



**THE EARLY YEARS:**  
Promoting a **PROMISING START** in  
**LITERACY DEVELOPMENT**

California State University | Center for the Advancement of Reading and Writing



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The early years in a child's life are profoundly important. The social, emotional, physical, linguistic, and cognitive experiences a child has during this time lay the foundation for a lifetime of learning. Research demonstrates that attention to children's early years positively impacts their futures and that the documented achievement gaps among groups of children can be ameliorated by providing quality care and education to our youngest members of society. This publication, prepared by faculty in the California State University system, focuses on the development of literacy, a crucial set of skills and dispositions that enable individuals to live richer, more satisfying lives and to engage more fully in their local, national, and world communities.

These are exciting times in the field of early childhood literacy. Research findings from a variety of disciplines have illuminated the importance of certain early experiences in the development of literacy, and increased attention is being devoted by policymakers to the care and education of young children. California has published learning and development foundations and curriculum frameworks for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers as part of an early learning and development system. The entry age to kindergarten has been delayed, making the prekindergarten years even more important.

The purpose of this publication is to provide information about the California State University's perspectives and ongoing work in early literacy for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. We begin by identifying fundamental understandings of literacy development and young children that should guide the work of practitioners. Then we describe essential components of early literacy programs. We also share the roles that CSU faculty play in supporting young children's literacy development, and we summarize what we consider to be the rights of young literacy learners and the responsibilities of those who provide school-based, center-based, and home-based early care and education. Throughout we highlight several topics and provide illustrative vignettes of children at different ages in high-quality settings that promote literacy development.

## THE GOAL OF LITERACY INSTRUCTION



Literacy empowers. Instruction is provided to children, youth, and adults so that they may successfully access and use printed texts and other media, including digital and visual sources, to meet their needs—whether those needs are related to academic achievement, professional responsibilities, social interests and obligations, spiritual development, or personal pleasure—and to contribute as informed and thoughtful members of their local, national, and global communities.

Literate individuals are able to navigate through complex and abstract text of different genres, employing a variety of strategies to make sense of spoken, printed, digital, and visual content. They seek and synthesize information from a variety of sources and draw tentative conclusions. They critically evaluate text.

Literate individuals also are able to harness the power of both the spoken and printed word as they speak and write to explain, argue, describe, persuade, inform, imagine, and entertain. They organize spoken and written language, whether through speech, American Sign Language, Braille, print, visual representations, or other media, to aid thinking and to communicate with a range of audiences for different purposes. Literacy empowers individuals to achieve their personal potentials and to contribute to their community's potential. Literacy development is a lifelong process, and experiences in the early years provide the foundation upon which future possibilities are built.



## A GLIMPSE AT **ONE-YEAR-OLD** FREDERIC'S DAY AT FAMILY CHILD CARE

**F**rederic has heard many books read aloud in his one year of life. His parents read to him daily. He gurgles and wiggles as they hold him on their laps and share a variety of books. His family child care provider, Ms. Martin, also shares many books with the several children she cares for in her home. She ensures that she has a variety of books, but she looks especially for sturdy, easily manipulated cardboard books on topics that delight her little charges. She reads them aloud with animation and enthusiasm, places them in accessible locations, and encourages the children to explore them on their own. Ms. Martin is pleased when she observes literacy behaviors, such as Frederic holding a book and turning its pages. Frederic's parents and his care provider have long known about the value of reading aloud with children, starting in infancy. They read aloud and talk about books daily, and they attend to Frederic's responses and interests, reading the books that he brings to them while also introducing him to unfamiliar books.

His parents and his care provider also are very much aware of the importance of language development. They speak with him regularly. They are responsive to his babbling, raising their eyebrows, nodding their heads, and saying, "Oh my!" and "Yes, this is applesauce. It is very nutritious. You like applesauce, don't you?" and "Let's get ready to go outside. You'll need your jacket today; it's a bit chilly. How about your blue one?" They respond with facial expressions and verbalizations to his vocalizations and interact with him as if there is an ongoing dialog.

Ms. Martin has many interesting objects available for play and exploration. She notices Frederic's frequent selection of music-making objects, and she shows him a recently added xylophone. She sits by him, talks about the instrument, and plays a tune. Frederic lights up, takes the mallet, and begins striking at the colorful tone bars. Ms. Martin smiles, nods, and listens a while before joining another child at play.

Later, when Frederic's father arrives to pick up his son, Ms. Martin tells him about Frederic's day. She offers to let the family borrow a book he enjoyed, shows Frederic's father the new xylophone he was so interested in, and asks his father to let her know about other special interests that Frederic demonstrates at home. She hugs Frederic goodbye and says directly to him that she looks forward to seeing him tomorrow.



## FUNDAMENTAL UNDERSTANDINGS

Several fundamental understandings about literacy development and young children, informed by research and theory, undergird the thinking and work of CSU faculty involved with early literacy. We believe that these understandings should guide all who are responsible for the care and education of young children as they develop and implement early literacy programs. These fundamental understandings, presented here, are reflected in the essential components of early literacy programs, which we share in the next section.

### THE EARLY YEARS ARE CRUCIAL IN LAUNCHING CHILDREN'S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT.

Literacy development begins well before formal schooling; indeed, it begins at birth as children start to communicate through nonverbal gestures, learn and use language, are exposed to print and to the world, and build understandings of self and others. Experiences children have in their early years lay the groundwork for future learning. Early experiences have long-lasting effects and profoundly influence children's trajectories as literacy learners. A society that cares about human potential ensures rich foundational experiences for young children.

### LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IS COMPLEX.

Literacy is a multifaceted and dynamic process. It involves the abilities to understand language, including rich vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and extended discourse; interpret and use symbols, such as letters of the alphabet in English and characters in Chinese; and think, as when readers draw on their background knowledge to make sense of new concepts, make connections among ideas presented in a text, and critically reflect on content. Literacy development demands both a commitment and an opportunity to participate in literacy experiences. Young children are most likely to flourish as literacy learners when they find personal value in print and when they are offered opportunities and experiences to develop and learn.

One of the complexities of literacy development is that it is heavily influenced by other aspects of children's growth and development, such as their social and emotional development and physical well-being. Thus, the many aspects of literacy and the entirety of the child's development must be considered when planning literacy programs.

### YOUNG LEARNERS ARE BOTH SIMILAR TO AND DIFFERENT FROM OLDER LEARNERS.

Learners of all ages need stimulating environments that allow for active exploration and investigation. They need challenges that foster new learning, opportunities to achieve, and choices that reflect and expand their interests. They need engaging learning experiences that connect to the worlds they know while enriching and extending those worlds. They also need consistency in both the physical environment and in the adults who care for them. It is important that their worlds are predictable while at the same time varied enough to allow for unique experiences that foster learning and development.

Young learners are different from older learners in that they are more dependent upon adults to provide opportunities and guidance in the variety of domains of learning and development, even as young children are passionately intentional about their own interests and interpretations of their world. Adults who work with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers must be exceptionally attentive and supportive as young children learn to regulate their behavior, communicate their needs, interact with others, and make choices.

Young learners also need many opportunities to engage freely in self-directed activities, work individually and in small groups, and build close and positive relationships with nurturing adults. Also particularly important for young children is the opportunity to engage in imaginative and sociodramatic play. Those who work with young children must provide sustained time for both free and guided play, recognize adults' roles in play (including responding to what a child initiates and extending and elaborating on the child's play), and understand the intellectual, social, and emotional value of play.



### **EACH CHILD IS UNIQUE.**

Although generalizations can be made about young learners and their development, no two children are exactly the same. They differ physically, linguistically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally. They come from different families, communities, and cultures. They have different interests, knowledge bases, and experiences. They also have different ways of interacting with and responding to their surroundings and others, and they have different ways of expressing themselves. Some have documented special needs, such as developmental delays, learning disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, and communication disorders. Early childhood educators and caregivers must learn about and appreciate children as individuals. They must thoughtfully and sensitively build and capitalize on each individual child's knowledge and prior experiences, interests, abilities, and values as they design learning experiences and interact with children. They must be skilled at providing information in a variety of ways, offering choices in activities that engage children with content, recognizing and responding to the multiple ways that children demonstrate their understandings, and building bridges between each child's background and new learning. They must be aware of and responsive to the individual child's learning capabilities and structure learning opportunities according to the strengths, needs, and affinities of each individual learner.

### **PARTNERSHIPS AMONG PROGRAMS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES ARE IMPORTANT.**

Families and communities are vital partners in fostering young children's literacy development. The special ways that babies and their families communicate, based upon trust, familiarity, and family routines, form what some researchers call the *roots of literacy*. These forms of communication and meaning-making are precursors to the literacy experiences that occur in early childhood programs and later at school. Family involvement in early childhood centers or home-based care settings supports the child's transition from home to other settings, and regular communication between the practitioners and the family are related to positive outcomes for children. Children are best served when families are well informed about classroom, center, or homecare activities and learning goals and their insights about and hopes for their children are solicited and respected. Communities, too, are valuable

resources, providing information and services and collaborating in efforts to support young children. Effective early childhood programs value and capitalize on the community culture from which a child comes. Where there is a network of support, there is the greatest likelihood of optimal development and learning.

### **CARING AND WELL-PREPARED STAFF ARE ESSENTIAL FOR QUALITY CARE AND EDUCATION.**

Relationships are central in human development, and interaction with adults is the primary means by which children's literacy develops. Those who work with children must establish relationships that are warm, dependable, nurturing, and responsive. Such relationships contribute to children's feelings of competence and well-being and to their openness to new learning situations.

Beyond establishing positive relationships, however, those who work with children must have a rich and deep knowledge of literacy development (including its interrelationships with other domains and disciplines), learning, and child development. They must have excellent preparation in order to best serve all children, and they should participate in rigorous ongoing professional learning that keeps them abreast of new research findings and exemplary instructional practices that meet the needs of diverse populations and children with a range of capabilities. Furthermore, they must have the knowledge, skills, and commitment to respectfully communicate with families and the community at large. A knowledgeable, skilled, committed, and caring workforce is the cornerstone of high-quality programs for children. It is essential that such a workforce be available to every child.

### **CONTINUITY AND COHERENCE ACROSS EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS AND SERVICES OPTIMIZE CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT.**

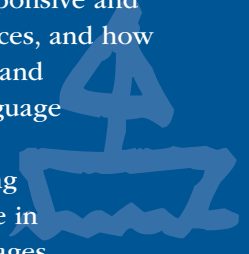
Alignment and two-way collaboration between programs serving children under the age of five (whether school-based, center-based, or home-based) and the K-12 system are crucial. Continuity and coherence across these systems make sustained development and learning more likely. When programs that serve children relate to and build on one another, when the communication is open and frequent, and when a vision for comprehensive child development and learning is shared, children benefit.

## **ENGLISH LEARNERS**



Many young children enter early care and education settings speaking a primary/home language other than English. They are culturally and linguistically diverse, and they learn English as an additional language. The development of each of the components of early literacy presented in this document in the primary language, whether English or another language, supports literacy development in additional languages. Thus, it is to a child's advantage to develop a rich language base in the primary language. Similarly, it is beneficial to have meaningful interactions with print in the primary language and experiences that develop background knowledge, phonological awareness, concepts about print, knowledge of written symbols and words, and a positive attitude toward and interest in literacy. In addition to contributing to literacy development in an additional language, literacy development in the primary language has profound and far-reaching social, emotional, and familial implications.

In the early childhood setting, many children are beginning to acquire English as an additional language. Adults who work with English learners should be particularly knowledgeable about primary and additional language acquisition, relationships among languages (spoken and written), the advantages of bi/multilingualism and bi/multiliteracy, culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining practices, and how learning to read and write in one language supports and enhances learning to read and write in additional languages.



## A GLIMPSE AT TWO-AND-A-HALF-YEAR-OLD

### TERRENCE'S MORNING IN THE TODDLER ROOM



nitially reluctant, two-and-a-half-year-old Terrence now enjoys attending an early childhood center in his neighborhood several days a week. His teacher, Ms. Linda, and the teaching assistant, Mr. Carlos, have created a warm and welcoming atmosphere. As a consequence, Terrence has become increasingly comfortable in the setting, and Ms. Linda and Mr. Carlos notice him developing and learning daily!

Today, as he crosses over the little bridge in the outdoor play area, he stomps his feet and hollers, "Trip-trap! Trip-trap!" Then he turns to a friend and says, "You be baby goat." Next he points to Mr. Carlos and says, "Troll!" Mr. Carlos laughs, then puts on a scowl and hunches under the bridge, ready for his part. Other children quickly join the activity. Ms. Linda is pleased to observe their reenactment of *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, a story she has read to them on more than one occasion due to popular demand.

Later, Terrence brings a smock to Ms. Linda. "Oh," Ms. Linda says, "You must have brought me this smock because you want to paint!" recognizing that Terrence wishes to work in the paint area, and talking about it. She thanks him for remembering to get a smock, noting that it will keep the paint off his clothing, and assists him in putting it on. He moves to the easel, picks up a brush, and begins to paint. His work at the easel is sustained for longer periods now, and Ms. Linda appreciates his increasing attention span. A bit later, he approaches her and takes her back to the easel to show her his painting. She encourages him to tell her about it, and she responds with interest, elaborating on the language he uses. Then, she asks if he would like her to write anything on the painting. He asks her to write, "This is a big, big dog!" She does so, saying each word as she prints it, and





then reads the entire sentence, moving her hand underneath each word as she reads. He smiles, repeats the sentence with a look of satisfaction, and together they use clothespins to hang the painting on the fence where it will dry quickly. Mr. Carlos does the same in the native language of the children who speak Spanish. Parent and community volunteers who speak other languages spoken by the children are frequently available to write what they want on their paintings in their native languages.

Once indoors, Ms. Linda invites children to assist her in making playdough. She displays the recipe and guides the children through each step, helping them locate the ingredients from among those on the table, measure the amounts indicated in the recipe, and mix as directed. Soon they are playing. Mr. Carlos takes several photographs with a digital camera. He will print these and post them on a large board so that children and their parents can view them.

After a busy few hours, the children settle down for a nap. Mr. Carlos reads aloud a couple of soothing books, and one by one the children fall asleep. Ms. Linda and Mr. Carlos record some notes about each child, which they will give to the families. Mr. Carlos writes in Spanish for some of the families. They talk about their observations during the morning and about upcoming activities for the children, including some modifications they wish to make in some of the existing play and work areas. They are pleased to have a role in the children's lives, and together they work diligently to create a stimulating and safe setting.

## ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF EARLY LITERACY PROGRAMS

Research has provided rich information about key experiences in the early years that support literacy development. In this section, we present essential components of early literacy programs for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. These components should be offered within a nurturing and comprehensive context that supports social, emotional, physical, linguistic, and cognitive development, and their implementation should be guided by the fundamental understandings shared in the previous section.

### LANGUAGE

Language is the foundation of literacy. Its development is fundamental to success in reading and writing. Experiences beginning in the first years of life that promote the acquisition of vocabulary, varied and complex sentence structures, and extended discourse are crucial; each of these plays an increasingly important role in long-term literacy development.

Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers need thoughtful and rich exposure to and experiences with language by attentive and responsive adults. They need ample opportunities to engage with varied forms of language as they participate in conversations, read-alouds, and meaningful content experiences. Furthermore, children flourish when provided with opportunities to use language—saying, signing, or using touch screens—to tell, question, learn, think, and imagine. Language interactions throughout the day, as children express needs, communicate feelings, share personal stories, explain understandings, interact with novel and familiar materials, and participate in spontaneous and dramatic play, are essential for literacy development.

Especially important are opportunities to engage in extended conversations in which multiple conversational turns are taken. A vital role of adults is to thoughtfully interact with children, express interest in children's verbalizations, and expand and elaborate on their language, adding details or more complex sentence structures to children's verbalizations. Furthermore, adults should provide experiences and instruction that increase children's vocabularies, use of complex sentence structures, and use of language for a variety of purposes.

## COMPREHENSION OF PRINTED MATERIAL

Comprehension is the heart of literacy. Reading and writing are fundamentally about meaning. They are communication processes. Rich early literacy experiences include engaging children in interactions with print in ways that make meaning central. These experiences cultivate children's understandings of the purposes of print: to share ideas, to entertain, to persuade or provoke, to inform, and to comfort. When children listen to stories about a topic that has special importance in their lives, when they are amused by an author's sense of humor, and when they watch an adult turn to books or other print media for information, they understand that reading and writing are meaningful processes. When adults model and assist children in making predictions, retelling or reenacting, making inferences, and responding to and generating questions about stories and other text, they are promoting the processes that support comprehension.

Key to understanding text is background knowledge. In fact, children's experiences with the world significantly influence their ability to comprehend printed material. As infants discover how to roll a ball, as toddlers explore floating and sinking objects, and as preschoolers observe wildlife in their setting, they are building a knowledge base that will serve them well as readers in the years ahead. Thus, a rich, coherent content program, thoughtful instruction, and myriad experiences during the early years are significant components of an early literacy program.

## CONCEPTS ABOUT PRINT

Crucial to reaching the goal of comprehension is learning how print works. Opportunities to interact with books are key if children are to learn how to handle a book (opening and closing it and turning the pages), orient it (right side up), and follow the directionality of print (in English, left to right and top to bottom). Furthermore, when text experiences are focused on their interests, children discover that print carries meaning and that it is used for a variety of purposes. Children begin to develop concepts about print when they are read to, observe an adult write a list or send an e-mail or text message, see their names displayed on a lunch bag or cubby, watch their thoughts being recorded on a poster or typed into a computer, and see others use print in a variety of ways. Adults who engage children with print—sharing books, pointing to print, commenting about print in the environment, and otherwise actively and deliberately drawing children's attention to print—and who themselves visibly engage with print are supporting the development of children's concepts about print.

## PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Phonological awareness, the ability to detect and manipulate the sounds of spoken language, is a powerful contributor to literacy development. Children who can turn their attention to the sounds of spoken language are well-positioned to later grasp the



alphabetic principle—the understanding that letters represent discrete sounds of spoken language—which facilitates their ability to decode (identify) printed words and to encode (put into print) words. In short, phonological awareness contributes to children’s understanding of how spoken language and written language are related.

Phonological awareness develops along a continuum. Children generally become aware of larger units of sound, such as syllables, before they notice and can manipulate smaller units of sound, such as onsets and rimes (/st/ is the onset in *stop* and /op/ is the rime) and eventually phonemes (the individual sounds of spoken language). When toddlers giggle at two rhyming words in a song or story, they are noticing how language sounds. When preschoolers comment that two words begin the same, or they point to the correct picture card in a guessing game in which an adult names an animal in segmented form (for example, the adult says each sound in the word *dog* separately: /d/-/o/-/g/), they are demonstrating progress in phonological awareness development. Phonological awareness is stimulated by particular experiences with language, and adults play an essential role in ensuring that children have those experiences. Activities, games, books, poetry, and songs that draw attention to and stimulate manipulation of sounds should be a part of early literacy programs, and adults must be intentional and explicit in fostering this significant component of literacy development.

## LETTER KNOWLEDGE AND WORD RECOGNITION

Familiarity with the special symbols used by a community to record thoughts is without question an important aspect of literacy development. In English, these symbols are primarily the letters of the alphabet. (Other symbols include punctuation, such as a question mark.) Thoughtfully planned, teacher-guided instruction and exposure to and experiences with these symbols in meaningful contexts are key to learning their names, forms, and the sounds they represent. Preschoolers also can begin to recognize some printed words, such as their names, classroom labels, and common words in their environment. Early care and education programs should stimulate and support children’s attempts to interpret and use printed words.

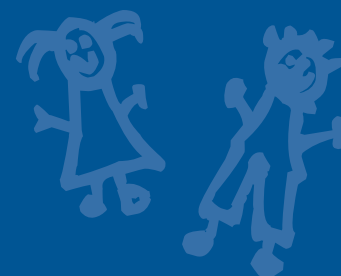
With appropriate experiences, many preschoolers will know the names of most of the alphabet letters, connecting some of them with the sounds they represent, and they will recognize and write some words, such as their names, by the time they transition to kindergarten. Important experiences include hearing alphabet books read aloud and the letters discussed, manipulating plastic and magnetic letters, observing and participating as adults use and talk about letters to record their own and children’s thoughts, searching for and discovering letters in familiar environmental print, and experimenting with recording their own thoughts with and without adult guidance.

## CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



A small percentage of young children enter early childhood educational settings with special needs that may impact their ability to learn early literacy skills in the same way or at the same rate as other learners. Children who are deaf, for example, can interact with books and written language just as typical learners can if given the opportunity to participate in a language that is accessible to them, but they are unlikely to access phonological information or decoding skills in the same way as a hearing child. Other young children may have cognitive or physical disabilities that slow down their progress in critical early literacy skills, yet they need the same opportunities to develop phonological understandings, learn concepts about print, explore the relationship between sounds and symbols, and interact with print in a variety of meaningful and motivational reading and writing activities.

Care must be taken to structure literacy experiences so that they are both physically and cognitively within the children’s developmental range and are organized to avoid frustration. Opportunities to practice should be increased and should occur through a variety of motivating, hands-on activities rather than meaningless drill or repetition. For young children with disabilities, building learning experiences based on affinities and personal interests may be even more important than for typical learners.



## WRITING

Writing development is an important component of literacy development. Reading development supports writing development, and writing development supports reading development. Even very young children often demonstrate a fascination with the marks that adults make on paper, and they show an interest in leaving their own marks on the environment. Infants and toddlers grasp crayons, markers, and chalk to leave lines and scribbles on paper, sidewalks, and walls. Eventually, as they move toward the preschool years and beyond, their writing takes shape, changing from scribbles to letter-like symbols, to random letter strings, then to semi-phonetic spellings such as *kt* for *cat*, in which some letters match what the child is attempting to record, to phonetic spelling such as *kat* for *cat*, in which letters match what the child is attempting to record but are not yet conventional, and finally to conventional spelling. When children see others write and have the opportunity to experiment with writing themselves, they develop a personal investment in understanding how print works and how meaning is conveyed through printed language.

Adults who work with young children can support the development of writing by being writers themselves, providing an abundance of writing materials, showing appreciation for children's work, and providing encouraging responses. Writing materials, such as washable markers, crayons, large pads of paper, envelopes, and adaptive writing tools or assistive

technology as appropriate for children with special needs, should be available in many areas of the early childhood setting—dramatic play area, blocks, sand table, and science centers. It is important that adults are observed writing for their own purposes (whether by hand or with the use of technology such as a word processor) and that they be available to write for children, stimulate and applaud children's efforts to write, and provide meaningful contexts for writing to occur.

## AFFECTIVE FACTORS

An interest in reading and writing and a willingness to persist when faced with challenges are related to literacy development. These affective aspects of literacy are influenced by children's experiences, perceptions of themselves as learners, and the value they attach to learning to read and write. Early literacy experiences that build children's sense of competence are essential, as are early literacy experiences that foster children's appreciation of the personally meaningful role literacy can have in their lives. Success is more likely when children are provided experiences that are appropriate for their age and their individual interests and needs and that systematically build their knowledge and skills. Adults can spark children's interest and enhance their motivation by reading aloud frequently from a variety of books and other print media, responding to children's curiosity, and providing ample choice in literacy-related activities.



## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Because families are the first, primary, and ongoing contributors to children’s literacy development and because they have the greatest interest in and insights about their children, effective early childhood literacy programs include a family component. Communities, too, have much to contribute. Resources such as libraries, museums, and child and youth centers can play an important role in supporting children.

This partnership component may take a variety of forms, but every partnership needs to ensure that families and communities are embraced, informed, heard, and included in literacy development opportunities, including those that enhance families’ skills. Each partnership needs to foster families’ and communities’ awareness of the significance of their roles in children’s literacy development, and each must support learning about literacy while also enlightening educators and caregivers about the home and community contexts of a child’s literacy development.

Family and community partnership activities may include afterschool programs, family literacy nights, home visits, library visits, local business involvement, and shared experiences or demonstrations in the community and at the early childhood site. Such involvement ensures that connections are made among the literacy experiences at home and in the community—in whatever language they occur—and

the literacy demands of schooling. Early childhood programs that collaborate with families and communities maximize children’s opportunities for literacy development.

## ASSESSMENT

Assessment of young children’s literacy learning is vital for several reasons. Information gleaned from assessments can be used to improve programs, determine the progress of individuals, and identify special needs so that appropriate and timely instruction and services can be provided. In short, assessments can positively impact children’s well-being. However, assessments must be carefully designed, responsibly administered, and cautiously and contextually interpreted, or they can negatively impact children and the adults who care for them.

Much—but not all—assessment of young children can occur effectively through skilled and thoughtful observations of and interactions with children in the context of daily activities. Some assessments, particularly in cases where there is concern about the development or progress of a child, must be individually conducted by adults with specialized knowledge who use reliable and valid measures in order to obtain accurate and detailed information. Assessments need not be cumbersome or excessively time-consuming. All assessments should be directly linked to program goals, inform practice, and be shared with families.





## A GLIMPSE AT **FOUR-YEAR-OLD** LILLIAN'S MORNING IN PRESCHOOL

**F**our-year-old Lillian and her mother are greeted warmly by Ms. Park on Monday morning. Ms. Park is the teacher in the preschool class at the local elementary school. Leaving her mother to chat with Ms. Park, Lillian confidently stashes her lunch and her sweater in her cubby, labeled “Lillian,” and then walks to the sign-in sheet. She finds her name on the paper, picks up a pencil, and carefully prints L-i-l-l-i-a-n next to her name, indicating that she is present. She joins some of her friends who are looking at books in the library center. They find a familiar book and, as they turn the pages, begin chanting the phrases that they have heard many times. Josh’s mother, who spends the first hour of every morning in the room, approaches the group, smiling, and becomes a receptive listener. The children enjoy having an audience and become more dramatic as they chant the story.

Soon Ms. Park asks all the children to join her on the rug. She welcomes them and previews the day’s activities. She draws particular attention to the fact that a guest will arrive later in the morning. A paramedic from the local fire station will visit, talk about her job, and share a book about a typical day in a firefighter’s life. The children are delighted. Ms. Park then shares some of the changes to the centers in the room. She comments that, per Demian’s request a few days ago, a veterinary center has been created. The children cheer, and those closest to Demian pat him on the back. Ms. Park encourages them to contribute items in the upcoming days. “What,” she asks, “would you like to include in the center? What would we find at a veterinarian’s office?” The children suggest stuffed animals, posters of animals, boxes of pet food, blankets, surgical equipment, bandages, books about animals, and a lamp for examinations. Ms. Park takes notes on a wall chart and asks their opinions about adding a telephone, message pad, and business cards for the veterinarians. The children agree enthusiastically.

She then reads the children a picture book about veterinarians. She holds the book to her side, pictures facing the children, so the children can see the pictures as she reads to them. Occasionally she stops to explain a word or phrase in the book. She monitors whether the children are engaged in listening. The children make comments and ask questions about the content and the pictures. When Ms. Park finishes

reading, the children discuss the book and make additional suggestions about what to put in the veterinarian center.

Then, shifting activities, Ms. Park asks if anyone brought something to add to their “2 syllable” box. A few children go to their cubbies and retrieve objects. Josh shows his peers a small pillow and says the word slowly: *piiilllow*. Ms. Park says, Pil-low. She claps each syllable of the word, encouraging the children to join her. Together they say *pil-low* and, and confirm that, indeed, it has two beats, or syllables. Ms. Park says, “*Pillow* does have two syllables, Josh! Please put it in our box.” Next, Lillian shows the toy kitten that she and her older sister found at home. That object, too, is named, the syllables are clapped, and the object goes into the box. A few more objects are shared and placed in the box. Then, Ms. Park shows a bell and asks the children if it, too, belongs in the box. The children say the word and decide that it should not be placed in the box. They discuss why. At another time, all the contents of the box will be displayed, and the children will clap the syllables in each item. A new box for objects with fewer or more syllable words will be introduced.

Soon the children move into independent activities, making their own choices. Ms. Park moves from one place to another, stopping to respond to children’s comments and engage them in conversation about their activities. She sits on the floor and begins working with magnetic letters. Lillian and her best friend, Mi, quickly join her and ask her to make their names and other words that are important to them. They take over the manipulation of the letters, asking for Ms. Park’s assistance. Lillian says, “I want to make my mom’s name.” Ms. Park says the name, “Marguerite,” and comments, “That’s a long name! We’ll need quite a few of these letters!” She asks the girls if they can identify the first letter. She says “Marguerite” again, emphasizing the initial sound. Mi notices that the sound is the same as the one that starts her name, and the two girls cry out, “M!” Lillian, with Ms. Park’s assistance, proudly constructs her mother’s name. “It *is* long!” the two girls say.

There is much activity during the day: Routines are followed; new activities are introduced; outdoor time includes dancing and investigating the flow of water through waterwheels in the water table; children paint, act out familiar stories, and engage in considerable talk and social activity. The guest paramedic is enthusiastically welcomed and shares information of interest to the children. When Lillian’s grandmother arrives at the end of the morning, Lillian fills her in on the day’s events.



## THE CSU AND EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Faculty in the California State University who have expertise in literacy education, early care and education, and child development play significant roles in supporting the literacy development of young children in our local communities and beyond. Many of our campuses offer undergraduate and graduate programs that prepare adults to work in early childhood care and education settings.

CSU faculty also share and continue to develop their expertise in early literacy through participation in a variety of professional activities. Faculty:

- Engage in research in early literacy
- Write on topics in early literacy
- Serve as reviewers for professional journals on topics of early literacy
- Serve as reviewers for professional agencies on topics of early literacy
- Serve on local, state, and national policymaking boards on topics of early literacy
- Collaborate with other agencies and institutions, such as the California Preschool Instructional Network and community colleges, to support teacher development in early literacy
- Volunteer in early childhood settings
- Facilitate professional learning for adults working in early care and education settings
- Provide leadership in early care and education programs
- Participate in grant-funded projects focusing on young children, their parents, and other adults who serve them

The CSU has a long and rich history of involvement in issues related to the literacy development of young children. We are well-positioned to continue, as well as increase, our efforts to serve our communities and work together to provide quality early childhood care and education for young children.





## YOUNG CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AS LITERACY LEARNERS

Faculty in the CSU believe that all children have a right to an excellent start to literacy development. To guarantee this, programs have the responsibility to provide the following:

### CARING AND KNOWLEDGEABLE EDUCATORS WHO

- Are physically, emotionally, cognitively, and verbally present
- Respectfully partner with families and communities
- Understand, respond to, and prepare appropriately for differences in ability, backgrounds (including language variety), and interests
- Are intentional in the experiences they offer children while also being responsive to child-initiated inquiry
- Provide individualized attention and engage in adult-child interactions
- Have high expectations and clear, appropriate learning goals for all children
- Are knowledgeable about the components of early literacy development

### THE FULL RANGE OF EXPERIENCES THAT FOSTER LITERACY DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING

- Well-conceived, well-delivered, and comprehensive instruction and experiences in each of the components of early literacy situated within a nurturing environment that fosters the development of the child in all domains
- A rich and coherent curriculum in the content areas situated within a nurturing environment that fosters the development of the child in all domains
- An integrated curriculum in which learning experiences are organized around big ideas and themes so that content area and literacy experiences support and build on one another

### ENVIRONMENTS THAT SUPPORT LITERACY LEARNING BY BEING

- Physically and psychologically safe environments
- Environments that encourage and foster imaginative play
- Language-rich environments
- Print-rich (or tactilely rich) environments
- Writing-rich environments
- Cognitively stimulating environments

### ACCESS TO NUMEROUS HIGH-QUALITY BOOKS AND MYRIAD OTHER PRINT, VISUAL, AND AUDITORY MEDIA

- Of all genres and that represent diverse populations and human perspectives
- That reflect children's interests and backgrounds and also expand their interests and build their background knowledge
- That include books and other media in the primary language(s) of the children
- In well-stocked libraries and throughout the early care and education setting
- That children can explore on their own in comfortable and quiet locations
- That are read aloud to individuals, small groups, and the whole group
- That are read repeatedly and daily

## FINAL COMMENT

CSU literacy education, early care and education, and child development faculty urge Californians to provide young children with their most promising start by ensuring that they have the early care and educational experiences that will support their literacy development in the context of their social, emotional, and physical development and well-being. We encourage increased attention to and resources for the care and education of young children, and we look forward to the continuation and expansion of our efforts with the broader community to help children thrive and flourish into positive and productive futures.

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