

Component One: Literacy Throughout the Day

“The dear people do not know how long it takes to read. I have been at it all my life and cannot say that I have reached my goal.”

- Goethe

Research has established a strong connection between language and literacy development (Braunger, J., Lewis, J., & Hagans, R., 1997; Watson, L., Layton, T., Pierce, P., & Abraham, L., 1994; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). The early childhood years, birth through eight, are the most important developmental period for language and literacy (Pinker, 1994; Schickedanz, 1999).

Children who are at risk for reading disabilities can be identified before experiencing reading failure in elementary school (Catts, 1997). Children who exhibit difficulty learning oral language are at significant risk for having problems learning to read (Jenkins & Bowen, 1994). Various studies reported that up to 80% of preschool children with language disorders acquire some degree of reading impairment (Adams, 1990; Jenkins & Bowen, 1994; Watson et al., 1994).

Families, caregivers, and early childhood educators have a significant impact on children’s language and emerging literacy skills. Children need to be provided with a wide variety of experiences and opportunities to talk, tell stories, read storybooks and be read to, and engage in imaginary playing, drawing, and writing.

Emerging literacy is a social process that describes behaviors exhibited by young children as they begin to approximate reading and writing acts. This process emerges as children develop oral language structures, find meaning in written symbols around them, and gain an awareness of the sound structure of language (Braunger et al, 1997; Kaderavik & Sulzby, 1998; Lonigan, C., Bloomfield, B., Anthony, J., Bacon, K., Phillips, B., & Samwel, C., 1999). Early childhood

programs should not replicate the formal reading instruction provided in elementary school. Instead programs should include experiences that promote children's development of vocabulary and reasoning skills, listening comprehension, expanded sentence structures, sense of story, sensitivity to the sounds of language, and concept understanding. Critical, too, are experiences that instill a motivation to read and reflect diverse people, places, things, and ideas (Paulson, L., Noble, L., Jepson, S., & van den Pol, R., 2001).

Three Areas That Are Critical for Language and Literacy Development

Research describes three areas that are critical for language and literacy development: language use, print awareness, and phonological awareness.

Language use. Language use is the listening and speaking part of communication. Oral language skills include abilities such as: understanding basic spatial, temporal, and sequential concepts; using words that are understandable; using sentence structures that follow the grammatically acceptable form; describing experiences; predicting what will happen in the future; and talking about events that happened in the past. Language skills include abilities such as: understanding basic spatial, temporal, and sequential concepts; saying words that are understandable; using sentence structures that follow the grammatically acceptable form; describing experiences, predicting what will happen in the future, and talking about events that happened in the past.

Print awareness. Print awareness is the understanding of books and symbols as well as comprehension of the alphabetic principle (sound/letter associations). Adults can help children find meaning in symbols around them by providing many opportunities to: look at and read books, recognize and talk about print and symbols in the environment, and experience and observe the functional use of print being read and written. Print rich environments provide

opportunities in which literacy structures and functions can be used to engage children in meaningful language and literacy experiences. Children need many exposures to and experiences interacting with print to develop an emergent understanding of how writing represents what is said. When young children experiment with print, they discover the connection between letters and sounds. At this time, there should not be a focus on correct spelling (Paulson et al, 2001).

Phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is the explicit awareness of the sound structure of language and the ability to reflect on and consciously manipulate the syllables and sounds of speech (Catts, 1991; Hodson, 1994; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). An awareness of the sound structure of language develops when children realize that the words they say are separate from the things they represent and that the words are comprised of sound segments that can be rhymed, pulled apart, and put back together. Phonological awareness consists of a wide range of sound play that includes rhyming, isolating the first or last sound in words, and detecting or substituting syllables and sounds. It also includes blending and segmenting words by syllables and sounds (O'Connor, R., Jenkins, R., & Slocum, T., 1995). When children develop an awareness that our language has meaning as well as a structure, they develop a sense of phonological awareness (Paulson et al, 2001).

Three important phonological awareness skills that young children develop are rhyming, segmenting, and blending. Rhyming focuses on sound correspondence of the endings of words written or spoken and is the first phonological awareness skill to develop (Snyder & Downey, 1997). When young children participate in saying rhymes, finger plays, and songs, they are developing a sense of the phonological structure of language (Jenkins, 1994). By saying these

rhyming patterns over and over, children develop the ability to recognize, identify, and then produce rhymes (Paulson et al, 2001).

Segmenting is the identification of individual syllables and sounds within words (Torgesen, J., Morgan, S., & Davis, C., 1992). When children acquire this skill, they are able to hear a word, analyze the components, and pull it apart into syllables and then individual sounds (Paulson et al, 2001). It appears that once children are able to recognize that speech can be segmented and that these segmented units are represented by letters, the systematic relationships between letters and sounds are easier to grasp and use in both reading and writing (Blachman, 1991; Donnelly, K., Thomson, S., Huber, L., & Schoemer, D., 1992).

Blending is the ability to combine a sequence of isolated syllables or sounds together to produce a recognizable word (Torgeson et al, 1992). Blending is an important skill needed later when children are learning to decode or sound out printed words phonetically (Paulson et al, 2001). Preschool children, as young as age three, demonstrate the ability to blend syllables into words (Hodson, 1994).

Early Literacy and Language Across the Five Developmental Domains

When designing inclusive curriculum materials, it is important to consider lesson plan goals and objectives that target each of the five inter-related developmental domains identified in federal eligibility regulations for children with disabilities (Nielsen, van den Pol, Guidry, Keeley, & Honzel, 1994) which are: 1) communication; 2) social, emotional, and behavioral; 3) physical; 4) self-help and independence; and 5) academic readiness. The Montana Early Literacy Project Model advocates that early literacy and language skills can and should cross over all five of the domains and must be considered as integral to the education of all children.

The five developmental domains and some of the early literacy and language skills that can be practiced within them are described below.

It is imperative 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. Examples of skills that would be included in these domains are: observing cooperative play rules and requesting to play; using communication skills during show-and-tell, telling stories, and listening to others; and developing positive self-esteem and self-expression to relay feelings to peers and adults.

Physical skills can also incorporate early literacy skills and can be divided into two categories: fine motor skills (small muscle) and gross motor skills (large muscle). Children have many opportunities throughout the day to practice physical skills. For example, fine motor early literacy skills may include copying letters on paper or the chalkboard, cutting paper or yarn, painting, turning pages of a book, and putting together a puzzle. During gym or recess, children develop gross motor skills and learn early literacy prepositional concepts such as climbing **up** the slide, sliding **down** the slide, crawling **through** the barrel, walking **around** the swings, jumping **over** the rope, and running **under** the trees. A variety of activities that foster early literacy and self-help or independence occur in the natural classroom and home environments. Some examples include cutting and gluing, transitioning between activities, hand washing, and following routines.

Preschool children need many opportunities to practice early literacy and kindergarten readiness skills such as: following instructions; manipulating classroom materials (writing utensils, paint brushes, scissors); attending and participating in group activities (circle-time, gym, table-top activities); participating in individual learning activities (work jobs and learning centers); completing daily transition activities (cleaning up, standing in line, waiting quietly); and learning

cognitive concepts (colors, shapes, recognizing written names, extending patterns, matching and sorting, rote counting, and counting with one-to-one correspondence).

Early literacy and language skills set the stage for reading achievement in the early school grades and should emphasize the gradual and natural emergence of language and literacy through rhyme, rhythm, and repetition in a literacy and language-rich environment. Many of these skills are learned incidentally through exposure to print and daily literacy activities including singing songs, listening to and retelling stories and nursery rhymes, drawing and writing, copying shapes and letters, and listening to and watching adults read and write. Some examples of activities which enhance the development of early literacy and language skills are the following: computer, library, listening center, flannel boards, puppets, dramatic play, easel painting, writing center, science and discovery center, name tags, helping hands, calendar, song cards, finger plays, and repeated readings.

Daily Routines and Naturally Existing Curriculum

Natural opportunities within the home, childcare, and school environments facilitate the development of young children's language and emerging literacy skills throughout daily routines and activities. Language and literacy activities should not be taught in discreet, isolated lessons. Rather, language and literacy should be embedded within the naturally occurring curriculum of a classroom or the daily activities of the home or childcare setting. Language and literacy skills can be developed within activities that occur seamlessly throughout the daily routine such as eating, dressing, playing, toileting, reading, and talking.

The first component of The Montana Early Literacy Project Model describes how to infuse language and literacy activities throughout children's daily preschool routines by developing and implementing Literacy Tubs. This process is accomplished by identifying a

theme, assessing students' prior knowledge related to the theme, developing theme-related activities, gathering necessary materials to be utilized and completed over a specified period of time, implementing the activities within the existing curriculum, and then gathering data to determine what the students learned from the activities.

The Literacy Tub Development Process

The Literacy Tub Development Process serves as a planning and organizational tool for early childhood service providers. The following steps describe the process of developing these thematic units.

Step 1. Identify: 1) a theme, 2) a selected children's book, and 3) a song to be the focus for a 2-week period of time. Determine the goals and objectives of the unit including the key vocabulary and target concepts.

Considerations for theme:

- Is it relevant to the program curriculum?
- Is it developmentally appropriate?
- Does it meet objectives for student needs?
- Is it fun?

Considerations for selected book:

- Is the book integrally related to the theme?
- Is it interesting to children?
- Is the text of the story an appropriate length?
- Are rhyming words and/or repeated sentences included in the text?
- Is the book culturally sensitive?
- Are there questionable issues within the wording or illustrations?

Considerations for selected song:

- Is the song integrally related to the theme?
- Is there a rhythmic pattern and repetition?
- Is the verse length appropriate for young children?
- Are there opportunities for associated movement and actions?
- Is it culturally sensitive?

Step 2. Determine students' prior knowledge about a subject, and pre-assess what they know in relation to the selected theme. During small or whole group activity, facilitate a class discussion related to the upcoming theme, for example caterpillars in *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle. Using a piece of butcher paper to write down the students' dictation, ask each child to tell the class something, if anything, that they know about caterpillars. Ask them to use words to describe caterpillars. Be sure not to "help" the children too much in this activity, because the purpose is to simply determine what they know prior to implementation of the unit. Make a list of the vocabulary, keywords, and phrases that children identify in the discussion in relation to caterpillars. Write the children's names next to the word or phrases that they contributed to the discussion. Date and save the piece of butcher paper to compare with the post-assessment. Tell students that in a few days, they are going to learn even more about caterpillars.

Step 3. Complete a book analysis on the selected story to identify relevant concepts and skills. (See Appendix A for the Book Analysis Form.) The analysis helps to ensure that books selected for the Literacy Tub contain a broad range of characteristics.

Considerations should include: the number of words per page, opportunities for left to right finger-sweeping and sequencing following words on pages, repeated sentences or

phrases, rhyme, real and pretend contexts, illustration descriptions, diversity representations, concepts presented, feelings, social skills, relationships, and other comments as needed.

Step 4. Choose an additional four to eight children’s books from the class, school, or public library that support and relate to the selected theme. Complete the book analysis for each book to ensure a representation of concepts, vocabulary, print, and cultural representations.

Considerations for selecting key vocabulary and target concepts:

- Identify approximately 10 key vocabulary words.
- Are the words included in the selected books and song?
- Are the words applicable to everyday living?

Step 5. Make a song card that illustrates the theme song and includes the words.

Step 6. Gather and create a variety of activities that relate to the theme and selected book to be embedded into the daily classroom routine (i.e. circle, learning centers, snack, recess, and library). “Lesson plans come in a variety of formats; however, good lesson plans contain three components: instructional objectives or intended learning outcomes; materials; and activities that prepare, guide, reinforce, and assess whether the learner has achieved the outcome” (Ashmore, 2001, p. 9). Develop lesson plans for activities using the Literacy Lesson Plan Form and the Bi-weekly Planning Sheet. (See Appendix A for the Literacy Lesson Plan Form and the Bi-weekly Planning Sheet.) Identify expected outcomes within each activity and write activity descriptions that target the five developmental domains: academic readiness, communication, social/emotional, independence, and physical. Include the key vocabulary and target concepts that will be

focused on during activity implementation. Also, identify opportunities within the literacy activities to work toward Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and objectives that meet specific needs of students. Make any necessary modifications and reasonable accommodations to ensure that all students succeed while participating in the literacy activities. Gather needed materials to complete each activity. Be sure to include activities that:

- ✓ focus on the following areas of instruction: language use, print awareness, and phonological awareness. Each of these three areas are described in detail and many activities that incorporate these three areas are described in the resource *Building Early Literacy and Language Skills* (Paulson et al, 2001).
- ✓ are extensions of the selected book, the songs, and the four to eight additional books;
- ✓ target the five inter-related early childhood developmental domains:
 1. academic readiness (e.g., shapes, colors, numerals)
 2. communication
 3. social/emotional and behavioral
 4. independence/self-help
 5. physical (fine and gross motor skills, sensory skills).

Step 7. Compile a list of an additional 20 to 30 theme-related book titles and authors. Books from this list are displayed in the class library and available for children to read during the 2-week thematic unit. The entire literacy Tub book reading list can be sent home to parents.

Step 8. Develop a 2-week lesson plan that infuses the literacy-related activities throughout the school day. (See Appendix A for the Literacy Lesson Plan Form and the Bi-weekly Planning Sheet.)

Step 9. Create a newsletter for families that briefly describes the daily events, key vocabulary, target concepts, extension activities, and other important information such as field trips, snacks, and classroom guests. (See Appendix A for the Sample Newsletter “The Very Hungry Caterpillar.”)

Step 10. Design a bulletin board or wall display that illustrates the selected book.

Step 11. Develop a family literacy bag of activities that corresponds to the Tub theme.

The process for developing Family Literacy Bags is described in Component Three: Family Connections.

Step 12. Gather the family literacy bag, books, and materials needed for the activities. Make a complete Literacy Tub inventory list. Put all items in a large storage container that becomes the Literacy Tub. Each literacy tub contains the following:

- ✓ Montana Early Literacy Project Manual
- ✓ Literacy tub booklet: tub development and implementation process; tub checkout procedure and guidelines; tub inventory list; tub newsletter sample(s); list of 20-30 theme-related book titles and authors; activity descriptions and materials to complete activities; tub blackline master copies; tub recipes; tub evaluation
- ✓ Multiple copies of the selected children’s book (hardback, paperback, and board book, if available)
- ✓ Four to eight additional theme-related books

- ✓ Songcard(s) that illustrate the song or finger play and includes the words to the song
- ✓ Family literacy bag including activities to be sent home with children or given to families during a home visit.
- ✓ Thematic bulletin board/wall display materials
- ✓ *Tell, Show, Help, Praise* Instructional Strategy: 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.
- ✓ *Sample Choice Book*: The *Choice Book* is produced at CO-TEACH each year and 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.
- ✓ Digital camera and several floppy disks
- ✓ Thematic literacy and language CD-ROM/computer software.

The Literacy Tub Implementation Process

The Literacy Tub Implementation Process serves as a procedure for infusing day long language and literacy activities into the existing curriculum. The following describes the process of implementing these thematic units:

Step 1. Read the activity descriptions and lesson plans. Share the activities and lesson plans with the teaching team. For example, use them to communicate with paraeducators, volunteers, special education service providers, and any other adults

working in the classroom, so that the entire teaching staff knows and understands what the lesson plan is, what skills will be practiced, and the schedule of each day's events. Staff members may also have ideas or strategies that compliment the Tub, and these could be added to the existing activities.

Step 2. Send the newsletter home to families briefly describing the daily events, highlighted vocabulary, concepts, extension activities, and other pertinent information such as field trips, snacks, and classroom guests. Make sure families receive the letter several days before the Tub implementation takes place. That way families can discuss the activities before, during, and after they are happening at school. This will ensure communication between school and home, as well as allow the opportunity for the same skills to be practiced at school and at home. Skills that are practiced in more than one environment are more likely to be generalized across settings.

Step 3. Using the items from the developed Tub, arrange the classroom to meet the needs of the prepared Tub activities.

- ✓ Hang the bulletin board or wall display that illustrates the selected book.
- ✓ Place the multiple copies of selected children's book, along with the four to eight additional books that support the theme, in the classroom library or reading area.
- ✓ Arrange the activities that are prepared in the Tub at the designated centers in the classroom, for example, a writing activity at the writing center, an art activity at the art center, dramatic play activity in the pretend play area, etc.

- ✓ Include the song card that focuses on the Tub theme in the circle or whole group activity area.

Step 4. Implement the Tub activities along with the existing curriculum for two weeks. Be sure to read the selected book and sing the accompanying song and finger play every day for two weeks. This act of repeatedly reading and exposing a child to the same book is completed in a variety of ways. For instance, when introducing children to the selected storybook for the first time during whole group (such as circle or library) discuss the title, turn the pages, look at the pictures, and talk about what might be happening in the story. The second opportunity children have to “read” the selected book, they will be somewhat familiar with it. Mention key vocabulary words, and read the book aloud to the children. A third opportunity to read the same story can begin by asking the children leading questions about the story such as “What is the name of this story? What is the caterpillar doing in this story? Is the caterpillar hungry? Why is the caterpillar hungry?” Then allow the children to retell the story while you facilitate the discussion and ask leading questions. Another example of story exposure happens each day by singing the related song or finger play. After numerous exposures to the same story and related song, children begin to “read” the story with adults or as they look at the book independently. Children’s attention spans also increase when they are able to participate in the act of “reading.” They can predict what will happen next and develop reading confidence.

Children benefit from repeated readings in countless ways. When stories are read aloud to children, they are exposed to the content and structure of language, which improves their vocabulary and sentence structure (Paulson et al, 2001). Repeated exposure to the same text provides multiple opportunities for children to assimilate and

process the oral language and provides the necessary repetition needed to become familiar with how print works (Barrentine, 1997; Katims & Pierce, 1995; Watson et al, 1994). Furthermore, children who are exposed to the same text and illustrations over and over again build confidence as readers and are able to predict what the sequence of the story is and how the story connects to events in their own lives. Repeated readings may vary in presentation and some examples include: reading the book from beginning to end; looking at the pictures and using the vocabulary within; singing songs and participating in the motions of fingerplays that retell the story; listening to the book on cassette tape; and acting out the story with puppets or flannel board characters.

Step 5. After two weeks, determine what students have learned about the subject/theme using the butcher paper as a post-assessment activity. During small or whole group activity, facilitate another class discussion related to the bi-weekly theme that was just implemented, for example caterpillars in *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle. Using a piece of butcher paper to write down the students' dictation, ask each child to tell the class what they now know about caterpillars. Be sure not to "help" the children too much in this activity, because the purpose is to determine what they know subsequent to the implementation of the unit. Make a list of the vocabulary, keywords, and phrases that children identify in the discussion in relation to caterpillars. Predictably, the list will be much longer, more descriptive, and involve every child's contribution given the thematic implementation. Date the list and compare it to the pre-assessment activity to determine child gains.

Step 6. Complete the Montana Early Literacy Project Tub Evaluation Materials. (See Appendix A for the Evaluation Materials.) This allows for reflection and evaluation of

how the Early Literacy Tub Implementation went, what worked well, what things had to be modified or adapted, what things need to be improved, and what to do differently the next time the Tub is implemented.

The thematic literacy tubs developed by the Montana Early Literacy Project include (by *tub title/repeated reading* – brief thematic description): 1) *The Wheels on the Bus* - transportation; 2) *Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes* – All About Me; 3) *Itsy Bitsy Spider* - Spiders; 4) *Rainbow Fish* – Caring, Sharing, & Friendship; 5) *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* – Spring & Butterfly Life Cycle; 6) *Alike and Different* – appreciation of diversity and tolerance; and 7) *Native American Stories* – Native American Indians & Oral Traditions.

As an extension of the original tubs, a series of traveling literacy are also available to be “checked out” and implemented by other early childhood educators and childcare providers across the state and broaden the scope of the MELP project. The traveling tubs include the seven original MELP tubs as well as the following thirteen additional tubs: 1) *Dinosaur Roar* - Dinosaurs; 2) *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* - Astronomy; 3) *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt* - Bears; 4) *Barn Dance* – Fall Harvest & Farming; 5) *Growing Vegetable Soup* – Health, Spring, & Gardening; 6) *The Mitten* – Winter & Forest Animals; 7) *The Very Grouchy Ladybug* – Friendship & Bully Prevention; 8) *Peanut Butter and Jelly* – Food & Cooking; 9) *Is Your Mama a Llama?* – Baby Animals; 10) *Eggs* - Hatching; 11) *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* – Alphabet, Numbers, Shapes, & Colors; 12) *Snowballs* – Family & Winter; and 13) *My Five Senses* – Seeing, Hearing, Touching, Tasting, & Smelling.

Seven original MELP tubs plus thirteen additional traveling tubs equals a total of twenty literacy tubs available for use among special educators, speech and language pathologists, preschool teachers, childcare providers and families across the state of Montana. To date, MELP

literacy tubs have been implemented in the following Montana communities: Butte, Dillon, Frenchtown, Heart Butte, Kalispell, Lame Deer, Laurel, Libby, Missoula, Ronan, and Thompson Falls.

These Literacy Tubs are available for check out by families, childcare providers, early childhood special and general educators, and anyone else who is interested. (See Appendix A for Literacy Tub Checkout Process and Guidelines as well as Literacy Tub Contents.) For more information about the Literacy Tubs, please visit www.co-teach.com or contact:

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