes, a cat makes the sound ‘meow,’ and a dog makes the sound, ‘woof, woof’.”
- “Mark, let’s make a book of your favorite words.”
- “Dog and dig begin with the same sound. What other words do you know that begin with /d/?”

Enrichment Experiences for Children K-3
- Read the comics from the local newspaper. Children cut them out and arrange them in sequential order. Or use the pictures to create a new story. Cover the text and ask the child to dictate or write in original thoughts and dialogue.
- Create an environmental print book using familiar store and product logos, such as toy brands or fast food restaurants. These are some of the first words children learn to read from their environment.
- Create a family conversation board with written reminders or questions. Post it on the refrigerator, a mirror, or other convenient place. Family members leave messages, draw pictures, write words to describe how they are feeling, and leave other notes. It is a great way to communicate while supporting literacy development.
- Hold family reading nights where family members share information about their favorite books. At family gatherings, invite a family member to read a favorite children’s book or poem or share a storytelling.

Ways to Share Early Literacy Information With Families
- Encourage families to get a library card.
- Host family reading nights.
- Set up a Family Resource Center where parents can use computers, enhance their job skills, learn strategies to help support their children’s educations, and other meet other needs identified in the community.
- Encourage families to visit classrooms to observe and/or engage in literacy activities with children.
- Publish a newsletter that includes curriculum-related literacy activities at home.
- Make positive phone calls, send encouraging e-mails, and maintain contact with all families.

Tips for Staff Training
- Start a teacher study group. Decide on a journal article or a book to read and discuss during monthly meetings.
- Designate an area in the school or center as a teacher resource room. Stock this room with various instructional materials, resources, and journals.

Note: Dimensions of Early Childhood readers are encouraged to copy this material for early childhood students as well as teachers of young children as a professional development tool.
Book Reviews

Books for Early Childhood Educators

by E. Anne Eddowes, Editor

Writing in Preschool—Learning to Orchestrate Meaning and Marks

Schickedanz and her co-author have added a new resource to her earlier books, More than the ABCs–The Early Stages of Reading and Writing and Much More Than the ABCs–The Early Stages of Reading and Writing. In this book the authors describe the development of writing skills of children from the ages of 3 to 5 years. This book can serve as an excellent resource for preschool teachers of 3-, 4-, or 5-year-olds, administrators, and supervisors of early childhood programs. It could also be a supplementary textbook for the students in an early childhood/elementary language arts class.

Schickedanz is a Professor of Education at Boston University and Casbergue is an Associate Professor of Education at the University of New Orleans. Based on their experiences with young children, the authors describe the journey that young children travel in learning to write.

In describing this writing journey, they include the description of several journeys or what they call strands to achieve writing capabilities. The strands include scribble to script, letter strands to real words, and short messages to detailed messages, that must come together if a preschooler is to become a confident, competent writer full of ideas and capable of expressing and recording those ideas.

The authors discuss and give numerous scenarios to illustrate a preschooler’s writing journey. They begin the journey by providing in the front of the book a simple glossary of specialized literacy terms. Chapter 1 starts with some examples of young children’s experiences with writing. In these examples the authors point out that the skill of creating marks must develop alongside the skill of expressing oral meaning and conveying a message. The authors provide a clear picture of how this process works for young children.

Chapter 2 provides a description of the development that children progress through, from first making marks to having a fair amount of control over their marks. Excellent pictures illustrating this process are included. Chapter 3 describes the process children make from letter strings to real words. The importance of helping and allowing children to play with language, to explore letters and sounds, and to experiment with writing is explained. While the growth and understanding that letters represent sounds seems slow, by the time children reach kindergarten or first grade, they begin to represent most of the sounds found in words.

In Chapter 4, the authors point out that teachers play a pivotal role in assisting children in developing their writing ability, in learning that writing has many purposes, and that it takes many forms. They stress that teachers must realize the significance of oral language in message composing. The authors provide teachers with help and advice to support children in moving from oral language composer to written language composer.

A table in Chapter 5 provides a graphic picture of how materials, a physical place to work, and adult involvement can assist children in moving along the continuum of writing development. The last chapter illustrates the importance of the home-and-school connection in helping children write.

This book can be an excellent reminder for a classroom teacher who is working with young writers, a great resource for a teachers’ inservice program on the development of children’s writing skills, or a supplementary text for college students learning about young writers. The illustrations provide excellent examples and quick references for points in the text. The text is simple and easy to follow. The authors have provided an interesting and useful developmentally appropriate view of how young writers develop and how to assist them.

—Janie H. Humphries
Louisiana State University
Ruston, LA

The Inclusive Learning Center Book for Preschool Children With Special Needs

Appropriate learning centers have been recommended as an integral part of early childhood classrooms for many years. But what about learning centers for children with special needs? Isbell and Isbell have developed this timely resource
to assist preschool teachers and childcare providers in including all children in their learning centers.

A major strength of the book is the introduction, which provides a rationale for why centers are successful strategies with young children with exceptionalities. Included in this introduction are ways to match the environment to preschoolers with special needs as well as how to evaluate the individual child in the learning center. Adaptations and safety issues are also included.

The authors describe more than 30 centers that can be adapted for children with unique needs: Chapter 1 focuses on Traditional Centers, Chapter 2 describes Sociodramatic Centers, and Chapter 3 suggests Unique Centers.

Examples of traditional centers include the home living area, block center, books/library center, water center, and pre-writing center. The sociodramatic centers incorporate a doctor’s office, grocery store, family, bakery, gardening, and a restaurant, just to mention a few. Finally, the unique centers appear to be structured especially for children with unique needs. Several centers focus on multisensory learning. There are vision, hearing, and tactile centers, along with ball, hat, music, and nature centers.

The chapters are easy to read and are full of practical suggestions developed around a standard format used throughout the book. Each chapter that is devoted to a specific learning center begins with learning objectives, includes a letter to parents, has a clearly drawn diagram of the center, incorporates vocabulary ideas, describes props, and presents ways to use integrated learning through center activities.

The expertise of the authors is a major strength. Christy Isbell is a pediatric occupational therapist with extensive experience in assessment and instruction for preschoolers with special needs. Rebecca Isbell is the author or co-author of numerous books and articles, including several on learning centers.

There are several good books available with information on learning centers, including *The Complete Learning Center Book* by the second author, also published by Gryphon House in 1995. However, few are devoted solely to the development of learning centers for including children with special needs.

This resource is a must for SECA members and especially for those who are preschool teachers or childcare directors. Any teacher who wants to use developmentally appropriate practices to include children with special needs in learning centers will find this a necessary addition to the library.

—Jerry Aldridge

University of Alabama at Birmingham

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