

ACCESS TO LITERACY OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN BEFORE KINDERGARTEN: ACCESSIBILITY TO THE "THINGS" OF LITERACY - READING AND WRITING

Use of this document: This document is provided to provide discussion and tools related to the early provision of opportunities to experiences and accessible "things" that develop literacy: reading and writing.

The importance of accessible print and consideration of access to books and other "things" of literacy for children before kindergarten cannot be underestimated! Children with typical skills have abilities that allow the progressive development of print, reading skills and the language of stories and print. Compromised ability in any of these areas can limit access and engagement with these "things" of literacy. Skills can be placed at risk for typical development by physical disabilities, vision impairment or blindness, hearing loss or deafness, speech and language disability, or reduced attention to language and social interaction.

We need to be prepared to find and effectively use alternative methods and tools for the young learner to have similar opportunities for literacy learning. These alternative methods and tools include modification of the environment, use of assistive technology, modification of the literacy items and a general awareness of the need to provide the same level of interaction with literacy "things" as pre-kindergarten children with typical skills. All children need the opportunity to:

- Independently locate and access books.
- Manipulate a book; turn it over, turn the pages, pick it up and put it down.
- See the content (print and pictures).
- Ask for a book to be read and reread. Ask, "What does this say?"
- Interact using speech and language to discuss the content of the book.
- Shift attention between close and far and have attention directed to something far off such as a sign for Hardees, Hy-Vee or McDonalds.
- Select favorite books and reject books that are not preferred.
- Talk about books after the book has been closed and later at the dinner table.
- Turn to their favorite page and encourage conversation from adults about the favorite part of the book.
- Repeat the lines and finish the sentences in stories.
- Develop language and communication that provides a mechanism for conversation and learning.

The reading-writing connection begins well before kindergarten when young children first pick up a typical writing tool and make their first scribbles and lines that are interpreted as letters and words. Parents/families help the young learner make connections between language/meaning and print beginning at a very early age through models and interactions around these "things of literacy." Learning the code for reading and writing is made enjoyable and happy, early interactions around literacy help in this development. Compromised skills in any of these areas can limit access and engagement if we are not prepared to find alternative ways for the

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young learners to use each of these skills. In addition to reading and text/print access, children need the opportunity to:

- See (or otherwise experience) people writing for meaning.
- Hold a typical writing tool (e.g. sidewalk chalk, pencil, crayon) or alternative to create early writing forms.
- Experience, select (or request) and manipulate writing surfaces (e.g. paper, whiteboards, tablet screens, etc.).
- Label their drawings verbally and later in print.
- Imitate writing for purpose in play (e.g. grocery store list, medicine from the doctor, toys to wash today, etc.).
- Develop writing preferences related to the color of the crayon, the size of the marker, the way it feels on a certain type of paper, etc.

Children, at the age before kindergarten, should have a large amount of experience with literacy “things” such as books, papers, writing, coloring, seeing models of print use, computer keyboards, etc. With disability may come a need to provide all of these experiences in a different way. With careful attention to the literacy-developing needs of pre-kindergarten learners, we can provide these experiences in ways that do not diminish their opportunity and learning. Our goal is to begin to provide these experiences in an accessible way at the same time these literacy experiences begin for typically developing children. We need to ensure that we create an environment that provides the frequency of interaction with the appropriate tools that allow progressive development of print, reading skills and the language of stories and print.

Our goal can be to provide the access to literacy development that typically developing children have. We can make this happen through early, thoughtful, systematically addressed, progressive and data-driven support for literacy experiences and opportunities for learning.

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