



Professional Learning Module
Emergent Writing for Early Learners

Framework for Understanding Emergent Writing Practices

This is an excerpt from the following source: "Promoting Preschoolers' Emergent Writing" Teresa A. Byington, Yaebin Kim, National Association for the Education of Young Children Young Children November 2017 Vol. 72, No. 5

Emergent writing is young children's first attempts at the writing process. Children as young as 2 years old begin to imitate the act of writing by creating drawings and symbolic markings that represent their thoughts and ideas (Rowe & Neitzel 2010; Dennis & Votteler 2013). This is the beginning of a series of stages that children progress through as they learn to write (see Stages of Emergent Writing). Emergent writing skills, such as the development of name writing proficiency, are important predictors of children's future reading and writing skills (National Center for Family & Literacy 2008; Puranik & Lonigan 2012).

Teachers play an important role in the development of three- to five-year-olds' emergent writing by encouraging children to communicate their thoughts and record their ideas (Hall et al. 2015). In some early childhood classrooms, however, emergent writing experiences are almost nonexistent. One recent study, which is in accord with earlier research, found that four- and five-year-olds (spread across 81 classrooms) averaged just two minutes a day either writing or being taught writing (Pelatti et al. 2014). This article shares a framework for understanding emergent writing and ties the framework to differentiating young children's emergent writing experiences.

Understanding Emergent Writing

Researchers and educators often use the term emergent literacy to define a broad set of language and literacy skills focused primarily on the development and significance of emergent reading skills. To better understand writing development—and to support teachers' work with young children—researchers have proposed a framework to explain emergent writing practices (Puranik & Lonigan 2014). The framework is composed of three domains: conceptual knowledge, procedural knowledge, and generative knowledge.

Conceptual knowledge includes learning the function of writing. In this domain, young children learn that writing has a purpose and that print is meaningful (i.e., it communicates ideas, stories, and facts). For example, young children become aware that the red street sign says STOP and the letters under the yellow arch spell McDonald's. They recognize that certain symbols, logos, and markings have specific meanings (Wu 2009).

Procedural knowledge is the mechanics of letter and word writing (e.g., name writing) and includes spelling and gaining alphabet knowledge. Learning the alphabetic code (including how to form letters and the sounds associated with each letter) is an essential component of gaining procedural knowledge. Children benefit from having multiple opportunities throughout the day to develop fine motor skills and finger dexterity using a variety of manipulatives (e.g., magnetic letters, pegboards) and writing implements.

Generative knowledge describes children's abilities to write phrases and sentences that convey meaning. It is the ability to translate thoughts into writing that goes beyond the word level (Puranik & Lonigan 2014). During early childhood, teachers are laying the foundation for generative knowledge as children learn to express themselves orally and experiment with different forms of written communication, such as composing a story, writing notes, creating lists, and taking messages. Children can dictate words, phrases, or sentences that an adult can record on paper, or they can share ideas for group writing.