



Professional Learning Module
Emergent Writing for Early Learners

Overview of Emergent Writing: Building Background Knowledge

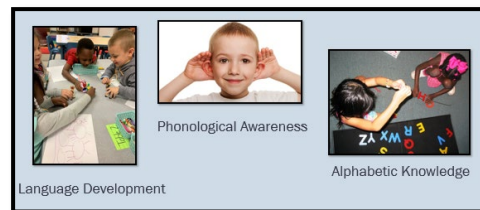
What is emergent writing?

Emergent writing (all underlined words are included in the Glossary) means that children begin to understand that writing is a form of communication and their marks on paper convey a message. (Mayer, K, 2007). Children's knowledge of the purposes and structure of written composition is demonstrated in their dictated stories and their own beginning forms of writing. Early writing is a key predictor of children's later reading success. Just as children grow in their ability to name and recognize alphabet letters, they also gain skills in using letter-like shapes, symbols, and letters to convey meaning. Reading and writing skills develop simultaneously and are interconnected. Progress in one fuel development of the other.

- * Meyer, K. 2007 January. Emerging Knowledge about Emergent Writing.

Emergent literacy connections

Emergent literacy is a term used to explain a child's knowledge of reading and writing skills before they formally learn to read and write. Emergent reading includes alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness along with the motivation for, and appreciation of, reading. Emergent writing includes composition and is interconnected to language and phonological awareness.



Emergent reading and writing work together to create a balanced literacy program. As children's writing experience expands, children develop an increased knowledge about the forms of letters. They begin to recognize that the 26 alphabet letters found everywhere are used to write messages. Growth in each area is important for children to become strong readers and writers. As proficiency in emergent reading skills increases, particularly letter knowledge and phonological awareness, children's writing proficiency will increase too. Across time, children will move from letters to words to sentences. Children's capacity to compose and dictate extended written messages is related to their growing language skills.

Emergent writing standard

The *Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards: Birth to Kindergarten (2017)* <http://flbt5.floridaearlylearning.com/about.html> are based on what we know about children, including what they should know and be able to do along a continuum of development.

The Florida Standards are organized into eight domains, or areas of development. Emergent Writing in part of the Language and Literacy domain.

The emergent writing standard and benchmarks are:

1. Begins to show motivation to engage in written expression and appropriate knowledge of forms and functions of written composition

Benchmark a: Intentionally uses scribbles/writing to convey meaning (e.g., signing artwork, captioning, labeling, creating lists, making notes)

Benchmark b: Uses letter-like shapes or letters to write words or parts of words

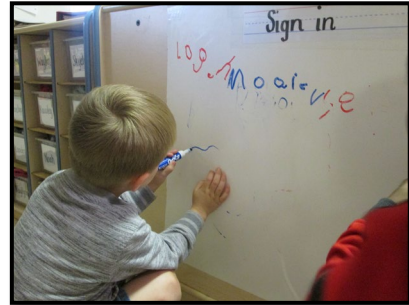
Benchmark c: Writes own name (e.g., first name, last name or nickname), not necessarily with full correct spelling or well-formed letters

Framework for understanding emergent writing practices

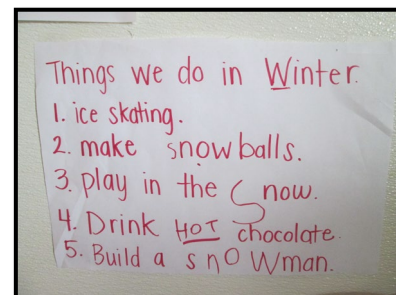
To better understand writing development- and to support teachers' work with young children- researchers have proposed a framework to explain emergent writing practices (Puranik & Lonigan 2014). The framework is composed of three domains: conceptual knowledge, procedural knowledge, and generative knowledge.

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. Fine motor skills are involved in smaller movements that occur in the wrists, hands, fingers, feet and toes. They involve smaller actions such as picking up objects between the thumb and finger, writing carefully, and even blinking.



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. 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.



- * See Content Support Document: Framework for Understanding Emergent Writing Practice
- * See Content Resources: Byington, T. A., Kim, Y. (2017) "Promoting Preschooler's Emergent Writing."

How Early Writing Develops

Writing develops through a progression of stages beginning with random marks and ending with conventional spelling. Typically, prekindergarten children move from drawing and scribbling to using letter-like forms and letter strings as they learn more about the alphabet. Eventually, when children are able to make some connections between letters and sounds, they will begin to use invented spellings in which some or all of the sounds are written in the order they are heard. After prekindergarten, children ultimately achieve mastery of conventional spelling where they are able to remember and apply the correct spelling for most words.



Remember, emergent writing is directly connected with language and reading. If you notice that a child's writing development is not progressing on a reasonable timeline, you may want to make some adjustments. Working with a few children or one-on-one will support them by providing targeted instruction in both reading and writing.

Young children may benefit from a variety of fine motor activities such as working with play dough, stringing beads, painting, and coloring with markers and crayons on large pieces of paper. Writing utensils and other fine motor materials should be available in centers throughout the classroom.

Teachers will always want to help families understand the what, why and how writing instruction is being addressed. They may not know that the scribbling stage is as important as being able to "properly" write their names. Displaying a variety of writing experiences around the room will help parents see the importance of writing and how it develops.



* See Content Support Document: How Early Writing Develops

Overview of Emergent Writing: Instructional Practices

Writing Routines

Providing opportunities for children to write and to learn about print is beneficial to their development as writers and readers. Children will develop increased knowledge about the forms of letters through their experiences in a classroom that is rich in emergent literacy skills.

As children learn how to write more letters, they will begin to experiment with different forms and functions of writing. Authentic writing opportunities allow children to choose their writing topic and encourage them to write for “real life” purpose and audience. Young children learn about print when they are provided ample opportunities to experiment as writers and plenty of coaching and modeling by teachers.

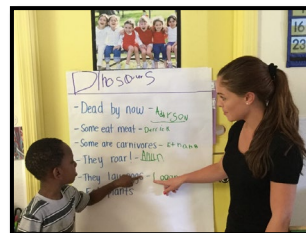


When children experiment with writing, they are consciously thinking about what they know about print and how it works. Children may enjoy writing on things other than paper which may make the writing process more engaging for reluctant writers. The act of writing engages children’s fine motor skills which involve the use of small muscles that control the hand, finger, and thumb and are important as children perform self-care tasks such as feeding themselves buttoning and zipping their clothes.

- * See Instructional Resources for additional fine motor activities

Children should have many opportunities to practice writing their names, but they should not be expected to write on lined paper nor should they be expected to practice their whole name all at once. Name writing practice can be encouraged by meeting each child at their current ability level and supporting their progression from writing the first letter of their name to writing their full name. Name writing is the first step in children figuring out the mechanics of writing (procedural knowledge).

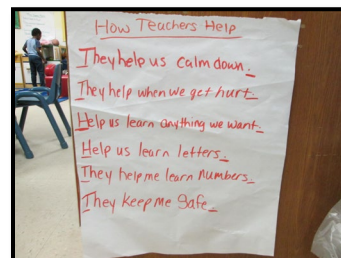
A print rich learning environment sends the message that writing has a purpose and print carries meaning. When teachers generate classroom management charts (e.g. class rules, daily schedule, attendance, jobs) with their children and post them around the room children will begin to understand the function of writing (conceptual knowledge). When charts are displayed at a child’s eye level, they are able to interact with the charts.



Children spend most of their learning by playing, exploring and interacting in areas around the room. Each learning area should include a variety of paper and writing tools to motivate children to generate stories, notes, or messages. A well-stocked writing center will support children in creating self-directed writing experiences. The center should include a variety of writing tools and paper to motivate children to write.

- * See Instructional Resources: Setting up a Writing Center

How often children write, how often they observe you writing, and how often you coach them in their writing will influence how much they learn about communication through writing. Writing messages throughout the day will support children in becoming readers and writers.



- * See Content Support Document: Writing Routines

Types of Writing Practices

In addition to creating a learning environment that is rich in purposeful and authentic writing opportunities, teachers also need to model the writing process using several writing practices.

Shared Writing is a strategy for teachers and children to work together to write a message. Shared writing is an opportunity for teachers to show children different reasons for writing and how to record messages on paper. In addition to showing children how to form letters and how to put letters together to write words, teachers are helping children understand that we write those specific words to communicate a message (generative knowledge). Shared writing can be conducted in whole group and small group settings.

Interactive Writing is similar to shared writing except that you are “sharing the pen” with a child. As you “share the pen,” you will pause and think aloud and ask children questions to help support them in connecting the writing process to their developing print knowledge and phonological awareness skills. Teachers who have carefully observed each child’s writing development will be able to select questions for each child that match their current level of skill and understanding.

Taking Dictation or “transcribing” as children talk about their picture is a powerful strategy teachers use to model the writing process with young children. Dictation is also an excellent way to support the composition process (mechanics of writing, procedural knowledge) and children’s language skill development at the same time. Typically, you will use dictation when working with a child one-on-one; however, sometimes you can use dictation with small groups asking children to take turns in telling you what to write. When using the strategy of dictation, your job is to write exactly what the child says.



- * See Videos: Shared Writing, Interactive Writing and Taking Dictation
- * See Content Support Documents: Types of Writing Practices

Integrating writing across content areas

As educators, we know children grow and develop in their own unique way and at their own pace. Areas of child development, such as physical, social/emotional, language and cognitive development are interrelated and dependent on one another.

Early educators understand that an integrated approach to learning throughout the day support young children in becoming successful learners. Children will benefit when learning experiences are integrated across content areas that link skills and concepts during formal and informal learning opportunities. Embedding writing practices within a variety of content throughout the day links learning to a variety of concepts and skills.

Making books with children is another way to integrate learning. The process of making books with children support language and literacy skills through a variety of content. It sends the message that “I am an author” and demonstrates that writing has a purpose and is meaningful (conceptual knowledge). Children will begin to understand more about print and how print works as they create their own books. A variety of content can be used to review and reinforce concepts and skills.



- * See Instructional Resources: Making Books

Meeting the needs of all learners

Most classrooms include children with a variety of literacy exposure and skills as well as developmental mastery. Intentional teachers help all children become writers by modeling, observing and coaching them in both planned and unplanned instructional settings.

As children learn to write, teachers should focus on the process they use, not the look of their finished product. Watching children as they write teaches you what they know and understand about how print works. Do not be surprised when you see children occasionally writing backwards, they are still learning about directionality and placement in writing. Writing letters backwards is not an indication of a reading problem. It can be developmentally appropriate. Showing children how you write teaches them how print works.



Teachers can adjust their lesson plans to accommodate all children at their current skill level. Children with fine motor skill impairments may find it easier to “write” with letter tiles or magnetic letters. To help children feel more comfortable while writing, teachers can make available additional materials including pencil grippers and wider writing instruments which can be easier for children with fine motor impairments to hold in their hands.

Children who have English as a second language will better understand the purpose of writing if the teacher models writing as the child dictates. This conveys the message that the words we speak can be written down. When English language learners begin to invent spelling, they often times use both of their languages to construct words. For example, Spanish speaking children might write “ll” for the /y/ sound. By understanding this typical phase of writing for English language learners, teachers can better interpret the children’s writing and encourage more attempts.

- * See Content Resources “How do I write...? Scaffolding Preschooler’s Early Writing Skills,”

Children will become writers when they are immersed in writing experiences and have purposeful opportunities and authentic reasons to write. Teachers support children’s writing development with emergent writing by establishing writing routines and modeling writing practices.

