Nurturing Early Learners
A Curriculum for Kindergartens in Singapore

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY
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Introduction

Children begin learning language, learning about language, and learning through language from the time they are born (Halliday, 1969). They learn how language is used as they listen to adults talking and reading to them and as they interact with others and play with their friends.

Children learn what written language looks like when they encounter signs, labels, posters, books and images on television. They begin learning about reading and writing as they observe others making lists, writing notes and reading newspapers in their daily lives. With these experiences, children develop literate behaviours even before they can read and write conventionally. They hold a book and turn the pages as if they were reading. They use the pictures and other clues in the book to tell the story as they ‘read’ the book. They draw a picture and make marks on the paper as if writing a story, and tell the story from their scribbles.

When children are provided with opportunities to interact with adults and peers as well as engage in meaningful literacy activities with purposeful instruction, they develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills that enable them to be effective communicators. While Language and Literacy encompasses the teaching and learning of English and the Mother Tongue Languages, this volume addresses the development of children in the English Language.
Language and Literacy in the Early Years

Language is about listening and speaking within a system that has its own rules and conventions while literacy involves reading and writing in order to understand print and convey meaning using print. Children’s language and literacy development is facilitated by their experiences at home, in school and in the community. As they interact with people and objects, they construct their own knowledge and use language and concrete representations such as drawing, mark making and writing, to communicate what they know and have learnt.
Dramatic play provides an authentic context for children to use language in their interactions with one another.

Children need to hear language in order to learn to speak it. They also need opportunities to use language to communicate with others.

Playing with their friends and interacting with the people around them provide real and meaningful contexts for children to use language. In the process, they learn to listen and take turns to talk in conversations and discussions. They also develop understanding of intonation, gestures, facial expressions and body language that are necessary to help them make sense of the words being spoken.

Children may go through the following phases as they learn and acquire language (Holdaway, 1979):

- **Observation** – Children act as spectators and may not speak up in class or when playing with peers. Instead, they are observing and learning as teachers and peers use language to express themselves and communicate with others.
• **Participation** – Children take part in the play, conversation or discussion with guidance from the teacher.

• **Practice** – Children practise using language through opportunities created by the teacher such as during dramatic or functional role play, large group discussions and “show and tell”.

• **Performance** – Children feel confident and are able to independently use language to communicate with others and express needs, wants and ideas.

Vocabulary\(^1\) and syntax\(^2\) are important components of oral language. The more vocabulary children have, the better able they are to understand what others are saying and to express themselves. The more children hear and use language, the better they learn how words are put together to form sentences. It is important to develop children’s listening and speaking skills in the pre-school years as they lay the foundation for reading and writing.

**Reading**

Reading involves constructing meaning from print. Children generally go through the following phases (Chall, 1983; Ehri, 1995) when learning to read:

• **Pre-reading** – Children first become aware that print carries a message. They use visual cues to make sense of print in the environment. For example, children recognise the word ‘exit’ by associating it with the sign above the door.

• **Initial reading** – As children begin to learn the names and sounds of letters, they use this knowledge to decode words and recognise some words by sight. For example, children who recognise the word ‘at’ become aware that words such as ‘cat’ and ‘mat’ share the same ending sound (i.e. ‘at’). They use this understanding to decode and recognise words in the ‘at’ word family.

• **Fluent reading** – As children start to decode words faster and more efficiently, they will be able to read more effortlessly. As automaticity\(^3\) sets in, children will be able to focus attention on understanding and making meaning of the text.

Children need experiences with oral language and a variety of texts (e.g. rhymes, story books and charts) to develop the following early literacy skills which help them in learning to read.

**Book and Print Awareness**

Developing book and print awareness helps children to understand the conventions of written English. Children need to understand concepts about books such as the title, author and illustrator of a book, the front and back of a book, knowing how to hold the book correctly, turning the pages one by one and from right to left as well as indicating where to begin reading.

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\(^1\)Vocabulary refers to words and their meanings.

\(^2\)Syntax refers to the structure of language or how words are combined to form meaningful phrases and sentences to communicate a message.

\(^3\)Automaticity refers to the ability to recognise words instantly without having to decode them deliberately.
Print awareness refers to the understanding that print carries meaning for the reader and can be read aloud. Children develop concepts of print as they learn the structure of print (e.g. sentences are made up of words separated by spaces and words are made up of letters) and conventions of written language (e.g. in English, print is read from left to right and top to bottom).

Exposure to books helps children develop book and print awareness.

Alphabet Knowledge

Alphabet knowledge refers to the ability to name the letters of the alphabet and recognise the letter symbols (both upper and lower case) in print. Being able to name the letters of the alphabet quickly and correctly helps children in learning to read and write words.
Experiences with the alphabet help children to recognise and name the letters.

There are four components of letter knowledge (Bradley & Jones, 2007) that children should develop:

- **Letter-shape knowledge** – ability to distinguish letters based on visual features (i.e. lines, curves, direction)
- **Letter-name knowledge** – understanding that a letter is a symbol and that it has both an upper case and lower case form
- **Letter-sound knowledge** – understanding that letters represent sounds
- **Letter-writing knowledge** – ability to write letters of the alphabet

Onsets and rimes refer to parts of words. The onset is the beginning part of the word that comes before the vowel sound and the rime is the ending part of the word comprising the vowel sound and the consonant sounds that follow it (e.g. “b” represents the onset and “ook” represents the rime in the spoken word “book”).

**Phonological Awareness**

Phonological awareness is about understanding the sound structure of spoken language. Generally, children begin with an awareness of large units of sound (i.e. words, syllables, onsets and rimes) and progress to smaller units of sound (Trehearne, 2003; Hall, 2006):

- **Word level**: Segment a sentence into words (e.g. tell that the sentence “I am happy.” is made up of 3 words)
- **Syllable level**: Segment a word into syllables (e.g. clap the number of syllables in the word ‘elephant’) and into onset and rime (e.g. segment “cat” into /c/ and /at/)

- **Rhyme level**: Recognise words that rhyme (e.g. recognise that “wall” rhymes with “fall” in the nursery rhyme “Humpty Dumpty”)

- **Phoneme level**: Blend sounds to make a word (e.g. say “mat” when presented with the individual sounds /m//a//t/) and segment a word into its individual sounds (e.g. say the sounds /s//a//t/ when presented with the word “sat”)

To help them learn to read, children first need to understand that spoken language consists of sounds that can be broken down into smaller and smaller parts – into words, into the syllables within words and finally into the individual sounds in words. It is important to note that the levels of phonological awareness are not discrete stages and neither do they develop in a fixed order. For example, as children become aware of individual words in sentences, they may also be developing an understanding that words can be segmented into syllables.

**Comprehension**

Comprehension refers to the ability to listen to or read and understand text. It involves thinking about and making meaning from print. There are different levels of comprehension (Sadoski, 2004) that children should develop in order to make deeper and fuller sense of a text:

- **Literal** – understanding what is directly said in the text (e.g. “Where did the story take place?”, “What did the hungry caterpillar eat?”)

- **Inferential** – understanding what is implied in the text based on background knowledge along with the words used by the author (e.g. “Why was the caterpillar not hungry anymore?”)

- **Critical** – evaluating what was read in the text and making judgements about characters (e.g. “Is the story real or make believe?”, “How do you know?”)
• **Application** – using the knowledge gained from reading to solve a problem (e.g. “If you were to continue the story, what might happen next?”)

• **Appreciation** – personalising and becoming part of the story (e.g. “Which is your favourite character and why?”)

## Writing

Reading and writing are intertwined. Learning one helps in the learning of the other. Thus, it is important for children to have experiences with both reading and writing.

Writing involves children being able to use print to construct a message that conveys meaning to others. Children must first understand that writing is intentional and conveys meaning. Before they learn to write conventionally, they need to develop their fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination so as to hold and use writing tools. They should be given opportunities to engage in activities that strengthen their hand and finger muscles as well as develop their dexterity. Examples of these activities include threading beads, tearing paper, cutting paper with a pair of scissors and modelling with play dough.

Activities such as tearing paper, threading and modelling with play dough allow children to develop their fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination which are essential for writing.
The first tools children should use are fat crayons, markers, jumbo chalk and fat pencils. They should be provided with opportunities to use these tools to draw and experiment with lines, whirls and patterns. This helps them when they have to use lines to form the letters of the alphabet.

Drawing and experimenting with different types of lines help children in letter formation.
As children explore and experiment with writing, they generally move from using less mature forms (e.g. scribbling and mark making) to conventional writing. While there are six broad categories of writing (Sulzby, 1990), they do not develop in a fixed order. Children often combine different types of writing to represent their ideas and express themselves. The table below shows the six broad categories of writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>Children draw to represent their ideas. They often ‘read’ their drawings as if there were writing on them.</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Sample Drawing" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scribbling</td>
<td>Children become aware that writing is different from drawing. As they develop their fine motor control, their scribbles start to resemble writing and are often in lines.</td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Sample Scribbling" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter-like forms and symbols</td>
<td>Children begin to recognise letters of the alphabet and become aware of the different shapes (i.e. lines, zigzags, loops) that make up letters. Their writing starts to resemble letters and symbols which are randomly scattered among their drawings and scribbles.</td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Sample Letter-like Forms and Symbols" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random letters or letter strings</td>
<td>Children use letter sequences (e.g. letters in their own names or strings of letters in random order) in their writing. They may write the same letters in different ways as they refine the way they form the letters. They generally use upper case letters in their writing as lower case letters require more finger dexterity and are more difficult to form. They may form letters incorrectly or write them in reverse as they learn about directionality and orientation of the letters.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing with invented spelling</td>
<td>Children begin to discover that spoken words are made up of sounds which are connected to letters in printed words. They may invent their spelling and use letters/groups of letters to represent the sounds they hear in words. Often, they hear only the first sound in a word so they may use one letter (i.e. beginning consonant) to represent the entire word. They begin to leave spaces between words and may mix upper and lower case letters in their writing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing with conventional spelling</td>
<td>Children progress from representing only the most prominent sound in a word to representing most of the sounds they hear (i.e. the ending consonant sound and finally, the vowel sounds in words). More words are spelled conventionally and eventually their writing resembles that of adults.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Listening and speaking skills that children acquire in the pre-school years lead the way for their reading and writing skills. Together, these help to build a strong foundation for language learning and reading and writing development in the later years.
Learning Goals for Language and Literacy

Language is essential for children’s development of thinking and learning. The focus in the pre-school years should be on developing children’s oral language and early literacy skills to lay a strong foundation for their future learning.

The learning goals for Language and Literacy serve as a guide for teachers to help children to be able to:

• Use language to communicate with others and express themselves in everyday situations
• Make meaning of and convey meaning using print

The examples in this chapter illustrate how teachers can provide opportunities for children to acquire knowledge, skills and dispositions of the learning goals.
Reading stories that are fun and have repetitive phrases helps to get children interested in listening to stories.

### Learning Goal 1

**Learning Goal 1:** Listen for information and enjoyment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key knowledge/skills/dispositions</th>
<th>Examples of what children’s learning and development look like...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy listening to stories, rhymes and poems</td>
<td>Pay attention when a story is being read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand and follow one- to two-step verbal instructions (e.g. “Draw a picture and colour it.”)</td>
<td>Respond to stories with appropriate facial expressions and/or gestures (e.g. smile, frown, laugh or clap)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify the main events/characters in a story that is read aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make eye contact when being spoken to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listen to others when they are speaking and show understanding by responding with appropriate gestures (e.g. nod/shake head)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The examples of children’s learning and development are neither age specific nor exhaustive. Teachers have the flexibility to provide appropriate learning opportunities based on their children’s abilities, interests and developmental needs.

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Example 1: Enjoy listening to stories, rhymes and poems

**Learning Objective:**
Children will listen to a story/rhyme/poem and join in the repetitive phrases.

**Activity:**
Select a story/rhyme/poem that is fun and has repetitive phrases. Read the story/rhyme/poem once through with varying intonation and talk about it with the children to ensure understanding. Once the children are familiar with it, read the story/rhyme/poem again and encourage the children to participate by joining in the repetitive phrases.

Example 2: Understand and follow one-step verbal instructions

**Learning Objective:**
Children will listen to and follow verbal commands in a game.

**Activity:**
Play the game ‘Teacher Says’ (similar to the game ‘Simon Says’) with the children after reading the story “From Head to Toe” by Eric Carle where they learn about parts of the body and simple body movements. Children have to listen and follow verbal commands such as “Teacher says turn your head”, “Teacher says wave your arms” and “Teacher says stamp your feet”. Once the children are familiar with the game, get them to take turns to give verbal commands that the rest have to follow.
## Learning Goal 2

**Learning Goal 2:** Speak to convey meaning and communicate with others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key knowledge/skills/dispositions</th>
<th>Examples of what children’s learning and development look like...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Express personal needs and wants (e.g. tell the teacher that he/she needs a crayon)</td>
<td>• Use one- or two-word utterances to express needs and wants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Talk about personal experiences with others (e.g. tell his/her friends about an outing to the park)</td>
<td>• Tell their friends about events they have experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ask simple questions (e.g. ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘when’, ‘why’)</td>
<td>• Talk about drawings and artworks they have created</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respond appropriately to ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘where’ questions</td>
<td>• Convey simple messages to their teachers, friends or family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask questions to learn more about their friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use non-verbal cues (i.e. posture, eye contact) when communicating with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use appropriate tone and volume when speaking (e.g. being dramatic when telling a story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Show understanding of questions by responding with gestures, expressions or words/phrases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The examples of children’s learning and development are neither age specific nor exhaustive. Teachers have the flexibility to provide appropriate learning opportunities based on their children’s abilities, interests and developmental needs.
Example 3: Talk about a personal experience with others

Learning Objective:
Children will talk about what they enjoy doing with their family.

Activity:
Pose a question such as “What do you enjoy doing with your family?” to motivate children to talk about their personal experiences. Get the children to bring a photograph or draw a picture of what they enjoy doing with their family. Pair the children and get them to talk about the photograph or picture with their partners. Facilitate the pair discussion by asking questions such as “Who are the people in the photograph/picture?” “Where did you go?” “What did you do together?”

Example 4: Ask questions beginning with ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘when’ and ‘why’

Learning Objective:
Children will ask questions about a mystery object to guess what it is.

Activity:
Show children the bag with a mystery object in it. In their small groups, get the children to think about a question they would like to ask to find out more about the mystery object. Invite the children to take turns to ask their questions (e.g. “Who uses it?” “What is it used for?” “Where can it be found?” “When do we use it?”). Have the children try and guess what the object is.

Example 5: Respond appropriately to ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘where’ questions

Learning Objective:
Children will respond to questions about themselves.

Activity:
Make a ‘talking stick’ by wrapping a paper towel holder with coloured paper and decorating it. Have the children seated in a circle. Pass the ‘talking stick’ around the circle while the music is playing. When the music stops, the child with the ‘talking stick’ gets to talk about himself/herself. Ask the child questions such as “What is your favourite colour?” and “Where do you like to go with your family?” Invite the other children to ask questions to learn more about their friend. This also provides an opportunity for children to learn to listen to their friends and pay attention when others are speaking.
Learning Goal 3

Learning Goal 3: Read with understanding and for enjoyment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key knowledge/skills/dispositions</th>
<th>Examples of what children’s learning and development look like...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Have print and book awareness</td>
<td>• Show interest in books (e.g. point and look at pictures in the book closely, comment or ask questions about the story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Handle a book in the correct way (e.g. hold the book upright and turn pages from right to left when reading)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Point out the title and author of a book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Point to the first word on a page of a story book to indicate where the teacher should start reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Point to words as teacher reads the story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tell that a word is made up of letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recognise upper and lower case letters of the alphabet</td>
<td>• Recite the letters of the alphabet in order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recognise the letters in their own name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Name upper and lower case letters of the alphabet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recognise beginning and ending sounds in words</td>
<td>• Play with sounds by elongating beginning or ending sounds (e.g. sssnake, buzzzzz)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pick out words that have the same beginning sound (e.g. ‘ball’ and ‘boy’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pick out the word that is different based on its beginning sound (e.g. ‘cat’ has a different beginning sound from ‘sun’ and ‘sea’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pick out words that have the same ending sound (e.g. ‘mat’ and ‘sit’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pick out the word that is different based on its ending sound (e.g. ‘cat’ has a different ending sound from ‘pan’ and ‘fun’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Create word families by manipulating onsets and rimes (e.g. form the words ‘bat’, ‘hat’, ‘rat’ with the rime ‘at’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key knowledge/skills/dispositions</td>
<td>Examples of what children’s learning and development look like...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recognise familiar/sight/high frequency words</td>
<td>• Recognise familiar logos and signs around them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recognise own name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recognise familiar words in the classroom (e.g. words on labels and word walls)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recognise sight/high frequency words in books and print around them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use pictures to talk about the meaning of words in the story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use sound/spelling pattern to read words (e.g. words in the ‘at’ family)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recognise words from their favourite books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Show understanding of the story/rhyme/poem by responding to questions and talking about the characters and events</td>
<td>• Talk about the pictures/illustrations in the book to help them make sense of the story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Respond appropriately to ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘where’ questions about the story/rhyme/poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sequence events in the story (e.g. by drawing or putting pictures in the correct sequence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Retell key events in the story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Predict what will happen next based on picture cues from the story and/or prior knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Talk about their favourite character in the story (e.g. why they like the character) or favourite part of the story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The examples of children’s learning and development are neither age specific nor exhaustive. Teachers have the flexibility to provide appropriate learning opportunities based on their children’s abilities, interests and developmental needs.*
Example 6: Print awareness

Learning Objective:
Children will recognise and read print found in their environment.

Activity:
Encourage the children to bring food labels, flyers and fast food menus to the classroom. Get the children to talk about them and ‘read’ the environmental print. This helps them recognise that print has meaning and words can be read. The food labels, flyers and menus can be put in the Dramatic Play Centre to encourage children to use print in their play.

Example 7: Alphabet knowledge

Learning Objective:
Children will name upper and lower case letters of the alphabet.

Activity:
Hide plastic letters in both upper and lower case in the classroom. Get the children to go on a letter hunt and find as many letters as they can. At the end of the game, they have to name the letters they have found.

Example 8: Phonological awareness (beginning sounds)

Learning Objective:
Children will sort and match pictures of objects based on their beginning sounds.

Activity:
Prepare sets of picture cards with familiar objects. Have the children name the objects on the cards. Model how to sort the picture cards according to their beginning sounds, for example, put the pictures of ‘fan’, ‘fish’ and ‘feet’ together and tell the children that they start with the same beginning sound /f/. Pair the children and give each pair a set of cards. Have them sort the picture cards according to the same beginning sounds.

When the children are familiar with beginning sounds, get them to play a game in their pairs. Distribute the set of picture cards between the children. Each child places his/her cards face down on the table and opens one card at a time. When they see a pair of picture cards that begin with the same beginning sound, they have to call out ‘Snap’. The first child to call out ‘Snap’ has to name the pictures and identify the beginning sound before he/she gets to keep the cards.
Learning Objective:
Children will sort pictures of objects based on their rimes. They will form word families by manipulating onsets and rimes.

Activity:
Prepare picture cards of familiar objects that share the same rimes. Have the children name the objects on the cards. Model how to sort the picture cards. For example, put the pictures of ‘cat’, ‘bat’ and ‘hat’ together, and tell the children that they end with the same sound (i.e. the rime ‘at’). Pair the children and give each pair a set of cards. Have them sort the picture cards according to the same rimes.

When the children have gained experience with onsets and rimes, get them to create word families using magnetic letters or letter cards. For example, have the children make as many words in the ‘at’ family (e.g. bat, hat, mat, pat, sat).
**Example 10: Comprehension**

**Learning Objective:**
Children will sequence events in the story.

**Activity:**
After reading a story, talk about the events in the beginning, middle and ending of the story with the children. Using illustrations from the book, prepare pictures of the events in the beginning, middle and ending of the story. Get the children to put the pictures in the correct sequence.

Once they are familiar with the story, get the children to retell the story and act it out using cut-outs or puppets of favourite characters from the book. They can also make booklets of the story by drawing familiar scenes from the story. Help the children plan what they want to draw in their booklets to capture key events in the story and discuss with them the sequence of these key events.

Children show understanding of the story when they retell it in the correct sequence.
Learning Goal 4

Learning Goal 4: Use drawing, mark making, symbols and writing with invented and conventional spelling to communicate ideas and information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key knowledge/skills/dispositions</th>
<th>Examples of what children’s learning and development look like...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Recognise and write their own name</td>
<td>• Show beginning control and manipulation when holding a fat pencil/marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Form upper and lower case letters of the alphabet</td>
<td>• Show proper posture and hold fat crayon/marker with correct pencil grip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Copy cords and phrases with understanding of basic writing conventions (e.g. spaces between words, appropriate use of upper and lower case letters)</td>
<td>• Use fat pencil/marker to make scribbles and letter-like forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use symbols to represent ideas (e.g. draw circle for moon, triangle or rectangle for sandwich)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use different forms of writing during play (e.g. make a shopping list, create a birthday card for a friend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Move from left to right when copying phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Put spacing between words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Form letters of the alphabet using materials such as buttons, beans and beads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Write their own name using upper and lower case letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Copy individual words and phrases from a book/sheet of paper in front of them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The examples of children’s learning and development are neither age specific nor exhaustive. Teachers have the flexibility to provide appropriate learning opportunities based on their children’s abilities, interests and developmental needs.
Learning Objective:
Children will recognise and write their names on the attendance chart to indicate they are in the kindergarten.

Activity:
Put up an attendance chart in the classroom. Each child has to select the card with his/her name on it and put it on the attendance chart. This helps them to recognise their own names. Once they are familiar with their names, get the children to write their own names daily to indicate that they are in the kindergarten.

Example 11: Recognise and write their own names

Recognising their own names as part of the daily routine provides a meaningful context for children to learn letters of the alphabet.


Learning Objective:
Children will form letters of the alphabet using different media.

Activity:
As letters of the alphabet are introduced, get the children to explore forming the letters with brushes and watercolour on a glass tabletop or with brushes and water on a concrete floor/wall. They can also form letters using an assortment of beads, buttons and beans or draw them in the sandpit using their fingers or sticks. This provides opportunities for children to explore forming letters of the alphabet using media other than paper and pencil.
Summary
Teachers need to set clear learning objectives for children. They should intentionally plan language and literacy experiences that engage children in quality interactions and allow them to make meaningful representations of their thoughts, feelings and ideas. This will help children to go beyond what they already know and are able to do.

Learning Objective:
Children will suggest sentences for a class story about what they observed during a neighbourhood walk and copy the class story.

Activity:
Bring the children on a walk to observe and find out more about the places in their neighbourhood. Based on the shared experience, get the children to talk about what they saw during the neighbourhood walk and suggest four to five sentences for their class story. While writing the sentences suggested by the children, model the writing process by sounding out words and drawing their attention to basic writing conventions. Read through the sentences with the children. Get them to copy the class story and draw what they saw during the neighbourhood walk.
Children acquire language and literacy through their interactions with peers and adults as well as through explicit instruction that occurs during formal teaching.

Strategies to nurture language and literacy development in children include:

- Modelling
- Reading aloud
- Teaching target vocabulary
- Using songs, rhymes and finger plays
- Using functional role play
- Using language games
- Shared writing
Modelling

As children learn to speak by listening to language being used by people around them, teachers play a vital role by being good language models. When children begin to communicate with people around them and use language to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas, teachers need to show that they value children’s talk by taking time to listen and respond.

In addition, teachers must be sensitive to and recognise that children come from different homes and language backgrounds. Some children may be at the beginning stage of their language development, learning the sounds, words and rules of a language that is different from the language they speak at home. Teachers can help to facilitate their understanding of the language by using simple sentences, speaking slowly and clearly as well as pausing between sentences.

Teacher facilitates the child’s understanding of the language by taking time to listen and respond to him.
As good language models, teachers can recast what children say in Standard English instead of correcting their language. For example:

Child: “He go toilet.”
Teacher: “Oh I see. He went to the toilet.”

Teachers can also extend and expand on what children say as this helps them to build new vocabulary. For example:

Child: “I like oranges.”
Teacher: “I like oranges too, especially those that are juicy and sweet.”

Teachers can model how to take part in conversations and discussions through active listening and asking questions. To model active listening, teachers should:

• Face the child who is speaking
• Make and keep eye contact
• Listen to what the child is saying and do not interrupt
• Repeat or paraphrase what the child has said to show understanding

Teachers model good listening and speaking skills when they maintain eye contact, listen attentively and respond to the child.
Reading Aloud

Children’s experiences with books help to build the foundation for their literacy development in the later years. The most important thing in the pre-school years is for teachers to read aloud to children. This helps children develop interest and positive attitudes towards reading.

Research has shown that “the single most important activity for building the knowledge and skills eventually required for reading appears to be reading aloud to children” (Adams, 1990, p.46). Reading aloud to children promotes their listening skills and exposes them to the sound structure and grammar of the language. They learn words beyond those they hear in their daily conversations with others. They also learn about letters and the sounds of letters, enhancing their alphabet knowledge which is important in learning to read.

When reading a story to children, teachers should:

• Know the story beforehand
• Sit in a position that allows for eye contact with the children
• Seat the children in a semi-circle so that every child gets to see the pictures in the book
• Hold the book so that the text and pictures face the children
• Use facial expressions, volume contrast, different voices for different characters and audience participation/involvement to focus and retain children’s attention

However, it is not just exposure to stories that makes a difference in children’s literacy development. What is more important is how teachers read to children. To enhance children’s learning of the language and early literacy skills, teachers can use storybook reading techniques such as Dialogic Reading or Shared Book Approach.

Dialogic Reading

In dialogic reading, teachers involve a small group of children in the reading process. The goal is for children to move from being a listener to a storyteller. Teachers start by thinking aloud (e.g. making predictions, checking predictions as the story unfolds, asking questions and making connections) which shows the children how to understand the story as they read. Teachers then get the children involved in the story by using prompts and asking different types of questions. Gradually the interaction moves from being teacher-led to one in which the children do more of the talking and storytelling.

The acronym CROWD (Whitehurst, 1992) refers to five different types of prompts that teachers can use to get the children involved in the story:

• **Completion prompts** – leave a blank at the end of the sentence and invite children to supply a word to complete the sentence (e.g. The caterpillar turned/transformed into a beautiful ___________.)
• **Recall prompts** – ask questions about the events and characters in the story (e.g. “What did the hungry caterpillar eat?”)
• **Open-ended prompts** – encourage children to talk about what is happening in a picture (e.g. “How do you think the caterpillar felt when it had a stomachache?”)

• **What, where, when and why questions prompts** – ask questions beginning with ‘what, where, when and why’ that focus on the pictures in the book (e.g. “Why did the caterpillar get a stomachache?”)

• **Distancing prompts** – relate the story to the children’s experiences as this allows them to practise conversational and storytelling skills (e.g. “Have you ever had a stomachache just like the hungry caterpillar?”, “How did you feel?”)

**Shared Book Approach (SBA)**

In SBA, teachers model the reading process by leading the children in reading a text which is usually from a Big Book. Big Books allow all the children to see the print and pictures, enabling them to participate actively in the reading of the story. Teachers can use a pointer to point to the words while reading to emphasise the link between spoken and written words as well as to draw children’s attention to print and print conventions. As teachers model how to handle books and talk about books, children develop knowledge about books.

Teachers should read favourite books over and over again as repeated readings help children to understand the story better, gain new information and acquire new vocabulary.

The general goals of SBA are to:

- Provide an enjoyable experience with books for all children
- Provide oral English models for both book and spoken language
- Encourage children to use English in non-threatening situations
- Introduce beginning reading skills through engaging stories and story-related activities
- Teach and reinforce vocabulary and language structures

In SBA, the teacher models the reading process using a Big Book.
An example of SBA using the book “From Head to Toe” by Eric Carle
This should be conducted over a few days.

First reading of the story

The teacher introduces the book “From Head to Toe”. To draw on children’s prior knowledge and help them make links with the book, she gets the children to name parts of the body and demonstrates the actions they can do with that part of the body.

The teacher then discusses the cover of the book with the children:

- What animal do you see?
- What is the gorilla doing?
- Why do you think it is doing this?
- Can you do what the gorilla is doing?

She points out the author’s name and tells the children that Eric Carle wrote the story and drew the pictures. She reads the title while pointing to the words with the pointer to direct the children’s attention to print.

She then uses the following questions to discuss the illustrations on each page before reading the text on that page aloud with rhythm and expression:

- What animal do you see?
- What do you think the _______ (name of animal) is doing?
- What is the boy/girl doing?

Second reading of the story

The teacher rereads the story without stopping, pointing to the words as they are being read. She invites the children to join in the repetitive parts of the story (i.e. I can do it!). She asks questions about the story to check the children’s understanding and gets them to talk about and draw what they like best in the story.

Subsequent readings of the story

The teacher gets the children to retell the story using the pictures in the book. She then rereads the story with the children once through and without interruption. Finally, she asks questions to relate their personal experiences to the characters and events in the story.

- Have you seen these animals before? Where have you seen them?
- What is your favourite animal in the story? Why?
The teacher follows up with activities that help the children learn the following:

- **Target language structure** – She gets the children to demonstrate actions using different parts of the body and describe them using the target language structure, “I can ________. Can you do it? I can do it”.
- **Target vocabulary** – She uses a word frame to focus children’s attention on target vocabulary (e.g. chest, feet, hands and head) from the story to help them identify and name parts of their bodies.

- **Letter recognition** – She uses a letter frame to highlight the letter ‘c’ in the word ‘can’ to help children recognise the letter by its shape, name and sound. She gets the children to write the letter c and draw two or three things they know that begin with the letter c.
- **Phonological awareness** – Teacher says the word ‘croc-o-dile’ and claps out the 3 syllables to help the children be aware of syllables in words. She then gets the children to do the same with words such as ‘chest’, ‘shoul-ders’, ‘wrig-gle’ and ‘buf-fa-lo’.

Word frames help to focus children’s attention on target language structure and vocabulary.
Teaching Target Vocabulary

Children need to know words in order to understand them. They need exposure to the words in different contexts over a period of time in order to learn them. Teachers should not assume that children will pick up new words just by listening to stories. Thus, they must select target words and intentionally teach these words to the children.

The following are key principles to bear in mind when teaching target vocabulary:

- Be intentional in selecting target words
- Provide both explicit and implicit instruction (e.g. explain the meaning of the word and present the word in context through a story)
- Give children repeated exposures to the word in order to consolidate their vocabulary

Teachers can do the following to help children learn target vocabulary:

- Select target words (e.g. words that are central to understanding the story, words that are useful to children in different contexts, book language or words that children may not hear in everyday conversations but may come across in books)
- Present each word in context (e.g. in a story/rhyme, using props and pictures)
- Explain the meaning of each word using a child-friendly definition
- Give examples of each word in sentences different from the story
- Get the children to say each word to establish phonological awareness of it
- Provide opportunities for children to use each word

The Say-Tell-Do-Play technique (Roskos, as cited in Roskos, Tabor & Lenhart, 2009, p. 58-59) is an example of vocabulary instruction that can be used during shared book reading:

- **Say** the target words and get the children to say the words
- **Tell** the meaning of each word using a child-friendly definition
- **Do** actions or use gestures to add to the meaning of the words
- **Play** a game or role play with the children to get them to use the new words
The table below shows an example of the Say-Tell-Do-Play technique based on “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” by Eric Carle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Say the word</th>
<th>Tell the meaning</th>
<th>Do the action</th>
<th>Play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tiny</td>
<td>very small</td>
<td>put thumb and second finger together to show very small</td>
<td>Children tell and act out the story using the target words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cocoon</td>
<td>outer covering to protect the caterpillar</td>
<td>wrap arms around body to indicate outer covering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nibble</td>
<td>to eat with small quick bites</td>
<td>pretend to take small bites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Using Songs, Rhymes and Finger plays**

Songs, rhymes and finger plays are natural tools for learning about language in a fun way, especially those that have repetitive phrases (e.g. “Mary Had A Little Lamb” and “Two Little Black Birds”) and require children to do actions and make sounds (e.g. “Itsy-Bitsy Spider”, “If You’re Happy and You Know It” and “Old MacDonald Had a Farm”).

Songs, rhymes and finger plays expose children to new vocabulary and help them to notice sounds and intonation patterns which develops their phonological awareness. They provide opportunities for children to:

- Develop sensitivity to beginning sounds of words
  - Songs such as “Baa Baa Black Sheep” or tongue twisters such as “Rama Rolls the Rambutans” help children to focus on the beginning sounds of words and notice that they sound alike.
- Recognise and produce rhyming words
  - Rhymes such as “Humpty Dumpty” help children hear similar sounds at the end of words. They can also substitute words to modify and create new rhymes. For example:
    
    Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall
    Humpty Dumpty had a big ball
    or
    Humpty Dumpty sat on a mat
    Humpty Dumpty had a pet cat

---

5Finger plays are chants, rhymes or songs that involve hand movements that are coordinated with the words.
When introducing a song/rhyme/finger play, teachers can consider the following steps:

- Introduce the song/rhyme/finger play by singing or reciting it once through.
- Demonstrate the actions of the song/rhyme/finger play to children as this makes it easier for them to understand the words.
- Go through the lines of the song/rhyme/finger play so children can focus on the words.
- Invite the children to join in the song/rhyme/finger play.
- Sing/recite it many times in different contexts/ways so that children can remember.

*Songs, rhymes and finger plays help children to be attuned to sounds in words.*
Using Functional Role Play

In functional role play, children take on different roles and act out situations in familiar settings such as the home, clinic, bakery or restaurant. Children have the opportunity to use language as they act out their roles as well as organise and sustain the play. Functional role play also helps them to develop their understanding of the world around them.

Children play best with what they know and are familiar with. Teachers can organise play settings based on their experiences. They can discuss the role play situations with the children (e.g. taking care of the baby at home, taking orders from customers in a bakery), suggest examples of what to say and do as well as role model the language to use (e.g. how to greet one another, make orders and ask questions). Teachers should not assume that children know what to say in different social contexts.

Functional role play allows children to use language as they act out roles, organise and maintain the play in familiar settings.
Teachers can take on the following roles (Roskos & Neuman, 1993) to initiate and extend children’s role play:

- **Stage Manager** – Teacher supplies the props and suggests ideas to enhance the play but does not enter into children’s play.
- **Co-player** – Teacher takes on a role (e.g. customer in a fast food outlet or passenger on the bus) and joins in children’s play while letting children take the lead most of the time.
- **Play leader** – Teacher actively participates in children’s play and takes deliberate steps to extend the play by introducing new props or problems that need to be resolved.

**Using Language Games**

Teachers can use language games to create contexts for meaningful communication. Games provide opportunities for children to practise phrases and sentences that are useful for communicating in everyday situations. Games are also fun and enjoyable. In the excitement of playing, children often lose their shyness and inhibition.

However, teachers need to consider the level of difficulty as children may get discouraged if the games are too challenging. To help children understand how to play the game as well as understand the language content, teachers can do the following:

- Demonstrate how the game is played
- Give clear and simple directions
- Provide a list of useful phrases and/or sentences
Examples of language games include:

- Guessing games such as “10 Questions” in which the teacher thinks of an object and children ask 10 “Yes”/“No” questions for clues to guess what the teacher is thinking of.
- Search games such as “Find a Friend” in which children move around the room, asking questions to find a friend who fits the description (e.g. find a friend who has a younger brother, find a friend who likes the colour blue).
- Matching games such as “Snap” in which children are given cards with pictures and/or labels and they take turns to open up a card from the stack with the aim of matching it with a similar card in hand (e.g. cards can be matched by the same beginning or ending sounds, or words that rhyme).
- Labelling games in which children match word labels and pictures.

**Shared Writing**

In order to spell and write words, children must be able to link letters to their sounds and understand that letters are used to write the sounds they hear in words. Teachers can help them by using shared writing to model the writing process. In shared writing, teachers think aloud what they want to write, sound out the words and represent each sound with a letter or letters, and demonstrate print conventions as they write. As children become more familiar with the writing process, teachers can encourage them to participate in the writing.

Teachers can use the following steps to engage children in shared writing:

- Guide the children in a discussion about an activity (e.g. making a Mother’s Day card) or a story that has been read aloud.
- Model the writing process by thinking aloud while writing. For example, say “I will write down the things I need to make the card. I need paper. Paper starts with ‘p’ so I will write the letter ‘p’ followed by ‘a’, ‘p’, ‘e’ and ‘r’. There, I’ve written p-a-p-e-r, paper.”
- Involve the children in the writing process by calling on them to suggest words or letters, or sound out words to spell them.
- At the end of the shared writing, read through the sentences with the children.
- Guide children in a discussion of the text. For example, point to the words and say “I notice that the words ‘paper’ and ‘pencil’ start with the same letter, the letter ‘p’. Can you find the letter p in another word?”
- Encourage the children to draw and write on their own as a follow-up activity.

The **Language Experience Approach (LEA)** is an example of shared writing where children use their own words to compose stories stimulated by a shared experience, for example, going on a field trip to the zoo or going on a neighbourhood walk. The shared experience provides the context and content for children to think, talk about and create a class story with the help of the teacher who transcribes their input. When teachers encourage children to talk about what they are thinking and then write it out for them to read, children begin to understand the link between spoken and written language.
LEA involves the following steps:

- Select a shared experience (e.g., going on a field trip to the zoo or going on a neighbourhood walk) as a base for the discussion and recording of ideas.
- Encourage the children to talk about what they have experienced (e.g., what they saw, what they did and what they liked best).
- Get the children to suggest a title and compose four to five sentences for their story.
- Read the story to the children, modelling expression and phrasing.
- Invite the children to reread the story.
- Explore the story by getting children to discover letters (e.g., “Let’s find the letters in the story and circle them with a blue marker.”) or words (e.g., “Let’s look for the word ‘bread’. We used bread to make our sandwiches.”) in the story.
- Display the class-dictated story on the wall at the children’s eye level so that they can revisit the story in their own time.

LEA provides the context and content for children to compose a class story with the help of the teacher who models the writing process.
Teachers should also consider the following to support children’s writing development:

• **Provide time, place, materials and opportunities**

Teachers need to set aside time and provide places, materials and opportunities for children to play with language, explore letters and sounds in words, and to experiment with writing. They can also introduce writing as part of classroom routines, for example, getting children to label or describe their artwork.

Getting children to label and describe their artwork helps to establish writing as part of the classroom routine.
• **Model correct ways of forming letters**

To help children in their handwriting, teachers can model the correct ways of forming the upper and lower case letters when writing for and with the children. Children often reverse their letters and teachers can help them by drawing their attention to letter orientation, for example “M and W are alike, but M faces down and W faces up.”

• **Model correct posture and handwriting grip**

It is also important for teachers to understand how children develop their handwriting grip. Teachers can observe children as they draw or write and model the correct posture as well as the correct way of holding drawing/writing tools using the tripod grasp. The diagram below shows how children develop their handwriting grip from the cylindrical grasp to the tripod grasp.

With the understanding of how children develop their handwriting grip, teachers can model the correct way of holding writing tools using the tripod grasp.

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**Summary**

Teachers can support children’s language development by modelling how to use language in different contexts and for different purposes. They can also continually model the processes of reading and writing to help children connect their knowledge of letters and sounds to reading and writing.
Organising the Learning Environment

When organising the learning environment, teachers need to consider the following:

- Creating a print-rich environment
- Setting up learning centres to support children’s language and literacy development

A classroom with vibrant wall displays and engaging reading materials encourages children to explore print. Including a variety of games and pockets of space within the classroom invites children to interact with one another and helps to enhance their language and literacy experiences.
Creating a Print-rich Environment

A print-rich environment with labels, signs, logos and other meaningful visual displays in the classroom helps children construct knowledge about print. When they understand that print has meaning and can be used in daily life, they are more likely to be curious about how written language works and what written words mean. This will motivate them to learn to recognise and read words.

Environmental Print

Environmental print is found in the everyday environment of the children. This includes street signs, food labels and advertisements that children encounter on a regular basis outside the classroom. Children learn to recognise and ‘read’ environmental print through their many experiences with it. A child who points to a box of cream crackers and says “I want cream crackers” may be using the context (i.e. picture of cream crackers on the box, recognising the shape and length of the word) rather than using the letters to ‘read’ the word.

Teachers should include environmental print in the classroom as it is familiar and meaningful to the children and helps to create an authentic context for them to learn about print. For example, teachers can encourage children to bring examples of environmental print (e.g. food labels, brochures or flyers and advertisements in magazines) to class. They can also bring children on a neighbourhood walk to identify the environmental print around them such as road signs and shop signs. Children can take photographs of these signs or draw them when they return to the classroom. The examples of environmental print and photographs can be collected and displayed on a chart or in a scrapbook that teachers and children can refer to and review.
Functional Print

Functional print refers to print found in the classroom that is related to daily classroom activities. Examples of functional print include labels, lists, calendars, classroom rules and messages.

Functional print such as labels and charts in the classroom helps to develop children’s print awareness.
Labels

Labelling common objects found in the classroom such as tables, chairs, easels and cupboards is one of the ways to help children recognise that print has meaning. Labels can be used to organise the space in the classroom, for example, to indicate the designated area for the different learning centres. They also help children know where to store materials such as shelves for writing tools and building blocks of different shapes. Labels can be accompanied by pictures to help children understand the meaning of the labels.
Lists

Lists and schedules are useful resources to display in the classroom as they contain simple phrases that children can learn to recognise. When children put their names on a list to indicate their choice of learning centre for the day, they gradually come to recognise their own names and their friends’ names. Lists also include classroom rules which remind children about acceptable behaviour in class. Displaying the daily schedule presents opportunities for the teacher to explain the activities of the day and helps children make connections between spoken and written language.

Calendars

Displaying the calendar introduces children to days of the week and months of the year. The calendar can be used to mark special occasions such as birthdays, festivals or class celebrations. Children can be encouraged to identify these days and create their own symbols or use invented spelling to mark these special dates.

Messages

Messages refer to notices that inform children of changes in their daily routine/schedule or introduce activities that will take place later in the day. These messages can be placed when children first enter the classroom for the day or during transition between activities when the teacher is waiting for the class to settle down. Children begin to realise that reading these messages is important and will be motivated to learn to read. Examples of messages include:

- We will have outdoor play in the morning.
- Teacher May has a surprise for us at circle time.
- It is Rani’s birthday today!

Setting Up Learning Centres to Support Language and Literacy

Setting up well-designed learning centres such as the Dramatic Play Centre and Literacy Centre provide opportunities for children to use language to communicate and play with one another, and motivates them to be interested in print and to use and make sense of it.

Dramatic Play Centre

A Dramatic Play Centre gives children opportunities to act out different roles. Through playing with others in imaginary scenarios, children are able to listen to and use language in meaningful ways. Teachers can consider the following when setting up a Dramatic Play Centre to support children in their language and literacy development:

- Display a sign with the name of the setting (e.g. Happy Restaurant)
- Label props that are related to the setting (e.g. sink, stove, oven)
- Display commonly used words and phrases that children can use when role playing (e.g. “Welcome to Happy Restaurant. May I take your order?”)
- Put up children’s drawing and writing related to the theme
• Display suggestions and messages to give children ideas on what and how to play
• Include printed materials (e.g. recipes, advertisement leaflets, brochures) and writing materials (e.g. paper of different sizes, markers, pencils) to encourage children to integrate reading and writing into their play

Printed materials such as brochures, recipes and menus in the Dramatic Play Centre encourage children to use print in their play.
Teachers can participate in the play and seize the opportunity to model how words and phrases are used when interacting/communicating with others. They can also introduce a problem for children to solve during the play as this helps to prolong the play scenario and allows children to extend and expand their language.

Children can make use of the writing materials to write words and phrases to remind themselves what to say as they role play. To encourage children to write in meaningful contexts, the role play could include having them create their own props such as designing a menu or writing a medical record card.

**Literacy Centre**

The Literacy Centre is a dedicated space for reading and writing. It is a comfortable and inviting place in the classroom that children can go to during small group time or in their free time. A wide range of reading and writing materials should be made easily accessible to them at the Literacy Centre to encourage them to pick up a book to read or use crayons to draw and write what they have experienced or read about.

**Writing Centre**

This is a place where children can explore writing for different purposes. A well-equipped Writing Centre contains a variety of writing tools such as markers, colour pencils and crayons, as well as paper of different sizes, colours and textures. Samples of greeting cards, pamphlets and posters can be displayed to encourage children to write for different purposes. An alphabet chart of upper and lower case letters can be displayed at eye level for children’s use in the Writing Centre.

A well-designed Writing Centre with a variety of paper, drawing and writing tools encourages children to explore writing.
Teachers can include book-making materials such as lined paper, a hole-puncher and ribbons in the Writing Centre for children to create their books. Children need not be accurate in spelling, grammar or sentence structure. The objective of encouraging them to create their own books is to help children express their ideas and take ownership of the writing and illustrating process. Teachers can engage children in a discussion about what they want to write and get them to share their story plans with their friends for feedback and suggestions. As children write their stories, teachers can encourage them to sound out the words. This presents an opportunity to review letter sounds with them and help them gain confidence in expressing themselves using print.

**Reading Centre**

This is a comfortable and inviting place that allows children to relax and choose from a wide range of books to read. Teachers can display books that are related to the theme to help children relate to and extend what they have learnt. Teachers can consider including audio players such as CD or MP3 player in the Reading Centre to play read-aloud stories. Paper or flannel cut-outs and puppets of characters from children’s favourite stories can be placed in the centre to encourage children to act out familiar scenes from the books and learn to retell stories. Book posters and “reviews” created by children can also be displayed to encourage their friends to read a particular book.

*A Reading Centre with a variety of books and an inviting environment encourages children to pick up a book and read.*
When setting up the Reading Centre, it is important to provide a varied and wide range of books for children to choose from. This will cater to children with different interests and abilities and helps to nurture in them a love for reading.

Teachers should consider the following when choosing books for pre-school children:

- Attractive illustrations that capture children’s attention
- Characters that children can identify with
- Storyline that is fast-paced and fun
- Brief text (one or two sentences per page)
- Repetition of words or phrases

Including different types of books in the Reading Centre presents opportunities for teachers to introduce a range of vocabulary. Each type or genre of books provides specific opportunities to help children learn about literacy. The different types of books include alphabet books, information books, picture books, rhyming books and storybooks.

**Alphabet books**

Alphabet books introduce the letters of the alphabet and help children review the alphabet in interesting and creative ways. Children can recall the names and sounds of the letters through such books. They associate the letter names to objects or animals whose names begin with that letter (e.g. B for “Banana”). Some books such as “Chicka Chicka Boom Boom” portray the letters as characters and remind children that letters in the alphabet have a consistent order.

Examples of alphabet books include:

- “Chicka Chicka Boom Boom” by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault
- “ABC” by John Burningham
- “Albert’s Alphabet” by Leslie Tryon
- “Anno’s Alphabet: An Adventure in Imagination” by Mitsumasa Anno
- “Alphabatics” by Suse Macdonald

**Information books**

Information books are written to convey information about the world. They appeal to children’s curiosity about the world and how things work. The photographs and pictures attract children and spark their interest about the world, prompting them to ask questions about the pictures or words they come across. These books help children learn about things they may not notice or experience first-hand, increasing their knowledge of the world. They also contain more sophisticated technical words with accompanying descriptions or explanations which children might be interested to know. This helps expand children’s vocabulary.
Examples of information books include:

- “Big Book of Trucks” by Caroline Bingham
- “I Spy” series by Jean Marzollo
- “Nature Spy” by Ken Kreisler
- “I Read Signs” by Tana Hoban

Picture books

Picture books are books in which the text and illustrations combine to tell a story. The text is minimal and the illustrations complement or extend the text, or provide information that is not stated in the text. The illustrations in picture books help children make meaning of and understand the story. They also help build background knowledge which is important as children learn to read.

Teachers and children can talk about picture books in different ways – they can talk about the story as told by the words, the story that can be told from the pictures or the story that can be told as a result of combining both the words and pictures.

In general, picture books for young children have the following features (Sutherland, 1997):

- Story line is presented in a brief and straightforward manner
- Story contains a limited number of concepts for easy understanding
- Text is written in a direct and simple style
- Illustrations complement the text

Examples of picture books include:

- “Dinosaur Roar!” by Paul and Henrietta Strickland
- “Goodnight Moon” by Margaret Wise Brown
- “Goodnight Gorilla” by Peggy Rathmann
- “Where is the Green Sheep?” by Mem Fox
- “The Snowman” by Raymond Briggs

Rhyming books

Children who read or who are regularly exposed to rhyming books, poems and songs develop phonological awareness and become better readers and spellers (Bryant, Bradley, Maclean, & Crossland, 1989). Rhyming books help children to be aware of letter sounds and make the association between written letters and sounds. The more children are exposed to such books, the more they are able to produce rhymes on their own and decode words that share the same rhyming sounds.

Examples of rhyming books include:

- “Each Peach Pear Plum” by Janet and Allan Ahlberg
- “Hop on Pop” by Dr Seuss
Story books

Most story books have predictable story lines, characters and settings. This predictability helps children become familiar with aspects of a story such as the beginning which introduces the setting and characters, the middle where a problem or conflict develops and the ending where the problem or conflict is resolved.

Through story books, children encounter book language which encompasses words and phrases not commonly used in everyday conversational language such as “Once upon a time” or “Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin”. Folk tales and fairy tales are good examples of stories and teachers should consider including them in the Reading Centre.

Examples of story books include:

- “We’re Going on a Bear Hunt” by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury
- “If You Give a Mouse a Cookie” by Laura Numeroff
- “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” by Eric Carle
- “Dear Zoo” by Rod Campbell

Summary

It is important to help children understand that language and communication are important not only for interaction but to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas. A learning environment that is purposefully set up to facilitate interaction and expression using verbal and written forms can make a difference in children’s language and literacy development.
Observation and Assessment

To find out what children know and can do so as to plan for and build on their learning, teachers must first understand how children acquire language and literacy. With this understanding and taking into account different home and language backgrounds, they observe children to identify where each child is at, design learning experiences that cater to the varying abilities and collect information to monitor their progress.
Observing and Documenting Children’s Learning

Language Development

Observing and documenting how children use language help teachers to better understand their language development. Teachers can use anecdotal records, checklists, audio and video recordings to document children’s language development over a period of time.

Children use language for different purposes and to perform different functions. For example, children can use language to communicate their wants (e.g. “I want to read this book.”), control the behaviour of others (e.g. “I will be the waiter and you be the customer.”), explore and learn about the world around them (e.g. “Why do I get a stomach ache like the hungry caterpillar?”) or create a new play scenario (e.g. “Let’s pretend this is a castle.”). By observing how children use language, teachers gain insights into their level of understanding of the language.

For a more complete picture of their language development, teachers should observe children using language in different contexts which includes both informal and formal settings. For example, as they converse with one another during play or when they stand in front of the class to talk about their artwork.

While children may feel comfortable using language to converse with their friends, they may not have the confidence to speak in front of a group. Teachers can provide opportunities for children to speak up in a small group before introducing activities such as “show and tell” in a large group setting. Teachers can also model and teach specific vocabulary and language structure to help children plan what they want to say in front of a large group.

Observing children in informal and formal settings such as during play and “Show and Tell” provides a more complete picture of their language development.
Early Literacy Development

Besides documenting children’s progress in their acquisition of the various early literacy skills (i.e. print and book awareness, alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness), teachers should consider observing and documenting children’s interest in reading as this shows their attitudes toward books and indicates their motivation to learn to read.

Teachers can consider the following questions while observing children during shared reading or as they select and read books on their own at the Reading Centre:

- Is the child attentive during shared reading?
- Does the child respond verbally to the story by answering questions or making comments?
- Does the child respond in non-verbal ways (e.g. laughing at the funny parts of the story)?
- Does the child choose a book intentionally and spend time looking through it? Or does he pick up a book at random, flip through it and then move on to the next book?

As comprehension is one of the major goals of reading instruction, teachers can also ask questions about a story or get children to retell the story to assess their level of understanding as they listen to or read texts. If children are unable to do so, this may indicate a lack of understanding of the text. Teachers may have to provide more scaffolds such as reading the story again or explaining the meanings of words using child-friendly definitions to help children in their comprehension.
Collecting samples of children’s writing over a period of time helps teachers track their writing development.

After reading a story, teachers can ask questions to assess children’s understanding. For example:

- What is happening on this page?
- How did the story end?
- Who is your favourite character? Why do you like the character?
- Which is your favourite part of the story?

Teachers can also ask children to retell the story. Pictures in the book can be used as visual cues if necessary. As the child retells the story, teachers can consider the following questions in order to understand the child’s level of comprehension:

- Does the child’s retelling show that he understood the story?
- Is the child telling the story in a logical sequence?
- Does the child know how to use relevant or key words from the story?
- Does the child include details in the retelling of the story?

To track children’s writing development, teachers need to take note of the different ways children attempt to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas in written form. They can keep samples of children’s drawing and writing accompanied by anecdotal notes (e.g., brief descriptions of where, when and how the writing was produced) to document these changes over a period of time.
Teachers can consider the following when analysing samples of children’s drawing and writing:

• Talk about the piece of writing with the child to find out the meaning he/she is trying to convey. Based on the context and purpose of the writing, is the message appropriate?

• Based on the six categories of writing, what types of writing is the child using to represent ideas and express himself/herself? Teachers can plan and provide opportunities for children to explore writing depending on whether the writing resembles:
  - Scribble that is randomly placed or marks arranged in a line
  - Mock letters or letter-like forms
  - Actual letters
  - Mock words or strings of letters randomly put together to represent words
  - Words spelt using letters/groups of letters to represent the sounds they hear
  - Words spelt conventionally

• What is the level of the child’s message based on length and complexity? For example, a story is a higher level message than a label for a picture. If the child continues to write one-word labels for his/her pictures, teachers may need to help the child progress to writing a higher level message. They can encourage the child to talk about the picture and write what the child says while sounding out the words to model the writing process.
Example 1

Context:
The Dramatic Play Centre was set up as a bakery as part of the current theme “Places in my neighbourhood”. In the following play scenario, Ryan, Jia Ming, Mina and Danial were in the Dramatic Play Centre, negotiating their roles in the bakery. Jia Ming speaks Mandarin at home and was only exposed to English when he joined the kindergarten a month ago. This was Jia Ming’s first time role playing at the Dramatic Play Centre.

Teacher’s Anecdotal Record:
- Ryan used language to communicate what he wanted – “I want to be the baker this time.”
- Ryan also used language to direct his friends by telling Jia Ming to be his assistant in the bakery and Danial to be the customer – “I need Jia Ming to help me.”
  – “We need more customers to buy bread. Danial, can you be the customer?”
- Mina volunteered to be the customer – “I am the customer. I want to buy kaya bread for breakfast.”
- Jia Ming followed Ryan around the bakery and imitated his actions of baking bread and serving the customers.
- Jia Ming did not add any talk to the play. He listened carefully to the other children while they interacted and played with one another.

Possible Interpretation/Assessment:
- Jia Ming acted as a spectator in the play, observing the other children as they used language to communicate with one another during the play.
- While he seemed to be able to understand what the other children were doing and saying, he might not have the vocabulary to express himself and join in the play.
What the Teacher Could Do:

- Introduce words related to the bakery (e.g. bake, bread, oven) and their meanings during large group discussion.
- Participate in the role play and model how to use words and phrases (e.g. “May I help you? How much is this?”).
- Work with Jia Ming and help him to practise using the words and phrases during the play.

Documentation:

Document Jia Ming’s progress over a period of time by including anecdotal records and audio/video recordings of his language to show:

- Increase in his vocabulary which will be evident in the words and phrases he uses during play
- How he uses language to communicate with his friends during play and small group activities
Example 2

Context:
As the topic was on “Animals”, the children were suggesting and discussing which animal they would like as a class pet. Rani suggested keeping a spider and some of the children immediately squealed. Finally, the children came up with a list of possible class pets including fish, snail and hamster, and decided that they would take a vote.

Teacher’s Anecdotal Record:
During learning centre time, Rani went to the Literacy Centre and drew a picture of a spider. She sounded out the word “spi-der” and wrote “SPID” to represent the word. She only used upper case letters in her writing. When asked about her picture, Rani was able to talk about spiders – “Spiders have eight legs so they are not insects. Insects only have six legs. You know, spiders eat insects and some even eat other spiders!”

Possible Interpretation/Assessment:
• Rani’s interest in and knowledge about spiders were apparent. She had the expressive vocabulary to talk about spiders.
• She wrote “SPID” as a label for her picture. Her writing did not reflect what she knew about spiders.
• She had knowledge of letter names and sounds. This was evident in her sounding out the word and using invented spelling to represent the word “spider”.
• In writing “SPID”, Rani only focused on and represented the beginning sounds of the word “spider” and did not represent the ending sounds of the word.

What the Teacher Could Do:
• Use shared writing during large group time to direct children’s attention to writing conventions (i.e. the use of upper and lower case letters, spaces between words).
• Talk about the picture with Rani and get her to suggest words/phrases to describe spiders. Act as a scribe and write what she has suggested while sounding out the words to help Rani link spoken words to written words.
• Encourage Rani to create her own book about spiders by drawing and writing what she knows about spiders. Get Rani to sound out the words she wants to write. Draw her attention to the ending sounds to help her represent the sounds she hears in words. Encourage Rani to share her book with the class during “show and tell”.

Documentation:
Document Rani’s progress over a period of time by including samples of her drawing and writing that show:

• How her writing has developed from representing only beginning sounds to representing beginning and ending consonant sounds
• How her writing has developed from a single-word label to phrases/sentences to describe her picture and from a single picture to a book about spiders

Summary
Observing and assessing children’s language and literacy development enable teachers to see how their children are progressing. This helps teachers to plan appropriate and timely learning experiences that will meet the needs of their children.
Bibliography


