

Linda Warren: Welcome back. Now we are going to turn our attention to writing an alphabet knowledge. Protégés play a major role in stimulating children's early literacy development. Mentor-coaches can best support protégés in this area by having solid content knowledge and supporting children's early attempts at writing and learning about letters and the alphabet.

We know that children develop skills, knowledge and attitudes about literacy even before they can read and write in adult ways. Babies are developing fine motor skills that are important for later writing. Protégés and parents can foster this development by providing a wide variety of age-appropriate materials for infants to explore and manipulate. Dee and Brenda, what materials do you suggest that protégés use with infants?

Dee Ard: We like to use play dough, sand, water. The play dough you can mix your your goals with that. Not only are you developing those fine motor skills, but you can do some other things with it so we like to do, use the play dough and sand and water. We like to use the toys where they can push, turn, flip. They all build nice fine motor -- we like to use the big blocks so they can stack those. That works for eye-hand coordination also.

Brenda Eliand-Williford: Very similar to what what Dee just mentioned, our mentor-coaches, coach mentor-teachers work with the teachers to help them identify age-appropriate materials to bring in for the zero-to-three because oftentimes the teachers, particularly in the area of writing, want to bring in things that are more appropriate for the three-to-five.

So we really talk about laying the foundation for understanding growth and development for zero-to-three at this age and what's appropriate for them to learn that are precursors to writing. Which is really manipulating and using their their hand muscles to pick up things and grasp things. So we bring in brushes, big brushes, small brushes and we allow the infants to play with with water.

They paint with the water outside and they use different size brushes along with the other items that Dee just mentioned in terms of their writing development. So teachers are sometimes interested and oftentimes want to know more about what to bring in that's appropriate because they tend to want to go to three-to-five. But toddlers need, infants need to be able to manipulate, play, move their fingers in different substances like play dough or water, sand, finger paint. All of those substances are good.

Linda: Good, thank you. Toddlers continue to build and refine their fine motor skills. Children between eighteen and twenty-four months are able to grasp and use writing tools to make marks. Many of the ways protégés and parents help infants can be used to support toddlers. Playing with blocks, play dough and sand help build eye-hand coordination which supports toddlers' early writing attempts. Let toddlers explore a variety of writing materials including paint, markers and large crayons and encourage scribbling and drawing.

Protégés and parents can help young children develop positive attitudes about writing by modeling writing for different purposes, like making a list, writing a letter or labeling a child's work. Protégés and parents can also narrate what they are writing for children. We visited infant and toddler classrooms to show you some of the ways that teachers can support young children's developing skills. Let's take a look.

[Video begins, music] Narrator: Many activities can be used to lay the foundation for writing. Children need to develop their visual-motor skills to be able to grasp crayons and markers.

Katherine Whitaker: The opportunities that we provide the infants to help develop their pre-literacy skills are activities such as picking up cheerios or other small objects to finger feed themselves - be able to manipulate a spoon. Provide materials such as rattles, manipulative boards, grasping the objects which all lead to early writing skills that they need such as bi-motor and the skills they need to develop to be able to hold the pencils and the markers and stuff later on.

Narrator: Early efforts at writing deserve encouragement. With a strong foundation in place, children can initiate their

own writing. [Video ends] Linda: Dee and Brenda, talk about activities you use to support children's early writing skills.

Dee: We use some activities like play dough and, I've mentioned play dough before because you can use that for several purposes. You can use it for developing the fine motor for early writing, and you can also develop some language with them. The finger painting, we've used stickers and as long as you have a purpose in mind, you can use things like that. We try to tell our teachers to make sure that their activities are purposeful. And you can do grouping, even on the very very young level, you can start doing grouping and different sizes. So you can use activities to have purposes for more than just one goal.

Brenda: And like the video showed, exposure to a variety of materials, markers, crayons, manipulative toys, picking up objects is just so important for infants and toddlers at this age. And our mentor-coaches work with our infant/toddler teachers to help them realize how important that is. And oftentimes teachers may not know these are really important skills that help children learn writing later on in life.

So the importance of having these objects out and available for the infants to use and the modeling and the language that the teachers use when the infants and toddlers are scribbling and writing and talking about encouraging that with infants and toddlers is so important for developing those pre-writing skills with infants and toddlers, and helping the teachers understand that it is really the thing to do with infants and toddlers at this age.

One of our classrooms that we have, a project that I really liked was they laid out a big sheet of butcher-block paper and lots of markers and they just allowed the toddlers go and just scribble all over the paper. It was like this group community writing project and they all felt a part of it and and that's the neat way to have fun and also encourage writing.

Linda: Absolutely, and it also is supporting large muscle development as well. Brenda: Absolutely.

Linda: Okay, like toddlers, preschoolers also need opportunities to experiment with writing. The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework contains important indicators of preschoolers' writing development. Some of those indicators include developing and understanding that writing is a way of communicating for a purpose, beginning to represent their experiences through dictation and pictures and progressing from scribbles to more conventional forms of writing.

Protégés and parents can support preschool children's writing development by providing a wide variety of materials for children to explore scribbling, drawing and writing. Protégés and parents can provide fine motor activities that support eye-hand coordination like puzzles, building with blocks, and cutting with scissors.

Other ways to support the development of writing skills include providing plenty of time throughout the day to engage in writing and drawing, also providing opportunities for children to practice writing for a purpose like writing their names on a sign-in sheet, labeling a block creation, sending a letter to another child or relative or creating a grocery list in the dramatic play area. Protégés can create inviting writing centers that contain a variety of materials. They can put writing tools in other areas of the classroom and they can plan activities that encourage writing such as creative journaling.

Protégés can talk to children about their work, asking questions that focus on the children's writing. They can introduce writing concepts like starting at the top of the page. Another way to support the development of writing skills is to take dictation of children's words and stories and model writing for various purposes. We visited a preschool teacher in Ohio to see how she supports children's developing writing skills in her classroom. Let's take a look.

[Video begins, music] Sarah Hessick: I feel that language and writing is very important in my classroom because I believe this is the foundation for the children to later on ... make it a fun and exciting experience for them that they will gain that because it's a very important stepping stone in life to be a success - if you can read and you can write.

Narrator: Fremont, Ohio teacher, Sarah Hessick, provides many opportunities for children to experience writing in her preschool classroom. Makayla joins her friends in the writing center to print her name on her painting. Sarah: When

she first came into the writing center it was just lines or it might be circles, so she's come a long ways, she's come a long way in her printing and everything. Now she's forming letters and forming the numbers.

Makayla: D D O 7.. Sarah: Oh, there's a number. Narrator: Makayla draws a picture of a tree while at the writing center. Sarah helps Makayla expand on her writing skills and see that writing is meaningful by labeling her drawing.

Sarah: I wanted her to realize that letters spell a word so she was already relating to trees. (To Makayla:) Would you, since you drew a tree, would you like to learn how to spell the word tree? If I make if I make it, can you do it next? Okay, let's see, tree is spelled t r e e. Okay, can you make it?

Makayla: Tree. Sarah: Boy, you're busy. I think she wanted to do it on her own. She didn't want anyone else to help her. She wanted to be by herself that she could prove it to me that "I can do it, I'm capable of this, let me alone, I can do it." Oh, I see.

(To Lillian:) Can you tell me the story of your book? Can you tell me? Lillian: If I can do some more words. Sarah: Okay, that would be nice to do some more words. Narrator: Sarah and Lillian create a book while in the writing center. During this spur of the moment activity, Lillian shows that her writing has a purpose.

Sarah: Lillian is a very good story teller, but to her, to to actually scribble and start printing words it was like, she was just amazed at herself – that she could actually do something like that – you could just see that she was getting excited and getting into the story. And it made a great impact on her that she was actually doing this herself.

Lillian: I want to tell my story. Sarah: Oh, tell me your story now. Lillian: Once upon a time a little girl named... Sarah: A little girl named who? What was her name? Lillian: She went to the store without her family, she didn't have no money, she couldn't go without her family.

Sarah: Oh, she had to go with her family to the store? Lillian: Yeah. Sarah: That's a good idea. Lillian: And then she decided to go back home and get her family to come with her but they were already at the store.

Sarah: I realized that she was, the function of print for her meant that she could tell stories, that she could write stories, that books play an important part of her life. It's literacy for her that she is actually realizing that it makes a difference in her life.

Lillian: The monster broke the houses all in pieces .. Sarah: It broke your house in pieces? Lillian: And then then she had to find a new house and a safe place where it couldn't break anything. Sarah: Oh, that's good.

Lillian: inside the izzy world. The end. Sarah: Well, that was a very nice story.

Jess Gropen: The easy thing I think in the case of Sarah is that she already relates her teaching to the progress that individual children make. So she finds it rewarding to tailor her practice to individual children and to their needs. Now in the case of Makayla, it was agreed that it would be beneficial for Sarah to actually model the writing of words and to help Makayla begin to distinguish letters and, and numbers for instance.

Sarah did this during a book-making activity and what you can see is that Makayla comes one step closer to becoming literate, to being able to use writing as a a way of commanding English. Now Lillian is at an earlier stage of writing practice, so in this case Sarah encourages Lillian to do what she's capable of doing. At first this might be scribbling, later on Lillian might make letter-like forms, but, but positively encouraging Lillian to do whatever she can, there's growth towards full literacy. [Video ends]

Linda: Sarah demonstrates several ways to make writing meaningful for children. Dee and Brenda, let's share some examples from your experiences for making writing meaningful.

Dee: We like to encourage our teachers when they're doing their day-to-day business-type things like taking attendance, doing lunch count or if they're doing their health check, to make that part of the modeling experience. As

they go through when they're doing their lunch count, they're standing in the housekeeping section and they're picking up fruits and vegetables and they're talking about, "Who's going to eat lunch here today?" And the children can see them write it down, check it off.

And the same with the health check, you know, pick up your little doctor's kit and off you go to make that a teachable moment. So we try to encourage that everything they do be a teachable moment. Model that writing, let the children see the teachers making their lists for tomorrow, that they have to have lists too, that writing has meaning, it has a purpose. So we think that's real important.

When they make their charts, you know, form those letters very carefully; let the children see that. Let the children come and be a part of making some of those letters. If you have a child that makes a really good "B", let them make that first "B" in the word.

Brenda: I, I definitely agree. Those things we do within our program and I see our mentor-coaches working with our teachers to figure out ways to put writing all throughout the classroom and all the different interest areas. And how can you put writing in the block area where the where boys usually go, gravitate to and how can you get them to write, and think about writing signs for the constructions that they make. And having them, having pencils and papers in that area so they can make their signs. And how do you do it in the housekeeping area?

Put in lists and pads of paper so they can write down things that they're going to go shopping for. So putting it all throughout the classrooms, the mentor-coaches really work with the teachers so that they can make make sure it's integrated throughout the classroom. The other way, within our program that the mentor-coaches work with the teachers to make writing meaningful and connected, is through what we call studies.

If there's a particular topic that the children are interested in and they really expand upon that and they learn all the content areas, music, science, math, as well as literacy and language through the study. And one study that I was just blown away by in one of our programs was the beauty shop and barber shop study. All the children in the program were very interested in that because some of the children had gone to see the movie Beauty Shop, Barber Shop with their parents.

So they came back and they did lots of activities around that, they changed one of their interest areas into a barber shop and a beauty shop. So the children were making lists of all the services that the beauty shop would provide. They were writing down appointments for the other children. They were taking signs around that said Beauty Shop and making signs that show their beauty shop. That was so fascinating and so meaningful because children connected the writing to something they were interested in, it had purpose. It was intentional. So they got a lot out of that experience.

Linda: Good point, and and it gives the message that what you can do, you can write about. Brenda: Yes. Yes. Linda: Okay, now it's your turn to think with your facilitator about working with your protégés to support children's writing. Stop the tape now and resume when you finish your conversations.

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