

Fostering Early Literacy

Teacher's Packet

A KET professional development workshop for educators approved for Professional Development Training by the Kentucky Department of Education.

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Fostering Early Literacy

The environment and instruction that support the literacy development of preschool children are different from those of the primary classroom. This four-part series explores developmentally appropriate strategies for the pre-K child. Viewers see the strategies modeled by outstanding preschool teachers at the University of Kentucky Early Childhood Lab and at a combined preschool/Head Start program at Mercer County Elementary School in Harrodsburg, Kentucky.

Early literacy is an indicator of a child’s future success—both in school and throughout life. Our society values literacy development in children. In our changing world, most jobs require reading and writing skills. Jobs once handled over the phone or in person are now done by e-mail, internet, or fax.

Brain research tells us that birth through age 8 is a critical time in the development of literacy. The optimal period for language is prior to age 4. We know that children are very aware of language at this time and tend to pick up words easily. Literacy development follows language development. We must ensure that children are exposed to language, books, and other text during this critical period in their development.

The first program in the series—“Planning for Literacy Instruction”—looks at the big picture: the kinds of things children should be doing to support literacy development. The program examines early literacy outcomes and standards and how to create a plan to help children meet those outcomes. It also discusses and illustrates developmentally appropriate and creative assessments.

In “Designing a Literacy-Rich Classroom,” the second program, we see how the classroom’s physical environment and schedule can foster literacy. Programs 3 and 4, “Strategies in Action,” focus on activities related to the literacy outcomes discussed in the first two programs. Viewers see a variety of activities, including one that everyone does—circle time—and learn how multiple literacy outcomes can be addressed in a single activity.

About This Packet

The materials in this packet include outlines of the content of the four programs, a list of developmentally appropriate practices from the National Association for the Education of Young Children and additional recommendations from other early childhood organizations, and an evaluation form for the series. Please take a minute to complete this form and return it to KET. Your feedback is important to us—your comments and suggestions help ensure that our professional development offerings are useful and appropriate.

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Meet the Presenters

Appearing in the series are **Peggy Branam**, preschool teacher at Mercer County Elementary School in Harrodsburg; **Jennifer Grisham-Brown**, director of the Early Childhood Lab in the Department of Family Studies in the College of Human Environmental Sciences at the University of Kentucky; **Charlotte Manno**, assistant director of the Early Childhood Lab; **Jennifer Polnisch** and **Whitney Stevenson**, preschool teachers at the Early Childhood Lab; and **Bobbie White**, instructional assistant in the preschool program at Mercer County.

Professional Development Credit

Stage of Participant Development: Practice/Application

The Kentucky Department of Education has approved all KET Star Channels Seminars for professional development credit if schools or districts choose to include them in their professional development plans. Districts or schools may choose to include preparation and/or follow-up time as part of professional development. For example, if a teacher participates in one 90-minute program and spends an additional 30 minutes in related activities, he or she could be awarded a total of two hours professional development credit.

Individual teachers who wish to use these videotapes for professional development credit should check with their school professional development chair or with their district professional development coordinator.

Professional development can also be used to satisfy requirements for the fifth year program. Contact your local university or the Division of Teacher Education and Certification at 502-564-4606 for more information.

Program 1: Planning for Literacy Instruction

Resources for Information and Guidelines for Early Childhood Education

- **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**
1509 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-1426
202-232-8777 or 800-424-2460
Fax: 202-328-1846
<http://www.naeyc.org/default.htm>
- **Head Start**
<http://www2.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/>
- **COR Assessment from High Scope**
<http://www.highscope.org/assessment/cor.htm>

Appropriate assessment includes:

- Taping children reading a story from a book or telling a story using puppets. Track progress over time by taping through the year and labeling tapes with the dates.
- Encouraging children to verbalize stories by narrating their artwork. Document the stories. Label the work with the child's name and date and, with the child's permission, keep the work at school to include in the child's portfolio, a gathering of the child's works to document growth and progress.
- Keeping a list of books read to children and asking the families to document books read at home.

Program 2: Designing a Literacy-Rich Classroom

Recommendations include:

- An environment rich with print. Label items and areas in the classroom, such as cubbies and classroom materials.
- A comfortable, interesting reading area where children can read alone or with friends
- Readily accessible books displayed on open shelves. Books should be rotated regularly, keeping in mind the children's interests.
- Books that reflect diversity
- Opportunities throughout the classroom for writing

Questions To Consider in Evaluating Classrooms

- What is being done to promote literacy?
- What materials are used?
- What adult support is needed?

Recommended Centers/Classroom Areas and Connections to Literacy Development

- Block area
Literacy connections: Talk with children about what they're playing with and building; enhance the center with blocks with letters on them.
- Dramatic play
Literacy connection: Playing pretend with children in the dramatic play area promotes their language development.
- Writing center
Literacy connections: Model writing; write names or letters for children as requested; place an alphabet strip on the table as a model for children.
- Reading area
Literacy connections: Ask children to predict what will happen next; point out words in the text; ask children to re-tell the story.
- Computer center
Literacy connections: Help children learn basic reading skills such as matching symbols; give children access to the alphabet letters on the keyboard; allow those who can to read sight words.

- Cubbies
Literacy connection: Guide children to find their names or symbols on their cubbies.
- Art center
Literacy connections: Ask children to explain their drawings and write down what they say; embed letters through stamps, stencils, and other means.
- Science center
Literacy connection: Use cooking to sequence events and teach symbols.
- Sensory center
Literacy connection: Use sensory experiences to teach descriptive words such as soft, cool, sticky, dirty, etc. Encourage children to use utensils to trace letters in play dough or sand.

Direct Interactions with Children That Promote Literacy

- Ask children questions that require them to expand their use of language. Ask open-ended questions.
- When reading to a child, ask him or her to predict what will happen next. Afterwards, ask the child to re-tell the story or “read” the book.
- Model how print conveys meaning by writing children’s names on their work and recording their descriptions.

Using Classroom Routines to Promote Literacy

- Promote phonological awareness. For example, at the end of circle time, you might ask all children whose names begin with a certain letter to get their things from their cubbies.
- Have children sing rhyming songs while walking to the playground.

Tips for Reading to Large Groups of Children

- Choose books with predictable patterns and rhyming words. Read the same book several times.
- Read the title of the book and the author’s name and make sure all children can see the page.
- Occasionally point to words.
- Run your finger over the text so that children see that we read from left to right and from top to bottom.
- Pause for children to supply rhyming words or to predict what will happen next.
- At the end of the story, ask open-ended questions about various aspects of the book, such as sequence of events, characters’ feelings, and additional story lines.

Program 3: Literacy Strategies in Action University of Kentucky Early Childhood Lab

About the Early Childhood Lab

The Early Childhood Lab is part of the Department of Family Studies in the College of Human Environmental Sciences at the University of Kentucky. This inner-city program, accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, serves children six weeks to five years old. It coordinates with Fayette County public schools to serve preschool children who qualify for Early Start; it is also a Head Start Partnership Site. The two mixed-age classrooms featured in Program 4 each include 32 children with and without disabilities, providing them with a developmentally appropriate curriculum focused on hands-on learning.

Literacy Activities Included in Program 3

- Reading a story with props during large group circle
- Making cookies in the science center
- Playing in flour in the sensory center
- Setting up a bakery in the dramatic play center

Literacy Outcomes Demonstrated During Specific Activities

Reading a story during large group circle time:

The teacher reads *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, a popular children's book with a predictable sequence, and makes the story more concrete through the use of real objects as props. As she reads, she models how to handle and care for books and how to read from left to right and top to bottom. Afterwards, the children re-tell the book independently using manipulatives.

Literacy outcomes demonstrated during the activity include:

- Responding to questions
- Predicting what will happen next
- Developing an interest in books
- Retelling a story

Making cookies in the science center:

The teachers have prepared a recipe card with pictures, words, and directions for making cookies. The children are asked about their past experiences cooking, their knowledge of the ingredients, and the recipe. They play an active role in measuring and combining ingredients and

predict what the recipe's outcome will be. Later, as the children eat their cookies during snack time, they are asked to recall the sequence for making the cookies.

Literacy outcomes for the activity include:

- Retelling stories from experience
- Predicting what will happen next
- Understanding that writing is a way of communicating
- Sequencing

Playing with flour in the sensory center:

Children are allowed to play in flour with sifters and other cooking utensils. Teachers promote language development by asking children to describe the texture, temperature, or taste of the flour and by asking open-ended questions such as “How does the wheat become flour.”

Literacy outcomes for this activity include:

- Retelling an experience making something with flour
- “Writing” in the flour with fingers

Setting up a bakery in the dramatic play center:

In a “bakery” in which the children make pretend cookies out of play dough and dress up in aprons and bakery hats, the teacher supports their language development by asking them questions about baking cookies and being a baker. The children also have a counter and a cash register where they can take “orders.”

Literacy outcomes for this activity include:

- Retelling an experience making cookies at home
- Answering the teacher's questions
- Following other children's directions
- Writing letters in play dough
- Making letter cookies from the play dough
- Writing “orders” to be filled at the bakery counter

Program 4: Literacy Strategies in Action Mercer County Elementary School

About the Mercer County Preschool Program:

Teacher **Peggy Branam** and her instructional assistant **Bobbie White** teach children who qualify for services through the KERA Preschool program and Early and Head Start. The children attend school all day, taking a nap shortly after lunch. Peggy follows a modified High Scope curriculum model. She also works with the children to help them attain specific outcomes developed by the Mercer County district. The preschool program is located at Mercer County's only elementary school.

Literacy Activities Included in Program 4

- Reading a story during large group
- Small group activities
- Dramatic play
- Flannel board
- Musical activity
- Developing interest in books
- Anticipating what will happen next
- Modeling how you read

Literacy Outcomes Demonstrated During Specific Activities

Reading a story during large group:

The teacher reads *The Napping House*, a popular story with a predictable sequence (like *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*). She illustrates the story with finger puppets that “sleep” on top of one another with clothes pins (and uses the manipulatives afterwards in small groups as a way for the children to re-tell the story). As she reads the book, the teacher points out words on the page and asks the children to respond chorally to the name of the next animal on the bed.

Literacy outcomes for this activity include:

- Developing an interest in books
- Modeling how to handle and care for books
- Anticipating what will happen next
- Modeling how you read—left to right and top to bottom

Making puppets using water-based paints:

After the story, the teacher divides the class into two small groups to participate in activities that further extends the story. The instructional assistant's group uses water-based paints to make hand puppets like the one the teacher used in reading the story. Later, the children take the puppets home along with a letter for their parents explaining how to encourage their children to re-tell the story.

Literacy outcomes for this activity include:

- Retelling stories from experience
- Labeling story characters
- Answering questions about the story
- Practicing pre-writing skills through painting

Playing a parachute game using balloons:

In the second group, each child is given a balloon and assigned the name of a character in a story. They hold the parachute as they walk around in a circle singing a song related to the story. When the teacher names a character, the appropriate child throws his or her balloon on the parachute. At the point in the story when everyone wakes up, the children jiggle the parachute and the balloons fly up in the air. (**Caution:** Balloons can be a choking hazard for children who put things in their mouths.)

Literacy outcomes for this activity include:

- Labeling the names of characters
- Following directions
- Singing a rhyming song
- Pre-writing

Re-telling the story either with the flannel board or through dramatic play:

The teacher sets up a flannel board with the characters from the story. With some adult support, the children use the flannel board to re-tell the story. In dramatic play, stuffed animals and dolls serve as the characters as the children acted out the story.

Literacy outcomes for these two activities include:

- Sequencing
- Labeling the story's characters
- Recalling events
- Developing an interest in books and storytelling

Quiet “reading” time:

After choice time, the children help to clean up and then are expected to choose a book, sit, and read quietly while the rest of the group finishes. Although most children cannot read yet, this activity—and others throughout the day—allow them to look at books.

Literacy outcomes for this activity include:

- Picture reading
- Handling books appropriately
- Following the print on the page while an adult reads the story
- Developing an interest in reading

Singing as a group:

Right before lunch, the teacher leads the children in singing “Willoughby Wallaby” as she holds up each child’s name on a strip during the song. She reminds them of *The Napping House* and how the animals slept on one another; “Willoughby Wallaby” has a similar repetitive motive involving an elephant.

Literacy outcomes for this activity include:

- Letter and name recognition
- Sequencing

Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Recommendations from the National Association for the Education of Young Children

- Teachers encourage children’s developing language and communication skills by talking with them throughout the day, speaking clearly and listening to their responses, and providing opportunities for them to talk to each other.
- Teachers engage individual children and groups in conversations about real experiences, projects, and current events; they encourage children to describe their products or ideas and they respond attentively to children’s verbal initiatives.
- Teachers use a variety of approaches and provide daily opportunities to develop children’s language and literacy skills through meaningful experiences, such as listening to and reading stories and poems; taking field trips; dictating stories; seeing classroom charts and other print in use; participating in dramatic play and other experiences requiring communication; talking informally with other children and adults; and experimenting with writing by drawing, copying and using their own “invented spelling.”
- Adults read to children everyday in various contexts, such as lap book reading to individuals, guided reading to small groups, as well as occasional large group story time.
- Children have opportunities to develop print awareness, sense of story, appreciation of literature, and understanding of the various uses of the written word, while learning particular letter names and letter sound combinations and recognizing words that are meaningful to them (such as their names, names of friends, phrases like “I love you” and commonly seen functional words like “exit”).
- Alphabet knowledge is a good predictor of early literacy. Children who learn to read well and most easily in the first grade are those children who have prior knowledge of the alphabet. So, do expose children to the alphabet, just in appropriate ways. Appropriate ways of exposing children to the alphabet in natural, playful ways include:
 - Help children learn to recognize their names by labeling their personal space in the classroom and writing their name on work.
 - Encourage children to write their names on artwork and in other functional ways—writing letters at the post office, etc.
 - Point out similarities and differences in names and words as children become more familiar with their names and the letters in the names. (Julie and Jack’s names start with the same letter, etc.)
 - Point out letters in the environment that start with words that are important to children. At story time, point out the first letter in the name of the book.

- Read books to children which are meaningful. Include alphabet books like *Chicka, Chicka, Boom Boom*.
- Weave the alphabet throughout thematic units by planning activities such as making books, focusing on names of items related to the theme, and encouraging writing related to the theme.

The NAEYC recommends that teachers *avoid* the following practices:

- Using a single approach for all children.
- Introducing letters one at a time (letter of the week). Some children will be bored with this activity since they may already know the letters. Other children will be confused because they cannot make sense of isolated bits of information.
- Following a rigid schedule of pre-requisites (ex. Teaching phonics skills before giving children experiences with books or meaningful texts.)
- Only reading in large groups. Children should be read to individually so questions can be answered and conversations can be extended regarding the book.

In summary, NAEYC believes literacy and language can best be supported by giving children daily experiences which are meaningful. Adults should encourage children to talk and have conversations with other children about what is meaningful to them in their environment. Teachers support children by listening, reading to them daily, and offering opportunities with writing and drawing.

Additional Recommendations for Appropriate Early Childhood Literacy Skills

The Division for Early Childhood (DEC), Head Start, and the COR Assessment from High Scope

The Division for Early Childhood (DEC)

The **Division for Early Childhood (DEC)** is another international organization which develops standards for teaching young children with special needs. DEC recommends that teachers:

- Develop and implement an integrated curriculum that focuses on children's needs and interests and takes into account culturally valued content and children's home experiences.
- Implement developmentally and functionally appropriate individual and group activities using a variety of formats, including play, environmental routines, parent mediated activities, small group projects, cooperative learning, inquiry experiences and systematic instruction.

Head Start Outcomes

Some of the **Head Start Outcomes** related to literacy suggest that a preschool child:

- Shows a growing interest and involvement in listening to and discussing a variety of fiction and non-fiction books and poetry.
- Shows a growing interest in reading and related activities, such as asking to have a favorite book read; choosing to look at books; drawing pictures based on stories; asking to take books home; going to the library; and engaging in pretend reading with other children.
- Shows progress in abilities to re-tell and dictate stories from books and experiences; to act out stories in dramatic play; and to predict what will happen next in a story.
- Shows progress in learning how to handle and care for books; knowing to view one page at a time in sequence from front to back; and understanding that a book has a title, author, and illustrator.
- Shows increasing awareness of print in classroom, home, and community settings.
- Develops growing understanding of the different functions of forms of print such as signs, letters, newspapers, lists, messages, and menus.
- Demonstrates increasing awareness of concepts of print, such as that reading in English moves from top to bottom and left to right, that speech can be written down, and that print conveys a message.
- Shows progress in recognizing the association between spoken and written words by following print as it is read aloud.

- Recognizes a word as a unit of print, or awareness that letters are grouped to form words, and that words are separated by spaces.
- Develops an understanding that writing is a way of communicating for a variety of purposes.
- Begins to represent stories and experiences through pictures, dictation, and in play.
- Experiments with a growing variety of writing tools and materials, such as pencils, crayons, and computers.
- Progresses from using scribbles, shapes, or pictures to represent ideas, to using letter-like symbols, to copying or writing familiar words such as their own names.
- Shows progress in associating the names of letters with their shapes and sounds.
- Increases in ability to notice the beginning letters in familiar words.
- Identifies at least 10 letters of the alphabet, especially those in their own name.
- Knows that letters of the alphabet are a special category of visual graphics that can be individually named.

COR Observation Record Used by High Scope

The last source of appropriate literacy goals comes from **the COR observation record used by High Scope**. The COR is a developmentally appropriate assessment instrument for use in early childhood settings for children 2 to 6 years of age.

The COR assessment addresses the following skills for preschool children. The child...

- Shows an interest in reading activities.
- Asks people to read stories, or signs, or notes.
- Answers questions about a story that has been read or repeats parts of the story.
- Reads a book or tells a story while turning the pages.
- Follows print on a page, moving his or her eyes in the correct direction.
- Appears to read or actually reads a book, pointing to the words, and telling the story.
- Identifies some letters and numbers.
- Writes using squiggles and marks as letters.

• **The Importance of Family in Early Literacy Development**

An important component of literacy development for all children happens not only in the classroom, but also in the home environment.

Teachers of preschool children know the importance of the family in encouraging a child's literacy development. We know that children who come from homes where books are valued and read each day come to school with a greater understanding and love for books and words. The single most important activity for building skills essential for reading success is reading aloud to children. This is a task that is easily accomplished by most parents.

Teachers can encourage parents to read to children by sending home lists of appropriate books for preschool children. Teachers can also communicate with parents about the importance of literacy development through conferences, correspondence such as class newsletters and lesson plans, and parent workshops. Teachers can keep parents up to date on their child's development by using appropriate assessment and sharing the child's portfolio during conferences.

In Fayette County School's Early Start program, a part of their mission is family literacy. On a monthly basis, parents and children are invited to participate in a family story time. Parents are invited to join their child at circle time to read a chosen book. After the circle time reading, children are given a copy of the book to take home, along with an activity that reinforces concepts from the book.

For example, the chosen book for story time in November was *The Mitten* by Jan Brett. Children were given a copy of the book to take home, along with a cut-out mitten and the characters to go inside. This take home activity reinforces concepts from the story, and allows the parent to participate in a literacy activity with their child.

Parents can be encouraged to take an active role in their child's literacy development. NAEYC and IRA recommend that parents of preschool children:

- Talk with children, engage them in conversation, give names to things in their environment, and show an interest in what the child says.
- Read and re-read stories with predictable texts to children.
- Visit the library regularly.
- Encourage children to recount experiences and describe ideas and events that are important to them.
- Provide opportunities for children to draw and print using markers, crayons, and pencils.

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