



Early literacy approaches aim to improve young children’s skills, knowledge or understanding related to reading or writing. Common approaches include: storytelling and group reading; opportunities to explore the concepts of print; activities that aim to develop phonological awareness; strategies to develop oral language, opportunities to develop fine motor skills and introductions to different kinds of writing.

CONVERSATION

Engaging children in conversation every day fosters children’s oral language development. Experience of hearing and saying sounds is how children begin to understand language and use it to communicate. From infancy, children develop receptive and expressive language through experiences and interactions. The quality of interactions that children have with adults is a key factor that impacts children’s language aquisition (cited in McTaggart et. al. 2025). Children develop their narrative and sequencing skills through engaging in high quality interactions where adults model narrative and sequencing concepts. Oral language development lays the foundations for early reading. Realising the Ambition (2020), states that the journey begins with children hearing and noticing sounds and conversations around them. This helps to secure the important skills of listening and attention. Children can start to notice the differences between a range of sounds. This skill is known as auditory discrimination and is an important step in learning to read. Children’s auditory memory is developed as they begin to hear, say and remember sounds and words. Strategies such as Observe, Wait, Listen and Strive for Five, help develop children’s conversation skills (Weitzmann and Greenberg, 2010).



VOCABULARY

A child’s vocabulary in the early years is a key predictor of their reading and writing outcomes at the end of primary school (cited in McTaggart et. al. 2025). To develop language comprehension children should engage in interactive approaches to connect prior learning and develop their understanding of vocabulary. Approaches to develop vocabulary such as ‘shoot for the stars’ and ‘making words sparkle’ are suggested in ABC and Beyond.

Talking and listening are vital to developing vocabulary. Building a wide and meaningful experience of words can help children to know, understand and be able to use a broad vocabulary. As children start to read this will help them to recognise words and use what they know to make sense of texts.

DEVELOPING PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Phonological awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate, or ‘play with’ the spoken sounds in words and sentences. Through the investigation and exploration of words, sounds and patterns in spoken language, children may begin to develop phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is an umbrella or overarching term for a wide set of skills. Children will grasp different aspects of phonological awareness at different times and may need to revisit areas as they learn to read. Skills which fall under the overarching term of phonological awareness include attention and listening, auditory and visual discrimination, word awareness, syllable detection and blending, rhyme awareness and production, alliteration awareness and production, and phoneme manipulation. Phonological awareness supports children to make connections between letters and sounds and encourages them to notice the sound structure in words. Awareness of these sound parts or structures is key to being able to join sounds together to read words at a later stage (Hulme et al., 2005).

RHYME TIME

Nursery rhymes are important when learning to read because they help children develop crucial pre-reading skills like phonological awareness by exposing them to repetitive sounds, rhythms, and rhyming patterns, which enables them to easily identify and manipulate individual sounds within words, laying a strong foundation for decoding and spelling later on.

Key points about nursery rhymes and reading development:

Phonological awareness:

The repetition of rhyming words in nursery rhymes helps children recognise and isolate sounds in words, a key skill for reading.

Vocabulary development:

Nursery rhymes introduce children to new words in a fun and memorable way, expanding their vocabulary.

Rhythm and repetition:

The predictable rhythm and repetition of nursery rhymes make it easier for children to anticipate words and follow along, enhancing comprehension.

Early literacy exposure:

Nursery rhymes introduce children to the concept of print and story structure, preparing them for reading longer texts.

Engagement and enjoyment:

The catchy melodies and playful nature of nursery rhymes keep children engaged and motivated to learn.

SINGING

Singing helps children develop reading skills by building phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and memory. Time to sing songs and nursery rhymes should be incorporated into your daily routine.

How singing helps with phonemic awareness

- Singing breaks words down into sounds, which helps children learn to identify and manipulate those sounds.
- Songs often rhyme and repeat phrases, which helps children recognise patterns in language.

How singing helps with vocabulary

- Singing introduces new words in a fun way.
- Children learn words they might not hear in everyday speech.

How singing helps with memory

- The melody and rhythm of songs helps children remember words and phrases.
- Music activates a different part of the brain than speech, which can help children retain information.

Other benefits of singing

- Singing helps children develop listening skills.
- Singing with actions helps children develop coordination and movement.
- Singing can help children learn opposites like loud and soft, fast and slow, and high and low.

SHARING STORIES

‘Reading for pleasure is the single most important indicator of a child’s success’ (Scottish Book Trust, 2023).

We can help to foster children’s love of reading through...

Interactions – sharing books together; modelling storytelling and reading aloud; exploring range of modes e.g. wordless texts, picture books, non-fiction and fiction.

Experiences – exploring stories through play; choosing texts that children will enjoy and connect with; promoting individual and group story time opportunities.

Research from the National Early Literacy Panel (2009) highlights interventions that are **frequent** and **interactive** have a positive effect on children’s oral skills. Storytelling and shared reading activities have consistently enhanced improvements in children’s language comprehension skills (cited in EEF,). The interactive shared reading or ‘three read’ approach is an evidence based strategy which allows for; *‘repeated interactive read-alouds, a systematic method of reading aloud, allows educators to scaffold children’s understanding of the book being read, model strategies for making inferences and explanations, and teach vocabulary and concepts’* (McGee and Schickadanz, 2007). Children take part in interactive story sessions using the same book, during the first read the practitioner reads the whole story aloud **with** the children. The second read then facilitates discussion around the character, setting, action, problem and resolution within the story and subsequent reads create opportunities for children to make predictions about the story, make connections to their own experiences, sequence events, bring the story to life through role play and recap on new vocabulary.



There are a variety of opportunities appropriate to Early Learning and Childcare for these eight core components.

LITERACY RICH SPACES

We want every child to fall in love with books and reading, but sometimes they may need a bit of help to get there. By creating cosy, relaxing, inviting reading spaces, you are helping children find new reasons to enjoy reading. You might have a big area or a tiny nook, but most importantly, the section of your setting allocated for books and reading will be attractive and enticing. Books and print should be evident in every area of the setting and relevant to children's interests.

It is important to co-create safe spaces with children to talk, sing, rhyme and play with sounds, vocabulary and print. Role modelling language and building vocabulary to make sense of the world is vital for all young children. The amount and quality of language that children are exposed to is crucial to their progress. RTA p.70

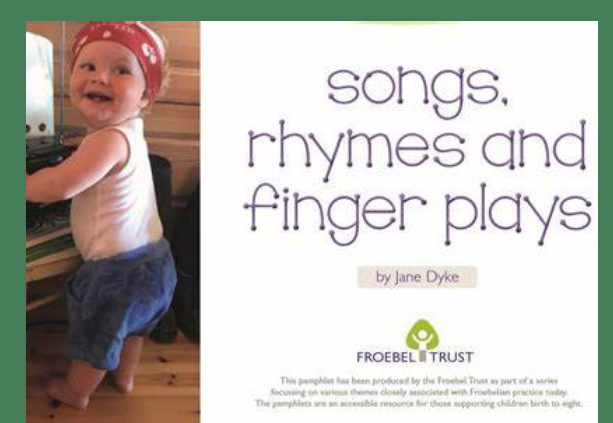
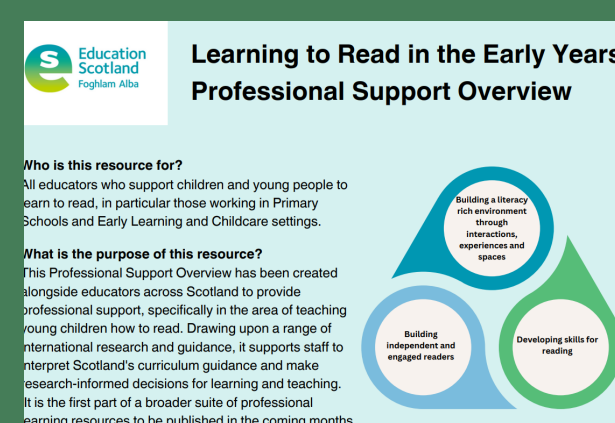
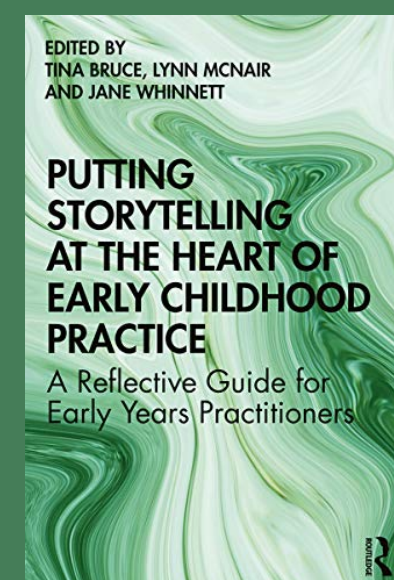
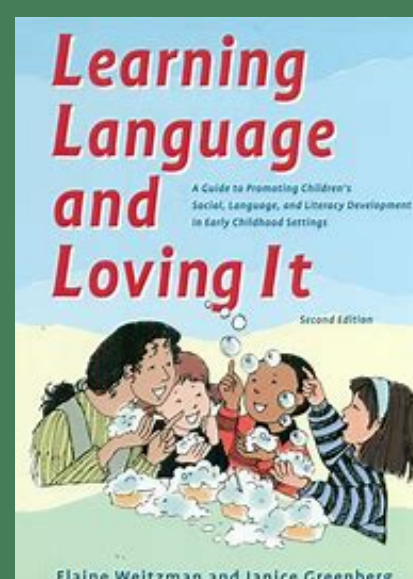
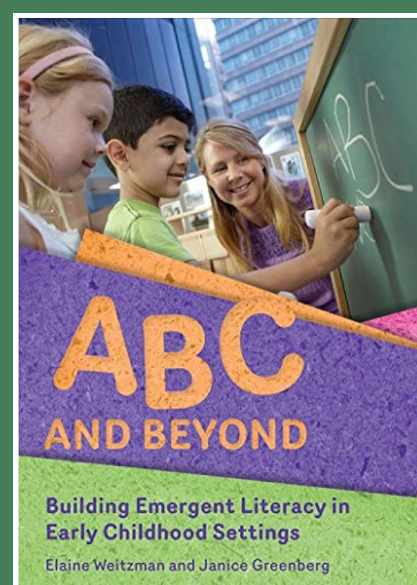


It is also important to recognise the many benefits of providing outdoor learning experiences which are embedded in and contribute to all areas of the curriculum. Literacy rich spaces should be developed outdoors, being mindful that traditional seating and tables make a lovely place to write, but this sends a hidden message that we only write at a table and when sitting on a chair. Likewise having books and other texts in different places outside enables children to access print easily and learn that reading is something that can happen anywhere. Children should be encouraged to share and build on their ideas and interests outdoors to guide their development of experiences. We should take view that an outdoor learning environment is significantly different from our indoor learning environment and should be treated as such (Glasgow ELC Outdoor Position Statement, 2025)

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

Parents and carers are key partners in nurturing a child's love of reading. As well as promoting reading for pleasure, reading with family supports speech and language development, bonding and attachment, and helps children to see their family members as reading role models. Parental engagement in early years education is consistently associated with children's subsequent academic success, (EEF, 2023). Research also shows that shared reading experiences with family continue to have literacy and emotional benefits for children beyond the lower primary years (Scottish Book Trust, 2022). There are many informal approaches such as reading cafes, library visits or stay and read sessions that support families to explore and enjoy a range of texts. Successful strategies include encouraging parents to read to children before they can read, then to begin reading with children as soon as they can; and running workshops showing parents how to read and talk about books with their children effectively (EEF, 2023). Book gifting is another way in which family reading, book ownership and engagement with texts can be promoted. Every year, the Scottish Book Trust provide free book bags and learning materials to all children in Scotland from birth to Primary 3 through the 'Book Bug' and 'Read Write Count with the First Minister' gifting programmes. Research by the Scottish Book Trust found that if books and materials are explored first in settings, families are far more likely to use and revisit them at home (Scottish Book Trust, 2022).

REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READING



- EDUCATION ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION (2023) Early Years Toolkit - Parental Engagement
- Hulme, Charles & Snowling, Margaret & Caravolas, M. & Carroll, Julia. (2005). Phonological Skills Are (Probably) One Cause of Success in Learning to Read: A Comment on Castles and Coltheart. Scientific Studies of Reading - SCI STUD READ. 9. 351-365. 10.1207/s1532799xssr0904_2.
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- Scottish Book Trust (2022) - Book gifting impact study - <https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/uploads/store/mediaupload/6973/file/Book%20gifting%20impact%20study%202022.pdf>

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