

Key Points and Highlights of the Early Literacy Literature Review

Excerpted from "An Evaluation of Every Child Ready to Read: A Parent Education Initiative" by Dr. Susan B. Neuman and Dr. Donna Celano. The complete literature review is available in the Every Child Ready to Read2® Manual.

Critical Dimensions of Language and Literacy in Early Childhood

Language

- Oral language and vocabulary are foundational skills critical to reading comprehension and success.

Code and Comprehension

- To become successful readers, children need an understanding that written letters (a code) represent spoken sounds.
- Children also need comprehension skills to understand the meaning conveyed by print. Comprehension skills develop from a rich general knowledge base and a broad vocabulary.
- Children develop decoding and comprehension skills through interactions with adults and their environment.

Phonological Awareness

- Phonological awareness, the ability to hear and play with the sounds in words, leads to an understanding that spoken words can be represented by written words. This decoding skill is a predictor of reading achievement.

Letter Knowledge

- Learning letter names and sounds is critical to learning how to decode, or read, words.

Background Knowledge

- Understanding the meaning of words and text – comprehension – is related to the amount of background or general knowledge a reader possesses.
- The more general knowledge, the easier it is to understand a book or story, as well as to acquire additional knowledge.

Print Conventions

- Print conventions like knowing how to hold a book, turn pages, and follow sentences on a page help a beginning reader, but they are not a predictor of later reading achievement.

Summary of Skills

- Experiences that develop oral language, phonological awareness, letter knowledge, and background knowledge play an important role in helping children get ready to read.

Research on Constrained/Unconstrained Skills

- Some early literacy skills are constrained or limited in their long-term impact. These include letter knowledge, phonological awareness, and concepts of print. These skills are predictors of early reading success. However, once these skills are mastered, they do not further influence reading achievement.
- Other literacy skills are unconstrained or unlimited in their long-term impact. Unconstrained skills are vocabulary, background knowledge and comprehension. These skills can develop throughout life and influence levels of reading achievement and enjoyment.

Features of the Environment that Support Literacy Development

- The environment influences learning. Spaces at the library and at home can be organized to support the development of early literacy skills. How space is arranged and used affects how often and how long children engage in early literacy activities.

Interactional Supports for Literacy Learning

- Interactions between adults and children have a great impact on the development of early literacy skills. The more parents and other significant adults talk and listen to children, the greater the potential for children to acquire language, vocabulary and background knowledge.
- Reading together with children continues to be one of the most powerful ways to develop early literacy skills.
- How parents read to children makes a difference. Talking about books and extending the conversation about a story by asking and answering questions leads to greater learning.
- Repeatedly reading the same book helps children learn vocabulary, background knowledge, how stories are structured, and other literacy skills.
- Reading and writing go together. Writing activities help children learn about letter names and sounds, that print has meaning, and that writing has a purpose.

Addressing the Needs of English Language Learners

- Parents who are English Language Learners are encouraged to read and talk about books in their home language. If parents use the language they speak most fluently, they can more easily help their children develop early literacy skills.