

INTRODUCTION

Young children become aware of print and books long before they can read. They learn that printed words in their environment represent objects, people, and ideas, and that print is speech written down. They develop an understanding of how books work, such as how to turn the pages of a book and where a book begins and ends. They understand that print tells the story illustrated in a picture book and that telling a story requires a special type of language and rules, for example having a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Cultures vary in their uses of oral and written language. Different languages have different written forms and conventions. Some languages are read from left to right or top to bottom, while others are read from right to left or bottom to top. During the preschool years, learning about books and print in any language supports children's book knowledge and print concepts in English.¹



WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

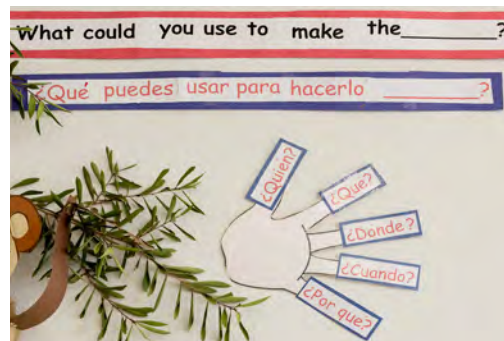
All children, including children with disabilities who are dual language learners (DLLs), benefit from high-quality literacy instruction designed to promote print concepts and book knowledge.² Many children with disabilities, however, are reluctant to seek out experiences with books and print on their own. Children with impaired language or attention skills especially tend to show less interest in print than other children and are less likely to desire book interactions with adults.³



Effective interventions aimed at improving emergent literacy skills of children with disabilities require a combination of meaningful child-centered activities and adult-directed explicit instruction on key literacy concepts.⁴

- 1 Deborah M. Chen, Diane Klein, and Anna Osipova, "Two is Better Than One! In Defense of Home Language Maintenance and Bilingualism for Young Children with Disabilities," in *Young Exceptional Children monograph series* no. 14: Supporting Young Children who are Dual Language Learners With or at-Risk for Disabilities eds. Rosa Milagros Santos, Gregory. A. Cheatham, and Lillian K. Durán (Missoula, MT: Division for Early Childhood, (2012): 133-47.
- 2 Laura. M. Justice, Jessica A.R. Logan, Joan N. Kaderavek, and Jaclyn M. Dynia, "Print-Focused Read-Alouds in Early Childhood Special Education Programs," *Exceptional Children* 81, no. 3 (January 2015): 292-311, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402914563693>; Sherri Lovelace, and Sharon R. Stewart, "Increasing Print Awareness in Preschoolers With Language Impairment Using Non-Evocative Print Referencing," *Language, Speech and Hearing Services in Schools* 38, no. 1 (January 2007): 16-30, [https://doi.org/10.1044/0161-1461\(2007\)003](https://doi.org/10.1044/0161-1461(2007)003).
- 3 Laura M. Justice, Jessica A. R. Logan, Sonnur İşitan, and Mesut Saçkes, "The Home-Literacy Environment of Young Children With Disabilities," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 37, (4th Quarter 2016): 131-39, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2016.05.002>.
- 4 Laura M. Justice, and Paige C. Pullen, "Promising Interventions for Promoting Emergent Literacy Skills: Three Evidence-Based Approaches," *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education* 23, no. 3 July 2003): 99-113, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121403023030101>.

Print-rich inclusive environment. High-quality, print-rich environments support literacy learning in young children with disabilities who are DLLs.⁵ A print-rich environment is one in which all children are able to engage in meaningful experiences with books and print.⁶ Education staff (e.g., teachers, home visitors, family child care providers) and families can adapt books and other print activities to make them more accessible and engaging for children and offer more structured learning opportunities by deliberately integrating literacy props and materials into children's play and other daily routines.⁷ Many children benefit from using assistive technologies and multimedia digital texts, which can be easily modified by font, size, and color to match a child's abilities.⁸



Print referencing. Explicit print referencing is an intervention that is structured specifically to increase children's print awareness. It refers to adults' use of verbal and nonverbal cues to direct children's attention to print concepts that are embedded into book reading interactions.⁹ Print referencing includes asking questions about print, making comments about print, and pointing to and tracking print.



Storytelling. Narrative interventions involve helping children tell or retell stories from books. Narrative interventions that use strategies such as visual supports, modelling, and prompts have been successful in teaching story structure to young children with disabilities who are DLLs.¹⁰



Home visitors can talk with families about the importance of home literacy experiences for young children with disabilities who are DLLs. During home visits, they can help families make adaptations and individualize practices to promote their child's participation when sharing stories and interacting with books and print.

WHY BOOK KNOWLEDGE AND PRINT CONCEPTS ARE IMPORTANT

Supporting young children with their development of book- and print-specific knowledge is important for reading achievement.¹¹ Many children with disabilities struggle with developing early literacy skills. They often show little interest in print and reading and may need frequent and direct support from adults to engage in literacy activities.¹²

5 Ying Guo, Brooke E. Sawyer, Laura M. Justice, and Joan N. Kaderavek, "Quality of the Literacy Environment in Inclusive Early Childhood Special Education Classrooms," *Journal of Early Intervention* 35, no. 1 (January 2013): 40–60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053815113500343>.

6 Joanne Knapp-Philo, Angela Notari-Syverson, and Kimberly K. Stice, "Tools of literacy for infants and toddlers," *In Young Exceptional Children monograph series no. 7: Supporting Early Literacy Development in Young Children*, eds. Eva M. Horn and Hazel Jones (Missoula, MT: Division for Early Childhood, 2005), 43–58.

7 Justice, and Pullen, "Promising Interventions for Promoting Emergent Literacy, 99–113.

8 Jennifer P. Stone, Christopher J. Rivera, and Stacy L. Weiss, "Literacy-Rich Environments for Young Students with Significant Developmental Disabilities," *Young Exceptional Children* 21, no. 4 (December 2018): 191–203, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096250616674330>.

9 Justice, Logan, Kaderavek, and Dynia, "Print-Focused Read-Alouds," 292–311.

10 Trina D. Spencer, Mandana Kajian, Douglas B. Petersen, and Nicholas Bilyk, "Effects of an Individualized Narrative Intervention on Children's Storytelling and Comprehension Skills," *Journal of Early Intervention* 32, no. 3 (September 2013): 178–99, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053815114540002>; Trina D. Spencer, Douglas B. Petersen, M. Aldelaida Restrepo, Marilyn Thompson, and Maria Nelly Gutiérrez Arvizu, "The Effect of Spanish and English Narrative Intervention on The Language Skills of Young Dual Language Learners," *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education* 38, no. 4 (February 2019): 204–19, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121418779439>.

11 Lovelace, and Stewart, "Increasing Print Awareness in Preschoolers," 16–30.

12 Justice et al., "Home-Literacy Environment," 131–39.

WHAT CAN PROGRAMS DO?

Education staff can use the Framework for Effective Practice and the individualization tiered approach to help children with disabilities who are DLL gain book knowledge and understand print concepts. The framework and the tiered approach are both described in the Introduction to the Big 5 for All: Highly Individualized Teaching Supplement, and they can be used to plan instructional strategies that support learning for all children, as well as more individualized and intensive supports for individual children. When implementing activities, education staff also need to regularly monitor how well a child is responding to the supports provided. They can use this information to adjust the amount and types of supports, based on the child's progress.

Selecting Goals: Behaviors and Skills that Support Book Knowledge and Print Concepts

Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (HSELOF) goals associated with book knowledge and print concepts appear in the Language and Communication domain and Emergent Literacy subdomain for infants and toddlers. For preschoolers, they appear in the Literacy domain and Print and Alphabet Knowledge and Comprehension and Text Structure subdomains.

Goals for infants and toddlers include handling books, looking at pictures and pretending to read, recognizing pictures and symbols, and understanding that books tell a story or convey information. Goals for preschoolers include demonstrating an understanding of functions and conventions of print, telling, or retelling stories, and answering questions about a book that was read to them.



Education staff and families can use these goals to promote children's book knowledge and print concepts in English and in the home language. A broader goal may need to be broken down into smaller, clearly defined steps. This makes it easier to see how well a child is progressing for each individual step and adjust types of support as needed.

Individualizing Instruction: Partnering with Families

The home literacy environment of young children with disabilities provides an important foundation for later reading achievement. Education staff needs to gather information from families about the kinds of oral and written forms of language a family uses at home and in the community. This may include learning about different print conventions and also whether the home language has a written format (some languages don't). Staff can use stories and print materials that children are already familiar with to support children's learning of how to use books and print to gain new knowledge and express their ideas in their home languages and in English. Also, education staff can encourage families to actively engage children in everyday interactions with traditional print and with digital media like eBooks and websites, recipes, menus, labels on products, and signs in the environment. Staff can make sure families have access to books and help families connect with local libraries.

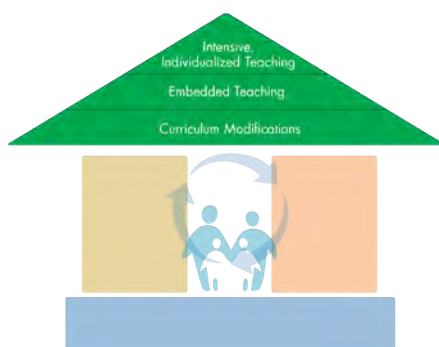
Teaching Strategies: Foundational Practices

Effective practices for supporting book knowledge and print concepts for all children include creating and using a print-rich environment, modeling ways of using books, drawing children's attention to the features and uses of print, and telling stories.

Adults should promote children's meaningful uses of print by using a variety of pictures, symbols, and signs in English and children's home language(s) to label areas in the learning environment and storage locations, and to provide directions related to daily activities such as in group schedules, attendance charts, and sign-in sheets for activities. Children should also have access to a variety of fiction and

informational books that reflect their cultural, linguistic, and individual identities.

Please refer to the Planned Language Approach Big 5 resource on book knowledge and print concepts for examples of specific ways to support book knowledge and print concepts with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers .



Teaching Strategies: Highly Individualized Teaching and Learning

Curriculum modifications. When a child may need more support to engage in interactions that promote book knowledge and print concepts, education staff can make some simple changes or [curriculum modifications](#) to the print environment, materials, and interactions that can increase children’s participation in book- and print-related activities.

Examples of modifications to help children interact and learn about books and print during everyday activities and routines include the following:

- Environmental arrangement. Make sure the library center is well lit, in a quiet area, offers comfortable, supported seating for children with physical disabilities, and is easily accessible to wheelchair users. Work with families to find a well-lit, cozy seating area in the home where children can access and read books.
- Visuals. Display pictures and labels at the children’s eye level. When reading a book, use real objects that are related to the story.
- Materials. Use books with different textures, including large, high-contrast print and Braille for children with low vision. Add tabs to make book pages easier to turn for children with motor difficulties. Laminate magazines and other paper materials to make them easier to handle and maintain.
- Peer support. Pair a child who is reluctant to look at books with a peer, sibling, or friend who is enthusiastic about reading.
- Child interests. Use familiar, culturally relevant books and print materials that are connected to children’s identities and lives. Make books using pictures of children, families, and their communities.
- Adult support. Tell stories and model using books and other traditional and digital print materials; talk about pictures, signs, and written words; point to and track the direction of print.
- Special equipment. Use assistive technologies and multimedia digital texts that can be easily modified by font, size, and color.

Curriculum Modifications in Action: Carlota

Home visitor Dylan was discussing ways to get Alicia’s 16-month-old daughter, Carlota, more interested in books. Alicia and her husband, Dave, loved to read books as did their 6-year-old son, Manuel. Carlota, however, just didn’t seem interested, much preferring to play with dolls and toys. Carlota had mild language delays in both Spanish and English and one of her individual goals was to point at and label pictures in books. Dylan shared some ideas to help increase Carlota’s interest in books and make pictures and stories more concrete and meaningful. Alicia might try including dolls and other objects into the reading activity (e.g., real objects that match key characters and events or a doll or puppet tells the story). Choosing books with different textures and sounds might help Carlota stay more engaged. Also, if he was willing, Manuel could read books with his little sister, who looked up to her older brother and often wanted to be involved in whatever Manuel was doing.

Embedded teaching. Some children may not be readily meeting their goals, even when provided with modifications and adaptations during regular activities and routines. They may need more systematic learning opportunities to help them make progress. Education staff can work with families and service

providers in planning ways to embed instruction on individual literacy learning objectives more frequently into daily activities.

Education staff can use an [activity matrix](#) to plan for how a child's specific learning objective will be addressed in an activity.

Education staff will also need to plan specific [teaching loops](#)—what they will say or do, the kind of support they will provide to help a child be successful, how they expect the child to respond, and what kind of feedback they will provide to the child.

Educators can plan how to include literacy props and materials into daily activities and routines and provide instructional support through frequent and planned use of modeling, role play, and conversations.¹³

Home visitors can help families identify ways to engage their child's interest in books, such as adding props, dolls, and other favorite toys into a reading activity. They can also work with families to create simple activity matrices that identify times during the day that offer opportunities to promote their child's learning goal. They can explain and demonstrate how to use teaching loops and provide feedback on the family's use of strategies.

Embedded Teaching in Action: Kamal

Thirty-month-old Kamal's individual learning goal is to recognize a few familiar letters and words, such as his name in his home language, Arabic, and in English. Kamal's family child care provider, Zoey, had a variety of print materials in her center. She read books daily with children and integrated books and literacy props into all activity areas and daily routines. Kamal's mother, Munira, made labels of items in Arabic for Zoey and gave her empty boxes of Middle Eastern foods for the pretend play center. She also explained that Arabic script was read from right to left and that pages in a book were turned from left to right. Tiana, Kamal's occupational therapist, helped Zoey add tabs to pages of books and laminate menus and other paper materials to make them easier for Kamal to manipulate, despite his motor impairments. Kamal had shown interest in books and other print materials, but mostly by pointing out and talking about pictures. Zoey decided to work daily with Kamal during small group storybook reading and pretend play, focusing on teaching him to recognize the English letters in his name. At home, Munira would teach Kamal Arabic letters and explain the differences in print conventions between Arabic and English.

Intensive, individualized teaching. Children with significant cognitive and communication disabilities may need more individualized and intensive teaching in the child's home language and in English. Education staff and families may continue to use modifications to promote engagement, along with embedded teaching to offer increased learning opportunities at school and at home. Staff also may need to work with service providers to implement a more specialized teaching strategy or use assistive technology devices to help the child make progress on a learning goal or objective. Explicit instruction and effective prompting during adult-lead activities can help focus children's attention on print and improve their narrative, story-telling ability.^{14, 15}



13 Justice, and Pullen, "Promising Interventions for Promoting Emergent Literacy, 99–113.

14 Justice, and Pullen, "Promising Interventions for Promoting Emergent Literacy, 99–113.

15 Spencer, et al., "Effects of an Individualized Narrative," 178–99.

Intensive, Individualized Teaching in Action: Fabienne

Four-and-half-year-old Fabienne loves listening to stories her grandmother, Rose, talks about her native Haiti. Fabienne would try telling stories herself in her home language, Haitian-Creole, and in English but had a hard time making herself understood in either language. Her teacher Nora and her mother Madeleine met to share information on how Fabienne was progressing at home and at school on her individual learning goal of retelling stories and events in an appropriate sequence with a beginning, a middle, and an end. With help from the speech therapist and input from Madeleine, Nora developed an individualized plan with tiered instructional strategies that included modifications, embedded learning, and more targeted practices. During group storybook reading, Nora selected books about the Caribbean islands and provided objects associated with the story, as concrete reminders of key characters and events. She identified additional activities during the day to help Fabienne practice her narrative skills, asking Fabienne to tell what she had done during outdoor time over the weekend. But most helpful was previewing books individually with Fabienne before reading to the larger group, asking questions, modelling responses, and providing feedback to support Fabienne in retelling the story. At least once a week, Nora wrote a note based on classroom observations that described Fabienne's progress. She shared these weekly notes with Madeleine, who often sent back her own notes on Fabienne's progress at home.

SUMMARY

Many children with disabilities tend to show less interest in print than other children and are less likely to want book interactions with adults. Effective interventions to promote book knowledge and print concepts of young children with disabilities who are also DLLs require a combination of meaningful, child-centered activities and adult-directed, explicit instruction. Key practices include creating print-rich inclusive environments, print referencing while reading storybooks, and narrative interventions. Education staff can collaborate closely with families and service providers to address children's individual needs. Partnering with families is crucial for education staff to understand a child's home literacy environment and use of oral stories, books, and print in homes and communities.

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