The Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework

△ Literacy Knowledge & Skills

Domain Description

Refers to the knowledge and skills that lay the foundation for reading and writing, such as understanding basic concepts about books or other printed materials, the alphabet, and letter-sound relationships. Early literacy is the foundation for reading and writing in all academic endeavors in school. It is considered one of the most important areas for young children’s development and learning. Early literacy learning provides children with an opportunity to explore the world through books, storytelling, and other reading and writing activities. It is a mechanism for learning about topics they enjoy and acquiring content knowledge and concepts that support progress in other domains. It is critical for supporting a range of positive outcomes, including success in school and other environments. In the domain of Literacy Knowledge & Skills, programs need to ensure that children who are dual language learners can demonstrate their abilities, skills, and knowledge in any language, including their home language.

PreschoolFirst Philosophy & Pedagogy

PreschoolFirst bases it approach to Reading & Language Arts on research it conducted when developing additional early literacy behaviors in 2007. We believe that young children who enjoy engaging literacy activities in the early stages of literacy development are apt to associate reading with positive experiences in later more formal learning environments. The following paragraphs are a synopsis of that research.
**Phonics & Phonemic Awareness:** A young child’s awareness that the sounds they hear in spoken words correspond roughly to individual letters is related to their future phonological understanding. Rhyming games contribute to phonemic awareness in young children. Young children do not develop phonemic awareness spontaneously, hence, specific experiences are necessary to help children notice sounds in language including rhymes and alliteration (Adams, Foorman, Lundberg, & Beeler, 2006; Schickedanz, 1999). Rhyming games provide opportunities to hear and speak phonemes in a consistent and repeated way. Such games engage listening and contribute to early literacy development (Schickedanz, 1999; Strickland, & Schickedanz, 2005).

By recognizing the letters of his/her name, a young child begins to explore specific letter shapes and sounds. This exploration can extend to other letters and words in print. As children reach their third and fourth year, they begin to understand that it is the print that is read in stories, and that print contains letters. During this process, children may learn that letters are a special category of visual items that are different from numbers (National Research Council, 1999). Because young children feel comfortable and confident when they see their name in print in various contexts (Clay, 1997), adults can use a child’s name to encourage further explorations and letter recognition. Young children are drawn to experiences that incorporate their names and are intrinsically motivated to learn to read and write their names (Strickland, & Schickedanz, 2005).

Early literacy behaviors such as rhyming words, listening to repeated sounds in words, and recognizing the letters in familiar words foster a young child’s interest in and ability to connect letters with sounds (Neuman, & Roskos, 1994). A young child may start to identify the first and last sounds in words with coaching and opportunities to do so (National Reading Council, 2004; Adams, Foorman, Lundberg, & Beeler, 1998). Connecting letters with their corresponding sounds is a strategy used by beginning and mature readers to identify (or decode) printed words, a core element of reading (National Reading Council, 2004). Adults can help children develop this strategy through both coaching and modeling during shared reading experiences (Strickland, & Schickedanz, 2004). When a young child begins to connect alphabet letters with phonemic sounds, he/she needs a variety of opportunities to practice this new skill and may also begin to use other more advanced strategies for extracting meaning from print (National Reading Council, 2004).

**Reading Comprehension & Connecting Spoken Words to Print:** Reading with children, helping them recognize print in the environment, and supporting early writing efforts are all practices adults can use to help young children obtain meaning from print (McCormick, & Mason, 1992; National Reading Council, 2004). As children reach their fourth year, they begin to understand that it is print that is read in stories, that print contains alphabet letters, and that alphabet letters are a special category of visual constructs (National Research Council, 2004). They begin to recognize and read some environmental print in their homes,
neighborhoods, and other environments (National Research Council, 2004). A print-rich environment attracts children’s attention to print. Sharing their experiences and attention to selected print in the environment (e.g., on the cereal box, a store sign), facilitates the development of letter and word recognition. Through these experiences children demonstrate awareness of print and exhibit beginning reading abilities by identifying words and labels found in purposeful contexts (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000).

During the course of literacy development, children strive to sort out the relationship between oral and written language (Sulzby, 1992). Fluent readers use several strategies to extract meaning from books. To begin developing different strategies, for extracting meaning from books, young children need many experiences to explore books both independently and with others (Debruin-Parecki, Perkinson & Federer, 2000). Additionally they need opportunities to listen to a variety of stories, engage in book-sharing routines with adults, and talk about events or characters in books (National Research Council, 1999). During pleasurable literacy experiences, young children are encouraged to interact with readers and to engage in extended discussions in which they demonstrate their understanding of a book’s content (Bus, 2001). Talk surrounding reading contributes to children’s language and literacy development (McKeown, & Beck, 2006). Children learn that text and information can be found in a variety of formats: books, magazines, websites, instructions, recipes maps, and charts; and that this information is used for a variety of purposes.

Emergent Written Expression: Young children need multiple experiences to explore books and imitate writing both independently and with others in order to develop a variety of early literacy strategies (De Bruin-Parecki, Perkinson & Federer, 2000). Allowing children to play and behave like readers and writers facilitates exploration with print, letter recognition and letter-sound awareness. Play-based literacy experiences stimulate higher levels of interest in learning to read and write (Fields & Spangler, 2004; Goodman, 1992). A child imitates literacy behaviors when he/she believes there is value in reading and writing (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000). As a child turns pages and pretends to read, he/she demonstrates knowledge of how books are used and that print has a function (Fields & Spangler, 2004). Progress toward higher levels of literacy development is facilitated through play-based literacy experiences (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000).

Young children who engage in literacy activities from an early age realize that although both are meaningful, pictures and text are very different (Goodman, 1992). Writing development occurs in sequences beginning with general drawing, moving to letter-like forms and letters and finally, developing into phonetic letter strings (Sulzby, 1992). Adults facilitate this development when they help young children understand that printed letters actually represent meaning, and when they encourage children to dictate their ideas, thoughts, or comments so that they can be
written down. Initially, a young child may draw or create pictures and ask an adult to write the words that label, describe, or tell a story (Clay, 1997). When a child observes an adult writing a dictated message, he/she begins to distinguish between the picture and the text. This reinforces the concept that print, not the picture, conveys a message. As with all early literacy skills, adults encourage young children to explore, offer meaningful ways in which each child can practice at his/her own pace, and observe each child’s developing abilities (Vukelich, & Christie, 2005).

References:


Schickedanz, J. A. (1999). Much more than the ABC’s: The early stages of reading and

