We will not have done our best for young children if we deny them the path to learning they seek through play, because young children are made to play. But we also will not have done our best if we fail to provide instruction. As much as it is true that young children play and discover many things on their own, it is also true that children need adult assistance or guidance.*

*Schickedanz 46
Find Out More About the Preschool Day


Laster, Barbara, and Betty Conte. Emerging Literacy: Message Boards in Preschool. Developing Reading-


Research on the Preschool Day

There is an energetic flurry of activity throughout the preschool day. Three- and four-year-old children are busy at work—moving from center to center, observing classroom pets, pouring sand into containers, building tall block towers, setting tables for tea, making shopping lists, and chatting up a storm with classmates and adults. Well-integrated, developmentally appropriate, and engaging opportunities form the groundwork for future literacy learning. Whenever possible, preschool teachers carefully plan literacy experiences that connect preschool curriculum objectives with play and real-life experiences. Every activity is an opportunity for young children to develop knowledge, skill, and positive attitudes about literacy.

Essential Elements of Effective Literacy Programs

Intentional literacy learning needs to be embedded throughout the preschool day, both at home and at school. Teachers and parents must provide the opportunities for children to develop skills in print awareness, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness and oral language. Many opportunities and “teachable moments” occur spontaneously and simply as a part of everyday life. However, literacy experiences must not be left to chance.

Preschool classrooms provide a predictable routine for young learners. Through routines, young children learn about expectations, responsibilities, group dynamics, and problem-solving. Language and literacy learning are greatly enhanced when teachers weigh the importance of the following factors: beliefs, time, engagement, teaching, effective literacy programs, flexible groupings, materials, early intervention for preschool children considered at-risk, and home/school partnerships.

Beliefs

Teachers’ beliefs are crucial to children’s success. Teachers must

• believe in their children as literacy learners.
• believe in themselves as literacy teachers.
• believe in the importance of literacy learning in preschool.

Time

Children show the greatest gains in literacy development when teachers spend more time on literacy learning—that is, literacy learning opportunities that are intentionally planned and occur throughout the day.

“Too many preschool and kindergarten teachers, perceiving themselves as advocates of developmentally appropriate practice, fear pushing children too much academically and fail to teach them the knowledge and skills they need.”

Bredekamp 38
Engagement
The more time children are truly engaged in relevant learning experiences, the greater will be the literacy learning. The difficulty and interest levels of the varied learning tasks are what largely determine engagement. (Allington and Cunningham 118).

Teaching

“Some children will need explicit, direct instruction in skills and strategies. They will need to see the alphabetic letters isolated to better capture their shape, size, and form. Some will need to hear the sounds of letters apart from their context, and some will need to be shown how to write their names and favorite words. Such explicit instruction is an important part of teaching in early childhood classrooms.”
(Neuman and Roskos 1998: 17–18)

Children need more structured modeling, demonstrating, and explaining and fewer tasks that are simply assigned (Allington and Cunningham 45).

Effective (Comprehensive) Literacy Programs
Effective preschool programs use a variety of teaching approaches, including

- read-alouds
- shared reading
- language activities
- independent “reading”
- shared writing
- interactive writing
- independent writing

Effective preschool teachers carefully organize the classroom environment and plan ways to pursue a wide range of literacy experiences to build a foundation for later reading and writing success. Goals for each child are addressed as opportunities arise in child-initiated activities and in activities planned and initiated by the teacher.
Flexible Groupings

Teaching involves a great deal of work with small, flexible groupings of children, based on the needs and interests of children. Whole-group, small-group, one-on-one, and partner work are all used.

Materials
Print-rich and engaging learning environments are essential in a preschool classroom. Books, posters, charts, displays, and environmental print should be everywhere. In a print-rich classroom, multiple opportunities exist for children to see ongoing demonstrations of adults using print around the room for a variety of purposes. Teachers need to explore the best ways to organize and display materials—considering the amount, types, and variety. An abundance of materials scattered around the room is not as effective as well-organized clusters that support literacy learning. However, it is the actual use of the print, by children, aided by the teacher, that counts. Children must be directed to and shown how to use the print regularly. Otherwise it will remain merely decorative.

Use of mainly whole-class instruction results in some children continually learning what they already know; for others, the lesson will be too difficult and proceed too quickly (Durkin 24).
“Classrooms need to provide a widespread presence of print and literacy activity in the environment in ways that are accessible to children. Placing print at children’s eye level, using print in functional ways, directing children’s attention to print, and extending their knowledge and uses of it in meaningful ways enhance children’s use and desire to become literate” (Roskos and Neuman 288).
Early Intervention

Research demonstrates that many young children know a great deal about literacy before coming to school. Although it may seem as if some children acquire these understandings magically on their own, studies suggest that they benefit from a great deal of adult guidance and instruction, much of it playful and informal (IRA and NAEYC, 1998, 32). However, many children who have not benefited from numerous preschool home literacy experiences are at risk, and even those who have such experience may still struggle. Both groups of children need strong preschool literacy programs. Some will need even more “good first teaching” in the form of one-on-one and/or small-group intervention.

Early Intervention in Preschool—Why Not Wait?

For many children, it is not effective simply to wait. The concept developmentally appropriate should not suggest delaying intervention but using appropriate instructional strategies at an early age—especially in preschool. Learning is a product of experiences and is not simply dependent on maturation. Waiting for the child to “flower” (mature) by proving the “gift of time” will not provide the necessary support. Specifically, at-risk children benefit from earlier experiences with books, print, language, and phonological awareness development. “Early intervention does not guarantee continuing achievement, but not providing early intervention guarantees failure for many children throughout schooling” (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996, 193).

Find Out More About Intervention


Which Children Are At Risk?

“Research reveals that the children most at risk for reading difficulties in the primary grades are those who begin school with less verbal skill, less phonological awareness, less letter knowledge, and less familiarity with the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading” (Burns, Griffin, and Snow, eds., 15). Experienced teachers soon know which children require the support (scaffolding) of early intervention. Children with language delays are at great risk for future reading difficulties. Oral language is the foundation of literacy learning. Whether the problem is biological or environmental, “strong language and literacy environments are especially effective for very young children who need an extra boost to promote their later success in reading” (Burns, Griffin, and Snow, eds., 1999, 137).

Phonological awareness and print awareness are two other important areas. “Failure to develop an adequate vocabulary, understanding of print concepts, or phonological awareness during the preschool years constitutes some risk for reading difficulties (Snow, 1998, 320). Approximately 20 percent of children have some difficulty with phonological awareness, with about 7–10 percent having substantial difficulty (Council for Exceptional Children 8). In fact, recent findings from Sally Shaywitz indicate that 88 percent of children with reading problems have phonological difficulties (D’Arcangelo 9). Is phonological awareness training helpful for supporting preschoolers who are at risk for reading difficulties? According to the National Research Council “the available evidence suggests that it is” (Snow, 1998, 151). “To increase school preparedness of at-risk children it is clear that instruction in phonological awareness ought to be accompanied by training in letters and letter associations” (Snow, 1998, 154). Through joyful, playful preschool programs that include effective intervention, young children feel success and remain motivated to learn.
Effective Intervention in Preschool

One-on-one or small-group intervention is not intended to replace effective literacy instruction across the preschool day. Fifteen- to thirty-minute intervention lessons are an integral part of the instructional environment created to foster literacy acquisition, but they are not a complete literacy program (Blachman, 1991). Before designing an intervention program, it is important to examine existing instructional practices in the preschool classroom. The research is clear. “Children must receive effective intervention and remediation programs well integrated with their everyday classroom activities, as soon as they begin to have difficulty” (Burns, Griffin, and Snow, eds., 1999, 13). “The major prevention strategy is excellent instruction” (Snow, 1998, 172).

What is important is not a particular “program” but that “the administrators and staff of a preschool work together to establish common beliefs and understandings about early childhood learning and teaching” (Strickland and Barnett, 2003, 112, 114). In Dorothy Strickland’s review of literacy interventions for preschool (2003), she noted that “overall the studies seem to indicate that children learn what they are taught. If language and literacy are featured predominately in the curriculum, children do better in these areas.” In addition, she noted the following:

- The importance of attention to oral language and to experiences with books is important
- Parent education and involvement remain key elements of any effort at preschool education.

According to Catherine Snow (1998, 321) all children, especially those at risk for reading difficulties, should have access to early childhood environments that promote language and literacy growth in an integrated rather than isolated fashion. These environments include

- adult-child shared reading and the conversations that ensue
- phonological awareness activities (e.g., games, songs, and poems)
- activities that highlight the relations between print and speech

Ongoing assessments reveal profiles for all children, including those who are at risk. “When children perform poorly, it is often attributed to their delayed development or disability, rather than the paucity of experiences and opportunities to explore written language and literacy understanding .... Teachers need to revise their instruction, not their expectations for learning, when children are not progressing” (McGill-Franzen, 1992, 57–58). Intervention in preschool is simply more good first teaching, often in small groups and occasionally individually, which is responsive to particular children’s needs. Some children with general delays will need more focused work in all areas: oral language, phonological awareness, print awareness, and letter knowledge. Other children may come from a rich oral language background, understand what print is about, and yet struggle with phonological awareness. (See Chapter 2: “Excellent preschools can also make a difference for at-risk children; excellent in this case implies providing rich opportunities to learn and to practice language and literacy related skills in a playful and motivating setting. Substantial research confirms the value of such preschools in preventing or reducing reading difficulties for at-risk children.”

Snow et al. 3
Phonological Awareness.) Still others may simply need more engaging opportunities to develop oral language skills. (See Chapter 1: Oral Language.) There is no one intervention that works for all. There is no one “quick fix.”

What is evident is that “We must target prevention efforts to the children we know will need them the most. We must do this as early as possible before children fail in school, before they are labeled, and before costly remediation is necessary” (Burns, Griffin, and Snow, eds., 1999, 128).

Home/School Partnerships

“The data show that 60–70 percent of children have an easy time learning to read. One third to 40 percent of each class is going to need special help.”

D’Arcangelo 9

“Home/School Partnerships

“The data indicate that preschool education for children considered at risk improves general cognitive abilities and produces long-term success as determined by measures of grade repetition and special education placement.”

Strickland and Barnett 107

“Parents belong at the center of a young child’s education. The single best way to improve elementary education is to strengthen parents’ role in it, both by reinforcing their relationship with the school and by helping and encouraging them in their own critical job of teaching the young. Not all teachers are parents, but all parents are teachers” (Bennett).

Much of the variation in children’s abilities when starting school is the result of what parents do or do not do in preschool years. Studies show that after children begin school, home factors and family literacy experiences continue to exert a powerful influence on their success in school (Hannon 123, Neuman 34). Research indicates that home-school links in the area of literacy learning are key determinants of children’s success, and this is true regardless of the family’s educational background or social status. (See Chapter 6: Linking Home and School.)
Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Literacy Program

There are several other major factors that affect preschool literacy growth. They include setting, materials, and scaffolding instruction.

Setting and Materials

Many preschool classrooms are small and challenge teachers to be creative in effectively utilizing the space at hand. "Research suggests that the variables of materials and setting exert a strong pull on the nature and quality of children’s learning through play. With physical design changes in play environments, we may be able to extend the range of literacy opportunities for young children and thereby encourage developmentally appropriate literacy activities" (Neuman and Roskos, 1992, 203). This means that the preschool classroom must be a print- and language-rich environment. The literacy objects found in play settings (centers) should be similar to what children use or see in their daily lives. However, simply having the items available is not enough. The ways in which items are arranged and the manner in which children are encouraged to use them are most important.

The classroom environment will influence children’s engagement, classroom tone, and classroom management. Therefore, it must be well-organized to promote literacy-related play.

Other Factors Affecting Preschool Literacy Growth

• Setting and Materials
• Scaffolding Instruction

“The physical environment may ‘coerce’ behavior.”
Neuman and Roskos 1992: 203

“Using items such as notepads and pencils, memos, and magazines in their dramatic play makes young children feel like readers and writers. Whether they are pretending or practicing these skills—or perhaps doing a bit of both—children use such play to progress toward fully developed literacy.”
Neuman et al., 2000: 32

How-To Strategies to Design a Literacy-Enriched Preschool Environment

• Use big and small physical objects to clearly define specific play areas, such as tables, shelves, plants, easels, and other classroom equipment.
• Post labels, captions, or signs to define specific actions in play areas, such as “dig” at the sand table, “pour” at the water table, and “paint” at the art center.

• Use words and pictures to label classroom items. These items may include baskets or manipulatives, writing utensils, and paper. These labels help children match words with objects and learn where things go when it is time to clean up.

• Remember that “large open expanses encourage children to run and chase, while small, enclosed spaces invite them to converse and play quietly with one another” (Roskos 9). “Small, intimate play areas encourage more interactive and sustained play activity” (Neuman and Roskos, 1992, 209).

• Choose “real-world” play areas to promote literacy-in-play such as the post office, doctor’s office, restaurant, toy store, and food market.

• Use familiar objects such as telephone books, coupons, catalogs, menus, maps, pads of paper, and tickets to incorporate reading and writing in children’s play.

• Organize the classroom to help children make connections. Having an alphabet frieze and books near the Writing Center will encourage their use.

• Organize the room so “noisy” areas are close together and farther away from areas where small groups meet for sharing or teacher-directed activities.

• Work toward creating a classroom filled with a wide variety of books: concept books, alphabet books, Big Books, board books, small books, information books, predictable books, class books, and individually created books. Use bookshelves, baskets, shoe boxes, and other containers to make books accessible to all children. Collect and organize books by topic, author, illustrator, or genre. The more books available to children, the greater the chance they will choose books to “read” alone or with a buddy throughout the day.

• Organize each center to allow room for an adult (teacher, volunteer, paraprofessional) to actively participate in children’s play.

• Create simple yet appealing displays of children’s work. Post documentations alongside the displays that capture the language and learning that took place. Encourage parents to read the displays to help them learn more about what their children are doing in the classroom.

“Familiarity with the setting and its objects frees children to go beyond physically exploring them to using them as springboards for episodes of pretend play.”
Roskos 8–9
“A literate classroom offers abundant opportunities for children to make use of print and practice literacy habits and skills throughout the environment. For instance, when dramatic-play areas contain literacy-related props, children write (or pretend to write) lists, notes, signs, prescriptions, price tags, menus, and more. When teachers rotate materials to stimulate and support varying play themes, children get fresh opportunities to broaden their vocabulary and social knowledge” (Neuman, Copple, and Bredekamp 42).

“Research has demonstrated that manipulation of the classroom play environment through physical arrangement of play centers, inclusion of literacy-related materials (pencils, paper, typewriter, computer, and dramatic play props) can affect the quality and variety of a child’s oral language use, engagement in literacy behaviors and story comprehension.”

Nielsen and Monson 261
**Scaffolding Instruction**

The classroom environment truly influences children’s literacy development. However, beautiful classrooms full of environmental print often have many children who are unengaged in literacy activities. Children who need to use environmental print the most are the ones who ignore it or find it too overwhelming. While print-rich environments provide engaging contexts, what matters is how children and teachers use the print. Teachers, adult volunteers, and/or older child helpers must constantly model and interact with print around the classroom to advance literacy learning for all children. Young children also need many opportunities throughout the preschool day to be engaged in extended conversations with classmates and adults. Lev Vygotsky suggested that “learning occurs because of social interaction between the child and an adult or more literate peer. In other words, the adult builds a bridge between what the child knows and is coming to know. This ‘scaffolding’ allows the child to move from dependence to independence” (Nielsen and Monson 261). However, all those involved need training to know how to make this happen.

**The Role of Play in Literacy Learning**

**How Important Is Play to Literacy Learning?**

“In a comprehensive review of numerous studies on play, researchers found evidence that play contributes to advances in many areas which impact literacy learning:

- verbalization
- vocabulary
- language comprehension
- attention span
- imagination
- concentration
- impulse control
- curiosity
- problem-solving strategies
- cooperation
- empathy
- group participation

Research also directly links play to children’s ability to master such academic content as literacy and numeracy” (Bodrova and Leong, April 2003, 50).

Play and literacy learning are mutually inclusive, not exclusive. “Research on early learning and development shows that when children are properly supported in their play, the play does not take away from learning but contributes to it” (Bodrova and Leong, April 2003, 50). The key word in this quote is “supported.” Teachers support literacy learning through play by
• allowing time and space for play  
• providing appropriate materials  
• developing background knowledge to enhance/enrich the play  
• scaffolding dramatic retellings of favorite stories and dictations.  
• guiding children’s attention and learning through modeling and interaction (Snow et al.).

Mature (High-Level) Play

Three- and four-year-olds play, but much of the play is often very immature. Immature play sees children who  
• rely on realistic toys and props  
• repeat the same action over and over again (e.g., feeding the baby, stacking blocks)  
• use little imagination to develop more involved dramatic play

Immature play may be in part attributable to recent childhood trends from birth to preschool. Children appear to be spending less time involved in imaginative play with peers and more time playing alone, interacting with “educational toys” and computer games. Mature or high-level play sees children involved in sociodramatic play (role-play) or pretend play with others where they  
• use their imaginations to create scenarios  
• use multipurpose props in different ways (e.g., a plastic baseball bat can be imagined to be a guitar; a paper plate may be a flying saucer)  
• may extend (not just repeat) the play over several days  
• may combine themes using multiple roles (e.g., the hospital center may not just incorporate a doctor, patient, and nurse but also visitors, an ambulance driver, and a unit clerk).

Story dictations provide an opportunity for children to work one-on-one with an adult to create stories or messages. As the adult writes the text, the child watches. This helps the child see the relationship between spoken and written words. When the teacher finishes scribing, the story is read back to the child, who may then suggest changes. Children often enjoy acting out their stories.

“Teachers increasingly recognize play’s powerful role in early childhood. Adults need to acknowledge that literacy also has a part, offering children new possibilities for learning about writing and reading and for joyfully playing with both.”

Roskos 15

“Nowadays young children spend less time playing with their peers and more time playing alone, graduating from educational toys to video or computer games.”

Bodrova and Leong, May 2003, 10

When using multipurpose props, it is often a good idea to brainstorm with children what the props might be. This stimulates their imaginations and supports vocabulary development.
Supporting Mature Play
Preschool teachers are instrumental in moving children from immature to mature play. This occurs when they

- provide both realistic props (e.g., rolling pins, plastic hot dogs, and cookie cutters) and nonspecific props such as play dough, bags, paper, crayons and pencils, and generic hats.
- brainstorm with children how the nonspecific props might be used. For example, a paper plate might really be _____.
- encourage children to discuss what they are going to play, who will be in what role, what props they might use, and what might happen. The teacher will hear “Let’s pretend that ....” Some children enjoy drawing the scenario.
- encourage and model for children how to negotiate roles with each other and take on different roles.
- use field trips and videos to promote imaginative play. A visit to a local store, for example, allows children to observe workers involved in a variety of tasks and note how their roles support one another. Children are also prompted to notice the environmental print in the store, which they can later replicate (with help) at a center.
- use literature (fiction and nonfiction) read aloud as a stimulus for discussion and role-play. Children love to play out a scene from a book read aloud. Alternatively, they often prefer to make up their own stories about the characters and act them out.
- encourage children to extend (not just repeat) their play from day to day.

Young children need supported or scaffolded play. However, teachers must work to maintain the balance. Young children spontaneously initiate their play, but effective teacher support helps the play to be just as fun, but richer.

The Project Approach
Project-based work can provide more intentional and planned learning experiences for young children while still offering many of the appealing qualities of play. Project work can build on and further children’s learning in stimulating and creative ways. Consider relevant topics or investigations to ensure that every child begins with a sense that they can be successful and can use their current skills and understandings. Work with children to generate a list of questions they have about a particular topic. Use a variety of resources to learn more about the topic as well as to find answers to your questions. Teachers need to consider a range of factors to make the project work relevant to all children:

- Is the topic related to children’s everyday experiences?
- Does the topic allow for integrating a range of subjects, such as math, science, and social studies?
- Does the topic allow for deeper investigations for at least a week?
- Are the planned activities useful/purposeful?
• Are the planned activities engaging?
• Does the activity help young learners apply their developing skills in a meaningful context? (Katz)

Project work provides children with engaging and diverse activities to deepen understandings about a variety of topics. These activities include art, construction, cooking, drama, movement, painting, reading, sculpting, singing, dictating, drawing, writing, and talking. Each activity provides a meaningful context to promote language and literacy learning as well as to further understandings of a particular topic.
Assessment

Assessment and teaching are intrinsically related—one naturally informs the other. Good assessments guide teachers’ efforts to systematically gather relevant information about children’s learning in order to determine how to advance literacy development or scaffold instruction. Preschool teachers assess all the time, through daily observations. This involves

• observing what children do
• listening to what they say
• reviewing the products that they develop (work samples)
• self-assessment
• parent observations
• input from paraprofessionals, speech therapists, and other professionals

Formal and informal assessments impact the way teachers monitor changes in children’s growing awareness and competence in literacy learning. This implies that a decision will be made and some action taken to guide instruction and further learning.

Teachers review the data collected in relation to

• their understandings of how children learn
• their knowledge of the individual child
• the language arts learning outcomes

(See “Literacy Goals in Preschool” and “Literacy Skills in Preschool,” Introduction, on pages 10–11).

Interpretation of assessment information can suggest actions such as

• identifying the next goal for the child’s learning
• planning for early intervention
• identifying the need for the use of alternative resources or techniques
• encouraging children to reflect on their learning and see the progress they have made over time

“Assessment is the process of observing, recording and otherwise documenting the work children do and how they do it, as a basis for a variety of educational decisions that affect the child, including planning for groups and individual children and communication with parents” (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 1992, 10).

For effective language and literacy development, it is essential to assess in the four major areas to determine what concepts, materials, and learning experiences will support the children:

• oral language
• phonological awareness
• print concepts
• alphabet knowledge
The Planning/Assessment/Teaching Cycle

Assessment is an active process. It influences the way that teachers identify instructional needs and determine next steps to address children’s growing awareness and competence. Assessment involves the systematic process of gathering information about children’s learning.

“What preschool teachers do to guide and promote learning needs to be based on what each child brings to the interaction, cognitively, culturally, and developmentally” (Bowman, Donovan, and Burns 11).

Collecting Assessment Information

The process for collecting assessment information is both collaborative and constructive. During the teaching day, teachers use an array of techniques and assess for different purposes. To get an authentic picture of what each child is able to do, teachers need to make assessment an ongoing and natural part of their day. Assessment activities should not be artificial or contrived. Making valid decisions about an individual child’s progress requires repeated opportunities to observe, listen to, and review products and performances. The following diagram shows the place of assessment in the planning/assessment/teaching cycle.

Where We Stand on Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation, a joint position statement of the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education: www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/standlcurass.pdf
Sources of Assessment Information

Teachers need to use a variety of assessment tools to gather information about children. Parents and teachers benefit from ongoing communication to build effective partnerships and develop a broader understanding of children’s interests, strengths, and needs. Other adults, such as paraprofessionals or speech pathologists, can also assist the teacher in gathering informative assessment data. In addition, self-assessment strategies such as simple interviews can be used with young children to help them reflect on their emergent understandings.

(See Blackline Master 12: Assessment: Parent Questionnaire, on page 281, and Blackline Master 13: Assessment: Parent Checklist, on page 282.)

Assessment Tools Are Many and Varied

Assessments are both formative (completed on an ongoing basis) and summative (completed at the end of a time period). Summative assessments reveal progress and growth over time, and they also reveal patterns for individual children and groups of children. Responsive whole-group, small-group, and individual instruction can then be planned to support concepts, knowledge, and further learning opportunities that align to the preschool literacy goals and literacy skills.

Literacy Goals in Preschool

Effective early literacy instruction considers developmentally appropriate settings, materials, experiences, and social support to help young children acquire the knowledge, skills, perspectives, and attitudes necessary to become lifelong readers and writers.

Reviews of current research indicate critical content categories in early literacy: oral language, phonological awareness, print awareness, and alphabet knowledge.

“Research also identifies at least one important disposition, print motivation—the frequency of requests for shared reading and engagement in print-related activities, such as pretend writing, cultivating preschool children’s willingness to listen to stories, desire to be read to, curiosity about words and letters, exploration of print forms, playfulness with words, and enjoyment of songs, poems, rhymes, jingles, books, and dramatic play are valuable dispositions of early literacy instruction” (Roskos, Christie, and Richgels 54).
Literacy Skills in Preschool

Preschool children acquire early literacy concepts and skills as they

• use language to communicate ideas, feelings, and questions and to solve problems.
• acquire and use new vocabulary
• discuss and make personal connections

• learn and develop concepts, ideas, and vocabulary
• understand and follow simple oral directions

• begin to learn that speech can be segmented into small units of sound
• learn how to play with and enjoy language

• learn to recognize (identify) some letters and their corresponding sounds

• understand that books and other forms of print have a purpose
• begin to understand the concepts of book and print such as directionality, front, back, top, and bottom of page, letter, word
• recognize that symbols are associated with letters of the alphabet and that they form words
• distinguish print (letters) as different from pictures
• recognize their own names in print and some environmental print

• write thoughts and ideas using pictures, scribbles, letters, and words
• engage in role-play reading and writing

• begin to see themselves as effective “readers,” “writers,” speakers, and listeners

Assessment tools include
• checklists
• observation surveys
• writing rubrics
• parent surveys
• portfolio collections
• anecdotal records
• questionnaires

(See Blackline Master 11: Assessment: Writing Assessment Rubric, on page 280.)
In addition to the assessment tools in this chapter, it is important to make use of those provided in the other chapters of this resource.

**Chapter 1: Oral Language**

- **Blackline Master 1:** Preschool Assessment: Oral Language Observation Checklist, pages 62–63
- **Blackline Master 2:** Preschool Assessment Summary Sheet: Oral Language Checklist, page 64
- **Blackline Master 3:** Class Assessment Summary Sheet: Oral Language—Checklist, pages 65–66

**Chapter 2: Phonological Awareness**

- **Blackline Master 1:** Preschool Assessment: Word, Syllable, Rhyme, and Sound (Phonemic) Awareness—Observation Checklist, pages 108–113
- **Blackline Master 2:** Preschool Assessment Summary Sheet: Phonological Awareness—Checklist, page 114
- **Blackline Master 3:** Class Assessment Summary Sheet: Phonological Awareness—Checklist, pages 115–116

**Chapter 3: Print Awareness**

- **Blackline Master 1:** Preschool Assessment: Concepts About Books and Print/Attitudes Toward Reading and Writing—Observation Checklist, pages 142–144
- **Blackline Master 2:** Preschool Assessment: Child’s Writing Samples, page 145
- **Blackline Master 3:** Assessment: Assessing Concepts of Print Through Writing—Child’s Writing Sample, pages 146–147
- **Blackline Master 4:** Assessment: Children’s Attitudes Toward Reading and Writing, page 148
- **Blackline Master 5:** Preschool Assessment Summary Sheet: Concepts About Books and Print/Attitudes Toward Reading and Writing—Checklist, pages 149–150
- **Blackline Master 6:** Class Assessment Summary Sheet: Concepts About Books and Print/Attitudes Toward Reading and Writing—Checklist, pages 151–154

**Chapter 4: Alphabet Knowledge**

- **Blackline Master 1:** Preschool Assessment: Alphabet Knowledge (Letter Recognition)—Observation Checklist, pages 178–179
- **Blackline Master 2:** Assessment: Fluency of Letter Identification Scoring Sheet—Lowercase, page 180
Blackline Master 4: Assessment: Child Letter Identification Sheet—Uppercase, pages 182–183
Blackline Master 5: Assessment: Child Letter Identification Sheet—Lowercase, pages 184–185
Blackline Master 6: Class Assessment Summary Sheet: Forming Flexible Groupings for Letter Work—Letter Recognition (Uppercase), page 186
Blackline Master 7: Class Assessment Summary Sheet: Forming Flexible Groupings for Letter Work—Letter Recognition (Lowercase), page 187
Blackline Master 8: Assessing Letter Recognition: Child’s Name Page, page 188

Chapter 5: The Preschool Day
Blackline Master 1: Self-Assessment: I Can Read, page 270
Blackline Master 2: Self-Assessment: I Can Write, page 271
Blackline Master 3: Self-Assessment: Listening to a Story, page 272
Blackline Master 4: Self-Assessment: I Like..., page 273
Blackline Master 5: Self-Assessment: My Book Log, page 274
Blackline Master 6: Anecdotal Records: Observations Recording Sheet, page 275
Blackline Master 7: Self-Assessment: Portfolios—Letter to Parents, page 276
Blackline Master 8: Self-Assessment: Portfolios—Parent Response, page 277
Blackline Master 9: Self-Assessment: Portfolios—Table of Contents, page 278
Blackline Master 10: Assessment: Story Retelling, page 279
Blackline Master 11: Assessment: Writing Assessment Rubric, page 280
Blackline Master 12: Assessment: Parent Questionnaire, page 281
Blackline Master 13: Assessment: Parent Checklist, page 282
Blackline Master 15: Assessment: Group-Work Assessment, page 284

Chapter 6: Linking Home and School
Blackline Master 1: Literacy Home Links: My Child as a Literacy Learner, pages 306–307
Blackline Master 2: Literacy Home Links: Getting to Know Your Child, page 308
Blackline Master 6: Literacy Home Links: Literacy Parent Survey, page 313
Informal assessments of preschool children can be done through storybook retellings, anecdotal records, sign-ins, and self-assessment, including using portfolios collections.

**Retellings**

Time is set aside every day for preschool children to hear a variety of books read aloud. Shared readings also provide a meaningful context for children to discuss and deepen their understandings of text. Retellings offer insights about children’s understandings of both narrative and expository structures. After listening to a story, a teacher may work one-on-one with a child and ask him or her to retell the story. This informal assessment involves the child in:

- identifying setting, characters, story events, and outcomes
- sequencing story events
- connecting information to real-life experiences
- responding to the story

(See Blackline Master 10: Assessment: Story Retelling, on page 279.)

**Anecdotal Records**

Anecdotal records offer valuable information about children based on ongoing observations. Often teachers use clipboards, index cards, or self-stick notes to list and describe children’s behaviors as they move around the classroom. The teacher observes and records specific behaviors, strategies, or skills. At other times, something spontaneous might occur that deserves recording. In any case, taking ongoing anecdotal records on a daily basis provides insightful information about each child to help plan effective instructional activities and to share with parents.

(See Blackline Master 6: Anecdotal Records: Observations Recording Sheet, on page 275.)
Self-Assessments
Simple interviews and conversations with preschool children about favorite activities in the classroom or at home, favorite movies or books, and so on can reveal information about the children’s language abilities, motivations, interests, and self-perceptions as literacy learners.

Me as a Literacy Learner
It is important that children develop an understanding of
• what reading and writing are
• what it means to be a reader and writer

(See Blackline Master 1: Self-Assessment: I Can Read, on page 270, and Blackline Master 2: Self-Assessment: I Can Write, on page 271.)

Interest Inventory
It is important that children are regularly involved in reflecting on their interests, likes, and dislikes. Interest inventories are usually done one-on-one, with an adult scribing for the child.

(See Blackline Master 3: Self-Assessment: Listening to a Story, on page 272; Blackline Master 4: Self-Assessment: I Like..., on page 273; and Blackline Master 5: Self-Assessment: My Book Log, on page 274.)

Portfolios
Portfolios help parents, teachers, and children set goals, make choices, reflect on their work, and celebrate literacy learning. The different types of work samples collected for portfolios capture children’s efforts, strengths, and achievement over time. The major purposes for using portfolios are
• to develop children’s skill in self-assessment and goal setting.
• to monitor child literacy development over time.
• to link assessment and instruction, home and school.

Collecting pieces of children’s work to place in a portfolio involves establishing a process of selecting, storing, and reflecting upon children’s work samples. Consider work samples that demonstrate the child’s growth in specific areas of literacy learning as well as individual items that reflect his or her personal interests. Work with children to talk about and select work samples for their portfolios. A portfolio collection may include
• writing samples
• artwork
• favorite songs, poems, chart stories
• drawings, collages
• dictations
• audiotapes of retellings
• photographs
• teacher’s observations
Children’s work samples can be stored in a variety of containers, such as
- file folders
- magazine holders
- decorative boxes
- large envelopes
- accordion files

**Sign-Ins**
Planning opportunities for children to sign their names for authentic purposes is important. Children use a variety of important skills when they write their names, such as spacing, directionality, letter choice, letter forms, and sound-letter matching. Reviewing the content of the completed sign-in form provides valuable information about children’s knowledge about print. Following are samples of possible sign-in tasks:
Surveys
Surveys provide a real reason to discuss and write. Through teacher modeling children come to understand the purpose of a survey.

After the teacher modeled surveying through a class survey, the results were then placed on a chart as a shared writing experience.

Each child is encouraged to make up his or her own survey.
- First they come up with a yes/no question that they would like answered.
- Next they write/draw/dictate the question.
- Then they survey one another, teachers, and volunteers.
- Finally, they share their results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you like dogs?</th>
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<tr>
<td>☺ Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>☹ No</td>
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Linking Assessment to Instruction—Putting It All Together

Blackline Master 1: Self-Assessment: I Can Read
Blackline Master 2: Self-Assessment: I Can Write
Blackline Master 3: Self-Assessment: Listening to a Story
Blackline Master 4: Self-Assessment: I Like...
Blackline Master 5: Self-Assessment: My Book Log
Blackline Master 6: Anecdotal Records: Observations Recording Sheet
Blackline Master 7: Self-Assessment: Portfolios—Letter to Parents
Blackline Master 8: Self-Assessment: Portfolios—Parent Response
Blackline Master 9: Self-Assessment: Portfolios—Table of Contents
Blackline Master 10: Assessment: Story Retelling
Blackline Master 11: Assessment: Writing Assessment Rubric
Blackline Master 12: Assessment: Parent Questionnaire
Blackline Master 13: Assessment: Parent Checklist
Blackline Master 14: Center Activity Time: Learning Center Schedule
Blackline Master 15: Assessment: Group-Work Assessment
Blackline Master 16: Center Icons
Essential Instructional Strategies That Support Effective Early Literacy Instruction

Effective preschools provide opportunities to promote language and literacy learning throughout the day. It is not only what children are taught but also how they are taught. Teachers need to carefully plan integrated and engaging literacy experiences for all children that support effective literacy practices. These experiences provide meaningful interactions with print in a variety of contexts to help build and extend important early literacy skills. A well-balanced preschool literacy program includes the following on a daily basis:

- Read-Alouds: Reading to Children
- Shared Reading: Reading with Children
- Language Activities: Letter/Sound/Word Work and Oral Language Development
- Independent Reading: "Reading" by Children
- Shared Writing: Writing for and with Children
- Interactive Writing: Sharing the Pen
- Independent Writing: "Writing" by Children

Read-Alouds: Reading to Children

What Teacher Read-Alouds Are
Reading aloud brings the preschool class together to listen to, think about, and share a wide range of stories, poems, and information books. Children watch and hear a fluent reader at work. Listening to books read aloud by the teacher is a way for all children to be exposed to a wide range of topics, genres, formats, and book language. Teachers engage children’s interest with dramatic readings, analytic conversations, and meaningful discussions.

Purpose of Read-Alouds
Reading aloud allows the teacher to
- immerse children in a wide range of literature
- develop book and print concepts
- instill a love of reading
- develop an understanding of the language used in books
- develop an understanding of the structure of stories, information books, and poetry
- increase vocabulary and knowledge through experiences described in books
- develop listening skills

“Children learn a wide array of language competencies related to literacy development through books” (Neuman, Celano, et al., 2).
Materials
• appropriate quality fiction, nonfiction, and poetry
• a variety of literature (e.g., narrative, fantasy, pattern books, alphabet books, traditional tales, informational books)
• a variety of book formats (e.g., Big Books, board books, wordless books, pop-up books, magazines)
• materials that represent a variety of writing styles and illustrations
• books in children's native languages

Timing
• at least once a day

Groupings
• whole class
• small groups

Suggested Teaching Strategies

Before Reading
• Set aside a time to read aloud daily.
• Choose a book or selection to read aloud that children will enjoy and that will scaffold their learning.
• Decide on the focus. Reading aloud may be used to introduce an author, topic for a unit of study, or background information for dramatic play, vocabulary, or language structures.
• Group children so that all can see the pictures and hear the text.
• Introduce the selection by sharing general information (title, author, illustrator), challenging vocabulary, and other relevant details to arouse interest in the book and stimulate background knowledge.
• Make predictions.

During Reading
• During the first reading (especially when using fiction), read the text with appropriate expression and few if any interruptions. Concentrate on enjoying the text and capturing children's interest.
• Encourage children to make predictions, when appropriate.
• Stop occasionally to explain story ideas that may interfere with children's understandings.
• Use prompts and questions sparingly during the first read-through.

After Reading
• Help children make connections between personal experiences and reading experiences (e.g., “The boy in the story has a puppy just like Terry in our class.”).
Rereading (and discussing) a text improves vocabulary and comprehension.

Big Books are designed to support early ventures into print. They provide a context for sharing the print and illustrations with a whole group of children. Tracking the print helps children internalize the language of a story and develops basic concepts about print such as directionality. More advanced children can look for visual differences between one word and two words or between long words and short words (Snow et al. 181–182).

• Ask children to talk about favorite characters, episodes, or illustrations.
• Ask children to retell parts of the story or to suggest new solutions to a problem raised in the story.
• Allow ample time for children to discuss and respond to the book.
• Place the book or reading selection in the Library Center so that it can be handled and “reread.”
• Plan opportunities for children to respond to the readings at the learning centers with related puppets, paint, blocks, writing materials, and props.

Shared Reading: Reading with Children

What Shared Reading Is
Shared reading is a collaborative language activity based on the bedtime story. It involves a teacher sharing a Big Book or other enlarged texts with a whole class or small group of children. Throughout the reading, the teacher demonstrates book handling skills, one-to-one correspondence, left-to-right directionality, and other important basic concepts about print in a meaningful context. Favorite stories, songs, rhymes, poems, and chart stories are read repeatedly, and children are encouraged to join in once the text is familiar.

Purpose for Shared Reading
Shared reading allows the teacher to
• bring children together to “read” with confidence and support
• introduce children to the pleasure of reading and to motivate them to read together
• increase young children’s awareness of the characteristics of books and print concepts (e.g., front and back, title, page(s),
punctuation, left-to-right and top-to-bottom) and phonological awareness

• provide a context for sharing text beyond children’s independent “reading” level
• draw attention to the structure and language of narratives, information text, and poetry
• increase vocabulary and concept development

Materials

• stories, poems, rhymes, chants, songs, raps, informational texts in enlarged print, charts, and overhead transparencies
• smaller, individual copies of enlarged texts for children to take home

Timing

• at least once a day

Groupings

• whole class
• small groups

Suggested Teaching Strategies

Consider the following

• Decide on the purpose or focus of shared reading. It may be used to
  – introduce children to concepts about print or books
  – enjoy a predictable story, song, poem, rhyme
  – introduce an author, topic, or theme
  – act as an introduction for a unit study
  – develop awareness of conventions of language (e.g., punctuation, grammar)
• Gather children together so that everyone can see the teacher and the enlarged text.
• Introduce the selection briefly by calling attention to the title, author, illustrator, and illustrations as appropriate.
• Ask children to make predictions about the selection.
• Read the whole selection with as few stops as possible, concentrating on enjoying the text and capturing children’s interest.
• Provide the best possible model of a fluent and expressive reading.
• Encourage children to share personal reactions to the selection.
• Reread the text, encouraging children to join in on the parts they remember.
• Teach a variety of mini-lessons as appropriate during subsequent readings, drawing attention to
  – concepts about books and print
– how stories are made
– alphabet knowledge
– interesting words/concepts

• Use an audio recording of the text to add variety to the rereading.
• Give children small book versions once they have heard multiple readings of the text.
• Invite children to respond to shared reading in small groups or in pairs in the following ways:
  – painting or drawing
  – writing
  – dramatic retellings
  – listening to the audio recording
• Work with children to innovate on the text (write a new verse or version of a story, song, poem, or rhyme together)

Allow time for children to share with others their responses to books introduced during shared reading.
• Reproduce the poems, chants, or chart stories on standard-sized paper. Children can “read” the text and illustrate with drawings as appropriate. This version of the text can be sent home on a weekly basis, to be enjoyed and reread with parents.

Language Activities: Letter/Sound and Oral Language Development

What Language Activities Are
Language activities involve letter/sound and oral language development. They are teacher- and self-directed activities designed to draw children’s attention to letter names, letter forms, and letter/sound relationships as well as new vocabulary and concepts. These activities are usually embedded in meaningful contexts and are beneficial in developing emergent reading and writing skills.

Purpose of Language Activities
Language activities allow the teacher to
• develop recognition of letter names and forms
• increase familiarity with letter/sound correspondences
• develop recognition of some sight words
• develop phonological awareness (e.g., rhyming, syllables)
• develop print-awareness concepts
• promote vocabulary and concept development

Materials
• alphabet cards/blocks
• alphabet charts
• photographs of children with labels
• variety of writing tools
• pocket charts
• magnetic letters
• Jumbo Reading Rods®
• picture and letter cards
• books
• chart paper

Timing
• daily (shared reading, shared writing, and learning centers)

Groupings
• whole class
• small groups
• individuals

Suggested Teaching Strategies
Consider the following:
• Decide on the purpose of the letter/sound activity or oral language activity.
• Gather children as appropriate for the activity.
• Demonstrate the activity if it is to be completed independently.

Learning Activities

Alphabet Chart (Letters with Matching Pictures)
• Sing the alphabet song and track the print.
• Play riddle games (e.g., Find the letter that is at the beginning of your name).
• Match magnetic or Jumbo Reading Rods® to letters on the alphabet chart.
• Read the chart as a choral reading.
• Read only the letters or the pictures.
• Cover some letters and predict what they are.

Name Cards
• Use magnetic letters or Jumbo Reading Rods® to spell names of classmates.
• Sort the names by size: long names, short names.
• Sort the names by number of letters.
• Sort the names by first letter.
• Match name cards to photographs.
• Use name cards for selecting centers or for indicating preferences.
• Use name cards to make alliteration cards (e.g., Munching Mary, Jumping Jim).
Word Wall
- Select words carefully to put on cards. Use words of personal interest, words from a shared reading, or words related to a theme.
- Display a Word Wall with word cards at children’s eye level.
- Arrange words alphabetically (theme-related words may be grouped separately).
- Use the words to create simple games.

Alphabet Letters
- Sort letters by similar forms (balls and sticks)
- Put in alphabetical order.
- Match with picture cards created by children.
- Make individual alphabet books for each child to illustrate.
- Match letters to words found around the classroom.

(See “Effective Techniques for Developing Letter Recognition,” Chapter 4, on pages 160–174, and “Effective Techniques for Developing Knowledge of Letter/Sound Correspondence (Phonics),” Chapter 4, on pages 174–175.)

Word Cards
- Make a set of small cards with frequently used words (e.g., run, walk, jump).
- Sort the words by length or first letter.
- Use the words for dramatic play and movement activities.

Rhythmic Activities
- Use a pencil, stick, or Jumbo Cuisenaire Rod® to tap out the number of beats or syllables in a word.
- Ask children to tap out syllables or clap out words in a sentence.
- Ask children to use rhythm sticks to accompany rereadings of favorite stories, poems, rhymes, and chants.

(See Chapter 2: Phonological Awareness)

Rhymes
- Learn nursery rhymes and ask children to innovate on the simple texts (e.g., Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a________________________).)
- Read a simple nursery rhyme. Ask children to fill in the missing word to complete the rhyme.
- Read three words and ask children to identify the rhyming words (e.g., clock, sock, book).
- Ask children to think of a word that rhymes with a familiar name (e.g., Can you tell me a word that rhymes with Sam?).
- Use color or number words for rhyming activities (e.g., What number rhymes with blue?—What word rhymes with nine, six, two?).
Encourage children to bring objects from home that rhyme (e.g., a toy mouse and a toy house).

(For more Language Activities, see "Effective Techniques for Developing Letter Recognition," Chapter 4, on pages 160–174; "Effective Techniques for Developing Phonological Awareness," Chapter 2, on page 88; and "Effective Techniques for Developing Oral Language Through Classroom Literacy Experiences," Chapter 1, on pages 53–56.)

Independent Reading: Reading by Children

What Independent Reading Is
Independent reading in preschool refers to a short block of time during which children can “look at” or “read” a self-selected book. Independent reading also includes reading environmental print or wall charts and displays around the classroom (also referred to as “reading around the room”). Independent “reading,” which may be done alone or with a partner, promotes discussion, vocabulary development, and comprehension.

Purpose of Independent Reading
Independent reading allows the teacher to

• immerse children in a situation in which books are being enjoyed
• familiarize children with a variety of books
• encourage children to revisit a book that has been previously read by the teacher
• offer children an opportunity to engage in an activity that might not be self-selected during activity time
• develop concepts of print and book knowledge
Materials

- a library center filled with a variety of interesting and appropriate books
- reading material such as children’s published books, classroom-made books, children’s magazines, and informational books
- individual book boxes for children

Timing

- daily

Groupings

- individuals/pairs

Suggested Teaching Strategies

Consider the following:

- Set aside a short period of time on a daily basis for independent “reading”.
- Schedule the independent reading for a “special” time slot. Consider some time for independent reading near the beginning or end of the day to help with transitions.
- Ensure that each child has the opportunity for independent “reading.”
- Model reading labels, signs, directions, notes, and so on in the room to promote independent reading at activity time.
- Encourage children to read the environmental print in the classroom by initiating a “read around the room” activity.
- Provide opportunities for independent reading during activity time in the Library Center.

Shared Writing: Writing for and with Children

What Shared Writing Is

Shared writing is a cooperative writing activity where the teacher and children work together to compose a text. It involves a teacher and the whole class or a small group of children. During a shared writing, a teacher demonstrates how to write down thoughts and ideas, models writing strategies, discusses different types of writing, and draws attention to concepts of print. Shared writing activities can be related to all areas of the curriculum as well as to creating texts for specific centers, such as the Dramatic Play Center.

“Young children need writing to help them learn about reading, they need reading to help them learn about writing, and they need oral language to help them learn about both” (Roskos, Christie, and Richgels 54).
Purpose of Shared Writing

Shared writing allows the teacher to

- show children that writing is print written down that conveys thoughts, ideas, facts, feelings, or opinions
- motivate children to write together and independently
- develop an awareness of the conventions of writing (e.g., different forms of writings such as lists, menus; spacing between words; use of capital letters)
- discuss the purposes and types of writing styles
- generate writing materials for children to “read”
- give children the opportunity to contribute to the writing process
- give children shared writing products (e.g., chart stories, Big Books), which can be examined closely
- give children the opportunity to manipulate the shared writing text by contributing to the writing process

Materials

- chart paper
- writing materials
- computer

Timing

- at least twice a week using planned lessons
- periodically throughout the day

Groupings

- whole class
- small groups

Suggested Teaching Strategies

Consider the following:

- Decide on the purpose or focus of the shared writing experience (e.g., to write a daily morning message, write questions for the Discovery Center, write a shopping list for the Dramatic Play Center, to innovate on a favorite nursery rhyme).
- Gather children together as in shared reading, so that everyone can see the teacher and the text that is being written.
- Involve children in prewriting activities such as selecting a topic or purpose for writing.
- Act as a scribe to record children’s thoughts and suggestions.
- Guide the composing process by “thinking aloud” and asking children questions to clarify and expand their suggestions.
- Provide children with a copy of the final shared writing text.
- Consider publishing the final text in a variety of ways, such as – making a Big Book (illustrated by children)
– making labels for a mural
– creating signs and wall charts
– mailing a letter
– illustrating steps to a recipe
– sending a class newsletter to parents
– displaying a chart story

### Questions for a Shared Writing Activity

- What would you like to write about?
- What do we need to write?
- Where should I begin to write?
- What do you think ...?
- Is there anything else to say about ...?
- Why did I leave a space here?
- Do you notice anything about this word?
- How can we use a list like this in our play (e.g., restaurant) center?

### Interactive Writing: Sharing the Pen

#### What Interactive Writing Is

Interactive writing provides many opportunities for literacy instruction as children “share the pen” with the teacher to create a text. During an interactive writing experience, children are encouraged to share what they know about letter forms, letter names, letter sounds, punctuation, and other concepts about print. This experience helps young literacy learners become aware of the process of writing and its purpose.

“Interactive writing is particularly designed to support beginning literacy learners. It is important for the preschool and preschool teacher to make finely drawn adjustments, raising the level of difficulty by small steps” ([Interactive Writing](#)) 207).

#### Purpose of Interactive Writing

Interactive writing allows the teacher to
- compose words or simple text with children
- draw attention to the formation and sounds of letters and words (concepts about print)
- model and demonstrate the writing strategies
- include children in contributing to the actual writing as appropriate
- create materials to display and read around the room
Materials
- chart paper, markers
- dry-erase board, markers
- chalkboard, chalk

Timing
- daily

Groupings
- small group

Suggested Teaching Strategies
Consider the following:
- Keep the activity simple and brief.
- Write about classroom experiences that are meaningful to children.
- Begin with simple labels and single lines of print (e.g., lists).
- Link teaching points to children’s names or other relevant concepts.
- Stretch out sounds (rubber-band the sound) to draw attention to sounds and letters.
- Use print resources around the classroom as a reference to help children identify and form letters as they contribute to the writing experience.
- Draw attention to spaces between words and correct letter formation.
• Encourage active child involvement (sharing the pen) through writing and drawing and sharing their thoughts.
• Reread the text with children in order to review it and to decide what to write next.

Independent Writing: Writing by Children

What Independent Writing Is
Independent writing provides opportunities for children to “write.” The “writing” may consist of pictures only, scribble, individual letters, or random strings of letters. Some children may begin to write words and even complete thoughts. Invented or developmental spelling is important both to develop and assess children’s phonological awareness, knowledge of letter/sound relationships, and concepts about print as well as their motivation to write. Teachers may also help children by scribing where appropriate.

Purpose of Independent Writing
Independent writing allows the teacher to

• build an interest in writing
• stimulate writing as an enjoyable, self-chosen, meaningful activity
• encourage risk-taking in writing
• assess phonological awareness, concepts about print, and letter/sound relationships

Materials

• writing center with a variety of writing tools, materials, and resources
• writing materials available at all centers
• picture/word lists, picture dictionary, alphabet cards
• computer

Timing

• daily opportunities at free play or learning centers

Groupings

• individuals

Suggested Teaching Strategies
Consider the following:

• Equip the Writing Center appropriately and distribute writing materials at other centers.
• Allow children to freely access writing journals in order to write independently during activity time.
• Set up a “mailbox system” so children can write notes to each other and mail them in their individual mailboxes or cubbies in the classroom.
Providing opportunities to share children’s writing is as important as the writing itself.

- Share notes, messages, or signs that have been written independently to encourage others to engage in the same writing behaviors. (See A Message Board—An Alternative to Show and Tell, Chapter 1, page 51.)
- Encourage children to write notes, messages, labels, or directions to be posted around the room or school.
- Establish a “Sign-In” procedure that encourages children to write their names for different purposes (e.g., attendance, center sign-up, snack sign-up, use of the computer).
- Create literacy props for the Dramatic Play Center that encourage children to write, such as ordering slips, equipment checks, signs, and shopping lists.
- Vary the writing materials at centers to engage and motivate children.
- Encourage children to share their writing with a peer.
**Program Planning**

Program planning is constant and ongoing. It is based on teacher knowledge of appropriate preschool literacy goals, how emerging literacy may effectively be scaffolded, and daily observations of children’s needs. In addition, resources (both human and material) impact on the quality of the program that may be provided.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Steps in Program Planning</th>
<th>Preschool Teachers need to</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Be familiar with emergent literacy goals/skills</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observe and assess needs, skills, and interests</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• review emergent literacy goals for preschool</td>
<td>• assess children’s strengths, needs, interests, and learning styles using</td>
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<tr>
<td>• share them with parents</td>
<td>- parent interviews</td>
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<td>• use as a basis for planning activities/instruction</td>
<td>- consultations with parents/caregivers, other teachers</td>
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<td>• review other board, government, and resource materials</td>
<td>- records from observations and informal assessments</td>
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<td>- diagnostic assessments (e.g., concepts of print)</td>
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Timetables and Schedules

Effective preschool programs use time efficiently and effectively to infuse literacy activities throughout the daily program. This planning involves not only what is included but how it is included. Planning integrated literary experiences helps children to see how their day flows from one activity to another. For example, a shared reading experience can be followed up with meaningful and related activities at each center. A shared writing lesson on writing labels can be followed up with related activities at the Writing Center (e.g., making labels for a mural) or Dramatic Play Center (e.g., writing labels for items found at a grocery store). Establishing and maintaining predictable routines is important. However, how the day is organized will vary from class to class.

Beginning the Day: Arrival (15 minutes)

Arrival
The tone of the day is established first thing. When children first come to class, they are encouraged to “sign in” and find a quiet activity. This could involve finding a quiet activity at an “open” center or “reading” a book alone or with a buddy. This is a good way to “settle” many children and set aside time to touch base with a few parents and/or children each morning. During this time the teacher and a child may discuss a book chosen by the child. The teacher is able to note the child’s level of print awareness and his or her attitude toward and interest in reading.

(See Blackline Master 6: Anecdotal Records: Observations Recording Sheet, on page 275; Blackline Master 10: Assessment: Story Retelling, on page 279; and Blackline Master 1: Preschool Assessment: Concepts About Books and Print/Attitudes Toward Reading and Writing—Observation Checklist, Chapter 3, on page 142.)

Whole-Group Time
(approximately 20 minutes)
The whole-group time usually involves the entire class, unless a paraprofessional or volunteer is available to work with individual children on specific activities. It provides an excellent opportunity for language learning activities. The whole-group time should be sensitive to the attention span of children, and the activities should be varied, relevant, and meaningful to engage all children.

Varied Language Activities
The activities that are specifically related to literacy instruction are listed and described below. During whole-group time, teachers need to plan predictable routines that include a variety of meaningful literacy experiences.
• read-alouds
  – stories
  – informational material
  – poems
• shared reading
  – Big Books
  – chart stories
  – poems
  – recipes
  – songs
  – nursery rhymes
  – print awareness activities
• shared writing/interactive writing
  – simple texts
  – labels
  – signs
  – innovations
  – morning messages
• phonemic awareness activities
  (See Chapter 2: Phonological Awareness.)
  – fingerplays and nursery rhymes
  – songs and chants
  – storytelling
• print awareness activities
  (See Chapter 3: Print Awareness and Chapter 4: Alphabet Knowledge.)
  – Jumbo Reading Rods®
  – ABC games
  – alphabet charts
  – letter/sound games
  – writing
  – Word Wall
  – more shared reading

Calendar Time
A large monthly calendar should be clearly displayed for all to see. Use the calendar to talk about special events, such as birthdays, school holidays, and field trips. Each day can be marked with a particular color, and the weather can be discussed briefly. In this way children can read the calendar, note the pattern of days, and read the labels of special events. Consider revisiting the calendar at the end of the day to reflect on something special that happened that day and note it on the calendar.
Sharing Time

Whole-group sharing time does not need to include a regular “show-and-tell” period or a long calendar/weather discussion. Keep these sharing activities brief to avoid inattentive behaviors. Through activity-based sharing the teacher extends children’s language by using comments and questions. See Activity-Based Sharing, page 49, Chapter 1. Also think about different ways to organize time for children to share interesting news or objects, such as including the details in a shared writing experience. (See A Message Board—An Alternative to Show and Tell, Chapter 1, page 51.)

Children may be encouraged to bring an item to school to show their classmates. The teacher may, at times, establish parameters for the choice of items. The objects may be placed in the Discovery Center for small-group discussion during center time.

(See Blackline Master 16: Literacy Home Links: Sharing from Home, Chapter 6, on page 325.)

Center Activity Time
(approximately one hour)

Learning Centers

Learning centers allow children to develop literacy and social skills individually, with a partner, or in a small group. Center activity time is intended to allow children free choice in selecting activities. During this time, the teacher is able to meet with small groups of children for teacher-directed activities.

Consider the following suggestions to make learning centers productive and meaningful experiences for all children:

- Ensure that all the main centers are open and available during this activity time.
- Introduce new materials at the centers and demonstrate any special small-group activities.

Use a Vocabulary Wheel to develop and extend language skills during activity-based sharing. (See Blackline Master 4: Vocabulary Wheel, Chapter 1, page 67.)
• Help children to think about and plan what they are responsible for doing at the centers.
• Develop a method for each child to indicate quickly which center he or she wants to attend initially or review the rotation system.
• Allow snacks to be prepared or eaten during activity time at a designated table. Snacks may become part of the rotation.
• Establish routines to outline safety precautions and expected behaviors for working at the centers as well as returning materials to their proper places.
• Preplan small-group activities during activity time.
• Observe children on a daily basis to informally assess centers they frequent and what they are doing while there.

(See Blackline Master 14: Center Activity Time: Center Schedule, on page 283; and Blackline Master 15: Assessment: Group-Work Assessment, on page 284.)

Small-Group, Language-Based Activities
As children are engaged in activities at the learning centers, preschool teachers
• Circulate from center to center, providing scaffolding for children and noting engagement in the activities and growth.
• Provide mini-lessons for small groups of children, based on need or interest. These mini-lessons may involve more shared reading, read-alouds, shared/interactive writing, or language activities, often in the area of phonological awareness. For children considered at risk, intervention lessons are critical for building important preschool literacy skills.
• Meet with individual children in order to conference.

A daily timetable will show how to group children for these activities to ensure that a comprehensive language arts program is provided.
(See "Daily Half-Day Preschool Schedule," on page 241 and "Daily Full-Day Preschool Schedule" on page 242.)

Sharing/Reflection Time (approximately 15 minutes)
Consider setting aside time for children to reflect on, review, and talk about their learning center activities. Children may bring to the whole group something they have created or talk about an interesting activity. This is the perfect time to talk about any problems children encountered at the centers and how they were resolved. Teachers may also use this time to talk about some of the activities or skills introduced during the whole-group time.
Outdoor Play/Recess/Gym  
(approximately 30 minutes)

A daily outdoor play/gym time is highly recommended for young children. This period is important for gross motor activities as well as for language learning. Activities can be planned to encourage children to listen and follow directions. Take time to talk about how to use new equipment and draw attention to different-sized materials, such as big and little balls and different shapes. Some teachers find outdoor play time is best at the end of the day to minimize time spent dressing and undressing.

In addition to the use of equipment for gross motor development, the outdoor play/gym period often includes activities planned by the teacher to promote literacy learning, such as:

- an obstacle race with directions and signs
- a class garden in the school yard with labels for vegetables and flowers
- dramatic presentation of favorite stories, songs, or fingerplays
- expressive story readings outdoors
- searches for colors, shapes, patterns, numbers, alphabet letters, signs, etc. in the environment
- mural painting and sidewalk drawings with chalk
- writing letters or words in a sandbox
- making alphabet letters with body shapes

We can make a V.
Library Time
Ideally, each preschool class should have a regularly scheduled period for library activities. This time may involve book exchanges and an activity planned by the librarian or teacher. If possible, children should be encouraged to choose and sign out their own books on a regular basis, using either the school or classroom library.

Organizing and Managing Movement
Teachers need to organize activities, form groups, and develop a plan for effective and efficient movement during activity time. When a teacher works with individuals and small groups of children (either at centers or through mini-lessons), other children need to be actively engaged with appropriate literacy learning activities. Young children need to be taught how to become independent learners. This involves a great deal of structure and lots of practice. There are three main ways of organizing child movement during centers time: rotation system, self-selection system, and modified self-selection system.

**Methods of Organizing Movement**

**Rotation System**
A rotation system is teacher-directed. The teacher has children move through a number of centers in a systematic way. Children generally go to two or three centers, staying at each for a fixed period of time and moving as a group. Teachers may play music, sing a song, or flick the lights when it is time to clean up and move to the next activity.

**Self-Selection System**
A self-selection system allows children more choice and the opportunity for self-management. Children work and move at their own pace. When using this system, the teacher has to establish clear guidelines as to how many children can work at each center at one time.

**Modified Self-Selection System**
A modified self-selection system allows children much choice and autonomy, but it requires that certain centers be visited weekly. Additionally, to encourage children to experience a variety of centers, the teacher may alternate which centers are “open” for children to choose. Or, children may be required to choose different centers daily.
Daily Activity Board

Preschool teachers use a variety of tools to highlight daily activities for children. Many find an Activity Board helpful. This board contains the blocks of time for the program, the planned activities, groupings of children, and the choices of activities. Sometimes teachers provide complete flexibility and choice for their classes, but in other cases the teacher may feel the need to provide greater direction and management.

(See the Activity Board Samples on page 240.)

The advantages of using an Activity Board to direct children during activity time include the following:

- It promotes language learning.
- It helps to form heterogeneous or homogeneous groups based on the needs and interests of children and the nature of the teacher-directed, small-group activity.
- It provides structure for children.
- It encourages new experiences.
- It enables the teacher to meet with a small group on a daily basis.
- It helps to best utilize the resources available at the activity centers.

Organizing the Activity Board

Making the Activity Board

Consider different formats to create an Activity Board that is easy to use, such as a magnetic board, flannel board, or pegboard. Include name cards that can be easily attached or moved around when the schedule changes. Display the Activity Board in an uncluttered area to encourage children to think about choices available to them. Take time to introduce the Activity Board and discuss how children need to use it. Use both pictures and print to promote literacy and develop independent work habits. If a magnetic board (e.g., cookie sheet) is used, the name and activity cards can be made of cardboard with a small piece of magnetic tape glued on the back. If the fabric of the board will adhere to Velcro®, small pieces of Velcro can be attached to the name and activity cards.

(See the Activity Board Samples on page 240.)

Organizing Small, Flexible Groups

Small-group time enables the teacher to address a variety of needs. Working with a smaller number of children allows time to introduce a new concept, teach a specific skill, follow up on an activity that was introduced during a shared reading, or write anecdotal observations about select children. The groupings should be flexible and should change daily or weekly based on the needs of children. Where possible, children who work well together should be
Small groupings allow teachers to more effectively scaffold learning. Whole-class instruction is often too easy for some and too hard for others.

provided the opportunity to work together. Ideally, time is organized to allow the teacher to meet and work with all children in small groups every day. Groups of children may be formed for different purposes:
- interest groups (heterogeneous)
- social groups (heterogeneous)
- needs groups (homogeneous)

Deciding on the Activities
Using centers is an effective way to integrate literacy instruction into the preschool environment. A large block of time allocated for centers or activities allows for both directed activities and free-choice activities. During this time, teachers work with a number of small groups. Adult helpers and paraprofessionals can also support children’s efforts during this time. In deciding the types of activities and how to manage movement, the teacher may provide varied amounts of structure to help children encounter a range of literacy experiences. (See Activity Board Samples 1 and 2 on page 240.)
Activity Board Sample 1

Today’s Activities
1. Entry to Classroom
   • Sign In
   • “Read” a Book
2. Large-Group Time
3. Activity Time
4. Sharing Time/Reflection
5. Outdoor Activities/Gym

This Activity Board allows for
• total child choice
• movement by child interest
• daily choices
• time limits (optional)

Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colors</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Names of four children*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Names of four children*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Names of four children*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Names of four children*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>ABC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name cards to be inserted into pockets for each center

Activity Board Sample 2

Today’s Activities
1. Entry to Classroom
   • Sign In
   • “Read” a Book
2. Large-Group Time
3. Activity Time
4. Sharing Time/Reflection
5. Outdoor Activities/Gym

This Activity Board allows for
• initial teacher assignment
• movement in circular patterns
• daily rotations
• definite time limits

T = Teacher-directed small group activity

ABC = Language activity: choice of music/listening center, alphabet/word center, “reading” center, or “writing” center


**Daily Half-Day Preschool Schedule**

Below is a typical half-day preschool schedule. The timeframes and activities will vary depending on the needs of the program and children. However, all components of the comprehensive literacy program should occur daily. Keeping a consistent daily schedule provides children with familiarity, security, and confidence. A consistent daily-lesson framework also supports effective classroom management. Each activity must be carefully planned to ensure a meaningful and purposeful learning experience resulting in real student engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Possible Activities</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Arrival</td>
<td>• Sign In&lt;br&gt; • “Read” a book by yourself or with a buddy&lt;br&gt; • Quiet Free-Play Activities</td>
<td>15 minutes (9:00–9:15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Whole-Group Time</td>
<td>• Opening and Calendar Activities&lt;br&gt; • Morning Message/Shared Writing&lt;br&gt; • Read-Alouds/Shared Reading</td>
<td>20 minutes (9:15–9:35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Learning Centers</td>
<td>• Small-Group and Independent Activities&lt;br&gt; • Integrated, Content-Focused Activities&lt;br&gt; • Dictations (teacher scribed) and Independent Writing</td>
<td>60 minutes including bathroom breaks, clean-up, and snacks (9:35–10:35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sharing Time/Reflection</td>
<td>• Oral Language Activities (songs, fingerplays, chants)&lt;br&gt; • Share Happenings at Centers&lt;br&gt; • Share Creations or Discoveries&lt;br&gt; • Share How Problems Were Solved&lt;br&gt; • Sing and Stretch Break</td>
<td>15 minutes (10:35–10:50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Whole-Group Time</td>
<td>• Read-Alouds/Shared Reading&lt;br&gt; • Prepare for Next Day</td>
<td>10 minutes (10:50–11:00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Outdoor Activities/Gym</td>
<td>• Gross-Motor Activities&lt;br&gt; • Integrated Language Activities</td>
<td>30 minutes (11:00–11:30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Dismissal</td>
<td>TOTAL TIME</td>
<td>150 minutes = two hours and 30 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Daily Full-Day Preschool Schedule

Recommended elements for literacy and content learning for a full-day schedule are also provided in the *Comprehensive Literacy Resource for Kindergarten Teachers*. Activities introduced in the morning continue in the afternoon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Segment</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrival</td>
<td>• Sign In&lt;br&gt;• “Read” a book by yourself or with a buddy&lt;br&gt;• “Quiet” Free-Choice Activities</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group</td>
<td>• Opening and Calendar Activities&lt;br&gt;• Morning Message/Shared Writing&lt;br&gt;• Read-Alouds/Shared Reading</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Centers</td>
<td>• Small-Group and Independent Activities&lt;br&gt;• Integrated, Content-Focused Activities&lt;br&gt;• Dictations (teacher scribed) and Independent Writing</td>
<td>60 minutes including bathroom breaks, clean-up, and snacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing Time</td>
<td>• Oral Language Activities&lt;br&gt;• Share Happenings at Centers&lt;br&gt;• Share Creations or Discoveries&lt;br&gt;• Share How Problems Were Solved&lt;br&gt;• Sing and Stretch Break</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group</td>
<td>• Read-Alouds/Shared Reading</td>
<td>10+ minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Activities/Gym</td>
<td>• Gross Motor Activities&lt;br&gt;• Integrated Language Activities</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>• Conversations with children</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest Time*</td>
<td>• Rest Time/Pillow Talk&lt;br&gt;• Quiet Activities&lt;br&gt;• Quiet Music</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Centers</td>
<td>• Children continue special activities and other integrated curriculum activities</td>
<td>60 minutes including bathroom breaks, clean-up, and snacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing Time</td>
<td>• Oral Language Activities&lt;br&gt;• Share Creations or Discoveries&lt;br&gt;• Sing-and-Stretch Break</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group</td>
<td>• Read-Alouds/Shared Reading&lt;br&gt;• Shared Writing/Interactive Writing&lt;br&gt;• Prepare for Next Day</td>
<td>20+ minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Activities/Gym</td>
<td>• Gross Motor Activities&lt;br&gt;• Integrated Language Activities</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>TOTAL TIME</td>
<td>350 minutes = five hours and 50+ minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Rest Time is a great time for the teacher to hold quiet, one-on-one conversations with children at their cots, just before they nap, or with children who do not nap. The children are encouraged to share anything they want. The teacher begins with “Do you have anything you want to talk about today?” This is referred to as Pillow Talk. For more information on Pillow Talk see Soundy, Cathleen S., and Nancy L. Stout, “Fostering the Emotional and Language Needs of Young Learners.” *Young Children*, March 2002, NAEYC, 20–24.
Language Learning at the Centers

Definition of Centers
Learning centers are specific areas in a preschool classroom that facilitate children’s active learning in a variety of curriculum areas. Clearly defined learning centers offer multiple opportunities for young children to engage in listening, speaking, “reading,” and “writing” activities.

Role of Centers in Language Learning
Preschool teachers believe that children learn best when they are actively engaged in meaningful activities. A well-organized classroom designed to promote many opportunities for children to work together fosters language, creativity, and problem-solving. Learning centers allow children to explore and use a wide range of materials to expand interests and abilities. Children work independently or cooperatively with classmates at the centers, and the teacher guides and assists as appropriate. Learning centers should be well planned to assist in the development and attainment of concepts, skills, and attitudes in the literacy program, as well as independence and social skills. Some centers—such as the Alphabet Center, Library Center, and Writing Center—are specifically designed to promote language learning. Other centers—such as the Art Center, Block Center, and Sand/Water Center—facilitate language learning through the “reading,” “writing,” speaking, and listening experiences taking place at those centers. There are numerous, ongoing oral language interactions taking place at the centers. In addition, children “read” and “write” at all centers in both self-directed and teacher-directed activities. Centers also provide teachers with the opportunity to work with individuals and small groups as trained paraprofessionals and volunteers (when available) to support center activity.

Guidelines for Using Centers
Consider the following guidelines to carefully plan and organize your learning centers:

- The number and choice of centers is dependent on the physical space of the room and the needs of the program and children in the class. Some centers may be permanent, while others may be set up only temporarily to accommodate a specific purpose.
- All centers should allow for manipulation of materials that are clearly labeled and well organized. To encourage reading, each container and area should contain a pictorial representation and a written label.

"A literate classroom offers abundant opportunities for children to make use of print and practice literacy habits and skills throughout the environment."

Neuman et al., 2000: 42

The center itself is not what is important. What is important is that in designing centers, preschool teachers purposefully plan activities that will support children’s literacy goals through active engagement.
some teacher supervision and direction (e.g., Snack Center, Computer Center).

- Vary the materials in the centers throughout the year to maintain interest. New items are introduced as suggested by children or planned by the teacher.

**Possible Centers**

![Possible Centers](image)

- Centers should be arranged to allow for a natural flow of traffic. The “dividers” between centers may be a plant, bookcase, and so on. The setup of the centers encourages children to focus on their particular center activity. The smaller the center, the more interaction and conversation that is encouraged.

- Some centers may be placed near each other to foster overlapping or combining of materials. For example, if the Dramatic Play Center is near the Block Center, children may take dress-up clothes to the Block Center to engage in dramatic play with their building structures.

- Some centers may need to be placed in certain locations due to the need for water, light, or electricity (e.g., Computer Center).

- Some centers may need to be placed on carpeted or tiled areas. For example, Water/Sand and Art Centers ideally should be on tiled flooring, while building blocks and books should be on carpet.

- Centers should be introduced gradually at the beginning of the school year. Children must become familiar with the rules and responsibilities for each center.

**Descriptions of Centers**

The possible centers are described in the following section. Some centers may be permanent, while others may be established temporarily and changed throughout the year. Each of the centers is described according to the following:
• definition
• materials
• setup and routines
• suggested language learning activities

Alphabet Center

Definition
The Alphabet Center is an area of the classroom containing an assortment of material for children to manipulate to learn more about letter forms, letter names, and letter sounds. Various activities and games can be carried out at this center to further reading and writing skills.

Materials

Resources
• magazines, catalogs, phone book
• story cards
• picture dictionaries
• name tags
• photographs of classmates with labels
• mailboxes with children’s names

Writing Surfaces
• sand or salt trays
• magic slates
• chalk and chalkboards
• flannel board
• magnetic board
• a variety of surfaces—wax paper, tin foil, sandpaper
• cookie sheets

Alphabet Materials
• a variety of alphabet letters—wood, sponge, sandpaper, pasta, felt, plastic, magnetic
• alphabet picture cards and books
• alphabet frieze
• alphabet posters
• alphabet puzzles
• alphabet stencils
• Jumbo Reading Rods®
Tools
• clipboards
• pocket chart
• modeling materials

Setup and Routines
Consider the following recommendations:
• Gradually introduce children to the materials and activities, modeling how to best use the manipulatives. Introduce each material one at a time.
• Ensure that there is a variety of materials for the emerging literacy levels represented in the class.
• Use only a few letters; then gradually add more letters. Begin with letters that are found in children’s names.
• Talk about how to put the materials away. Allow time for children to practice putting the materials away on their own.
• Display and organize the materials in clearly labeled containers.

Suggested Language Learning Activities
Children can
• use alphabet puzzles to gain familiarity with letter names, letter shapes, and alphabetical order
• practice letter formation with sand trays, salt trays, modeling material, and other writing materials
• play matching games by matching upper- and lowercase letters
• match alphabet letters with pictures of words beginning with that letter
• use labeled photographs of classmates to spell names with magnetic letters, foam letters, or Jumbo Reading Rods®
• play letter-sorting games by using sorting rules such as upper- or lowercase letters, letters with or without sticks, letters that are tall or short, and so on
• make their own ABC cards or books by writing letters on cards and illustrating them with corresponding pictures

Remember:
I do it ➔ We do it ➔ You do it
Art/Painting Center

Definition
The Art Center is designed to encourage children to use a variety of materials of different shapes, textures, and sizes in order to make their own creations. Most of the activities at this center are self-directed, but some may be teacher-directed. The materials from this center can be used at other centers to promote oral language and enrich dramatic-play experiences.

Materials

Construction Materials
- containers with lids for liquid glue
- glue sticks
- glue spreaders
- liquid glue
- ice cream sticks, toothpicks, straws
- cardboard containers (e.g., toothpaste boxes, cereal boxes)
- magazines
- paper plates and cups
- fabric
- yarn, string
- scissors (right- and left-handed)
- egg cartons, foam chips, doilies, sparkles, pipe cleaners

Modeling Materials
- play dough
- cookie cutters, rollers
- mats for use with modeling material
- clay

Painting Materials
- short brushes
- sponges for clean-up
- paint shirts or aprons
- paper (variety of textured paper, different shapes)
- other painting tools (e.g., spools, sponges, marbles, straws, feathers, cotton swabs, toothbrushes, leaves, yarn, pine cones)
- drying rack
- containers for paint
- liquid and powdered paint of various colors
• liquid and powdered soap (change texture of paint)
• liquid starch
• finger paint

**Drawing Materials**
• a wide variety of paper (e.g., newsprint, tissue, construction, wallpaper, foil)
• crayons, markers, pencils
• stickers
• cookie cutters
• stencils
• letter shapes

**Setup and Routines**
Consider the following recommendations:
• Locate this center near a sink for convenience in cleaning up spills.
• Use a clear plastic mat beneath the paint easel or table if the whole room is carpeted.
• Use paint brushes and containers of paint that are appropriate for young children.
• Ensure that the materials are clearly labeled and properly organized.
• Display materials at children’s level to encourage “reading”.
• Establish a routine to ensure that materials are properly used and stored.
• Discuss with children ways to avoid wasting paper and other materials
• Provide varied activities to encourage the use of materials for language learning through the arts.
• Display paintings from famous artists for children to note different styles and techniques.
• Encourage children to write their names on their papers.

**Suggested Language Learning Activities**
Children can
• mold materials into sculptures
• make collages of various types to create a media product
• develop drawing abilities as a precursor to writing
• develop fine-motor skills in cutting, pasting, tracing, and so on
• experiment with mixing various media together (e.g., write words with a crayon and paint over them)
• make prints of various kinds (e.g., vegetable prints, alphabet letter prints)
• make rubbings of the raised alphabet letters
• use labels to make signs and tags
• illustrate dictated stories or self-made books
• talk about their paintings
• experiment with different variations of paint (e.g., shaving cream and shakers filled with tempera paint) and discuss the different results
• give titles to their artwork as artists do
• use alphabet letter sponges to paint letters and words
• use finger paints to form letters and write their names
• paint pictures in response to stories read aloud
• make cooperative paintings and murals
• paint illustrations to make a class Big Book

**Block Center**

**Definition**
The Block Center is an area large enough for construction activities. It includes blocks of various sizes and shapes and other small building items. There may also be writing materials at this center for children to make signs and labels.

**Materials**
- large, hollow wooden blocks
- multi-shaped floor blocks
- small table blocks
- sponge blocks
- waffle blocks
- signs, buildings
- play mats
- small toy cars, trucks, buses, and boats
- plastic animals, dinosaurs, and people

**Setup and Routines**
Consider the following recommendations:
- Use an open area for the blocks, one that is not in the path of traffic.
- Consider carpeted areas to help reduce noise.
- Locate the blocks near the Dramatic Play Center to allow for extensions in play.
- Store the blocks on low shelves in an organized manner with appropriate labels on boxes or bins.
• Store blocks in such a manner as to increase awareness of mathematical characteristics such as size and shape.
• Establish that creations should be no taller than the builder.
• Establish a routine whereby children learn to put away large items neatly.
• Uniformly establish a routine if children want to save structures (e.g., have children write a note or take a photograph of the structure).

Suggested Language Learning Activities
Children can
• "read" the labels used to organize each type of block (e.g., large blocks, small blocks)
• use the blocks to make literacy-related centers such as a post office or bookstore
• engage in dramatic play of favorite stories
• label their structures with appropriate signs (e.g., HOSPITAL, STREET, MARKET)
• use books with pictures of structures to re-create those structures
• write a story/draw a picture about their structures or buildings

Computer Center

Definition
The Computer Center contains one or more computers to help children develop confidence in their ability to use a computer as well as to develop literacy skills and concepts. Related software needs to be developmentally appropriate to the interests and emerging literacy levels.

Materials
• computers
• open-ended, developmentally appropriate software programs
• clipboard with sign-in sheet for monitoring use and logging in
• table
• several chairs

Setup and Routines
Consider the following recommendations
• Locate computers in a quiet, low-traffic area.
• Provide table and chairs for cooperative work and conversations between children.
• Demonstrate how to open and close programs, save and print documents, and navigate the screen using a mouse.
• Make signs to show children how to log in.
• Label essential parts of the computer, such as mouse, keyboard, and monitor.
• Establish routines for use of computer (e.g., number of children, rules about turning off/on).
• Review software to determine appropriateness for children and the curriculum.

Suggested Language Learning Activities
Children can
• develop familiarity with the computer
• develop early reading skills by relating word labels to graphics
• use software to play games that develop language concepts
• dictate stories using a word-processing program
• print out own materials, pictures, and so on
• develop eye-hand coordination
• improve visual skills by tracking left-to-right movement on the screen
• develop fine-motor skills by inserting a disk, clicking a computer mouse, and using the keyboard
• reinforce alphabet knowledge

Discovery Center
Definition
The Discovery Center contains a variety of materials usually related to science and technology. It offers specific opportunities for children to explore, observe, classify, and sort materials in order to infer and predict. This gives them a greater understanding of their environment and technological concepts.

Materials
Nature
• living things—plants and animals
• birds’ nests
• beehives/wasps’ nests
• pine cones
• aquariums
• ant farms
• terrarium
• collections (rocks, seashells)

Technological Objects
• wind-up toys
• musical instruments
• smoke detectors
• kaleidoscopes
• wheels—different sizes
• pendulums
• timers

Scientific Tools
• magnets
• magnifying glass
• mirrors
• thermometers and other weather-related instruments
• rulers
• binoculars
• stethoscope
• eyedroppers
• prisms
• balance
• compasses
• microscope

Other
• books on related topics
• related objects children bring to school
• signs, labels, charts, posters
• paper and writing tools

Setup and Routines
Consider the following recommendations:
• Provide materials for recording discoveries made by children—paper, charts, marking tools, modeling material, tape recorder, and so on.
• Specify which materials may be moved to another center (e.g., magnifying glasses can be used by the “detectives” in the Dramatic Play Center, but plants and animals should stay at the Discovery Center).
• Encourage children to bring special objects at this table and discuss them in small groups to foster oral language skills.
• Establish procedures for placing “objects of interest” from home for viewing at this center by other children.
• Write the questions children ask or encourage children to dictate their own questions for further research.

Suggested Language Learning Activities

Children can
• “read” the labels or questions at the Discovery Center
• formulate questions to ask classmates or teachers
• engage in an independent writing activity to label, record, or reflect on “discoveries”
• engage in a shared writing activity where the teacher records the information gathered, such as a KWLM chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What We Know</th>
<th>What We Want to Know</th>
<th>What We Learned</th>
<th>What More We Want to Learn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - Birds have feathers.  
- Birds have wings to help them fly.  
- Birds make nests.  
- Birds lay eggs. | - How do baby birds learn to fly?  
- Why is a robin’s egg blue? | | |

KWLM Chart

Dramatic Play Center

Definition
The Dramatic Play Center often represents the home environment and facilitates role-playing related to children’s background experiences. This center may be changed into various dramatic settings to match the interests of children, favorite stories, or topics of study in the curriculum.
Materials

Home
- stove
- sink
- refrigerator
- pots, pans, dishes, silverware
- small table and chairs
- dress-up clothes, shoes, jewelry
- dolls, stroller, bed, highchair
- full-length mirror
- telephones
- stuffed animals
- ironing board and iron
- dresser
- cleaning equipment

Language
- pads, paper, cards
- pencils, pens, markers
- calendar, self-stick notes
- printed material such as books, catalogs, phone books
- multipurpose props to be used imaginatively

Store/Restaurant/Bakery
- cash register
- calculator
- menus, hats, food items, aprons
- store signs, labels

Puppetry
- puppets, puppet theater

Setup and Routines
Consider the following recommendations:
- Locate this center away from traffic areas and close to the Block Center. A window area is desirable.
- Clearly define this center with natural dividers.
- Provide ample space for free movement.
- Use pictures and words to label storage areas.
- Use low shelves, boxes, hooks, or clear bins for storage.
- Display and organize the dress-up clothes for easy accessibility.
- Demonstrate where to return materials to their proper locations.

By providing open-ended or multipurpose props, young children are encouraged to use their imaginations. With realistic props (e.g. plastic hamburgers) children often repeat the same stereotypical activity over and over. This is often called immature play. With multipurpose props and teacher scaffolding, a plastic baseball bat could be imagined to be a guitar. This is often called mature play.
Library/Reading Center

Definition
The Library Center is intended to be a quiet area in which children can enjoy books and other printed materials, either individually or in small groups. This area should be a comfortable spot with a wide variety of books easily accessible and attractively displayed.

Suggested Language Learning Activities
Children can
- engage in dramatic-play activities such as role-playing, retelling favorite stories, and puppetry
- develop listening and speaking skills through interaction with classmates
- use the language-related materials to engage in “reading” and writing activities (e.g., write a shopping list, make a sign, read a bedtime story to a doll)
- be empowered to change the center into various settings to reflect children’s interests, and be involved in transforming the center

Dramatic Play Themes
- supermarket
- post office
- library
- doctor’s office
- restaurant
- flower shop
- pet shop
- campground
- office
- bookstore

“Using items such as notepads and pencils, memos and magazines in their dramatic play makes young children feel like readers and writers.”
Neuman, Copple, and Bredekamp 32
Materials

Furniture
- rocking chair (adult- or child-sized)
- rugs, mats, pillows
- shelving
- baskets, bins, boxes

Types of Books
- class-made and teacher-made books
- informational books
- narratives
- alphabet and counting books
- wordless books
- traditional tales
- fantasy
- fables
- nursery rhymes
- poetry
- song books
- predictable books
- books in the child's first language
- Big Books
- leveled books
- book collections (by author, illustrator, genre, or theme)

Accessories
- stuffed animals
- flannel board and flannel story sets
- puppets
- pointer for reading words on walls
- posters

Other Reading Materials
- Morning Message
- class newsletter
- class calendar
- environmental print
- catalogs
- magazines

Setup and Routines
Consider the following recommendations:
- Display books and materials attractively, with covers showing.
• Make the area inviting and quiet.
• Use bins, boxes, and baskets for small books.
• Carefully review the books, considering the multicultural makeup of the class. Avoid books that are stereotypical.
• Ensure that the books accommodate a wide range of interests and abilities.
• Encourage children to use the pointer to read the environmental print around the room.
• Change books periodically to include old favorites and new books.
• Demonstrate how to handle and take care of books.
• Establish a sign-out routine for the At-Home Reading program.
• Interact with children regularly to facilitate reading interests and abilities.
• Include book boxes for children to place favorite books to "read".

Suggested Language Learning Activities
Children can
• learn book-handling skills and develop awareness of print concepts
• develop an appreciation and respect for books
• become familiar with different types of books
• develop an awareness of different illustrator styles
• borrow books for classroom and home use
• move books to other centers as appropriate (e.g., move a book about shells near the shell collection)
• read and respond to books (e.g., draw a picture, act out a book)
• "read" personal reading material such as a T-shirt, snack package labels, or lunch box logos, which can be displayed in the Reading Center

Listening/Music Center
Definition
The Listening Center provides children with the opportunity to listen to music or stories from a CD or tape with accompanying text. The center may also include children's own recordings of favorite or class-made books.

Materials

Equipment
• tape recorder, CD player
• headphones
• tapes or CDs that provide a variety of music—classical, jazz, environmental sounds
• tapes or CDs that provide a variety of stories from children’s books, produced commercially and read/narrated by familiar artists

Setup and Routines
Consider the following recommendations:
• Demonstrate how to use the equipment in the center.
• Provide a variety of book and tape/CD sets.
• Have parents, school staff members, or older children record some favorite storybooks.
• Provide tapes labeled with the child’s name for recording individual retellings of a favorite story.
• Provide different kinds of music for children to listen and respond to (e.g., move, dance, keep rhythm).
• Talk about terms related to music (e.g., rhythm, tone, beat).
• Use terms to describe children’s movement relative to the music (e.g., bouncing, gliding).
• Print the lyrics on chart paper for shared reading experiences.
• Include songs in the program that develop phonemic awareness using rhyming words or alliteration (e.g., “Willoughby Wallaby Woo,” “Oo-pples and Boo-noo-noos”).

Suggested Language Learning Activities
Children can
• associate oral language with written language
• listen to books emphasizing alphabet skills (e.g., Chicka Chicka Boom Boom)
• “read” books that are songs in book format (e.g., “Wheels on the Bus,” “Down by the Bay”)
• tape themselves retelling a favorite story or song
• experiment with creating their own instruments to use when children tape the retelling of a story

Favorite Books and Songs for Listening Center
• Wheels on the Bus
• Down by the Bay
• Jamberry
• Chicka Chicka Boom Boom
Math Center

Definition
The Math Center contains a wide range of manipulatives that can be used to develop mathematical concepts and language as well as a wide range of literacy skills.

Materials
Mathematics Materials
- large and small pegboards, pegs
- ManipuLite® Color Cubes, PopCubes, SnapCubes
- pattern blocks, parquetry blocks, small blocks, attribute blocks
- patterns to re-create, copy, or trace
- sorting materials—buttons, cars, animals, seeds, beans, and so on
- 3-D solids—foam, plastic, wood
- abacus
- boxes—different sizes, shapes
- balls—variety of sizes
- cone shapes
- cylinders, straws, small boxes, tissue rolls
- calculator
- scale
- tape measure
- sorting trays
- math board games

Language Materials
- pencils, markers
- paper—different varieties
- catalogs, magazines
- math-related literature (concept books, stories with embedded math themes)

Table Toys
- large- to medium-sized beads, laces for stringing
- puzzles—different sizes and difficulty levels
- games, dominoes, matching sets, memory

Setup and Routines
Consider the following recommendations:
- Use sturdy containers that are clearly marked for small blocks, pattern blocks, and so on.
• Introduce the materials to children so that they are aware of
  – the correct terminology
  – how to use the materials to their best advantage
  – how to access them
  – where to put them when finished

**Suggested Language Learning Activities**

Children can
• make patterns using a variety of materials and then label the patterns
• sort objects according to size, shape, and color
• count objects, use one-to-one correspondence, and dictate number stories
• work together to gather information for graphing activities
• dramatize number stories, chants, or rhymes

**Snack Center**

**Definition**

The Snack Center is a designated area where a small group of children sit independently to eat a snack brought from home or made at school. Children should be encouraged to refer to class-made signs that remind them what the snack of the day is or how to assemble the snack of the day.

**Materials**

• round/rectangular table
• 6–8 chairs
• washable place mats
• paper towels
• cooking utensils as necessary

**Setup and Routines**

Consider the following recommendations:
• Consider establishing a self-initiated snack routine during activity time.
• Inform parents of the snack routine and encourage children to bring nutritious snacks from home.
• Interact with children during snack time and ask questions related to number concepts, food textures, and tastes.
• Be aware of food allergies and establish procedures to ensure the safety of all children.
• Prepare some simple snacks with children on designated “cooking days.”
• Use the Snack Center for reading activities such as “reading” recipes and following directions to make individual snacks (e.g., mini pizzas = English muffin + tomato sauce + cheese).
• Use the Snack Center to develop conversation skills among children by modeling and interacting with them.

Suggested Language Learning Activities

Children can
• show an awareness of and appreciation for a variety of foods
• talk about changes that happen in different types of food when baking, freezing, popping corn, and so on
• gain familiarity of nutrition information or ingredients named on labels
• use language and vocabulary pertaining to food items in conversations (e.g., favorite foods, sorting foods by color or texture)
• follow directions to make simple recipes
• sort food according to first letter of the name of the food (e.g., a = apple, b = banana, c = carrot)
• play language games such as riddles: “I have a snack that is orange and sweet. What is it?” [orange]

Allergy caution:
Be aware of children who may be allergic to certain foods or ingredients and establish procedures to ensure the safety of all children.

Water/Sand Center

Definition
The Water/Sand Center is a permanent station in the classroom where children can explore and experiment with a variety of materials. The container should be large enough for a small group of children to work around it comfortably at one time. Both sand and water offer mediums for learning many skills and concepts. Consider alternative mediums for play at this center, such as corks, pebbles, and packing materials. Interactions at this center promote conversations as well as vocabulary development.

Materials

Basic Water Materials
• plastic containers of varying heights, shapes, and colors
• different sizes of scoops, sponges, spoons, shovels, and jugs
• different lengths and widths of hoses
• sieves with holes of various sizes (e.g., colander, strainer, sand sieve, tea strainer)
• eyedroppers, basters
• plastic aprons
• water mill

Water Accessories
• sponge alphabet letters
• hand egg beaters
• various sizes of plastic and self-locking bags
• pails of various sizes
• various sizes and shapes of ice cube trays
• magnifying glasses
• bubble equipment
• toy people, fish, boats, plastic/foam letters

Basic Sand Materials
• wet and dry sand
• pails, shovels, spoons
• funnels
• strainers, sieves, shakers
• plastic containers (variety of sizes) and letters
• cars, trucks, toys with wheels
• plastic people, animals, dinosaurs, and “bones” for paleontologists
• broom and dustpan, brush

Sand Accessories
• molds, muffin tins
• small garden tools (e.g., rakes, hoes)
• alphabet letter molds
• cookie cutters
• jar lids
• plastic farm and wild animals
• dinosaurs
• plastic fences
• trowels
• balance scales
• rolling pins
• shells, stones, pine cones
• twigs, toy trees
Setup and Routines
Consider the following recommendations:

- Ensure that the table is at an appropriate height for children to observe closely at eye level and reach into with ease.
- Locate the Water/Sand Center away from heavy traffic areas and away from electrical outlets.
- Allow sufficient space for movement around the outside of the center.
- Provide mops, pail, sponges, rags, dishpans, and brushes to clean up spills with ease.
- Use drawers, bins, or plastic tubs to store similar equipment together. Label the containers to help children know where to find and put things away.
- Place equipment under the sand/water table, along a nearby wall, or on shelves adjacent to the work area.
- Provide plastic aprons or protective clothing when children use the water. Keep these on hooks near the center for easy access and quick drying.
- Ensure that the water is changed regularly. Replace the sand with clean sand when necessary.
- Introduce each piece of material or equipment gradually so that children know how to handle and use each item.
- Pose challenges to children and work together to chart observations, such as
  - Objects that float
  - Add ice cubes to the water; what happens?
  - How many scoops will fill up the tall cup?
- Provide a variety of activity ideas throughout the year to keep children engaged in the center.

Suggested Language Learning Activities
Children can

- use language to discuss their observations
- develop vocabulary related to sand and water activities (e.g., sift, trace, pour, splash)
- develop games with plastic alphabet letters, such as “Fish for Letters,” or dig for objects that begin with specific letters of the alphabet
- dictate or write about their experiences at the center
- make treasure maps to find hidden treasures in the sand
- write lists of things needed for the center
- make predictions of volume of water and sand containers, and draw and label their findings (e.g., one pail = three scoops of water)
**Writing Center**

**Definition**
The Writing Center is an important activity center in the preschool classroom. Here, children are encouraged to explore and use a variety of materials to develop their emerging writing skills. The Writing Center should be an attractive, welcoming place that offers writing experiences for independent or cooperative activities. Materials from the Writing Center can be moved to other areas of the classroom to make labels, signs, and so on. Each child’s writing journal should be stored in the Writing Center.

**Materials**

**Paper Products**
- paper—newsprint, wallpaper, construction paper, blank journals, handmade books, paper of different shapes and sizes
- cardboard—cut in a variety of shapes and sizes
- ready-made blank books of interest—of various sizes and thicknesses
- stationery (used cards can be cut for this purpose)
- stickers
- labels, signs
- envelopes
- picture and word dictionaries

**Writing Utensils**
- pens, pencils, erasers
- markers—thick, thin, scented
- crayons, pencil crayons
- chalk

**Tools**
- tape
- paper clips
- stapler
- book rings
- scissors
- one-hole punch
- clipboards
- shape and letter templates
- shape, letter, and date stamps
Setup and Routines
Consider the following recommendations:

- Locate the Writing Center in a quiet, low-traffic area of the classroom.
- Place the Writing Center close to the Library Center, Listening Center, and Art Center, for natural extensions to occur.
- Organize and store materials in easy-to-use, labeled containers.
- Display print and pictures at children’s level.
- Work with children to label the classroom environment, starting gradually and building as print awareness increases (e.g., make signs for centers and storage bins).
- Allow integration of writing materials into as many other classroom activities as possible (e.g., menus in Dramatic Play Center, sign-making at Block Center).
- Use the Writing Center for scribing dictations and interactive writing experiences with small groups of children.
- Display favorite books for children to use as springboards for their own writing—include different book formats and illustrative styles.

Suggested Language Learning Activities
Children can

- use the materials at the Writing Center to draw pictures and “write” in individual writing journals
- take materials from the Writing Center to make literacy props for the Dramatic Play center, such as signs, price tags, menus, shopping lists, and tickets
- take materials to the Block Center to make traffic or road signs, maps, labels, “reserved/saved” signs, and drivers’ licenses
- take materials to the Water/Sand Center to make signs and record observations
- take strips of paper to the Art Center to “write” or dictate labels to describe a painting or sculpture
- use materials to write notes to each other or to school staff
- use the clipboard to sign up for specific centers or to be placed on a waiting list
- make individual books to reflect personal interests or information gathered from the ongoing project
Keeping Track of Activities at the Centers

It is essential to monitor center activities in order to advance language and literacy skills. The goal is for all children to use oral language, reading, and writing on a daily basis. In order to do this, the teacher needs to do the following:

- Take time to observe how children work at the centers
- Interact with children as they engage in their center activities
- Provide a system for collecting work produced at the centers, such as
  - a folder for each child
  - a bin for finished and unfinished work
  - a table for creations to be saved until the next day
- Establish a system for recording which centers have been used by children; for example:
  - Each child has a sheet with icons of each center and, on a daily basis, puts an "X" beside the centers that he or she used.

(See Blackline Master 14: Center Activity Time: Center Schedule, on page 283.)

- It is also important to monitor how children interact in the group.

(See Blackline Master 15: Assessment: Group-Work Assessment, on page 284.)

Making Learning Centers Work

Center activities need to be purposeful and appropriate for young language learners. It is important that children understand the task at hand as well as their responsibilities at a particular center. In order to make this happen, the teacher needs to do the following:

- Introduce the centers gradually.
- Demonstrate how to use materials at the centers in various ways.
- Work with children to write and review the rules for each center.
- Discuss effective strategies for independent work and group work.
- Demonstrate the way to move from one center to another.
- Introduce and review the activity board daily.
- Model and discuss new materials and activities daily.
- Discuss and role-play appropriate center behavior.
- Provide ample opportunities for children to share and save products.
Closing Thoughts

Effective preschool environments promote exploration, discovery, play, and socialization. However, preschool classrooms need to include intentional literacy learning activities throughout the day. Research indicates that it is crucial for teachers to provide the necessary scaffolding to support children in the areas of oral language, phonological awareness, print awareness, and alphabet knowledge. This scaffolding should ensure that all children see themselves as successful and motivated literacy learners. To reach the intended literacy goals, children rely on parents and teachers working together to provide effective literacy programs. Teachers must plan and continually assess and modify the setting, materials, and how the instruction is scaffolded to address the needs of all children. “Effective schools” research indicates that the parent-school link in the area of literacy learning is a key determinant of child success. Ongoing communication between home and school is important. Parents frequently ask, “How might I best help my child learn to read and write?” The next chapter answers this question by providing many practical ideas that will enable parents to support literacy learning at home.
Chapter 5

BLACKLINE MASTERS

BLM 1: Self-Assessment: I Can Read
BLM 2: Self-Assessment: I Can Write
BLM 3: Self-Assessment: Listening to a Story
BLM 4: Self-Assessment: I Like ...
BLM 5: Self-Assessment: My Book Log
BLM 6: Anecdotal Records: Observations Recording Sheet
BLM 7: Self-Assessment: Portfolios—Letter to Parents
BLM 8: Self-Assessment: Portfolios—Parent Response
BLM 9: Self-Assessment: Portfolios—Table of Contents
BLM 10: Assessment: Story Retelling
BLM 11: Assessment: Writing Assessment Rubric
BLM 12: Assessment: Parent Questionnaire
BLM 13: Assessment: Parent Checklist
BLM 14: Center Activity Time: Center Schedule
BLM 15: Assessment: Group-Work Assessment
BLM 16: Center Icons