

Literacy in the Community

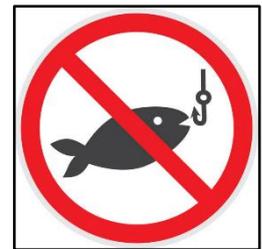


Literacy development emerges from babies' and young children's experiences in real life activities at home, in communities and in the world around them. Before children develop the skills to form recognisable letters and understand the conventions of written language, they need to develop visual and auditory discrimination skills (i.e. the ability to identify and make sense of what they see and hear) and physical skills. These experiences begin before birth, develop at speed during the early years of life and underpin the development of reading and writing. As [Sally Neaum explains](#):

Imagine an iceberg. The crisp, white tip emerging from the sea, supported by a vast body of ice, unseen, huge and absolutely necessary to the existence of what we see. This is a wonderful analogy for children's literacy learning. The tip of the iceberg is the observable skills of reading and writing, and these emerge from, and are supported by, a significant body of knowledge, skill and understanding: vast, unseen but absolutely necessary!"

Case Study

A family are out walking around a fishing pool. The little boy, aged five, says "Stop! I need to check something." He then runs over to a sign that informs the public that fishing is not permitted at certain times of the year (illustrated by a red circle with a red line through a picture of a fish). He scans it from side to side with his index finger. The boy then confidently informs his family of its meaning; "This means you can't take the fish out of the water". He used the sign and his previous knowledge to construct meaning, he understood the red circle and cross line meant something was not allowed and then used the picture of a fish to piece the puzzle together.



Through being exposed to a rich variety of media in the community during the first five years of his life, this child understood how to 'read' information in his environment. These sorts of experiences are the mass of ice below the waterline of the iceberg.

This example demonstrates the importance of children, from birth, being exposed to written language, literature, symbols and illustrated materials. These early experiences will gradually develop and contribute to children's holistic understandings of literacy.

[Building parent partnerships](#) to support early literacy

It is often said that parents are children's first and most enduring educators and that the home learning environment is the most important predictor of children's future outcomes. Parents and carers hold valuable knowledge of their child's interests and preferences, and they also know about the rich literacy practices that their children experience outside their early education and care setting.

Each family is unique, and the literacy practices enacted and valued in homes and communities often differ from those of early childhood settings and schools. At home, children may be included in online shopping, or conversations between family and friends via social media or instant messaging. They may have favourite comics or look at sports or motoring magazines with a parent. The storytelling they experience may be in [other languages](#) and they may experience religious texts. [Respectful practitioner / parent relationships](#) enable parents to support learning in the setting and practitioners to support learning at home.

A broad and balanced early years literacy curriculum supports and builds on young children's everyday experiences of literacy. So early literacy learning does not need to be

structured or involve sitting at a table with a pen and paper. It involves children being immersed in [literacy rich environments](#) and their early literacy learning is enhanced through adult scaffolding in playful, engaging activities.

See 'Supporting Creativity and Enjoyment with Literacy'

Libraries and community book sharing schemes

There is no doubt of the importance of reading stories, singing songs and providing a visually stimulating environment from a very young age, therefore libraries and community book sharing sessions are valuable resources. They provide a community environment to explore books (a broader range than one could ever afford to buy), to stimulate a love of reading and to enjoy a range of activities. Libraries are perfect to help young children become inquisitive about books and literature.

Valuing home language

Written English (and many other European languages) is founded in the Roman alphabet, a phonographic (letters represent sound) script that is read from left to right and from top to bottom. However, many languages use different scripts that are read in different ways. Therefore, many young bi-lingual or multi-lingual children are not only developing and learning to discriminate between different oral languages, they are also learning about different writing systems.

We know from research that if young children [have a good grasp of their first language](#), then it is easier for them to learn a second language such as English. Whilst there are challenges in learning a second or third written language, research (Kenner, 2000) has shown how a 4-year-old recognised differences between Gujarati, her home language script, and written English, despite having received no formal instruction. Another study (Datta, 2007) gave an example of a 5-year-old who included characters from three different scripts (Bengali, English and Arabic) in one text she created.

Young [bi-lingual and multi-lingual children can be supported](#) by ensuring that a diverse range of dual-language texts and resources are available in the setting.

- Ensure children's home languages and cultures are represented in different play areas
- If possible, invest in [dual-language](#) story books, eBooks and apps
- Include role play props in multiple languages (e.g. food packaging, magazines)
- [Draw on parents and the local community](#) to learn simple songs in children's first language

References

Datta, M. (2007) *Bilinguality and Literacy: Principles and Practice*. (2nd edition). London: Continuum

Kenner, C. (2000) *Home Pages: Literacy Links for Bi-Lingual Children*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

Suggested online resources

1. <https://www.teachearlyyears.com/images/uploads/article/Binder8.pdf>
2. https://ukla.org/wp-content/uploads/Working_in_partnership_with_parents_-_creating_multimodal_stories_in_the_Early_Years.pdf
3. <https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/time-together-multilingual-families/>

4. <https://app.croneri.co.uk/feature-articles/supporting-children-learning-english-additional-language>
5. https://www2.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/childreducationandfamilies/informationforchildcareproviders/Toolkit/eal_guidance.PDF
6. <https://www.teachearlyyears.com/learning-and-development/view/literate-environments>
7. <https://www.readingrockets.org/pdfs/edextras/37100-en.pdf>
8. <https://uk.mantralingua.com/>