

CHAPTER 2

Building Print Knowledge: Supporting Early Print Discoveries

Print knowledge is a key dimension of emergent and early literacy development. *Print knowledge* encompasses children's knowledge about printed letters, words, and book conventions. Some specific aspects of print knowledge include understanding the distinction between print and pictures, understanding that print carries meaning, and understanding how to hold a book, turn pages in a book, and read from left to right (Justice & Ezell, 2004). Print knowledge contributes to literacy development by providing children an essential tool for translating the alphabetic code to decode words; in turn, children who are able to fluently decode are able to focus their cognitive resources on making sense of what they read.

How Print Knowledge Develops

Adults may notice that children who have not yet begun to read tend to focus on the pictures rather than print during storybook reading interactions. When preschool children share books with adults, about 95% of their visual attention is directed at the illustrations in the storybook (Justice & Lankford, 2002) and 95% of children's talk during shared reading focuses on illustrations or concepts expressed in the storybook (Ezell & Justice, 2000; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990; Yaden et al., 1989). With the help of an adult, children can be guided to explore the print within storybooks as an object worthy of their attention (Justice & Ezell, 2004).

Print knowledge is an important aspect of emergent literacy that develops gradually over the course of early childhood; evidence of print knowledge development may emerge in the toddler years (Goodman, 1986; van Kleeck, 1998). Young children demonstrate print knowledge in several ways. First, children demonstrate an increased attention to and awareness of print in their environment. They may begin to point out familiar letters ("That letter is in my name."), recognize words that they see frequently (e.g., the word *STOP* on a stop sign), or inquire about letters and words that are unfamiliar ("What does that word say?"). Second, children develop

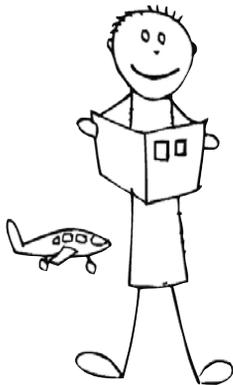
an understanding of the functions that different forms of print can convey. For example, they understand the difference between print that they see on road signs and print that they see in newspapers and on menus. Third, children develop an understanding of the set of idiosyncratic conventions that govern print presentations, including left-to-right directionality and spacing between words. Children with this understanding are able to identify where to begin reading on a page, which direction to read a page, and how to turn the pages in a book. Fourth, children begin to develop the ability to associate words spoken aloud with words in print. This means that if adults read a simple sentence aloud to children while looking at a book, the children will be able to point to some or all of the words, in the correct order, as each word is read slowly. Finally, children recognize the way in which print units are organized for written language purposes, such as how letters are grouped to form words and words are grouped to make phrases and sentences (Hiebert, 1981; Justice & Ezell, 2004; Lomax & McGee, 1987).

Within the context of shared storybook reading, one of the first signs that children are attending to the organization and functions of print is memorization of lines of text and pretend reading of stories (Adams, 1990; Snow et al., 1998). Adults can capitalize on this print interest and create a literacy-rich environment in the following ways: (1) demonstrate the value literacy holds by modeling reading and encouraging children to read; (2) respond to children's interest in reading and set expectations for them to participate in reading; (3) ensure that appropriate reading materials are available and accessible to children; and (4) read with children and encourage verbal interactions that extend beyond the text on the page (Adams, 1990; Snow et al., 1998). To help children in all of these areas, particularly the fourth point, which emphasizes children's participation in verbal interactions that go beyond the text on the page, it is important that adults reference print within storybooks to show children that print is interesting and worthy of discussion. Through these conversations, adults can guide children to understand how print is organized, its various functions, and its relationship to the more global act of reading for meaning. Helping parents to support their children's print knowledge in the home environment is an important goal of early education. On the next page, we provide some tips for parents to guide your efforts.

How Interactive Reading Supports the Development of Print Knowledge

Interactive reading offers a natural and authentic context through which adults can help children establish the relationship between spoken and written language and learn more about how print works. As adults and children engage in interactive reading, adults can make references to print in simple and unobtrusive ways. Ezell and

print Knowledge TIPS for parents



Parents can foster their children's print knowledge throughout the day using a variety of authentic experiences. It is important for parents to guide children's interaction with print placed throughout the home environment; just placing print around the child's environment is not nearly as powerful as guiding the child to make sense of the forms and functions of print. These activities will help children expand their awareness of print in the world around them through authentic and meaningful experiences:

- Encourage your child to play with toys such as alphabet blocks and magnetic letters because these toys provide opportunities to manipulate letters in a fun way.
- Point out environmental print on restaurant signs and menus, food containers, or signs on the street and draw attention to the fact that the letters and words help readers to understand what the signs and labels say.
- Consider creating labels for concrete and important items around the home. For example, help your children make signs with their names to hang on the doors of their rooms (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999).

Justice (1998, 2000) report that while adults rarely reference print verbally (e.g., questions or comments about print) or nonverbally (e.g., tracking or pointing to print) without explicit instruction to do so, adults significantly increase their references to print with a minimal amount of instruction. Furthermore, when adults reference print during storybook reading sessions, children also ask more questions and make more comments about print (Ezell & Justice, 2000), and they show marked improvement in important early literacy abilities over a short period of time (Justice & Ezell, 2002). By talking about print within the interactive reading context, adults can make literacy an *explicit* rather than *implicit* focus in the reading routine.

Interactive Reading Activities for Building Print Knowledge

Adults can intentionally target print knowledge during shared reading with children to encourage children's achievements in print knowledge. Here we present activities

using specific storybooks and strategies that can assist children in developing print knowledge. Activities are arranged in a developmental sequence to enable children to achieve the following objectives:

1. To comprehend and begin to use print-related vocabulary
2. To demonstrate awareness of book organization
3. To understand the role of words as carrying meaning
4. To demonstrate understanding of text directionality
5. To demonstrate word awareness

ACTIVITY 2.1

Words About Print

Objective: To comprehend and begin to use print-related vocabulary

Storybook: *I Went Walking* (1990) by Sue Williams, illustrated by Julie Vivas

Description: *I Went Walking* uses simple, short sentences and contains just one sentence per page. The text is predictable because of its repetition and support from the illustrations (e.g., part of an animal is shown to provide a clue about what the next animal will be). The sentence forms alternate between statements and questions throughout the story, with the final sentence ending in an exclamation. The variety of sentences provides an excellent context to draw attention to varying sentence forms, how they are punctuated, and how they sound when read aloud. The repetitive text allows children to quickly become familiar with new vocabulary and concepts.

An important early print accomplishment is learning the language of storybooks, particularly the use of a *metalinguistic, print-focused* vocabulary. This vocabulary provides the child with the tools for talking about print and analyzing written language. This includes words such as *cover, title, author, illustrator, letter, page, word, sentence, front, back, beginning, and end*.

Interactive Reading Experience Using *I Went Walking*

Text

(cover, pp. 1–4)

I Went Walking

WRITTEN BY

Sue Williams

ILLUSTRATED BY

Julie Vivas

Extratextual Conversation

Adult: Let's look at the *front* of the book.

This is called the *cover* of the book.

The name of the book is right here

[points to title]. *I Went Walking* is the

title. The person who wrote the book is

called the *author*. Her name is right here [points to author's name]—Sue Williams. There is another name here [points to illustrator's name]—Julie Vivas. She is the *illustrator*, the person who drew the pictures.

*I went walking.
What did you see?*

Adult: The *first* word on this page is *I*.
And here is the second word, *went*.

The preceding extratextual conversation illustrates the use of strategies that include pointing to text and making comments related to print vocabulary. These may help to increase the child's awareness and understanding of these print-related concepts. Also notice that the preceding conversation simply draws attention to features of the book and models the corresponding vocabulary. No demand is made on the child to participate beyond attending to the adult's comments.

Words From Start to Finish

ACTIVITY 2.2

Objective: To demonstrate awareness of book organization

Storybook: *If You Give a Moose a Muffin* (1991) by Laura Numeroff, illustrated by Felicia Bond

Description: This book features a colorful cover that clearly displays the title, author's name, and illustrator's name. The story line follows a friendly moose who, when you give him one thing, always wants something else to go with it. The sequence of the story lends itself to predicting what comes next and requires that each page be explored before going on to the subsequent one.

If You Give a Moose a Muffin has some unique features that make it particularly appropriate for increasing awareness of book organization. The inviting illustrations of the friendly moose participating in familiar activities (e.g., eating muffins, painting, cleaning up a mess) are sure to engage children. Beginning with the cover, adults have opportunities to draw children's attention to print, for example, by pointing to the title, author's name, and the illustrator's name. The primary goals are to convey concepts related to the organization of books, such as the following:

- The front of the book is called the cover and tells us the title and the author.
- Starting at the front of the book, we turn one page at a time.

Interactive Reading Experience Using *If You Give a Moose a Muffin*

Text

(pp. 1–5)

[Hand the book to the child in a random direction—with the spine or back of the book facing toward him or her.]

If you give a moose a muffin,

he'll want some jam to go with it.

[pause for comment]

*So you'll bring out some of your mother's
homemade blackberry jam.*

Extratextual Conversation

Adult: I need to start reading at the front of the book. Show me where I should start reading.

Child: [points to the cover]

Adult: [opens book to first page] Where should I start reading on this page?

[If necessary, adult gives the child choices by pointing first to the word *If*, then to *moose*, and then asks which one to start with.]

Adult: I finished reading this page [points to the page on the left]. Now, where should I read next?

Child: [points to right-hand page or first line of text on that page]

Note that to increase children's awareness of book organization, the adult incorporates the print-related vocabulary and concepts from the previous activity and then shifts to increasingly involved and advanced forms of these concepts. As children become more skilled at employing these concepts, educators can require higher levels of accuracy in children's responses and participation. For example, in the last question by the adult in the previous extratextual conversation ("Now, where should I read next?"), children may initially just point to the page on the right. With more practice and modeling of the vocabulary and concepts, one might expect the child to point to the first word in the first sentence on the right-hand page.

ACTIVITY 2.3

The Story Is in the Words

Objective: To understand the role of words as carrying meaning

Storybook: *Growing Vegetable Soup* (1987) by Lois Ehlert

Description: This book features illustrations in bold colors and a story written in large, salient print. In addition to the story text, print is used to label illustrations on

each page. The story moves step-by-step through planting, growing, harvesting, preparing, and eating the vegetables grown in a garden and includes instructions on how to make your own vegetable soup.

Adults can draw attention to the role of print as having meaning using two simple types of print-referencing techniques:

1. Nonverbal references, such as pointing to words or tracking words when reading
2. Verbal references, such as commenting on print (e.g., "There's a picture of the sun. Look, these letters next to it spell the word *sun*.")

Initially, the adults should simply model print concepts for children and draw attention to the print through verbal and nonverbal references. Later, when a book becomes familiar, adults should encourage children to take a more active role in identifying print.

Interactive Reading Experience Using *Growing Vegetable Soup*

Text

(pp. 1–7)

We're ready to work, and our tools are ready, too.

We are planting the seeds,

And all the sprouts,

Extratextual Conversation

Adult: There's a picture of the tools. I see a shovel [points to the picture], and right above it are the letters that make the word *shovel* [points to the label].

(This can be repeated with the other tools in the picture.)

Adult: These words help to tell the story, so I will read them [points to the words and follows along with a finger while reading]: "We-are-planting-the-seeds."

Adult: Look, all the sprouts have their names on them [points out the labels on each picture]. Here it says, "tomato sprout, pepper sprout, and cabbage sprout."

As the child becomes more familiar with a book and the words in the story, adults can make tasks more challenging. For example, adults can point to the picture of the shovel and ask, "What do you think this word above the shovel says?" At this

point, children will still benefit from the support of the picture, which will assist them in building awareness and understanding of the correspondence between words and pictures. To increase the challenge, adults might point out the first occurrence of the word *grow* on one page and then ask children to “find another word that looks the same” as the target word.

ACTIVITY 2.4

Show Me the Words

Objective: To demonstrate understanding of text directionality

Storybook: *Mama Cat Has Three Kittens* (1998) by Denise Fleming

Description: This is a story of two kittens who follow Mama Cat’s lead and one kitten who aims to be different than his siblings. The large print and clear organization of text (one to three short lines of text per page) make this book an appropriate choice for drawing attention to the text and the order in which we read the words.

Previously, we discussed the use of nonverbal print-referencing strategies (tracking and pointing to print) to help the child distinguish print from pictures while reading. Once children understand that words (as well as pictures) tell the story, they are likely able to examine more closely how to approach the text when reading, such as where to start and in which direction to move across the page.

Interactive Reading Experience Using *Mama Cat Has Three Kittens*

Text

(pp. 1–5)

Mama Cat has three kittens, Fluffy, Skinny, and Boris.

When Mama Cat washes her paws,

Fluffy and Skinny wash their paws.

[at top of page]

Boris naps. [at bottom of page]

Extratextual Conversation

Adult: [following along with a finger, points to the text as it is read] Look, I just read these words at the bottom of the page. I started over here. It says [rereads the sentence while again tracking with a finger].

Adult: This page has two lines of words, so I will read the top one first [points to the top line of text].

Adult: Look, there are words at the top and bottom of this page. Which ones do you think I will read first?

[Child may point to the words or say “at the top.”]

Adult: [regardless of the correctness of the child’s response] I will start up here [points to first line of text] at the top of the page and read this line first.

In the preceding extratextual conversation, the adult draws attention to the directionality of print with verbal and nonverbal print-referencing strategies. When adults first introduce this concept to children, making extratextual comments after reading each and every sentence can be distracting and take away from the enjoyment of the story, so verbal references should be minimized early on. However, tracking print visually with a finger is less intrusive and may be appropriate on each page. In a book such as *Mama Cat*, incorporating comments and questions every two to three pages would still provide at least five opportunities throughout the book to make comments about print.

After providing several verbal and nonverbal print references, including tracking the print when reading, the adult can consider involving the child in some of these print-referencing strategies. For example, the child can be provided choices for where to begin reading on the page, such as “Should I start reading here,” [points to first word on the page] “or here?” [points to last word on the page]. These choices serve as a scaffold for children, with the eventual goal being for them to identify the starting and ending points on the page independently.

Word Search

ACTIVITY 2.5

Objective: To demonstrate word awareness

Storybook: *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (1967/1992) by Bill Martin Jr, illustrated by Eric Carle

Description: This book features simple, repetitive text that children can memorize with ease. Clear, bright pictures of the animals support the text that changes on each page. When children are able to name pictures with little or no effort, adults should then move to a focus on word-to-print relationships.

The goal of this activity is to begin to highlight words in print. Children may not naturally recognize that sentences are made up of separate words and thus benefit from cues that help them attend to words as specific units of print. The repetitive

text in this particular book gives children opportunities to see the same words several times throughout the story (e.g., *brown, bear, see*).

Interactive Reading Experience Using *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*

Text

Brown Bear,
Brown Bear,
What do you see?

Red Bird,
Red Bird,
What do you see?

Yellow Duck,
Yellow Duck,
What do you see?

Extratextual Conversation

Adult: I heard the word *bear* two times in that sentence. Here is the first one [points to the first *bear* in the sentence]. You find another word that looks the same.

Adult: What animal do you see on this page? [allows time for the child to respond] Let's find the word that names this animal [helps the child find the word *bird*].

Adult: The word *see* is the last word on this page. Which word do you think is the word *see*? [helps the child find the last word, *see*]

This familiar storybook also lends itself to pretend reading, described in the introduction of this chapter. Adults should encourage children who have memorized the text in a storybook such as *Brown Bear* to attend to specific words in print and match them to the words they hear. This will help the child gain confidence in storybook interactions and help to develop the true ability to read text.

Additional Storybooks for Building Print Knowledge

***Come Along, Daisy!* (1998) by Jane Simmons**

Daisy Duck is very curious and likes to explore on her own. As she wanders away, Mama Duck calls, "Come along, Daisy!" but Daisy doesn't listen. When she gets a little too far away, Daisy gets scared and calls for Mama Duck. Bright illustrations will engage young readers, as will the familiar notion of children testing boundaries. This is a good book for talking about print vocabulary, book organization, and text directionality.

***Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* (2003) by Mo Willems**

This silly and entertaining book about a pigeon who wants to drive a bus will engage readers of all ages. At the outset, the bus driver assigns the reader the responsi-

bility of watching the bus and not letting the pigeon drive the bus. The entire text of the book is written in speech bubbles to represent the bus driver and pigeon talking. This feature makes this an excellent book for print awareness activities and is particularly useful to convey the role of print in carrying meaning.

***Fall Leaves Fall!* (2000) by Zoe Hall, illustrated by Shari Halpern**

Two brothers wait for fall each year so that they can collect, rake, and jump in the colorful leaves that fall off the trees. Near the end of the story, the boys make leaf pictures and label each type of leaf. This illustration offers a print-salient context in which to talk about the letters next to the leaves that spell their names. This book can thus be used to demonstrate the role of words as conveying meaning. This is a great book for the fall season when children can collect leaves, make pictures, and label them with the appropriate names.

***Good Night, Gorilla* (1994) by Peggy Rathmann**

The zookeeper says goodnight to each of the zoo animals, who he believes are locked up safely for the night...but the gorilla has other ideas. This book uses simple, repetitive text (the words *good* and *night* appear on almost every page), which allows children to become quickly familiar with the words on the page.

***If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* (1985) by Laura Numeroff, illustrated by Felicia Bond**

Written with the same flow as *If You Give a Moose a Muffin* (Numeroff, 1991), this story is one of a mischievous mouse who asks for milk to go with his cookie. That milk gives him a milk mustache, and the adventure begins! This is an excellent book for reinforcing print vocabulary and focusing on book organization.

***My Car* (2001) by Byron Barton**

A book illustrated in bold colors, this is a story of Sam, his car, and how he takes care of it and uses it. It includes some pages with embedded print such as the gas pump, street signs, and the city bus route. But don't put this book down before reading the last page, because a car is not the only thing that Sam drives.

***My Street* (1998) by Rebecca Treays, illustrated by Rachel Wells**

Milly and Jack tell about the streets that they live on, including what is under the street, how long their streets are, and the other buildings that are on their streets. The text in this book is abundant, which may be overwhelming for some young readers; however, the excellent use of text to label the actions and places Milly and Jack encounter makes this book useful for increasing word knowledge. Print is also

embedded in the pictures (e.g., the words *POST OFFICE* displayed on the front of the post office building), which provides another opportunity to draw attention to print.

***Sheep in a Jeep* (1986) by Nancy Shaw, illustrated by Margot Apple**

The novelty of this story will keep children interested to the final page. For starters, who has ever seen sheep drive a jeep? The antics of these sheep driving the jeep, getting stuck in the mud, then finally getting out, only to face a final mishap, make this book a page turner for young children. This book has relatively few words and few lines of words on each page, making it suitable for drawing attention to print, left-to-right movement, and top-to-bottom progression. The repetition of the words *sheep* and *jeep* also makes this book appropriate for word-finding activities.

***Spot Goes to the Farm* (1987) by Eric Hill**

The always curious Spot explores the farm with his dad, looking for some baby animals. This is a lift-the-flap book, which allows children to interact directly with the book and become engaged in guessing what Spot will find next. With lots of questions and exclamations in the text, it is a good book for highlighting the differences in sentence endings and the expressions to match them. Bubbles of speech are present on most pages, representing the animals' noises or words and highlighting the fact that the animals are "talking."

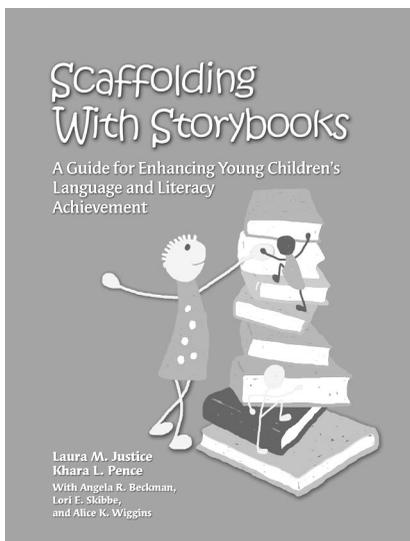
***We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (1992) by Michael Rosen, illustrated by Helen Oxenbury**

Be a part of the excitement as a family of four children and their father goes on a bear hunt. Each environment they pass through on their hunt inspires its own sound effect, which children love to imitate (the long, wavy grass goes "Swishy swashy! Swishy swashy! Swishy swashy!" as they go through it). No one is scared until they come upon that bear! Then the whole family must travel back through each environment before making it to the safety of home! This book is appropriate for drawing attention to a variety of punctuation at the ends of sentences. There are several lines of text per page, so this could also be used in a more challenging task to address top-to-bottom and left-to-right directionality.

The strategies in this chapter emphasize adults' use of a print-related vocabulary as children learn to attend to book organization, the role of words as carrying meaning, text directionality, and words as units of print. Through adults deliberately exposing children to conventions of books and print, children are likely to begin to value print as an object worthy of their attention and will feel comfortable discussing print as they work actively with adults by turning pages and tracking print with their

finger. Chapter 3, on building word knowledge, provides adults with strategies for increasing children's vocabulary in more general ways so that they can talk not only about what the title of their favorite book is but also about how their favorite book makes them think and feel.

Use storybooks to build early literacy skills!



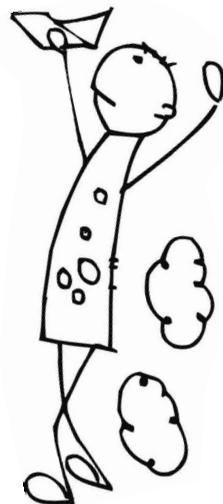
Scaffolding With Storybooks

A Guide for Enhancing Young Children's Language and Literacy Achievement

Laura M. Justice and Khara L. Pence,
with Angela R. Beckman, Lori E. Skibbe,
and Alice K. Wiggins

Use storybook reading to build the early literacy competencies that young children need to become successful readers and learners. Strategies and sample interactions will help you to strengthen children's knowledge of written language, vocabulary, phonology, the alphabet, narrative discourse, and the world around them. Also included are lists of additional storybooks for use in the classroom. As you develop children's abilities and interests in these areas, you will ease their transition to more advanced levels of reading and learning.

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