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Developing Alphabetic Knowledge in a School-to-Home Project with Students Who Are At-Risk: Literature Review

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DEVELOPING ALPHABETIC KNOWLEDGE IN A SCHOOL-TO-HOME PROJECT WITH STUDENTS WHO ARE AT-RISK

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Abstract

Literacy skills are developing in children from the time they are born and should be nurtured during the preschool years (Joint Position Statement, 2005). There are important literacy skill sets for children to acquire to be competent readers. The 2009 National Early Literacy Panel has defined one of these skills as alphabetic knowledge (Bell & Westberg, 2009). Alphabetic knowledge is being able to recognize and name letters and their sounds. The research shows that mastery of alphabetic skills is required before children can engage successfully in phonemic awareness. (Bara, Gentaz & Cole, 2007). Parents can facilitate their child's mastery of these skills through activities that can be integrated into play and their child's daily schedule. Educators can provide resources and support for learning these skills through a school-to-home connection. This is invaluable to students who may be at-risk because of disabilities, being an English Language Learner, or living in a low-literacy or poverty home. This project provides a literature review of emergent literacy skills and the need for support of at-risk students. It also includes a resource book of activities that can be sent home for students to work on with their families.

Developing Alphabetic Knowledge in a School-to-Home Project with Students who are At-Risk

Reading is a process that generally is of great importance to parents of young children. From a parent's perspective, learning to read seems to be almost a magical process. As children enter preschool programs, parents often ask educators, "When will my child learn how to read?" The process of learning to read requires certain developmental skills, and some of those skills can serve as predictors of future reading success. Emergent literacy skills are "the acquisition of those concepts concerning print, language, and the activities of reading and writing that provide the foundation for learning the skills of literacy" (Emergent literacy (n.d.). Allwords online dictionary).

Alphabetic knowledge and phonemic awareness are two of the building blocks of emergent literacy (Anthony & Francis, 2005; Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006; Evans, Shaw & Bell, 2000). Alphabetic knowledge as defined in the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) report is, "…the recognition of letters as distinct symbols that have specific names and specific sounds associated with them and is a strong predictor of later reading success" (Bell & Westberg, 2009, p.18). Phonemic awareness is "…an understanding about the smallest units of sound that make up the speech stream: phonemes" (International Reading Association, 1998, p. 3). Research shows that mastery of alphabetic skills is required before children can engage successfully in phonemic awareness (Bara, Gentaz & Cole, 2007). Emergent literacy skills are developing in a child from the time they are an infant, through the time that they start school. There are prerequisites that need to be in place for mastery of these skills to come to fruition.

Some populations of students struggle to learn the skills required to develop alphabetic knowledge and phonemic awareness to become competent readers within the classroom setting. These students are considered to be at-risk for failure to complete their schooling and become fully literate. They include students who have disabilities, are English Language Learners, or are in poverty or low-literacy homes. Preschool educators should be aware of the risk factors that can lead to low-literacy and the practices that can surmount them. Good quality school-to-home programs can make the difference between success and failure with these young at-risk students (Weigel, Martin & Bennett, 2006). This project will provide background information about important literary skills, risk factors that may impede emergent literacy skills and best practices that can ameliorate them. A school-to-home program that involves parents in teaching their children alphabetic knowledge is one protective factor to facilitate reading success in students who are considered to be at-risk. Therefore, specific school-to-home activities for preschoolers that focus on alphabetic knowledge are included.

Emergent Literacy Skills

It is imperative that all children are prepared for kindergarten with some basic literacy skills. The National Adult Literacy Survey (1993) reports that children who do not have select basic literacy skills are 3-4 times more likely to drop out of school without graduating. If a child's experiences with language and literacy are limited, it diminishes their ability to learn the skills that they need for success (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006). These experiences could take place in the classroom or home setting. According to a joint position statement by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2009)

there are five phases in a child's development of reading and writing skills. The first phase, which starts in infancy and continues to preschool, is a phase of awareness and exploration. This is when children should be exposed to literacy activities through play and daily interactions with their environment. The second phase takes place during the kindergarten year when children start to experiment with reading and writing skills. Parents and teachers should provide natural opportunities for this experimentation to expand. The other three phases progress through early reading and writing to transitional reading and writing, and culminate in independent and productive reading and writing in the third grade. These phases are guidelines that illustrate the sequence of literacy skills that most children progress through. There are specific skills that must be mastered within each of these phases for emergent literacy to develop.

Alphabetic knowledge. Alphabetic knowledge is one of these skills and includes letter identification. English is an alphabetic language that has 40 distinctive shapes within the upper and lower case letters. These must be identified before written language can be mastered (Ehri & Roberts, 2005). Children need to learn that each letter has distinct spatial features. Research shows that learning to identify uppercase letters first is most efficacious (Neumann, Hood & Neumann, 2008). Their shapes are more easily distinguished than lowercase letters. According to research done by the "Handwriting without Tears" program, it is harder to write lowercase letters because there are more peculiarities in their form and design (Olsen & Knapton, 2008). It is because of these differences that identification of lowercase letters usually progresses after mastery of uppercase letters.

The term alphabetic principle is sometimes used synonymously with alphabetic knowledge. It is defined as the ability to understand "that there is a systematic relationship between letters and sounds" (Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children, 1998, p. 4). Children recognize this relationship as they sing the alphabet song and read alphabet books. They can make connections as they see environmental print, or have conversations with adults and hear vocabulary spoken. Letters should be introduced a few at a time, and within meaningful contexts to the child, such as their name. Personal names are of great importance to young children and one of the first words that they attend to (McNair, 2007). Introducing letters in isolation creates splinter skills instead of a cohesive literacy foundation. Children can also relate letter sounds to letterforms as they hear the sounds emphasized in shared book reading or other language activities. There is some evidence that children may benefit from learning letter names before letter sounds, but best practices indicate that both skills should be taught in conjunction with each other (Bell & Westberg, 2009; Adams, 1990).

Decoding phonemes. Preschool children must come to understand the systematic relationship between letters and sounds. "Learning the names of letters and the sounds they represent provides a concrete way to attend to phonemes, given that phonemes do not have physical reality independent of each other. That is, phonemes produced in speech are acoustically inseparable because adjacent phonemes are articulated" (Anthony & Francis, 2005, p. 257). If children are having difficulty differentiating letter sounds, they may need an assessment of their hearing ability by a Speech and Language Pathologist or audiologist. Children who are English Language Learners may need extra support in hearing the differences in letter sounds. Thus, phonemic awareness- the

smallest units of sound in phonemes- and alphabetic knowledge- recognizing the names and sounds of letters- are interactive.

Alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness form the basis of early decoding skills for reading. Both are correlated with reading and spelling mastery as these skills are developed (Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices, 1998; Molfese et al., 2006). Anthony and Francis (2005) have outlined three phonological processing abilities that children develop. These abilities are distinct skills within themselves. They include phonological memory, phonological access to lexical storage, and phonological awareness. Of these, phonological awareness is the ability most strongly correlated to fluent reading. They define phonological awareness as "one's ability to recognize, discriminate, and manipulate the sounds in one's language, regardless of the size of the word unit that is the focus" (p. 256). There is some debate about how and when phonological awareness and other literacy skills should be formally taught. Some early childhood advocates are concerned that the process of teaching literacy skills may be "pushed down" to preschoolers, instead of them being taught in developmentally appropriate ways. Ultimately, though, the development of emergent literacy skills should not be left to chance.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Teaching Emergent Literacy

The International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2005) collaborated to issue a joint position statement about developmentally appropriate practices for teaching young children to read and write. One of the basic premises of the statement is that the most important window of time for developing literacy skills is from birth to eight years old. When skills are taught

within this window, children come to kindergarten better prepared and are able to progress from learning to read, to reading to learn. Early childhood educators and parents need to capitalize on this timeframe by engaging with young children in specific emergent literacy activities that have been researched and shown to be effective. Within this timeframe, there are targeted skills that should be developed.

Simpson and Andreassen (2008) have developed a matrix of literacy skills that emerge in typically developing children. (See Appendix A for a copy of the entire matrix)

Skills that two-five year old children are using with print knowledge:	**Skills that five-seven year old children are using with print knowledge:**
Learning the alphabet song	Learning the alphabetic principle- words are made up of sounds and sounds can be represented by letters
Learning to recognize and name letters	Learning all letter names and the letter sounds for consonants
Learning that letters have sounds	Learning the sounds for vowels
Learning that print is what you read	Matching letters to sounds
Learning that words are clusters of letters that are separated by space	May be recognizing sight words

Developmental milestones

It is important for adults who work with young children to be able to recognize appropriate developmental milestones. Having a matrix of emergent literacy skills to refer to helps adults to frame how and when they present literacy activities to their child or student. While every child develops emergent literacy skills at their own rate, the key to development along the literacy continuum is having rich literacy experiences. If they are not having rich literacy experiences, their literacy skills are not going to grow and

evolve at the rate that they should. If a child is not at the developmental marker that they should be, there may be cause for concern about the child's development. Early childhood educators have the responsibility to assess where their student's developmental literacy skills are, and to engage the parents as team members to teach emergent skills and administer interventions when necessary.

The IRA and NAEYC state that a typically developing child should be able to acquire conventional reading skills by the age of seven, if they have experienced good teaching and print-rich environments. Ideally, children should start developing alphabetic knowledge when they are 3-5 years old. This goal should be individualized for children who have disabilities or special learning needs (Joint Position Statement, 1998). The Idaho Early Learning Guidelines are a set of goals and indicators that mark where a typically developing child should be in the acquisition of specific skills. In the sub-domain of literacy, there is a goal for demonstrating knowledge and use of letters and symbols, and a goal for demonstrating awareness of letters and symbols. As Idaho early educators acquaint themselves with the Early Learning Guidelines, they will have a baseline to work from as they strive to teach alphabetic knowledge to their students. This baseline will help them recognize when a student's learning is threatened by at-risk factors for school failure.

The desire to learn is a key piece to developing any skill, and can be directly applied to emergent literacy skills (Adams, 1990; Share 2004). Maintaining the desire to learn in a child requires developmentally appropriate practices, and a balance of formal and informal experiences. Perpetual exposure to print, specifically letters of the alphabet, is critical to achieving mastery. Children learn to discriminate between the distinguishing

characteristics of the letters as they have experiences using them. Discrimination requires attending to those features, and attending happens when children are eager to learn. Attending skills can be taught within the framework of a child's daily activities, both in play and structured interactions.

At-Risk Factors Impacting Early Literacy Skills

There are certain populations of young children who are considered to be at-risk for reading deficits. Risk factors can include: having a disability, being an English Language Learner (ELL), having parents who have low literacy skills, or living in poverty (Bara et al., 2007; Ehri & Roberts, 2005; McGinty & Justice, 2009; Weigel et al., 2006; Early School Readiness, 2010). The numbers of children in poverty are increasing, especially as our country has experienced economic downturn over the past few years. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, 63% of the children in Idaho are living in homes where they are exposed to multiple risk factors. These risk factors could include any combination of the following: living in a single parent household, living in poverty, being linguistically isolated, parents having less than a high school education, and parents having no paid employment (Early Childhood Profiles- Idaho, 2008). Research indicates that multiple risk factors in a child's life can be a detriment to their development and learning (Evans, 2004). Statistics from the Idaho Kids Count Data Book-2009 show that 16% of children in Idaho live in families that earn less than the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The 2009/2010 FPL guidelines are $22,050 annual income for a family of four. This guideline is established by the U.S. Census Bureau as a level of income that is minimally adequate to support individuals and families. Many of the families in poverty are considered minority populations. Nationally, in 2005, "children

of color were at least three times as likely to be in poverty as children who were white" (United States Government Accountability Office, 2007, p. 5).

At-risk Statistics

Idaho has increasingly become home for many children from refugee and immigrant families. The Idaho Kids Count Data Book-2009 listed an increase of minority children from 60,189 in 2000 to 85,658 in 2007. These children speak a multitude of languages and face the challenges of being English Language Learners. As the numbers of minority children and children in poverty have increased, the resources to support them have not. One example of this is that Head Start programs in Idaho are only serving 20.5% of the families that are eligible for their services. Eligibility for Head Start is determined by living at the FPL, or having a disability (Idaho Kids Count Data Book, 2009). Concern was expressed by Treasure Valley United Way President and CEO Sally Vive, that, '… nearly one in three low-income Treasure Valley children are entering kindergarten at risk of failure due to low pre-literacy skills" (as cited in Webb, 2009, p. 2). Across the nation, this is a growing challenge for young children.

Of all of the children under the age of six living in the United States, only 56% are living in homes that are above the low-income or poverty level. To compare National and Idaho statistics for young children, see Appendix B. However, living at a low-income or poverty level is only one aspect of what can be considered being in an at-risk situation. Nationally, in 2006, the population of English Language Learners in Head Start or Early Head Start programs was one of every three students (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & McLaughlin, 2008). In short, children are at-risk for not developing literacy skills for multiple reasons. Researchers have focused on some of the attributes of

being at-risk and their correlation with emergent literacy skills. They seek to develop greater understanding of those areas that can be improved by best practices in preschool programs.

Group Risk Factors

In the literature by Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998), they identified three group risk factors that could affect a child's ability to acquire literacy skills. The first factor is when children live in poverty and in poor neighborhoods. There is a range of the quality of neighborhoods that children in poverty live in. When the characteristics of poverty permeate the neighborhood, the resources for quality learning experiences are diminished. The literacy environment in poor neighborhoods has been found to be of a lesser quality than middle-upper class neighborhoods. The second factor is that the public schools that are generally available to these children do not show significant achievement in the academic progress of their students. Resources and teaching staff tend to be inferior to schools in more affluent neighborhoods. The third factor is the multiple risk factor of being a non-English speaking student, in a low social economic status (SES) home, with a low home literacy environment and poor quality of school. These risk factors are not a death knoll for school failure, but they do place a significant burden on educators and families to accommodate for these conditions. Parents should be apprised of the benefits of their child acquiring emergent literacy skills (e.g., mastery of alphabetic knowledge) before kindergarten, as a tool to neutralize the effects of multiple risk factors.

According to Molfese, Beswick, Molnar and Jacobi-Vessels (2006) there is a marked difference in letter identification skills for children from low-SES homes and/or

who have mothers that are not highly educated. Children who come from high-income homes, or who have well-educated mothers are able to identify more alphabet letters as preschoolers. Ehri and Roberts (2005) reported that children from low SES families often enter programs such as Head Start knowing as few as four letters, whereas children of the same age from middle class SES homes know an average of 13 letters. Low SES students may only identify up to five more letters throughout the program year if not provided with adequate support. This can be problematic. Head Start Outcomes state that children should "identify at least 10 letters of the alphabet, especially those in their own name" by the end of their year in the program (Head Start Outcomes Framework, Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, http://edkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/). They also recommend that students should be able to: 1)" show progress in associating the names of letters with their shapes and sounds; 2) increase in ability to notice the beginning letters in familiar words; 3) know that letters of the alphabet are a special category of visual graphics that can be individually named". These are indicators of Alphabetic Knowledge within the Literacy domain of the Framework. Teachers and families can work together to teach these skills to students before they enter kindergarten.

Poverty as a Risk Factor

As important as letter identification is, it is also imperative that children be able to use their letter knowledge. When students apply alphabet activities to familiar names and environmental print they are able to generalize what they know to words that are novel (Bell & Jarvis, 2002). It is also important to know that there is a set order for letters in words (McNair, 2007). This skill can be reinforced by environmental print that children are familiar with such as a McDonald's sign or Cheerios box. Children who have had

rich experiences with literacy activities will naturally extend them into their individual play and routines (Neumann, Hood, & Neumann, 2008). If the home does not have children's books, magazines, newspapers, or other high interest reading materials the child will not have the opportunity to apply their knowledge within naturalistic settings and internalize it. Thus, it is vital for early childhood educators to help families in poverty to access resources such as libraries, family literacy programs, periodicals etc.

Children in poverty need to have the same rich literacy experiences that middle to high SES children do. Too often teachers of low SES preschoolers resort to rote learning methods that do not require critical thinking or allow the children to make connections in their learning. They may think that they are incapable of critical thinking, or that the children are better served by learning more discrete skills. Neuman (2006) lists five teaching practices as being effective for language-rich instruction. The first is that children need the time, materials, and resources that will help them construct language and conceptual knowledge. There are many ways for educators to support families in achieving this goal. The second practice is that there should be an expansive variety of print resources available. Educators should be sensitive in realizing that this can be a challenge for low SES families. The third practice is that literacy experiences should make connections with the student's knowledge and experience base. Fourthly, teachers should provide "opportunities for sustained, in-depth learning" (p. 31). It is not Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) to rush children through learning skill sets. The last practice is to provide ample levels of teacher scaffolding of skills. The risk factors that can keep young children from gaining the expertise they need to be literate do not have to be any student's reality. Early childhood educators can provide access to a

rich, literacy environment in their classrooms, and extend that into their home experiences.

Educators need to employ ongoing assessments of their students to ensure that they are not falling behind in the development of their emergent literacy skills. Unfortunately, there are not sufficient empirical data about emergent literacy screening and early intervention programs to state unequivocally which tools or programs are the most effective. Further, research that has been done at the elementary level is sometimes applied to preschoolers. This is inappropriate as the developing skills of preschoolers differ from older elementary students (Bailet, Repper, Piasta & Murphy, 2009; Lonigan & Shanahan, 2010). There has been a call by early childhood educators for more appropriate, effective literacy assessments for preschool children. In the meantime, even basic monitoring of emergent literacy skill development will serve to alert teachers and parents when a preschooler is not progressing.

Disability as a Risk-Factor

In addition to poverty, having a disability can be a risk factor for failure to become literate. Educators should follow DAP as they work to teach literacy skills to young children with disabilities. The literature is abundant in addressing different deficits with suggestions for augmenting them. This is an important period of time to identify delays in the cognitive development of young children. A child can have cognitive delays no matter what their SES or background is, so it is imperative that quality interventions are provided early. There needs to be a support system between school and home so the deficit can be addressed and bridged (Molfese et al, 2006).

Children with disabilities are a group that struggle with emergent literacy skills. It is posited that parents of children who have disabilities do not engage with them as often in literacy activities as they do with typical children. It is noted that they spend their time and energy in activities that are directed more towards the care required for their child's well-being. Children with disabilities may not be as easily engaged in literacy activities with their parents, which can discourage parents from trying to involve their child in reading or play (Skibbe, Justice, Zucker & McGinty, 2008). This is a concern, as early delays in print knowledge development can be a predictor of struggles as the student goes through school. It has been reported that almost 50% of children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI) experience reading problems by 2nd grade (McGinty & Justice, 2009). This is a significant number of children who are at-risk of not developing strong reading skills.

Treiman, Pennington, Shriberg and Boada (2008) found that children who have speech sound disorders at 5-6 years old are not as capable in letter name and sound tasks as their peers are. They did find that children with speech sound disorders or language impairments were more able to identify letters that have their sound at the beginning of their names than at the end. It seems that having a base of knowledge to work from- the letter name- helps children to bridge that skill to learn the letter sound. Approaching the child's skills from a strengths model, as opposed to a deficit model, will help educators to scaffold the child to the next level of learning.

Teaching strategies. The research team of van Bysterveldt, Gillon and Moran (2006) confirmed that all children, regardless of typical or atypical development, need to develop strong phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge skills for reading and spelling development. Teaching methods may vary for children with disabilities. Children who have disabilities, specifically SLI, may need more structured instruction to gain target skills (Skibbe et al., 2008). Structured instruction may include learning letter names by writing them as well as visually identifying them, and associating letter names with their shape and sound (Ehri & Roberts, 2005). It may include a discrete trial format that breaks the learning task down to its smallest elements. A study by Bailet et al. (2009) showed that a developmentally appropriate, structured intervention program made significant gains in children who were assessed to be at-risk for later reading failure. The children made gains as the intervention program proceeded through the eighteen lessons, denoting that there is a dosage effect in the amount of intervention experiences. A multisensory form of teaching is effective for preschool age children.

All children can benefit from visually exploring the features of each letter. This helps them to "…more easily distinguish one letter from another and learn letters more quickly" (McNair, 2007, p. 86). As students learn to describe the features of the letters by their shape, size, and other distinctive features they will more aptly be able to identify them. A more comprehensive method of teaching letters to children who are at-risk is from visual and haptic exploration of letters known as HVAM (haptic-visual-auditory-metaphonological). HVAM is a multi-sensory intervention that includes activities using letters that can be manipulated, as well as visual exercises. An example would be an activity where several 3-D letters are hidden under a cloth. The student puts their hand

under the cloth and picks up a letter while keeping it under the cloth. They feel the contours of the letter and verbally describe the attributes of the letter. They then make a guess as to which letter it is. This multisensory approach provides more of a critical thinking base to the learning method. Bara et al. (2007) found in a study of children from low-income families that they had a deficit in alphabetic knowledge before they entered kindergarten. As they compared the HVAM intervention to an intervention that just presented letters visually, they found significant improvement in the children who received the HVAM intervention. Haptic activities, which relate to touch, could be done with magnetic letters, foam letters, embossed block letters, etc.

Another method of applying a multisensory approach to learning letters of the alphabet is called the Up Downs strategy. It uses visual cues (pointing to letters in the natural environment); auditory cues (giving the letter name and sound); kinesthetic (using body movements to trace or form the letter); and tactile (tracing or writing the letter with different writing tools or materials). The researcher used the Up Downs name during the letter activities because of the verbal cue it illicits. An example is- The mother points to the mustard sitting on the table, and says, “Mustard starts with ‘M’. Use your finger to write ‘M’ in the air. It goes up and down, and up and down”. This method is used as each letter is introduced or reinforced in environmental print activities (Neumann et al., 2008; Neumann & Neumann, 2009). Children enjoy doing activities that engage their senses. By embedding learning into play it becomes a more natural interaction between parent and child than a formal, direct teaching activity when that is more appropriate.

Other research has identified additional methodologies for educators to use for children with disabilities. In the past, the research has been inconclusive about strategies for teaching children with Down syndrome. The current literature is suggesting that the most successful way of teaching children with Down syndrome is to start with a sight word approach and then progress to decoding strategies, such as phonemic awareness and activities that teach alphabet knowledge . In van Bysterveldt et al.'s (2006) study of children with Down syndrome; parents were trained to engage their child's attention to four target letters and their corresponding sounds during shared book reading. The focus on the letters was not supposed to detract from the pleasure of reading the book and should sustain the child's interest. The study showed positive results of combining focused learning skills within a familiar family activity. There was a statistically significant difference in Letter Sound Knowledge, Print Concepts, and Initial Phoneme Identity. The results were approaching significance in the Letter Name Knowledge category. By staying current with research findings, educators can design and implement appropriate interventions at school and at home for their students with disabilities.

The Risk Factor of being an English Language Learner

Children whose home language is not English represent a growing proportion in school populations. Many of these children live in poverty as well. This represents a multiple risk-factor of poverty and language, and may include parents who have had little formal education. The National Center for Children in Poverty (2009) records that 63% of immigrant families in the United States live at low-income status. This represents 2.8 million children and compares to 40% of children from native-born parents. This

combination accounts for the lack of school readiness by many Hispanic children (Miller, Andrews, Cuellar, & Jensen, 2007). The ability to serve this population of students has caused educators to have to expand their knowledge and skill sets.

A variety of terms are used to describe children whose home language is not English. English Language Learners (ELL), as defined by the National Council of Teachers of English (CTE) is the term that will be used in this paper. The NCTE definition is, "…an active learner of the English language who may benefit from various types of language support programs. This term is used mainly in the U. S. to describe K-12 students" (Policy Research Brief by the National Council of Teachers of English, 2008, p. 2). ELL students instinctively develop the capabilities that their home and community value and use. These include language usage, relationship interactions, symbols, and object categorization (Barbarin, Downer, Odom, & Head, 2010). Young children come to school with the experiences of the home culture that they live in and are valued so these should be incorporated into school-home programs.

Educators should have some background on student's cultures to prevent disconnects between the expectations of home and school. The NAEYC advises that "…when the language and culture of the home and school are not congruent, teachers and parents must work together to help children strengthen and preserve their home language and culture while acquiring skills needed to participate in the shared culture of the school" (Joint Position Statement, 1998, p. 9). This disconnect is further highlighted by the disparity in the ratio of children of color to educators of color. The National Center for Education Statistics (2009) outlined the fact that about 83.5% of teachers are White, non-Hispanic as opposed to Black, non-Hispanic and Hispanic teachers who each

represent less than seven per cent of staffing (Enyeart, Diehl, Hampden-Thompsom & Scotchmer, 2006). The differences in cultural upbringing in these groups can cause discord between parental and educator expectations (Barbarin et al., 2010).

Cultural understanding. It has been found that the culture of the home can influence the value that children place on reading. Cultural aspects such as the parent's workload, religious activities and the parent's education can affect the time and effort that parents are able to put into supporting their child's literacy efforts. When there is potential for a conflict in value systems, it is essential that a solid school-home connection be established through team collaboration. Parents may not understand that emergent literacy skills are the foundation for the reading skills that are necessary for school success.

There may be a lack of understanding on the part of educators about the cultural values that non-English speaking families espouse about literacy. There is a body of literature about how Hispanic families are involved in the schooling of their preschool children. Some of the premises can be generalized to other cultures of ELL's. Some cultures have more oral literacy traditions than English-speaking people. Other cultural traditions about education influence how parents support their children's academic endeavors.

Reese and Gallimore's (2000) study of immigrant Latino families found that parents feel that children are not ready to be taught reading until they reach the age of five or six and enter school. They rarely acknowledged the emergent literacy activities of their children as legitimate precursors to learning how to read. Because of these beliefs, many parents did not read to their children before the age of four-five years old. These

practices changed, however, if teachers gave them assignments to participate in specific, ongoing literacy activities with their child. It is important to note that cultural models of literacy may differ between early childhood educators and families. Parents are not likely to commit to reading with their children based solely on suggestions from teachers. They need to experience a paradigm shift in how they view emergent literacy.

Cultural values. The value of teaching children what is right and wrong is a strong incentive for Latino families to participate in literacy activities. Perry, Kay and Brown (2008) found in a study of Hispanic family's literacy practices that parents modified activities to reflect their cultural beliefs and practices. These modifications may: "(a) emphasize pleasure and interactivity in literacy activities; (b) merge supportive and direct instruction scaffolding strategies into home literacy instruction; (c) impart moral messages while engaging in interactive literacy activities with their children; and (d) activate linguistic resources by creating opportunities for bilingual literacy events to occur during school-designed interactive literacy activities" (p. 104). Engaging the entire family, especially siblings, in the literacy activities was a high priority for the Hispanic families in this study. This research is supported by work that the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics has done. They found that Hispanic families have *familismo,* which is a strong commitment to supporting family members and maintaining family ties. However, these parents also talked and read less to their children, and had fewer books and other literacy materials in their homes. These cultural differences need to be acknowledged by educators and respectfully addressed (Miller et al., 2007).

The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (2006) published a report relating in part to the school-home connection. It outlined three findings from the research about the role of home language as students work towards mastery of literacy. The first finding was that many minority parents are willing and able to support their child in academic activities at home. Educators often underestimate and underutilize them as a collaborative partner in their child's education. The second finding was that the literature is divided in the assertion that the home literacy environment plays an important role in student success. Some of the research shows superior literacy outcomes based on home literacy activities, whereas other studies have not supported that relationship. The third finding was that "the relationship between home language use and literacy achievement is unclear. In general, home experiences with the first and second language are positively (but modestly) correlated with literacy achievement in the first and second languages, but negatively (and also modestly correlated) with literacy achievement in the second language" (August & Shanahan, 2006, p. 13). If in fact non-English speaking parents were being underutilized as partners with educators, it would be prudent to make those shifts in practice that are necessary to bring them into a collaborative role. The research is inconclusive about the effects of the home literacy environment, so educators are encouraged to error on the side of safety.

Teaching strategies in the home. There are activities that parents can do to enrich the home literacy environment without too much extra effort on their part. An example is for parents to include in their daily interactions with their child opportunities to take notice of letters that are part of the environmental print in their home. Products that are specific to their culture may have different letters of the alphabet that can be

compared to the English alphabet. Parents can send product items to the child's classroom for dramatic play areas or cultural displays. When children can see letters represented in both English and their home language it helps them to discern the similarities and differences in their written structure (Gonzalez- Bueno, 2003).

It is important for parents to be educated about the benefits of creating home literacy experiences with their child. These home-based experiences need to be supported by school-home activities that the educator makes available on a regular basis. It may be difficult or expensive for families to find books in their native language (Ford, 2005). Educators have access to resources to find books for families to use, and can encourage the use of newspapers, food packaging, magazines, etc. in the family's home language. There are websites available that have literacy tips for parents in many different languages. A list of these resources is available in Appendix C. Some children who are ELL face the multiple risk of living in poverty or in a low-literacy home. The accumulation of risk factors over time is most detrimental to the ability of these children to navigate successfully the demands of schools (Evans, 2004). Collaborating with parents can help to mediate some of these effects.

The Risk Factor of Living in Poverty or a Low-Literacy Home

The research is not ambiguous on the importance of home-school collaboration for teaching emergent literacy skills. It is less clear regarding the attitudes and abilities of at-risk families to be active, effective teachers within their homes. Parents who have low-literacy skills are those who have "an inability to read or write well enough to perform necessary tasks in society or on the job. In the U.S., this is generally categorized as having a reading level at or below seventh grade" (McKinney & Kurtz-Rossi, 2000,

Definition of terms). When parents have low-literacy skills, it is especially hard to engage them in enrichment activities with their children.

Parents whose literacy level is sub-standard may feel inadequate about working with their child academically. They may have had painful experiences in school due to learning difficulties or insufficient academic supports. The idea of working collaboratively with their child's teacher may be uncomfortable to them. However, most parents are highly invested in their child's school success and will assist them, as they are able. They will need guidance and resources from educators in order to accomplish this (Karther, 2002). Unfortunately, according to a survey on Parent and Family Involvement in Education, families that were in poverty or were Spanish speaking did not report regular, effective communication from their child's school as other families did. There was a breakdown in the system that prevented them from getting information, thus they were not as involved as other parents (Enyeart, Diehl, Hampden-Thompson & Scotchmer, 2006). Part of this breakdown could be a gap in the language skills of this population of parents or misconceptions that educators have about their abilities.

School readiness. The National Education Goals Panel (2010) has outlined five dimensions of school readiness for children who are entering kindergarten. They include physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, early literacy and language development, and cognition and general knowledge. Within the early literacy dimension, letter recognition is identified as a necessary skill to know. Data from the Child Trends Data Bank- 2007 shows that 35% of three-six year old children living above poverty level were able to recognize all of the

letters of the alphabet. Of those children who were living in poverty, 21% were able to recognize all 26 letters (Table 1).

Not only are there individual risk factors for children, but there are group risk factors as well. Poor students who go to schools that have a large population of students in poverty face an added impediment to their learning (Snow et al., 1998). School resources are stretched to capacity when the majority of the student body requires intensive support to ensure learning success. Families can buttress the educator's efforts to provide a quality education by maintaining appropriate home literacy environments.

Home Literacy Environments

Quality home literacy environments are a vital component of teaching children alphabetic knowledge. Parent's literacy beliefs tend to shape that environment (Skibbe et al., 2008). According to McGinty and Justice (2009), the quality of home literacy experiences can account for a 9% variance in children's skills in print knowledge. When parents are aware that the emergent literacy activities of their children are the foundation of future reading skills they are more apt to scaffold and extend them. Children tend to replicate what they see modeled at home, whether it is reading directions on a label or writing a letter (Ballantyne et al., 2008).

Emergent literacy consists of "the acquisition of those concepts concerning print, language, and the activities of reading and writing that provide the foundation for learning the skills of literacy" (www.allwords.com). The home literacy environment should be conducive to the development of these emergent skills. Children will acquire these skills as they are exposed to a "language-rich, content-rich setting" (Neuman, 2006, p.31). Foundational learning of literacy skills requires an expansive skill set of

phonological skills, vocabulary, and the alphabetic principle. Therefore, if children's experiences are confined to a pre-determined set of activities and responses, they will not develop the ability to be critical thinkers. Their literacy knowledge base will only be perfunctory (Neuman, 2006). It is more effective for parents to teach within a naturalistic framework of work and play.

School to home connection

Compared to other activities, teaching children the letters of the alphabet seems to be a natural activity for many parents. Researchers found that children have stronger alphabet skills when their parents do take a lead in their learning (Ehri & Roberts, 2005). In a study of parent's habits when engaging their children in print, it was found that 94% of the parents reported that they read alphabetic letters to their children daily or weekly. They may point to letters within environmental print at home or in the community, or in more structured activities such as helping their child spell their name (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008). Early childhood educators can capitalize on these activities by sharing ideas on how to extend them.

There is power in coordinating resources and training between home and school. Whitehurst et al (1994) did research on a picture book intervention with children in low-income homes. The intervention was applied either in the classroom with the teacher, in play situations in the classroom, or with the parents and teachers working with the child. Their conclusion was that the parent-teacher collaboration was the most effective program of intervention. Most parents are eager to do what they can to ensure their child's success in school. Barbarin et al. (2010) have stated that the critical point in success for children from diverse backgrounds is reached when there is a "degree of

match on the culturally rooted beliefs and practices of parents and teacher" (p. 35). Educators need to find those resources and practices that are congruent with success within their student's cultural makeup. Fortunately, a few studies have defined different categories of parent skill sets within literacy-rich home environments. These tend to fall within class or cultural strata.

Weigel et al. (2006) define low-income parents as being more skill oriented in the literacy activities that they do with their young child than are middle-class parents. These skills are presented through direct teaching such as flashcards or worksheets. They termed these parents conventional, as opposed to facilitative. Facilitative parents tended to create a richer literacy environment using direct and indirect experiences for their child. Conventional parents need to be educated as to the benefits of direct teaching in combination with rich literacy activities. There are many ways to involve parents in emergent literacy activities with their children.

Parent involvement. There are natural elements in the interactions between parents and their children that facilitate teaching moments. As these teaching moments arise, parents can scaffold their child's learning to make progress within their zone of proximal development. Lev Vygotsky, a cultural psychologist, is credited with applying the principle of scaffolding to early childhood principles. Scaffolding is the process of guided participation by the adult to help the child move forward in the skill they are working on (Neumann et al., 2008).

A goal set by the National Education Goals Panel in 1990, was that by the year 2000 all parents would be involved in the education and teaching of their children. The objectives for this goal are:

- "Every State will develop policies to assist local schools and local educational agencies to establish programs for increasing partnerships that respond to the varying needs of parents and the home, including parents of children who are disadvantaged or bilingual, or parents of children with disabilities.
- Every school will actively engage parents and families in a partnership which supports the academic work of children at home and shared educational decision making at school.
- Parents and families will help to ensure that schools are adequately supported and will hold schools and teachers to high standards of accountability" (www. govinfo.library.unit.edu).

Fulfilling these objectives continues to be a goal that educators need to strive towards achieving**.** One way to achieve this is for school-to-home programs to have tools and resources that will guide parent's efforts to teach emergent literacy skills at home (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006). It is important for parents to realize that these skills need to be nurtured from the time their child is an infant.

According to a report on America's Early Childhood Literacy Gap (2009), the first five years of life are critical for brain development. In the first year a child's brain triples, and by kindergarten it is almost fully formed. This growth, and the experiences that a child has, develop the cognitive development essential for learning emergent literacy skills. Elliott and Olliff (2008) and Landry and Smith (2005) concur that this time is crucial for emergent literacy development. This window of time needs to be utilized fully if early intervention is going to be most effective. Parents need to be able to

discern their child's developmental stage in emergent literacy, and provide guidance and support.

Family literacy skills. The United States Department of Education has also stated that one of its goals is to get parents more involved in the education of their children (Arnold et al., 2008). According to their report, "Family involvement in their children's education is a central component of national policy aimed at improving the academic performance of low-income children, with policymakers citing 'overwhelming' empirical support for family involvement as a means of bolstering children's achievement" (Dearing, Kreider & Weiss, 2008, p. 227). The issue becomes how to turn that goal into a reality.

Aram and Aviram's (2009) study on the correlation between a mother's expertise in choosing quality books and children's literacy skills showed that maternal education contributed significantly to the child's level of alphabetic knowledge. The storybook reading itself did not have an effect on the child's letter skills, but it did on language development. The study did not specify how mothers read to their children, so the naturalistic activities of pointing out letters in the text and pictures may not have been a practice that these mothers espoused. Adult literacy programs can facilitate higher maternal education, which in turn strengthens home literacy practices.

Educators can provide resources to parents so they understand the steps in teaching alphabetic knowledge, as well as encouraging teaching that are embedded into daily activities. Parents need to be given guidance with literacy activities to ensure that they are DAP. One aspect of DAP is that the child is not required to do "drill and kill" or rote activities. Children will be most successful in learning letter names and phoneme

sounds when the activities are meaningful and of interest to them (Ehri, 2005). When teachers provide home activities for families to do with their child they become active participants in the growth of their child's literacy knowledge and skills (Elliott & Olliff, 2008).

Alphabet Skill Development

Formally, educators can teach parents that there are four phases in the development of alphabetic skills. There is a body of research showing that when parents use a guided approach to teaching literacy it is more efficacious (Neumann & Neumann, 2009). There is a pre-alphabetic phase when children do not know letter names and sounds, and are not making connections between letters and words. Next, comes the partial alphabetic phase. In this phase children know letter names or sounds, and are making some connections to phonemic awareness. The full alphabetic phase manifests when children can segment, blend, and know how to classify vowels and consonants into graphemes and phonemes. The consolidated alphabetic phase occurs when children are forming spelling connections, which include syllables and morphemes (Ehri & Roberts, 2005). These are concepts that parents are not going to understand unless they are put into terms and examples that they can relate with. The most salient point is that parents understand that children's developmental stages differ, and that there are specific skills that need to be mastered. Educators can support parents by sharing information and resources, modeling strategies, and making materials available to them (Bell & Westberg, 2009).

It is important for parents to know that they do not have to solely use formal teaching practices to support their child's literacy growth. By using teachable moments throughout the day, and scaffolding on their child's activities, they can provide valuable support (Neumann & Neumann, 2009). Scaffolding as described by Jerome Bruner, is a "type of instruction in which caregivers not only assist children by providing them with a supportive learning environment, but also modify instruction so that it corresponds to a child's current level of competence" (Haney & Hill, 2004, p. 216). Scaffolding skills may not come naturally to some parents, but these skills can be modeled and taught by early childhood educators.

This is reinforced in research done by Murray, Stahl and Ivey (1996) as they looked for links between phonemic awareness and alphabet skills in conjunction with reading alphabet books. The researchers found that by having children listen to alphabet books that combined the letter name in a target word, the children showed significant improvement as opposed to just hearing the letter name in isolation (van Bysterveldt et al., 2006). In a study of mixed socio-economic families, it was reported that most parents started reading to their children between 6 months and 1 year old. They were read to on a regular basis when they were between 1 and 2 years old (Evans, Shaw, & Bell, 2000). This is not a pattern that is typically followed by families that are ELL, or low-literacy. They tend to read to their children when they are closer to preschool age.

Implementation through Parent Involvement/Home to School Connections

Parents should understand that children make stronger connections to their learning when it is done within the culture and context of their life. Learning activities should be imbedded with the natural flow of the day. This can be accomplished by using

a Family Strengths approach. All families should be defined by their strengths, not by their deficits. Researchers have identified low SES and ELL students as having lower academic outcomes than other groups of children. The hope is to find those educational elements that can be implemented by educators to level the playing field for school success with these students. These labels should not be used as the definitive description of who these students and families are. As educators help families to evaluate their schedules and strengths, they can identify natural occurrences for teaching language and literacy skills (Carter, Chard & Pool, 2009). This can be especially helpful for at-risk families so that they feel that this is attainable for them.

Alphabet activities. There are activities that can be embedded into the natural setting of the child's home to teach alphabetic knowledge. Children are especially connected to their first names. McNair (2007) states that "…personal names provide a way for children to make sense of the print world as they first recognize and then learn to produce their own name" (p. 1). As parents work with their child on identifying these letters, they learn them quickly (Ehri & Roberts, 2005; Molfese et al., 2006). Activities that can be used to teach the letters in a child's first name may include: 1) reading alphabet books, 2) pointing out street signs, 3) reading directions on board and card games, 4) reading menus, 5) writing shopping and chore lists, 6) reading ads, 7) cooking with recipes (Lynch, 2008). As parents become comfortable directing their child's attention towards letters within these activities, their children will benefit from the increased exposure to them.

When children are able to have experiences working and playing with letters, there are concepts they will learn that will help them develop alphabet knowledge. They

will learn that: 1) a letter has features that distinguish it from every other letter; 2) letters have names; 3) letters have sounds; 4) directional movements are required to make letters; 5) letters come in a certain order in the alphabet; 6) there is a limited number of letters. (National Head Start S.T.E.P. Teacher's Manual, 2002, p. 173). Knowing that these are the essential skills that need to be learned will help parents to focus their efforts efficaciously.

Carter et al. (2009) report a framework of strategies created by Hannon that parents can do to help their children learn reading skills. These are: "a) creating opportunities for learning, b) providing recognition of the child's achievements, c) interacting with their child around literacy activities, and d) providing a model of literacy" (p. 521). Many of the components of these strategies are already being carried out in the natural course of a family's daily schedule. As educators form partnerships with their student's families they can more confidently make suggestions that families will want to buy into. These partnerships develop as teachers and families have experiences that they share in common such as home visits, center and classroom based family activities, field trips, parent-teacher conferences, etc.

There should be a balance of incorporating literacy activities into play, as well as presenting them in structured activities (IRA & NAEYC, 2005). Alphabet skills can be introduced and reinforced through book reading and should be encouraged. Quality alphabet books should be part of a home literacy library, or could be borrowed from a library. Pointing out letters within shared reading time is an effective method of reinforcing alphabet knowledge, integrating two foundational literacy activities (Evans,

Shaw & Bell, 2000). When preschool children participate in literacy activities in their home, it can instill attitudes and skills that will benefit the child as they enter school.

Impediments to the success of parent involvement. While the importance of parental involvement in their child's acquisition of literacy skills cannot be overstressed, there are impediments that need to be acknowledged. Because the intervention is taking place in the home, there are likely to be disruptions and distractions for the parents and the child. There may be demands on the parent's time to care for and interact with siblings. Some children may not consider the home to be a place of learning and be non-compliant to the parent's desires to work with them (van Bysterveldt et al., 2006). This is why naturalistic activities are most effective.

Parents who are both holding a job to survive economically, single parents, and parents who struggle with mental health issues or disabilities often find it hard to cope with their day-to-day struggles. It makes it difficult for them to find time also to volunteer in the classroom or help with homework (Arnold et al., 2008). As parents gain more confidence in their ability to teach their child, they may be more willing to make those sacrifices to be able to work with them. According to Waanders, Mendez & Downer (2007), "The present data show that parents who perceived themselves as important agents in the education of their children were more likely to be involved in educational activities as a whole" (p. 632). When parents are given the opportunity and the tools, they are better able to rise to the occasion of being that agent of change in their child's life.

Involving the whole family. Significant research has been done on the effects of mother's working with their children on literacy skills. Less has been done about the role that father's play in children's development of emergent literacy. The results show that a father's involvement with their child affects how well they are interested in learning. Fathers can incorporate literacy activities into the household tasks that they do, or make games that include reading, writing and problem solving skills. In this way, the father's literacy skills would not matter so much, but would be an effective way of supporting their child's budding skills (Gadsen & Ray, 2003).

Involving the whole family in literacy activities is the optimum model. There can be many relatives within a family unit who can provide the rich experiences that young children need. This is especially advantageous in families of ELL preschoolers. They may have siblings that have learned English and can read to them or do activities that have been sent home. This could help both the child and the sibling in strengthening their literacy skills. There may be grandparents, aunts or uncles who live with the family or close by (Hendrix, 2000). As family members are enlisted to support learning, new avenues are opened for support and growth.

Conclusion

Emergent literacy skills begin developing from the time a baby is born. It has been said that parents are their child's first and best teacher. If this is to become a reality, it is imperative that early childhood educators inform and support at-risk families with resources. In their position statement regarding the development of literacy, the IRA and NAEYC "believe that achieving high standards of literacy for every child in the United States is a shared responsibility of schools, early childhood programs, families and

communities" (Joint Position Statement, 1998, p. 8). This task seems to be more successful for communities and families who are middle-to-high class socio-economic status. Research studies have shown that higher SES families are more competent in their ability to incorporate language and literacy activities into their child's activities (Weigel et al., 2006).

There is concern for children who are considered to be at-risk of failure in school due to the circumstances of their home life. These circumstances may include having a disability, being an English Language Learner, or living in a low-literacy or poverty home. The National Adult Literacy Survey "found that children who have not already developed some basic literacy practices when they enter school are three to four times more likely to drop out in later years" (America's Early Childhood Literacy Gap, 2009, p.5). In and of themselves, these circumstances do not prescribe failure, but educators should develop quality school-to-home connections to ensure success.

Key Literacy Predictors

According to Strickland and Riley-Ayers (2006), some key early literacy predictors of reading and school success include oral language skills, having alphabetic and print knowledge. There is a correlation between letter knowledge and phonological processing in a significant number of research findings (Molfese et al., 2006). If children do not have a rich literacy environment in their homes, they can come into schools with a deficit. Educators can support home literacy environments by sending home resources and activities.

Parents of children who are considered to be at-risk can be taught the basic literacy skills that are important to their child's academic achievement. Arnold et al.

have suggested "…children most at risk often have parents who want to be involved, but are not engaged in effective home-school collaborations" (2008, p. 78). Early childhood educators need to understand that parents should be presented with evidenced-based literacy strategies to use in their home literacy activities. These activities will provide them with valuable tools for creating formal and informal teaching moments (Neumann & Neumann, 2009).

Home Literacy Practices

As cited in Perry et al. (2001) the research of Pellegrini has shown that, "The integration of the school-based literacy practices into the home literacy practices is particularly important when we consider the fact that children experience more success in reading when the literacy practices in their home environment mirror those practiced in school" (p. 100). Alphabetic knowledge is a skill that educators recognize as vitally important to future reading success (Bell & Westberg, 2009; Share, 2004). Parents can teach their children letters of the alphabet as they point to letters during shared reading, as they explore and manipulate 3-D letters, as they interact with environmental print, and as they help their child to identify and write the letters in their name.

Developing quality home literacy environments will benefit all members who live in the home. As educators work within a family strengths model, they can help families to achieve this. Parents of children with disabilities may need more support on how to work with their child, as they may require more explicit teaching than typical children may. In Idaho, there are many children considered to be at-risk, and those numbers are growing (Idaho Kids Count Data Book- 2009). According to Klein, Lomax and Murgula (2010), "Apologists for our educational failure say that we will never fix education in

America until we eradicate poverty. They have it exactly backward: We will never eradicate poverty until we fix education" (Idaho Statesman, Sunday Insight, p.5). The success or failure of children at-risk depends upon a quality education provided by educators that are willing to support them where they are. The success of these children can be facilitated by good quality school-to-home collaboration in early literacy activities and resources. Typical and atypical developing children should have the opportunity to experience the world in all its richness through developing effective literacy skills. The Alphabetic Knowledge project handbook and activities will provide resources so that all young children will have access to rich literacy experiences. They can be used in a school-to-home connection that will support and extend alphabet activities used in the classroom.

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Appendix A

Hierarchy of Phonological Skills

Birth to 2 years

5 to 7 years

7 to 9 years

Birth to 2 years

LITERACY SOCIALIZATION	PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS	PRINT KNOWLEDGE	READING	WRITING
• Enjoys joint book reading • Learns to hold book right-side up • Learns to turn pages • Answers questions about pictures	• Rhyme awareness emerges at 24-30 mo.	• Learns to distinguish print from pictures	• May pretend to read when others are reading	• Learns to hold crayon, scribble

2 to 5 years

LITERACY SOCIALIZATION	PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS	PRINT KNOWLEDGE	READING	WRITING
• Interested in books • Learns the need to turn page to get to next part of story • Learns print is stable; anyone reading a book reads the same words • Recognizes familiar books, may know their titles	• Segments sentences into words • Segments words into syllables (emerges at 48-60 mo) • Counts syllables (50% by age four) • Recognizes/produces rhymes (ability to produce rhyme emerges at 30-36 mo) • Recognizes/produces words with the same beginning sound • Segments/blends words by onset/rime (s+un=sun) OR given sounds, can blend them into a word	• Learns alphabet song • Learns to recognize and name letters • Knows some letter names, can identify 10 (usually if it's in their name) • Learns letters "have" sounds (i.e., grapheme-phoneme relationship awareness) • Knows that print is what you read • Learns clusters of letters separated by space, form words	• Learns to recognize name in print • May recognize environmental print on signs and labels (reads "Stop" sign) • Knows to read from front to back • Learns left-right progression of print	• Begins representational drawing • Learns to write name • Distinguishes drawing from writing • Learns to write some letters • May use invented spelling to label drawings • Experiment by writing/scribbling strings of letters or numbers, or similar forms • May write left to right, right to left, or up, down, and backwards

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Johnson, K. L., & Roseman, B. A. (2003). *The source for phonological awareness.* East Moline, IL: Linguisystems, Inc..
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5 TO 7 YEARS

LITERACY SOCIALIZATION	PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS	PRINT KNOWLEDGE	READING	WRITING
• Reads picture books for pleasure, with assistance (e.g., audiotaped book) • Reads picture books for pleasure, independently • Knows parts of a book and their functions	• Identifies (names) first and last letters and sounds in words • Lists words that start with the same sound • Counts sounds in words (50% of children by age 5) • Tells which of three words have common sounds (e.g., ball, bat, pen) • Tells which of three words is different (e.g., sit, sit, sat) • Blends 3-4 sounds to make a word (/h/ + /ae/ + /n/ + /d/=*hand*) • Segments words into 3-4 phonemes (*hand*= (/h/ + /ae/ + /n/ + /d/) • Manipulates syllables (e.g., delete, substitute, reverse) • Manipulates sounds in words (What's hop without the /p/? [/ha/]) • Manipulates letters to make new words (can change *hat* to *cat*)	• Learns alphabetic principle: Words are made up of sounds; sounds can be represented by letters • Learns all letter names, letter sounds for consonants • Learns sounds for vowels • Matches letters to sounds (grapheme-phoneme correspondence) • May recognize words by sight	• Learns to decode by identifying sounds for printed letters and synthesizing sounds across letters to form words • Learns some words by sight • Starts to track print when listening to a familiar story • May read a few short, regularly spelled words (e.g., their names or their classmates names)	• Learns conventional spelling for some words • Writes many uppercase and lowercase letters • Learns to spell by using phonemic awareness and letter knowledge • Makes errors based on phonetic correspondences • Writes most letters and some words from dictation • Writing is simpler than speech • Writing begins to be more common than drawing

Selected References:
Johnson, K. L., & Roseman, B. A. (2003). *The source for phonological awareness.* East Moline, IL: Linguisystems, Inc..
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7 TO 9 YEARS

LITERACY SOCIALIZATION	PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS	PRINT KNOWLEDGE	READING	WRITING
• Reads "chapter books" for pleasure independently • May read non-fiction for pleasure, as well	• Plays with sounds in words, as in pig latin and other secret codes • Uses phonological awareness skills when spelling	• Begins to learn conventions for punctuation, capitalization, other conventions of print	• Transitions from emergent to "real" reader • Recognizes more words by "sight" • More phonic patterns are recognized to increase automaticity of decoding (e.g., "silent e rule") • As reading becomes more automatic, more attention is focused on comprehension • Reading moves toward fluency	• Learns spelling patterns (e.g., *-ight* pattern words) • Increases vocabulary of known spellings • Makes fewer spelling errors • Uses writing to send messages • Begins school-sponsored writing, such as book reports • Writing resembles level of complexity in speech • Oral and literate styles are mixed in writing • Narrative writing predominates

Selected References:
Johnson, K. L., & Roseman, B. A. (2003). *The source for phonological awareness.* East Moline, IL: Linguisystems, Inc..
Paul, R. (2007). *Language disorders from infancy through adolescence: Assessment & intervention* (3rd ed.). St. Louis: Mosby, Inc.

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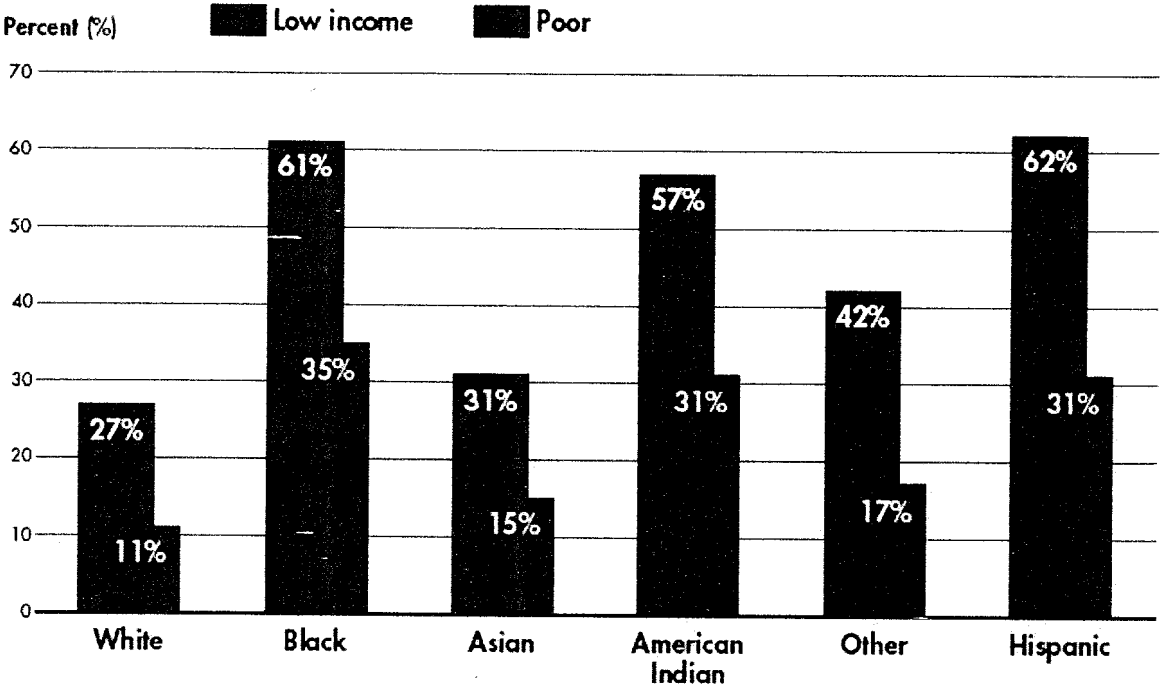
Appendix B

2008 Poverty Statistics for young children- National

2008 Poverty statistics for young children- Idaho

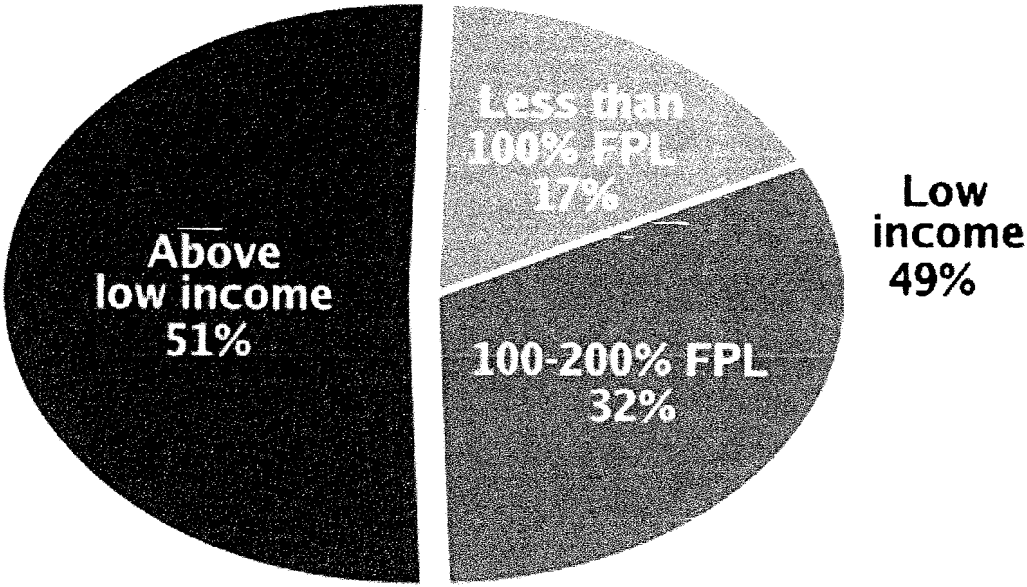
2008 Statistic- Percentage of children in low-income and poor families by race/ethnicity- National

Percentage of children in low-income and poor families by race/ethnicity, 2008



© National Center for Children in Poverty (www.nccp.org)
Basic Facts About Low-income Children: Children Under Age 18

Young children by income, 2008



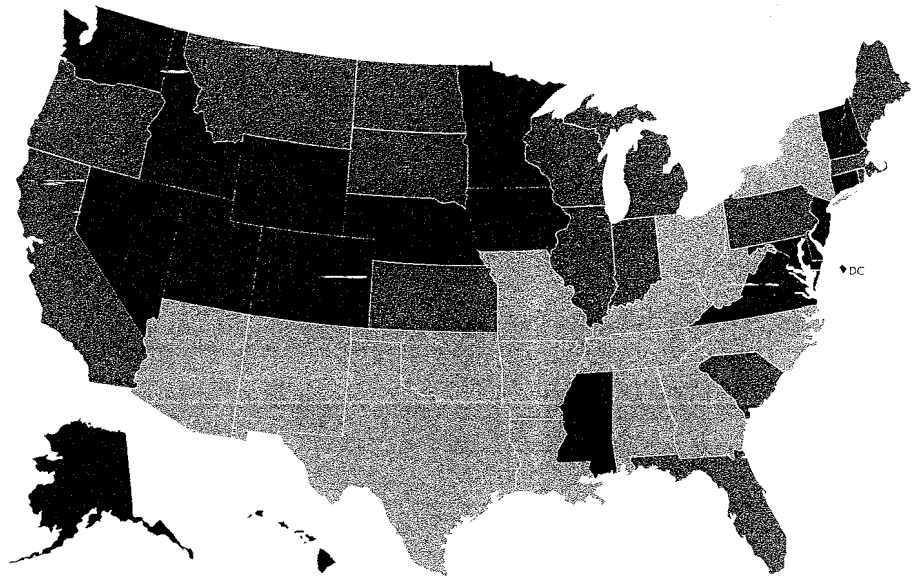
Among young low-income children, 7% live in extreme poverty (less than 50% FPL).

© National Center for Children in Poverty (nccp.org)

Rates of official child poverty vary tremendously across the states.

- Across the states, child poverty rates range from seven percent in New Hampshire to 28 percent in Mississippi.

Child poverty rates across the states, 2008



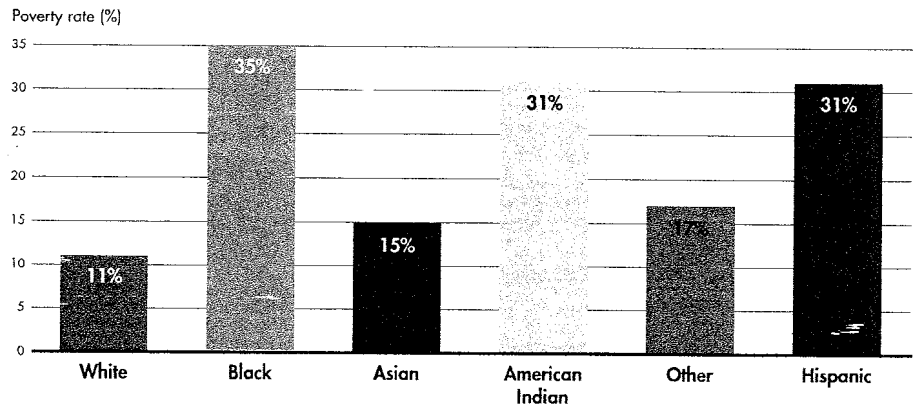
- 25% or more (2 states): DC, MS
- 20%–24% (15 states): AL, AZ, AR, GA, KY, LA, MO, NM, NC, NY, OH, OK, TN, TX, WV
- 15%–19% (16 states): CA, FL, IL, IN, KS, MA, ME, MI, MT, ND, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, WI
- Under 15% (18 states): AK, CO, CT, DE, HI, ID, IA, MD, MN, NE, NH, NV, NJ, UT, VA, VT, WA, WY

What are some of the characteristics of children who are officially poor in America?

Black and Hispanic children are disproportionately poor.

- 11 percent of white children live in poor families. Across the 10 most populated states,[6] rates of child poverty among white children do not vary dramatically; the range is eight percent in California and Illinois to 11 percent in Georgia and Ohio.
- 35 percent of black children live in poor families. In the 10 most populated states, rates of child poverty among black children range from 26 percent in California to 51 percent in Ohio.
- 15 percent of Asian children, 31 percent of American Indian children, and 17 percent of children of some other race live in poor families (comparable state comparisons are not possible due to small sample sizes).[7]
- 31 percent of Hispanic children live in poor families. In the 10 most populated states, rates of child poverty among Hispanic children range from 19 percent in Florida to 40 percent in North Carolina.

Child poverty rates by race/ethnicity, 2008



Appendix C

Literacy tips and resources for English Language Learners

1) Tips for Reading with Children- 26 languages
2) On-the-Go Literacy Resources- 6 languages
3) Supporting Early Literacy in Natural Environments- English and Spanish
4) Family Storyteller program- English and Spanish

Tips for Reading with Children: a 1-page literacy handout in 25 languages from the Minnesota Humanities Center (8 ideas for parents to use as they read with their children)
http://minnesotahumanities.org/resources/tips

Languages available:
English
Spanish
Amharic
Arabic
Bosnian
Burmese
Chinese
Farsi
French
German
Hindi
Hmong (green)
Hmong (white)
Japanese
Lao
Mende
Nuer
Oromo
Romanian
Somali
Tibetan
Tigrinya
Urdu
Vietnamese

On the Go literacy resource: 14 early literacy activities from Washington Learning Systems
http://www.walearning.com/resources/on-the-go

Languages available:
English
Spanish
Somali
Russian
Vietnamese
Mandarin
Burmese

Activities:
Doing things with music
Beginning to sing songs
Making up silly songs
Rhyming words
Guess the password
Seeing words
Keeping a diary
Talking about nursery rhymes
Talking about what will happen next
Talking about things outside
Listening to different things outside
I Spy
Window writing
Talking maps

Supporting Early Literacy in Natural Environments: 46 early literacy activities in English and Spanish
http://www.walearning.com/resources/preschool

Activities:
Talking about food
Talking about things outside
Talking about TV shows
Talking about things that happened in the past
Talking about what will happen next
Learning how to use books
Looking at pictures in books
Learning about book's covers
Showing your child how to read
Making a touch book
Making a picture book
Making a book
Talking about a story
Listening to music
Doing things to music
Singing songs
Making up silly songs
Listening to different sounds
Learning my name
Discovering print
Seeing first words
Making signs
Many ways to write
Writing with magnetic letters
Playing with sounds
Talking about words
Talking about nursery rhymes
Learning about rhyming
Making a story up
Many ways to draw
Keeping drawings
Keeping a diary
Keeping a diary with words
Writing words
Having fun with rhyming
Using letters to rhyme
Rhyming words
Measuring things
Making maps
What sounds begin words
Guess the word syllable games

Guessing the password
Going to the grocery store
Going to the library
Going to the museum
Going to the zoo

Family Storyteller literacy activities: early literacy activities for children in English and Spanish
http://www.unce.unr.edu/programs/sites/storyteller

Activities:
Fun with books
Games and activities
Help with Reading
List of books for toddlers and preschool children

Appendix D

Idaho Early Childhood Learning Guidelines- Literacy

DOMAIN 5: COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE, AND LITERACY			
SUB-DoMAIN: LITERACY			
READING			
GOAL 57: CHILDREN DEMONSTRATE AWARENESS OF LETTERS AND SYMBOLS.			
Age Range	Developmental Growth	Child Indicators	Caregiver Strategies
-		▪ Sings alphabet songs. ▪ Knows that letters are symbols with individual names. • Begins to recognize letters in their name. ▪ Recognizes and identifies letters in the environment (fast-food restaurants, stop signs, local stores). ▪ Recognizes beginning letters in familiar words (Mom, classmates' names). • Names and recognizes several letters beginning with letters in their own name. ▪ Recognizes written name. ▪ Begins to recognize letters in familiar words and names them. • Begins to make letter sound connections.	• Encourage child to notice letters in their environment. ▪ Encourage child to experiment and play with letters. • Provide alphabet letter in blocks and magnets. ▪ Make letters with a variety of materials (play dough, sand, shaving cream, blocks). • Point out letters and symbols in the environment (fast-food restaurants, familiar cereal namesllogos, local stores). • Play letter games with child. Start with the beginning letter in the child's name, their siblings, mom, dad, etc. Point to objects in the environment that begin with the same letter. • Read alphabet books with child. • Solve alphabet puzzles with child.
36 to 60 Months	Recognize letters as special symbols to represent spoken	▪ Recognizes the difference between numbers and letters.	• Immerse child in age-appropriate songs that focus on letter-sound

	language.		recognition. • Engage child in activities where he/she can manipulate and copy letters using different textures, tools, and mediums (let the child play with large sponge letters). • Provide physical/motor activities to practice letter shapes (make letters with body parts, make a letter on the floor with yarn, chalk huge letters on pavement and walk around them). ▪ Identify letters in books. • Comment on similarities and differences in letters. • Post children's names and pictures. ▪ Label areas in environment (table, chair, door). • Provide "letter wall" to practice matching letters and word beginnings.

DOMAIN 5: COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE, AND LITERACY			
SUB-DoMAIN: LITERACY			
WRITING			
GOAL 61: CHILDREN DEMONSTRATE KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF LEITERS AND SYMBOLS.			
Age Range	Developmental Growth	Child Indicators	Caregiver Strategies
		▪ Uses horizontal scribbling with breaks or separate marks to represent writing. • Creates representational drawings. • Uses scribbling to represent their name. • Knows the difference between printed letters and drawings. • Attempts to copy one or more letters of the alphabet. • Labels pictures using letter-like marks.	▪ Provide a variety of writing and drawing tools with different kinds of paper (tablets, shopping lists, loose paper, sandpaper, etc.). ~ Model Writing by writing lists, letters, daily log of classroom activities, and notes stating the words as they are written. • Encourage the use of creative spelling to label pictures, write name, and write notes to family and community members. • Use the letters of the alphabet as they come up in real life situations.

36 to 60 Months	Begin to write and draw to communicate language.	• Knows that alphabet letters are a special category of graphics that can be individually named. ▪ Identifies letters to match the said-aloud letter name. ▪ Works at writing own name. • Shows awareness of the difference between own writing and conventional print. • Shows awareness of two or more different writing systems (especially appropriate for ELL and bilingual/multilingual children). ▪ Uses pictures, symbols, and letters to convey meaning. • Uses letters to represent sounds in words. • Prints some alphabet letters for given letter names.	• Call attention to names of children that begin with the same alphabet letter. • Guide the child in writing his or her own name. ▪ Create games for child to pretend to be the letters of the alphabet and call out alphabet names. • Draw letters in sand, shaving cream, finger paint, and play dough. • Give child a special journal to write their name and draw pictures. ▪ Provide opportunities for child to write letters, lists, invitations, cards, and notes. • Encourage child to describe their artwork and label it with letters to represent sounds they hear.