

Activities for Storytimes

By Bill Breitsprecher



Thanks for joining me today and sharing ideas to enrich storytimes and promote early literacy. I have created a Website to support my work at:

www.earlyliteracyweb.com

At least one week prior to the 2011 conference, I will be posting more handouts online that support this presentation, early literacy, family outreach, and early childhood education.

I regularly post resources and multimedia to support my work with children, families, early literacy, and developmental reading. Please check back at my Website before *UW-Whitewater's Early Childhood Conference* for updates.

I. Early Literacy Skills. The American Library Association has identified these six key skills that will prepare children to become readers when they enter school (**Handout: *Early Literacy: See It Yourself***; www.earlyliteracyweb.com):

- A. **Print Motivation.** Being excited about and interested in books.
- B. **Phonological Awareness.** Playing with the sounds in words.
- C. **Narrative Skills.** Telling stories and describing things.
- D. **Enriched Vocabulary.** Knowing the specific names of things.
- E. **Print Awareness.** Noticing print everywhere, knowing how to handle a book, and following words on a page.
- F. **Letter Knowledge.** Knowing the difference between how letters look, their names, and their sounds.

II. One-To-One Versus Group Storytimes.

- A. Individual attention allows us to create conversations with children when we share stories.
- B. When working with small groups, it is harder to give each child the attention they need.
- C. If possible, consider breaking children into smaller groups (4-5). Creating a series of activities to rotate students through can be helpful.
- D. Even in larger groups, readers can ask children about books, even if children all state their answers together.
- E. While "less than ideal", consider prompting children with yes/no questions that they can answer with show of hands.
- F. Pair Sharing. Children can be paired at tables with the person sitting directly across from them (face partners) or to the person next to them (shoulder partners)
- G. Remember, how children answer prompts is not as important as the process they go through articulating their ideas.

III. General "Tips and Tricks" by Age Groups

A. Pre-talkers (0-2)

- Read together everyday. Make it a part of your routine.
- Choose a time when your baby is wide awake and happy.
- Find a comfortable place to share stories together. Make it a special time for you and your child. Snuggle your baby.
- Books with large, simple faces (photos and illustrations) work well.

- Read with expression. Use silly voices and have fun!
- Point to and talk about the pictures.
- Stop when your baby grows tired or loses interest.

B. Talkers (2-3)

- Read together everyday. Make it a part of your routine.
- Find a comfortable place to share stories together. Make it a special time for you and your child.
- Read with expression. Use silly voices and have fun!
- Now that your child is talking you can have discussions about what you are reading. This is called Dialogic Reading. This simply means creating a dialog about what you are reading. This technique consists of asking your child questions that start with "what", such as.... Or asking open-ended questions a "What do you see in the picture?" or "What do you think is going to happen next?" Then when your child responds you can acknowledge his answer and provide more information, such as "That's right, there is a cat in the picture. It's a brown cat."
- Point to and discuss the pictures.
- Read the same books again and again. Toddlers love repetition!
- Talk about the book and how it relates to your child's real life experiences.

C. Pre-Readers (4-6)

- Read together everyday. Make it a part of your routine.
- Find a comfortable place to share stories together. Make it a special time for you and your child.
- Read with expression. Use silly voices and have fun!
- If the story is familiar, let your child tell the story.
- Let your child ask questions. Use the book as an opportunity to discuss things in their everyday life.
- Point out the words and run your finger along the text to help your child follow along.
- Point to and discuss the pictures.
- Talk about the book and how it relates to your child's real life experiences.

IV. Dialogic Reading (Handout: *Today's Storytimes: Dialogic Reading*, www.earlyliteracyweb.com)

- A. Dialogic reading gets a child involved as an active participant or even a storyteller.
- B. Start by choosing books that children can participate in, books that repeat words for children to say, that invite children to respond through the story, or provide opportunities to ask "what happens next?"
- C. Creating a more engaging story time, having children become the story tellers can be done in steps.
 - Read the book as written, asking children to identify parts of the action illustrated by the pictures and having children repeat any phrases that are used repetitiously in the book.
 - Choose a page from the book with an attractive picture that illustrates action. Ask children "what" questions (what they are seeing, what is happening, what will happen next, etc.). Be prepared to give children time to answer - they are still developing these skills.

- Extend the answers they give you. For example, if they say, "the pigeon found a hot dog", you could say, "yes, the pigeon found a hot dog, a hot dog in a bun that is half eaten.
- Ask children to repeat your extended answer. Be prepared to give children time to restate the extended answer - they are still developing these skills.
- DO NOT ask questions that can be answered yes/no or by pointing.

V. Music and Storytimes (Handout: *I Love It When You Read To Me!*)

- If you play a musical instrument, kids love to see you play. If you don't, no problem.
- Keep it simple! Professionally produced music today often has very complex arrangements and instrumentation. This may make it harder for children to sing along. Avoid highly orchestrated recordings.
- If you don't play an instrument, many songs are effectively shared by clapping the rhythm without accompaniment or recorded music.
- Be careful with music marketed specifically to kids – often the rhythms and music itself has been so simplified that much of its value as an early literacy tool is lost.
- Latin, Swing, and African rhythms are good – they are not based on a count of ONE-two-three-four.
- I play jazz guitar and find that children really enjoy these more exotic feels. I never “water down” my music for young children, their open minds and tend to love everything and a guitar is a popular instrument.
- Repetition is the key – we are all more comfortable singing songs we know. Try to keep songs short (maybe 2 minutes) so that you can repeat them to get children comfortable.
- If instruments are available (probably primarily rhythm instruments), give children a choice as to whether they play along or just sing.
- Before passing out instruments, clearly demonstrate how you expect them to be used before passing them out. Be sure to include clear “rules” like, “hold your instrument quietly on your lap until I point to you”.
- Only pass out instruments to children that agree they want to do it, understand expectations, and that they will have fun playing along.
- Find ways to tie songs into other activities and books – this isn't very hard, be creative. Remember, music supports the storytime and early literacy, not the other way around.
- Instead of using music (with melodies), consider using short rhymes and raps – these have all of the advantages of singing songs, but are easier to learn and accommodate the different abilities of children to sing and carry a tune, emphasizing rhythm and rhyme sans melodies/harmonies.
- Some good books to learn more about music and storytimes include:
 - **Musical Story Hours: Using Music with Storytelling and Puppetry**, by William M. Painter (19889, William M. Painter).
 - **The Sound of Storytime**, by Tiara Dixon and Paula Blough (2006, Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.).
 - **The Big Book of Stories**, Songs, and Sing-ALongs, by Beth Maddigan (2003, Libraries Unlimited).

- **Storytelling with Music, Puppets, and Arts**, by William M. Painter (1994, William M. Painter).

VI. Rhyming and Storytimes

- Phonological awareness means that children play with the sounds in words, an important “ready to read” skill. Rhyming is important – it allows children to compare and contrast how words they hear are alike and how the words they hear are different.
- Rhyming is FUN! Children love to learn and create rhymes, even using nonsense words. Children are demonstrating a readiness to read when they freely work with rhymes; they can recognize rhymes and can create their own.
- Start by pointing out words that rhyme, being sure children can tell the difference between words do and don't rhyme. Ask them direct questions such as, “does BEAR rhyme with APPLE?” This is fun as a series of prompts or, when sharing a picture book, asking children about words on each page.
- Once children are able to correctly identify words that rhyme and words that don't, they are ready to start creating their own. Use direct prompts like, “what rhymes with CAR”?
- Prompting children with books is fun. Point out rhyming. When children indicate they understand the pattern used in the book, leave out rhyming words. Let children finish the rhyme. Rhyming alphabet books are wonderful, integrating another early literacy skill, letter awareness.
- Playing with rhyme is valuable whether the words are real or not. Children get “ready to read” when they hear the sounds in words, recognizing rhymes and creating their own. They will learn when rhymes are real or not as they become readers.
- An interesting book about rhyme and babies is: *Baby Rhyming Time*, by Linda L. Ernst (2008, Newl-Shuman Publishers, Inc.).

VII. Finger Plays, Rhymes, and Puppets

- These three activities are fun to include, children love them, and they engage them in different ways. Finger plays are rhymes that keep little hands moving!
- Puppets are best used with presentations that are more involved than finger plays. Not only do young children love puppets, but they love talking to them too. Often, children will share ideas with a puppet that they would not express to an adult.
- Puppets and other props are hard to use when reading a book (hey! Which hand turns the page!), however, but it can be done. Some lay books on their laps to read them while freeing both hands to act out the story. If picture books are selected carefully, additional props and puppets might actually distract from the presentation in the book.
- Books on finger plays, rhymes and puppets:
 - **101 fingerplays, stories, and songs to use with finger puppets**, by Diane Briggs (1999, American Library Association)
 - **1001 rhymes & fingerplays for working with young children**, by Totline Staff (1994, Warren Publishing)
 - **Alphabet art: with A-Z animal art & fingerplays**, by Judy Press (1998 Williamson Publishing)

- **Creative fingerplays & action rhymes: an index and guide to their use**, by Jeff Defty (1992, Oryx Press)
- **Felt board fingerplays**, by Liz Wilmes (1997, Building Blocks)
- **Fingerplays, movement and story songs**, by Colleen & Uncle Squaty (1993, North Side Music)
- **Finger Rhymes**, by Marc Brown (1980, Dutton)
- **Fingerpuppets, fingerplays and holidays**, by Betty Keefe (1984, Special Literature Press)
- **Fold-and-cut stories and fingerplays**, by Marj Marj (1987, David S. Lake)
- **Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes: and other Action Rhymes**, Zita Newcome (2002, Candlewick Press)
- **Little Hands Fingerplays & Actions Songs: Seasonal activities & creative play for 2- to 6- year olds**, by Emily Stetson (2001, Williamson Publishing)
- **The Baby's Game Book**, by Isabel Wilner (2000, Greenwillow)
- **The Neal-Schuman index to fingerplays**, by Kay Cooper (1993, Neal-Schuman)
- **Too many rabbits and other fingerplays: about animals, nature, weather, and the universe**, by Kay Cooper (1995, Scholastic)
- **Trot, Trot to Boston: Play Rhymes for Baby**, by Carol F. Ra (1987, Lothrop, Lee & Shepherd)

VIII. Early Literacy "Tips and Tricks"

A. **Print Motivation.** Developing interest and enjoyment of books is important - make this easy to do by finding books to share with children that you enjoy. Read in a way that demonstrates that you love books, the story being shared, and the time you spend with your child. A cheerful voice is important.

- Don't read to children when you are in a bad mood. Remember, a few minutes of fun with a book is much more important than a reading session that is tense or stressful. If the child is not ready for story time or does not seem to be enjoying a book, that's OK. You can always read more together later. Don't count how much time you spend reading books, just make sure it is something you share regularly in a positive environment.
- Find a comfortable place to share and hold little children. Letting a small child rest their head against your chest creates a bond and they hear the deep resonance of your voice. And don't keep all the fun to yourself - get your child involved - see what they have to say while you read.
- Nonfiction books are probably best - they feature colorful pictures and powerful images. They also encourage a child to use their imagination. Who doesn't love a good picture book? A good story encourages a child to think about "what happens next," an important motivator.

B. **Phonological Awareness.** Being able to break words into smaller sounds is important too. For example, ask a child what "piglet" sounds like without the "pig" (leaving just "let"). Point out the first sound in words - "what sound does 'cat' start with?" Then ask, "What other words start with that sound?"

- Rhyming books are popular with children and represent an important way to build this aspect of

phonological awareness. Show children rhyming words and ask them if word in a story rhyme - "do 'bear' and 'bowl' rhyme?" or "do 'bear' and 'chair' rhyme?"

- Rhythm, cadence, and alliteration are important too. Songs and simple children's raps use rhythm and cadence extensively. Point out when a series of words begin with the same sound - Dr. Seuss' ABCs uses alliteration to teach children the alphabet: "Aunt Annie's alligator..."
- The sounds you play with together don't have to be real words. Made-up words can be fun and teach phonological awareness too. Point out multi-syllable words. Clapping for each syllable in a word is fun for a child and helps them understand the different parts of that word.

C. **Narrative Skills.** Being able to describe and explain things is an important skill for preschool children - it gets them ready to read. Picture books are a wonderful way to encourage children to talk about what they see and "what will happen next." Let young children look at the pictures in a book and make up their own story.

- Children need to develop a "sense of a story" and learn that each story has a "beginning", "middle", and "end." As they get older, they can learn that some stories have a "beginning", "problem," and then a "resolution" or solution to that problem.
- To start building narrative skills, ask children to repeat phrases or parts of a story. Using props, puppets or even stuffed animals can be a fun way to ask a child to act out a story. Be sure to ask children questions while reading stories, give them time to answer (count to 5 to yourself), and be positive about each response - these questions should not have "right" or "wrong" answers.

D. **Enriched Vocabulary.** Research shows it is easier for children to read words they have already heard. Exposing a child to as many different words as possible gives them a head-start when learning to read. A larger vocabulary also helps young readers better understand what they have read.

Notice how people speak very different than they write. The words in books are different than the words used in conversations, on the radio, or on TV. Reading to children expands their vocabulary. Talking to children, however, is important too.

Talk to children from birth - in fact - you can talk to your child before birth. Don't worry if the child understands everything - the important thing is that they are hearing words. Don't forget to leave time for a child to talk back, even for babies!

E. **Print Awareness.** The printed word is all around us - this is something children need to see. Give babies board books to handle, part of print awareness is being comfortable with books. Babies will put things in their mouth, so keep some books that are no longer needed and let your baby have them.

- As baby gets older, be sure to point to the words in a book too - use your finger to follow sentences. Help them see that we read from left to right, from top to bottom, and from the front of a book to the back. Don't forget to let your child turn the pages sometimes too.
- Point out signs to children - in the grocery store, in parks, anyplace you go. Make lists with children. A shopping list is a great activity to share - be sure to say each item as you write it down. Remember, the child

does not need to understand each work on your list, only that each word they hear can be written down too.

- A good way to start is by always showing children the front cover of a book and running your finger along the words as you announce the title, author, and illustrator. Do this with phrases that repeat in the book too. Check to see if children are learning how to handle a book, pick one up wrong (upside down or from the back cover) and ask, "Is this the right way to hold a book?"

F. **Letter Knowledge.** Being able to see that letters are different from each other and can be written in different ways helps children get ready to read. Before learning to read, children should learn that each letter has a name and relates to specific sounds.

- Try to find books with words in the title that children can relate to - kids love bears - read them bear books. Be sure to point at the word "bear" and tell them the beginning letter is "B" and say the sound that this letter makes.
- There are many fun, creative alphabet books - remember, we are not concerned with teaching the A, B, Cs right now. We want to start by letting children to see the differences between letters and sounds. This starts by talking about shapes - circles, triangles, straight lines - the shapes that we use to draw letters. Talk about how the shapes of letters are alike and how they are different.
- Get different senses involved - hand them balls for round objects, blocks for squares and rectangles. Find triangular-shaped toys to handle. Point out the straight edge on objects. Cookies are great for this - you can make (or buy) them in different shapes and children can enjoy eating the shapes too!
- When they are ready, start reinforcing the names of the letters by talking about the first letter in the things they are interested in. Moving blocks with letters or magnetic letters is fun. Children will also enjoy making letter shapes with play dough.

IX. Storytime Basics

- A. **Break up stories.** Assume 1-2 minutes per age (I would assume 1) Use physical movements too - even just stand and spin.
- B. **Names are powerful tools** - consider name tags (ASK GROUP TO SHARE WHAT WORKS FOR THEM) Give the children name tags when they arrive. It's much easier to get a child's attention if you call them by name. "Michael, stop hitting Jeremy."
- C. **Criss Cross Applesauce.** Get them to sit on the floor with their legs crossed and their hands in their laps. That way it's harder for them to get up and start wandering around. It also prevents fingers from getting stepped on. Use carpet squares for them to sit on if the room doesn't have a carpet. Then it's easier to get the group up and into an activity without chairs in the way.
- D. **Give children chance to "get wiggles out".** Here's a fun way:
- Wiggle your fingers
 - Wiggle your toes
 - Wiggle your ears
 - Wiggle your nose
 - Now all my wiggles are gone
 - So turn around and sit right down.

E. **If children get distracted during a story,** look for the cause.

- Can all the children see the book? Move it slowly from side to side for large groups while you tell the story.
- Is someone pinching the children around them? Call the child by name and say "Misha, hands on your lap, now look right here." Use a gesture to pull their attention into the book.
- Is the book too long or too sophisticated a story for the children? In some cases, you can skip a few pages and get to the end more quickly. Always have an extra storybook and activities to fall back on when one doesn't suit the group.
- One way to get a group to stop wandering and direct their attention to you as the leader is to have them sit and put their hands over their eyes. Tell them you're going to play a guessing game where you'll make a sound and they will guess what it is. "No peeking." Some easy sounds to make are hand clapping, book closing, footsteps.

X. Mr. Breitsprecher's Favorite Storytime Activities.

- A. **Magic Books.** Children can pretend they are "magic books" that get up and move when you turn your back. Create 2 lines to represent "shelves". Use different ways to compare/contrast books/stories to assign each "book" to a shelf. When you turn your back on the children, they move "off" their shelf. When you turn around again, they get "back" on their "shelf". This is also a great alphabet activity - lining "magic books" in alphabetical order.
- B. **Show and Tell.** Announce the story of the week and ask the students to participate by bringing in an item that relates to a part of the story.
- C. **Sign Language.** Teach the students special signs that relate to the story line. A story treasure chest; Fill a small box with surprise items related to the story. Prior to removing an item from the chest to share with the preschool students, provide a brief verbal description of the item, then have the class guess what the item could be. The variations are extensive and are only limited by the vision of the instructor.
- D. **Student-Made Books.** At the beginning of the preschool year the student could create an 'About Me' styled book. Include pages about their favorite foods, family pets, favorite color, a hand drawn family portrait or even a self-portrait. Add the books to the preschool class library to encourage not only the love of reading but individual familiarity. A book extension activity will also encourage the understanding of the book being read.
- E. **Perform Books.** Acting out preschool storytime is a hoot. I love acting out "The Three Bears" "The Three Billy Goats" and "The Three Pigs" among other things. Sometimes I read or told the story several times so everyone would get a turn to act.

Sometimes I would add characters, three baby billy goats, three medium goats and three big goats, maybe two or three trolls. That way everyone who wants to be in the story can. It is easier to assign roles as you go and choose your characters in the order children sit in the circle. I seldom use props except simple things like a rug for a bridge. Some great stories for acting out are:

- Owl Babies
- Stone Soup
- The Big Turnip
- The Mitten
- The Three Pigs
- Are You My Mother
- The Three Bears
- The Three Billy Goats Gruff

F. **Talk About Books/Dialogic Reading.** Sometimes we talk about the parts of the book, or I point to a punctuation mark and tell the children what it is called. Sometimes I point out an extra long word. Maybe we count the letters in the word.

G. **Use Big Books.** Children, of course, chime in and help me read. Sometimes I have the children look for a particular letter in the text as I dismiss them for the next activity. Some of my favorite big books are:

- Who's in the Shed
- Silly Sally
- Dinosaur Stomp
- Nightmare in My Closet
- Noisy Nora

H. **Preschool Flannel Board Activities.** A valuable tool for preschool storytimes, flannel boards are easy to make. Find a good stiff piece of cardboard the size you want your flannel board. Cover it with flannel. Pull the flannel tight around the cardboard and glue it around the back edges.

Try using three sides of a box if you want the flannel board to stand up by itself. You can buy flannel board characters or make them. Try tracing outlines of storybook characters from coloring and other books. There's no need for any details.

Encourage children to participate using the storyboard. Here's a tip while each child waits for his/her turn: hand out the characters for storytimes when it is each child's turn to put it on the board.

I. **Magnetic Board.** These work just like a flannel board. They are easy - use the front of a metal cabinet, the side of a filing cabinet, or a magnetic chalkboard/white board for your story telling. Cookie sheets are great too.

Characters for a magnet board are easy to make. Cut the them out of old books, find characters online, trace coloring books characters, etc. or even encourage children to draw their own!

I would recommend that if you laminate the characters that you might consider laminating only the front. Sometimes the pieces get too heavy to stay put if they have too much laminate. Put a piece of magnetic stripping on the back of each character. Fairy tales are good for this kind of activity: Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Rumpelstiltskin etc.

J. **Magnetic Letters.** For lots of great ideas on using these fun and educational toys, please be sure to see Mr. Breitprecher's newsletter, "*Early Literacy With Magnetic Letters*," available free online at:

www.earlyliteracyweb.com

K. **Jolly Jump Up!** This fun preschool activity helps youngsters with numbers, shapes and alphabet letters.

What You Need: Index cards, black marker and clear contact paper.

How to Play: In advance on each index card teachers write numbers, shapes or abc's, whichever concept you are trying to help the children learn. Cover with contact paper so that they will last longer. I use the cards during circle time.

Show the cards to the children one at a time and they call out what is written on the card. Explain to them that whenever they here the words Jolly Jump, they are to get up and jump until you say sit to back down.

Depending on the attention span of the children teachers can make it fast or slow the pace. It is a good way to get youngsters moving about, if they seem restless, and it's also a good way to reinforce numbers, shapes and alphabet letters.

L. **No Lose Musical Chairs.** Preschool children use large motor skills and participate in a group game in which everyone wins during this large group activity.

What You Need: Chairs and music. Try to use music with simple instrumentation but exotic rhythms like Latin and Jazz.

How to Play: Line chairs up like regular musical chairs. Use the same amount of chairs as there are kids. Play the same as Musical Chairs; only do not take hairs away at end, so no one loses. Even toddlers love it!

M. **Circle Time Song.** Teachers can use this song from Sharon at the beginning of circle time to get the children focused and excited about the circle.

What You Need: Puppets or stuffed animals.

How to Play: We sing this song as one of the first songs once the children are sitting down for circle:

Everybody do this, do this, do this
Everybody do this, just like me.

"This" can be clapping your hands, stomping your feet, touching your toes, etc. Instead of the teacher doing "this" herself, the teacher can use a puppet that is related to the theme the children are studying.

Manipulate the puppet to do "this". The children love the idea that they are taking their lead from a puppet!

N. **Pre-school Days of the Week.** Pre-k children begin to learn the days of the week through these 2 songs. These days of the week songs are sung to old TV show favorites.

The children don't know the show, but when they share it with their parents the familiar song creates a fun connection for both.

Tune: "The Addams Family theme"
There's Sunday and there's Monday,
There's Tuesday and there's Wednesday,
There's Thursday and there's Friday,
And Saturday ends the week.

Days of the Week (Clap, Clap)
Days of the Week (Clap, Clap)

The following song is to tune of the show "Happy Days"

Sunday, Monday, Happy days
Tuesday, Wednesday Happy days
Thursday, Friday Happy Days
And Saturday ends the week
Leaving 7 days for you.
There's 7 da-ays in a week,

Yours and mine
Happy Days!

- O. **Washing Hands.** Teach children the importance of washing hands with this activity.

What You Need: Bowl, water, soap (perhaps disinfectant wipes/gels/washes) and towel.

Teachers get a bowl of warm water. Show kids how to wash their hands making sure they cover the whole hand, in between fingers, etc. Let the children practice washing their hands with soap and water. Stress the importance of thorough washing to get rid of all the germs.

Hand Washing Finger Play

Five little fingers playing all day
Getting really dirty
Wash the germs away

Four little fingers catching a sneeze
Needing some gel soap
Just a squeeze please!

Three little fingers staying pretty clean
Sneeze into your shoulder
See what I mean!

Five little fingers happy to say
We're clean and healthy
Hip! Hop! Hooray!

- P. **Storytime: Pajama Party.** Preschool children have fun learning about bed and night time during this activity. A creative way to begin rest time or nap time.

What You Need: Stories about bedtime, The Napping House or Goodnight Moon etc. Paper finger puppets of monkeys to use with the rhyme:

Five little monkeys jumping on the bed
One fell off and bumped his head
So Momma called the doctor and the doctor said
No more monkeys jumping on the bed!

Four little monkeys jumping on the bed
One fell off and bumped his head
So Momma called the doctor and the doctor said
No more monkeys jumping on the bed!

Three little monkeys jumping on the bed
One fell off and bumped his head
So Momma called the doctor and the doctor said
No more monkeys jumping on the bed!

Two little monkeys jumping on the bed
One fell off and bumped his head
So Momma called the doctor and the doctor said
No more monkeys jumping on the bed!

One little monkey jumping on the bed
He fell off and bumped his head
So Momma called the doctor and the doctor said
No more monkeys jumping on the bed!

No little monkeys jumping on the bed
None fell off and bumped his head
So Momma called the doctor and the doctor said
Put those monkeys back in bed!

How to Play: Children are invited to a pajama party story time. They are invited to wear pajamas, bring favorite stuffed animals, pillows or blankets. Five little monkeys finger puppets and rhyme is done, plus stories read while children sit on their blankets and listen.

- Q. **Circle Time Feelings.** Help young children develop listening skills and identify and express feelings with this early childhood activity.

What You Need: Pictures of children or adults with facial expressions. Try dolls and stuffed animals too.

Sitting at circle time, spread the materials on the floor. Each child is given a turn (one at a time) to pick up a picture/doll/animal and tell us what the facial expression means to them and if that is how they felt that day.

- R. **English Language Learners.** The key to working effectively with children that are learning English as a second language (English Language Learners or ELL) is to recognize and value their experiences as enrichment.

There is a great deal of transference between different languages. While ELL students may need more time to read, write, and think in a new language – the language (s) that they hear and speak at home helps them get ready to learn English.

Pre-readers and emerging readers need early literacy skills to prepare them to successfully read. This is true regardless of the languages they hear and learn at home. Parents should be encouraged to read and speak to their child in the language that they are comfortable and proficient with, usually their native tongue.

When working with ELL students, support early literacy with minor adaptations to the usual strategies and activities we share with children.

Tips and Tricks: English Language Learners/ELL

1. When giving directions, demonstrate actions. Ask children to repeat directions aloud when they engage in the action.
2. Pause, give children “wait and think” time.
3. Paraphrase, restate directions in different ways. Watch for feedback that children understand.
4. Read books with short, simple sentences. Have students repeat these phrases.
5. Engage children with dialogic reading – using a book as a springboard into a conversation. One-on-one is ideal, but if not possible, try grouping students by similar abilities.
6. If ELL cannot be given special read-alouds, try to find ways to rehearse or prep the before group activities.
7. Learn children’s names, being careful to pronounce them correctly.
8. Repeat chants, rhymes, finger plays/rhymes and sing songs.
9. Use as many different, simple alphabet books as you can find.

10. Read aloud often – children need to hear the written and spoken work. English is spoken very different than it is written.
11. Find books that integrate all children’s native cultures.
12. Use manipulatives – string to shape into letters, food, anything that approximates letter shapes, and word and name cards.
13. Keep ELL children up front and in the middle of groups. Do not have them sit in back or off to the side.
14. Use real objects to demonstrate words. If not possible, use pictures. Letting children handle and see things more-fully engages them.
15. Carefully pronounce words, but accept children’s approximations. English may use very different sounds than their native language.
16. As you recognize the sounds that each student has a hard time pronouncing, accept alterations in pronunciation. Sounds like: s, sh, r, l, sh, ch, f, and v can be difficult for ELL children to differentiate.

Charts to match pictures with words can be helpful. Consider making little pocket charts that students can keep handy and take home.

When Kids Are Ready to Read Kids Are Ready for School

Studies demonstrate that the greatest factors predicting a child’s success in school are early literacy skills – a “readiness to read.”

These need to be nurtured in a child’s early years, before they enter preschool or Kindergarten, so that children begin formal education as developmentally ready as possible and with fundamental skills that provide a foundation for reading, writing, and all other academic subject areas.

Children do not enter Kindergarten as “blank-slates.” Developmental periods before children start formal schooling are key windows – yet these years of a child’s life are viewed as distinctly separate from the school experience. In fact, they largely determine education outcomes.

A child’s development from birth to 4 years of age represents a tremendous opportunity to help prepare them to succeed in school.

A meaningful dialog about school reform must look at the larger socioeconomic issues that negatively impact a family’s ability to raise children in an enriched environment that prepares them for academic achievement.

This is especially true in urban communities where the functions of macro economics and government policies have created high concentrations of unemployment, poverty, and little hope for residents to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” Saying that urban schools can resolve structural problems and issues that have little to do with education is not a rational

approach. Meaningful change demands recognizing that not all parents, for various reasons, are in a position to provide enriched early childhood experiences.

The early years are critical, from 0 to 4, this is when a child’s brain is developing. An environment that stimulates a child’s development prepares them to learn. Disadvantaged socio economic status, poverty, and stresses that adversely impact families can undermine enrichment experiences that nurture a child’s ability to learn.

Young children that grow up in urban areas with high concentrations of poverty start school at significant disadvantages and more likely to have problems learning to read throughout their K-12 experiences.

When children start school, differences between students’ language skills and early literacy development are striking. Students that are behind in terms of their “readiness to read” are at significant disadvantage and are unlikely to catch up.

Schools generally let students develop reading skills at their own rate. Special attention and interventions are not provided until students have failed to acquire reading skills.

By this time, gaps between poor and proficient readers are large and often cannot be overcome for the remainder of disadvantaged students’ K-12 schooling. The current system allows students to “fail” before recognizing basic problems – by that time, it is really too late.

These burdens fall most heavily on students in high-poverty schools. Indicators of socio-economic status are consistently found to predict academic outcomes. Clearly, poverty undermines schools.

Children from high-poverty communities are less likely to meet literacy and academic standards. As students fall behind in reading, they also have less access to academic curriculum than their peers.

The fundamental issues that underlie a child’s access to enriching life experiences are complex, inter-related, and may lie totally outside of a school district’s control. While we work towards creating schools that more fully educate diverse learners with diverse needs.

We must promote early literacy skills, share strategies for families and childcare providers to nurture these skills, integrate early literacy into family life, build elements of social change, and use these organizations and resources to share the importance of early literacy development and education while forming information networks and media outlets to give a voice to those that are underserved by the mainstream media.

Helping children build early literacy skills prepares them to get the most out of the schools they attend. It is fun and creates bonds within families, caregivers, and communities – it gets those close to children more involved in their education. The resulting collaboration between diverse communities and stakeholders sharing early literacy can create a dialog, social capita, and emergent leadership needed for meaningful school reform.