

How Caregivers and Teachers Support Book Knowledge and Print Concepts

STRATEGIES

Introduction

Long before they can read, young children are developing book knowledge and print concepts. Book knowledge is the understanding of how books and print “work.” Print awareness includes the understanding that print is speech written down (Justice & Kadaravek, 2004). Young children show that they are developing book knowledge and print awareness when they:

- ▶ Notice and talk about print in the environment— signs, symbols, and logos
- ▶ Enjoy books and other experiences with print
- ▶ Ask to be read to (from new books or from the same book over and over)
- ▶ Memorize parts of stories
- ▶ Pretend to read (considered part of emergent reading)
- ▶ Participate in conversations about the books they have heard

Children learn book knowledge and print concepts in the languages that are read to them and shared with them. Book knowledge and print concepts that children develop in any language support children’s book knowledge and print concepts in English. So it is important for caregivers and teachers to support book knowledge and print concepts in their home language.

When caregivers and teachers share books and talk about print, children learn that print is meaningful and that reading together can be fun.



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Supporting babies to develop Book Knowledge and Print Concepts

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Babies and young children are learning important information about books and print that they will soon need to become readers. They watch how teachers and caregivers hold books and turn the pages, noticing that the pictures change when they do so. They notice the rhythm of words in the story and how the reader's voice rises and falls. In fact, when babies are read to often, teachers may observe them "book babbling," which involves babbling in a way that mimics a reader (Baghban, 1984). Book babbling is different from other forms of babbling. It is what babies do when they are beginning to understand that book reading is different than talking.

Babies begin to develop Book Knowledge and Print Concepts when caregivers and teachers:

- ▶ Share stories, poems, and songs in the children's home language (Birckmayer, Kennedy, & Stonehouse, 2009)
- ▶ Cuddle up and "read" books together every day by, for example, labeling or describing pictures on each page (Zambo & Hansen, 2007)
- ▶ Look in the direction where children point, or follow their gaze; support babies' language development by labeling and describing the objects of interest (e.g., "That? That is a fire hydrant.") or by building on their comments (e.g., "Yes, that *is* a truck! It's a dump truck! See that big pile of dirt in the back!")
- ▶ Engage babies in conversations about age-appropriate books by getting their attention, asking a question, and then waiting for them to respond (e.g., "What do you see? A dog? That's right! I see a dog, too. It's a little brown dog with a bone.") and offering a response if none is provided (Ninio & Bruner, 1978; Swain, 2006)
- ▶ Play games such as peek-a-boo, pat-a-cake, or invented games (e.g., "Can you find the ball?") (Field, 2008) to build children's interest in language (Healey, 2011)



At the Early Head Start Center

Sylvia is getting the babies ready for nap time. As part of their settling-in routine, she sings quietly to them. Sylvia had asked families to help her learn a song or lullaby in their home language. Now every day Sylvia sings these song to the babies. They fall asleep listening to comforting sounds and languages from home.



At the Early Head Start Center

Eleven-month-old Soledad is reading a book with her teacher, Myae. "Gaa!" Soledad says and points to the bear on the first page. "Yes, a bear! That's a big brown bear," Myae says. "Do you know what a bear says?" "Ahh! Ahh!" Soledad shouts. "Yes!" Myae says. "A bear can say 'ahh!' It can also say 'grrrr.' Can you say 'grrr'?" "Grrr," Soledad growls. "Oh my! What a scary bear you are!" Myae says, laughing and growling, too. "Let's see what is on the next page."

Supporting toddlers to develop Book Knowledge and Print Concepts

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Toddlers learn about their world through observing, listening, and touching everything in reach and by having their questions answered in the language(s) they know. Talking about print at home and out in the community helps toddlers begin to understand that print is meaningful and important. Many toddlers are interested in books and will ask to have their favorites read over and over. Some toddlers may only listen to a few words before drifting away, and some others develop their interest in books later on. Despite these differences, caring adults should continue to provide opportunities for toddlers to discover the joy of story reading by reading and talking about books.



Toddlers develop Book Knowledge and Print Concepts when caregivers and teachers:

- ▶ Read and talk about environmental print, such as exit signs, stop signs, bathroom signs, store and restaurant logos (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984)
- ▶ Share stories, poems, and songs in English and the toddlers' home language(s) (Birckmayer, Kennedy, & Stonehouse, 2009)
- ▶ Make story time fun so that children happily join the group every day (Zambo & Hansen, 2007)
- ▶ Read (and reread and reread) favorite stories, poems, and chants in English and in their home language(s) (Murphy, 2004)
- ▶ Talk about books and ask questions during and after story reading ("The hippo is going up the hill. Where do you think he is going?") (Whitehurst et al., 1988)
- ▶ Talk about unfamiliar words and encourage them to say them (e.g., "Spooked means it scared him. Say 'spooked.'" Or "That's the engineer. He drives the train. Can you say 'engineer'?") (Collins, 2010)
- ▶ Respond when they ask what print, signs, and logos say (e.g., "That says push—so we need to push this door to get it open.") (Baghban, 1984)
- ▶ Point out and name meaningful letters of the alphabet, such as those in a child's name. (e.g., "Oh look! The word 'kite' has a K in it—K for Kaila!" (Adams & Osborn, 1990)
- ▶ Provide durable books, such as board or cloth books designed to "hold up" to their active explorations as they carry books around and turn the pages (Hoffman & Cassano, 2013; Schickedanz & Collins, 2013)
- ▶ Create a comfortable book nook or place where books are attractively arranged and easy to reach, such as low, sturdy shelves or book baskets for easy storage with places to sit and read (Schickedanz & Collins, 2013)
- ▶ Model how to use books appropriately by opening them, turning pages carefully, and returning them to the shelves or basket (Schickedanz & Collins, 2013)

On a Home Visit

The home visitor Isabella is showing Mario and his mom how to make a book from labels, boxes, and other forms of environmental print they have collected from the recycling bin. After cutting them down to sizes that will fit into a notebook, Mario says, "First we tape down a label—like this one we peeled off a can of corn." "Maiz," Isabella echoes. "Si," Isabella confirms, "una lata de maiz." Isabella explains how after taping the label to the top of the page, Mario and his mother can draw pictures and words about it. She models how she might write "maiz" and draw a picture of it. "When you finish, you will have an exciting book to read again and again," Isabella says. Mario helps Isabella color her picture and then eagerly reaches for a new label so that he can add another page to his new book.

At the Early Head Start Center

Tameka sits in her book nook reading to 2-year-old twins Mimi and Max. As the twins listen attentively, other toddlers come into the nook—some stay for a few minutes and listen to Tameka read. Others listen for a few seconds. Some pick out their own books to explore. Before the story ends, Max gets up, selects a different book from a basket, and carries it out of the book nook to the block area. As she continues to read, Tameka observes the many ways (and the many places) her toddlers enjoy books. Later, when it appears that Max is truly done with the book he chose, she will encourage him to return his book to the book basket. For now, she is pleased that he and her other toddlers are learning to love and care for books.



At the Early Head Start Center

Ms. Judy knows that 2-and-a-half-year-old Alex loves dinosaurs. Ms. Wendi selects several books about this topic and asks Alex to choose one that they can read together. Alex points to the book with his favorite dinosaur, Tyrannosaurus Rex, on the cover. Ms. Wendi says, "That's a great book! That dinosaur was gigantic! Did you know that a tyrannosaurus couldn't do much with his small arms?" "Sharp teeth!" Alex says. "That's right!" Wendi replies, "Tyrannosaurus Rex definitely had very sharp teeth!"

Supporting preschoolers to develop Book Knowledge and Print Concepts

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Preschoolers notice print everywhere, particularly when guided by responsive caregivers and teachers! As adults intentionally read and discuss print with them, preschoolers learn that print is meaningful and that it carries a message. Reading to preschoolers in their home language(s) helps them learn that print provides information, tells an interesting story, and sometimes makes the reader laugh. Many preschoolers pretend to read books, demonstrating their emerging understandings about print.



Preschoolers develop Book Knowledge and Print Concepts when caregivers and teachers:

- ▶ Share a range of stories, poems, and songs in their home language (Birckmayer, Kennedy, & Stonehouse, 2009)
- ▶ Set aside time to read age-appropriate books together every day (Zambo & Hansen, 2007)
- ▶ Read (and reread) funny stories, stories that encourage children to use their imagination, and stories that surprise
- ▶ Read informational texts to help them learn concepts and ideas; for example, to learn about insects, animals, and habitats (Schickedanz & Collins, 2013)
- ▶ Model how to care for books by holding them and turning pages carefully (Schickedanz & Collins, 2013)
- ▶ Discuss the important ideas in a story that has been read in order to support children's comprehension (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007)
- ▶ Talk about how print is used for different purposes, such as following a recipe, following directions, sending an email, and making a list, as well as how print “works”—that words are made up of letters and that there are spaces before and after them (e.g., “Look. There are four letters in ‘Papi,’ four letters in ‘Mami,’ and four letters in your name, ‘José.’”) (Adams & Osborn, 1990)
- ▶ Draw children's attention to letters, words, signs, and logos in meaningful contexts (e.g., “Look at the red sign by the door. It says ‘Exit!’ The exit sign tells us that we use this door to exit, or get out of, our building.”) (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984)
- ▶ Model using books, magazines, and digital texts as sources of information on a topic of interest by looking at a book on goldfish while making a class aquarium, for example, or following a recipe for chocolate chip cookies (Donovan & Smolkin, 2002; Pappas, 2006)
- ▶ Include print and writing materials in children's play areas by placing, for example, child-friendly directions for building a tower with children's blocks and by placing materials for creating grocery lists, taking restaurant orders, and making menus in a play kitchen (Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006)

Some ways teachers support preschoolers' Book Knowledge and Print Concepts

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On a Home Visit

Brenda, a home visitor, is talking with Camilla about reading to 3-year-old Lillianna. Camilla shares that Lillianna loves books and that they read every night. Camilla also shares that, although she tries to read books in English, she finds reading in Armenian to be much easier. "That's even better," Brenda explains, "It is so important to read to Lillianna in her home language—in *your* language. Everyone in this family



speaks in Armenian—right? Camilla will learn English later, and the fact that she knows Armenian already will help her learn English well." Brenda gives Camilla a few picture books in Armenian and promises to bring her more on her next visit. "There are a lot at the library," Brenda explains. "Do you have a library card? If not, I can take you there on your next visit to get one. It is free, and they welcome parents and their children there!"

At the Head Start Center

Sarah is reading the folktale *The Mitten* to a small group of preschoolers. "So the mouse went into the mitten and the mitten got bigger and bigger and bigger until . . ." When the story is finished, she closes the book and says, "I am thinking that it was so interesting that the mitten stretched and stretched as different animals climbed in to get cozy and warm." As she says "stretched" she models stretching with her hands while she also emphasizes the word by stretching out the word. After the children discuss what they found interesting in the story she says, "I have placed a copy of this book, a pair of knitted mittens, and some plastic animals in the pretend area so you can tell your own mitten story. See if this mitten stretches as different animals climb into the mitten to get cozy and warm. Count how many animals can fit in the mitten." Sarah has also placed several other versions of *The Mitten* story and other books about animals in the pretend area so that the children can get other ideas for their mitten stories.



Resources for Book Knowledge and Print Concepts

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Resources for Book Knowledge and Print Concepts

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