

Early Childhood Education

An overview of programs, concepts, and
new research

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Early Childhood Reading Group

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Why is high-quality Pre-K important?

- 50% of low-income 4th graders cannot read at the proficient level. (NAEP, 2007)
- Children in high-quality preschools display better language, cognitive and social skills than children who attended low-quality programs. (Cost, Quality and Outcomes, 1999)
- A majority of reading problems can be prevented in preschool and the early grades. (NRC, 1998)

ED programs in early childhood education

- Early Reading First (ERF)
- Even Start Family Literacy (State and Tribal)
- Early Childhood Educator Professional Development (ECEPD)
- Title I Preschool

- Programs emphasize coordination with existing community services and coordination with related Federal programs: Head Start, Reading First, Title I, Adult Education, Special Education

Early Reading First

Early Reading First uses scientifically based reading research to create “centers of excellence” by:

- **Improving the quality of instruction**
- **Improving the curriculum and materials**
- **Improving the classroom environment**

Eligible applicants can be:

1. One or more LEAs eligible for Reading First.
2. One or more public or private organizations or agencies located in a community served by an LEA eligible for Reading First, applying on behalf of one or more early education programs.
3. One or more eligible LEAs collaborating with one or more eligible organizations or agencies.

Even Start Family Literacy

State formula and Tribal discretionary grants to provide services in four areas:

- Adult Education
- Parenting Education
- Early Childhood Education
- Interactive Literacy Activities

Eligible applicants are partnerships between an LEA and nonprofits, IHEs, agencies or other LEAs.

ECEPD

- Grants to enhance school readingness of young children by improving skills and knowledge of educators
- Increased emphasis on evaluation
- Grants awarded to partnerships of IHEs, public agencies (LEAs, SEAs, human services), and entities with experience in training educators
- No funding in FY 2008.

Key concepts in early childhood reading instruction

- SBRR – research based instructional practices
- Regular assessment and use of data
- Classroom environment and structure
- Quality professional development for teachers
- Parent involvement and education

Research-based instructional practices

- Phonological awareness
- Teaching about letters
- Reading aloud/ dialogic reading
- Teaching book and print concepts
- Integrating reading and writing into all classroom activities
- Building knowledge and thinking skills
- Explicitly teaching vocabulary
- Combination of whole group and small group instruction

It's important for teachers to:

- **Ask open-ended questions that invite children to expand upon their answers**
- **Present new words to children to expand their vocabularies**
- **Respond to questions and let children take the conversational lead so they may build their language skills**
- **Gently reinforce the rules of good listening and speaking throughout the day**

Phonological Awareness

refers to children's ability to notice and work with the sounds in language.

Teaching strategies may include:

- Choosing books to read aloud that focus on sounds, rhyming and alliteration
- Inviting children to make up new verses of familiar words or songs by changing the beginning sounds of words
- Playing games where children isolate the beginning sound in familiar words, and generate rhyming words

Teaching about books

Teaching book concepts means that children:

- Know how to handle the book appropriately.
- Recognize book features such as the front and back covers, and the top and bottom, of the book.
- Understand that a book has a title, was written by an author, and has drawings done by an illustrator.
- Recognize that printed letters and words run from left to right and from top to bottom.

Teaching print concepts

Teaching print concepts means that children:

- Recognize print in their surroundings.
- Understand that print carries meaning.
- Know that print is used for many purposes.
- Experience print through exploratory writing.

Assessment and use of data

- Assess children regularly through observation, collection of student work, and administration of valid, age-appropriate assessments
- Use data to determine grouping, communicate with parents, and provide additional assistance

What does a good EC classroom look like?

- Centers for different activities, including a comfortable reading area, writing center, dramatic play area, whole group, etc.
- Print-rich environment
- Print, books and writing integrated in all activities
- Children's work displayed prominently
- Alphabet, other print displayed at children's eye level

Print rich classroom

A print rich classroom is one in which children interact with many forms of print including signs, labeled centers, wall stories, word displays, labeled murals, bulletin boards, charts, poems and other printed materials.

Professional Development

Should be:

- High-quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher's performance in the classroom.
- Fifteen elements of quality PD defined in ESEA 9101(34)

Parent Involvement

- Communicate regularly with parents about progress
- Family literacy programs (Even Start) seek to increase parents' literacy levels
- Teach parents to reinforce skills at home, including:
 - Basic strategies for interactive reading with children
 - Ways to include reading and writing in household activities
 - Creating space for reading and writing at home
 - Understanding that parents' interaction with print affects children

ECE Challenges

- Intensity matters – providing enough hours of instruction
- Parent involvement and education – reinforcing ECE at home – integrating services to adults and children
- Serving ELL students effectively
- Limited research on serving children ages 0-3
- Transition and alignment of standards with K-3 instruction
- Use of interventions in pre-K classrooms

What's new in ECE?

- Increased interest in early childhood literacy
- New study from NELP to be released January – study is a review of all existing research on early childhood literacy instruction
- ERF and Tribal Even Start will hold competition for new awards in spring 2009

NELP Study

Developing Early Literacy – report to be released
January 8

Research Questions:

- What skills are linked to later literacy development in reading, writing and spelling?
- What helps children develop the skills and abilities linked to literacy development?
- In what contexts? For which children?

Some Key Findings of NELP Study

- Code-focused interventions impacted early literacy and conventional literacy skills, especially when combined with ABCs
- Dialogic reading impacted oral language skills and print knowledge more than “just reading”
- Parent programs impacted oral language and general cognitive ability
- Literacy-focused pre-K programs impacted reading readiness and spelling; most effective when combined with PD

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