Project REEL
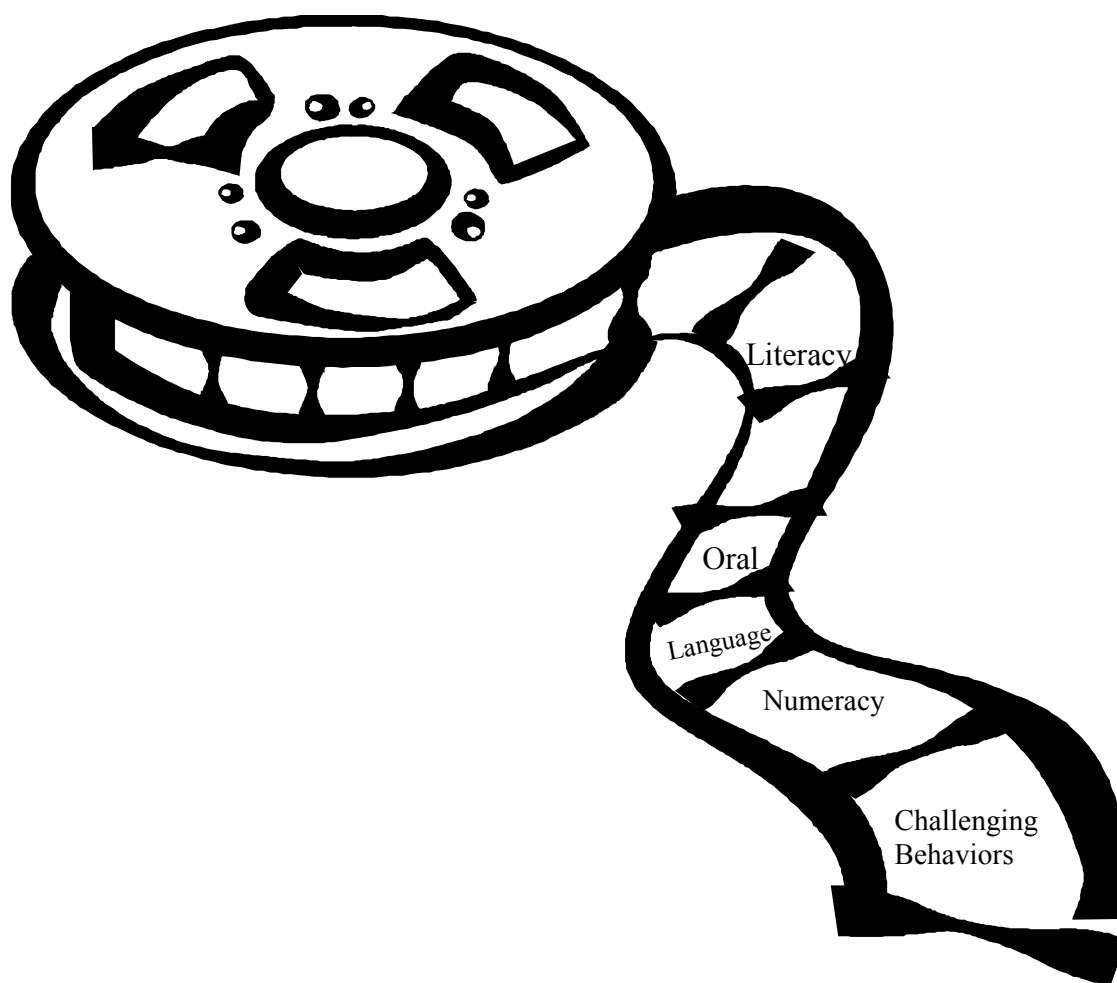
Literacy

Oral

Language

Numeracy

Challenging
Behaviors

Resources for Early Educator Learning

FIVE BIG, FAT IDEAS

to remember about young children's learning:

1. Children learn best in a social setting.

    Therefore, avoid independent seat work.

2. Children learn best through play.

    Therefore, immerse them in a richly active play and
    avoid worksheets.

3. Children learn best when they are allowed to approximate adult
   behaviors.

    Therefore, demonstrate adult practices and accept
    children's attempts at those adult practices **as if** they were already
    conventional efforts.

4. Children learn best in an atmosphere of respect where their dignity is protected.

    Therefore, establish appropriately high expectations for children, focusing
    on positive guidance instead of punishment.

5. Children learn best when they have daily opportunities to use diverse social,
    language, literacy, and numeracy practices and receive extensive feedback
    from the caring adults in their classroom.

    Therefore, offer children time to use new ideas and
    respond to them in ways that enriches their understandings.
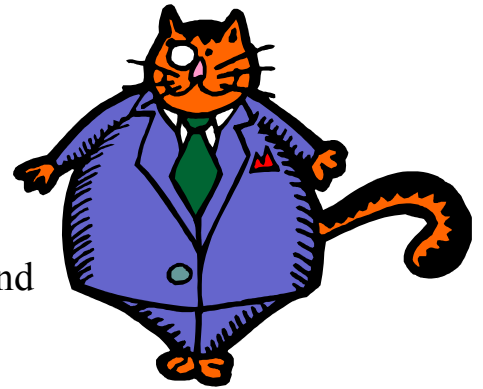
Project REEL: Workshop 11
CREATING A PRINT-RICH ENVIRONMENT;
INTEGRATING LITERACY MATERIALS INTO INTEREST AREAS

"Careful selection and placement of materials can make a big difference in how well children make use of the environment to learn about print. Materials for reading, drawing, and writing should be available in many areas of the classroom. Materials should allow children to make choices, work independently or with others to complete a task, and develop both creativity and skills."

(Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004, p. 21).

Below is a general checklist by Strickland & Schickedanz (2004) outlining the qualities of the environment that is supportive of children's literacy development:

Checklist for Print Exposure and Use

_____ Print is visible on open charts and bulletin boards around the room.

_____ Print is incorporated into each area of the classroom.

_____ Environmental print is clear, easy to read, and displayed at children's eye level.

_____ Environmental print represents words that are familiar to children because of daily activities, thematic inquiries, and special experiences.

_____ Children's names are printed on their cubbies, placemats, and other items.

_____ Name cards and other carefully printed words are available for children to copy or "read."

_____ Children are encouraged to write their own names or letters from their names on their paintings and drawings [which are displayed at children's eye level].

_____ Some print is written in languages other than English.

_____ Mailboxes are available for each child and family, encouraging communication between home and school and showing children that written messages are an integral part of classroom life.

_____ A newsletter describing children's activities is shared with the children and sent home regularly.

(from Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004, p. 23)

WHAT CAN PROVIDERS DO IN THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN TO SUPPORT THEIR UNDERSTANDINGS OF PRINT FUNCTIONS?

We are supporting children's understandings about literacy when we
- respond to children's questions about print in positive, supportive ways
- model the functions of print so children are aware of its use
- take care to provide inviting displays that include print
- offer praise and encouragement when children attempt to read and write
- take advantage of 'teachable moments' to extend children's knowledge by relating new discoveries to what children already know
- are aware that children need time to express their thoughts and ideas
- build on what is known about children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds to help them move from the known to the unknown.

(Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004, p. 24)

WHAT SHOULD BE IN THE LIBRARY AND WRITING CENTERS TO SUPPORT YOUNG CHILDREN'S CONCEPTS ABOUT BOOKS AND PRINT?

In terms of concepts about print and books, two centers in your setting will need to be the focal point of the children's experiences and will need to remain in active use no matter what other centers are established. Those are, of course, the library center and the writing center.

The **Library Center** should have as many of the following characteristic as possible:

- child sized table and chairs
- books shelved with their spines out (so children can learn some kind of coding system)
- books shared in class or that are child favorites are displayed with their covers out
- 5-8 books for every child in the setting
- books on multiple genres, from predictable pattern books, poetry, science books, picture books, wordless picture books, biographies, etc.
- a large box or two for privacy in reading
- pillows to rest against and stuffed animals to read to
- a Literacy Chair of Honor where teachers and others read out loud
- check-out system for books
- puppets, flannel board, dry erase board, and other original storytelling or retelling props
- listening library (a book and an audio tape of the book) and table so that children can select audio tapes and follow along in the book
- library book return cards
- date stamp for returned books
- sign-in/sign-out sheet
- posters of children's books on the wall

The **Writing Center** should have these characteristics:

- child sized table and chairs
- extensive writing materials: pencils, felt-tipped markers, crayons, colored pencils, and more
- both lined and unlined paper; 3x5 cards
- spiral bound small notebooks for each child as their personal journal (time should be set aside each day for children to record their thoughts, activities, and drawings in their journals)
- ABC and number books
- alphabet boards
- child sized chalkboards and chalk or dry erase boards with markers
- magnetic letters and boards or cookie sheets
- picture dictionaries
- pictures of objects to pair, classify, and match
- computer(s) (if possible)
- typewriter
- Wikki Stix (wax covered yarn) for children to shape into letters
- letter stamps with washable ink pad
- display board for children's work
- book making materials: paper, hole punch, stapler, construction paper

(Morrow, 2001; Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004)

Be thoughtful about where you place your centers. A quiet center, like the Library Center, should not be next to the block center, which can get a bit noisy when buildings are being demolished!

LITERACY IN OTHER INTEREST AREAS

"Findings from Singer and Singer's (1990) studies of 3- and 4-year-olds indicated that the children who engaged more often in pretend play were more persistent, engaged in more cooperative play, and were less likely to be angry or aggressive. As children make believe in their social role playing, the create, learn to think divergently, and learn to solve problems that emerge in the play."

Klass (1999), p. 175

In addition to rich demonstrations by parent/caregivers and teachers, children need to practice literacy behaviors in multiple reading/writing opportunities every day. Particularly, they need to gain knowledge and skills in using literacy in many different adult settings that they observe.

Below are listed many center ideas and the literacy materials you might include in that center. It is generally considered to be good practice to set up several centers (2-3) and then rotate in new centers. If you are unaccustomed to creating centers, just create one at a time. Children may become bored with a center after it has been used for several weeks, and changing materials in the center and the centers themselves with hold their interest and keep their play fresh.

Try to select the scenarios with which children have had the most experience. However, the children will still need you to step into the interest area "in role" (as customer, cook, veterinarian, salon owner, etc.) to show them how the literacy materials are used: the appointment book for the doctor's office, the menu for the restaurant, the money in the grocery store, etc. Remember from the workshop on oral language (see Workshop #2) that two-and three-year-olds' play language increases with adult participation, but with three-and-a-half year olds and older, teachers need to show the children how to use the materials and then exit from the play. Research suggests that preschoolers and pre-kindergarten children's language become more sophisticated *without* an adult present (Pellegrini, 1984; Pellegrini & Perlmutter, 1989). The centers need to be large enough so that 4-5 children can participate. Of course, a field trip to observe and talk about these businesses would build up children's understandings so that they could better re-enact the experiences:

Post Office
mailboxes, envelopes stickers for stamps, pens tape, packages, boxes, scale, address labels, cash register, play money

Hair Salon
curlers, brush & comb, hair magazines, mirror empty shampoo bottle, towel, wig & stand, appointment book, open/closed sign

Travel Agency
travel posters, brochures maps, tickets, wallet w/play money & credit cards, cash register, suitcases, receipt book

Doctor's Office
appointment book, white shirt, medical bag, stethoscope, play syringe, play thermometer, tweezers, bandages, prescription pad, folders, bottles & labels, clip board with paper

Vet's Office
stuffed animals, books about pets, cardboard boxes for cages, white shirt, other medical tools from doctor's office, labels for labeling pets in cages, records for feedings, cleanings, & medications, appointment books, prescription pads

Grocery Store Center
Food packages, plastic fruit & artificial foods, grocery cart, price stickers, cash register, money, grocery bags, marking pen, coupons, advertisements

Restaurant Center
table cloth, dishes, glasses,
silverware, napkins, menus,
order pad & pencil, apron,
tray, vest for waiter, hat for chef,
cooking magazines, recipe books,
3 x 5 cards for recipes

Blocks Center
many different sized
blocks, paper for designing
buildings, books with
pictures of a variety of
structures, architecture
magazines with blueprints
large newsprint for recording landscapes
  (cities, rivers, mountains, etc.)
colored paper

Bakery Center
cookie sheets, muffin tins,
measuring cups & spoons,
cookie cutters, rolling pins,
empty food packages,
empty spice containers,
containers labeled flour,
sugar, baking soda, baking
powder, homemade or
commercial play-dough, recipe
books, cards for new recipes,
materials for writing orders and
labeling prices

Other Center Ideas:

Space Center

Auto or Body Shop

Movie Theatre

Race Track

Gas Station

Fire Station

Police Station

Construction Site

(developed from suggestions in Tompkins [2001], Owocki [2001])

Model, model, model . . . and then model some more!

We cannot emphasize enough how important it is to **model, model, model** the use of the centers. You must show children every step of the process they are to follow: how to move from an activity to the centers, how to use the materials and re-enact the activities that logically occur in the center, how to use language that is appropriate for that center, how to keep their voices low, how to work collaboratively, how to put materials back in their proper place after use, how to move from one center to the next, how to follow the rule that prevents too children in one center, etc. If teaching experiences are less than successful, then it is usually because of our failure to model our expectations to children.