

School Readiness: Language and Cognitive Development

by Alka Burman

Language and cognitive development is one of the more well-known areas of school readiness. It is often associated with a child's ability to spell their name and recognize letters and simple words; however, it also relates to a child's abilities in basic literacy, their interest in reading, their recognition of numbers and shapes and their awareness of numeracy concepts like number sense and mathematical language.

The Importance of Language and Cognitive Development

An individual's ability to understand and use language will determine their success, both in school and later on in life. During early childhood, the ability to understand, to process and to produce language develops at an exceedingly fast rate. If supported, children's vocabularies will expand dramatically and they will become highly skilled at remembering and practising the language models around them. These early literacy skills can be seen as a very important facet of language development.

Developing Language and Cognitive Skills

Early on, children learn to use language to get information, give information and explore ideas, and by the time they start school they will have generally acquired the ability to understand words and their meanings. Children soon learn that one word can have multiple meanings and that pictures and print represent objects and ideas. From there, they quickly move to matching spoken words with familiar written ones, such as their name or signs in their environment. Identifying some letters and making some letter sound matches, as well as engaging in writing attempts, demonstrates the understanding of the use of writing to share information. Children will move through these different areas of literacy development

with supportive learning environments and encouragement that is provided in their home.

Children who have all the basic literacy skills know how to handle a book. They also show an awareness of rhyming words, know the writing directions and are able to write their own name. These children also show an interest in literacy and numeracy activities and have competencies in memory. Children who are proficient in this area may also be able to read and write simple words or sentences. Lastly, children will have basic numeracy skills such as counting to 20, recognizing shapes and numbers, using one-to-one correspondence, sorting and classifying and understanding simple concepts of time.

Learning Environments That Support Language and Cognition

To foster language and cognitive development, plan activities that help children with their storytelling and writing skills, and provide environments in which books and other print and writing materials are readily available throughout the day.

Children who enjoy stories and being read to, and whose language and cognitive development is appropriate for their age, are children who are prepared to learn and succeed in school.



Supporting Language and Cognitive Development in the Home

There are many ways that parents can support these skills at home:

Reading to their child:

- Making books, stories and storytelling a part of the child's daily routine will encourage his or her love of reading.
- Story time isn't just for bedtime. There are many chances to encourage reading throughout the day. From reading cereal boxes at the kitchen table to making a grocery list together—all these things help to encourage a love of reading.

Using rhymes, games and songs:

- Rhymes and songs are fun for parents and children, but they also build a child's understanding and appreciation of language—how it works and how it's used.
- Children learn a lot of new words through songs, rhymes, riddles and chants. Developing their vocabulary also gives them more knowledge of words that they will be learning to read and write later on.

Talking about what's happening:

- Labelling and putting names to what they see also helps to extend children's vocabularies and gives them a good foundation of words that they will later learn to read and write.

Using daily routines as opportunities to learn basic literacy skills:

- Cooking provides opportunities to measure and count—key numeracy skills for school readiness.
- A trip to the grocery store creates opportunities for children to interact with print-rich environments, reading signs and labels on food items. They can also count and measure what is purchased.
- Family time spent playing board games and doing other activities will further support language and cognitive development. Reading simple instructions, counting their turn on the board and reading print on the game board are just some of the opportunities to engage in language and literacy in the home.
- Limiting computer and television time and instead choosing activities that support language and cognitive development provides more significant opportunities to build these skills in the home environment.



Alka Burman, Early Literacy Specialist, Parenting Specialist, Childhood Diversity Trainer, Registered Early Childhood Educator with special supports and services provided to programs supporting Home language and English language learning. Alka can be contacted at burmana@peelregion.ca.



17 Fairmeadow Avenue, Suite 211, Toronto, ON M2P 1W6 — Tel. 416.395.5027 | Fax. 416.395.5190 | www.cmascanada.ca
Funded by: Citizenship and Immigration Canada / Financé par: Citoyenneté et Immigration Canada

Supporting Child Care in the Settlement Community / Soutenir les services de garde d'enfants dans la communauté d'accueil