

Supporting Creativity and Enjoyment with Literacy



Babies and young children develop literacy knowledge and skills in many different ways and particularly if they enjoying themselves and doing something creative. Early understandings of literacy, what it is, what it's for and how it works, develop when babies and young children are immersed in the literacy practices of their homes, communities and early childhood settings. Literacy development can be enhanced through creating literacy rich environments and through adult scaffolding and modelling of literacy during play and everyday activities.

This section discusses how practitioners can support creativity and enjoyment in early literacy.

Observing Literacy in Everyday Activity

Written text is everywhere in western societies, on food packaging, street signs, on phone and tablet screens, leaflets, clothing, backpacks, birthday cakes, as well as in more conventional printed media such as comics and children's books. Careful observation and listening to children's natural and spontaneous activity with written text is the first step to supporting their early literacy development. When children play in a text-rich role play area, create cards or invitations, or engage with books, apps or comics, observation enables practitioners to learn about children's interests and about the literacy experiences and knowledge they bring from their home and community environments.

- Observe how children naturally handle printed and digital materials, how they turn pages, swipe screens, use writing tools or keyboards.
- Look for indicators of engagement, rather than evidence of literacy skill. Do children's movements, facial expressions, direction of gaze and verbal responses suggest enjoyment, curiosity, anticipation or enthusiasm? Do children sustain and persist in literacy activities? Are they motivated to share their thoughts and ideas with others and talk about what they are doing?
- Do children seem fully invested in the stories they hear and retell? Do they display empathy with characters or relate the narrative to their own lived experience?
- Talk to parents about children's literacy at home. Which comics, apps, books, TV programmes or websites do they like?

Careful observation and listening enable practitioners to build upon what children know and can do, and provide relevant and meaningful resources in an enabling literacy rich environment.

Literacy rich environments

The materials and resources available in early years settings shape how children are able to participate in literacy activity. A [literacy rich environment](#), both indoors and outdoors, enables children to engage in authentic and meaningful literacy activity in

their play, in their interactions with adults and peers, and as part of their everyday routines. A literacy rich environment comprises a wide range of resources, it includes materials with which children are familiar, and it also introduces children to new resources that spark curiosity, interest and creativity. Resources should be readily available for children to spontaneously incorporate into their play and activity.

- **Environmental print:** Populate the setting, both indoors and [outdoors](#), with print on displays, labels, name cards and signs that represent the cultural diversity of the setting. Include inviting posters, with familiar characters or nursery rhymes in the nappy-change area. Images and print associated with children's TV and Film can be highly motivating and mediate dialogue in which children can share their experience and knowledge.
- **Props:** Include story sacks, small world props and magnetic boards with story characters, pictures, letters and emoticons that enable children to express their thoughts, retell familiar stories and create their own.
- **Role play areas:** Include leaflets, take away menus, recipe books, food packaging, signs for local shops, written text and writing materials associated with vets, hospitals, an office, supermarkets, train stations, airports or hairdressers. Also include signage and writing materials in [outdoor play areas](#).
- **Digital Technology:** Include eBooks and story apps. A [wide range of apps](#) offer online access to thousands of children's eBooks titles, with functions such as read-aloud, text highlight and interactive modes that can be turned on or off. Story making apps enable the creation of digital picture books, which can be [personalised and engaging](#). Stop-frame animation apps and cartoon sequence apps also allow children generate their own stories.
- **Reading area:** Create a cosy and inviting reading area with a comfortable space for children and adults to engage with storybooks, non-fiction, [interactive books](#), comics, poetry, eBooks, and other reading materials. Of course, the reading area is not the only space in which children engage with written text, however, a dedicated space means that children will always know where to find their favourite book or to browse a selection of inviting texts.
- **Writing materials:** Include an easily accessible range of notebooks, paper, card, pens, pencils, scissors, used greetings cards, stickers, envelopes, ink stamps, chalk and chalk boards, white boards.
- **[Making stories come alive](#):** Encourage children's story telling by making characters and stories come alive in creative ways, such as making clay models of story characters, using stop-frame animation, suggesting three unconnected words that children might put in a story and have fun with them! Or choose something from a non-fiction book, such as a tree, and encourage groups of children to use crayons, paints etc to make a big picture of a tree.

For more detail, see Early Reading, Early Writing and Symbolic Play sections.

Adult Modelling - Children also learn a great deal about literacy from the reading and writing they see and experience around them in everyday contexts. There are innumerable opportunities to model authentic reading and writing practices in routine activities in early childhood settings. Practitioners might engage alongside children in literacy activity, such as making greeting cards, or writing stories, lists or poems.

Practitioners can further illustrate the functions and purposes of literacy by ‘thinking aloud’ whilst using a search engine, browsing a catalogue or instructions, or writing a note, for example.

Furthermore, modelling literacy is a valuable opportunity to nurture motivation and enthusiasm for reading and writing.

Nurturing motivation and enthusiasm for reading and writing

Literacy is an affective practice, meaning that engagement in the process of reading and writing, and the content of the texts we encounter and produce, evoke feelings and emotions. When adults show enthusiasm and enjoyment for reading and writing and demonstrate how literacy facilitates social connection and mediates different kinds of activity, from making a list to enjoying a story to keeping in touch with distant loved ones, then children come to value literacy and are motivated to participate.

- **Scribe children’s stories:** This powerful activity validates children’s early attempts at composing narrative, and it encourages children to view themselves as legitimate authors, as people who have stories to tell to other people. Keep a notebook to hand and encourage children to tell you a story about something they are interested in, or something that has happened to them. Listen attentively and write the story as the child tells it, without ever correcting the child, then read the story back with enthusiasm – however short it may be. These stories can later be acted out by other children in the group, as in the [‘Helicopter Stories’](#) approach.
- **Book Chat:** Shared reading, whether fiction or non-fiction, is also an opportunity for shared thinking. Make shared reading events social and interactive, share your curiosity, and listen attentively to what children have to say.
- **Empathy:** Show [empathy with characters](#) and situations in stories, talk about the way the narrative makes you feel, ask children how it makes them feel and validate the emotions a story evokes in children.
- **Value early mark making:** Show genuine interest in [the texts that children create](#) and what they mean. Often, what appears to be random marks or scribbles have been created with agency and intent and they express meaning. Make space and time for children to share that meaning with you, should they wish to.

Practitioner knowledge of children’s books and other texts

Children’s participation in shared reading can be enhanced through opportunities to talk about, enact and explore a story topic, narrative, and characters (See Early Reading). In addition, [research has found](#) that children’s engagement with reading is enhanced through practitioners developing their knowledge of children’s literature, authors, poetry and other texts. Not all children are naturally drawn to books; some will need support to find reading material that ignites their interest. When practitioners share the right text with the right child at the right moment, it can change a child’s relationship with reading forever. Broad knowledge of children’s literature and other texts, coupled with good knowledge of children’s lives and interests, enables practitioners to inspire children to become keen readers.

Practitioner knowledge of new authors and contemporary children's literature also ensures that children experience books which positively represent cultural diversity, disability and diverse families and that counter social stereotypes. The stories and images that children experience in books send powerful messages about who is valued or devalued in society. As Professor Rudine Sims Bishop, from Ohio State University [explains](#), every child deserves the opportunity to see themselves reflected in books. Knowledge of children's literature enables practitioners to offer books and texts that are relevant and meaningful to children's diverse lives.

- Explore the picturebook titles short listed for children's book awards, such as the [Kate Greenaway Medal](#) or [UKLA Book Awards](#).
- Explore booklist websites, such as [Book for Topics](#) or [Love reading4schools](#)
- Browse recommended app for young children, such as this guide by the [National Literacy Trust](#).
- Audit your setting's book collection and reflect upon the diversity of characters.
- Spend time browsing the children's section in your local library or book shop.
- More ideas for finding and funding books can be found [here](#).

Online resources

1. Teach Early Years: Creating Literate Environments in Early Years Settings <https://www.teachearlyyears.com/learning-and-development/view/literate-environments>
2. <https://www.early-education.org.uk/outside-play-and-learning-ideas-info-and-lots-links>
3. National Literacy Trust: Literacy Apps - <http://literacyapps.literacytrust.org.uk/>
4. Kucirkova, N., Messer, D., Sheehy, K. and Flewitt, R. (2013) Sharing personalised stories on iPads: a close look at one parent-child interaction. *Literacy*, 47(3), 115-122. http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/3363/1/Kucirkova_Messer_Sheehy_and_Flewitt_2013_Early_View_Sharing_Personalised_Stories.pdf
5. <http://makeyproject.eu/about/>
6. Cremin, T., Swann, J., Flewitt, R., Faulkner, D. and Kucirkova, N. (2013). Evaluation Report of MakeBelieve Arts Helicopter Technique of Storytelling and Storyacting. MakeBelieveArts/The OpenUniversity. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/38391/1/MBA%20Final%20Report%20.pdf>
7. Research Rich Pedagogies, Open University: Book Chat: Reading with your Child <https://researchrichpedagogies.org/research/supporting-rah/book-chat-reading-with-your-child>
8. Empathy Lab: <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/b2f3fbc2/files/uploaded/EMPATHYLAB%202021%20primary%20GUIDE%20Landscape%20WEB.pdf>

9. Making their mark – children’s early writing: Penny Tassoni - <https://www.early-education.org.uk/sites/default/files/Making%20their%20mark%20-%20children%27s%20early%20writing.pdf>
10. Research Rich Pedagogies, open University: Teachers’ knowledge of children’s literature and other texts - <https://researchrichpedagogies.org/research/theme/teachers-knowledge-of-childrens-literature-and-other-texts>
11. Rudine Sim Bishop, Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors: Video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=_AAu58SNSyc
12. The CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal - <https://carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/the-cilip-kate-greenaway-medal-2021/>
13. UKLA Children’s Book Awards - <https://ukla.org/awards/ukla-book-award/>
14. Books for Topics - <https://www.booksfortopics.com/early-years>
15. Love Reading4schools - <https://www.lovereadingschools.co.uk/lists/15281/Early-Years-3-5-yrs-Reluctant-Readers>
16. Finding and Funding Quality Books - https://researchrichpedagogies.org/downloads/Funding_and_Finding_Quality_Books.pdf
17. Fell, S. (2012) Working in partnership with parents - creating multimodal stories in the Early Years. *English 4 – 11*, 45, 9-12. https://ukla.org/wp-content/uploads/Working_in_partnership_with_parents_creating_multimodal_stories_in_the_Early_Years.pdf
18. Book Start for Practitioners - <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/programmes-and-campaigns/bookstart/practitioners/#!?q=&sortOption=MostRecent&pageNo=1>