Building literacy before school: The Little Big Book Club @ your library

Training and development program handbook

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Acknowledgements

Building literacy before school: The Little Big Book Club @ your library

This document was written because young children, particularly babies, are often underestimated. The fact is that babies are brainy! They know, think and can understand a lot more than we previously thought.

The speed in which babies learn about language and other ways of communicating is staggering. What is most amazing is the vocabulary growth of young children and so much of this is associated with reading, songs and rhymes. Language underpins future literacy development and there is overwhelming evidence that reading to young children has an impact on their language and later literacy learning – not to mention the enjoyment they get from the whole experience.

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Thank you to the Adelaide Hills Library Service, for permission to document their Baby Bounce and Rhyme sessions.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without support from Public Library Services and the South Australian Public Library Network.

Susan Hill
Introduction

Building literacy before school: The Little Big Book Club @ your library training and development program aims to provide library staff with training and development in order to provide an early childhood literacy program. The program targets families and children, new born to two years of age.

The training program and this accompanying handbook are divided into modules. The handbook has been developed as a reference tool and provides more detailed information particularly with regards to child development.

Both the training program and the handbook are based on current research and contain strategies for engaging diverse families and communities in the active development of children’s early literacy.

Module 1: Child development
- Brainy babies: early childhood development: cognitive, motor, social and emotional development.
- Brain development in the early years
- Talkative toddlers: the importance of vocabulary
- The big picture: Phases of literacy development
- Break out activity ‘Vocabulary: What does the research tell us?’

Module 2: Connecting with communities
- Connecting with homes and communities
- How can libraries access the ‘funds of knowledge’ in language and literacy resources in homes and communities?
- DVD on literacies in homes and communities with a particular focus on technology and new literacies
- Break out activity, ‘Ways libraries can connect with communities’.

Module 3: Reading and interacting
- What is reading?
- What is important for beginning reading?
- What books work for babies? – books for ages and stages, board books, soft chewable books, books with flaps and cut outs, narratives, predictable books, rhymes and rhythms, information and fact books
- Top story telling tips.

Module 4: Successful strategies
- Tips for reading aloud
- Tips for storytelling
- Break out activity: practical sessions for the 0-2 year old
- Successful ways of working in different communities. Sharing community sessions that work.
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Module 1: Child development

- Brainy babies: early childhood development: cognitive, motor, social and emotional development.
- Brain development in the early years
- Talkative toddlers: the importance of vocabulary
- Phases of literacy development; 0-8 years
- Break out activity ‘What does the research tell us?’

Introduction: The early years are important

Leo was so sad. He could not do anything right. All the other animals could read and write their names, he just scribbled. Leo's father watched Leo for signs of blooming. Leo's mother recognised that ‘Leo was just a late bloomer.’ Leo's friends continued to grow and do things as the seasons changed. Then one day, in his own good time, Leo bloomed! He could read! He could write!

(Leo the late bloomer, 1971)

Leo the late bloomer is the story of a lion cub who couldn’t read or write even though all of his friends could. His father watches over him fearfully wondering when he will develop while his mother just waits for him to read and write in his own time. The story highlights the different roles that adults can play in helping children read and write – on one hand being anxious and worried that their child is being left behind – on the other just waiting for development to occur. Leo took his own time in learning to read and write and as he was doing this he was watching, thinking and exploring the world around him.

We now know a lot more about babies, toddlers and preschoolers. Babies are not just fed, changed and washed, they need intellectual stimulation. Toddlers are absolute talking machines and therefore how do we develop their vocabulary for thinking and future reading and writing? Preschoolers are already reading and writing, learning from videos, DVD and computers.
This workbook is organised around four key ideas:

- Child development
- Language and literacy development
- Families and communities
- Building literacy together.

Literacy development begins before birth and steadily continues as children develop. Some people think that young children learn to read and write best of all by rote learning and repetitive drill of letters and words. However, this is not the most successful way to learn to read and write, as rote learning works best as a way to memorise facts. It is not effective for learning the strategies and complex problem solving required for reading and writing.

Some people think that children learn to read and write best of all by being left alone and by having masses of books available for them to pick up and learn by themselves. However, this may not be the case, as most children require careful guidance from an adult. Some people think all children learn in the same way and move through identical stages at the same age, taking the same amount of time. Fortunately children are different, they learn differently at very dissimilar rates and some children require more support than others.

In early reading, writing and word work there are some core ideas about learning and the importance of:

1. Adults extending children’s learning
2. Children as active learners and problem solvers
3. Learning being connected to children’s worlds.

This handbook emphasises these three ideas and grounds early literacy learning in a social constructivist philosophy because adults make a difference. This philosophy views children as active learners and problem solvers and emphasises the importance of adults connecting to children’s worlds so that learning is relevant and builds on what children already know.

**The importance of early years research**

Research conducted for Sure Start in the UK has already shown that taking a young child to the library is one of the most significant things to make a difference to their later education. If they develop a clear library habit early in life, it is a massive benefit to the children (Guild 2004). Prenatal and early childhood experiences have a more powerful and long lasting effect on subsequent health, well-being and competence than was previously thought (Hertzman 2000).

- Children who begin school with low achievement in literacy (concepts about print, phonemic awareness) often live in high poverty areas
- Children with low levels of literacy prior to school have difficulty catching up without extensive parental/adult support
Building literacy before school

- Learning in the preschool years impacts on later learning
- The influence of the years before school for literacy development is clearly documented
- Unequal access to rich preschool learning opportunities exacerbates wider social and educational inequalities
- Early years education makes a difference to children's cognitive attainment and subsequent social outcomes
- Brain-based research articulates the importance of the early years of learning on brain development and later academic achievement
- Providing early years education is a better investment than paying for remediation programs later in life for problems rooted in poor early development.

Brainy babies

Babies are brainy and there is more going on than we realise. This section explores the milestones that most babies pass through in the very early stages of life. The phases of child development are important for designing and adjusting programs for babies, toddlers and preschoolers.

Early childhood development: Motor, visual, cognitive, social and emotional development.

Age divisions referred to by many child developmentalists are as follows:

- Babies and infancy:
  - 1-4 months
  - 4-8 months
  - 8-12 months
- Toddlerhood:
  - 12-24 months
  - 24-36 months
- Early Childhood preschoolers:
  - 3-5 years
- Early Childhood school age:
  - 5-8 years
The child development milestones of motor, visual, cognitive and social growth are important for planning active library programs for babies and toddlers.

**Baby to toddler development**

**How does your baby move? Motor development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average age achieved</th>
<th>How does your baby move?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Rolls from side to back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Begins to reach for things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Begins to grasp things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>Crawls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 months</td>
<td>Stands alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 months</td>
<td>Walks alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 months</td>
<td>Builds a tower of two blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 months</td>
<td>Scribbles vigorously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 months</td>
<td>Jumps in place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What can your baby see? Visual development**

| 0-4 weeks | Can focus only 25-30cm away, most things are blurred, will look at bright objects brought into their vision. Can distinguish and focus on a human face immediately after birth. Can discriminate some colour. Black and white images can be focussed on after one month e.g. checkerboard design. |
8-12 weeks | Follows moving objects with eyes, turning whole head to see. Use both eyes together, but have not enough muscle control to keep their eyes from crossing. Follow vertical movements more easily than horizontal and can now see up to two metres away. Can see bright primary colours. By three months, associates visual image with an action e.g. a bottle and being fed.

16-24 weeks | At four months babies begin to notice own hands and reach for things – the beginnings of hand-eye coordination. Has definite reactions to smiling faces etc. Can track vertically, horizontally and in a circle. Both eyes now work together and baby can now see in full colour. They can focus on things both near and far and by six months have normal 20/20 vision.

What can your baby hear and say? Language and hearing development
Source: Berk (2003) & http://members.tripod.com/Caroline_Bowen/devel1.htm

| Birth | New babies are aware of the sounds in the environment. They listen to the speech of those close to them and startle or cry if there is an unexpected noise. Loud noises wake them, and they become ‘still’ in response to new sounds. |
| 0-3 months | Babies recognise the sound of a familiar voice. |
| 4-6 months | Babies begin to respond to ‘no’. Respond to changes in tone of voice, and to sounds other than speech. Fascinated by toys that make sounds, enjoy music and rhythm, and look in an interested or apprehensive way for the source of all sorts of new sounds. |
| 7-12 months | Listens when spoken to, turns and looks at your face when called by name, and discovers the fun of games like: *Round and round the garden, Peek-a-boo* etc. It is in this period that you realise that he or she recognises the names of familiar objects (‘Daddy’, ‘car’, ‘eyes’, ‘phone’, ‘key’) and begins to respond to requests (‘Give it to Granny’) and questions (‘More juice?’). |
Building literacy before school

1-2 years
First words appear – vocabulary builds to several hundred words, object words appear first. Children also understand about turn taking in conversation and maintaining a topic. Points to pictures in a book when you name them, and can point to a few body parts when asked. Can also follow simple commands and understand simple questions. This is a stage in which they will want the same story, rhyme or game repeated many times.

2-3 years
Understands two stage commands (‘Get your socks and put them in the basket’) and understands contrasting concepts or meanings like hot/cold, stop/go, in/on. Notices sounds like the telephone or doorbell ringing and may point or become excited, get you to answer, or attempt to answer themselves.

3-4 years

4-5 years
Understands nearly everything that is said to them at home or pre-school. Speech is surprisingly articulate with complex grammatical structures.

What is your baby thinking? Cognitive development
Cognition is the mental process of knowing, thinking and learning, including aspects such as awareness, perception, reasoning, remembering, understanding and judgment.

1-4 months
Limited anticipation of events
Object permanence begin to be present
Beginnings of imitation.

4-8 months
Actions aimed at repeating interesting effects in surrounding environment
Able to retrieve a partially hidden object
Spontaneous imitation of another’s actions.

8-12 months
Intentional or goal directed actions
Improved anticipation of events
Able to retrieve a hidden object
Imitates behaviours regularly seen

12-18 months
Explores and acts on objects in novel ways
Able to search in several locations for hidden objects.
More varied experimental play
Imitates unfamiliar behaviours.
18-2 years  
Internal images of absent objects and past events.  
Beginnings of make believe play.

Do babies have friends? Social and emotional development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1-2 years | Self recognition emerges and becomes well established  
Beginnings of perspective taking. |
| 3-5 years | Self esteem is typically high with both social acceptance and social competence  
Achievement related attributes appear  
Can infer others intentions from behavioural cues  
Friendship is viewed in terms of play and exchange of material goods  
Social problem solving skills expand. |

If babies could talk they would say………..

If babies could talk this is what they may tell us about what they are learning in the first 8 months of life.

I learn who I am

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Experience</th>
<th>Baby’s Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I learn about my body</td>
<td>I suck on my fingers or hands. I study them. I discover that my hands and feet are part of me and I can move them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn to trust</td>
<td>I learn I can depend on you if you come when I cry. I feel secure when you hold me in your arms. I feel good when you smile at me. I learn my world is safe to explore when you watch over me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn to comfort myself</td>
<td>I may suck my fingers or hands it soothes me. As I grow, I can wait a few minutes because I have learned you will always come.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can make things happen</td>
<td>I can shake a rattle and make a sound. I can kick a mobile and make it move. I can smile and you will smile back at me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**I learn about my feelings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I can show you many feelings</th>
<th>I smile and wiggle to show you I like playing with you. I frown or cry when you stop paying attention or playing with me. I laugh aloud sometimes with a belly laugh.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pleasure, anger, fear, sadness, excitement and joy</td>
<td>Sometimes I need you to help me with my feelings. I need you to try to understand how I feel. I need you to comfort me when I am upset or frightened. I need you to protect me when I feel overwhelmed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I share my deepest feelings. I know and trust you</td>
<td>My smile is brightest for you. Sometimes I cry when you pick me up. Sometimes it’s because I’ve missed you. Sometimes I’m just fussy. I know you’ll understand. I can protest strongly when I am upset. I know you will be there for me no matter what. I’ll show you more of my feelings than I may show others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**I learn about people, objects and how things work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I can tell the difference between people I know and people I do not know</th>
<th>I recognize my parents’ voices. I relax more when I am with you and other people I know.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I sometimes am afraid of strangers</td>
<td>I prefer the special people in my life. I may begin to act differently and fearful of strangers, even at this young age. I sometimes cry if a stranger gets too close to me or looks at me directly in the eyes. I may cry or cling to you until I know I am safe with a new person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to be with you</td>
<td>I like to be held by you. I like to play with you. You are more interesting than any of my toys. I like you to talk softly and smile at me. I smile and “talk” back to you. You are the most important person in my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn about how the world works</td>
<td>I like to look around and see new things. I like to play games with you, like peek-a-boo and hide-n-seek. When I want you to keep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I learn to move and do</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At first, my body moves automatically</td>
<td>I search for something to suck. I turn my head when something blocks my breathing. I turn my head or close my eyes when it is too bright.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within a few months, I begin to learn to use my fingers and hands</td>
<td>I put my hand and objects in my mouth. I can hold something, let go, and get hold of it again. I can move an object from one hand to another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over time, I move my body with purpose</td>
<td>I can hold my head up. I can roll over. I can sit without your help. I have favourite positions. But I like change! It feels good to move from being on my back to my stomach to sitting up. I can crawl by myself. I may even be able to stand up if I hold on to you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>I learn to communicate and relate</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can tell you things even as a newborn</td>
<td>I cry to tell you I need you. I communicate through the expressions on my face and gestures. I have different cries, facial expressions and body movements to tell you I am sleepy, hungry, wet, frightened, uncomfortable or just need a break.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within a few months, I develop new ways to communicate</td>
<td>I learn to make many different sounds. I laugh. I use my sounds, change the expression on my face and move around to get your attention. Sometimes I may just listen to you. I love to hear your voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn to babble</td>
<td>I make some of the sounds that I hear you use. Sometimes I try to imitate you. I like you to imitate my sounds too. My babbling can even start to sound like adult speech...a question, an exclamation, a request, a song...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to “talk” with you even though I don’t yet speak words</td>
<td>I may catch your eye and smile to tell you I am ready to communicate with you. I pay attention to the tone of your voice and the expressions on your face when you talk with me. I stretch my arms toward you when I want you to pick me up. I look at you when I am ready to play. When I close my eyes or turn my head away, I am telling you I need a break. I learn how much fun language can be when you talk, sing and read with me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [http://www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org) compiled by the National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families in Washington.

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**Baby 12 weeks old at *Baby Bounce and Rhyme***

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**Communicating with babies**


Babies are very bright and clever and are naturally good communicators. They cry to say I’m hungry, cold and tired but they also watch peoples’ faces and copy them as they actively try to understand and communicate with those who care for them.
Babies are always listening
Babies have very sensitive hearing in the weeks before they are born and prefer the sound of human voices just after birth. They can identify the voices of those who look after them and turn towards their parents and carers when they hear them speak. Just the sound of a carer’s voice will soothe a baby’s crying. Babies also love sound effects, for example, ‘Aaaachoo!’, ‘boo!’ etc, as well as lots of raspberry blowing!

The eyes have it!
New born babies find the eyes the most interesting part of the face. Babies know how to use eye contact in their ‘conversations’. They gaze into peoples’ eyes when they want to play, and turn their eyes elsewhere when they are tired or bored. Babies love face to fact talk and play as well as exaggerated facial expressions and simple signs with the hands and body.

Making faces
Adults naturally use exaggerated facial expressions and sounds when communicating with babies. They like to play little games and ask silly questions, for example, ‘Peek-a-boo’, ‘Where’s your nose?’, ‘I can see you’ etc. This is dramatic behaviour and it helps to hold the babies attention and makes the way we communicate with babies fun and exciting. Adults particularly exaggerate expressions and the feelings and meanings behind the words, for instance, they open their eyes and mouth wide for surprise, they pout their lips, frown and smile.

Getting excited
Babies respond to an adult’s fun behaviour by getting excited. When babies get excited they use their whole bodies. They wriggle their toes, wave their arms, make faces and stiffen their bodies. When babies communicate it is total communication with every part of their body. Babies also make sounds to communicate, they babble, gurgle, cry, squeal, grunt etc and this is the beginning of verbal communication.

Talk to me
The amount of ordinary daily talk directed to a baby is one of the most important factors for literacy development. Talk to the baby when changing nappies, shopping, at bath time, when cooking, washing, cleaning. Talk about what’s happening, where you are going, when, why, who you will see, and how you will get there.

By singing songs and reading books, we build on all of these communications. Through rhyme and sharing books – there is more talk, cuddles, facial expressions, sounds to make, there are pictures to focus on and talk about. However, the main reason is to enjoy the experience together, to have fun, to act out and to play!

Action songs to share with babies
There are many rhymes that can be sung with babies, lap-riding rhymes, self rhymes, body part rhymes, nursery rhymes and lullabies. For more rhymes see Module 3. Babies can hold a rattle or maracas or other forms of percussion instruments.
**Hello and Goodbye**  
(Tune: London Bridge)  
Hi, hello and how are you?  
How are you? How are you?  
Hi, hello and how are you?  
How are you today?

*Lap-riding rhymes*  
Babies sitting on an adult’s lap can be bounced in time to the rhythm of the song.  

**Row, row, row your boat**  
Row, row, row your boat  
Gently down the stream  
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily  
Life is but a dream.  
Row, row, row your boat  
Gently down the stream  
If you see a crocodile  
Don’t forget to scream. Aah!  
*Parent/caregivers rock baby back and forward on their knee or on the floor*

**This is the way the lady rides**  
This is the way the lady rides  
The lady rides, the lady rides  
This is the way the lady rides  
So early in the morning  
*Parent/caregivers bounce baby on their knee for this rhyme other verses include the gentleman, the farmer and the little boy. For the lady an elegant trot is required! For the gentleman a steady canter, for the farmer a slow plod, then for the little boy an extremely fast jiggle!*

**The Grand old Duke of York**  
Oh the Grand Old Duke of York  
He had ten thousand men  
He marched them up to the top of the hill  
And he marched them down again.  
And when they were up they were up  
And when they were down they were down  
And when they were only halfway up  
They were neither up nor down.  
*Parent/caregivers can hold babies as they march or bounce them on their knee, lifting them up high and down low and finishing with a cuddle. The speed can be varied to add more fun.*

**Self rhymes**  
**Round and round the garden**  
Round and round the garden  
Round and round the garden  
Like a teddy bear  
One step, two step...  
Tickely under there!  
The adult walks their fingers up the child’s body to tickle them under the chin
Body parts rhymes
These rhymes focus on the baby

Peek-a-boo!
Peek-a-boo! Peek-a-boo!
I see you! I see you!
I see your little nose
I see your tiny toes
Peek-a-boo! I see you!
_parent/caregivers cover there eyes for this one and babies nose and toes are touched or kissed._

These are baby's fingers
These are baby's fingers
These are baby's toes
This is baby's belly button
'Round and 'round it goes!
_parent/caregivers can touch or kiss babies fingers and toes and tickle their belly button_

Clap, clap, clap your hands
Clap, clap, clap your hands
Clap your hands together
Clap, clap, clap your hands
Clap your hands together.
Other verses include:
_jump, jump, jump up high...
Spin, spin, spin around...
Give, give, give a hug...
Blow, blow, blow a kiss...
Wave, wave, wave goodbye...

Ring a ring a rosie
Ring a ring a rosie
A pocket full of posies
Ah tissue, ah tissue
We all fall down.

Cows are in the meadow
Eating buttercups
Ah tissue, ah tissue
We all stand up.
There are many variations on this one, parent/caregivers stand up and twirl baby round

Sharing books with babies
You have to play it by ear when you read to a baby. To begin look at the lists of books recommended such as _Where is the green sheep?_ by Mem Fox or the Spot books or choose any picture book that you enjoy. Over time babies will communicate to you which books they like the best, but your voice, facial expressions, and your interactions with the baby as you read, will be what baby likes best. There are books written specifically for young babies, but any picture book you or other children enjoy is suitable for this age.
Tips:

- Make sure the baby is cozy and comfortable and can see the book
- Only continue if the baby is enjoying it, if they seem bored or get distressed do something else
- Board books, cloth books and soft plastic books are good for babies of this age but be sure to share other picture books as well
- Exaggerate your voice and facial expressions, make the experience a fun one
- Include tickling, dancing and clapping as part of the story
- Point out things in the pictures and ask and answer questions as you go, e.g. ‘Where is that cheeky puppy?’ ‘Oh there he is, he’s hiding!’
- Reading should be spontaneous and happen at anytime anywhere, e.g. curled up on the couch, lying on the floor, propped up on pillows in bed
- Remember that babies use all their senses during story time, let babies smell, touch and taste the book as they listen and look at the pictures
- Many books for babies are textured e.g. with fluffy teddies or shiny paper so give them time to explore
- Change the story to make it about your baby and their world
- Be silly, act out, play and be prepared to make a fool of yourself!
Understanding the brain

The very first years of life are important for later learning. How does the brain work? How does the brain develop?
**Brain development in the early years**

**Brain Quiz**

This Brain Quiz was created to introduce some of the basic concepts concerning early brain research in a way that challenges us to think critically and creatively about what we have heard about the research. Test yourself to see what facts and misinformation you have heard concerning infants and brain development.

- **T or F** Basic brain connections are laid down before birth.
- **T or F** Babies are born with the ability to learn all the languages in the world.
- **T or F** A human baby's brain has the greatest density of brain cells connectors (synapses) by age 3.
- **T or F** Because the brain is making so many connections pre-birth to age 3, the first three years of life are the most critical for brain development. After age 3, the "window of opportunity" closes.
- **T or F** Good nutrition is one of the best ways we know to aid healthy brain development.
- **T or F** Reading to a newborn infant is the best way to help a child learn to read in the future.
- **T or F** Living in an orphanage as a baby will likely result in negative, long-lasting effects on the brain.
- **T or F** There are times when a negative experience or the absence of appropriate stimulation is more likely to have serious and sustained effects on the child.
- **T or F** The large majority of what we've learned about the brain comes from research conducted on animals rather than on humans.
- **T or F** Brain research has been misunderstood and misapplied in many contexts.

**Basic brain connections are laid down before birth.**

**True**

- During pregnancy, the basic architecture of the brain is formed. The different parts of the brain are in place (e.g., brain stem, thalamus, cerebellum). This initial development also provides basic brain functions that help the baby live.
- Although this "hardware" is laid out during pregnancy, the brain is still immature in that the "software," or the connections between different parts of the brain, are not yet formed.
- To a certain extent, formation of the connections depend on exposure to our environment--through relationships and experiences.
- Unlike the other organs of the newborn, such as the heart which is already functioning as it will throughout the child's life, the brain is not yet ready to perform all the amazing functions it will eventually be able to do. It goes through a series of developmental stages. It is following birth that experience begins to have a greater effect on brain development than it did during pregnancy (although, certain experiences do influence the developing brain during pregnancy, such as maternal health and stress, intake of drugs and/or alcohol, and quality of maternal nutrition).
**Babies are born with the ability to learn all the languages in the world.**

**True**

- The infant brain is "wired" to seek out and learn language.
- Amazingly, infants are born with the capacity not just to learn language, but to learn all languages. As researcher Patricia Kuhl from the University of Washington puts it, infants are "citizens of the world." They are able to perceive the different sounds and patterns of speech of all languages in the world. For example, at birth, Japanese babies can hear the distinction between "r" and "l", although only the "r" sound exists in Japanese. They can still hear the distinction at 6 months of age, but cannot by 12 months of age.
- Even in the womb, the infant is turning towards the melody of its mother's voice. The brain is setting up the circuitry needed to understand and reproduce language.
- Babies learn to talk by hearing language and having language directed at them in "conversation."
- Between 6-12 months, babies begin to fine-tune their ability to perceive the speech sounds of their native language as opposed to non-native language.

**A human baby's brain has the greatest density of brain cells connectors (synapses) by age 3.**

**True**

- Researchers who have studied the brains of both monkeys and humans have shown that there is a pattern of rapid synapse formation during early development.
- However, this density does not remain throughout life. After these connections are formed, there is a "plateau period" and then a period of pruning, or elimination, where the densities decrease and resemble adult levels.
- In humans, this period of elimination begins around early adolescence and continues until at least age 16.
- Different parts of the brain undergo synapse formation, plateau, and elimination at different points in development, depending upon when they mature.

**Because the brain is making so many connections pre-birth to age 3, the first three years of life are the most critical for brain development. After age 3, the "window of opportunity" closes.**

**False**

- You're sitting here learning something right now aren't you?!!
- Although brain connector density is at its highest level in the first three years of life, that doesn't mean that the brain has its greatest brain power at that time. A great deal of learning goes on after the first three years of life.
• However, the first three years are important for laying the groundwork for healthy psychological development. We know that from psychological research, particularly research on parent-child attachment, but not from brain development research. What we know from brain development research right now is that for very specific aspects of brain development, such as the visual system, that critical periods exist and thus a window of opportunity.

• The brain continues to grow and mature well into adolescence; thus, it is virtually impossible to make the general claim that the window of opportunity closes by age three.

• The brain is adaptable and flexible, although the ability to adapt changes with age and situation. In reality, there are many windows of opportunity throughout development. Knowing that the brain is more flexible than previously thought doesn't mean that it's easy to change the brain. It's an incredibly difficult challenge. Much more research is needed before we can make claims or suggestions about how to do that.

Good nutrition is one of the best ways we know to aid in healthy brain development.

True

• It is important that families provide an environment that supports health in both lifestyle and nutrition.

• Good nutrition is important for both the pregnant mother and the infant. Pregnant mothers need appropriate amounts of folic acid and iron, and should avoid nicotine, alcohol, and illicit drugs throughout their entire pregnancy.

• The developing brain craves iron. Babies need an appropriate amount of iron either via breast milk or formula in the first six months of life, and via iron-fortified infant cereals and iron supplementation after that, whether or not their mothers are iron-deficient. Iron deficiency has been clearly linked to cognitive deficits in young children. Iron is critical for maintaining an adequate number of oxygen-carrying red blood cells, which in turn are necessary to fuel brain growth. Bottle-fed babies should receive formula that contains iron.

• Breast milk contains all the amino and fatty acids needed for brain development. Some research has shown that babies who are breast-fed as compared to babies who are formula-fed have scores that are significantly higher on IQ tests.

• Children who are malnourished--not just fussy eaters but truly deprived of adequate calories and protein in their diet--between mid-gestation and two years of age do not adequately grow, either physically or mentally. Their brains are smaller than normal and they suffer often lasting behavioural and cognitive deficits, including slower language and fine motor development, lower IQ, and poorer school performance.
Reading to a newborn infant is the best way to help a child learn to read in the future.

False

- It is important to recognise that what is most important is providing a language-rich environment for children. Reading is one way, but there are many other ways as well, such as talking, singing, listening to music.
- There are a number of studies that show that when children hear a good deal of "live" language, when they are spoken to often and encouraged to communicate, they are more proficient with language than children who have more limited language exposure. For example, Janellan Huttenlocher, University of Chicago, found that at 20 months of age children of "chatty" moms averaged 131 more words than kids of "non-chatty" moms and by age two the gap had increased to a difference of 295 words. Only live language, not television, produced these vocabulary-boosting effects.
- Risley & Hart, in their 1995 book Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Lives of American Children, compared the early language environments of children from 7-9 months until 3 years, and then correlated language exposure to achievement test scores in 3rd grade. Children who heard the greatest amount of language when they were young had the highest achievement test scores, while children who heard the least amount of language had the lowest achievement test scores.

Living in an orphanage as a baby will likely result in negative, long-lasting effects on the brain.

False

- Non-responsive, inconsistent care can set children up for cognitive, social, emotional and physical problems.
- This is a complicated issue; intervention can make a difference.
- Studies of children reared in orphanages in the first few years of life suggest that children's developmental outcomes are better when children are adopted by the time they are 6 months of age (Nelson, 2000c).
- However, there are numerous instances of children who were adopted after the first year of life who experience catch-up growth and developmental improvements.
- Scientists believe that harmful behaviours or neglect in early life can affect the brain, leading to lifelong problems. A healthy and caring environment, however, can create opportunities for the child to develop to his or her full potential.
- High quality care giving experiences, particularly for young children who experience abuse or neglect, can support the healthy development of the stress system.
There are times when a negative experience or the absence of appropriate stimulation is more likely to have serious and sustained effects on the child.

True

- Early exposure to nicotine, alcohol and/or drugs can have devastating effects on the developing brain, particularly during the time during pregnancy when the brain is being formed.
- Critical periods in brain development do exist, although we have a long way to go to understand them. We know that the absence of a reasonable amount of light in the first weeks after birth alters the development of the visual system (e.g., development of binocularity is not possible), and that the complete absence of hearing language or receipt of extremely poor care (such as in an orphanage) will likely result in developmental deficits, but we still have much to learn about the persistence of these effects and the ability of the brain to overcome them.
- In general, although some critical periods do exist, the concept of sensitive periods better explains early development. Sensitive periods are times in development when certain kinds of experiences are essential for healthy development, when the absence of some kind of stimulus results in development going awry, or off-course. Compared to critical periods, sensitive periods are generally longer and suggest that there is more flexibility in the timing of input or experience to the brain and the brain's ability to learn and develop over time.

The large majority of what we've learned about the brain comes from research conducted on animals rather than on humans.

True

- The bulk of cognitive neuroscience research has been conducted on animals, such as rats and monkeys. These animal models provide us with hypotheses about how things might work in the human brain, but they are not perfect analogues. So, what we learn about animals may be meaningful but still needs to be documented in humans.
- This also means that we need to be careful about the extent to which the claims about brain research can legitimately be made about human brain development.
- Currently, a great deal of knowledge is being generated about both animal and human brain function. The core, basic knowledge on how brains develop and function is being compiled. However, as the picture is not yet complete, it is difficult at this time to use current research to inform prevention or intervention in relation to problems in the brain.

Brain research has been misunderstood and misapplied in many contexts.

True

- Many are concerned about the potential misuse of the brain research to marginalise oppressed populations, particularly children of colour or children
living in poverty. For example, the size of the brain and how the brain works has been used to rationalise oppression in the past.

- Recommendations for certain kinds of parenting practices have been offered with the notion that they are based on brain development research, when in fact, they are based in psychological and educational research. They may be fine recommendations, but they aren't based on knowledge from early brain development.
- It is important that accurate information get communicated to parents and child care providers; in making public policy; in prevention and intervention; and in providing opportunity for all children including ethnic minorities or children living in poverty.


Are there left and right brain thinkers?
The following is a very simple description of the brain and how we use it. It is important because babies are born with one hundred billion brain cells, that are not yet connected. Sensory experiences – seeing, smelling, hearing, touching, and for babies in particular, tasting – stimulate connections by creating electrical impulses across gaps (synapses) between brain cells. The development of these impulses across synapses is the basis for learning. The more we use our brains (regardless of how old we are), the more connections are made between brain cells, and therefore the more capable we are of thinking intelligently. Children’s brains are so active and absorbing so much information, that children aged between three and ten, have triple the number of synapses that an adult brain has. As children grow there are fewer synapses, but they are more organised. The reason why some synapses stay and others disappear is repetition! The ones that are used repeatedly are the ones that stay, and since we repeat things that we enjoy doing, making learning fun, is particularly important (Ghoting & Martin-Diaz 2005, p.6-7).

The human brain is actually made up of three brains in one. The basic brain controls the basic things we need to stay alive such as breathing, keeping our heart beating and the ‘fight or flight’ response. The middle brain controls our health and hormone system, our sexuality, emotions and long term memory. The higher brain (or the thinking brain) controls our ability to think, learn, reason, set goals, develop language and understand ideas, it makes sense of all the input we receive.

The brain is also divided into two hemispheres, the left and right, which are connected by a large bundle of nerves. All of us use both sides of our brains, for example when singing, our left brain will be attending to the words and our right brain to the melody. In fact when singing, the whole brain is actively involved – we use our memories, we’re aware of timing, rhythm, rhyme, the words, the tune, and even our emotions are engaged. Thus singing is a particularly powerful activity to share with young children whose brains are so rapidly developing. Although humans utilise both sides of the brain, many rely more heavily on one than the other. While this is interesting and often fun to discover, it is especially important for understanding the ways different children learn. Becoming aware of the different multimodal ways of learning, helps us provide activities that are more ‘in tune’ with each child. For example adult left brain operators generally:
• Like to start reading at the beginning of a book or magazine and work their way through to the end
• Like to get all the details first and plan things out before starting a task and will follow the instructions step by step
• Like to analyse things and figure things out
• Like being organised and tidy and have everything neat
• Solve problems logically and sequentially and are very rational thinkers
• Control their feelings
• Are good with numbers and like maths
• Are good at keeping time and don’t like to be late
• Make clear distinctions and notice differences.

On the other hand, right brain operators tend to:

• Look at the pictures first, rather than the words
• Look for patterns when solving problems
• Often ‘flip’ through a book or magazine, and just start reading anywhere
• Jump right in, following their intuition and ‘gut feeling’
• Not follow instructions or even read them at all
• Find following a schedule and arriving on time difficult
• Learn through movement, hands-on experiences, and dancing around
• Decorate their work with doodles and lots of colour
• Be very free and open with their feelings
• Be spontaneous and not very organised or tidy.

Even with young children such attributes may begin to emerge.

**Visual, auditory and physical learners**

Not only are there left and right brain operators, but there are also visual, auditory and physical learners. It is much easier, even in young children to distinguish between these different learning styles and ways of learning. Some children have to see to understand – these are the visual learners. They learn best from visual displays such as photographs, pictures, diagrams, videos and television. They like to talk to people face to face, and rely a lot on body language and facial expressions to understand.

Then there are auditory learners who learn instead through listening, they must hear to understand. These learners will listen to what others have to say but they also like to talk! Rather than relying on body language and expressions, they listen to the tone of voice, the pitch, the speed and the volume. Auditory learners are easily distracted by sounds and music.

Finally, there are the physical learners, also known as tactile (touch) learners or kinaesthetic (movement) learners. These are the children that simple have to touch things! While many physical learners are both tactile and kinaesthetic, others may be clearly one or the other. Those that like to touch and feel things and those that cannot keep still! Physical learners learn through hands-on activities and movement. They find it extremely hard to sit and listen, instead they need to be active. They like sports and games, clapping and dancing. Sitting down and reading may not be their favourite pastime, so they need stories with a lot of action.
While all young children need to be active, like listening to stories, and enjoy looking at pictures, being aware of the different ways of learning, enables us to offer more appropriate activities. Making sure you use facial expressions, that each child can see the page and that you point things out in the pictures, satisfies the visual learners. Putting expression in your voice, creating different character voices, making use of pitch, tone and pace, will help the auditory learners to tune in and concentrate. Being aware of the need to allow children moments to jump up and dance or clap, stamp their feet and wave their arms around, will also help those wriggly kinaesthetic kids – before they get bored and start acting out!

**What are multiple intelligences?**

There is also the idea that human beings have multiple intelligences* – different strengths, abilities and understandings. This is important because adults have different intelligences and so do babies. Some babies love singing and moving while others like quiet times just looking on.

These intelligences, while listed below, may not be apparent in very young children. Nevertheless finding out what intelligences children have – in other words, what they are good at, and where their interests lie – enables us to choose appropriate books, activities and games that hold their attention and motivates them to learn more. Providing different non-fiction books; including collage, drawing, singing and dancing; and outdoor activities, accommodates for all learning styles and intelligences and makes learning fun.

- **Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence** – well-developed verbal and written skills. They are good listeners, speakers, writers, storytellers and teachers. They understand the grammar and meaning of words and are able to learn other languages easily.
- **Mathematical-Logical Intelligence** – the ability to use logic and reason. These are the mathematicians and scientists of the world, they are particularly good at working with numbers, seeing patterns and connections, classifying, categorising and doing experiments.
- **Musical Intelligence** – the ability to produce and appreciate sounds and music. They can easily recognise the pitch, tone, structure and rhythm of music and are very attuned to all sounds around them. They are good at singing, playing instruments and remembering melodies.
- **Visual-Spatial Intelligence** – the ability to think in images and pictures. These are the artists, architects, inventors and designers. They think in pictures, have vivid imaginations and enjoy looking at maps, diagrams, images and movies. They have a good sense of direction and are very good at puzzles.
- **Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence** – the ability to control one's body movements and to handle objects skillfully. They have a great sense of balance and good hand-eye coordination. Thus they are good at sports, dancing and gymnastics.
- **Interpersonal Intelligence** – the ability to understand and relate well to others. They are easily able to see another’s point of view and can ‘sense’ how others are feeling. They are known as having good ‘people skills’ and encourage cooperation and involvement, striving for positive relationships at all times.
• **Intrapersonal Intelligence** – the ability to self reflect and be aware of and in tune with the ‘inner self’. They seek to understand their own feelings, values, dreams, beliefs and thinking processes. They know their own strengths as well as weaknesses.

• **Naturalist Intelligence** – the ability to recognise and categorise plants, animals and other objects in nature. These are the people who are fascinated by the world of nature and always remember the Latin names of things!

• **Existential Intelligence** – a sensitivity and concern for the deeper questions in life. Where did we come from? Where do we go? What is the meaning of life?


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**Talkative Toddlers**

‘I'm being haive!’
Two year old boy when his mother told him to behave

‘Why don't you get some expensive money?’
Three year old when told by her mother that she could get a small toy but that the ones asked for were too expensive

‘Daddy, did your hair slip?’
Three year old to his bald, but long bearded father
The age of 12-36 months is when children chatter and ask questions and explore how language works.

The research into early language
- Variations have been found in the vocabulary development of young children in high and low income groups and their future trajectories
- Children aged 10-30 months, of economically advantaged parents heard an average of 382 different words per hour. Children of economically disadvantaged parents heard an average of 167 different words per hour
- By the time children enter school, a conservative estimate is that children who speak English know 4,000-5,000 word families in oral language
- Exposure to rich vocabulary and stimulating discussion in the preschool years predicts literacy development in the first year of school and literacy in fourth and seventh grade
- Other research strongly supports the connections between children’s oral language development and academic success.

Spoken language is the base for building literacy. It is very difficult for a child to read the words in a book if they do not have the spoken word to begin with. In their well known book, *Preventing reading difficulties in young children* (1998), Snow, Burns and Griffin write that a child’s language development is one of the most important preconditions for literacy. Being able to hear language, perceive differences in meaning and articulate language is crucially important in learning to read and write. Children with intact neurological systems raised by caring adults in speech rich communities effortlessly acquire the spoken language of the community.

Oral language provides the base and foundation for written language. When children begin to speak this is the beginning of using language as a symbol for meaning. While spoken language is the foundation for written language – the two modes, written and spoken language, are quite different. Spoken language relies on the context, the here and now objects to make meaning, for example, pointing to an apple a child may say ‘Look at this one’. Written language, however, is removed from context; it is decontextualised and the writer has to provide additional information for the reader, for example, if we were speaking we could just say ‘Look at this’, however if we are writing we must add context ‘Look at this red apple’.

Language is a symbol system
Language – English, Chinese, French, Spanish – is any system of symbols that is used to communicate meaning. These symbols can also consist of sounds, finger/hand movements and print. The topic of this handbook is about language and literacy – speaking, listening, reading and writing. To simplify matters, any reference to language will refer to oral language which is communicating through speaking and listening and any reference to literacy will refer to reading and writing which is communicating through print and multimedia.
Language is made up of sounds (phonemes), words and word order (syntax) and meaning (semantics). Pragmatics is the social use of language which has to do with selecting language to suit a particular purpose, and vocabulary (lexicon) is knowledge about words and word meanings. From birth onwards infants and toddlers experiment with sounds, words and word order and by the time they are 3-4 years old have a large vocabulary of words.

**Key definitions of the components of language**

- **Phonology**
  - Phonology refers to the way sounds of a language operate.

- **Syntax**
  - Syntax refers to the rules for how words work in phrases, clauses and sentences.

- **Semantics**
  - Semantics refers to the ways that language conveys meaning.

- **Pragmatics**
  - Pragmatics refers to the ways the members of the speech community achieve their goals using language.

- **Vocabulary**
  - Vocabulary refers to stored information about the meanings and pronunciation of words.

**Phonology**

Phonology is the sound structure of speech and includes intonation, stress and timing, as well as words, syllables and phonemes. Intonation involves stress, pitch and juncture. Pitch refers to how high or low a voice is when producing a sound, stress to how loud or soft it is, and juncture to the pauses or connections between words, phrases and sentences (Morrow 2005).

The sounds of language are called phonemes. There are 44 phonemes in the English language. The word ‘cat’ has three phonemes and so does the word ‘sheep’ because in written language letters are used in various combinations to represent sounds: ‘sh’ is one sound and ‘ee’ is one sound. Phonemic awareness is the insight that every spoken word can be conceived as a sequence of phonemes. Phonemic awareness is important for understanding the alphabetic principle in English, which is, sounds are represented by letters.

**Syntax**

Grammar is the syntax or the rules by which words are organised into sentences. Grammar also includes the use of markers that indicate number, tense, person, gender and case, for example cat, cats: prince, princess: jump, jumped. Syntax refers to the ways words, phrases and clauses are structured in sentences. In English the order of the words in sentences is important, for example ‘the dog bit the boy’ has a very different meaning from ‘the boy bit the dog’. Some basic sentence patterns are:

- **Subject – verb**
- The baby cried
- **Subject – verb – object**
The baby drank milk
Subject – verb – indirect object – direct object
The baby gave Freda the bottle.

Words and word order are important in expressing ideas and in understanding what other people say. Children experiment with word order in simple sentences like, ‘Give me’ and ‘Me give,’ playing with the order of words and meanings. The grammar of young children’s beginning sentences ‘Give me’ and ‘Me give’ are shortened versions of standard grammar which would sound like this, ‘Give it to me’ and ‘I’ll give it to you.’ Syntax is recognisable and we can tell if a sentence is grammatically acceptable even when using meaningless nonsense words like the following:

Bix was plux zopt.
‘Morp when you are zopt,’ said Tjbe.

**Semantics**
Semantics or meaning is achieved by the choice of words, word order and the tone and stress placed on words. In spoken language the facial expressions and gestures affect how meanings are communicated.

**Pragmatics**
Pragmatics is the social communicative side of language. It is often taken for granted until adults work with children with autism spectrum disorder where pragmatic skills are not developed. Pragmatics involves turn taking, maintaining topic relevance, understanding gestures, tone of voice and judging what kind of language form or genre to use in different social situations. For example to facilitate interactions with others (Let’s go shopping), express opinions and feelings (This makes me feel great), provide information (That’s a digital watch), use imaginative language (I’m a movie star), when to express needs and wants (I want that bag), to regulate others (Stop that!), to inquire (How much is this?).

The ability to comprehend and produce communication is referred to as pragmatic competence which often includes one's knowledge about the social distance, social status between the speakers involved, the cultural knowledge such as politeness, and linguistic knowledge.

**Vocabulary**
Vocabulary is knowledge of words and word meanings. Pronunciation of words and knowledge about word use is important because it affects children’s comprehension of spoken and written language. In order for an emergent reader to get meaning from text most of the words represented by the text must be in the reader’s oral vocabulary. If the reader can recognise most of the words in the text they can use context clues to figure out the meaning of a few unfamiliar words.

A writer’s choice of words is affected by their oral language vocabulary. Children with rich oral language experiences at home before school tend to become early readers. By the time children enter school, a conservative estimate is that children who speak English know 4000-5000 word families in oral language.
Children combine all aspects of language phonology, semantics, grammar, pragmatics and vocabulary to communicate meanings. Acquisition of each one facilitates mastery of the others.

**How words develop**

**Babies—birth to age one**

At about 3 months a baby will turn their head towards voices and recognise when parents are speaking by stopping crying. A baby indicates contentment and amusement by smiling. They repeat sounds (e.g. cooing).

At 4 to 7 months, a baby notices new sounds such as the telephone. They respond to ‘no’ and to changes in tone of voice and pay attention to music. Early sound discrimination skills are beginning to emerge. Sounds have a more speech-like babble to them (e.g. ‘baba,’ ‘mama’). When playing alone or with parents, the baby makes gurgling sounds. Infants tell you by sound or gesture when they want something. By 6 months of age, long before they are ready to talk, babies start to organise speech into the phonemic categories of their own language and they stop responding to sound distinctions that are not useful in their language community (Berk 2003).

At 8 months to one year, an infant is beginning to recognise their name and can turn their head or look up when you say their name. The baby listens when spoken to. The baby is beginning to recognise common words (e.g. ‘cup,’ ‘juice,’ and ‘bottle’), and to respond to requests like ‘Come here.’ Infants imitate speech sounds, and utter their first words, usually things that are meaningful to them such as Mummy, Daddy, biscuit, milk, bottle, bye-bye and no. The baby more frequently uses speech or non-crying sounds to get and keep attention. Babbling has repeated consonants and vowel sounds such as ‘mama mama’.

**Toddlers—age one to three**

By the first year the child’s babbling reflects the sounds and intonation patterns of the child’s native language. Comprehension of words emerges before the ability to produce words and this occurs at around the time of the child’s first birthday. Children begin to participate more actively in listening to simple stories, songs and rhymes. They can follow simple commands and can point to a few body parts. Children can point to pictures of things in a book when the adult names them.

Children begin to use telegraphic speech from 12 months on usually noun and verb but no content words, ‘Daddy home’, ‘get milk’, ‘bottle fall.’ Some 1-to-2 word questions, such as ‘What's that?’ are used. Children are beginning to put 2 words together; for example, ‘more juice’ and ‘get up.’ They use many different consonant sounds at the beginning of words. By 18 months most children can pronounce most of the English phonemes and use 9-20 words.

**Age two to three**

Between 2 and 3 years of age, three word sentences appear. In English they conform to a relatively fixed word order, subject-verb-object. At the same time a grammatical explosion takes place as children add grammatical morphemes – small markers that change the meaning of sentences, as in ‘John’s dog’ and ‘he is eating’. Children may hear words but not be able to pronounce them, for example a mother I know said ‘Can
you see the rabbit?’ and the child answered, ‘See wabbit’ Mother replied, ‘It’s rabbit, not wabbit’. ‘I know it’s wabbit’, said the toddler.

**Preschoolers—age three to four**

Most children at three to four years of age have a large vocabulary and more and more complex sentence structure. They can use plurals and regular verbs but often over generalise plurals and verb inflections, for example, these words are irregular plurals ‘sheep’, ‘mice’, ‘children’. Children at this age may say ‘sheeps’, ‘mouses’ and ‘childs’ as they over generalise the rule of adding ‘s’ to form a plural. Similarly the past tense of these verbs are irregular ‘sleep’, ‘come’, ‘run’ and children may say ‘slepted’ ‘comed’ and ‘runned’.

Children may talk to themselves as they complete tasks and it seems as if they are trying to articulate their actions. A four year old boy was noticed talking to himself by researcher Lesley Morrow (2005), saying ‘I’m making a nice picture. I’m making colours all over. I’m painting, pit, pat, pit, pat. I’m going back and forth and up and down. Now I’m jumping as I paint’. As he talked and painted, he did exactly what he said, words and actions coinciding.

**Age four to five**

Children continue to learn new vocabulary and more complex sentence structures. At aged five they may have a vocabulary of between 2500 and 5000 or so words. Some have difficulty pronouncing sounds /l/, /r/, and /sh/ at the end of words. If they do not have a word for a particular situation they may create their own. They talk a lot and use words to control situations.

**Summary of development of language**

The age at which children say their first words varies considerably from child to child. Developmental guidelines – from beginning to emergent – provide a guide but they are not perfect. The following guidelines were developed with children who speak English from middle income children in modern industrial cities but the notion of ‘universal norm’ must be interpreted carefully. Developmental guidelines are however useful if parents think their children may be delayed and if so intervention may be useful.

**Language development 0-4 years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Language skill</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Makes sounds in response to stimulus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Makes cooing sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>Makes sounds such as giving a ‘raspberry’</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 months</td>
<td>Single syllable babbling (‘ma’, ‘pa’, ‘ba’, ‘da’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 months</td>
<td>Multiple syllable babbling (‘mama’, ‘dada’, ‘baba’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 months</td>
<td>Uses mama and dada (or similar sounds) to call</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 months</td>
<td>Uses some words besides mama and dada</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has a vocabulary of four to six words</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Can express some wants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 months</td>
<td>Can be understood by parents about half the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 months</td>
<td>Can form two word sentences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
29 months: Has a 50 word vocabulary
34 months: Uses ‘me’, ‘you’, ‘my’
          Uses prepositions
37 months: Can carry on a conversation
          Can identify and use ‘cup’, ‘spoon’
          Can be understood by strangers about three quarters of the time
47 months: Can be understood by strangers most of the time.


**Children construct language**

Children actively construct language to communicate and they often create amusing comments as they try to work out how the phonology, grammar, semantics, pragmatics and vocabulary works in language. The following comments show how children may interpret language and concepts.

‘I’m being naive!’ – two year old boy when his mother told him to behave.

‘Why don’t you get some expensive money?’ – three year old when told by her mother that she could get a small toy but that the ones asked for were too expensive.

‘Daddy, did your hair slip?’ – three year old to his bald, but long bearded, father.

‘Daddy picked them up and looked underneath. I think it’s printed on the bottom’ – three year old when his mother asked how his father knew the genders of four new baby kittens.

‘They didn’t see it – it was all cut off!’ – two year old when his mother asked how his grandparents liked his new haircut.

**The importance of vocabulary**

Rich language experiences in the early years play an important role in developing children’s literacy and vocabulary skills in the later years of schooling. Researchers Dickinson and Tabors (2002) found the scores that children achieved in kindergarten were highly predictive of their later scores in reading comprehension and receptive vocabulary in fourth and seventh grade at school. Other research strongly support such findings, that children’s exposure to varied vocabulary and stimulating oral language experiences in kindergarten, are strongly related to later academic success.

**Exposure to varied vocabulary**

Knowing the ‘right word’ is vital if one is to communicate information clearly. Large vocabularies have long been known to be linked to reading success. They are also a signal that children are building the content or information knowledge about the world that is so critical to later reading (Neuman 2001).
**Opportunities to be part of conversations**

Extended conversations (or discourse) are those that require participants to develop understandings beyond the here and now and that require the use of several sentences to build a linguistic structure, such as explanations, narratives or pretend talk.

**Home and early learning environments that are intellectually and linguistically stimulating**

Children are most likely to experience conversations that include extended discourse, and are rich with vocabulary, when able to obtain and read good books and when provided with a curriculum that is varied and stimulating.

Adults who use interesting and varied words help to create a vocabulary-rich environment – children should be exposed to and encouraged to use a variety of words. For example when reading Eric Carle’s *The very hungry caterpillar* a child’s vocabulary can be extended by using words such as ‘huge’ and ‘enormous’, when describing the big, fat caterpillar. Or when discussing the final page and the beautiful butterfly he becomes, using words such as stunning, magnificent, or spectacular also enhance a child’s vocabulary. Another example of how conversations can support vocabulary learning is provided below when a kindergarten teacher talks with four year olds engaged in dramatic play.

Child: I’ll check the oven  
Teacher: What **temperature** does it have to be put at? When you put on the oven, you have to put it at a certain **temperature** to see how hot it is. So, you might turn it to 100 degrees, or 200, or 300, or 400, or 500  
Child: 500  
Teacher: 500? That’s **usually** that’s the **hottest**, and that’s **broiling**.

The teacher introduces various interesting words and gives brief explanations of each. She intentionally focuses on fostering language development.

To test whether the home environment or preschool makes the difference, Dickinson and Tabors (2002), developed several hypothetical situations to investigate: high-home/low-preschool language and literacy environments; and low-home/high-preschool language and literacy environments. Their results indicated that excellent preschools can compensate for homes that have well below average language and literacy support. 

This is where libraries can make an enormous difference. Since families are encouraged to bring their young children to the library it is important their language and literacy experiences there are really engaging and also of a high standard. For example, research in Canada shows that early literacy support programs for parents can make a difference to children. Vancouver’s public libraries are well placed throughout the city, but there is a vast difference in the rates of circulation of books for young children. The most well used libraries are those in the south central parts of town, where librarians have done substantial outreach work in the community,
showing that this has a direct impact on the use of libraries. (Hertzman, McLean, Kohen, Dunn & Evans 2002).

**Play and language development**

Children’s spoken language is encouraged through play, through reading books aloud, and through conversations.

**Playful language and early literacy development**

Play has many functions, for example, play may involve risk taking, turn taking, reasoning and understanding. Children can modify their problem solving strategies, correct their mistakes, rethink their plans and achieve higher levels of performance. Play offers varied contexts for acquiring literacy skills as well as acting out the social roles associated with literacy. In imaginary play, players can become part of a community where meanings are communicated through gestures, words, scripts, roles, rules and other symbolic tools. Woods (2004) provides an example of playing with words, rules and various roles when she writes of three girls aged 3.5-4 years of age in the home corner.

**Home corner bedtime stories**

(Sophie comes into the home corner, alone. She speaks into a mobile phone)
Sophie: Going to bed now Mummy. It’s night time. Got dolly.
Goodbye.

(Sophie lies down, pulls the sheet over her and goes to sleep. Tasha and Beth come into the home corner. Tasha sits next to the bed)
Tasha: I’ll be the Mummy. I’ll read the bedtime story
(Chooses book from the nearby shelf)
Beth: I’ll read the story
Tasha: No, I’m the Mummy. You be the Daddy
Beth: Daddies can read stories
Tasha: No. Mummies read stories
Beth: Well my Daddy reads me stories
(Tasha reads a pop-up book showing different insects)
Tasha: Now let’s see. Here’s the naughty spider and he’s popping out for some dinner
Sophie: Don’t read me spiders. I’ll get bad dreams.

The above example demonstrates the children’s knowledge of:

- Knowing about and negotiating roles and rules
- Reproducing cultural knowledge about bedtime routines
- Challenging gender stereotypes
- Conveying meaning through symbolic actions
- Understanding that print conveys meaning
- Acting as readers.

Play in literacy rich play centres helps build connections between oral and written expressions. In imaginary play with peers children often use more complex syntax and longer sentences in the play setting. They also show they are aware of how language
works and what language is appropriate. This is an important step in language learning as the children are recognising spoken language as a tool for representing meaning and also that written language can be used to represent meaning. Play may be the place where children first begin to experiment with narrative – with a beginning, different characters, setting a problem, then providing a resolution.

**Dramatic (or imaginary) play**
In childcare centres and preschools, dramatic or imaginary play is a common sight, many centres have a ‘home corner’ set up in which children act out ‘real life’ situations. Such play can be extended to become ‘real life’ literacy play as well. While libraries may be more limited in their abilities to provide such opportunities, ‘real life’ literacy play can become a natural part of library storytime. The following ‘real life’ centres and props promote literacy related play. If children are surrounded by literacy related materials they are more likely to use this in their play.

**Office centre:** Paper, pens and pencils, computer, keyboards, telephones, files and folders, books relating to the kind of business performed e.g. travel books

**Restaurant:** Menus, bills and receipts, order forms, cash register, cardboard check out scanners and EFPOS machines, swipe cards, and advertising

**Highway:** Cardboard safety signs for traffic, street signs, billboards, police tape, note taking equipment, mobile phones

**Shopping centre:** Paper, pens and pencils, food packages, food signs and prices, cash register, check out scanners, swipe card machines.

Much simpler activities can also be effective. For example, after reading *Maisy goes shopping*, a whiteboard or butchers paper could be used to write out a menu together for an imaginary barbeque or street party. After exploring the book *The Eleventh Hour*, again the whiteboard could be used to come up with a list of party food with everyone’s favourite foods included. This may also provide an opportunity to talk about other cultures, their different foods and traditions. Adults could also assist children to write their own party invitations.

Examples of real life literacy activities may include taking an order in a restaurant setting, writing out a doctor’s prescription or even a parking ticket! After reading *The Jolly Postman* by the Ahlberg’s, letters could be written to family members, sports stars, cartoon characters, Hi-5 or The Wiggles! Cardboard post boxes could then be made to post them in. Finding out what the children are interested in and familiar with in their local culture and communities, will enable appropriate books and activities to be chosen.

It is also important that families understand why such activities are offered, that it’s not just because they’re fun. It is important that we don’t just do these activities, that parents and carers understand why we do them. Providing a language and literacy rich environment is a good way to demonstrate to parents the types of things they could do at home and to model appropriate interactions with children.
Librarians are not teachers but they should be playing an essential role as educators by designing and delivering emergent literacy programs for young children as well as educating parents in their role as their child’s first teacher (North 2003, p.69).

Many parents need encouragement and support in providing early learning experiences for their child. Many adults who are not readers themselves are aware of the importance of reading in their children’s lives. They are keen for their children to have opportunities they did not have and are attracted by public library programs that improve their confidence and ability to succeed as their child’s first teacher (North 2003, p.69).

**Children’s books**

Reading books aloud is one of the best ways to introduce new vocabulary and syntax. Picture books are the best source of new vocabulary with more than 30 rare words introduced per 1000 words (Hayes & Ahrens, 1988)

| Frequency of Word Use in Major Sources of Oral and Written Language (Hayes & Ahrens, 1988) |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| I. Printed texts | Rare Words per 1,000 |
| Abstracts of scientific articles | 128.0 |
| Newspapers | 68.3 |
| Popular magazines | 65.7 |
| Adult books | 52.7 |
| Children’s books | 30.9 |
| Preschool books | 16.3 |
| II. Television texts | | |
| adult shows | 22.7 |
| children’s shows | 20.2 |
| III. Adult speech | | |
| Expert witness testimony | 28.4 |
| College graduates talk to friends/spouses | 17.3 |

The connection between having stories read aloud and children’s language development is very strong. Books don’t have to be narratives, they may be information books as well. Some children prefer to have information books read aloud and these texts provide a different vocabulary and the use of scientific language. Rereading old favourites is important as children learn the books off by heart and then find it easy to match spoken words with the written word. Close adult-child interactions also spark discussion about the ideas as well as the pictures in the book. Children may ask questions and adults can respond with further questions.

It is important however, that questions asked of young children, are open-ended. Open-ended questions require more than one word answers, such as ‘What else do you think the hungry caterpillar could eat?’ ‘What kinds of things do you like eating?’
‘Which part did you like best?’ Examples of closed questions include, ‘Do caterpillars like eating leaves?’ ‘Do you like eating strawberries?’ ‘Did you like the ending?’ However, reading and story time should not become a lesson or question and answer time. Too many detailed questions can stifle children’s interest in reading, which should be primarily for enjoyment.

When adults read aloud books that engage children they can pose questions that promote discussion. In the example below the storyteller reads a fantasy book about a child who finds a dinosaur named Danby and brings it home to live. The dinosaur is overwhelmed by the loud noises that he hears around him. The storyteller extends the conversation to encourage the children to analyse the dinosaur’s reaction and to recognise and describe the emotion of fear.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storyteller:</th>
<th>How do you think Dandy feels, Susan?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan:</td>
<td>Bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storyteller:</td>
<td>Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan:</td>
<td>Everyone take a look at the picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storyteller:</td>
<td>I think he not only feels sad, he feels very –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children:</td>
<td>Happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storyteller:</td>
<td>I don’t think so. What did Dandy do when the truck came?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd:</td>
<td>Shook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storyteller:</td>
<td>He was scared – he shook. And what did he do when the airplanes zoomed overhead? And when the train roared by? Did Dandy like loud noises?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children:</td>
<td>No!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storyteller:</td>
<td>How is Dandy going to feel with all this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children:</td>
<td>Bad. Sad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storyteller:</td>
<td>Not only sad. What else?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children:</td>
<td>Mad!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James:</td>
<td>Scared!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storyteller:</td>
<td>You got it, James! He’s going to be very scared!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Dickinson & Tabors 2001, pp. 190-91)

The adult’s role in extending children’s vocabulary is crucial. How can adults encourage children to share ideas? What kinds of questions can adults ask to generate talk? Interestingly, children often engage in extended conversations more, if the adult talks less. By listening more, adults become more attuned to children, and children also gain because they have to put their ideas into spoken language.
Practical suggestions for language development

**Adult support for language development**
The way adults talk with children is vitally important. Adults’ talk includes descriptions, instructions, expression of personal thoughts and feelings, questions, statements, explanations and responses. Very often the adult talks too much and children are not given the time or the opportunity to express ideas. It is hard but sometimes adults have to bite their tongue and not put words into the children’s mouths. Adults can try to:

- Avoid monopolising the conversation
- Provide opportunities for children to talk
- Ask questions only when the adult does not know the answer
- Avoid closed questions that just require a one word answer
- Give children enough time to think and get the words out
- Listen to children.

**Open-ended questions**
Open-ended questions extend children’s thinking and conversations, closed questions generally require one word answers. An important way to encourage children’s talk is to ask open-ended questions about what the child is doing or saying.

Examples of open questions include:
- Tell me about this?
- How did you make this?
- What makes you think that?

Examples of closed questions include:
- Is this a tower?
- Do you like making things?

Listening to a child’s conversation about something that is important to them and then asking open-ended questions will prompt more language use.

**Use new words**
Use new words when possible, Roskos, Tabors and Lenart (2004) suggest that vocabulary is learned in context gradually over many encounters with a new word again and again. They suggest that adults use new or unusual words whenever possible such as:

- I’m **famished**, let’s stop for some pizza
- That dog is a **stray** dog because he’s **roaming** around without a leash.

**Scaffolding children’s language**
There are many ways for adults and caregivers to scaffold (extend and enhance) children’s language development so that new vocabulary and syntax is introduced.

**Expansions** – Adults can restate the child’s language and expand it to introduce new words or new syntax.
Child: Dog sleep
Adult: Yes the dog is sleeping. He’s tired.

**Extensions** – The adult restates the child’s comments and provides more information.
Child: Dog sick
Adult: The dog is very sick
Child: Dog sick
Adult: The dog has a cut leg.

**Repetition** – The adult repeats all or part of the child’s comments.
Child: Dog sick
Adult: Yes the dog is sick. The dog is sick.

**Parallel talk** – Adult describes the child’s actions.
Child: Dog sick
Adult: Sammy is looking at the sick dog.

**Self-talk** – Adult describes actions or thoughts out aloud.
Adult: I feel sorry for the sick dog.

**Vertical structuring** – Adult uses questions to encourage the child to produce longer more complex sentences.
Child: Dog sleep
Adult: Where is the dog sleeping?
Child: Dog on chair.

**Fill-ins** – The adult says a sentence that prompts the child to complete the sentence.
Adult: The dog is sleeping because he is…
Child: Sick!

**Dramatise a story**
Read a simple or familiar storybook to the children. After the reading, distribute some props that refer to the story and help them dramatise what has been read. For example, after reading *Goldilocks and the three bears*, designate some space with chairs and a table to be the bears’ house. Place three plates on the table, etc. Encourage the children to use their own words, along with the book’s dialogue to elaborate or extend the story.

**Describe a picture**
Describing different pictures can be a very beneficial activity for oral language development. Cut out pictures from various sources such as magazines, advertisements and old books. Have children describe the pictures. Use pictures with increasingly more complex themes for this purpose. You will need to prompt children to elaborate the descriptions of their pictures through questioning. You might ask questions such as the following: ‘Who (or what) is in the picture?’ ‘What is its size?’ ‘Tell me about the colour of the picture’ ‘When and where does the picture take place?’ ‘Tell me about the shape of the picture’ ‘Tell me more about the background’, You should be able to describe the picture fully based on what the child or children have told you. Later, ask the children to make up a story based on the picture.
**Summary**
From birth onwards infants and toddlers experiment with sounds, words and word order and by the time they are 3-4 years old have a large vocabulary of words. By the time children begin school they have a vocabulary of between 2500 and 5000 words. Children’s vocabulary prior to school is highly predicative of reading and writing in first, fourth and seventh grade. Attentive adults are important for extending children’s oral language, phonemic awareness and writing skills.

Real life literacy play stimulates the use of language for a range of purposes. Activities to extend children’s language may include reading aloud, dramatising stories, drawing and writing activities and storytelling. The ways adults pose questions and scaffold children’s language is also important for language and literacy development.

**The big picture: phases of literacy development**
Learning to read, write and gain word knowledge is a developmental process. The following phases in literacy development are used in this handbook – Babies 0-12 months; Beginning (0-3); Early-emergent (3-5 years); Emergent (P-Kindergarten); Early (K-Year 1); Transitional (Years 1-2); and Extending (Years 2-4) – so that we can envisage the development between what children can do and more sophisticated understandings. Reading and writing often occur as parallel processes, for example a child at three years of age may be reading by exploring the pictures in books, and beginning to understand that signs and symbols in books represent a message, and attempting to write by exploring scribble.

These phases in literacy development are a guide and are not closely age related as some three year olds may have sophisticated concepts about print and some five years olds may require extra support to develop these concepts.
### Phases in literacy development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Babies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-12 months</td>
<td>- Babies listen to language and may begin to say one and two syllable words for favourite objects and events. - Holds a book, turns pages. May sniff, touch suck to explore the board book, cloth book or picture book. Looks at pictures.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Claps, waves and develops fine motor skills to hold objects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beginning</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toddlers 1-3 years</td>
<td>- Begins to write or scribble. - Begins to separate scribble that represents writing and the more free flowing scribble for drawing.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretends to write on paper with crayon, paint or pencils.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Understands that signs and symbols tell a message.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Early-emergent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschoolers 3-5 years</td>
<td>- Uses scribble with random letters and numerals. - Uses initial consonants to write words, e.g. P for people.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Chooses favourite books, joins in with books read aloud, memorises rhymes and predictable books. - Turns the pages uses left to right directionality.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scribble can contain drawing and writing. Invents some letters and repeats these.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emergent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Records the initial and final sounds in a word. - Begins to use vowels and consonants PEPL for people, WUNS for once.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Begins to grasp concept of words. - Left to right, top to bottom directionality. - Reads word by word matching spoken word to print. Can retell a simple story.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writes letters and words. Leaves spaces between words.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Begins to understand a sentence and some punctuation.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understands that another person can read the written words.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early</td>
<td>Can write many high frequency words</td>
<td>May still read word by word match print and voice</td>
<td>Writes about topics that are meaningful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can write many one syllable three and four letter words including blends</td>
<td>Uses multiple sources of information and self corrects if the reading doesn’t make sense</td>
<td>Can write in simple sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can write one syllable word families with onset and rime</td>
<td>Adjusts reading style to the type of text. Retells the text in sequence. Increasing fluency of reading and reads vocalising aloud</td>
<td>Is aware of and can use most forms of punctuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building a vocabulary of topic and interest based words</td>
<td></td>
<td>May use repetitive sentences such as ‘I like …’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Transitional  | Uses a range of strategies to write words; visual for high frequency words, phonics and morphology | Reads with more fluency in phrases rather than word by word | Can write several sentences with several ideas and includes punctuation |
|               | Recognises that some sounds are represented by two letters for example ship, rain, nose and moon | Reads silently | Records own ideas. Checks spelling and punctuation |
|               |                                | Can retell main ideas and summarise what has been read | The speed of writing increases and the ideas rather than the mechanics of writing takes over |
|               |                                | Uses a variety of strategies to comprehend texts |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extending</th>
<th>Changes style of reading to suit the text type</th>
<th>Writes a range of texts types suited to different audiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses visual, morphological and phonic strategies to spell complex words</td>
<td>Careful close reading for directions and research reports and faster reading for narrative and descriptions</td>
<td>Revises, edits and proof reads, checks for flow and meaning of texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary suited to different genres such as scientific language with information texts and descriptive figurative language with narratives</td>
<td>Uses a range of reading strategies to identify new words and comprehend texts</td>
<td>Uses a range of punctuation conventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can construct a paragraph with topic sentence. Can link several ideas in a formal piece of text</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Babies**

Babies like to explore books. They explore them by touching, looking, tasting, smelling and listening to the words read aloud. They love to listen to stories told aloud with lots of repetition, rising dramatic action and comforting resolutions. They also enjoy information books with photographs about objects in their world. They learn to turn the pages, look at the pictures and join in with well known stories. They may pick up ask to hear stories read again and again.

**Beginning 1-3 years**

Toddlers are beginning a language explosion where they love to listen to stories and love to talk.

In writing they learn to hold crayons and pencils and scribble. They are learning that writing conveys a message – a way to communicate – because they have seen the people in their family write. The scribble can be large circular movements and in time the scribble changes.

In the beginning phase the scribble slowly changes into drawing and writing like scribble. Writing like scribble can look like the beginning of wavy lines whereas the drawings are free flowing and circular. The writing is usually linked like handwriting and the distinction between symbols for drawing and writing are commencing. The writing may mean something quite different each time it is read.
Early-emergent 3-5 years

In the early-emergent phase children actively join in with an adult reading their favourite stories. If a child has had a book read aloud to them each day then by age three they will have heard over 1000 stories. Many books are asked for again and again and children like to memorise rhymes such as Humpty Dumpty and predictable books such as Brown bear, brown bear what do you see? They turn pages from left to right and play at reading aloud to themselves. Some children attend to the words at this stage and begin to ‘read’ the print.

Their writing becomes a mixture of drawing and writing and sometimes replicates picture books so there is print on the page with a large scribble drawing. Children begin to write letters and numbers realising that there are individual symbols to communicate meanings. Some words and letters are copied, particularly the child’s own name, or the first letter in their name. Letters may be invented as the child explores the symbols figuring out the features of different letter and numerals such as F E 3 B 8 which all look similar.
Emergent
In the emergent phase children learn the concept of a word and they begin to read each word aloud realising that each written word has a spoken word association. This word by word reading may be known as voice pointing or word pointing as they connect the written word with the corresponding spoken version. When the words don’t make sense the child rereads and self corrects. At this phase children can retell the events that occur in a simple story.

In writing, children’s understanding of a word is developing and there are spaces left between each word. The children begin to understand the meaning of a sentence and are developing ideas about punctuation such as comma, question marks, full stops and quotation marks.

In word knowledge children listen to words and record the initial and final sounds with associated letters. The words children write may include some vowels based on the sound the child hears and the letter that best corresponds. For example sometimes the letter name is used for a sound such as CAK for ‘cake’ where the A is the name of the letter yet also fits the long /a/ sound, similarly LIK for the word ‘like’ the vowel is the name of the letter. Invented spelling is common as children match the sounds they hear to the letter names or sounds associated with letters. In the following example a boy tells us he likes playing soccer and football, using his own invented spelling.

Emergent writing

Early
In the early phase of reading, some print to voice matching continues. Concepts of print such as directionality, top to bottom, left to right are well under control. The child’s reading is usually vocalised and even if asked to read silently there may be sub-vocalising as the child problem solves to identify new words. The child is using visual information to read the printed words and also uses the syntax and the meaning and self corrects if the reading doesn’t make sense.

In writing the child writes simple sentences with most forms of punctuation, for example capital letters, full stops, quotation marks and questions marks. Often the word ‘and’ is used repetitively to link ideas – ‘…and…and…and…’. Some repetitive sentences may also be found – ‘I like…. I like…. I like…. ’ These sentences are known as sentence stems and they occur in children’s beginning reading books.
Many of the high frequency words recognised in reading, words like ‘the’, ‘was’, ‘is’, ‘a’, are now also used by the child in writing. Often the first 20 high frequency words, including the child’s name, are used confidently in writing. The spelling of three letter words using phonics becomes more common and groups of words in word families, ‘bat, cat, fat, sat’ occurs as well as lists of words with the same initial consonant, the ‘s’ words or consonant blends such as the ‘st’ words.

![Early writing example]

**Transitional**

At this phase children are fine-tuning reading and writing strategies before becoming fluent readers and writers. The child has built up fluency when reading aloud and chunks together the words in phrases, rather than word by word reading. Reading silently occurs and changing the form of reading to suit the particular text is occurring. For example narratives may be read quickly and information texts with factual details may be read more slowly and deliberately. Children at this phase have built up a repertoire of strategies they use to understand the meaning of a text, such as posing questions, organising and classifying information into graphic organisers.

In writing the child has developed greater ease with the mechanics of writing such as letter formation and writing linked script, so the writing is faster and more efficient. Paragraphs elaborating on one idea may be written and the writing drafted several times, proof read, revised and edited.

At this stage children use a variety of spelling strategies, at times using phonics, and at other times morphological base of words to spell, such as happy, unhappy, happiness; medicine, para-medic and medical; and port, import, export, portable, porter. They realise that some words do not fit common patterns and need to be learned by memory.
Extending

In the extending phase children can write quite elaborate texts and use a variety of text types suited to different audiences. They are familiar with revising and editing writing and read and reread their writing to check for meaning and flow of the text.

In word work children use a variety of spelling strategies to spell complex words: phonics, visual and morphological strategies. The vocabulary that children use is suited to the different genres, for example, scientific terms are used within scientific reports and descriptive language used with narratives. Children’s reading is silent and they read quickly and fluently adapting their style of reading to suit different text types. The child will use detailed reading for procedures and reports and skim texts for information to answer questions. The child has a repertoire of strategies and can articulate what strategies are important for different tasks.
Theories about how children learn

Our theories about learning have an impact on all we plan and organize for young children. This handbook draws on social constructivism as a view of how children learn.

Social constructivism


For Dewey the process of learning how to learn was central. Children need to explore how they learn and how knowledge develops by asking questions and then actively seeking answers. For adults this means inviting children to think about their thinking strategies, exploring how they learn. This is like inviting children into a ‘learning club’ to better understand how knowledge is gained and how it is structured and organised.

Five of Vygotsky's ideas are very important for educators of young children:

1. Children construct knowledge
2. Learning leads development
3. Learning can’t be separated from its social context
4. Language plays a central role in intellectual development
5. The concept of the ‘zone of proximal development’.

1. The first idea, that children actively construct knowledge, means they need to be actively engaged in organising and exploring ideas. In other words, being involved in hands-on experiences – science experiments, constructing block and cardboard structures, and exploring the properties of living and non-living things – are all important, so too is the adult in supporting children to classify and organise information, by asking questions and helping children reflect on their thinking.

2. The second idea is that learning leads development which means if the child is given a label, for instance, the name of an animal such as a ‘zebra’, this will accelerate the child's ability to understand the concept that animals can be named and classified into groups. If the child is at the zoo looking at a zebra and the adult tells the child the name of the animal, ‘zebra’, this will enable the child to recognise other zebras at the zoo, zebras in picture books and also to recognise zebras in other representations such as drawings. This labelling, linked to a real experience, leads the child into exploring and classifying other animals.

3. Vygotsky's third important idea is that learning cannot be separated from its social context. Peers assist and support the learning process. However, it is not simply a matter of pairing children for peer support, as a crucial factor in collaboration is having a common goal. Working to achieve a common goal involves each person asking questions, explaining and bringing different points of view. In a nutshell if children don’t have the same goal – to read a good book, to play a game on the computer, or create a shared big book about a classroom event – then collaboration is not effective.
4. The fourth point is that language plays a central role in intellectual development because it is through language that the higher mental functions, such as symbolic thought, are communicated. In the example above, an adult supports a child's greater understanding of the concept of zebra by focusing the child's attention on the features of the zebra asking questions to help the child recognise a zebra in other situations, in books, photographs and in drawings. Language helps to refine thoughts leading to higher mental functions.

5. The fifth and the most important of Vygotsky’s ideas is the zone of proximal development. This concept has influenced adults to scaffold (extend) learning so that children achieve success. According to Vygotsky, the child has two levels of performance: the first is the level that the child is capable of achieving independently; and the second is the level of performance that the child reaches with assistance. The distance between these two levels is known as the zone of proximal development. For instance, an adult sitting beside a child who is drawing a picture of a zebra might focus the child's attention on the colours of the zebra. The adult might ask the child ‘what colour will you draw the zebra?’ In this way, the adult moves the child from the level of unassisted learning to the level of assisted learning within the child's zone of proximal development. With help from an adult, the child may now begin to use accurate representational colours in drawing the zebra and this in turn may lead to drawing other animals with attention to colour.
Break out activity
Discuss Hart and Risley’s findings in small groups

Hart and Risley
The Importance of the Home Environment

The Study
Hart and Risley (1995) have carried out a unique long-term investigation of the direct effects of home language experiences on children’s development. They looked at the verbal interactions between parents and their children and analysed tape recordings taken from the age of about 10 months to 3 years. There were 42 families involved and these were classified into three main groups: professional families (where parents were professors/lecturers); working class families; and families who were on welfare support.

Findings
Hart and Risley found there were differences in the language abilities of the children from the three types of homes. Although children from all of the groups started to speak at about the same time and also developed good structure and use of language, their vocabulary varied significantly. By age three, they observed the vocabulary for children in the professional families was about 1100 words. For the working class families it was about 750, and for the welfare families it was just above 500.

They found in professional families, children heard an average of 2153 words per hour; in working class families 1251 words per hour and in welfare families only 616 words per hour. Expanding these figures to cover 4 years of experience would mean children from professional families would hear 11 million words, 6 million for a child in working class family and 3 million for a child in a welfare family. One can easily see how such differences would affect later literacy learning and how important it is to provide language rich environments for young children.

Hart and Risley also identified a number of key features that could be grouped into five main categories of parent behaviours:

1. ‘They just talked’- generally using a wide vocabulary.
2. ‘They tried to be nice’- using high rates of approval and few prohibitions.
3. ‘They told children about things’ - language had a high information content.
4. ‘They gave children choices’ - children were asked about things, rather than simply being directed.
5. ‘They listened’ - responding to what children said rather than just telling them what to do or making demands.

When these key features were combined there was a strong relationship with children’s general linguistic and intellectual development.

Module 2: Connecting with communities

- Connecting with homes and building on the language and literacy resources in communities
- How libraries can access the ‘funds of knowledge’ in language and literacy resources in homes and communities
- DVD on literacies in homes and communities with a particular focus on technology and new literacies
- Break out activity: Ways libraries can connect with communities.

‘It takes a village to raise a child’
‘A child does not grow up only in a single home’
‘A child belongs not to one parent or home’
‘Regardless of a child’s parents its upbringing belongs to the community’
(African proverbs)

It is important for adults to learn about children’s homes and communities to be able to make connections between what children already know or are interested in and what children need to learn to be readers and writers. Many parents and caregivers want to be involved in teaching their children, and they enjoy reading to children and hearing them read, among a host of other activities.

Watching Tom!

The following are brief observations made of baby Tom who has been read to from birth and is now 14 months old. Tom adores books and being read to and has a large collection from which to choose, he also visits the library for story time, bringing home new books each time.

At 2 weeks
Tom is lying in his baby capsule and starts to get a bit restless. Mum says, ‘Have you had enough of lying there, just a minute, I’ll get you a book’. She returns with a picture book, opens it to a colourful page, and holds it just 25-30cm away from his face. Tom immediately quietens down and gazes intently at the pictures. Mum talks to him as she points out things in the pictures, pausing between each thing to give him time to see them. ‘What can we see here?... Oh look there’s a little dog… and a duck on the water… quack, quack says the little duck… woof, woof says the dog’. She waits a few seconds and slowly turns the page. ‘Oh look, there’s a fire engine… and a truck…’. Tom continues to gaze intently at the book as they ‘read’ together. This continues for a further five minutes, until Tom has had enough and looks away.
At 4 months
Mum is sitting cross legged on the floor with Tom in her lap, together they are reading Teddy bear, teddy bear. Tom is smiling and watching and jigging up and down with excitement. Mum reads the rhyme and points out the teddy as he does each action. She finishes the book and goes to put it down and get the next one. Tom immediately cries and reaches for the same book. ‘Oh you want that one again? Shall we sing it this time?’ She repeats the story this time singing the words. Tom is delighted and smiles and giggles and looks up to smile at everyone else in the room. After this he is happy to change to his all time favourite book about Maisy Mouse. Interestingly, while he obviously likes Maisy, it is not until Maisy’s friend Taloola appears that Tom chortles with delight and waves his arms in glee!

At 6 months
At six months Tom is now a seasoned book reader and knows exactly what to do. He likes to hold the book while you read and when presented with a lift the flap book, he immediately reaches for the flap on each page, never tiring of the joy at finding out what’s underneath! He knows exactly which flaps lift up, down, left, and right, he knows which way the levers move and which way the tabs pull. Although at six months, the control over his hands and arms is limited, he does each task with surprising ease.

At 8 months
Tom is now a very active baby, crawling from place to place. His books are kept at floor level and he accesses them throughout the day, happy to just flip through them on his own, or bringing them to others to read for him. Both Mum and Dad continue to read to him regularly. Maisy of course is still a favourite, but now non-fiction style board books and books with rhymes and songs are also popular. He loves hearing animal noises, car and truck noises (which Dad is particularly good at), and smiles and waves his arms to join in singing.

At 12 months
Tom is now keen to make the animal noises himself, although they all seem to say ‘wo wo’! He points out objects on his own and will also point to other familiar things when asked, such as dog and aeroplane. When given two books for Christmas, the baby’s encyclopaedia, while full of wonderful pictures, is soon pushed aside to make room for the rhyming story *Five little ducks went out one day*. This is board book using photographs of plastic ducks in the bath. When the first page is read to him he seems to really enjoy it, but when the second page is sung, he is entirely engaged, watching the actions with a big smile, immediately recognising the different ways this book can be enjoyed.
Families have changed

In traditional families there is a father, a mother and children however in many families the family structure is not standard or traditional. Some children live with their grandparents or one of their grandparents. Some children live in blended families with step-brothers and sisters and a step-mother or father. Many children live in two houses where they spend one week with the mother and one week with the father. Some families are extended with aunts and uncles or friends living in the house.

Some children live with foster families and some children are adopted from families within the same culture or from very different countries and cultures. There are families who speak English at home while others speak Chinese, Malay, German, Spanish or one, two or even three of over hundreds of languages spoken in Australia.
today. Some families may be fluent in several languages but insist on only speaking English at home and in the community. Other families choose to send their children to special language and culture schools, for example Korean or Greek schools.

There are children whose parents and caregivers may both be employed and have little time for leisure, or both parents may be unemployed. The traditional roles of father working and mother at home is decreasing with the large percentage of mothers now working. The high incidence of divorce and the tendency for mothers to have custody of the children, has led to and an even high percentage of single parent, and in particular, single mother families. Studies conducted in the 1990s by the US National Center for Education Statistics showed that children were more likely to be successful at school if their fathers were interested and involved in their education, regardless of whether they lived with the children or not (Ortiz 2002).

**Getting dads involved**

With such changes in the family structure many fathers have far less time to spend with their children. Many fathers like to do physical activities with their children, but they should also be encouraged to spend time reading, exploring books, or sharing a literacy activity together. However, men are often unsure of where to start and what to do. Men can easily become involved in any of the literacy activities discussed in this handbook, but may need encouragement to begin. For many men, school was not an enjoyable experience, which of course is the case for many boys today, because of this, men may dislike literacy activities, especially reading aloud.

Fortunately there are many different strategies men can employ to overcome such feelings, for example, a discussion of the pictures first may be a way to ease into reading. Helping fathers choose appropriate books may be a start, some may feel decidedly uncomfortable reading about fairies, but be happy to share a picture book about dogs. Others would be more comfortable exploring a non-fiction book together with their child, rather than a story book or book of rhymes. Using humour also helps, encourage fathers to create funny character voices, make silly sound effects for animals and cars, or perhaps acting out stories could help ease the embarrassment of reading. For just as many boys are tactile, kinesthetic learners, so too are many men, and may instead enjoy moving around the room to tell a story!

Men also tend to have different reading habits from women. Sporting and fitness magazines feature highly, as do car and computer magazines, newspapers, manuals and maps are also read more frequently by men than women. To some these texts may not be seen as appropriate for young children, however, this is not the case. All of these texts can be explored, enjoyed and read with young children. Fathers should build on their own strengths and interests, if they like to read sports magazines, then they should be encouraged to share this interest with their children.

Instead of reading men may choose instead to tell stories. Children like to hear about their father’s hobbies, what they do at work, or what they did when they were young. Any literacy activity with young children is important to share, not just reading. Fathers may be far more comfortable with hands-on, practical experiences, than joining in with imaginary/pretend play. Simply talking about what they are doing and why, as they fix the car, is a valuable literacy activity. Fathers are good at pointing out signs and things they see as they drive. Fathers are good at explaining how things
work, how things are made and where things come from, all of which are fascinating topics to young children. Fathers may therefore enjoy non-fiction picture books to stories, rhymes and poems. We need to ensure fathers that any talking, listening, reading, writing, or singing activity is important to share with their children. Fathers should be encouraged to become role models and demonstrate how they use literacy in their everyday lives.

Other ideas may be found at:

http://www.mnfathers.org/

http://www.dadsmakeadifference.com

http://fatherhood.hhs.gov
   http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/factsheets/fact20000617.html

http://www.minnesotahumanities.org/Literacy/dad.htm

http://earlyliteracy.psesd.org/parents/maleinvolvement/

After work or just before bed is a wonderful time for Dad’s to share books with their children

**Literacy in different families**

A highly influential study by Heath (1994) explored different family and community literacy practices. She observed children in their homes and communities as well as the school environment and observed similarities and differences in the practices in each situation. The three communities she studied were named Maintown, a white middle class community; Roadville a white fundamentalist Christian working class community; and Trackton a working class, Black community. The research study showed that the children of Roadville and Trackton communities were less successful at school, yet both communities placed a high value on success at school.

Several ideas from Heath’s study are critically important. First, the concept of the home culture, is the culture the children learn as they grow up:

> [T]he culture children learn as they grow up is, in fact, ‘ways of taking’ meaning from the environment around them. The means of making sense from
books and relating their contents to knowledge about the real world is but one ‘way of taking’ that is often interpreted as ‘natural’ rather than learned (Heath 1994, p. 73).

The ‘ways of taking’ from books are as much a part of learned behaviour as are ways of eating, sitting, playing games, and building houses.

Secondly, each community’s ‘ways of taking’ from the printed word and using this knowledge are interdependent with the ways children learn to talk in their social interactions with caregivers. Both talk and engagement with print were interdependent. The key concept which draws together ‘ways of taking meaning’ from written sources across communities is that of literacy events.

Familiar literacy events for mainstream preschoolers are bedtime stories, reading cereal boxes, stop signs, and television ads, and interpreting instructions for commercial games and toys. In such literacy events, participants follow socially established rules for verbalising what they know from and about the written material. Each community has rules for socially interacting and sharing knowledge in literacy events (p. 74).

School oriented parents or mainstream parents in the years before school give their children, through modelling and specific instruction, ‘ways of taking from books’ which seem natural. In some communities the ways of schools are very similar to the ways learned at home; in other communities school ways may be in conflict with home-taught ways.

The following is condensed version of the three communities.

**Maintown**

(A white middle class community)

Children growing up in mainstream communities like Maintown are expected to develop habits and values which show their membership in a ‘literate society’. The children learn certain customs, beliefs and skills in their early experiences with written materials; the bedtime story is a major literacy event which helps set patterns of behaviour that recur through the life of mainstream children and adults. Children have years of repeated practice with talking about books and taking meaning from books. They know how to display or show an adult their skills and strategies and have learned to listen and wait for cues from the adult that signal when it is appropriate to display this knowledge.

This learning has been fine tuned and its habits are highly interdependent. Patterns of behaviours learned in one setting or at one stage reappear again and again as these children learn to use oral and written language in literacy events and to bring their knowledge to bear in school-acceptable ways.

In Maintown there is a focus on what-explanations. ‘What is the word?’ ‘What is the book about?’ Children learn to pick out topic sentences, write outlines and answer standardised tests which ask for the correct titles for stories and so on.
Roadville
(A white fundamentalist Christian working class community)
Adults in Roadville believe that teaching children the proper use of words and understanding of the meaning of the written word are important for success. Adults repeat the learning of literacy events they have known as children for example they discussed how their parents had insisted they read it right, say it right.

Children were not encouraged to move their understanding of books into other situational contexts or to apply it in their general knowledge of the world about them. There are lots of skills activity books and workbooks on colours, shapes and letters. Children are given practice in the linear sequential nature of books; beginning at the beginning, stay in the lines for colouring. Draw straight lines to link one item to another, write your answers on lines, keep letters straight, match the cut out letter to diagrams of letter shapes.

The differences between Maintown and Roadville are substantial. Roadville parents do not extend literacy events beyond book reading. They do not connect items or events in the real world to a similar event in a book. Any fictionalised account of a real event was viewed as a lie. Roadville’s church and community life admit no story other than that which meets the definition internal to the group. Children were not taught to decontextualise their knowledge, or fictionalise events known to them, and shift them about into other frames.

Heath writes that when the children from Roadville go to school they perform well in the initial stages of each of the three early grades. They often know portions of the alphabet, some colours and numbers, can recognise their names, and tell some of their address and their parent’s names. They will sit still and listen to a story, and they know how to answer questions asking for what-explanations. When the adult finishes reading a story and asks questions such as, ‘What did you like about the story,’ relatively few of Roadville’s children answer. When asked what would you have done if you had been Billy [story’s main character] Roadville children most frequently say ‘I don’t know’ or shrug their shoulders.

Trackton
(A working class, Black community)
In the Trackton example children learn by experience about what things mean. One parent said, ‘Ain’t no use me tellin’ ‘im: learn this, learn that, what’s this, what’s that? he just gotta learn, gotta know; he sees one thing one place one time, he know how it go, see sump’n like it again, maybe it be the same, maybe it won’t’. Parents do not believe they have a strong tutoring role in this learning. They provide the experiences on which the child draws and reward signs of their successfully coming to know. Children are continually presented with almost continuous communication. They do not decontextualise; instead they heavily contextualise nonverbal and verbal language.

When adults read they may do so in pairs or in a group. One person reading aloud for example from a brochure on a new car decodes the text, displays illustrations and photographs, and listeners relate the text’s meaning to their experiences asking questions and expressing opinions. Then the group as a whole may summarise the written text to construct a meaning for the brochure.
In school, Trackton children have skipped learning to label, list features and give what-explanations for example when adults ask ‘What is happening on this page?’ ‘What is the main idea?’ ‘What does the person feel?’ The children may need to have the mainstream or school habits presented in familiar activities with explanations related to their own habit of ‘taking meaning’ from the environment. Such simple natural things as distinctions between two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects may need to be explained to help Trackton children learn the stylisation and decontextualisation which characterises books and much of school learning.

**Indigenous literacy**

In Australia the literacy outcomes for Indigenous children are lower than other community groups. Family interaction patterns in Indigenous communities may be different to the interaction styles in school. In Indigenous communities children are often encouraged to be independent, self reliant, resilient to teasing and bullying and to take care of younger members of the family (Malin, Campbell & Agius 1996). Unfortunately these family interaction patterns may be misconstrued by outsiders from a different culture with different values. For example encouraging independence can be construed as children not being adequately supervised or disciplined.

Along with different child rearing practices the degree to which Indigenous students are socially included and supported within the organisation of the classroom can have significant implications for their health in the longer term. According to Malin (2002) the broader societal picture is lived out in the microcosm of the classroom. She writes that lack of control over destiny and social exclusion promotes stress hormones which in turn affect health.

Malin explains the stressful situations that occurred for Naomi, a five year old Aboriginal child in a mainstream school. Many incidents pointed to her social exclusion including the behaviour of other students towards her, particularly after she had received a reprimand. They would make faces at her, move away from her, declare that they would not play with her, or refuse her requests to play with them. Sometimes she would offer them food or money in an effort to win their friendship. Often the adult's behaviour towards her also excluded her.

Throughout the year, the teacher ignored or failed to understand Naomi's efforts to share jokes with her or chat with her. It was apparent that Naomi lacked credibility with the teacher, who often double checked on what Naomi said she had done outside of school; the teacher's low expectations of Naomi resulted in her sending another child on errands with her; and also resulted in her double checking that Naomi's competent work was indeed hers. Two years after these events, when Malin questioned Naomi about whether she remembered sitting in 'time out' with her face to the wall. She commented that the experience had been a 'horrible' one for her.

Naomi's experiences of invisibility and lack of recognition and validation of achievements are consistent with the ‘invisibility syndrome’ (affecting many, not just Indigenous, children). Such an experience is stressful and can provoke a range of emotions including disillusionment, anxiety and anger. Both the receiving of low levels of social support, or being socially excluded are associated with higher stress levels. Flinn (1999) found that such factors as punishment, conflict, social exclusion and the like contributed to an associated increase in colds and flu.
In Indigenous communities a common and perhaps epidemic problem is hearing loss due to Otis Media, a middle ear infection which persists if untreated. Otis Media may affect the development of auditory discrimination and processing skills and as a consequence may reduce phonological awareness, short-term auditory memory skills, auditory sequential memory skills and thus numeracy and literacy skills.

Understanding the different funds of knowledge is important for teaching Indigenous children and there are particular styles of teaching that may be more successful that others. Being aware of the different child rearing practices of Indigenous families, helps us understanding their children more. The following table may help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babies are seen as ‘helpless little things’</td>
<td>Babies are seen as ‘small adults’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babies sleep by themselves in their own cot in their own room away from the family and often left to cry alone</td>
<td>Babies sleep with family members, never left on their own, considered cruel to leave a baby crying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babies are encouraged to sleep at set times</td>
<td>Babies fall asleep whenever they are tired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babies are fed at regular times often at four hourly intervals</td>
<td>Babies are fed whenever they are hungry and are often breast fed to sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family are encouraged to be quiet around baby</td>
<td>Family life continues as normal, babies are part of regular noisy family life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet training occurs at a certain age and taught by the mother</td>
<td>Toilet training is very casual and learnt by copying older siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children are constantly protected from harm, cuts and bruises are kissed and ‘made better’ with band-aids, cuddled until tears stop</td>
<td>Young children are left to tumble around and play together, adults rarely get involved leaving kids to sort it out, distraction is used to stop tears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children are kept away from dangers such as fire or knives and not allowed to touch at all</td>
<td>Young children allowed to experiment but situation is controlled by adults e.g. can touch but not be burnt/cut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children are taken everywhere and do not learn their way around</td>
<td>Young children quickly learn about their surroundings and gain a good sense of direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children are trained to be good listeners and to follow instructions, verbal instructions constantly given</td>
<td>Observation is considered more important than listening. Children learn to observe and experiment and learn by experience, verbal instructions are rarely given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication occurs mainly through speech, children are taught to converse and respond verbally</td>
<td>Communication occurs in many ways, body language, facial expression, sign language/hand signals and speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children learn about time early, ‘bedtime’, ‘bath time’</td>
<td>Time is not taught/adhered to, nor spoken of to children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children have their own toys and possessions, they may be taught to share but expect things to come back</td>
<td>Children may be given things but they share them with everyone e.g. clothes, toys, money, no focus on ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual effort highly valued, children learn to do things on their own to get help maybe seen as cheating</td>
<td>Group effort and support highly valued, children are helped by older peers, reinforcing learning through observing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children encouraged to be quiet, in school, at mealtimes, near bedtime</td>
<td>Children always make noise and have fun if things go quiet mothers worry!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only parents are allowed to discipline the children</td>
<td>All family members discipline each others children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline is given with strong/harsh words, verbal reasoning, time out sessions, even smacks</td>
<td>Discipline is in the form of gentle teasing and scaring. Positive behaviours are demonstrated/ focused on instead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline occurs through parents seeing behaviour as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’</td>
<td>Adults do not judge child’s behaviour, children are given free choice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Local funds of knowledge
Families and communities can have very different ‘funds of knowledge’. Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) described ‘funds of knowledge’ as the tools, strategies and activities families engage in to live their lives. Funds of knowledge are not just a bank of ideas. Finding out about community funds of knowledge is crucial if one is to unite with and relate to the children we come in contact with. Making connections with children and their families is a way to make activities meaningful. Children develop funds of knowledge in activities such as shopping, food preparation, family celebrations and sporting events. Funds of knowledge are not taught directly but are shared activities with families and communities. Building on and valuing children’s funds of knowledge encourages motivation and participation. For example, if we learn a family member is a dentist then reading William’s Steig’s Doctor De Soto will bring about much enjoyment.

Finding where the child ‘is at’
To be effective the first step to take is to find out where the child ‘is at’. Sociocultural theorist McNaughton (2002) explains the concept of finding where the child ‘is at’ as recognising and building on children’s current knowledge and skills. This is where the
Building literacy before school

local community and family funds of knowledge becomes important. If neither the adult nor the child can figure out where the other ‘is at’ the dynamics of the relationship can produce very negative results. Unless one of the parties modifies the system it is almost as though both adult and child conspire in a downward spiral of more and more limited learning and teaching. This downward spiral of losing more learning is what is known as the Matthew effect: ‘For those who have will be given more. Those who do not have, even what they have will be taken away from them.’ (Matthew, 25:29, The Holy Bible, New International Version).

Building on the familiar

Building on the familiar is linked to making connections to children’s worlds. Building on the familiar means finding out what children know about and can do and using this as a vehicle for literacy learning. Finding their interests – television shows, videos, computer games, books, sports and other activities – analysing what is involved in these activities and incorporating them into the literacy activity. On a simple level it may be that the child needs help with letter identification and you know the family loves going to fast food outlets. Using the leaflets or advertisements or catalogues from these stores are a great source of letters which can be categorised in various ways according to capital or lower case, according to similarities, or cut out and rearranged to make other words and sentences.

Another example is a child who is keen on a particular football team and goes to the game each week. The names of the football team are always printed up in the local paper and this can be used in a variety of ways, to learn how to read and write new vocabulary such as uniform, football, umpire, goal, kick and so on. If the child needs help with spoken language such as forming simple sentences then talking about the football team may be the place to start. Chances are the child has lots of information to share about his or her team.

Computer games, videos, visits to friends, going fishing, fixing things like fast cars, making pizzas, shopping are all possible activities that children have lots of knowledge about and can be used in lots of innovative ways.

Activity: connecting with children’s funds of knowledge

The following mini case studies are about Erin, Christianne and Pete who were all in the same classroom in the first year of school. There are some similarities between Heath’s research into three communities and these case studies.

What are the funds of knowledge within these case studies that can be drawn out and used to promote literacy development with each of the children?

Erin at home

Erin was the youngest of five children and both parents were unemployed. Erin’s mother, Eva, suffered from clinical depression and Erin’s father, Steve, decided to resign from his job to look after her. Both parents were regular visitors to the school attended by Erin’s older siblings. Steve was Chair of the School Council. Erin always accompanied her parents in dropping off and picking up her older siblings. Erin’s mother said she was ‘bored stupid’ at home and wanted to go to school.

In the girls’ bedroom there were two bunks and three shelves of books. On these shelves are the children’s collection of about 50 Golden Books and about 140
Lollipop Books. Eva bought the Lollipop Books, which cost about $2.00, each time she went to the supermarket and she also kept the girls’ books neatly organised from easy texts to the more difficult Enid Blyton books. Eva said that Erin knew all the books off by heart. Erin learnt the books off by heart because the older children in the family had read them to her many times and they insisted on word perfect reading.

**Christianne at home**

We first met Christianne when she was 4 years old. Her preschool years were spent between her parents’ house and her Grandmother, Yaya’s place, both of which she considered home. Her Greek Grandmother read Greek story books to Christianne and translated English songs such as Jingle Bells into Greek so they could sing together.

Playing school was important for Christianne because her mother, Robyn, was a primary school teacher. Even when she began school, Christianne was aware of the concept of ‘homework’ from watching Robyn, and would join in by doing her own ‘homework’ such as colouring in. Robyn consciously prepared Christianne for school by introducing literacy activities. Christianne was encouraged to learn her letters by looking at a pictorial alphabet board. Games such as ‘I spy’ were used to teach initial sounds. Her mother taught her word families.

‘Cat’ was her first word. I said ‘Well what happens if we change that first letter?’ So we learned the ‘at’ words. Then I’d say ‘What’s going to happen if we change that letter?’ And then I tried ‘mat’ and ‘rat’ working on that word family.

Children’s lives are grounded in the environments they inhabit. These environments are important influences on their development. When there are commonalities between them, children have the opportunity to link one environment to another, and move from one to another relatively easily. When there are differences however, children are involved in negotiating ‘how to be’ in each environments.

**Pete**

Pete’s extended family is large, there are uncles, auntsies and grandparents, who are related to Pete’s mother, living in the same suburb. Pete’s father’s family lives in Queensland and he has not had much contact with them since he left home at 13 years of age.

The family has weekly get togethers and the family laughs and jokes a lot. In fact the tale they tell, with some amusement, is about last year when Pete was four years of age. He was playing with a cigarette lighter, and set his bed alight by accident. He wouldn’t come out from under the burning bed because he thought he would get into trouble. The house burnt down and the family lost everything, photos, furniture books and all kinds of momentous, but no one was hurt. Now there are few books in the house and not much furniture and fortunately, his mother commented wryly, one good thing the family did was get household insurance which enabled the couple to rebuild.

Pete’s Dad is very keen on building model Harley Davidson bikes and is drawing a large motor bike mural on Pete’s bedroom wall. He and Pete don’t read much but they love racing and fast cars, going to the drag racing together and both have motor bikes for ‘bush bashing’. Pete rides his motor bike over the nearby paddocks near his house.
Pete and his Dad watch lots of television, sports and the Foxtel discovery channel. They have computer games like Nintendo and both males in the family play these games together. Pete watches his Dad make motor bike models or work on the mural in his room, the interactions are demonstrations, not verbal instructions.

Pete’s Dad, said he shows Pete how to do things whether it’s drawing or making models of motor bikes. Pete’s mum said that Pete has a mind of his own and if you can show him, not tell him what you’re trying to say, then he’s happy.

Pete’s parents claim that children learn through experience and it doesn’t matter how much you tell them they have to learn through their mistakes. The parents do not believe they have a strong tutoring role in this learning: they provide the experiences on which Pete draws and reward signs of success. The parents had a view of ‘Let them be kids while they can’ and being a kid meant playing outside with wheel toys, or inside playing with computer games or watching TV.

**Helping parents and caregivers understand about literacy**

Parents want their children to be successful in school, but few realise the importance of the years before school and the role they can play in their child’s future. Public libraries are in a unique position in that they are able to help families, regardless of socio-economic status, to introduce literature to children and parents should be a primary role of the young peoples services librarian. By doing so public libraries are investing in their own future.

- Naming/kissing/tickling body parts as you dress or change nappies, ‘Where’s your tummy? – here it is!’
- Talking about what you are doing as you go about your day, ‘We need to do some washing, let’s find the socks, here a green one and here’s another green one, these two match. Now we need to find the shorts’
- Counting things and measuring things when you cook, ‘How many eggs? – one, two, three, and one cup of milk’
- Using your voice

**Helping parents and caregivers understand about early learning**

All parents and caregivers want their children to be successful in school, but few realise the importance of the years before school and the role they can play in their child’s future. Public libraries are in a unique position in that they are able to help families, regardless of socio-economic position, by introducing them to the world of books, teaching them about early literacy, and offering a range of activities to introduce children to the joy of learning.

Introducing literature to children and parents should become a primary role of the young peoples services librarian. Our first responsibility should be to young children not served by other libraries. Public libraries should develop programs and services that invite people with young children to use the library (North 2000, p.58).
Those with little or no contact with babies have no idea just how much they are really learning or doing or how they are learning at all. They see babies as helpless and unable to do anything. Many parents and caregivers underestimate their role in their child’s education. They may also see child care and kindergarten as places where children ‘just play, they don’t really learn anything’, believing that learning mostly takes place in school. Similar questions and comments to the following are often heard:

- How can a baby play games?
- What can a baby do, they can’t really do anything
- They’re just helpless little things
- They can’t do anything for themselves.

However, from our studies so far, we can see that babies are in fact extremely adept at communicating (and getting what they want!) and are learning a great deal.

A child who is rarely spoken to or read to in the early years may have difficulty mastering language skills later on. A child who is rarely played with may have difficulty with social adjustment as she grows… Chances are a child submerged in language from birth will learn to speak very well. A baby whose coos are met with smiles, rather than apathy, will likely become emotionally responsive (Silberg 1999, p.7-8).

Early childhood advocate Jackie Silberg has written numerous books on how to interact with babies and toddlers. These books are not textbooks, there is very little reading required. They are practical books for parents and caregivers, with simple instructions and lots of illustrations. Silberg’s books not only provide literally hundreds of games but also a brief explanation of the learning that takes place. Titles include:

- Games to play with babies
- Brain games for babies
- Games to play with toddlers
- Games to play with two year olds
- Brain games for toddlers and twos.

Silberg emphasises the fact that the simplest of games can have profound affects. Activities as simple as naming, kissing or tickling body parts as you dress or change a baby, helps increase a child’s vocabulary and demonstrates what language is for. Naming things, ideas and feelings, talking about what you are doing – ‘We need to do some washing, let’s find the socks’ – increases vocabulary so children too can learn to question, describe, explain and express themselves. Such simple activities form the basis of literacy learning and show how we use language in our daily lives. The same can be said for numeracy, by counting out and measuring things when you cook, ‘How many eggs? – one, two, three, and one cup of milk’, develops an understanding of mathematics and how we use it everyday.

Hearing rhymes in songs and stories, in other words attending to the sounds as opposed to the meanings of words, helps form the basis of phonological awareness. When singing we often break words up into syllables and sounds, providing a basis
for future spelling strategies. Varying the volume and speed of verses in songs, shows baby that not only is language fun, but that we can use it in different ways.

As children grow they take great delight in nonsense rhymes and being silly. Holding the book upside down, or pointing out an elephant and calling it a duck, shows children that books and language can be lots of fun. By pointing to pictures of things as you read the words shows the connectedness of illustrations and text. As children get older, pointing to the words themselves, demonstrates the relationship between letters and sounds. Playing with words and sounds, by coming up with words that rhyme (it doesn’t matter if they’re nonsense words – that’s half the fun); by thinking of other words that start with ‘d’; by letting children finish familiar sentences as you read, all help improve reading success later in life.

Sharing lots of books with young children is wonderful, but exploring books in greater depth is also important. This is particularly so for children just beginning to grasp different concepts, for example, if you read a book about opposites, encourage children to think of more opposites. If you read a book about feelings, try to help children to express their own feelings. Having children retell stories in their own words is also an important learning tool. Encouraging conversations by looking closely at the pictures, bringing in real life artefacts that appear in books, such as shells, toys, leaves, rocks, hats etc, all help extend language and learning. Collecting environmental texts is also a way to encourage discussion, for example, adverts, catalogues, menus and flyers.
Break out activity

Ways libraries can connect with communities.

The funds of knowledge A-Z

The following is a brainstormed list of possible items, events and everyday activities that can be used to connect the children’s funds of knowledge in families and communities.

Could these ideas work in a library?
How could they be adapted to the library situation?

A Alphabets
Make an alphabet frieze on squares of paper and cut out letters and pictures of objects from catalogues and magazines. Paste the cut out letters of the alphabet onto a square of paper and then paste pictures of objects that begin with the letter in the square. Another kind of alphabet is an alphabet book that can be made using plastic folders with many plastic sheet protectors inside. Inside each plastic sheet protector, or plastic sleeve the child may place candy bar covers, packets from the supermarket can be added. For example in the Cc page there may be pictures of carrots, cucumber, Coco-Pops, Coke and so on, making sure there are healthy choices, not just junk food!

B Books
Collect many books on very different topics. The books may be information books rather than narrative texts which are often used as early reading texts. Many children, especially boys, prefer to read information books on animal welfare and care or fixing and making things or cooking. Other children may like story books such as fairy tales instead. From these collections select books to read together.

C Comics
Comic books contain pictures and words. Comics can be found in sections of the newspapers and in actual comic books. Comics can be read aloud, cut up into frames and made into games and puzzles to be remade or to change the storyline of the comic. Children can draw comics and make up new versions of the comic.

D Digital camera
Many families have digital cameras and take photographs and download them to make electronic books/slideshows about visits, celebrations, and family holidays. The child can tell the story or information about the photographs and parents or caregivers can write/type the words for the child.

E Environmental print
Environmental print may be street signs, car number plates, signs at shopping centres or petrol stations, bill boards, traffic signs and brand names on cars, clothing and a range of different items that may be for sale. One of the best known environmental print sites is the golden arches where parents drive down the road only to find that their children notice the sign and ask for a hamburger. The pictures, symbols and words can be used to teach children to read print.
F Food - recipes for cooking and food packets
Cooking together either with a recipe or just talking about what to cook and how to
cook, teaches children vocabulary about ingredients and the processes used in food
preparation. Shopping for food also provides written signs and symbols where
children experience how symbols, either alphabetic or numerical, can communicate
information.

G Games
There are many games and activities linked to television and movies. There may be
stickers, booklets and activities specially designed to build on the television or movie.
Alternatively visit your local toy library and borrow from a wide range of literacy
games and activities.

H House maintenance
Some families like to renovate and repair at home. They may have this knowledge
passed on from family members or they may purchase DIY (Do it Yourself) manuals.
The diagrams and instructions are useful for learning to read and write. Encourage the
child to take an active and safe part in these activities.

I Internet
Many children who have access to computers like to go online to various search
engines to find answers to their questions. Children are reading computer screens and
the various logos as well as using the computer keyboard where they may recognise
upper and lower case letters, numerals and other symbols.

J Junk mail
The catalogues and advertising leaflets that come into houses and schools can be used
to make word walls and posters and they can be added to folders of what children can
read. The folders can be used as a portfolio of ‘I can read this’ where all the symbols
the children can read, for example milk cartons, pizza leaflets and more can be added.

K Knitting, sewing and knots
Many families engage in knitting and sewing clothes. Some use books or manuals to
do this and others may share this information by talking about it. The patterns and
instructions can be shared at school as well as the different design choices. Knots are
used in gardening, in fishing and in many household tasks. The types of knots can be
discussed and perhaps the instructions about how to tie knots can be read together.

L Library
The community library is a resource available to most families and it is a place where
DVDs, Talking books on CD-Rom, the Internet and books of all descriptions can be
accessed for free. Many libraries have regular programs for babies and toddlers and
the librarians themselves are involved in storytelling activities.

M Movies and DVD
There are large spin off products from movies targeted at the child audience. Some of
the books or booklets produced may be just at the right time and at the right level to
get children to want to read and write. Associating reading and writing with a great
experience at the movies is an excellent idea.
N Newspapers
Newspapers are relatively inexpensive and can be used for many different literacy activities from cutting and pasting to searching for information about television programs, the weather or sales advertising. Newspapers are a cheap source of paper for children to draw and scribble on and it doesn’t matter if it gets torn. Children soon learn the difference between paper to draw on and good books.

O Other literacy things
Just make a game of finding other literacy related things in your own community and environment. Look out for: bus and train timetables, signs in shop windows, advertisements, community notice boards, opening times to the local library, oral stories, traffic signs, recycling signs etc.

P Pasting
Provide children with a scrapbook in which to paste a range of pictures cut out of newspapers, magazines and junk mail. This will enable you to have a chat about each of the pictures in their book while you are also developing their oral language skills.

Q Questions
Try and provide plenty of opportunities for children to respond to open ended questions that provoke thinking rather than questions that only provide yes or no responses.

R Restaurants
Restaurants and fast food stores often have placemats and napkins that children can draw on or play games. The menus on paper can be collected and cut up for their pictures and words.

S Shopping, supermarkets, signs
The products in a supermarket have brightly coloured labels and a range of different fonts describing the names of the product and product details. In supermarkets there are often promotions with large posters and banners and these can be used in literacy learning. Many young children’s parents work in retail and talking about items for sale, how they are advertised and marketed may be information that children hear at home. Bringing the shopping topic into school may take the form of setting up a shop or inviting parents to talk about their work.

T Talk, dialogue, conversation, vocabulary
Talking with children is a taken for granted ‘fund of knowledge’ in communities. Parents, grandparents and other family members share ideas about fixing household appliances, maintaining cars, shopping, cooking and other forms of food preparation. The more interesting words the child hears on a range of topics the more likely they are to have a good vocabulary. Children usually have a vocabulary of about 5000 words by the time they begin school.

U Under, up and over
Make literacy fun and look for ways to include language in everyday things. Go to the local park and use the directional language to move under, along, and over the equipment. By using language in context, children expand their vocabulary and
understanding of the meaning of different words. When you are out walking, always
look up to see what signs you can see and talk about them with children.

**V Video to book**
Children enjoying viewing various TV programs and videos. Tap into this enthusiasm
by letting children view a video of a particular program and then read the book/s as
well. You could also read the books first before viewing the video. There are many
stories that have been made into movies, stage plays or TV shows, for example, the
Hairy Maclary stories by Lynley Dodd.

**W Write**
Children learn by seeing things modeled for them. Let children see you writing at
home with things such as: emails, shopping lists, letters. Provide appropriate writing
materials for them to use and allow time for them to explore print.

**X Boxes**
Start looking at a range of boxes that are around the home. Milk cartons, pizza boxes,
biscuit boxes, and any other products that you have in the house. These boxes and
cartons provide a lot of words and pictures. You could compare these different
products and find out what is the same and what is different.

**Y Yes**
Yes is a positive response and can be used over and over again as children extend on
the literacies used at home. Responding positively to what children notice in the
environment and sharing reading and writing at school needs a very positive response
from adults so that children’s ideas are encouraged.

**Z Zoo and other excursions**
Children gain a lot from new experiences in their world. Take children on a trip to the
zoo or just a walk to the local park. Talk with them about what you are doing and
seeing. Afterwards you could write about the experience or make a simple book using
photos taken on the trip.

**Families reading to children**
Why Read to children?
- Reading aloud to children is the single most important activity for building the
  skills and knowledge necessary for successful literacy learning
- Children build literacy skills long before they begin school and these make it
easier for a child to learn to read when they start formal education
- Children who are good readers are usually successful learners and do better at
  school, not just in reading but also in maths, science and humanities
- It’s never too early to start reading to your baby – children actually learn the
  foundation skills of literacy in their first three years
- Research shows that children who are read to from an early age have a larger
  vocabulary and better language skills when they start school. They are also
  more interested in books and are more likely to want to learn to read
- Children whose parents read more easily adopt reading habits themselves
- Sharing books with children is fun and creates a special bond between you and
  your child.
Long before a child can read or write they know that there is a right way up to hold a book, they understand that you read a page from top to bottom and from left to right, they know how to turn pages and can anticipate and predict what will happen next in a story. Well before a child can read words, they understand that print has meaning. Children also learn words that are part of literacy and reading, for example, book, cover, picture, word, etc. They make connections between illustrations and words and develop early word and letter recognition. These are all essential early literacy skills that a child needs to learn to read and write. The earlier parents begin to read to their child, the better their language and early literacy skills are.

- Children learn best by doing and experiencing things. By sharing books and stories every day, babies will learn to love and look forward to story time
- Parents are a child’s most important role model – when a child sees their parents reading and enjoying books they will want to do the same
- Young children have very short attention spans so doing a variety of activities for short periods throughout the day is the best and most enjoyable way to entertain and teach young children. Finishing the book may not be the priority!

Adults reading aloud to children is important as a source of information about print and letters and the characteristics of written language. Adult enjoyment and engagement with books is a way to transfer literacy skills and a love of reading to children. Adults who show that reading is fun, keep the story moving with a ‘semantic’ rather than a ‘decoding’ orientation, and encourage questions and humour when reading, encourage children to be more positive about reading. Children who learn that reading is a source of enjoyment persevere if they encounter difficulties. As well as reading aloud to children, singing songs from radio and television, chanting advertisements, nursery rhymes and playing rhyming games all promote a positive attitude to literacy.

Literacy programs where adults are engaged in storybook reading strategies that enhance interaction with children, reveal that children’s concepts about print and receptive language increase.

Books read aloud introduce children to more rare and unusual words than conversations or television. Reading aloud can continue well into the school years and be enjoyed by children of all ages. Those whose parents continue to read to them, continue to develop comprehension skills, particularly when their parents talk to them about the books and stories.

**Families listening to children read**

When children have begun formal schooling it has been found that parents listening to children read is important in fostering high achievement in school. Along with listening to reading it is important to make dictionaries and encyclopaedias available to the children as well as discussing their homework. Many teachers inform parents about how to listen to reading and the questions that can be asked after reading. For example:

- Encourage children to read independently
- If a child doesn’t know a word you might say:
‘Have a go and see if you can work it out’
‘Read the sentence again’
‘What word could fit there?’
‘What is the first letter?’

After reading you can talk about the book together asking:

- ‘What part did you like the best? Why?’
- ‘What did you learn?’
- ‘Do you have any questions about the book?’

**There are many ways to help children learn to read and write**

When walking or on transport:
- Point out and read signs
- Talk about bus timetables
- Read shop signs
- Point out bus stop signs
- Use a street directory or GPS
- Play I spy with my little eye.

When out shopping:
- Make shopping lists together
- Check recipes for ingredients
- Talk about what to buy
- Point out the names of products
- Show and talk about various brand names
- Examine catalogues together, compare items and prices
- Cross off items on a list
- Read some of the product ingredients.

At home:
- Use ‘post-it’ or a blackboard to leave notes
- Discuss television ads
- Read television guides
- Read favourite books together
- Read recipes aloud
- Make photograph albums with titles and captions
- Arrange CD-ROMS, video and DVD collections
- Play games together, computer and board games
- Email friends and family together.

To build quality connections between homes, schools and libraries demands we explore the worlds of children, their activities, practices and funds of knowledge. Literacy is not print alone nor language but the ways meaning is represented in signs, logos, music, animation and all forms of multimedia.
Module 3: Reading and interacting

‘Few children learn to love books by themselves. Someone has to lure them into the wonderful world of the written word; someone has to show them the way’ (Prescott, cited in Trelease 1984, p.48)

- What is reading?
- Interacting and reading with 0-5 year olds and their carers, parents and grandparents. Babies 0-18 months, Toddlers 18 months-3 years, preschoolers 3-5 years
- What books work for babies? – books for ages and stages, board books, soft chewable books, books with flaps and cut outs, narratives, predictable books, rhymes and rhythms, information and fact books.

**What is the process of reading?**

**Activity**

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Beginning to read using new symbols. What strategies do you use?
Reading is a process in constructing meaning from print and from other symbols. Think about how you read when reading this adaptation of a traditional tale.

Once upon a time Polly Wolly baked a beautiful thick-crusted pizza for her seven hungry children. ‘You are a very wonderful Pizza,’ she said. When you are cooked we will eat you. When the Pizza heard this he was afraid. He jumped out of the pan and rolled out of the door and down the road. Soon he met Doggy Poggy.

‘Hello Pizza’, said Doggy Poggy. ‘Why are you rolling so fast? Slow down. Stop for a minute.’ ‘No way Doggy Poggy’, said Pizza. ‘I ran away from Polly Wolly and her seven hungry children and I must run away from you too’

When reading the story once you became familiar with the language style you probably did not read each word. Once you read the first line you probably just sampled some words in the text predicting what words would come next. You read on and only if the story stopped making meaning you would go back and reread the individual words. Maybe you have heard versions of the story before. Perhaps you can predict what will happen next in the story? What do you think will happen to Pizza?

Reading involves, not just the print and the illustrations in a book, but also includes readers bringing their knowledge of the world and their past experiences. Readers’ eyes move along the line of words and then can go back to check, looking for connections between what the reader knows and expects to see on the page. The reading process does not involve reading every single letter and that is why proof reading essays and papers is difficult when you are very familiar with the ideas you hardly need to read the words at all. Try to read the following where words and letters have been left out:

When the Pizza …… this he was ……
He …….. out …… the pan
and …….. out of the door … down the ……
Soon he D Poggy ‘Hello P’ said Doggy Poggy.

‘Why are you so fast?’

Slow d... st... for a m...te’

Can you read the story without all the words and some of the letters missing? What did you use to read the story the syntax, the meaning some of the words and letters? If you had a problem with a word how did you work it out? What strategies did you use?

According to Clay (2002) ‘all readers, be they five-year-old beginners working on their first books or effective adult readers, need to find and use different kinds of information in print and combine the information that they find in print with what they carry in their heads from their past experiences with language’ (p. 14). The kinds of information include:

1. Knowledge of the world
2. The possible meanings of the text
3. The sentence structures of language
4. Rules about the order of ideas, or words, or letters
5. The words often used in the language
6. The alphabet
7. Special features of sound, shape, and layout
8. Special knowledge about books and literary experiences.

The cues from meaning, structure, sound and print

When children attend to the print in reading they use several sources of information known as cues. Readers combine sources of information to read print.

Semantic cues are meanings that come from knowledge about the world, from books heard read aloud and from personal experiences. If a child comes across the words ‘thick-crust pizza’ or ‘fritz sausage’ they associate this with their experiences. If a child has not had these experiences then the meaning is difficult to come by.

Syntactic cues concerns the structure or syntax of written language. The word order or syntax affects how we read. The syntax patterns ‘Sam kicked the ball’ would sound correct to the reader whereas ‘Ball kick Sam the’ would sound incorrect.

Grapho-phonic cues are the individual letters or graphs and the phonemes associated with the letter. Patterns of letters have to be recognised by sight and then associated with sounds. Visual information is important for word meanings, for example compare these words and their meanings ‘wait/weight’ and ‘read/red’, the words have different letters and different meanings.

In the following example a child uses several cueing systems to read the sentence:

Child: When the pie/pizza/sc heard this he was angry.
Text: When the Pizza heard this he was afraid.

The child used semantic knowledge and some grapho-phonic cues such as the first letter of the word to read the word ‘pie’ and then self corrected probably looking
again at the letters in the word and noticing ‘zz’. The child read ‘angry’ instead of ‘afraid’ and did not self correct perhaps because both words are of a similar length and made sense in the story.

**Active problem solving**
Reading is active problem solving because a reader has to search for, use and check against each other, several sources of information while reading for meaning:

- The text meaning – semantics
- The sentence structures – syntax
- The sounds – phonology
- The letters, illustrations, format and layout – visual.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 7.1 Reading and active problem solving**
(From Clay 1985; Clay & Cazden 1992)

Effective readers use information from many sources as they match their thinking to that of the author of the text. They read for meaning and when the text doesn’t make sense they call on a range of strategies to use and may ask themselves, ‘Does that still make sense? ‘Can I say it that way?’ ‘Does it look right?’ ‘Is that what I expect to see?’ They read for meaning and anticipate what the print will say. Sometimes they will use visual information like letter/sound associations or words already known. Sometimes they will use a word they already know to get to a new word. Sometimes they will use clusters of letters and words which are chunked into phrases. While checking on the visual details of words and the sentence structure an effective reader will stay focused on the meaning.

**What’s important in beginning reading?**
What’s important for beginning reading is–phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, concepts about print plus a love of books and language.

**Phonemic awareness**
The common phonemes (sounds) in the English language.

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<td>hit</td>
<td>look</td>
<td>cut, about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/aw/</td>
<td>/I/</td>
<td>/OO/</td>
<td>/U/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caught, fought</td>
<td>height</td>
<td>flute, shoot</td>
<td>cute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following points are adapted from McGee & Richgels (2004):

- Any such list is dialect sensitive, in other words, many sounds may be pronounced differently in other countries, e.g. in Adelaide people say pla(r)nt and in Melbourne, plant.
- There is no ‘C’ sound as C usually spells /k/ (cat) or /s/ (city).
- There is no Q sound. QU usually spells the two sounds /k + /w/ (quick)
- There is no X sound; X usually spells the two sounds /k/+/s/ (box) or the one sound /z/ (xylophone)
- Some sounds are combinations of others. The /I/ sound is really /ah+/E/. The /oi/ sound is /O/ +/E/. The /U/ sound is really /y/+ /OO/ in cute.

This list has forty phonemes (sounds), but many sources give forty-four as the number of English phonemes. This list does not include the schwa sound. The schwa sound is the same as the short U sound /uh/ in about and button. Other lists also include the vowels followed by /r/ which slightly changes the way the sound is pronounced.

**TASK: How many sounds (not letters) are in the following words?**

- clump
- chemist
- thought
- hiccup
- instrument
- couple
- friendly
- treasure
- hospital
- optician

The development of phonemic awareness

Children develop increasing attention to the phonemes in spoken language and they begin to attend to: words, syllables, rhyme, alliteration and analysis of phonemes.

**Words**

Phonemic awareness involves awareness of words and word spaces in oral language. When children speak they do not usually concentrate on individual words. For example a child may say ‘We went to the beach.’ When beginning to write children may write:

```
Wewettthebech
```

As children develop awareness of words and sounds they learn that words, in English, have spaces between them. Awareness of words and spaces in spoken and written language is helpful for spelling, writing and reading.

**Syllables**

Some words have one syllable or beat like cat and Ann while others have two or more syllables like can-dle and San-dy. Becoming aware of the syllables in words helps
Building literacy before school

children write and read compound words like birthday and words with several syllables like umbrella.

    birth day
    um brel la

**Rhyme**

When children become aware of rhyme they understand that words with the same sound rhyme. Children enjoy chanting raps and jingles and noticing words that rhyme. Many of Dr Seuss’s books appeal to children because of the rhyme. Research suggests that knowledge of the rhyme in traditional nursery rhymes is related to the development of more abstract phonological skills and emergent reading abilities (Maclean, Bryant & Bradley, 1987). However, raps, chants, advertising jingles and pop songs can be used in the same way to explore rhyme. Some people prefer to use onset and rime when exploring words that rhyme. For example:

    Adult:  What is the first sound in dog?
    Child:  d
    Adult:  What is the last sound in dog?
    Child:  og

Onset is the consonant before the vowel ‘d’. Rime is the vowel and other letters in the syllable ‘og’.

**Alliteration**

To develop awareness of alliteration ask the children to listen for the beginning sounds in words. For example, ‘What is the first sound you hear in these words?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>book</th>
<th>bed</th>
<th>baby</th>
<th>bottle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lovely</td>
<td>lucky</td>
<td>licky</td>
<td>lollipops</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis of phonemes**

Analysis of phonemes means the actual isolation of sounds in words. For example, explore children’s understanding of phonemic awareness by saying particular words and asking them to listen for and identify beginning, middle or final sounds in words. Analysis of phonemes in words is a complex activity and sometimes completion of the task relies on having a good memory rather than the child’s ability to hear sounds.

Some people stretch words to help children hear their sounds. For example:

| www eee kkk |

When children begin to write and invent the spelling of words they learn to stretch out words like, ww-ee-kkk e-nn-ddd when writing the word week-end.

**Phonemic awareness levels of task difficulty**

There are several levels of difficulty in phonemic awareness. The following is a summary of phonemic awareness tasks in order of difficulty.
• **Hearing sounds** in words when listening to rhymes, jingles and chants
• **Rhyme or alliteration** of sounds are identified. The child focuses on the components of sounds that make them the same or different e.g. asking are these words the same or different: cat – cat, dog – dig
• **Blending or syllable splitting** where words are subdivided into sounds. In these tasks children must hear and produce sounds in isolation. For example kit-ten, bot-tle
• **Phoneme segmentation** tasks where words can be analysed into a series of phonemes. For example h-a-t and b-a-g
• **Phoneme manipulation** tasks where children can add delete or move any designated phoneme and regenerate a word from the result e.g. what word would we have if we took the /s/ from smile – mile. If we added t to rip what word would we have?

The last two tasks, phoneme segmentation and phoneme manipulation are generally unattainable by children who have not received formal reading instruction in preschool and school.

**Rhymes for phonemic awareness**
**Babies 0-12 months**

*Lap-riding*

This is the way the lady rides
This is the way the lady rides
This is the way the lady rides
The lady rides, the lady rides
This is the way the lady rides
So early in the morning
The next verse is farmer with a slow bounce, then boy with a quick bounce.

*Self rhymes*

This little piggy
This little piggy went to market
This little piggy stayed at home
This little piggy had roast beef
This little piggy had none
This little piggy went wee, wee, wee
All the way home!
Played with the child’s toes and concluding with a tickle

*Body parts*

Head and shoulders
Head and shoulders, knees and toes,
Knees and toes, knees and toes
Head and shoulders, knees and toes,
Let’s all clap hands together.
Eyes and ears and mouth and nose,
Mouth and nose, mouth and nose
Eyes and ears and mouth and nose,
Let’s all clap hands together.
Everyone points to the various body parts
Verses can be sung at varying speeds

Finger or action rhymes

Five little ducks
Five little ducks went out one day
Over the hills and far away
Mother Duck said, quack, quack, quack, quack
But only four little ducks came back...
The five little ducks are wiggling fingers that disappear over the adults shoulder
Each time one less duck comes back, until...
None of those five little ducks came back!
Final verse...
All of the five little ducks came back!

Toddlers 12 months-3 years and babies too
Rhymes for phonemic awareness of words, rhyme, alliteration, beat or syllables in words and phonemes.

If you're happy and you know it
If you're happy and you know it clap your hands (clap clap)
If you're happy and you know it clap your hands (clap clap)
If you're happy and you know it then you really ought to show it
If you're happy and you know it clap your hands (clap clap)

If you're happy and you know it tap your toe (tap tap)
If you're happy and you know it tap your toe (tap tap)
If you're happy and you know it then you really ought to show it
If you're happy and you know it tap your toe (tap tap)

If you're happy and you know it nod your head (nod nod)
If you're happy and you know it nod your head (nod nod)
If you're happy and you know it then you really ought to show it
If you're happy and you know it nod your head (nod nod)
Different verses include...
If you’re sad and you know it say boo hoo (rub eyes)
If you’re mad and you know it stamp you feet (stamp feet)

The wheels on the bus
The wheels on the bus go round and round
Round and round, round and round
The wheels on the bus go round and round
All the way to town.
Actions are made to suit each verse.

Other verses include...
The people on the bus go up and down
The babies on the bus go waa waa waa
The horn on the bus goes toot toot toot

Animals sounds can also be introduced...
The seals on the bus go...
The monkeys on the bus go...
The turkeys on the bus go...

**Open shut them**
Open shut them, open shut them
Give a little clap!
Open shut them, open shut them
Lay them in your lap

Creep them, creep them
Creep them, creep them
Right up to your chin
Open wide your little mouth
But do not let them in! (sung very quickly)
Do the actions as you sing

**There was a little turtle**
There was a little turtle Hold fist with thumb sticking out
He lived in a box Cup hands together
He swam in a puddle Swimming motion with hands
He climbed on the rocks Walk fingers over babies hands
He snapped at a mosquito Make a grabbing motion in the air
He snapped at a flea Repeat
He snapped at a minnow Repeat
And he snapped at me! Repeat
He caught the mosquito Clap hands together
He caught the flea Repeat
He caught the minnow Repeat
But he didn't catch me! Shake head, hands on hips and point at self

*And a particular favourite with the twos and threes!*

**When I was a baby**
(To the tune of ‘The more we get together’)
When I was a baby, a baby, a baby
When I was a baby I talked like this...
Ba ba ba, Ba ba ba, Ba ba ba, Ba ba ba

When I was a baby I talked like this.
Other verses include
When I was a baby I ate like this (sucking thumb)
When I was a baby I crawled like this (crawling)
Now I am a big kid, a big kid, a big kid
Now I am a big kid I talk like this
Well hello, and hello and hello and hello (nodding and smiling at everyone)
Now I am a big kid I talk like this.
Other verses include
Now I am a big kid, I eat like this (using a spoon)
Now I am a big kid, I walk like this (marching)
Because I’m not a baby, a baby, a baby (shaking head, hands on hips)
Because I’m not a baby, NO NOT ANYMORE!

*Nursery Rhymes with notes for adults*

**Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.**
**Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.**
All the king’s horses and all the king’s men
Couldn’t put Humpty together again!

Humpty Dumpty was a powerful cannon during the English Civil War (1642-49). It was mounted on top of the St. Mary's at the Wall Church in Colchester defending the city against siege in the summer of 1648. (Although Colchester was a Parliamentary stronghold, it was captured by the Royalists who held it for 11 weeks.) The church tower was hit by the enemy and the top of the tower was blown off, sending "Humpty" tumbling to the ground. Naturally the King's men tried to mend him but in vain. The "men" would have been infantry, and "horses" the cavalry troops.
- From the East Anglia Tourist Board in England

**Jack, be nimble**
Jack, be quick
Jack, jump over
The candlestick

The lace makers of Wendover in Buckinghamshire were a lively bunch. Every year on November 25th, they celebrated the feast of St. Catherine, their patron saint. Costumed as men, singing special love songs for the occasion, they visited neighbors, who served them wiggs - buns flavored with caraway seeds - and a hot pot - a drink of warm beer thickened with rum and whipped eggs. Afterward, they held a banquet and set off fireworks, especially Catherine Wheels. In conclusion of the evening, they played leap-candle. A candlestick with a lighted candle was set on the floor. A player's jumping over the candle without extinguishing the flame augured good luck for the following year.
- The Great American Baby Almanac

**Rock-a-bye-baby on the tree top**
When the wind blows the cradle will rock
When the bough breaks the cradle will fall
And down will come baby, cradle and all.

The author of this well-loved lullaby was reportedly a pilgrim who sailed on the Mayflower. The Wampanoag Indians, who befriended the colonists, carried their infants in cradleboards on their backs. In temperate weather, they suspended the cradles from tree limbs so that passing breezes could rock the babies while their mothers tended the maize and beans. With typical motherly indulgence, the cradles were decorated with shells, beads and porcupine quills. For sober-minded puritans, the sight of a birch tree festooned with such cradles must have been very memorable indeed.
- The Great American Baby Almanac
Little Jack Horner sat in a corner
Eating a Christmas Pie
He put in his thumb
And pulled out a plum
And said "Oh, what a good boy am I!"

According to legend, Little Jack Horner was actually Thomas Horner, steward to the Abbot of Glastonbury during the reign of King Henry VIII. Rumour had it that the inquisitive king would soon be reaching for some Glastonbury holdings. The nervous Abbot, hoping to appease the royal appetite, sent the king a special gift: a pie containing twelve deeds to manor houses. On his way to London, the not-so-loyal courier Horner stuck his thumb into the pie and extracted the deed for Mells Manor, a plum piece of real estate, where his descendants live to this day.
- The Great American Baby Almanac

Ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross
To see a fine lady upon a white horse
With rings on her fingers and bells on her toes
She shall have music wherever she goes.

Before the suffragists came along, women were sometimes compelled to obtain their ends by unusual means. Consider the case of Lady Godiva. Her husband Leofric, Earl of Mercia, imposed a heavy tax on his subjects. Distressed by their hardship, Godiva pleaded their case. Her husband listened politely for a few days, then with mounting annoyance, and finally offered a dare...."Ride naked through Coventry, and I'll do as you ask." Confident that his wife would never commit such an act, Leofric returned to his ledgers. Undaunted, Godiva galloped through town on a handsome white horse, clad only in her coppery tresses, while all the folk in Coventry stayed indoors with the shutters locked, to spare her blushes. The earl conceded, and lifted the tax. And if she hears music wherever she goes, it's probably the townspeople singing her praises.
- The Great American Baby Almanac

There was a little girl who had a little curl
Right in the middle of her forehead
And when she was good, she was very, very good
But when she was bad she was horrid!

This poem is the work of American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He composed it one day when his daughter Edith refused to submit her hair to a curling iron. For many years afterward, Longfellow, the author of such works as Evangeline and "Paul Revere's Ride," denied having written the verse. When pressed by his friends, he owned up, albeit somewhat crossly; "When I recall my juvenile poems and prose sketches, I wish that they were forgotten entirely. They however cling to one's skirt with a terrible grasp."- The Great American Baby Almanac

Ring a ring a Rosie
A pocket full of posies
Ashes, ashes, (a tissue, a tissue)
We all fall down.

Philip Hiscock, a folklorist at Memorial University in Newfoundland, states that this rhyme likely originated as a way of skirting Protestant bans on dancing: "Adolescents found a way around the dancing ban with what was called in the United States the 'play-party.' Play-parties consisted of ring games, which differed from square dances only in their name and their lack of musical accompaniment. They were hugely popular, and younger children got into the act, too. Some modern nursery games, particularly those which involve rings of children, derive from these play-party games. 'Little Sally Saucer' (or 'Sally Waters') is one of them, and 'Ring Around the Rosie' seems to be another. The rings referred to in the rhymes are literally the rings formed by the playing children."
There are also many picture books (and big books) whose words can be sung/chanted:

- *Old Macdonald had a farm*
- *We’re going on a bear hunt*
- *There was an old lady*
- *Over in the Meadow*

The Internet is a good resource for songs, actions songs/rhymes, poems, raps and chants for children. Below is a list of just some of the websites available and the following page provides a list of songs and action rhymes suitable for sharing with young children. Remember to ask families from different cultures about songs and games they may like to share.

http://www.theteachersguide.com/ChildrensSongs.htm
http://www.kididdles.com/
http://www.mamalisa.com/world/
http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/songs.htm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Macdonald had a farm</th>
<th>The ants go marching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B-i-n-g-o</td>
<td>The farmer in the dell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row row row your boat</td>
<td>The bear went over the mountain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Polly had a dolly</td>
<td>Little Peter Rabbit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m a little teapot</td>
<td>Pop goes the weasel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incy wincy spider</td>
<td>I’m a flippy floppy scarecrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was an old lady</td>
<td>Who’s afraid of the big bad wolf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had a cat</td>
<td>Shoo fly don’t bother me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny works with one hammer</td>
<td>I hear thunder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Bridge is falling down</td>
<td>Looby loo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were five in the bed</td>
<td>Michael Finnegan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’re all going to the zoo tomorrow</td>
<td>The more we get together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galoop said the little green frog</td>
<td>Skip to my Lou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where is Thumbkin?</td>
<td>There’s a hole in my bucket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five fat sausages</td>
<td>Twinkle twinkle little star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree</td>
<td>Baa baa black sheep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s a bear in there</td>
<td>Hey diddle diddle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubber ducky</td>
<td>Hickory dickory dock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bananas in Pyjamas</td>
<td>Humpty dumpty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC song</td>
<td>Mary had a little lamb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give me a home among the gum trees</td>
<td>Jack and Jill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are my sunshine</td>
<td>Here we go round the mulberry bush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zip-a-dee-doo-dah, zip-a-dee-ay</td>
<td>One two buckle my shoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The grand old Duke of York</td>
<td>Polly put the kettle on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knick knack paddy whack</td>
<td>She’ll be coming round the mountain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The hokey pokey</td>
<td>Who stole the cookie?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m a little teapot</td>
<td>Teddy bear teddy bear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hi-5 songs</td>
<td>Five fat sausages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiggles Songs</td>
<td>Five little monkeys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Concepts about print**

This involves being aware of print, not just in books but all around, as well as understanding how a book works, including how to handle a book and how to follow print on a page.

This story from Wendy Cooling, the brainchild behind the British BookStart project, illustrates the importance of this skill. She tells the story of her meeting with Kevin, a member of a primary school class on their first day at school. The class teacher had just given the children books to keep them briefly occupied. Cooling noted:

> It was obvious which children were used to books, and which weren’t. I was quite shocked by one little boy – Kevin – who had arrived at school, clearly never having held a book before. He didn’t know whether to bite it, sit on it or throw it. He obviously wasn’t deprived in other ways, but was starting school with this huge disadvantage.

You can help make children print aware by:
- Pointing to signs and reading them
- Following words with your finger when you read to a child
- Encouraging children to handle and play with books, turning pages etc
- When reading books with repetitive text, point to a word that’s repeated and encourage your child to identify and say it.

**Concepts of print**

When beginning reading, children develop concepts about how print works. Concepts about print, involves
- learning left to right directionality when reading English
- book handling such as holding the book the right way up
- turning the pages from left to right
- beginning at the top of the page
- reading from left to right
- the return sweep (moving eyes back to the left hand side of the page to read the next line)
- understanding that the print relays a message
- printed words are read the same way each time they are read
- the concept of a word
- spaces between words
- knowing the difference between a word and a letter
- the layout of pages with print and illustrations
- punctuation
- spaces
- capital letters
- commas
- full stops
**Letter Knowledge**

Letter knowledge is an understanding that letters are different from each other and that they have different names and sounds. This is a vital early literacy skill, as before children learn to read, they need to understand that words are made up of individual letters and that these have their own sounds. By helping young children to identify different shapes you can give children a head start in letter identification later on.

- Decorate rooms and play spaces with alphabet posters and mobiles
- Babies love looking at the faces of other babies. Board books featuring babies with different expressions and doing different things are ideal first books
- Other good books for babies feature simple, brightly coloured illustrations and geometric shapes
- Talk to babies and young children about the shape of everyday objects e.g. their toys, ‘Look, the ball is round’ or ‘This block has corners’
- From the time children turn one, you can introduce concept books to introduce them to letters
- Sing songs and share rhymes featuring letters and numbers.

[Eric Carle’s *The very hungry caterpillar* is a wonderful book for children and adults that introduces all sorts of concepts such as colour, numbers, size and shape]

**Love of stories and books**

“What is the use of a book”, thought Alice, “without pictures…”

(Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, p. 1)

‘Picture books - where words are wonderfully inadequate without pictures and pictures inadequate without words.’ (source unknown)

**The power of stories**

The narrative structure of picture books can play a central role in how we structure our world. Hardy (1968, cited in Spilka 1977) suggests that all human beings’ constructions of reality are in fact stories that we tell ourselves about how the world works. She suggests:

We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate, love by narrative (p.31).

Stories help children explain, interpret and understand their emotions. Through literature children extend their experiences and the boundaries of their vision. Many enthusiasts of children’s literature echo the words of Chukovsky, the Russian poet, who tells us that a child’s understanding is enhanced through good stories which:

Consists of fostering in the child, at what ever cost compassion and humanness…this miraculous ability to be disturbed by another being’s misfortune, to feel joy about another being’s happiness, to experience another’s fate as our own (Chukovsky 1963).
Narrative can be a vehicle for opening up discussion about ethics, morality, justice and oppression. Texts are not neutral and all carry a moral and political position which can be explored with children. Even young children can learn to look at the motives and messages behind texts and begin to understand the authors intent for instance, or the hidden agenda’s behind advertising.

**Picture books and early reading**

Picture books offer young children the visual context and additional information that is conveyed in longer novels using complex language. Many beginning readers do not have the reading skills to unlock complex concepts so the picture book provides this information. Picture books provide an aesthetic adventure combining both visual and oral language experiences. All library staff and storytellers have a collection of favourite picture books.

Using picture books in the literacy program:

- Allows children to make contact with other people: people like themselves and those who are quite different
- Allows children to examine and question people’s motives, moral conflicts and values at a safe distance
- Encourages children to think aesthetically and creatively use their imagination
- Enables readers to ‘travel’ to different places and times
- Develops children’s understanding of the power of written and spoken language and how it works
- Extends children’s ideas and understandings of relationships
- Shows that we can relate to others on lots of different levels - that people are multi-faceted quite unlike fairy tale character stereotypes.

All children from birth through to twelve year olds and older love to hear books read aloud. They also like the opportunity to choose their own books to read, and time to talk about the books with others. Somehow picture books are still popular alongside super, fast-paced television shows because children want to hear the words read aloud and be visually entertained at a more reflective pace. Children even like to watch books being read aloud on television.

**Early-emergent reading using predictable materials**

Four year old Jennie listened and watched the pages turn as the preschool teacher read the story she had heard over and over again. When Jennie heard the words ‘and Drummer Hoff…’, she cried out ‘fired it off’.

Jennie aged 4 is processing the printed page in the same way as a competent mature reader. She is employing predicting, sampling, confirming and disconfirming strategies as she responds to the predictable language structure of the book. Later Jennie may take Barbara Emberley’s *Drummer Hoff* and read it to herself or a friend. She will point to the lines of print with her finger, pause at each page and look at the picture and at times she may trace each word as she speaks the word aloud. Jennie is learning that reading is not only a lot of fun but it is also a way to communicate and share experiences with another, be it a large audience or an audience of one.
Jennie is already involved in the process of reading as a meaning-gaining, problem-solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practiced (Clay 1979). Jennie is also developing hypotheses about words and their meanings and is developing strategies for improving her predictions about possible phrase and sentence combinations. Jennie is not yet at school but she is already learning the powerful strategies of mature reading (Holdaway 1979).

Learning the conventions of print related to the act of reading or to reading-related tasks are discussed by Mason, 1982. These conventions include:

- Knowledge about how to hold a book, turn pages and direct one’s eye while reading
- Knowledge of terminology such as book parts (e.g. front page), location terms (top, bottom), actions (make a circle, underline), size (a big or little word), and reading words (letter, word, sentence)
- Knowledge about rules and procedures for reading, printing, writing and spelling tasks.

Children may re-read various predictable patterns in books. One of the simplest patterns is repetition in which a certain phrase or sentence is repeated at various parts of the story. A more complex repetitive cumulative structure, in which a word, phrase or sentence is repeated and added to e.g. in the tale There was an old lady who swallowed a fly. Many predictable materials are based on sequences of numbers, as in Ten little Indians. Alphabet rhymes, days of the week, months of the year, and colours can all be incorporated into rhymes with pattern sequence to make up predictable materials. Some predictable materials include a sequence of words or events, which makes it possible to predict what comes next, as in The three billy goats gruff and The little red hen.

**Picture books and language and literacy development**

Literature provides a range of new vocabulary and introduces different patterns of words and phrases. Unusual patterns, figurative language such as metaphors and similes (e.g. ‘she was a spider like creature’), rhyme, rhythm and well developed plots, characters and settings, all provide opportunities for the child to reflect on how language works to create images and ideas.

**Picture books and bibliotherapy**

Literature is a useful way to deal with talking about issues like divorce, adoption, child abuse and death of a parent. In bibliotherapy children read stories on these themes, which provide useful strategies, to help them deal with such problems safely within the pages of a book.

**The multiple readings of picture books**

The well known illustrations in the picture book Where the wild things are by Maurice Sendak create a book for multiple readings and interpretations. The book creates a fantasy mood with pictures growing larger and larger as the fantasy grows. Max, the main character, is a little boy sent to his bedroom by his mother. He has an adventure, tames the wild things and returns home to find his dinner still hot. The fantasy cannot be told in words alone as the illustrations are integral to the words as
the images grow larger and larger as the complex adventure unfolds. The story cannot convey the wildness of the ‘wild things’ nor Max’s power as he tames the wild things. The illustrations combined with carefully chosen language create a fantasy adventure where children experience Max’s amazing power over wild things, perhaps counteracting the powerful adult mother who can control and punish at will.

The book *Where the wild things are* also has an underlying literary structure and this can be analysed as a way to further understand the text. Many narratives have a story structure like the following:

Orientation (this is where the characters and setting are introduced)
Max is introduced as a ‘wild child’ Max is punished, maybe unjustly. He sails away to the land of the wild things.

Problem (this is the conflict or challenges for the character/s)
Max’s challenge in the plot is to tame or control the wild things.

Resolution (here the loose ends are tied up)
Max returns home victorious to find his dinner still hot.

The plot follows the cyclical quest of many adventure stories and movies such as *Star wars: the empire strikes back*, *The wizard of Oz*, *Hook*, and *The lion, the witch and the wardrobe*.

The genre or form of literature in a picture book can vary from humorous, historical, biographical, realistic, fairytales, folk tales, predictable repetitive books, alphabet and counting books, nursery rhyme and riddle books.

**What makes a good quality picture book?**
The picture book of the year is chosen by a committee of children’s literature experts. Some of the factors they take into account are:

**Theme**
The theme is the author’s purpose for writing the story. The theme should be worthwhile and relevant to children’s interests. Some of the main themes in picture books are: accepting yourself as a unique person; people loving you for yourself; growing up; accepting responsibility; overcoming fear; and dealing with conflict.

**Character**
The character should grow throughout the story. Stereotyped characters like the witch in *Sleeping Beauty* does not change. Many picture books use anthropomorphism, where an animal has human characteristics, they feel jealous, cry, have temper tantrums and lose things like some of the characters in *Blinky Bill* or *Winnie the Pooh*. Effective characterisation shows people as having several facets or sides to their personality, fear, selfishness combined with deciding to be selfless and taking risks to overcome fear. A strong character in a picture book in not just good or bad. We see or read about their thoughts, understand their actions and hear them speak.
Setting
The setting is the geographical location and time, either past, present or future where the story takes place. If the book is historical it should be authentic. If set in a particular country it should be accurate. Sometimes fairytales and picture books use setting to create a mood by using symbolism:

- Forest (the unknown, evil or darkness)
- Tunnel (a journey of self-discovery)
- Lamb (new life)
- Blossom trees (new life)
- Sunshine (light, goodness)
- Sunset (end of the story)
- Mountains (obstacle to overcome).

Plot
The plot is the action. The plot at a simple level contains an introduction to the characters and settings, next a problem occurs, then the character(s) work to overcome it. Finally the problem is resolved. The development of events is usually chronological, although sometimes there are flashbacks. The excitement or engagement with the book occurs when the main character experiences a struggle and overcomes conflict. Picture book conflict may be:

- Person against person (good guys vs bad guys)
- Person against self (learning self control or changing behaviour)
- Person against society (new to the neighbourhood, school or country)
- Person against nature (being lost in the forest, wilderness or desert).

Plots may have different patterns of action:

Predictable repetitive plot

Where a child can predict what a character will say or do

‘Quack, quack,’ said the duck.

‘Meow, meow,’ said the cat.

Common plot
Introduction > problem > resolution
Quest
Hero begins journey > test one > test two > test three > heroic return
Episodic
Self-contained chapters > rising action, building suspense > final climax.

Episodic books can also make use of ‘cliffhangers’ where peaks of action occur throughout the book, usually at the end of chapters. The whole book will still be working towards a final climax, but the suspense along the way is irresistible, each chapter ends at such an exciting point that a reader simply has to read on.
Illustration
Are the illustrations relevant to the story? Is the mood created appropriate? Is the technique one that combines well with the story line? Types of illustration technique include: water colour, wax resist, acrylic, collage, pen and ink, wood cut, stitchery, cross hatching. There are novelty picture books with cut outs, concertina lift out, cartoon style and paper sculpture.

Format
The format of a picture book is important. Should the book be square or rectangular? How big should the book be? How big should the illustrations be? Should the layout be the same on each page? How much text should there be on a page? There are usually 32 pages in a picture book can you think why?

The author makes a story board with 32 pages to plan how much text will be printed on a page and where the illustration can be placed. A picture book is a work of art. Each individual page is considered as is the flow from page to page.

Language style
This refers to the way the author uses words and sentences. Combinations of words can create powerful images. Characters should use believable language when they speak. Some books work best when read aloud. This is often because the language is. Some books do not have an effective use of language and can be ignored! Book language like ‘A frog, indeed! Exclaimed the king’ helps to build a repertoire of language children use in their own reading and writing of stories.

Evaluating picture books
- Character, plot, setting, theme, point of view, style are all important and so too is the unique combination of text and illustration
- Neither the text or illustration stand alone (Where the wild things are)
- Imaginative quality of the art (Voices in the park)
- Illustrations reflect, extend and enrich the text (Shrek)
- Pages flow from one to the next and draw the reader’s eye along (We’re going on a bear hunt)
- Illustrations can be water colour, ink, photographs, wood cut crayon (Jumanji).

More on the artistic devices in picture books
Most picture books come with a standard 32 pages, or 16 double page spreads, limiting both artists and authors in what they can present. Each word and every detail within the illustrations are carefully chosen to evoke the appropriate response. Often it is the illustrations rather than the words that provide the details of character, setting and in the case of Rosie’s walk, a large part of the story itself!

Line is a vital element to any illustration. Line can refer to the line of perspective, outline, shape as well as various hatching techniques and is used to represent mood, distance, movement and emotion. Square, solid forms suggest stability and strength. Rounded figures suggest cosy, comfortable characters. Vertical lines represent height and lack of movement such as a forest scene. Horizontal lines denote calmness and peace like the ocean. Jagged, diagonal lines suggest a loss of control, danger and
extreme emotions (e.g. Hiawyn Oram’s *Angry Arthur*). Curved lines represent fluidity and unpredictability, such as the wind or swirling snowflakes. Hatching and cross hatching are techniques used by artists such as Ron Brooks in *John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat*. Here the subdued tones and cross hatching add to the night time scenes.

**Texture** is represented through the artist’s choice of medium. Collage is particularly effective, such as Jeannie Baker’s actual leaves and bark etc, or in books which use paper and material instead (see Patricia Mullins’ *V is for vanishing*). Blobs and streaks of paint or the transparency of watercolours also add to the texture of the illustration, as does the surface the artist chooses to work on.

**Colour** is used to reflect the mood and emotion of the story. Lighting and shadow, the density of colour, the tone and the choice of colour all add to the overall effect. Colours can be bright and happy or dark and gloomy, with the media chosen adding another dimension, for example, the transparency of watercolours may provide a dreamlike quality as opposed to the density of oil paints.

**Perspective** helps give a picture depth and dimension. Perspective can suggest a journey or movement across vast distances, although illustrations are two dimensional, perspective and positioning helps give the picture a three dimensional quality.

**Point of view** positions the reader in relation to the action on the page. Where the reader is looking from the ground up, the focus of the page is given added height and power. The reader feels very small and insignificant looking at a huge monster from ground level. Alternatively the reader may be placed in the dominant position, allowing one to see the ‘whole picture’ from high above, indicating the greater understanding the reader has over those in the story. Cross sections allow another point of view to be explored. The vertical aspect may be shown, for example, the creatures seen above and below the water line. Bringing the reader face to face with a character allows an understanding of the emotions and thoughts of that character. Thus point of view can be changed both literally and psychologically.

**Design** and the overall layout and format of the book also add to the story. The size of the book itself; the use of windows or frames around a picture; where the text is placed in relation to the illustrations; and the use of white space, are all features of design. Beatrix Potter insisted her books remain in miniature, for children’s little hands to hold, making for a very personal experience. Graeme Base’s *Animalia* is just the opposite, large enough to invite the reader right inside, he also varies the text and makes the typography itself a part of each illustration. Maurice Sendak’s *Where the wild things are* purposefully uses a landscape format, taking the reader along for the adventure. In this book, frames around the pictures grow along with Max’s imagination and expand until the illustrations fill the whole page. They shrink again as he returns to reality – although never quite to the same extent, representing his now expanded life experience and understanding. Beatrix Potter on the other hand uses unframed windows to display her illustrations, giving us just a glimpse into her magical world.
Award winners and children’s choices
While children’s literature specialists select books based on literary merit, when children are asked to read the book they like best they choose different books to adults. Research shows children like:

- Books with fast paced plots
- Lots of detail, detail interests them more than specific topics
- Lots of description of setting and character particularly in novels
- All kinds of plots – cause and effect plots do not dominate
- Happy, optimistic books, children do not like sad books
- Books that teach a lesson but are not overly didactic
- Warmth in books – where the characters like each other, express their feelings in things they do and say, and sometimes act selflessly.

Beginning readers who may be aged three to six and sometimes older, like comical stories about seemingly realistic family situations, traditional folk and fairytales, humorous animal stories, stories that develop emotional experiences, action filled fantasies, counting books, rhymes and riddles.

Some young readers are reading novels like Charlotte’s web while others enjoy factual texts. Many young readers age five to eight, like realistic stories about families, friends, school and personal problems. Animal stories, fast paced adventure, folktales and humorous stories are also favourites. All ages of readers appear to like information books about health, animals and biographical tales about sports stars. Comics, cartoons and catalogues are read by children and these too are an important way to encourage literacy.
Top storytelling activities

Puppets
Puppets are used in telling and retelling stories. They can be simple cardboard pictures on a stick, for example when reading *Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?* each animal mentioned could be made into a puppet to be used in the retelling of the story. Other puppets can be more complex such as a caterpillar that turns into a butterfly for the story of *The very hungry caterpillar*.

Story Maps
After listening to a story you or the children can draw in sequence the events that occur. For example in one version of *Little Red Riding Hood*, the following events can be drawn. Red Riding Hood leaves home, meets the wolf, goes to grandma’s house and finds the wolf and the wolf runs away when the huntsman comes.

Other books by the author
Finding other books by the author can lead to comparing similarities and differences between the books. This activity leads to more reading of similar books, for example try books by Pamela Allen, Mem Fox, Tomi dePaola, Eric Carle, Dr Suess. For more ideas go to the Internet School Library Media Centre http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/index.html

Finger plays and action rhymes
Finger plays should be repeated several times so that children can copy your actions. These rhymes help with reading readiness as well as providing children with an opportunity to stretch between stories.

Songs
Children like to sing songs with repetition or songs with a tune and words they can catch on to easily. Action songs, such as *I'm a little teapot*, are also good. If you are able to play a musical instrument this can be used in some sessions. Tapes or CDs are also a useful accompaniment and may give you more confidence.

Tell and draw stories
These are usually short tales that evolve on a white board or a large sheet of paper. See the books *Chalk in hand* by Phyllis Pflomm, *Chalk talk stories* by Arden Druce and *Tell and draw stories* by Margaret Olsen for a host of stories suitable for using this way.

Fold and cut stories
These culminate in a paper creation that you can cut out as you tell the story. The simplest of these can also be done by the children. See the book *Paper Stories* by Jean Stangl for some examples.

Felt & magnetic board stories
Many titles are suitable to use with felt or magnetic board characters. There are commercially produced versions, however, felt and magnetic characters are easy to make yourself. You can use velcro or magnetic tape on fabric or paper figures. Old discarded picture books can be cut up, laminated or covered in clear contact and used,
or simply draw your own characters. Flannel board fun by Diane Briggs and The flannel board storytelling book by Judy Sierra have patterns for felt board characters. Using a felt board is probably the most non threatening way to get into storytelling. The felt and magnetic boards can be used on an easel or if you are sitting on the floor simply lean them against a wall or chair. Arrange your characters in order of appearance. Some people number them on the back for easy identification. Put your pieces behind the board or in a box or basket so that the audience does not see what is coming next. Take care to turn to the audience when you place a figure on the board and talk to them, not the board. If a piece falls off, pick it up and put it back. If you ignore it children will disrupt the story by reminding you that it is gone! Many of the classics, such as The three little pigs, Goldilocks and the three bears and Henny Penny are excellent choices for felt board stories. Let the children help take the figures off the board after the story is finished and if you have a copy of the book show it to the audience before or after the story so that they know the story came from a book. Many rhymes and songs can also be adapted for use on a felt board.

With any story telling it is important to know the story well, have the sequence of the story clear and practice. If you enjoy your story telling the audience will enjoy listening. By all means use different accents and characters voices, but remember, if you begin a story with accents, they must be continued for the entire story!

**Puppets**

Puppets are a wonderful inclusion in story time, whether they be the simplest finger puppet or an entire puppet play. You can use a character puppet as your story time host to welcome children to the session, introduce the stories or close the session. Over time puppets develop a unique personality.

There are some wonderful commercially produced hand and finger puppets, but simple home made puppets can be equally effective. Try making some simple stick puppets and retelling The three little pigs, or make characters from gloves or socks. Simple calico mittens can be sewn up and decorated to make all sorts of animals and characters and felt finger puppets can be sewn or glued.

Puppets and toys are excellent to use as aids to your program but put them right away out of sight when you have finished with them so as not to distract children as you move through the session.

**Realia and other ideas**

Just as you can start each story session with an opening song or rhyme try using a symbol. For example, you could light a candle at the beginning of the session and blow it out at the end, or sprinkle magic dust (glitter or just imaginary) so that the children listen quietly to the story. What ever you use, if you do it regularly, it quickly becomes an established tradition that is looked forward to.

Realia appropriate to the stories being read can act as a useful way of leading into a story or introducing a theme. This can be as simple as showing children a beautiful shell to introduce stories about the beach, or a whole display of the items bought on a trip to the shop in John Birmingham's The shopping basket.
Craft
Choose simple craft activities that you feel comfortable with and that are appropriate to the age and ability of the children attending the session. Unless you have lots of time don't attempt anything very ambitious that will require a lot of preparation. You should be able to quickly explain to children and parents how to make the item. The most important thing is that the activity compliments the theme and can be tied into the books that have been read. Time permitting, it is a good idea to make up a sample of the craft and to go through the activity step by step with the children. Make sure you have enough of everything you will need for the craft activity. There is nothing worse than running out of materials.

Everyday stories
Good narrative skills provide children with the ability to describe objects and events as well as telling stories. There are many ways which parents and other adults can establish these skills in their children so that they understand that stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. For example:

- Name things as you read books, watch television or play
- Have conversations with your child and encourage them to interact and respond. Even with pre-talkers, you can ask them questions and then answer for them
- Read stories
- Tell personal stories about your family
- Sing songs and recite rhymes
- Explain what you are doing throughout the day, for example, ‘We’ve come to the shop to buy some milk and some eggs and some pancake mix. We’ll take these home and make the pancakes. You can help mix the pancake batter’.

As children get older you can explain feelings, emotions and ideas as well as things. Children will begin to understand that not everything is a tangible object. Around three years of age, children start to understand the difference between fantasy and reality and books and stories help develop these concepts.

Summary
Reading aloud builds children’s enjoyment of books, literary language, vocabulary and knowledge about how to read. Adults can read aloud fiction books and information books at a level beyond what the children can read independently. The language in books may be highly decontextualised or removed from the here and now which is different to spoken language.

Good picture books have several features that all work together to be effective. The characters, plot, setting, point of view, illustrations and format must capture children’s interest and imagination. The visual techniques used in the illustrations can be analysed for colour, texture, line, perspective, design and point of view.

Storytelling is a more intimate way of engaging children with story and this combined with props such as puppets, toys and other dramatic artefacts helps builds children’s love of language.
Award winning books can be explored as well as several books by favourite authors. If a child hears a book read each day, by the age of five years they will have heard one thousand seven hundred and twenty-five stories!

**Websites to explore**

https://infotree.library.ohiou.edu/bysubject/education/childrens-literature/

http://www.storyarts.org/

http://home.comcast.net/~chris.s/myth.html


http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/storyhandbook.htm

http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/carle.htm


http://kizclub.com/storypatterns1.html
Module 4: Successful strategies

- Tips for reading aloud
- Tips for storytelling
- Break out activity: practical sessions for the 0-5 year old.
- Successful ways of working in different communities
- Sharing community sessions that work
- Puppets, props, parents and grandparents
- Singing, choral reading
- Sharing ideas tips and strategies.

**Reading aloud**

We read aloud because we want children to fall in love with books and language, to delight in the rhythm and rhymes and vast array of words and sounds. We want them to be transported to another time and place, to hear about amazing characters, and find out how others live and think. We want children to see us as adults enjoying reading, laughing along with them, getting drawn into the drama and suspense, and providing them with the key they need to learn to read – desire. Desire, described by Trelease as the ‘magic ingredient’ (1984 p.30), is not something we are born with, but something planted by parents, teachers, older siblings, and others.

For many children, books and reading are often associated with ‘work’, with text books, tests and homework and not with the sheer pleasure of reading and getting ‘lost’ in a book (Trelease 1984, p.31). Storytellers and parents who read aloud to children demonstrate what fun reading can be, there are no expectations, no tests involved, no grades to be given, no scores to be marked, just the simple pleasure of sharing a book. Children imitate what they see and hear, therefore families that value books and read, for both pleasure and information, are more likely to raise children that value books and reading and go on to be successful in school. Such families tend to frequent libraries more, have a variety of reading and writing materials on offer, and also read aloud to their children as part of their bedtime ritual. Thus by the time their children enter school they have already been immersed in a language rich environment, are aware of the uses and function of language, and have been introduced to a wide variety of rhymes and stories. Children who are read to from an early age are far more likely to be early readers and become successful long term literacy learners.
Reading aloud to children improves their pronunciation, their comprehension and increases their vocabulary. Their imaginations and emotions are stimulated. They are introduced to conflict and a variety of problem solving skills, their sense of adventure is heightened as they ‘travel’ through real or imaginary worlds, and their understanding and compassion for others is developed. Children learn to actively listen and by hearing other people’s stories are more likely to then share their own. Trelease describes each read aloud session as ‘a language arts lesson, bolstering the four language arts: the art of reading, the art of listening, the art of writing, and the art of speaking’ (1984, p. 44).

In recent years various programs, literacy advocates, libraries, and authors, have been encouraging families to read to their children right from birth. While babies may not understand the story, they enjoy the closeness with the person reading and the sound and rhythm of the reader’s voice. The warmth and security of the physical contact, the one-on-one attention they receive, the soothing, happy or excited sounds they hear and the pretty pictures they see, all help to introduce babies to the joy of books and reading. Trusting relationships not only benefit a child’s emotional development but also their language development. Thus time spent cuddled in the arms of a loving adult hearing the wonderful sounds of a story help create a lifetime love of reading. Books with simple illustrations, bright colours, words that rhyme, sound effects and repetition are perfect for babies and toddlers. Nursery rhymes with their wonderful use of alliteration, assonance and nonsensical words delight young children and continue to do so for many years.

Children will always enjoy narratives, whether they are based in fantasy or reality, but they are also extremely curious. From about the age of two, children begin to ask numerous questions about familiar things in their lives, about how things work and where things come from. Information books help to answer many of these questions and help keep pace with the child’s learning. Information books written for this age group are full of fun with wonderful illustrations, while still being extremely informative. There are countless books written about all the things that fascinate children – animals, machines, babies, nature, night and day (and every other kind of opposite), ABC books and books about counting. Literacy skills, maths skills and science skills can all be enhanced along with social, emotional and language development, simply by reading picture books.

As children reach the age of three or four, they begin to ‘read’ the books themselves. They tell their version of the story using snippets they have memorised, together with their own words. Such actions need to be praised and encouraged as they build confidence and increase self esteem. Children particularly enjoy reversing the roles and telling adults the story instead. Children will begin to be aware that the text on a page tells the story and may follow the words with their finger, but wordless picture books are also important to share, allowing the ‘reader’ to invent their own adventures. But whether a picture book, nursery rhyme, non-fiction book, or poem, they need to be books that ‘make children sit up and take notice, laugh, and ask ‘Why?’ … involve them deeply, and lift them out of the here-and-now to a place of wonder’ (Butler 1988, p.200).
Tips for reading aloud to children

- Become familiar with the story, so as not to stumble over unfamiliar words
- Make sure everyone can see and you can see them
- You might begin with some action songs until everyone gets settled
- After the song, use a calm voice to settle the children down for listening
- Introduce the story, briefly discuss from the picture on the cover what the book might be about, for 3-5 year olds get them to guess
- Read clearly and dramatically using your voice to portray characters and mood
- Show or point to the illustrations as you read
- Mix old favourites with new titles.

Reading should be fun and children should see you enjoy it too. From hearing words and sounds repeated, comes improved communication skills, and increased vocabulary. Books allow children to understand different ideas, people and places they would not come across in their daily lives.

0-6 months – at this age the child may be a passive listener, simply enjoying the comfort of being cuddled, the sounds they are hearing and the pictures they are seeing. Any picture book or rhymes are appropriate at this age.

6 months – the child now wants to join in and will attempt to grab the book and turn the pages like you do. Strong sturdy books are available for this age as well as soft, plastic books that can withstand being chewed on, but be sure to keep reading all the others as well, any picture book that you enjoy will do.

8 months – children of this age will already have favourite books and characters, e.g. Maisie Mouse, Spot the dog, Winnie the Pooh etc. Many babies of this age will have the control to start to turn pages and begin lifting the flap in lift-the-flap style books and take great delight in seeing what is hidden underneath. Continue with the old favourites, but be sure to introduce new books as well.
12 months – children will be actively involved in the reading process, pointing to pictures, naming characters and objects on the page and making animal noises, the more involved they can be the better. Children enjoy guessing games and surprises and will have definite favourites that they will want repeated again and again.

2 years – children will continue to love story books, but from about the age of two, they begin to ask questions about how things work and where things come from. Non-fiction books written for this age group are full of wonderful illustrations and help children develop an understanding of a range of ideas, maths, science and life skills.

2-5 years – improve children’s language skills by asking questions e.g. ‘What did Max do to tame the wild things?’ ‘Does Rosie know the fox is behind her?’ or getting children to predict what might happen next e.g. ‘Who will help the little red hen?’ Conversations can also centre on the children’s lives e.g. after reading Hairy Maclary ask about the pets they may have and what their names are or after reading about Grandparents, encourage the children to talk about their own families and what they like to do together.

**Sharing books with babies**

(0 – 12 months)

What do babies get from books?

- Cuddles and stories
- Language and how it works
- Rhymes and repetition
- Good feelings about language, stories and books
- They learn to look at pictures
- They learn to make stories from pictures
- They learn to focus on the tiny details in pictures
- They also begin to understand the difference between text and illustrations.

How do I share books with babies?

- Find a quiet moment, when baby is awake and wants to play
- Keep it brief let the babies interest guide you
- Try singing, tickling, clapping, stamping, dancing round to make the book more fun
- Stories can happen at anytime, indoors, outdoors, lying down, curled up or just sitting in a chair
- Hold the book close (within 30cm) to the baby’s face in the first three months, close enough for them to see, to be touched and sniffed
- Make sure there are times when the baby can see your facial expressions
- Reading can be a sensory experience. Books can be touched, sucked and held
- Turn the pages slowly
- Talk about what’s going on in the story and pictures
- Watch the baby closely and let them set the pace - let the baby tell you when to turn the page and how much to talk
- Change the story to make it about your baby and their world
• Ask the baby questions just as you would with a toddler and then answer them yourself, e.g. ‘What’s in that little egg?’ ‘Oh it’s a tiny little caterpillar!’
• Point out interesting things in the pictures
• Don’t be afraid to make a fool of yourself. The sillier you are the more they will enjoy it. Try different voices and make animal noises
• Put the books on a low shelf/basket so babies can reach them easily when they start to crawl
• Include nursery rhymes, poems, tongue twisters and things with lots of repetition.

Sharing books with groups of babies (and their carers)
(Using Big books or charts with words for parents to join in)
Any session with babies and their carers will need to focus on action songs and sing-a-longs, but can also include storytime. Smaller individual books may be handed out to each adult to share with their own baby, but for the whole group, in order for everyone to see, big books may be more appropriate. Present the book earlier rather than later in the session before babies get too tired. You may not get to finish the story, but the babies will enjoy it while it lasts. Choose predictable texts that have lots of repetition, chants or songs and make sure all the parents and caregivers join in with you. The Internet if a good resource if you don’t know the tune, but even better is the local kindergarten, especially for books such as *We’re going on a bear hunt*, which are presented in a particular way.

Old MacDonald had a farm
This of course is a song everyone knows and can join in with singing and making animal noises. Those from other cultures, not familiar with it, will soon pick it up.

Over in the meadow
This story can also be sung and simple actions included.

We’re going on a bear hunt
This is a fabulous book for repetition and actions. The reader chants each line and the audience repeats it. There are also actions for swishing through the grass, squelching in the mud etc. Everything is repeated very quickly as they all run home.

There are big books of nursery rhymes available as well and traditional tales which are always popular and provide a good opportunity for character voices and repetition.
• *Goldilocks and the three bears*
• *The gingerbread man*
• *The three little pigs.*

Other modern classics include:
• *Ten in the bed*
• *Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?*
• *The wheels on the bus*
• *Five little ducks.*

Big books can of course be used with children of all ages, toddlers and under 5s will love joining in with the singing and the actions, but they may also like to explore the many non-fiction books available.
Another way of immersing children in literacy and creating a language rich environment is to tell stories, not just reading aloud, but sharing stories. Human beings have always told stories. Folk tales, fairy tales, myths and legends, are all part of our oral history. Traditionally stories were told to pass knowledge on from one generation to the next. Stories were told of hunts and battles, were used to thrill and inspire and give meaning to the world. Such stories were often accompanied by song or dance, or drawings in the sand, but the art was in the telling itself. The hands, voice and facial expressions were used with artistry and skill to stir imaginations and evoke powerful emotions. Through stories, tellers connect with their listeners transporting them to another time or place; they pass on information and of course provide entertainment and pleasure.

The eyes can be very powerful, creating surprise, wonder, fear, happiness and sadness, and be used to make contact with every listener. How the voice is used also adds to a story; the tone can reflect the mood of each tale; the volume adds emphasis and drama and ensures you capture each audience member; and the pace adds meaning and effect. However the telling is also done with silence, pausing for effect can be a powerful tool, it builds suspense and gives the audience time to think and reflect.

Stories can be told to all ages, but sharing stories with young children is particularly rewarding. Storytelling helps develop language and literacy skills, expands a child’s vocabulary and comprehension skills, and helps them become more active listeners.
Children are introduced to the complexities of the English language as well as being able to delight in its rhythm, rhyme, exaggeration, alliteration and onomatopoeia. Phillips (1996), from the Australian Storytellers website, provides the following: Stories can help children develop:

- An understanding of human nature
- An understanding of feelings
- An awareness of the role characteristics people assume
- An understanding of sequence
- Language skills (vocabulary, grammar, syntax and pronunciation)
- Their attention span and their ability to listen
- Their ability to follow instructions
- Their ability to co-operate with others
- An understanding of concepts.

A story stirs the child’s imagination, allows them to experience many emotions, and encourages their own creativity – for anyone can be a storyteller. Stories can be based on everyday life, actual events, myths and legends, fairy tales, children’s picture books or made up entirely. Stories can be inspired by a memory, an event, a smell, a toy, or someone else’s tale, everyone should be encouraged to tell their stories.

Children particularly like to hear stories about things, people or places they know, especially themselves! Stories about when they were a baby, when they did something clever, about their own families or pets, have children squirming with delight! They also like to be involved, children can chant the spell with you, call out a repeated line each time, or dance if the story calls for it. Children also enjoy hearing personal stories about the adult storyteller, when they did something silly or embarrassing, about when they were young, or when something funny happened to them. Stories with humour, sound effects, lots of repetition and characters with funny voices, are always appealing.

Stories from other cultures can be particularly inspiring, not to mention educational. Stories from Indigenous groups lend themselves perfectly to telling, since they have always been told, it is only recently these stories have been written down and published. Such stories need to be chosen with care though, as telling stories of sacred places may offend, and where possible the tribal group should be acknowledged as the traditional owners of the tale.

Children need to know that stories are told in every corner of the globe and have been passed down for hundreds of years, but choosing the right story for the ages, interests and attention span of the group is particularly important. Stories shared with young children need to be simple and clear with quick action and a happy resolution, especially if the story is scary or sad. Tellers need to choose stories they enjoy themselves as they need to be told with joy and enthusiasm. Storytellers should know their stories well, not memorised word for word, but well enough to ensure the story flows. Stories are dynamic and ever evolving, almost with a life of their own, as they change each time they are told.
Types of stories to tell

There are many different types of stories. McKay and Dudley (1996) write that the most important consideration when choosing a tale to tell is whether you like it enough to tell it with enthusiasm. Stories should communicate to you a need to be told. Some of the different categories of stories available to storytellers are:

- **Fable** - a short moral story not based on fact, using animals as characters, such as, Aesop's Fables - The fox and the grapes, The lion and the mouse and others
- **Fairy tale** - The best-known would be Grimm's fairytales about imaginary folk, such as elves, giants, witches, gnomes, and fairies. Closer to home is Mary and the leprechaun, by Irish-Australian writer John Kelly
- **Folk tale** - a traditional story, in which ordinary people gain special insight, transforming them and enabling them to overcome extraordinary obstacles. See The magic orange tree & other Haitian folktales by Diane Wolkstein
- **Legend** - a story based on the life of a real person in which events are depicted larger than life, for example, The stories of Robin Hood, or King Arthur and the knights of the round table
- **Myth** - a story about gods and heroes, explaining the workings of nature and human nature. See Psyche and Eros or Inanna by Diane Wolkstein
- **Parable** - a fictitious story told to point to a moral, for example, the sower and the seed from the New Testament of the Bible
- **Personal story** - a life story from your own or your family's experience
- **Religious story** - an historical and philosophical story based on a particular culture and religious persuasion, for example, the story of Lazarus from the Bible
- **Tall tale** - an exaggerated story, often humorous. Fishing stories, Australian Bush stories, see The Loaded Dog by Henry Lawson
- **Traditional tale** - a story handed down orally from generation to generation, such as the Polynesian stories - Maui, and The Coming of the Maori.

Storytelling tips

- Storytelling is fun, choose a story you enjoy and make it come alive!
- Build up a repertoire of stories, from many different sources that you can call on at any time e.g. myths, legends, fiction, non-fiction, fairytales, personal stories, stories from other cultures etc
- Practice well beforehand, know the story and the sequence of events and what parts to emphasise
- Practice using your eyes and body and hand gestures to add expression
- Practice using your voice, tone, volume, pace etc, as well as create character voices, to provide expression, humour, suspense, drama etc.
- Plan how you will create mood, evoke emotions, involve the audience
- Ensure the story suits the audience’s age, interests, and emotional level
- Stories shared with young children need to be simple and clear with quick action and a happy resolution
- Decide if you need props, but remember it is you and the story you want your audience to focus on, so keep them simple
- Ensure everyone can see you
You may like to start your story off in a very quiet voice so the audience has to be quiet to hear you, alternatively it might begin with a ‘bang’ and be far more dramatic.

To help get children settled and focused on you, you might begin by miming out actions that will intrigue young children. You might pretend to be looking for something and ‘slip’ through the audience to find it, even pretending to peer in people’s pockets, or under their hats etc. Have a number of approaches to use at different times.

The eyes can be very powerful, creating surprise, wonder, fear, happiness, sadness, and be used to make contact with every listener.

Your voice adds to a story; the tone can reflect the mood; volume adds emphasis and drama; pace adds meaning and effect. Pausing for effect can also be a powerful tool, silence builds suspense and gives the audience time to think and reflect.

Create a storytelling persona for which you may need props e.g. a special hat, cloak or jacket that helps you ‘become’ the storyteller. You may carry a bag of ‘tricks’ e.g. an old toy, cultural artifacts, or puppets perhaps. Some storytellers like to ‘set the scene’ with candles, coloured cloth etc to make the storytelling place a special one.

Children like to be involved and like to hear stories about things, people or places they know. Think of as many ways as possible to include the audience in the story. Children can chant spells, repeat lines, sing and dance. They will also enjoy hearing personal stories about you! For example, about when they were young, or when you did something silly. Stories with humour, sound effects, lots of repetition and characters with funny voices, are always appealing.

Stories from other cultures can be particularly inspiring and fascinating. Stories from Aboriginal groups however need to be chosen with care. Modifying Dreamtime stories in any way gives the impression such tales are made up. Telling stories of sacred places can easily offend. Where possible the tribal group should always be acknowledged as the traditional owners of the tale.
The Little Big Book Club
Suggested reading list

0 – 6 months

*Peepo*  
Allen Ahlberg

Miffy books  
Dick Bruna

*Maisy’s bathtime*  
Lucy Cousins

Any of these books  
Dorling Kindersley

*Eyes, nose, fingers & toes*  
Judy Hindley

*Dog in, cat out*  
Gillian Rubinstein

*Round & round the garden*  
Ian Beck & Sarah Williams

6 months – 2 years

*My dad*  
Anthony Browne

*Dear zoo*  
Rod Campbell

*The very busy spider*  
Eric Carle

*Where is the green sheep?*  
Mem Fox

Spot books  
Eric Hill

*Wheels on the bus*  
Ann Kubler

*Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?*  
Bill Martin Jr.

*My very first Mother Goose*  
Iona Opie

Whose tail? books  
Jeannette Rowe

*I went walking*  
Sue Williams

2 – 3 years

*Hug*  
Jez Alborough

*Grandpa and Thomas*  
Pamela Allen

*The very hungry caterpillar*  
Eric Carle

*Za-Za’s baby brother*  
Lucy Cousins

*Ten in the bed*  
Penny Dale

*Are you my mother?*  
Philip Eastman

*Too many pears!*  
Jackie French

*Titch*  
Pat Hutchins

*Kipper’s book of colours*  
Micky Ingpen

*We’re going on a bear hunt*  
Michael Rosen

*I want my potty*  
Tony Ross
4 – 5 years

Mr McGee and the biting flea       Pamela Allen
The secret birthday message       Eric Carle
The wide mouth frog               Keith Faulkner
Night noises                      Mem Fox
Pete the sheep                    Jackie French
Eat your peas                     Kes Gray
Pig out                           Sascha Hutchinson
You’ll wake the baby              Catherine Jinks
One duck stuck                    Phyllis Root
Seven more sleeps                 Margaret Wild

Other books suitable for young children

Drac and the gremlin               Allan Baillie
The five Chinese brothers         Claire Bishop
Mr. Magnolia                      Quentin Blake
Goodnight moon                    Margaret Wise Brown
Stellaluna                        Janelle Cannon
Billy the punk                    Jessica Carroll
Sebastian lives in a hat          Thelma Catterwell
My grandmother’s journey          John Cech
Bright star                       Gary Crew
Babar books                       Jean de Brunhoff
There’s a hippopotamus on my roof eating cake Hazel Edwards
The story about Ping              Marjory Flack
Millions of cats                  Wanda Gag
Jack and the beanstalk            Paul Galdone
Cat and fish                      Joan Grant
An ordinary day                   Libby Gleeson
The wonder thing                  Libby Hathorn
My dog                            John Heffernan
Robert the rose horse             Joan Heilbroner
Horrible Harriet                  Leigh Hobbs
Not a nibble!                     Elizabeth Honey
Islands in my garden                              Jim Howes
The fisherman and the theefyspray               Paul Jennings
You’ll wake the baby                               Catherine Jinks
Edward the emu                                          Sheena Knowles
Edwina the emu                                         Sheena Knowles
Leo the late bloomer                                Robert Kraus
Wheels on the bus                                    Ann Kubler
Too loud Lilly                                          Sofie Laguna
Eat the your peas, Ivy Louise                      Leo Landry
A year on our farm                                Penny Matthews
Guess how much I love you!                        Sam McBratney
Boomer goes to school                               Constance McGeorge
Elmer                                                   David McKee
In your dreams                                        Sally Morgan
The story of Ferdinand                              Leaf Munro
The hunt                                               Narelle Oliver
Sunshine                                                Jan Ormerod
Moonlight                                                   Jan Ormerod
The kissing hand                                      Audrey Penn
The rainbow fish books                               Marcus Pfister
Cassie and the kiss soldier                         Marion Rose
Gobble, growl, grunt                                  Peter Spier
Doctor De Soto                                        William Steig
I love my hair!                                       Natasha Tarpley
One less fish                                          Kim Tofts
The seven Chinese sisters                           Kathy Tucker
John Brown, Rose and the midnight cat               Jenny Wagner
My place                                               Nadia Wheatley
There’s a sea in my bedroom                           Margaret Wild
Little Humpty                                          Margaret Wild
Any titles by the authors listed below

Allen and Janet Ahlberg  Pamela Allen
Jeannie Baker  Graeme Base
Anthony Browne  John Burningham
Eric Carle  Babette Cole
Tomi de Paola  Lynley Dodd
Dr. Seuss  Ian Falconer
Mem Fox  Amanda Graham
Bob Graham  Eric Hill
Pat Hutchins  Bill Martin Jr.
Junko Morimoto  Helen Nicholl
Jan Pienkowski  Beatrix Potter
Maurice Sendak  Margaret Wild

Practical sessions for the 0-2 year old

Exploring story books

Dog in, cat out
(0 – 6 months)

Tips:
When reading books such as Dog in, cat out, because of the size of the book, this really only lends itself to small groups.

- Any activities involving babies can include action songs and rhymes
- Read the story and look for the humour in the pictures
- Ask babies (ie parents/caregivers) to point out the cat and the dog in each picture and other things as well
- Discuss the fact that there are not many words in the book, but there is lots of action in the pictures
- Really explore what is happening in each picture, but not to the point that babies become restless and bored
- Include animal sound effects. Make one hand a dog that barks and the other hand a cat that meows, have parents join in to make the game a fun one.
Aims:
To help babies understand:
- That pictures in books can tell stories too
- About time, sequence and events
- How families live and the similarities and differences between them.

Discussion starters:
These questions would be directed at the babies, but expecting the parents/caregivers to answer, or providing answers yourself. Use a fun voice and the baby’s name.
- ‘Does that happen in your house Isabella?’
- ‘What do you have for breakfast Jason?’
- ‘Who put those muddy paw prints on the bed do you think Alex?’
- ‘What do you think the girl is giving the cat to drink Jack?’
Sharing books with groups of babies (and their carers)
(0 – 12 months)
(With thanks to the Stirling library and Ghoting & Martin-Diaz 2005)

Tips
Larger groups of caregivers and babies, may need a different approach altogether. Instead of reading books to babies, this group activity should be centred around rhymes and action songs.

- Begin with a welcoming song as people arrive, make this the same each time so the babies recognise the fun is about to start
- Introduce yourself and explain how the session will work
- Ensure parents/caregivers know it is fine to get up and leave if baby is distressed and that they are welcome to return at any time
- You will need to move quickly from one song to the next to hold the interest of your audience
- Talk to the parents/caregivers as you go along and explain what the children are learning when you play the games and sing each song e.g.
  - Action songs helps babies physical development
  - Reaching out for the puppet helps their hand-eye coordination
  - Reading and singing helps them understand how language works
  - Songs help babies learn about rhyme and rhythm
  - Pointing to the pictures as you say the words, help babies understand the link between words and pictures and that words have meanings
- Vary your action songs, so that some can happen on laps e.g. This is the way the farmer rides, and for others you will need to be standing e.g. London Bridge is falling down
- Print the words onto large sheets of paper so everyone can join in
- Have a box of puppets on hand. Puppets, especially different textured ones, can be handed out to snuggle with each baby and join in with the songs
- Have a box of instruments on hand and provide a music making session in which babies are given rattles, shakers, jingle bells etc to join in with
- Have a box of board books on hand. Parents/caregivers can then spend a quiet moment reading alone with their baby. Offer advice beforehand about how to hold the book, how to use their voice, how to point out things in the pictures, and encourage them to ask and answer questions about the book e.g. ‘Where’s the dog? Oh there he is!’
- Ensure non-readers and non-English speakers that reading the words is not important, there is lots to talk about in the pictures
- Finish the session with a goodbye song or lullaby, make this the same as well so the babies know it is home time.
Interactive story
I know an old lady who swallowed a fly
(all ages)

Tips:
• Read/sing the story and enjoy the humour together
• Emphasise this is a nonsense story that can’t be real, it is just for fun
• Pause before you say the creatures, prompting children’s memories
• Share out the puppets to allow children to participate.

Aims:
To help children understand:
• Rhyme and rhythm
• Sequence and predict what will happen next
• That nonsense stories and rhymes are lots of fun!

Directions:
Figures are made on cardboard, coloured and laminated or covered with clear vinyl.
(see templates provided)
1. Using an overhead projector, enlarge the figure of the old lady to the size you want her to be.
2. Tape a piece of heavy clear plastic over the front of the old lady and cut a slit in the cardboard at the back to create a pocket with an opening.
3. Make the other animal figures to fit inside the old lady's stomach and colour
4. When telling the story, place animal figures into the pocket using the slit in the back of the old lady.

Discussion starters:
• ‘What do you think she’ll eat next?’
• ‘What do you think it would feel like to have all those things inside you?’
• ‘There were lots of animals in this story, can you remember them all?’
I know an old lady who swallowed a fly
I know an old lady who swallowed a fly.
I don't know why she swallowed a fly, perhaps she'll die.

I know an old lady who swallowed a spider
That wiggled and jiggled and tickled inside her.
She swallowed a spider to catch the fly.
I don't know why she swallowed the fly, perhaps she'll die.
I know an old lady who swallowed a bird.
How absurd to swallow a bird!
She swallowed the bird to catch the spider
That wiggled and jiggled and tickled inside her.
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly.
I don't know why she swallowed the fly, perhaps she'll die.

I know an old lady who swallowed a cat.
Now fancy that, she swallowed a cat!
She swallowed the cat to catch the bird.
How absurd to swallow a bird!
She swallowed the bird to catch the spider
That wiggled and jiggled and tickled inside her.
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly.
I don't know why she swallowed the fly, perhaps she'll die.

I know an old lady who swallowed a dog.
What a hog to swallow a dog!
She swallowed the dog to catch the cat.
Now fancy that, she swallowed a cat!
She swallowed the cat to catch the bird.
How absurd to swallow a bird!
She swallowed the bird to catch the spider
That wiggled and jiggled and tickled inside her.
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly.
I don't know why she swallowed the fly, perhaps she'll die.

I know an old lady who swallowed a cow.
I don't know how she swallowed a cow.
She swallowed a cow to catch the dog.
What a hog to swallow a dog!
She swallowed the dog to catch the cat.
Now fancy that, she swallowed a cat!
She swallowed the cat to catch the bird.
How absurd to swallow a bird!
She swallowed the bird to catch the spider
That wiggled and jiggled and tickled inside her.
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly.
I don't know why she swallowed the fly, perhaps she'll die.

I know an old lady who swallowed a horse.
She died, of course!
Music story
The three little pigs
(all ages)

Tips:
• Read the story and have the children chant the repeated words with you
• Talk about what characters might have a loud voice and a soft voice
• Discuss which instruments might be good to use in the story e.g. drums and clapping for when the houses are blown down or high pitched whistles for the little pigs voices
• Share out the instruments to allow children to participate, others can clap and stamp their feet
• Instruments can be as simple as old tins for drums, cardboard tubes for trumpets, jars filled with water for chimes and metal lids for cymbals
• Be prepared for noise!

Aims:
To help children understand:
• Rhyme, rhythm and timing
• Sequence and predicting what will happen next
• Music and the sounds different instruments make
• That characters can be represented using sounds and actions as well as words
• That characters can ‘talk’ to each other using sounds.

Discussion starters:
• ‘What do you think will happen to the little pigs house?’
• ‘What sound could we use for the wolf as he huffs and he puffs’
• ‘What sort of noise would a stick house make when it fell down?’

Alternatives:
Other suitable stories may include:
• Three billy goats gruff
• Goldilocks and the three bears
• Old MacDonald had a farm
• The wide mouthed frog
• The little red hen.
Activity story

The very hungry caterpillar
(all ages)

Tips:
- Read the story and have different children put their fingers through the holes
- Have props ready to extend the story afterwards then hand them out to
different children (and their parents!)
- Talk about why caterpillars eat so much
- Talk about what happens to caterpillars after they build their cocoons.

Aims:
To help children understand:
- Sequence and predicting what will happen next
- Number and counting
- The life cycle of different creatures
- That many activities can come from reading a book.

Discussion starters:
- ‘What will this hungry caterpillar eat next?’
- ‘Lets count together all the things he ate’
- ‘What do caterpillars really eat?’
- ‘What do you think happened to the caterpillar?’

Alternatives:
- After reading the story, have websites with photographs of real caterpillars
  ready for the children to look at
- Read other stories by Carle such as:
  The very busy spider
  The very quiet cricket
  The very lonely firefly
  The very clumsy click beetle
- By having a green sock on hand and printing out the following templates the
  story can turn into an interactive activity.

Print two of each template, colour them in, cut out the centre hole and paste them
back to back and laminate. Be sure to then make the appropriate number to match
with the story e.g. two pears, three plums etc.
Source: http://edtech.kennesaw.edu
Building literacy before school
Building literacy before school
Building literacy before school
Building literacy before school
Act out a story
Edward the emu
(all ages)

Tips:
- Read the story and enjoy the humour together
- Talk about the different animals Edward meets, the sounds they make and how they behave
- Talk about other animals you might see at the zoo
- After reading the book have the children act out the different animals and any others the children suggest
- Encourage the children to really act like each animal, to make the appropriate noises and move their bodies like the animal would
- Make sure everyone has a turn at being an emu!

Aims:
To help children understand:
- The difference between fantasy and reality stories
- How different animals behave
- That sometimes fun stories can have a message too
- That stories can ‘come alive’ by acting them out.

Discussion starters:
- ‘Where do you think Edward might go next?’
- ‘What did Edward find out in the end?’
- ‘What other animals could Edward pretend to be?’
- ‘Have you ever been to the zoo?'

Alternatives:
- Follow up by reading Edwina the emu
- Another book with a similar theme is Arthur by Amanda Graham.
Puppet story
Where is the green sheep?
(ages 2-5)

Tips:
• Read the story and enjoy the humour together
• Have the children guess where they think the green sheep might be
• Talk about why the scared sheep might be scared and the brave sheep, brave
• Talk about what all the sheep are doing in the park
• Make cardboard sheep puppets for the children to hold.

Aims:
To help children understand:
• Colours
• How animals behave
• All the different things people (and sheep) do!

Directions:
• Make cardboard sheep puppets for the children/carers to hold. They could also be stuck onto pop sticks.
• Have the children hold up the different sheep as you read
• Ask the children what the sheep in the park might be called e.g. the swimming sheep, the fishing sheep.

Discussion starters:
• ‘Who’s got the red sheep?’
• ‘Who thinks they know where the green sheep is?’
• ‘Who is travelling in the train?’
• ‘What are all the sheep doing in the park?’
Glossary

Alliteration
A device of sound used by authors, where the initial consonant sound is repeated, for example ‘round the ragged rocks the ragged rascal ran’.

Assonance
A device of sound used by authors, where similar vowel sounds are repeated, for example, ‘oh no here we go’.

Alphabetic Principle
The alphabetic principle is the understanding that spoken language is made up of sounds and sounds can be mapped to written letters.

Bibliotherapy
Where carefully selected reading materials are used to help solve personal problems. Bibliotherapy can be particularly powerful for children in helping them deal with issues such as anger, divorce or the death of a loved one.

Cognition
The mental process of knowing, thinking and learning, including aspects such as awareness, perception, reasoning, remembering, understanding and judgment.

Constructivism
Constructivism is an educational theory of learning which recognises learners as the constructors of their own knowledge, values and dispositions. Learning involves constructing meaning from a variety of experiences, instead of just regurgitating facts. Thus learning should be hands on, active, collaborative and situated in real world contexts.

Contextualise
To place a word or idea, for example, in a particular context.

Critical literacy
Critical literacy involves the analysis and critique of all forms of texts including written, visual, spoken, multimedia and performance texts. It provides new ways of looking at texts and encourages children to question and challenge the attitudes, values and beliefs that lie beneath the surface and investigate how language practices can transform social practice. Critical literacy asks children to look at the meaning and motives of a text and the purpose for which it was composed. It explores how language shapes self and society and the relationship between language, power, social groups and social practices.

Decontextualise
Decontextualised language occurs in books as all the information about the characters, setting and plot has to be described. For example ‘It was a cloudy day when Sam set out on his adventure’. Book language may be in past tense, formalised and very different from everyday contextualised spoken language that relies on a here and now context, for example ‘That looks good. Let’s go!’ where no description is needed.
Digital Literacy
(see also Electronic Literacy, Multimodal Literacy and Technological Literacy)
Digital Literacy extends beyond the ability to read and write. With the digital age came the need to understand information presented in a wide variety of ways, for example, with text, images and sound. Digital Literacy refers to these multimodal ways of reading, seeing, interpreting and assessing information. The knowledge and skills needed to interpret and use sounds and images are different from those needed to interpret and use words, yet all are needed to become digitally literate.

Discourse
Discourse is simply an exchange of communication or conversation which can be written or spoken.

Electronic literacy
(see also Digital Literacy, Multimodal Literacy and Technological Literacy)
Electronic Literacy includes not only the ability to use the traditional literacy skills of reading and writing, but also the ability to use a range of electronic resources, such as the Internet, to produce information electronically, for instance on a webpage. Thus knowledge and skills of computers and computer software are also needed.

Funds of knowledge
The knowledge and experiences that children acquire in their daily lives. They are therefore unique to each individual/family, although can be very similar among like minded or ethnic groups. They may include knowledge associated with: gardening and cooking; music and painting; computer games and TV shows; the family business; buying and selling; motor bikes and cars; religious studies etc. Successful educators often draw on their children’s funds of knowledge incorporating them into their activities, to make learning relevant and motivating.

Grapho-phonics
The relationship between the letter (grapho) and the sound (phoneme).

Lexicon
See Vocabulary.

Metacognition
Metacognition is when a child becomes aware of, and is able to reflect upon, their own mental thought processes. By the age of three, children quite commonly use the words, think, pretend and remember, indicating that they are aware of their own inner world and see it as being separate from the outside physical world. This is an important step in development, by school age, they are able to reflect, reason and think about their actions. This enables children to problem solve, question and discover. Therefore morals begin to be developed and social skills improve as well.

Morphology
Morphology refers to the ways words are formed and relate to each other. The words medic, medicine and para-medic have a similar morphemic base that affect the spelling even through the pronunciation may change.
Multiliteracies
A broad view of literacy that takes into account the influence of, and constant change in information and communication technologies. It acknowledges many forms of representation and how meanings are increasingly communicated using multimodal texts. Information may be communicated using a blend of text, image, sound, film, and animation. This view of literacy also recognises the diverse nature of social and cultural practices associated with literacy and how these practices provide differential access to power within society.

Multimodal Literacy
(see also Digital Literacy, Electronic Literacy and Technological Literacy)
Communications using multimodal literacies contain a variety of texts, sounds, graphics, animations and video footage, thus even a picture book can be considered multimodal. However multimodal texts are becoming more and more complex and nowadays are often linked with the use of computers, the Internet and various software. Multimodal presentations can convey not only the written word, but also the spoken word; they can play music and sounds; show pictures, photographs, animations and films. They can take us on virtual tours to places on the other side of the globe and using time-lapse photography show the changes that take place over time. The screen itself can also be divided showing multiple images at once, requiring complex observation, recognition, interpretation and evaluation skills.

New literacies
New literacies are those literacies associated with the new information and communication technologies (ICT) and are therefore, just like the technologies, constantly evolving. Students skilled in new literacies have mastered the traditional literacy skills of reading and writing, but also incorporate visual literacies, with complex interpreting and analysing skills. These students can not only ‘read’ fast paced, ever changing, non-linear hypertexts, but can simultaneously design and create them. They may incorporate a complex mix of different media including digital images, video, animation as well as traditional drawing and writing skills. They are fully aware that their audience extends beyond the classroom, school, home and community and indeed can reach audiences across the globe.

Onomatopoeia
A device of sound used by authors, where words sound like their meanings, for example, bang, swish, gulp.

Onset
See Rime.

Pedagogy
Pedagogy is the art, science or profession of teaching. It is the methods used to transmit and encourage another to learn and expand their knowledge, ideas and understandings.

Phonemes
Phonemes are the sounds of language. There are 44 phonemes in the English language. The word ‘cat’ has three phonemes and so does the word ‘sheep’ because in written language letters are used in various combinations to represent sounds: ‘sh’ is
one sound and ‘ee’ is one sound. Phonemic awareness is the insight that every spoken word can be conceived as a sequence of phonemes. Phonemic awareness is important for understanding the alphabetic principle in English, which is, sounds are represented by letters.

**Phonemic awareness**
Phonemic awareness is the insight that every spoken word can be conceived as a sequence of phonemes. Phonemes are speech units that make a difference to meaning. The words ‘cup’ and ‘pup’ differ by one phoneme. Phonemes are usually written like this /s/. The word pup has three phonemes /p//u//p/.

**Phonics**
Phonics is instruction in the sound-letter relationships used in reading and writing. Phonics involves understanding the alphabetic principle, that spoken language is made up of sounds and sounds can be mapped to written letters. In the English language a letter or combinations of letters represents sounds. In the word ‘lamb’ there are four letters and three sounds because ‘mb’ represent a single sound.

**Phonological awareness**
Phonological awareness is the general ability to attend to the sounds of language as distinct from its meaning. It involves noticing rhyme, syllables and similarities in word sounds.

**Pragmatics**
The social communicative side of language. Pragmatics involves turn taking, maintaining topic relevance, understanding gestures, tone of voice and judging what kind of language form or genre to use in different social situations.

**Rime and Onset**
The rime is the vowel and any consonant sounds that come after it. The onset, if it is there, consists of any consonant sounds that precede the vowel, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Onset</th>
<th>Rime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>itch</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>itch</td>
</tr>
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**Scaffolding**
Scaffolding extends the child’s zone of proximal development (see below). Assisting performance is known as scaffolding and makes it easier for the learner to be successful and may increase the rate at which learning occurs. Scaffolding may involve:
- Task definition
- Direct or indirect instruction
- Specification and sequencing of activities
- Provision of materials, equipment and facilities
• Assistance with planning, organising, doing and/or reflecting on the task.
Source: http://www.educ.utas.edu.au

Semantics
Semantics is concerned with meaning. Semantics or meaning is achieved by the choice of words, word order and the tone and stress placed on words. In spoken language the facial expressions and gestures affect how meanings are communicated.

Sociocultural Perspective
The sociocultural perspective is a theoretical viewpoint that searches for the causes of social behaviour of an individual or small group within a larger one. The sociocultural perspective of teaching, learning and assessment takes into account the connectedness between children’s learning and development and the social and cultural worlds in which they live.

Syntax
Syntax refers to the ways words, phrases and clauses are structured in sentences – the order of the words. Some basic sentence patterns include:

- Subject – verb
  The baby cried.
- Subject – verb – object
  The baby drank milk.
- Subject – verb – indirect object – direct object.
  The baby gave Freda the bottle.

Technological Literacy
(see also Digital Literacy, Electronic Literacy and Multimodal Literacy)
To be technologically literate one needs to: know what technology is; have a basic understanding of how it works; and understand its purposes, potential and uses. Technological tools include computers, mobile phones, digital cameras and fax machines etc, and are used to access, analyse and evaluate information, problem solve and communicate information and ideas.

Visual Literacies
(see also New Literacies)
Visual Literacies extend beyond traditional literacies to include the ability to recognise, interpret, create and use graphics, icons, images, animations and video to think, teach, learn and communicate.

Vocabulary
Also known as lexicon, vocabulary is all of the words of a particular language. Vocabulary can also refer to the knowledge of words and word meanings.

Zone of Proximal Development
According to educational theorist Lev Vygotsky, the child has two levels of performance: the first is the level that the child is capable of achieving independently, and the second is the level of performance that the child reaches with assistance. The distance between these two levels is known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).
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