

Print All Around Us

by Alka Burman

A print-rich environment is one in which children interact with many forms of print including signs, labelled centres, wall stories, word displays, labelled murals, bulletin boards, charts, poems and other materials. With adult support, children gain literacy skills by interacting with print in their surroundings. A print-rich environment allows children to see that reading and writing serve a real purpose, and that print carries meaning. Children who explore print will become motivated to try reading and writing activities.

PRINT IN EARLY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Program staff can set up learning environments to optimize print exposure. Increasing accessibility to print will allow children to have more hands-on experiences with print and the meaning that it conveys.

Library or Book Area

This area is traditionally where we see the majority of the print in a child care room. The book area provides experiences with many genres of books and can be a comfortable and inviting space with additional props and materials that support a child's interaction with books. Picture books, homemade books, photo albums, dual-language books, magazines, newspapers with text in the home language, other books with informational text, poetry books, and wordless books are just some examples of the types of books we can add to the book area. We can also add props like felt board activities, puppets, pillows, a rug and a comfy chair to make this area inviting to the reader.

Art Area

Art areas can provide opportunities for children to make connections between reading and writing. Here children can draw a picture, put their name on their picture and also ask for support in writing a story for their picture. This learning environment

can support the connection between art and print by providing materials not only for drawing, but also for writing out stories. Pre-made books can be provided on the shelf with space for drawing and some lined paper for writing out a story. Adults in the learning environment can continue to support this by being available to take dictation and write down what a child has said about their picture. If there is a staff member who can write in the child's home language as they dictate the story, this is a positive way to develop a connection to print in the home language as well. As children tell their stories and we write them down, we make the ultimate print-rich connection for them.

Dramatic Area and Block Area

Children will often spend a great deal of time making plans in these areas about what they want to play. Adults can write these plans down for them. This area of the child care room can also be made print-rich by providing supportive tools that children can use to extend their learning experiences while making a print connection to the play that they are engaged with. For example, children might be setting up the block area to look like a school bus, so here staff can provide road signs for the children or encourage them to make their own road signs, or they can provide maps that can be included with the block area materials. In the dramatic area, chil-



dren might be setting up a restaurant and staff can give them a clip board, paper and pencil to take an order, or get some real menus. Empty food containers of familiar foods can be used, or parents can bring containers from home with labels in their home language. These familiar food packages will also provide cultural context with print in the classroom.

CLASSROOM LABELLING

Another way to create a print-rich early learning environment is labelling. Labelling helps to create an environment that leads to more self-directed learning. It also helps children in the following ways:

- It helps children to recognize that words have meaning (e.g., setting up a schedule for the day with pictures and print and placing it at children's eye level).
- It infuses the environment with print (e.g., adding signs above each play area).
- It helps children develop responsibility (e.g., putting labels on each toy container so children can easily tidy up on their own).
- It gives visual cues to the location of items (e.g., an art shelf will have a labelled bucket where all the scissors will be placed).
- It adds to the appeal and organization of the child care room (e.g., having a floor plan of

the room with the placement of learning areas labelled).

- Providing labelling in children's home languages in all areas of the program builds home language support in the learning environment and invites parents to also participate in the program.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S INVOLVEMENT WITH PRINT

- Encourage book making activities.
- Let children see you writing as much as possible.
- Provide support and dictation in the home language.
- Talk about what you write with the children.
- Include print in all areas of the program.
- Enable children to see their words written down.
- Have different types of reading materials in all parts of the program.
- Share your own experiences with children.
- Observe the children closely.
- Encourage children to notice print.
- Encourage them to use writing in their play.



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