

Creating Environments to Support Literacy

Time: 2 hour workshop: 3 hour option.

Objectives

In this workshop participants will:

- Gain a deeper understanding of how to plan and set up preschool and kindergarten learning environments that support emergent literacy and foster active learning.
- Acquire strategies for creating developmentally appropriate print-rich environments that facilitate meaning, support diversity, and promote literacy development.
- Collect ideas for literacy materials, props, and ideas to enhance learning centers.

This workshop supports participants' understanding of:

All Preschool Language Arts Literacy Expectations

All Kindergarten Language Arts Literacy Standards

Materials Required

- L6 Overheads #1 - 7 or L6 PowerPoint slides 1 - 8
- Chart pad, markers, tape
- Props as described for Activity 4. Print has a Purpose
- Use L6 PowerPoint Environment Photos or print these photos

For 3 hour option

- L6 Overhead 6 or L6 PowerPoint slide 7

Additional Materials

Review Chapter 6 in Schickedanz, J. (1999) *Much more than the ABC's*.

Review Chapter 4 & 6 in Owocki, G. (1999) *Literacy through play*.

Handout List

L6 Agenda

Developing the Literate Play Environment

Key Elements in Organizing Space and Materials

Literacy Materials and Center Books

Activity: Infusing Literacy in Centers

Essential Messages

- The materials we make accessible to children (or don't make accessible) encourage (or limit) their play. Without varied props to support literacy, we limit children's opportunities to develop literacy skills and knowledge.
- A *print-rich environment* means that there is liberal inclusion of print that has meaning for children. The print serves a purpose. Signs, labeled centers, wall stories, labeled displays, labeled murals, charts and poems are just a few ways to display print. This does not mean putting labels on everything in sight such as door, window, tables, etc. nor does it mean papering the walls with words.

- When adults thoughtfully plan children's environment and activities to incorporate literacy, reading and writing are meaningful in children's everyday lives.¹

Trainers' Agenda

Opening Activity: (5 - 10 minutes)

Open the session by saying "Today we are going to focus on the environment. I want you to find all the literacy materials you have in your possession. Let's see which table can come up with the largest amount of different items. For example, you can only count a pen once." Allow time for each table to rummage through their possessions and find materials to support literacy.

After about 5 minutes, ask each table to pause and count up their items. Ask each table to tell you how many items they have. Have the table with the most items show/list each item, one at a time and say what it is used for and which expectation or standard it supports.

Use L6 Overhead 1 (Preschool) or 2 (Kindergarten) or PowerPoint slide 2 (Preschool) or 3 (Kindergarten) to provide a list of the expectations/standards as a reference.

Trainer's Note: If 2 tables tie, have them do it as a run-off, which one table showing 1 item and the other table showing a different item not already shown.

Possible items they may find include the following: pen, pencil, marker, crayon, cell phone, pad, address book, a CD, a book, checkbook, file card, takeout menu, credit card, an envelope, a letter, business card, receipt, coupons, family pictures, magazine, date book, calendar, recipe card, map, note, post-its, journal, notebook, etc.

After the table has finished going through its items, ask if any table has something that hasn't been shown yet. Invite them to share their item and which expectation it supports.

After all different items have been shown, pose the rhetorical question:

"How many of these items are available in your dramatic play center? Think about what you would do if you didn't have a checkbook. You wouldn't be able to write checks. The materials we make accessible to children, or don't make accessible, encourage or limit their play. Without varied props to support literacy, we limit children's opportunities to develop literacy skills and knowledge."

"Today's workshop will focus using the environment and materials to support children's literacy development. The environment provides a vehicle to support all expectations/standards."

2. Welcome and Logistics (5 minutes)

Use Handout L6 "Agenda" to review agenda and session objectives.

3. Introducing the Topic (35 - 40 minutes)

Using L6 Overheads 3 - 5 or L6 PowerPoint (slides 4 - 6) to introduce this topic.

¹ Schickedanz, J. (1999). *Much more than ABC's: The early stages of reading and writing*.

Begin by saying “Knowing the power of the physical environment to affect children’s literacy development, good teachers carefully and intentionally arrange classroom environments in ways that promote children’s literacy learning.”

Add:

- The physical environment tells children what they may or may not do – what is expected of them.
- The way we arrange and the types of materials provided help decide what learning will take place.

Show L6 Overhead 3 “Good Environments Promote Literacy”² or PowerPoint slide 4.

Classrooms must be arranged so children can

- **Engage in meaningful firsthand learning that makes the need for language real and necessary.** The environment is arranged into learning centers with materials that are interesting and accessible to children. Materials should be real and reflective of the children’s experiences. Children can select among centers and varied materials.

Ask: “What is some meaningful firsthand learning that takes place in your class?”

- **Develop awareness of the purpose and use of print.** The NAEYC and International Reading Association’s joint position statement *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children* (1998) notes that a central goal of early childhood programs is to expose children to print and develop concepts of print.
- **Use language, talking, listening, writing, and reading in connection with their interactions with their physical world and socially with others** Children are active learners. They learn by interacting with their environment, materials, other children, and adults. When children are actively engaged, they find the need to use both spoken and written language real and necessary.
- **Use language to manage themselves, convince another of their point of view, and control their social, play, and physical environments.** As children work in learning centers, they learn social skills such as cooperation and sharing, as well as how to deal with conflicts and diverse points of view.

Ask: “Who can give us an example of an observation of a child in your room using language in one of these ways.” Allow one or two to respond.

- **Think through an idea, reflecting on their experiences, and clarify their own thinking.** Children make meaning through experiences. Teachers encourage children to talk through or explain their reasoning. They interact in ways that clarify, extend, and expand children’s language skills and knowledge.

² Seefeldt, C. & Galper, A. (2001). *Active experiences for active children: Literacy emerges*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

- **Experience success as they gain new language skills and knowledge.** Teachers ensure that materials are varied and open-ended and available on different levels of difficulty. Ask: “Why is it important that children experience success?”

Show L6 Overhead 4 or PowerPoint slide 5 and read the quote aloud: “**A good learning environment empowers children to become confident learners.**” Pause for 30 seconds and read it again. Invite teachers to comment on ways their environment empowers children.

Distribute L6 Handout “Key Elements in Organizing Space and Materials”. Allow teachers to take a few minutes to review the handout, and ask them to put a + next to those items they do very well, and a √ by those items they need to improve. Ask teachers to share #14 “something beautiful” in their room. *Trainer's note: While children are beautiful, they are not things.*

Say: “We are going to focus now specifically on literacy in the environment.”

Show L6 Overhead 5 “Developing the Literate Environment” or PowerPoint slide 6. Annotate as noted. *Trainer's Note: Use a paper to uncover Overhead only one line at a time. If using the PowerPoint, this will occur naturally.*

1. **Establish a literacy-rich learning atmosphere.** A literacy-rich play atmosphere is one in which teachers and children use written language, as it to needed, *to serve real-life functions* in play. Unless children see that reading & writing serve a purpose, they will have little reason to use them. Your role is to support and extend their spontaneous uses of written language and to model and demonstrates its many meaningful functions.

Ask: “What are some of the real-life functions of written language? In other words, why is it necessary to read and write?” Solicit a variety of reasons. Then uncover the next section on the overhead and relate their functions given to the 4 major functions. Some examples might be to provide information about the world (street signs, store signs, schedules, bills, price tags, coupons); used as part of one's job (menus, order pads, signs, money, appointment books, reference materials, plan books, check books); to get information (calendars, clocks, diagrams, newspapers, phone books, etc.); and used for leisure, social occasions, etc. (magazines, storybooks, poems, travel books, birthday cards, thank you notes).

2. **Establish a print-rich learning environment.** A *print-rich environment* means that there is liberal inclusion of print that has meaning for children. The print serves a purpose. Signs, labeled materials/shelves, wall stories, labeled displays, labeled murals, classroom charts, and poems are just a few ways to display print. This does not mean putting labels on everything in sight such as door, window, tables, etc. nor does it mean papering the walls with words. It also means that there are books and writing materials in many centers.
3. **Establish at least one classroom literacy center.** Typically this is an expanded writing center that includes items such as various types, colors, and sizes of paper, markers, crayons, pencils, colored pencils, stapler, hole punch, tape, blank books, envelopes, cards, stencils, word files, note books, clip boards, post-its, name cards, stationery, books, etc.
4. **Provide books and varied writing materials in many centers.** Each center should have books/reading materials linked with that center, and varied materials to write with and on. Consider what children do in that center, and what purposes writing and reading can serve.

5. **Introduce literacy props to familiar play areas.** These play areas should be linked to children's interests and experiences. Observe children's play themes and talk with family members about where children have been and had experience with. For example, most children have been to the grocery store, so it makes sense to provide literacy props to support that play. On the other hand, not all children have been to an airport, so their play and experience will be limited unless you take the children for a visit. Knowledge for young children is context-bound.
6. **Systematically collect literacy materials.** Start a collection of literacy materials to be used for various dramatic play themes. Create a center for dramatic play themes beyond the home area when possible. For the home center, think about all the literacy props found in your home, and in your children's homes. Start collecting and add these. Visit real places in the community and ask for literacy materials to support creating that theme center. Create theme prop boxes to support literacy.

Adapted from Owocki, G. (1999). *Literacy through play*. & Morrow, L.M. (2001). *Literacy development in the early years: Helping children read and write*.

4. Activity: Print has a purpose (15 - 20 minutes)

Ask for 2 volunteers to do an activity. Pull them aside to give private directions. Tell them that one is a customer, the other a store clerk. The customer wants to return a present she got for her birthday, but she doesn't have the receipt. The store clerk won't accept the item back as store policy is no returns without receipt. They can not talk or use their voices during the activity but are to act it out, no props allowed.

Bring the two in front of the group and let them act it out for about 1-2 minutes.

Stop the activity, and ask if anyone knows what the scene was about? Invite a few guesses.

Pull the same two aside again, and give the customer a gift box with a scarf or pair of gloves and a birthday card. Give the clerk, a name tag, a cell phone, a few receipts, a phone book/or list to look up her boss's number, and a paper that looks like rules. Tell them to repeat their scene, still without voices, but now they may use props.

Bring the two in front of the group and let them act it out again for a few minutes until someone guesses what the scene is about.

Make the following points:

- The materials and props we provide for children allow them to take on different roles and learn about the various purposes of print.
- Providing literacy materials encourages children to explore literacy and learn that print has meaning, and takes different forms.

Ask: What were the literacy props our actors had? (birthday card, phone book, name tag, cell phone, receipts, rule sheet).

Ask: What forms, functions or features of print did they use? (e.g. when you buy things you get a receipt, and when you return them, you need the receipt; receipts are usually lighter weight)

paper; cards go with presents; phone books tell us how to find people; name tags are written in big letters; people who work in stores have name tags; there is always fine print for rules). Add those not mentioned.

Ask: What print with a purpose is in this room? Possible answers may be exit signs, turn off the light signs by the switch, recycle signs on trash cans, emergency exit chart, notice of an upcoming meeting, etc.)

Ask: What examples of print with a purpose are in your room? As different participants respond, ask for the purpose that it serves. Keep in mind the 4 functions of print and that simply labeling items like wall, window, table, chair, shelf serve no purpose.

Give example of the importance of putting picture cues for print: A sign by the toilet that says please flush with a picture of a child flushing the toilet. Note that this not only helps children to learn to flush, but also that print has meaning.

The print should contain a simple, clear message or meaning. Print should be used so that it will capture children's attention, and be large, attractive, and eye-catching. Other examples include: helper charts, the child's schedule of the day, labels on bins to note what goes in that bin, and labels on shelves to know where to put things.

Show L6 PowerPoint of Environmental Print

Ask teachers to work with a partner and to jot down the print with a purpose they see. After each slide, pause to let pairs discuss for a minute. Then invite responses to the print with a purpose they see. There are 8 slides.

Trainer's Note: If you do not have the access for PowerPoint, make color overheads of the pictures (Kinko's, Staples, Office Max, or most print shops can do this for you) or have several sets of hard copies made of the photos.

5. Activity: Literacy in centers (30-35 minutes)

Use L6 Handout 6 "Infusing Literacy in Centers" or PowerPoint slide 7.

Say:

"To infuse learning centers throughout the classroom with language and literacy learning, address 4 questions:

- What materials can be added?
- What specific ideas do children need to guide their work and play so that literacy learning is fostered?
- What is your role?
- What expectation/standards can be addressed?"

Divide into groups of 4-5 participants. Give each group a different center to work on and give each group a piece of chart paper and markers. Centers to assign include: Art, Blocks, House Area, Science/Discovery, Sand/Water, Outside, Table Toys, Music/Movement, Computer, and Library Corner. Say:

“With your group, work on your assigned center. Think about materials to add and ideas you can use to focus and extend children’s literacy learning. It is not necessary to include those materials generally found in that learning center. As you develop your ideas, think about the expectation(s) it addresses. Record your plan on a chart.”

Provide about 20 minutes for group work. You may want to put the L6 Overhead 1 or 2 up for teachers’ reference.

Have each table report out.

6. Discussion (5-10 minutes)

Note that through adding materials to the centers, and appropriate teacher supports (interactions and questions), most tables were able to address all of the literacy expectations. Add also that center time should occur for large blocks of time in both the morning and afternoon.

Distribute copies of L6 Handout “Literacy Materials and Center Books”. Provide a few minutes for teachers to review. Ask: “Where there materials listed on the handout that they forgot to include.” Suggest that perhaps a few teachers would like to volunteer to type up the ideas generated by this activity for distribution to all.

7. Closure (15 minutes)

Show L6 Overhead 7 “Reflections” or PowerPoint slide 8.

Good teachers use ELAS to continually self-evaluate & reflect on their role in facilitating literacy through active learning.

- Do my children read and write during play?
- Are materials meaningful?
- Do I take the time to capitalize on teachable moments?
- What functions does literacy serve in my children’s play?
- Are my children exploring a variety of genres and forms of written language?
- Do they have the materials they need for explorations of the features of print?

Distribute L6 Handout “A Ha! slip”. Provide teachers with 5 minutes to reflect on the questions and write a written A Ha! from today’s session. Invite a few to share their A Ha’s.

Additional Activity for 3 Hour Session

8. Activity: Dramatic Play Themes to Support Literacy (35 - 40 minutes)

Begin this activity by saying “For this activity, we are going to explore in more depth the varying functions of written language.” Divide the participants into 4 groups. Assign someone as a facilitator and recorder for each group. Give the recorder chart paper and markers. Assign one function to each group: Environmental, Occupational, Informational, Recreational. Have each group do a 5 minute brainstorm of Dramatic Play Themes that support that area. Stop them after

5 minutes and post the chart paper on the wall and read off the lists. Allow groups of 4 to select a theme they would like to tackle.

Give each group chart paper and markers to record their ideas.

Trainer's Note: There will probably be overlap among the lists. That is okay because many themes provide the opportunity for children to gain knowledge about the various functions of print. The intention is to develop a list of various dramatic play themes. If you are short on time, simply divide into groups of 4 and assign a dramatic play theme. Do not assign or let get chosen "Supermarket" as most classrooms already do this theme.

Themes may include Office, Flower Shop, Gas-Station, Bakery, Repair Shop, Sporting Goods Store, Hair Salon, Fast Food Restaurant, Police Station, Doctor's Office, Post Office, Pet Store, Library, Construction Site, etc.

Show L6 Overhead 6 or PowerPoint slide 7 for Instructions: Each group is to first discuss **how this theme will be introduced. How will they motivate children's interest in this theme and ensure that they have the necessary experience to support their play. What materials will be added? How will the theme be organized? What roles are there to play and how can the teacher support their literacy learning in this play center?**

After 15-20 minutes, have the groups report out to each other.

9. Discussion (5-10 minutes)

Pose these questions to stimulate dialog.

- What are some ways that teachers can ensure children have the necessary experience to make this a successful theme center?
- Where can one get materials to support the theme center?
- How do you select themes to expand to a center?
- What themes have been successful?
- In what ways can a theme help build children's knowledge of the various functions of written language?

10. Closure: (same as above)