Concepts of Print

Practice-Based Instruction and Assessment

Abstract

The concept of print is one of the first literacy skills children develop. Print awareness is when a child realizes that print carries meaning. Families and teachers can prompt this awareness by creating a "print rich" environment. This toolkit includes various strategies that can be implemented to create such an environment.

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Concepts of Print

Developing print awareness is one of the first literacy skills to develop and is the foundation for all other literacy learning (Texas Education Agency, 2002). Print awareness has to do with the child realizing that print carries meaning. Through exposure to print, a young child begins to realize that written language is connected to oral language and that print can provide both information and enjoyment. As a result of their burgeoning awareness, emergent readers and writers begin to learn how print works (Birsh, et al., 2018).

Families and teachers can accelerate this awareness by creating a "print-rich" environment. This enriching environment includes lots of exposure to books, with daily read-alouds, access to a variety of writing materials in diverse places, and print is regularly displayed at the child's eye-level to encourage exploration of print (Abraham, 2003). Plenty of exposure and exploration to print in a variety of ways helps children discover these main elements of print awareness (Morello-DeSerio & VanDyke):

- Functions of Print - How and Why these "symbols" on the page are used
- Conventions of Print - When and Where the different types of symbols are used
- Book Conventions - How do I use these things called "books"

To support young learners in their development of these concepts, families, childcare providers, or teachers can label objects in the classroom. This should not be overwhelming to the child but should demonstrate that object names can be written and that this print carries meaning. Another way to facilitate this important development is through reading aloud to students on a daily basis and by supporting the child's identification of letters.

Overview of typical development of concepts of print:

- Year One: Children look at storybooks and begin to recognize the difference between print and pictures.
- Years Two & Three: Children begin to notice environmental print and special words (like their name).
- Years Four & Five: Children begin to read a few basic words and start to write stories on their own.

This toolkit will explore how early childhood educators can promote the development of print awareness skills in their young learners.

Instructional Strategies and Routines for Concepts of Print Skills

Functions of Print

The functions of print focus on the organization and features of print. This helps students grasp how print works and helps them answer the question: How and why the "symbols" on the page are being used. Below are some strategies and routines a teacher and/or family member can use, the rationale of the strategy, how it can be implemented, and how it can be assessed.

Strategy/Routine	Why is this strategy/ routine important for reading development	Strategy/Routine Implementation	Assessment Look Fors/Listen Fors

Print vs. Pictures	This strategy supports students in recognizing that print and pictures are separate but work together to tell a story.
	
	Teacher candidates should know that guessing words by looking at pictures is not a best practice. Students should decode words using phonics patterns and rules.
		The teacher does a read aloud activity with students. The illustrations in the book are just as strong as the words.
		
		Teacher educator:
		1) Hold up the book as the story is being read.
		2) Stop periodically to
		   • show how some words in the story match the pictures.
		   • make and check predictions about the story using both words and pictures.
		3) Also stop to show how the pictures may tell more of the story than the words or the words may tell more than the pictures.
		This strategy can also be done with informational text. The teacher should focus on sharing what we learn from visual elements in informational text such as graphs, diagrams, charts, etc.
			The teacher listens for students who are able to:
			• make and check predictions using words and pictures.
			• use visual elements in informational text to learn content.

Features of Print	This strategy helps students learn the features/parts of a book.
	
	Teacher candidates should know that students may not be
		The teacher identifies the parts of the book and the purpose of each part.
		
		Teacher educator:
		1) Hold up the book as the story is being read.
		2) Identify the
		   • front of the book
		   • back of the book
			The teacher listens for students who are able to:
			• identify the parts of a book.
			• explain the purpose of each part of a book.

Strategy/Routine	Why is this strategy/ routine important for reading development	Strategy/Routine Implementation	Assessment Look Fors/Listen Fors
	able to read the title or author's name. However, students should be able to identify the location of the title and author.	• spine • cover page • author and illustrator's names • illustrations in the book 3) Review each feature of the book with the students before reading. (Come up and show me the front of the book.) 4) As you read, talk about the illustrations that help tell the story.	• explain how illustrations help tell the story.
Directionality: Left to Right and Top to Bottom	This strategy helps students learn that print in English is read from left to right and top to bottom. Teacher candidates need to be made aware that directionality can change depending on the language. It is important to identify students who may have a different "directionality" at home and with their home languages.	The teacher identifies the parts of the book and the purpose of each part. **Teacher educator:** 1) Hold up book as the story is being read. 2) As you read the title, author, and illustrator's names, sweep under the words from left to right. Do the same for the cover page. 3) Before beginning to read, point to the beginning of the first sentence and say, "I am going to start reading here. I will read across the page (move finger from left to right), and I will stop right here on this page (point to the period at the end of the sentence)." 4) Before going to the next page/sentence to read, follow the same procedure identified above. 5) Enjoy the rest of the book without stopping. However, keep modeling what you are thinking by pointing your finger to the starting point, sweeping as you read, and then pointing to the stopping point on the page or sentence. 6) After reading the book, turn to a random page and ask, • Where do I start reading? (Have a student point.) • Where do I stop reading? (Have a student point.) • Show me how I move my finger under the words as I read. (Have a student first move from left to right by one-on-one correspondence, then by sweeping.) • Where do I go after I finish this page/sentence? (Have a student point to the beginning of the new page or sentence.)	The teacher listens for students who are able to: • identify the parts of a book. • explain the purpose of each part of a book. • explain how illustrations help tell the story.

Conventions of Print

The conventions of print focus on when and where the different types of "symbols" are used. Below are various strategies and/or routines a teacher and/or family member can use, the rationale of the strategy, how it can be implemented, and how it can be assessed.

Strategy/ Routine	Why is this strategy/ routine important for reading development	Strategy/Routine Implementation	Teacher Actions
Environmental Print	This strategy helps students make the connection between the names of familiar places and the shape of the print that spells the name. Teachers will show pictures of restaurant signs, street signs, and familiar food labels. Not only will this help students make the connection that spoken language can be represented in written format, but it will also support vocabulary development for students who need vocabulary for naming common places and things.	The teacher shows the students pictures of familiar food restaurants from their community. **Teacher educator:** (Hold up a picture of a McDonald's sign.) What is the name of this place? What do you get here? **Teacher candidates:** McDonald's. We get French fries and chicken nuggets. **Teacher educator:** I see an "a" on this sign, like the "a" that is in Ana's name. Do you see any letters in this sign? **Teacher candidate:** I see an "M" like in my name, Mike. **Teacher Educator:** I also see a curved line. The letter 'd' has a curved line (trace the curved part of the letter 'd'). Can you find any curved lines in any of the letters? **Teacher Candidate:** I see a curved line in the 'o.'	The teacher listens for the students who are able to: • Name the places or familiar objects (vocabulary). • Share additional information about the place or object. • 3) Share a distinguishing feature or "noticing" about the sign/picture (name a letter or describe the shapes in the letters).

		Teacher Educator: When we are at home, school, and in our community, we can see letters and shapes in signs around us.	
Identifying Names	This strategy helps students make the connection between the names of familiar people and letters in their names. Students begin to recognize the differences in the letters in our names. Although kindergarteners are not readers when they begin the year, within the first few weeks of school, they will be able to distribute items with names on them. Not because they can read the names using phonics, but because they recognize the patterns and shapes of letters in peer's names.	The teacher shows the students his/her name. Teacher educator: (Write your name on the board while the children watch.) My name is Ms. Jones. I wrote it on the board. Do you see any straight or curved lines in my name? Teacher candidates: I see a straight line (points to the line on the letter 'M.' Teacher educator: Yes, this is the letter M at the beginning of Ms. The letter M has 4 straight lines. (Count the 4 straight lines in the letter 'M.' Look at your name plates on your desk, do you have a straight line in your name? Do you have an 'M' that looks like this in your name? Teacher candidate: I have a straight line in my name (points to letter). Teacher educator: Yes, the letter "L" in your name has 2 straight lines (holds up the nameplate and points to the two straight lines. Teacher Educator: Can you find any curved lines in the letters in my name?	The teacher listens for the students who are able to 1) Identify straight and curved lines in letters. 2) Match letters in names or words.

		Teacher candidate: I see a curved line in the 'J.' Teacher Educator: When we are at home, school, and in our community, we can see letters all around us. When you see letters, pay attention to the curved and straight lines.	

Books Conventions

Books conventions focus on the features of a sentence or a page. This section shares strategies/routines a teacher or family can use to help students explore how they use these things called "books" including why the strategy is important and the various ways you can implement the strategy.

Strategy/Routine	Why is this strategy/ routine important for reading development	Strategy/Routine Implementation

Identifying parts of words or sentences	This strategy helps students learn the features/parts of a sentence or word.	The teacher identifies the parts of a word or sentence and shares the purpose of each part.
		
		Teacher educator:
		1) Hold up the book as the story is being read.
		2) Skills of focus:
		    a. Identify letters in the book (only identify the letters that have been previously studied)
		    b. Match upper and lowercase letters in the book or on a page.
		    c. Distinguish between a letter, a word and a sentence.
		    d. Distinguish between one word or two words.
		    e. Identify punctuation marks.
		    f. Identify page numbers.
		3) Review each part of a word or sentence that is the focus of the day with the students before reading. Tell the students why the feature or part is important in text.
		4) As you read, talk about the skills of focus for that particular lesson to help the students notice it in context. Only pick 3-4 opportunities to

		stop to discuss a part of a word or sentence to keep students' interest in the book.
		5) After reading the book, turn to random pages and ask students to identify the focus areas for the lesson and to tell you why the feature is important.

Resources

Cox Campus - Concepts of Print All Around: Concepts of Print All Around! | Cox Campus	This resources a variety of concepts of print activities that can help children begin to understand how printed language works.
The Balanced Literacy Diet – Building Concepts of Print	The teacher is modeling how to teach the concepts of print through a morning message.

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