

## Component Five: Professional Development Connections

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”*

Margaret Mead

The fifth component of the Montana Early Literacy Project (MELP) is a compilation of Components One – Four of the Model. It provides teaching and staff support with the knowledge and assistance necessary for creating the environment to promote literacy throughout the preschool day, incorporate Individual Education Programs, connect families, and do it in a culturally and individually sensitive manner. This manual, along with the suggested resources, provides the needed information to be able to make full use of the Montana Early Literacy Model.

The type and intensity of training depends on participants’ experience, background knowledge, and perceptions of early childhood educational practices, classroom management, as well as language and literacy development. The process for creating the environment provides guidance in designing a literacy rich classroom as well as a method to identify personal beliefs and opinions regarding literacy development and instruction for young children. Additional strategies describe developmental sequences for book use, identifying supports and challenges that books can provide, technology integration, and school safety as it relates to academic engagement.

Literacy Acquisition Perception Profile. Adults have their own perceptions of how language and literacy develop and what is important to have in classrooms to facilitate that development. The Literacy Acquisition Perception Profile (McMahon & Reeves-Kazelskis, 1998), or LAPP, determines teachers’ perceptions of literacy acquisition. It is helpful for

educators to complete the LAPP at the beginning of the school year, so that they are able to use the scoring key to identify their own beliefs about literacy acquisition and to reflect on how those beliefs effect their teaching (See the LAPP and LAPP scoring key in Appendix E).

Classroom Literacy Checklist. Research shows that a literacy rich classroom environment goes a long way in promoting early literacy skills (McMahon & Reeves-Kazelskis, 1998). In an effort to assist teachers in determining whether or not their classrooms provide a literacy rich environment, The Montana Early Literacy Project adopted the “Classroom Literacy Checklist” (CLC). This instrument rates the availability of literacy materials in the preschool setting. It consists of a listing of 66 items considered to represent recommended practice. The Classroom Literacy Checklist has been adapted to identify opportunities in the environment for children to be exposed to print and language and to analyze how literacy and language rich the classroom is and to ensure that references to culturally diverse materials were included and that it referenced adaptations needed by students with disabilities. Teachers fill out the CLC to determine the quantity and quality of their literacy environments for children. It can serve to help teachers identify strengths of their environment and alert them to areas where they could be focusing on literacy that they are not (See Appendix E for the Classroom Literacy Checklist).

#### Knowing the Books: Supports and Challenges of Text

Developmental Sequence of Book Use (adapted from *Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood* by Dodge & Colker, 1996). Young children go through a fairly predictable sequence of stages using books that facilitates their understanding of the function of print and how print represents speech. When children explore books they: learn about book orientation, turning pages, and the difference between front and back; pretend to “read;” ask

to have books read to them, some favorites over and over; anticipate what happens next; and feel confident knowing the answers to questions.

When children understand the story sequence they: develop a sense of story; begin to recognize that stories have a beginning, middle and end; develop narrative skills retelling the story (sometimes verbatim); become fascinated by details; develop left to right sequence turning pages; and know when a page is skipped.

When children recognize written words as symbols they: know the difference between pictures and words on the page; understand that the written words tell the story and stand for ideas and thoughts; follow the words on the pages in a left to right sequence; and identify the beginning and ending of the book.

When children match words with printed text they: begin to use one to one word correspondence as the book is being read; develop an awareness that words are made up of individual letters; and increase narrative skills in story telling. When children recognize printed words they: develop sight word vocabulary; recognize written or printed words in the environment; ask what words say; and become curious about the meaning of words (See Appendix E for the Developmental Stages in Using Books).

One of the most effective strategies to stimulate the development of language and emerging literacy is shared storybook reading, especially when the books being read are enjoyable, rewarding, and have meaning. Identifying literature that has the best potential for helping children to become successful readers is an important task. Teachers need to decide which of a book's features will be challenging and will provide support. These supports and challenges within any one book will differ from child to child. When a challenge has been

learned and practiced, it may become a support. The features within a book have direct implications for learning. The following are examples of these features:

- ✓ familiar themes help children use their background experience to understand the story line
- ✓ an identifiable beginning, middle, and ending help children see how a story works
- ✓ repeated refrains and rhythmic patterns create a pace which encourages children to anticipate and participate
- ✓ the font size of the print helps children predict the sequence of the story line
- ✓ the story language can reveal how children think and talk in their play
- ✓ illustrations can stimulate a deeper level of interpretation and comprehension
- ✓ the humor of a story can be appealing and encourage participation
- ✓ the layout complements the story line
- ✓ placement of the text on the page builds visual awareness
- ✓ text can expand vocabulary development
- ✓ text using letter-sound associations of initial letters, consonant blends, or word endings provides confirmation of predictions
- ✓ a variety of genres ensures readers establish a purpose for reading
- ✓ print conventions signify directionality, expression, and meaning (capital letters, periods, question marks, exclamation marks, etc.)

### Knowing the Approaches: Reading to Children and Reading with Children

Knowing the book helps the reader decide on the purpose and approach most suitable for a particular situation. Both “reading to” and “reading with” children offer unique opportunities to increase the children’s confidence as “readers.” Reading to children is an

opportunity to extend children's horizons about books and to stimulate a desire to be a reader. When reading to children, the teacher acts on behalf of the author, presenting the writing with as much enthusiasm and commitment as if it were his or her own. The teacher becomes the vehicle for the book's voice, enabling the children to interact with the author's central idea without having to interpret the written symbols. The teacher's role includes presenting a wide variety of types, forms, and styles of writing and illustration.

The teacher's role in shared reading, or reading with children, is to encourage participation in readings. An enthusiastic presentation will ensure that children remain attentive, and together the teacher and children unfold the story line and predict events and actions. The teacher's task becomes one of providing continued access to books and time for reading and responding.

#### Technology Integration in the Preschool Classroom

“Technology plays a significant role in all aspects of American life today, and this role will only increase in the future. Early childhood educators have a responsibility to critically examine the impact of technology on children and be prepared to use technology to benefit children” (NAEYC Position Statement, *Young Children*, September 1996, p. 11). The Montana Early Literacy Project supports the notion that when used as a teaching tool for appropriate, short periods of time each day, and with the facilitation of an adult, technology is a powerful tool to advance and support language and literacy in young children with diverse abilities (See Appendix E for the complete NAEYC Position Statement: Technology and Young Children – Ages Three Through Eight). MELP has adopted the notion that the integration of technology into the already existing curriculum expands upon everyday literacy

events and existing routines of classroom and home environments to build literacy and language directly into children's daily experiences.

Children with diverse abilities have opportunities to acquire skills by using a variety of tools from low to high technology. Families of all children and particularly those who experience communication challenges, have the opportunity to learn how to use technology to create a medium that fosters communication. Community members such as receiving school personnel of children transitioning to kindergarten, pre-service teachers, and Head Start personnel have an opportunity to learn about the various forms of assistive and instructional technology implemented in the CO-TEACH classroom. The local community, as well as the state of Montana, has access to technology in the preschool curriculum through the checkout and dissemination of the Montana Early Literacy Project literacy tubs described in Component One.

Following are several descriptions of the multiple ways technology is infused in the CO-TEACH classroom and the impact that its use has on teachers, children, and families:

- ✓ **Boardmaker** is a graphic database containing picture symbols that may be used to communicate daily functions, tasks, wants, and needs. At CO-TEACH, Boardmaker graphics assist children with communication challenges throughout their preschool day. For example, "Zach," a child with Autism, uses a picture exchange program to communicate his specific needs and wants. Teachers communicate with Zach using picture exchange paired with verbal information to facilitate expectations, peer interactions, and transitions.
- ✓ Each Spring, CO-TEACH children put on a puppet show for family and community members. This year, several children who are non-verbal used

assistive technology to help them “say” their lines. Peers recorded their non-verbal friend’s lines onto a **Tape Recorder** or a “**Mac**,” which enabled their friend to activate the device by simply pushing a button to deliver his speaking part in the play.

- ✓ **Computer Software** is an excellent tool for developing a variety of skills in young children. For example, at the CO-TEACH computer center, some of the skills that children practice are sharing and turn-taking; communicating wants and needs; waiting for a turn; raising their hand; recognizing letters and numbers; hand-eye coordination; sequencing events in a story; writing stories; making a movie; and creating stories and artwork. *Living Books*, *KidPix*, *Earobics*, and various age appropriate academic readiness skill programs are implemented and facilitated by a teacher during learning center time at the computer. These activities can be individualized, or met to address both small and whole group needs.
- ✓ “**Family Book-making Night**” or “**Family Feed and Read**” at CO-TEACH is an excellent opportunity to introduce preschool technology as well as early literacy, to families and community members. At these annual CO-TEACH events, families are encouraged to use the digital cameras to take pictures of their family members and to use the photos to create a book. Books may be based on a theme, a special family event, or a particular family member (e.g., child).
- ✓ The **Choice Book** is a tool used to teach and encourage positive social skills in young children. A digital camera is used to “catch” children who are engaging

in desirable pro-social skills. The photographs are then used to create book pages with pre-scripted phrases that children may use when solving a problem. The pages are laminated and bound to create a book that enhances early literacy and language skills, as well as problem solving skills.

- ✓ Throughout the CO-TEACH classroom there are several **Picture Schedules** displayed. Picture schedules visually reinforce daily classroom routines, rules and expectations, and tasks that involve multiple steps (e.g., hand washing). Picture Schedules are developed by taking digital photographs of children participating in a specific theme of the picture schedule. The schedule is then laminated and posted for daily classroom use.
- ✓ For many children, **transitions** can be challenging and supports are needed to ease the transitioning process. At CO-TEACH, digital photographs are displayed upon classroom entry to allow children to visually observe the **“menu” of daily activity choices**. This cuing system provides added information that helps children choose an activity based upon its visual representation. As children transition to the selected activity, they understand they have successfully completed the transition process when they see the identical digital photo located at entrance of the learning center.
- ✓ Classroom Safety Rules are created by the class each year at CO-TEACH. During circle time, children brainstorm necessary classroom rules that keep friends safe. The rules are posted in the classroom. Teachers use the digital camera to take photographs of CO-TEACH kids following the rules and then post their photos on the rule board.

- ✓ Tracking child progress at CO-TEACH is imperative. A staff, family, and child favorite form of data collection is through the development of individual child Portfolios each semester. Portfolios demonstrate child progress throughout the school year and provide children and their families with a fun, tangible, and memorable collection of each child’s artwork, writing samples, favorite activities, digital photographs, and accomplishments.

By embedding technology seamlessly throughout the existing curriculum, it becomes an integral part of the curriculum, as opposed to an “add on.” Because storytelling begins in infancy, a preschool classroom is an optimal place to develop and nurture that skill in young children and their families. This does not happen in a single way during a single event, but instead occurs in multiple ways over time in a preschool classroom. Storytelling is an integral part of the Montana Early Literacy Project Model. Storytelling through the use of technology will remain, develop, and improve in preschool classrooms in much the same way that storytelling through the use of oral traditions, songs, fingerplays, and books has evolved.

#### School Safety for Young Children of All Abilities

CO-TEACH Preschool mission. The mission of the CO-TEACH Preschool Program is to offer all children a stimulating, playful first school experience and to provide them with the early literacy and language skills they need to achieve - now, when they transition to kindergarten, and in the years that follow. Moreover, CO-TEACH operates on the belief that all children and families have individual strengths and needs and deserve to be treated with respect and dignity in a safe school environment.

School safety and literacy teaching techniques. Children have a right to be safe at school. When children are not or do not feel safe, they are not academically engaged. In

order for learning to take place, everyone must feel and be safe. Therefore, safety is the number one priority at CO-TEACH (See Appendix E for the CO-TEACH Program Preschool Priorities: A Hierarchy of Intervention Strategies). CO-TEACH staff teach children to follow safety rules that are posted in the classroom such as: walking in the classroom; holding the railing to walk up and down stairs; touching friends and teachers gently; playing without risk to themselves or others; holding hands on field trips; and responding to safety instructions such as “Stop,” “Wait,” “Listen,” and “Look.” Adults describe fire drills and practice safety routines with children periodically throughout the school year. Parents are welcome to participate in safety drills with their children.

CO-TEACH implements a literacy-based social communication skills program, *Good Talking Words*, which focuses on skills such as listening, using good manners, helping others, problem solving, and sharing feelings. *Good Talking Words* incorporates quality children’s literature, posters, puppets, notes home to families, and certificates for children to reinforce appropriate behavior.

Sometimes young children who are just learning the language and social communication skills of taking turns, making requests, and following instructions have temper tantrums. Teaching all children self-management skills allows them to experience success both socially and academically. One way to develop self-management skills is to provide consistent structure and routines, so that children know what is expected of them and can predict what will happen next. The physical arrangement of the classroom and materials is an important tool for eliciting appropriate behavior and addressing concerns of safety and accessibility. The environment is arranged so that all adults can see each area of the classroom easily. Low shelves, tables, and chairs allow for simple visual access.

In order for children to succeed in school, they first must learn to gain control of their actions and make appropriate choices. The *Choice Book* is produced at CO-TEACH each year and is an example of a teaching strategy that incorporates language, literacy, and social skills development. It includes photographs of current preschool students engaged in desirable prosocial behaviors. The *Choice Book* provides children with strategies for problem solving and helps children learn how to effectively deal with a variety of situations that occur frequently in the classroom and at home. Examples of positive strategies of problem-solving include: using good manners or sign language to ask for a toy; taking turns with a friend; waiting for a turn by setting a timer or counting; trading toys; sharing, working, or playing together; describing feelings; walking away from a child who is bullying; and asking a teacher for help (See Appendix E for the *Choice Book*).

Communication, social, emotional, self-management, and academic competence are integral to the development of young children. It is critical that children have the opportunity to practice social communication skills and learn to identify and express their emotions appropriately, as well as communicate their wants and needs to others. The following social, emotional, and communication skills have life-long value and are fostered at CO-TEACH: observing cooperative play rules (sharing, taking turns, problem solving, requesting to play), using communication skills (show-n-tell, telling stories, listening to others), and developing positive self-esteem (self-expression, relating to peers and adults, independent decision-making).

Teachers at CO-TEACH pair basic preschool sign language with verbal instructions, conversations, songs, and finger plays. They model appropriate behavior for children and focus on using positive language and telling children what to do such as:

“Please walk”, rather than telling children what not to do such as: “Don’t run.” Children are offered choices whenever it is safe and reasonable to do so. Teachers “catch kids being good” and give them enthusiastic praise when they make a good decision, behave like a good friend, or accomplish a task. Tell-Show-Help-Praise (TSHP) is a gentle, nonintrusive teaching method implemented by teachers at CO-TEACH, which enables children to learn skills in the least restrictive way first, gradually increasing directiveness, only to the point at which the child responds. This instructional strategy has many uses. TSHP (See Appendix E for TSHP) is an instructional tool, as well as a behavior management technique (Neilsen, et al, 1994).

Conclusion. Academic engagement, including but not limited to language and literacy development and social competence, allows individuals to fully participate in their schools and communities. Young children with diverse abilities can learn early literacy and language skills that give them a strong foundation before formal reading and writing instruction begins in elementary school. The five components within the Montana Early Literacy Project Model demonstrate how to develop literacy and language skills in young children with and without disabilities. Professionals, parents, and community members must work together to build a solid foundation of social communication and early literacy and language competence in all children.

To see the Montana Early Literacy Project in action, visit the two demonstration sites: CO-TEACH Preschool on The University of Montana campus, Missoula, Montana; and Cherry Valley Elementary School on the Flathead Indian Reservation, Polson, Montana.