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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Child Care Bureau

Linking Child Care and Early Literacy: Building the Foundation for Success

By Joan Ohl, Commissioner, Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF)

According to the *Quality Counts 2002: Building Blocks for Success* report in the January 10, 2002, edition of *Education Week*, "11.9 million children younger than 5 in the United States—or about 6 in 10—spend part of their waking hours in the care of people other than their parents: relatives, caregivers operating out of their homes, workers in child care centers, Head Start staff members, and teachers in State-financed prekindergartens among them. The quality of the early care and education that young children receive in such settings sets the tenor of their days and lays the building blocks for future academic success."

This Administration understands and is supporting the critical role played by child care. In April, the President announced his *Good Start, Grow Smart* early childhood initiative to help States and local communities strengthen early learning for young children. The goal is to ensure that children are equipped with the skills they will need to start school ready to learn—by focusing on literacy and cognitive development as well as social and emotional foundations.

This is not a completely new concept. It was Plato who said, "The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future life." Getting children ready to read is not only important—it is critical! There is a remarkably strong and stable link between what preschool children know about words, sounds, letters, and print, and later academic performance. Children lacking such knowledge upon entry into kindergarten will not only struggle there, but will also have difficulty learning to read through high school, if intensive and informed intervention is not provided. Accordingly, strong pre-reading and vocabulary skills are good predictors of a child's later success in school.

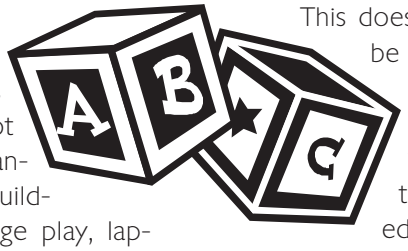
School Readiness

Yet children, whether from wealthy or poor families, are experiencing significant difficulties with respect to school readiness. In 1998, 25 percent of our nation's children from families without any risk factors such as poverty, parents with limited education, single-parent homes, or lack of experience with the English language entered kindergarten bereft of the necessary oral language and early literacy skills critical for learning. Still, children from poor families are much more likely to enter school with limited vocabularies and meager early literacy skills.

Participation of the child care world in the Administration's early literacy agenda is absolutely critical. The President and the First Lady are highlighting early literacy as a major priority. One of the goals of the First Lady's *Ready to Read, Ready to Learn* initiative is to ensure that all children are prepared for reading and learning when they start school.

Children who are not ready to learn arrive in kindergarten at a disadvantage. It is troubling to watch these little ones struggle with print, and even more troubling to see how embarrassed and frustrated they are by their failure to do what they see other children do. Their confidence and self-esteem are chipped away and they may decide that they are not comfortable in school—it is not a place they want to be.

The Foundations of Literacy



Many of these children have difficulties learning to read because they have not developed the basic building blocks of language during their preschool years—the building blocks that are forged through language play, lap-time reading, bedtime stories, and the conversations about the characters and the situations that the stories brought to life.

Why is this basic foundation missing? In some cases, the children's parents have not learned to read themselves and could not read to their children. In some cases, limited income means no books in the home. As the First Lady has said, "For many children, being left behind does not begin in elementary school—it begins in the years between diapers and backpacks."

The infant brain actually seeks out and acquires a tremendous amount of information about language in the first year of life. Even before babies can speak, they have already figured out many of the components of language. They know which particular sounds their language uses, what sounds can be combined to create words, and the tempo and rhythm of words and phrases.

Why is this information important? Because developmental science has taught us that there is a strong connection between early language development and reading. Both oral language and reading require the same types of sound analysis. The better babies are at distinguishing the building blocks of speech at 6 months of age, the better they will be at other more complex language skills at 2 and 3 years of age, and the easier it will be for them at 4 and 5 years to grasp the idea of how sounds link to letters.

Preschool cognitive abilities, including language and pre-reading abilities, can predict school success and school completion. For example, reading scores in the ninth grade can be predicted with surprising accuracy from a child's knowledge of the alphabet in kindergarten.

Building Pre-Literacy Skills

Children need help learning these concepts—they do not develop naturally. A child will not learn the name of the letter "A," the sound the letter "A" makes, or how to print it simply by being with adults who know these things, or by being with an adult who reads a great deal for pleasure. Children learn these critical concepts because adults take the time and effort to teach them in an exciting, engaging, and interactive manner.

This does not mean that preschool children should be taught using the same methods and materials that are used with first and second graders. The challenge for the parent, the grandparent, the preschool teacher, or the child care provider is to develop fun, educational language activities that also engage and develop children's interests, social competencies, and emotional health. All of these goals can be joined and met, but there must be a clear and equal emphasis on building pre-literacy skills.

The Key to Success

Every expert who participated in the White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development in July 2001 stressed that reading is the keystone for academic and life success. A failure to learn to read not only leads to failure in school, but portends failure throughout life.

Not only are children humiliated emotionally and socially in school because of this failure, but they are unable to learn about the wonders of science, mathematics, literature and other subjects because they cannot read grade-level texts. By high school, the student who cannot read has almost no dream of attending college and can only look forward to meager occupational choices.

Without school readiness, the damage to a child's future not only reflects an educational problem, but a public health problem as well. As Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Tommy Thompson puts it, "Reading contributes to good health. Without reading skills, you can't figure out a prescription, or a warning sign, or keep up with news reports relevant to your health. Less information means greater risk. Put another way, literacy means a healthier life."

The *Good Start, Grow Smart* Initiative

When he announced the *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative, President Bush said, "Now we must take another essential step. We must make sure that every child enters school ready to learn—every child—not just one, not just a few, but every, single child." The goal is to ensure that children are equipped with the skills they will need to start school ready to learn—by focusing on literacy and cognitive development as well as social and emotional foundations.

As a condition of receiving Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) funds, States will be asked to identify criteria for early childhood education in three areas. First, States will develop early learning guidelines on literacy, language, and pre-reading skills activities that align with K-12 standards. Second, States will develop a plan for offering education and training activities to child care and pre-school teachers and administrators. Third, States will plan for coordinating at least four early childhood programs, which may include CCDF, Head Start, programs in public schools, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), among others.

To help States develop and meet these criteria and to leverage Federal investments, States will have more flexibility with their Federal child care funds. Specifically, States will be allowed to increase the percentage of State pre-K funds they can use to match Federal CCDF funds. In addition, the President's welfare reform proposal allows States to seek new waivers for integrating funding and program rules across a broad range of public assistance programs.

Literacy Efforts Already Underway

It will take action at every level from the Federal government to the classroom to ensure that child care systems are well-developed and teachers are well-prepared to foster language and early literacy skills for young children. Many States and private organizations are already taking creative steps to incorporate early literacy into their programs.

According to the latest round of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) State plans, the following States have CCDF-funded literacy initiatives:

- In Massachusetts, child care is a part of the *Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium*, which works to create collaborations for family literacy programs. Massachusetts also is reimbursing programs that incorporate literacy principles at a higher rate.
- In Missouri, child care providers are trained using *HeadsUp! Reading* with technical assistance and support from the Missouri Child Care Resource and Referral Network.
- In Connecticut, the child care lead agency works with the State Department of Education and the Commission on National Service to support adult and child literacy programs at child care centers.
- In California, the *Public Broadcasting Service's Preschool Education Project* is providing training for approximately 2,500 family child care providers and parents within the viewing areas of seven public television stations. Each public television station has established a network of trainers in order to offer continued support and to conduct refresher training.
- In Wyoming, in partnership with the Wyoming State Library, the Department of Family Services will fund training for every child care provider on the *Mother Goose Asks "Why"* literacy program. Individuals will be trained to deliver this curriculum in every county of the State.

Local child care resource and referral agencies (R&Rs) also have literacy initiatives. A number of State R&R networks, including California, Florida, Utah, and Oregon, have literacy specialists housed in R&R agencies to train and consult with providers. Many of these specialists also work with parents.

Within the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, collaboration and partnerships between the Head Start and Child Care Bureaus offer exciting possibilities for quality and educational improvements. Around the country, collaborations between Head Start

and child care mean that you can get full-day, full-year care that provides comprehensive social and educational services. Many more children can be served with this type of care. The Child Care Bureau will leverage Head Start's efforts with respect to literacy.

At the Department of Education, the *Early Reading First* initiative is seeking to create early childhood centers of excellence by improving the instruction and classroom environment. The ultimate goal of *Early Reading First* is the prevention of later reading difficulties by helping children acquire the necessary language, cognitive, and early reading skills required for continued school success.

A number of funders across the country support early literacy efforts, including many national and local foundations, United Way agencies, local councils on early childhood development, and State government agencies for Human Services and Education. Several of these State initiatives are funded from CCDF quality funds. States can and do spend a portion of their 4 percent CCDF quality set-aside funds and other quality improvement funds on literacy initiatives.

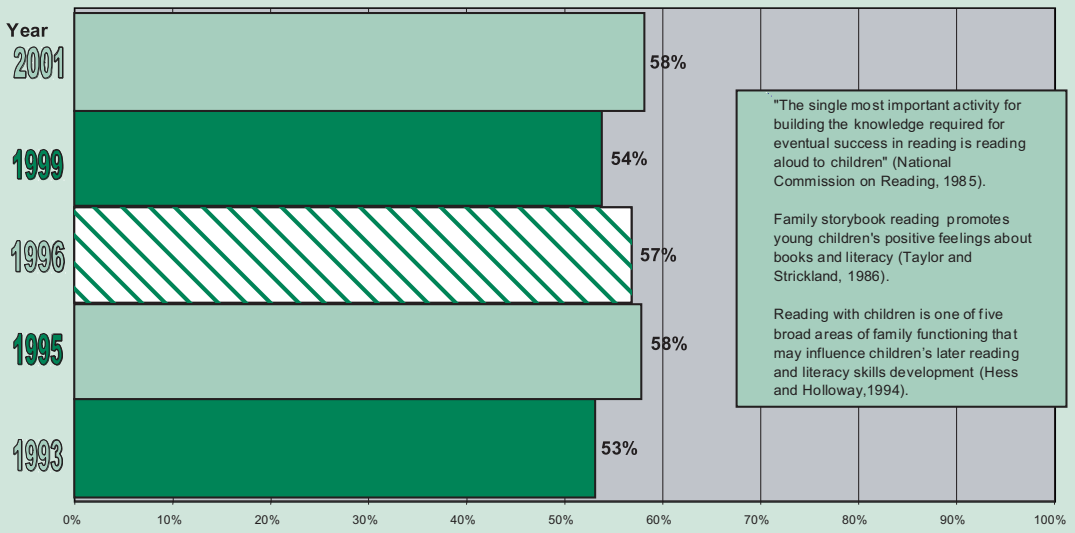
Child Care Bureau Efforts

Through research and technical assistance, the Child Care Bureau provides States with information and tools to support States' choices for investments in child care quality improvement. Through a variety of publications, conferences, and consultation, the Child Care Bureau will support States' efforts to enhance early literacy practices in child care. In addition, the Child Care Bureau has outreach networks to help deliver information about literacy practice in child care. Through the National Child Care Information Center, the Bureau works to inform child care policy-makers and practitioners at all levels about the importance of improved literacy practices in child care. CCB also sponsors Child Care Aware, a national hotline and Web site operated by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA). The hotline reaches millions of parents each year with information on choosing child care that supports children's development and is a potentially powerful partner in spreading the word about literacy practices in child care.

A National Movement

The First Lady has emphasized that "Language development begins long before a child speaks his first words, and learning how to read begins long before a child reaches school age." It begins while listening to nursery rhymes, stories and songs. Parents and caregivers, whether in center-based care, family child care, or kith and kin care, are helping our pre-school children's developing brains understand how language is organized. In all of these settings it is imperative that caregivers have the knowledge and skills they need to promote language and literacy. What could be more important or more worthwhile?

From day one, the education we provide our children will shape the way they think and learn. The quality of their education will either drive or stifle the enthusiasm, motivation, and effort they bring to learning, the way they interact with others, and their ability to adapt to their successes and failures throughout life. We all have the duty to take the evidence of scientific research seriously and translate it into practices that can be implemented by the full range of child care providers, because the time between birth and age 5 is the foundation upon which successful lives are built.



*Based on children who have yet to enter kindergarten.
**The four skills tallied are: ability to recognize the letters of the alphabet, count to 20 or higher, write one's name, or read or pretend to read.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *National Household Education Survey,* 1993 and 1999.

Bush Administration Launches New Early Childhood Initiative: *Good Start, Grow Smart*

On April 2, President Bush introduced his early childhood initiative—*Good Start, Grow Smart.* The Administration's initiative was developed to help States and local communities provide comprehensive early childhood programs that prepare young children to enter school equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed, with a focus on literacy, language, numeracy, and cognitive development.

Good Start, Grow Smart includes three main areas: strengthening Head Start, partnering with the States to improve early childhood education, and providing information to teachers, caregivers, and parents.

The initiative encourages States to develop quality criteria for early childhood education (ECE) programs. In exchange for money from the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), States will be required to outline their quality criteria in their biennial State plans. The development of Early Learning Guidelines is one of the quality-related goals delineated in *Good Start, Grow Smart*. The Early Learning Guidelines are to be voluntary State guidelines adaptable to varied child care settings, on literacy, language, and pre-reading skills for children ages 3 to 5. These guidelines must correspond with State public school standards.

Plans for professional development for child care staff and administrators, and a plan for coordination of at least four early childhood programs, are two other quality criteria that States are to include in their biennial plans. Coordination efforts may include public schools, Head Start, CCDF, and Transitional Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or other early childhood programs. A joint task force between the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services is providing guidance to programs on how best to create a seamless transition for young children and their families who are moving from early care to public school settings.

To support information sharing and collaboration between early childhood programs and public schools, States will have more flexibility in the use of their Federal CCDF funds. For example, States may count up to 30 percent of State monies used to fund pre-K programs toward their CCDF matching requirement.

Good Start, Grow Smart also includes a public awareness campaign through the Department of Education. The campaign is aimed at informing both child care professionals and the general public about new research on young children's cognitive development, and about how to effectively translate the new theories into everyday practices with young children.

The Administration committed $45 million to a five-year partnership between the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Department of Education. These partners are charged with supporting the dissemination of new research on early childhood development and best practice strategies, with a focus on emergent literacy. The Department of Education is hosting regional Early Childhood Educator Academies, which will be facilitated by early childhood experts, to highlight the latest brain development research.

A series of booklets for parents and families, *Healthy Start, Grow Smart*, is available in both print and electronic format. The booklets, inspired by an earlier Texas initiative led by First Lady Laura Bush, focus on the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive needs of newborns. A manual titled *Teaching Our Youngest,* designed for early childhood professionals, was developed by a U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services task force and includes practical strategies for both designing and operating comprehensive early care programs, with a focus on supporting emergent literacy skills and cognitive development.

In addition, the Department of Education is recognizing outstanding early childhood programs and initiatives across the nation, identifying them as "Sunshine" schools and initiatives. Strategies and best practices developed by these celebrated Sunshine programs are being made available to child care workers and programs.

For more information on the Bush Administration's Good Start, Grow Smart initiative, visit http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/earlychildhood/toc.html on the Web.

Head Start Bureau Invests in Early Childhood Literacy

By Carol Whitten, Special Assistant to the Associate Commissioner, Head Start Bureau

President Bush's *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative outlines the next critical step in education reform—improving early childhood development programs within Head Start to prepare children to read and succeed in school.

In response to the President's charge and to fulfill a statutory obligation to promote school readiness, the Head Start Bureau launched Project STEP (Summer Teacher Education Program). STEP focuses on training local program staff as literacy trainers. The Head Start Bureau's goal in developing this program is to give every Head Start teacher the skills needed to foster early literacy in Head Start children.

STEP provides nationwide, research-based literacy training for all Head Start programs, builds on existing quality improvement and professional development efforts, and creates a consistent foundation of staff knowledge and skills in early literacy to enhance the locally designated curriculum and staff development efforts.

More than 3,000 Head Start staff and many State Child Care representatives and program directors completed training in one of 15 conferences conducted throughout the summer and fall of 2002. This research-based training was delivered by the University of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston's Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education (C.I.R.C.L.E.). Training topics during the four-day conferences included approaches to teaching strategies, optimum classroom arrangements, and use and placement of materials to promote children's literacy and language learning. After completing STEP training, the Head Start staff returned to their local programs to provide training to nearly 50,000 teachers.

The STEP approach includes the following components designed to expand and extend the skills and techniques used by Head Start teachers:

- Coaching and mentoring in each classroom;
- Evidence-based strategies to support children's social and emotional development, to guide challenging behaviors, and to improve child outcomes;
- An "Excellence in Teaching" summit in summer 2003; and
- Distance-learning technology.

Additional investments by Head Start that will strengthen early literacy include:

- Funding additional research efforts designed to identify effective early literacy curricula and teaching strategies for Head Start children;
- Continuing to fund the Head Start Family Literacy Project, which will work with Head Start programs to improve the quality of family literacy services;
- Targeting training and technical assistance resources to ensure that every Head Start classroom is delivering curriculum experiences that promote reading, vocabulary, and language skills; and
- Disseminating findings of early literacy education efforts already underway as part of the Quality Research Center consortium.

The White House early childhood initiative—*Good Start, Grow Smart*— and Project STEP seek to raise the bar, using research as one more source of information for creating better learning environments, a well-planned and implemented curriculum, and improved outcomes for our children. Professional development training has the potential to move us years forward in the delivery of quality early education for all Head Start children. It also offers a major milestone in achieving professional development goals for program staff who train and mentor education staff. Most importantly, this work will help Head Start children succeed throughout their preschool experiences.

For more information, contact the Head Start Bureau at 330 C Street SW, Washington, DC 20447; Phone: 202-205-8572; or at http://www2.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/ on the Web.

Promoting Early Literacy in Early Childhood Programs

By Robert Gundling, Professional Development Specialist, National Association for the Education of Young Children

Adele Robinson, Director, Public Policy and Communication, National Association for the Education of Young Children

Early literacy has garnered much public and political attention over the last few years, and that is a good development. However, ensuring that child care and other early childhood education programs incorporate and promote effective early literacy development takes commitment, resources, and knowledge of the research and how it translates into practice and policies.

Good practices that support early literacy development begin with a close and dependable relationship with caring adults who are nurturing and responsive to the child's interest and natural curiosity. When adults understand that young children are active learners who delight in engaging in meaningful activities, and provide them with multiple opportunities for exploration, they help create a strong early literacy foundation. Depending on the children's ages and developmental characteristics, teachers and parents support children's language and literacy growth when they engage in daily ongoing, challenging conversations with young children; ensure that there are plenty of books at school and at home; provide children with opportunities to learn rhymes and play with words to help them learn about the sound system; show them that writing goes from left to right and top to bottom so that they learn about print concepts; and play games with children to help them break words into their individual sounds.

To provide guidance to early childhood teachers in programs for children from birth to age 8, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) joined with the International Reading Association (IRA) in May 1998 to adopt the position statement *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children.* According to the position statement, "a review of research along with the collective wisdom and experience of members has led IRA and NAEYC to conclude that learning to read and write is a complex, multifaceted process that requires a wide variety of instructional approaches, a conclusion similar to that reached by an esteemed panel of experts for the National Academy of Sciences (Snow, Burns, & Griffin 1998)." The teacher needs to be able to assess the early literacy development needs of the child and design experiences that help the child move forward in his or her development as a literate human being. Some of the activities will involve the teachers working directly with the children on a specific skill, such as helping them notice the beginning of words. At other times, the teacher may guide the children through broader sets of experiences that support their early literacy development, such as extending their knowledge and vocabulary about all sorts of topics, from sand to machines to cats. With older children such activities could include involving the children in writing about their own experiences.

What Early Childhood Teachers Need to Do

Supporting early literacy means more than reading books aloud to children. Although reading aloud is important for young children both in programs and at home, there are other critical considerations for good early literacy development. Teachers must understand that early literacy development does not exist in a vacuum, separate from other elements of children's development and learning. A high-quality program includes effective early literacy teaching practices and reflects knowledge of the continuum of children's early development in reading and writing. For example, to support a child's development as a writer, the child can dictate a story to the teacher. By having the teacher write what the child says, eventually, children begin to recognize letters, use invented spelling, and write their own sentences and stories.

While no one curriculum addresses the needs of all programs and children, programs should include research-based effective practices, and well-planned activities and use of curricula. Well-designed, ongoing classroom-based assessment of children's developing language and literacy skills can help teachers learn more about how to build success.

What States Can Do

As recommended by IRA/NAEYC's joint position statement, there should be "a comprehensive, consistent system of early childhood professional preparation as well as ongoing professional development" that includes a focus on children's early reading development. As noted in various research reports, the key to a high-quality program is the teacher. Both professional preparation and ongoing professional development should include research and its application in early literacy. State Child Care Administrators can coordinate with agencies responsible for higher education and teacher preparation and professional development to promote a professional development plan and career lattice and to create an articulation between community-based professional development and two- and four-year institutions of higher education. They can also promote initiatives to increase the compensation of early childhood educators based on additional education and experience so that qualified teachers will be attracted to and remain in child care programs.

What Policy-makers Can Do

Without adequate resources, the goal of high-quality early childhood programs with a strong early literacy focus is difficult to

attain. Early childhood programs need funding for professional development, materials and books, recruitment and retention of qualified staff, and support for small class sizes. They need funding to meet the special needs of children with disabilities and children whose first language is not English, as well as children with other special needs, so that all children are ready to learn to read when they start school and are able to reach their full potential.

What Would These Elements Look Like in a Child Care Program?

To respond to this question, let's take a tour of a high-quality early childhood program, focusing particularly on the language experiences that underlie literacy development. The program's staff have participated in a series of professional development activities that provided them with an understanding of the recommended teaching practices in the IRA/NAEYC position statement and how to apply this knowledge to their work with young children.

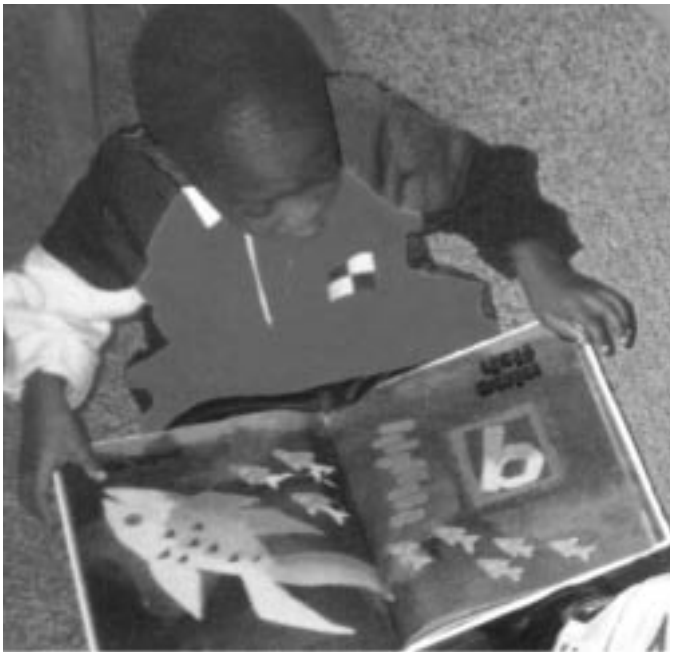
We begin in the infant room, where we find the teachers talking to the infants and responding to the infants' facial expressions and sounds. These teachers know that face-to-face interactions support oral language development and lay the foundation for later literacy learning. Our next stop is the toddler program. Here we find a teacher working with a child in the writing area. The teacher is engaged in a conversation with the child, who is using crayons and markers to express thoughts and ideas on paper. In the preschool room, the early childhood teachers continue to engage in conversations with several small groups of children. They use open-ended questions to help the children elaborate on their thoughts about the books they are reading. They listen as the children share their thoughts and reactions to the stories. In another area of the room, a teacher engages in finger play and sings songs with a small group of young children. Through these activities, early childhood teachers intentionally foster children's awareness of sounds and the flow of language.

When policy-makers, State Administrators, early childhood teachers, and families take part in providing high-quality early literacy activities in programs and in the home, they put young children on the road to enjoyment and success as confident and motivated readers.

Reference

IRA/NAEYC. 1998. Joint position statement. *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children. Young Children* 53 (4): 30-46.

The joint position statement by IRA/NAEYC is available on the Web at http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/psread0.htm. For additional resources, visit NAEYC on the Web at http://www.naeyc.org.



"Providing a quality education for our children begins with putting first things first, and in education, reading always comes first. Reading is the first step to learning. So that all our children can achieve their dreams, my own country, and countries around the world, must do a better job of teaching children to read."

Remarks by Mrs. Bush at Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Forum, May 2002

Strategies for Building Partnerships with a Focus on Literacy and School Success

By Janie Huddleston, Director, Division of Childcare and Early Childhood Education, Arkansas Department of Human Services

Arkansas has taken significant steps toward promoting literacy in its child care and early childhood education system. Pre-K Early Literacy Learning in Arkansas (Pre-K ELLA) training provides caregivers of young children with the knowledge and skills to provide developmentally appropriate experiences that promote emergent literacy skills for children prior to their entry in kindergarten.

One of the questions I'm asked most frequently is "How in the world did you get the State agency staff to work together to accomplish your literacy objectives?" Although our work seems easy now, it certainly took a lot of effort in the beginning to bring all of the parties together. It doesn't just happen by itself, and it certainly doesn't happen unless there are strong leaders who buy into the outcome. All of the parties need to feel that there is trust among the team members and that their voices count. I can remember vividly the conversation I had with one key leader of the team who asked me, "How do I know I can trust you?" My answer came immediately and did not center on personality issues or power, but simply focused on the outcome. "I am in this position to make a difference for children and I need your help—will you be willing to give it a try?"

Arkansas has made progress because we laid that premise as our foundation. We have looked at research and designed our initiatives based on best practice. We have long known that children from poorer families are at risk for school failure. According to the *U.S. Department of Education's Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K)*, a significant number of children arrive at kindergarten with significant gaps in "kid capital," the cultural knowledge that more advantaged children bring to the classroom as contextual understandings that make it much easier to move forward. For example, almost one-fifth (18 percent) are unfamiliar with the conventions of print—they do not know that English print is read from left to right and top to bottom or understand where a story ends. Thirty-four percent cannot identify letters of the alphabet by name, which indicates that they are not yet at the first level of reading proficiency.

Arkansas' Literacy Initiative: Pre-K ELLA

Choosing an initial project to tackle is crucial to the sustainability of the collaborative team. Pre-literacy skill development was a goal that we all felt was a priority in Arkansas. However, the *Pre K-Early Learning Literacy in Arkansas Initiative (Pre K-ELLA)* got a push with a headline outside of our arena—namely, the news that test scores of students in grades K-12 were below the proficiency level. The results of the Grade 4 Test Scores on the *Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment and Accountability Program (ACTAAP, 2001)* showed that only 43.2 percent of children were assessed as meeting or exceeding a proficient level of literacy competence. Since we had already aligned our pre-K frameworks for 3- and 4-year-olds with those of kindergarten through grade two, we started to discuss what could happen before kindergarten to ensure that the children coming to school would be ready to address the kindergarten benchmarks in literacy.

What resulted from our discussions was *Pre-K ELLA*, a comprehensive, five-day training designed for all early education settings, including center-based care, family child care homes, and professionals working with parents in our *Home Instruction for Parents of Pre-school Youngsters (HIPPY)* program.

The components of *Pre-K ELLA* training include the following:

- Social and Emotional Development related to Literacy
- Creating Learning Environments that are Literacy Rich and Guide Behavior
- Overview of Language Development—Language Arts
- Promoting Language and Literacy—The Role of Play
- Promoting Language and Literacy—Dramatic Play, Drama and Play Acting
- Promoting Language and Literacy—Read Aloud
- Promoting Language and Literacy—Storytelling
- Promoting Language and Literacy—Poetry, Nursery Rhymes, Finger Plays, Songs
- Reading Experiences—Shared Reading
- Learning about Letters, Sounds and Words
- Environmental Print
- Writing in the Pre-K Balanced Literacy Program
- Assessment, Observation, and Portfolio
- Fostering Children's Emergent Literacy Development through the Family

Making it Happen: Partnerships, Collaboration, and Evaluation

Pre-K ELLA would not have happened without partnerships, and in order to build partnerships, there must be some strong leaders. In the case of Arkansas, there were three leaders involved who believed strongly in collaboration and would not back down—the Director of the Division of Child Care, the Head Start Collaboration Director, and the Special Grants/Early Childhood Coordinator at the Arkansas Department of Education. In building partnerships, it is also important to focus on outcomes and present the message that by working together, you can accomplish your goal. Our primary goal was for literacy training to be conducted across the State, with a subsequent increase in levels of knowledge of pre-literacy skills among children entering kindergarten. I never attended a Joint House and Senate Education Committee meeting without representation from the collaborative team. We were all pleased a year into the collaboration process when a State Representative commented at a committee meeting that it seemed that the early childhood agencies were working together.

In addition to partnerships, you need collaboration. True collaboration emerges from doing "real work" together, not just participating in surface conversations—the real work gets to the heart and spirit of the issue. In our collaboration, we knew that we would be held accountable for the results and we all understood the outcomes that we wanted. Trust was the basis of the partnership and we felt that we could talk freely with each other. We even reached a point at which we could openly disagree with each other. The competitive nature of State work began to diminish with the elevation of the outcome so clearly in all of our minds. We began to overcome each challenge we faced in order to reach our goal. We also started to see a new energy develop, and more partners began asking to join the team. We began to take on other issues that needed to be resolved as well.

Evaluating both the product and the outcomes is also necessary. Very early in the collaboration process we collectively decided that any initiative that we participated in together would have an evaluation piece tied to it. That was a turning point for us because our State funding is limited. Despite funding received from several agencies, we were still faced with the dilemma of having to take service dollars away from families to fund an evaluation in order to show that our project would work. We began to explore other funding sources, including foundations. (Two of our latest projects were paid for with funding from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.) During the last legislative session in 2001, we were able to secure additional funding for our State pre-K program—*Arkansas Better Chance*—due to our strong collaboration. The time we spent building and developing public and political will for early childhood education resulted in funding from a new dedicated tax.

At the conclusion of the work on the literacy initiative, two of the key leaders on our collaborative team received terrific job offers and left their positions. At first, I was concerned that our progress might stop, but that has not happened. A true collaboration continues because of the process and outcomes, and is not dependent on any one person or group of people. Other leaders have stepped up and continue to move the collaboration forward because they see that it works. We are now actively involved in defining School Readiness Indicators for preschool children, developing child assessments to utilize with incoming kindergarten children, and collaborating around such issues as accountability, expanded professional development opportunities, mental health concerns, and additional funding for quality early education for all 4-year-olds. We have also received approval from the State Board of Education for the "Core Quality Component Model" for pre-K programs, which includes higher standards in the areas of staff, ratios, curriculum, professional development for staff, and parent involvement.

We believe in working together in Arkansas and have made enormous progress as a result. We challenge each of you to do the same. Identify the key leaders, set some goals to accomplish, and get started!

For additional information, contact Janie Huddleston, Division of Childcare and Early Education, Arkansas Department of Human Services, 101 East Capitol, Suite 106, Little Rock, AR 72201; Phone: 501-682-4891; Fax: 501-682-4897 or 501-682-2317; E-mail: janie.huddleston@mail.state.ar.us.

Massachusetts Initiative Promotes Family Literacy

By Kathy Rodriguez, Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium Coordinator

What is the Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium (MFLC)?

The Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium is a Statewide initiative with the mission of forging effective partnerships among State agencies, community organizations, and other interested parties to expand and strengthen family literacy and family support. The MFLC is comprised of parents, providers who work with families and children, community organizations, and 14 State agencies providing health, education, employment training, and human services.

"MFLC members believe that the comprehensive integration of our respective services can add up to so much more than the sum of the separate parts," said co-chair Bob Bickerton, State Director of Adult Education. "By working with whole families to coordinate and integrate the range of literacy and support services our member agencies provide, we can create an upward spiral of success for all Massachusetts families."

What Does the MFLC Do?

The MFLC promotes awareness of the value and benefits of family literacy, provides family literacy products and training, and creates opportunities for collaboration at the State level and in local communities. Its activities are guided by a work plan with seven major goals, one of which is to provide literacy training for State, regional, and local stakeholders.

A 1997 kickoff conference, keynoted by Sharon Darling of the National Center for Family Literacy, attracted about 600 early childhood, adult education, and family support professionals and featured over a dozen literacy workshops and five regional collaboration-building sessions. After the conference, the MFLC worked with the Massachusetts adult education professional development provider—System for Adult Basic Education Support—to provide regional institutes on community planning for family literacy and family literacy implementation across the State.

More recently, the MFLC provided trainings ranging from family literacy awareness to family literacy curricula for providers funded by the consortium's State agency members. As part of a Memorandum of Agreement with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), the Massachusetts Head Start–State Collaboration Project of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and the Massachusetts Head Start Association developed a plan for delivering family literacy professional development to Head Start staff.

In October 2001, these partners and the Education Development Center held a one-day family literacy training for Head Start programs in Massachusetts. The programs sent teams of managers, parents, and community partners charged with planning for family literacy initiatives. The agenda focused on an overview of family literacy principles and allowed planning time for incorporating those principles into program activities for the upcoming year.

"Head Start participants recognized that they were doing some family literacy activities, but acknowledged a clear need to do more. The community teams praised the strength-based approach to family literacy and appreciated the exchange of information and perspective that the participation by the various partners enabled," said Hugh Galligan, ACF Regional Administrator. "We were very pleased with the turnout for the meeting, and encouraged at the level of enthusiasm Head Start staff shared for the material. We look forward to continuing our partnership to advance the family literacy agenda in Massachusetts."

What is Next for the MFLC?

Given the positive feedback from the State agency trainings and the success of the October Head Start training, there is much enthusiasm for continuing this work in Massachusetts.

Says EOHHS Secretary Robert Gittens, "I look forward to our continuing partnership with the Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium, the Department of Education, the Administration for Children and Families and the Head Start Association around the critical need for family literacy services and supports. Promoting family literacy is an essential component of our efforts to support the healthy development of young children and to help families achieve economic self-sufficiency. High-quality cross-system trainings are an effective way to promote partnerships and skill-building among both community and State providers."

MLFC plans in the future to coordinate both regional trainings with Head Start and local community stakeholders and enhanced literacy trainings with the leadership of State agency partners.

For more information, contact the Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium, Massachusetts Department of Education; 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148; Phone: 781-338-3000; Fax: 781-338-3394; or visit MFLC on the Web at http://www.doe.mass.edu/familylit.

Oklahoma Takes Early Steps to Literacy

Interview with Ruth Ann Ball, Project Director of Oklahoma's Early Steps to Literacy

In October 2001, Oklahoma began the *Early Steps to Literacy Project*, aimed at preparing early childhood educators to facilitate low-income children's language and literacy competencies. The project employs a comprehensive research-based approach, consisting of three components. Component I, Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators, provides college-level instruction on emergent literacy for early childhood educators (teachers and directors) and professional preparation for administrators on supporting teachers' new literacy practices in early childhood settings. Component II, Support Network and Peer Coaching for Educators Focused on Promoting Children's Language and Literacy Development, creates a support network to facilitate and sustain teachers as they work to change and improve their literacy practices. Component III, Training and Support for an Early Literacy Infrastructure, creates bridges between the child care, Head Start, and public school communities, and supports and extends the existing early childhood infrastructure.

The *Early Steps to Literacy Project* targets early childhood educators in five regions in Oklahoma, encompassing 14 counties with the highest poverty and illiteracy rates. The participants come from licensed child care centers where families who receive child care subsidies from the State Department of Human Services comprise at least 50 percent of their enrollments. Early educators working in Head Start centers are also enrolled in the project.

For early childhood teachers, the Project provides 60 clock hours of college-level training on emergent literacy topics. Sixty clock hours of literacy and leadership training is provided for early childhood administrators. Center participants must enroll in pairs—a director and a staff member. The administrators attend the same trainings as the staff members for half of the classes. About five classes are for directors only, and focus on leadership in early literacy. The project also includes a strong research component. Trainings include such topics as data collection, child observation, and reflective practice (including journaling).

The *Early Steps to Literacy Project* has established a support network of literacy mentors, peer coaches, and a technological network that includes a listserv, Web site, and interactive satellite broadcast. In addition, the project hopes to place Literacy Mentors in child care resource and referral agencies to expand the current early childhood infrastructure, and to build an *Early Steps to Literacy* child care/Head Start/public school coalition to facilitate children's successful transition to public school and beyond.

As of summer 2002, *Early Steps to Literacy* had enrolled a total of 144 students. Classes are held in public libraries one day per month, for 10 months. Upon successful completion of the trainings, participants receive three college credits through Southeastern State University and the University of Oklahoma.

"This is a very exciting initiative for our State," said Project Director Ruth Ann Ball. "People are excited about the classes, the literacy mentors enjoy going out and working with their cohort participants. I am seeing that we are really making a difference in terms of how we are providing resources and support for our staff that teach our 3- and 4-year-olds. We are providing needed professional growth, especially for the teachers in the rural parts of the State. Participants are excited to be involved and are excited about all of the resources they are able to bring back to their classroom. We feel honored and privileged to be able to do this project in our State."

The *Early Steps to Literacy Project* was developed by a large collaboration known as the Early Steps to Literacy Consortium. The consortium includes the Center for Early Childhood Professional Development at the University of Oklahoma, Public and Community Services, a division of the College of Continuing Education, the Department of Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum within the College of Oklahoma City, the Division of Child Care within the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Little Dixie Head Start (serving the southeastern portion of Oklahoma), the Oklahoma City Public Schools, The Tulsa Public Schools, Parents as Partners in Education, the Oklahoma Head Start Collaboration Project, the American Indian Institute, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma TEACH®, and resource and referral agencies in Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and Durant.

For more information on Oklahoma's Early Steps to Literacy Project, contact the Center for Early Childhood Professional Development at the University of Oklahoma; Phone: 405-799-6383 or 888-446-7608; or E-mail: mlenington@ou.edu.

Supporting Cognitive Development in Early Childhood

By Susan H. Landry, Ph.D., Michael Matthew Knight Professor of Pediatrics and Chief, Division of Developmental Pediatrics, University of Texas–Houston Health and Science Center (UTHHSC)

Dr. Landry directs the Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education (CIRCLE) at UTHHSC. She served as keynote speaker at the Child Care Bureau-sponsored National Leadership Forum on Literacy in Early Care Settings held on February 26, 2002. In this address excerpted from the White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development, held on July 26, 2001, Landry discusses educational and developmental research related to supporting cognitive development in early childhood. Landry's full speech is available on the Web at http://www.ed.gov/PressReleases/07-2001/07262001-landry.html. For additional information about CIRCLE, visit www.uth.tmc.edu/circle on the Web.

What Educational Research Tells Us

Research tells us that if language, literacy, and other cognitive factors are attended to through quality programming in early childhood settings, children's school readiness is optimized. Research describes three key components of quality programs for reading and academic success. These include a strong foundation in: 1) language development, 2) early literacy (i.e., phonological awareness, letter knowledge, written expression, book and print awareness, motivation to read), and 3) early math (e.g., number and operations).

What Developmental Research Tells Us

Research also tells us how young children learn most effectively through interactions with others. Based on developmental theories that emphasize the role of learning in social contexts, we know that caregivers and teachers are a critical source of stimulation for young children. The way in which more competent others are able to support young children's learning has been described as "scaffolding." Scaffolding includes a broad range of interactive styles that are consistently reported to enhance children's ability to learn because they provide support for the young child's less mature attention, cognitive, and language skills. Scaffolding occurs in everyday situations when caregivers or teachers notice a child's interest in a toy or book and help him/her hold the object and talk about how it works and what it is called.

In our own research with 360 families followed across children's first 8 years of life, we have found the following types of scaffolding to be important in the early childhood period for more optimal cognitive and social outcomes. These include caregivers who: 1) provide rich language environments through labeling and explanations about children's interests, 2) respond to children's requests and signals promptly and sensitively, 3) maintain and expand on children's interests in specific learning activities, 4) avoid negative and highly restrictive behaviors, and 5) provide opportunities for choice by the toddler/preschool periods when children are more capable of beginning to direct their own learning. When this interactive style is apparent, children are willing to signal their needs and interests, caregivers and teachers respond to these in a sensitive and prompt manner, and children receive a supportive consequence and more effective learning occurs.

In our research, after identifying the behaviors that are important for early learning, we addressed whether early childhood was a critical period for children to experience these supportive and stimulative interactive styles. We were specifically interested in whether the period from infancy through entry into kindergarten played a unique role in children's development of cognitive and social skills because this was a time when children were more receptive to supportive learning environments. This question was motivated by research demonstrating that the young brain is highly susceptible to different types of stimulation as it is in the active process of developing networks of associations from learning experiences.

We evaluated the question of a critical period for 360 families and their young children by observing mother and child interactions in home visits when children were 6, 12, and 24 months of age, and again when they were 3, 4, 6, and 8 years of age. They were observed interacting in everyday activities such as having lunch together, bathing and dressing, as well as in toy play and book reading activities. To address the role of responsive stimulation across this time period, we constructed average ratings of mothers' behaviors for the infancy period (6, 12, 24 months of age) and the preschool period (3, 4 years of age). We also collected measures of mothers' behaviors at 6 and 8 years of age. We were interested in whether mothers differed in their ability to show responsive stimulation across infancy and early childhood. Through cluster analysis we found four evenly distributed groups of mothers: 1) one that was consistently and highly responsive throughout early childhood, 2) two of whom were responsive in either infancy or preschool period but not both, and 3) one that was consistently low in their responsiveness across this age period.

Examination of how these four patterns of parenting predicted children's cognitive/language abilities as well as their social skills showed that the children whose mothers were consistently the highest in responsiveness had the fastest rates of cognitive language development. This group of children had cognitive skills at average levels by kindergarten. The inconsistent and low responsiveness groups showed slower rates of development with children being considerably behind in their cognitive skills by 5 years of age. When

we considered this question through 8 years of age and took into consideration mothers' 6- and 8-year parenting interactions, we continued to find that the quality of parenting in early childhood was the strongest predictor and that parenting at these two later ages did not predict additional variance in the children's outcomes. These findings demonstrate support for a unique role of quality stimulation in early childhood for cognitive/language development.

This research led us to develop parent programs that were tested in random assignment studies for their effectiveness in facilitating parents' interactive behaviors. We are finding that parents from all socioeconomic levels usually want to learn more about how to enhance their children's development. Our research is demonstrating that with information about effective parenting practices and a facilitator helping them practice specific responsive strategies, caregivers show dramatic increases in their use of these strategies. This, in turn, resulted in their young children showing large gains in cognitive and social skills.

For additional information, contact Susan Landry, Ph.D., Michael Matthew Knight Professor of Pediatrics, University of Texas–Houston Health Science Center, 7000 Fannin St., Suite 2300, Houston, TX 77030; Phone: 713-500-3710; Fax: 713-500-3705; E-mail: susan.landry@uth.tmc.edu.

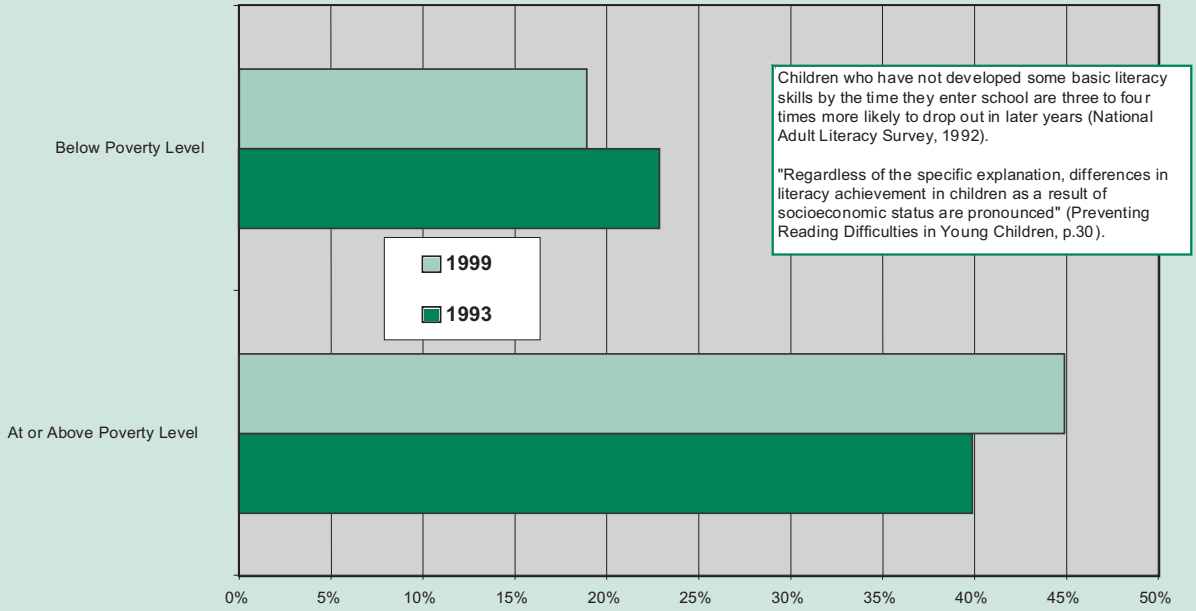
National Leadership Forum Highlights Early Literacy

Early literacy is one of the key priorities of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF). On February 26, 2002, the Child Care Bureau addressed this priority by holding a National Leadership Forum on Literacy in Early Care and Education Settings. In addition to discussing the latest research and innovative State models, participants worked together to identify concrete actions for policy-makers, families, and practitioners, and helped the Child Care Bureau to identify ways in which literacy efforts for young children can be encouraged and supported.

A Summary Materials Notebook was produced as a follow up to the Leadership Forum. This document contains speeches from keynote speakers, summaries and recommendations from small group work sessions, and resources related to literacy and young children. The notebook is available on NCCIC's Web site at *http://nccic.org/forum/forfeb02.html.*

"The educational careers of 25 to 40 percent of American children are imperiled because they do not read well enough, quickly enough, or easily enough to ensure comprehension in their content courses in middle and secondary school. Although some men and women with reading disability can and do attain significant levels of academic and occupational achievement, more typically poor readers, unless strategic interventions in reading are afforded them, fare poorly on the educational and, subsequently, the occupational ladder. Although difficult to translate into actual dollar amounts, the costs to society are probably quite high in terms of lower productivity, underemployment, mental health services, and other measures" (*Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, p.98).

Percentage of Children Ages 3 to 5* with Cognitive/Literacy Skills, by Poverty Status**



*Based on children who have yet to enter kindergarten.
**The four skills tallied are: ability to recognize the letters of the alphabet, count to 20 or higher, write one's name, or read or pretend to read.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *National Household Education Survey,* 1993 and 1999.

Early Literacy Resources

The following selected publications provide useful information about literacy and learning in young children.

Early Reading First video (2002)
U.S. Department of Education
To order, call 1-877-4-EDPUBS

Helping Your Child Become a Reader: With Activities for Children from Infancy Through Age 6 (2000)
Andrea DeBruin-Parecki, U.S. Department of Education
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/Reader/index.html

Ideas at Work: How to Help Every Child Become a Reader (1999)
U.S. Department of Education, America Reads Challenge
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ideasatwork/

Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children (2000)
Susan B. Neuman, Sue Bredekamp, and Carol Copple
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children (1995)
Betty Hart, and Todd R. Risley

Much More than the ABCs: The Early Stages of Reading and Writing (1999)
Judith A. Schickedanz, NAEYC

Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (1998)
National Research Council
http://www.nap.edu/books/030906418X/html/index.html

Put Reading First: Helping Your Child Learn to Read (2001)
The Partnership for Reading
http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/PFRbrochure.pdf

Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read (2001)
The Partnership for Reading
http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/reading_first1.html

Reading First video (2002)
U.S. Department of Education
To order, call 1-877-4-EDPUBS or visit
http://www.ed.gov/about/ordering.jsp on the Web

Ready to Read: Ready to Learn: First Lady Laura Bush's Education Initiatives
http://www.ed.gov/inits/rrrl/index.html

Start Early Finish Strong: How to Help Every Child Become a Reader (1999)
U.S. Department of Education, America Reads Challenge
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/startearly/

Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success (1999)
National Research Council
http://search.nap.edu/books/0309064104/html/

Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction (2000)
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) in consultation with the U.S. Department of Education
http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook.pdf

Teaching Our Youngest: A Guide for Preschool Teachers and Child Care and Family Providers (2002)
U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/teachingouryoungest/

The following selected organizations and initiatives provide useful information about literacy and learning in young children.

Child Care READS!
Child Care Action Campaign (CCAC)
330 7th Avenue, 14th Floor
New York, NY 10001
212-239-0138
Web site: *http://www.childcareaction.org*

Early Reading First
U.S. Department of Education
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202-6000
202-260-4555
Web site: *http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/earlyreading*

Reading First
U.S. Department of Education
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202
202-401-4877
Web site: *http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/readingfirst/index.html*

Additional publications and organizations related to the topic of early literacy can be located on NCCIC's Web site at http://nccic.org/cctopics/literacy.html.

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Internet access to ACF and the Child Care Bureau:
http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ccb

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