

Chapter 2: Emergent Literacy

Cognitive development and language learning occur together. Children learn language naturally by observing and imitating language users and then constructing language to meet their needs. Emergent literacy, a continuum of literacy growth beginning at birth, assumes that children already know a great deal about reading and writing before entering school. Teachers should build on and expand children's growing awareness of language as purposeful communication.

In the emergent literacy classroom, the teacher acts as a facilitator of learning by creating activities to meet the children's needs and interests. A print-rich classroom environment with books, charts, labels, environmental print, and centers provides a further stimulus for language development. Realizing the value of a literate home environment, the teacher may suggest strategies to parents for guiding their youngsters toward literacy.

Many children's listening and speaking skills are well developed when they enter school, and teachers provide opportunities for further growth in listening comprehension and oral expression. Through exposure to reading and writing materials and experiences, children gain knowledge of print conventions and sight words. Children's growth in reading and writing, based on what they already know, occurs concurrently and interrelatedly through experiences with big books, journal writing, listening to stories, and working on computers. Invented spelling helps children to connect letters with sounds.