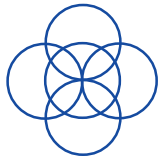


# Birth to 6 EVENTS



Waisman Center

A BULLETIN FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SERVING YOUNG CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Issue 62—Fall 2009

## Bridges to Literacy: Early Routines That Promote Later School Success

Sharon Rosenketter, Ph.D. and Lauren R. Barton, MA  
ZERO TO THREE, February/March 2002, pp 33-38.

Full text link:  
[www.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/Vol\\_22-4f.pdf?docID=1182&AddInterest=1145](http://www.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/Vol_22-4f.pdf?docID=1182&AddInterest=1145)

Summary by Arianna Keil

Authors Rosenketter and Barton identify 11 meaningful ways, or “bridges,” that families and communities can aid the youngest children in their efforts to become readers and writers. They note that play provides young children the best opportunity for these strategies to be practiced and integrated in a safe environment.

Bridges to Literacy, and “How To’s” for parents and home visiting professionals:

### 1. Relationships that include print

Reading together daily with a parent or caregiver can provide young children with positive feelings associated with this activity. It can also be calming and offer security.

**How To:** The child sits on the lap of (or next to) an adult as a book is shared. Both reading the printed words (occasionally following with a finger as words are read) or pointing to pictures and talking about images are effective. Ideally, this occurs daily, even if only for a brief period of time.

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*This issue of Birth to 6 EVENTS focuses on early literacy. Skills like decoding and meaning making are strongly related to, but distinct from, the complex task of reading. These skills develop along a continuum during a child’s early years. Increasingly, both anecdotal and research evidence suggests that addressing early literacy skills in very young children is an essential piece of ensuring that children are successful in school and life beyond.*

*The Journal Highlights section of this issue reviews many activities promoting early literacy for infants all the way through preschoolers. Want concrete ideas of how to share this with families? Read the “How To’s” for the 11 bridges to literacy outlined on pages 1-3.*

*Wisconsin-specific efforts in early literacy (including the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards) are addressed in this issue, along with national resources on early literacy and “research bites” from our partners at Head Start. Your State Birth to 3 team has spent time considering how this topic influences the Office of Special Education Programs’ Child Outcomes Indicator 2. Read their contribution on page 11.*

*To promote literacy in children with communication challenges, we review strategies for children who require alternative/augmentative communication on pages 4-5.*

*Finally, we’ve said farewell to Arianna Keil and Mary Peters as they’ve transition from state level work to other positions on pages 16-17.* 

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## 2. Responsiveness

Following the child's lead, parents or caregivers give attention to, repeat, expand and affirm the child's attempts at using words. Learning that language is enjoyable and gets results are foundational for early literacy.

**How To:** Parents respond verbally to child's vocalizations. If the child says "Dada!" when seeing her father, the adult might say, "Yes, that's your daddy. Daddy loves you."

## 3. Repetition

Repetition of familiar words and actions helps children build and maintain connections in their brains and nervous systems. Including rhymes and rhythms throughout routines also helps to surround children with diverse sounds and words.

**How To:** Home visitors can use or encourage parents to use set phrases to mark activities or transitions. Examples of such phrases include "time to choose," "let's have lunch," and "scrub a dub dub."

## 4. Modeling and motivation

Family routines demonstrating the importance of reading in the lives of adults draws attention to the value of reading in everyday life.

**How To:**

- Hang images that include print at children's eye level in infant and toddlers' environments.
- Write and read aloud children's verbal comments about their artwork.
- Showily read and write in children's presence, in order to draw attention to what you are doing.
- Act out stories, create stories, role play and refer to story characters during everyday activities also link prose to daily life.

## 5. Oral language

Exposure to a lot of verbal interaction helps children not only learn to talk, but also facilitates later literacy acquisition and overall school performance. Researchers in this area Betty Hart and Todd Risley (1999) state that "the data show that the first 3 years of experience put in place a trajectory of vocabulary growth and the foundations of analytic and symbolic competencies that will make a lasting difference to how children perform in later years."

**How To:**

- Home visitors can model for families responsive talking in conversation and play with infants and young children.
- Home visitors can also model for parents parallel talk, or side-by-side verbal descriptions of work and play activities that help children link language with actions and objects.
- Encourage parents to dialogue with their children about their everyday thoughts, feelings and activities. The most important aspect of parent talk appears to simply be its amount.

## 6. Experiences in the world

The more ideas a child has experienced personally, the easier she will find word identification (guessing the meaning of a word), and predicting nonfiction descriptions and fiction storylines involving a known concept. Personal experience also is essential in helping children find meaning in topics.

**How To:**

- Providing and talking about ordinary experiences with young children introduces them to people, objects and actions they will later experience in print. Parents can be reassured that discussion around everyday activities like going grocery shopping, and trips to the park or grandma's house provide ample opportunity to learn many concepts.
- Watching television can also help here, if adults watch the program with the child and talk about what they see.

## 7. Experiences with the tools of literacy

Young children and their families are ideally surrounded by the tools of literacy, or print in daily life. Examples include catalogs, newspapers, sale bills, billboards, picture and story books, magnetic letters, writing instruments and computers.

**How To:** Libraries are great resources for ensuring that every home has access to developmentally appropriate books. Encourage parents to attend library story times with their toddlers and preschoolers.

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## 8. Experiences with sounds

A child learning to read must pair visual symbols with sounds. Using rhythms and rhymes throughout infant and toddlers' daily activities helps build auditory requirements for literacy.

**How To:** Encourage parents and caregivers to purposefully increase what they do with the sounds of language, through

- Word play with similarities (“Tell me a word that starts like ‘pig’”).
- Word play with differences (“Let’s say ‘pig’ with a buh sound”).
- Songs that play with language (such as *Old MacDonald Had a Farm*, *Bingo* and *Raffi’s Apples and Bananas*).
- Jump rope rhymes, songs made up by caregivers, jingles using the child’s name or other ways of encouraging attention to individual sounds.

## 9. Experiences with decontextualized language

In order to read, children must be able to imagine times and places that are not physically present. This is a challenge for children who are often just learning to take another person’s perspective.

- How To:**
- Tell children joint stories about experiences with people or places they have experienced but are not currently present. In joint stories, an adult prompts the child to fill in missing pieces of the story with guided questions, such as “Who was it who had a birthday and gave us cake?”
  - Play games like peek-a-boo and hide-and-seek.
  - Share riddles and jokes with preschoolers.

## 10. Experiences with writing

Scribbles and invented spelling by young children help them realize not only that written words stand for spoken words, but also that words stand for objects, actions or ideas.

- How To:**
- Adults can write down an oral story told by a young child.
  - Children aged 3 or 4 can engage in daily journal writing with picture symbols.
  - It is now recommended that preschoolers write a lot with relatively few corrections, so that greater enjoyment of writing gradually leads to conventionalized spellings and more self-confidence.

**Early literacy** is important for all children. It is especially important, however, that children in groups at higher risk for literacy challenges have access to materials and experiences to facilitate early literacy.

Literacy problems are more common among:

- children in poverty,
- children of color,
- children whose primary language is not English,
- those with preschool hearing impairments and
- children whose parents had difficulty learning to read (Snow, 1998).

## 11. Hypothesis construction and testing

In order to read, children have to combine many observations and then guess as to the print’s meaning.

**How To:** Have conversations with children that encourage them to think about different pieces of information and then draw conclusions. For instance, “It is time for lunch and all the forks are dirty. What could we do?”

In the end, the authors conclude that the most important actions for emergent literacy are for adults or older children to frequently share words and print with young children, and to pair words with actions and feelings as they happen. 🌀