Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for Ages 3 to 5

Child's Growth and Learning

Creative Arts
Science
Mathematics
Social & Emotional Development
Approaches to Learning
Health & Physical Development
Language & Literacy Development
Language and literacy skills develop through talking, listening, playing, reading, writing, and learning the skills that adults use to communicate. Children develop the foundation for all communication in the early childhood years. They begin with nonverbal interactions (smiling, facial expressions, gestures), and then gradually move toward spoken language, sign language or other alternative communication methods to practice the rules of communication in their culture and family. Between three and five years of age, children begin to understand how oral language is reflected in written symbols (letters), and learn to create written symbols to communicate their ideas. Language and literacy development is promoted and supported through play, especially pretend play, and through music, rhyme, and rhythm.

A solid foundation in oral language development in the early years before a child enters school will promote success in reading and writing in the future. Young children who have rich language and literacy experiences are more likely to experience success in learning to read independently. In fact, a study by Hart and Risley at the University of Kansas found that the more words children heard from their parents or caregivers before they were three, the higher their IQ was, and the better they did in school.
Listening and Understanding (LL.01)

Widely Held Expectations

- Child listens to directions and conversations with understanding
  - Demonstrates understanding of the meaning of stories, songs and poems
- Child follows directions in sequences
  - Follows single, multi-step, and complex directions in order
- Child listens to others and responds to feelings and expressed ideas
  - Responds verbally or by alternative means to simple, direct, conversational sentences
- Child demonstrates understanding of home and/or English languages during social interactions, program directions, and activities

Learning in Action: Examples

The Child:

- Follows directions from the adult such as “Please wash your hands, then sit at the table.”
- Retells main events of stories, and repeats familiar songs and poems
- Carries on a conversation with another person, either verbally or by alternative means, that extends a thought or idea
- Listens to stories that are read aloud, and shows understanding through body language, pointing to pictures, or retelling the story

The Adult:

- Builds upon children’s comprehension skills by listening, responding, and asking questions
- Greets children daily by name and with a short conversation
- Engages children in stories, songs and poems throughout the day
- Intentionally incorporates new vocabulary words into the learning environment

The Environment Includes:

- Stories, songs, words, games and daily schedules in English and the languages of the non-English speaking children
- Ways to assist children in the understanding of new vocabulary, such as a word wall, pictures, or labels
- Defined space for children to look at books with carpet squares, beanbags or soft chairs so children can listen at story time without being too close
- Accessible books (on low shelves, in baskets, or bins on the floor)
- Opportunities to listen to stories/songs independently or in small group situations (listening area protected from more active areas to reduce distractions)
- Technology activities available to support and extend children’s language learning (smart boards, audio books, computer programs assistive technology)
- Color-coded tape for play and stop buttons for independence when listening to books on audio players
- Visual cues (photos, a visual schedule board or a video) to support listening and understanding of step by step directions, such as washing hands or setting the table

**Strategies to Support Listening and Understanding**

**Teaching with Intent Throughout the Day:**

- Present information in a variety of ways with a variety of materials. For example, the adult may read a book to the children, while giving each child a felt picture that corresponds to the information in the story. When the adult reads about their picture, the child puts their picture up on the felt board.
- Make learning meaningful by helping children apply their everyday experiences to concepts. For example, the adult introduces magnets by showing the children various magnets and asking children what they know about them. Children reply that they have them on their refrigerators at home. The adult asks what makes them stick to the refrigerator and the lesson about how magnets work follows.

**Supporting Children with a Wide Range of Abilities:**

- Provide adaptations to support children with communication boards and auditory communication tools during their daily routines. Sign language and Braille are used, as needed, to enable children to participate in literacy activities. Photographs can be used to help children break down parts of stories or literacy activities.
- Use assistive technology such as computer/smart devices to listen to books.

**Supporting English Language Learners:**

- Pair non-English speaking children with bilingual peers and adults.
- Meet with the child’s family on an ongoing basis and support his/her home language development and the development of English.
- Continue to interact even though the children do not offer verbal responses.

**Supporting Children from a Variety of Cultures:**

- Use information from families and observations of children to individualize services to help children learn meaning from directions and conversations.
- Teach children what is and what is not acceptable in the classroom/group culture.
Speaking and Communicating (LL.02)

Widely Held Expectations

- Child communicates needs, wants, thoughts, ideas and feelings through words, gestures, actions, or expressions
  - Uses sentences that include two or more separate ideas using new vocabulary that has been introduced
  - Tells about another place or time
  - Child understands different rules for using language and variation in voice level
  - Child begins to understand body language as a nonverbal means of communication
- Child communicates for a variety of purposes
  - Attempts to solve problems with other children independently through communicating
  - Greets and initiates interactions with adults and peers

Learning in Action: Examples

The Child:
- Speaks clearly enough, or uses alternative communication methods, to be understood
- Asks questions to acquire more information
- Uses “please,” “thank you,” and “excuse me,” with reminders
- Uses language for a variety of purposes (role playing, rhyming, using props, describing feelings, telling jokes, conversing)
- Uses eye contact (as culturally and individually appropriate)

The Adult:
- Builds on children’s interests to introduce new vocabulary and ideas
- Asks open-ended questions (requiring more than a one-word response) throughout the day
- Provides opportunities for children to engage in turn taking and dialogue in conversation
- Repeats and extends children’s responses (Child says, “Leaves.” Adult says, “Yes, red leaves and branches on trees and ….”)
- Encourages communication during daily routines

The Environment Includes:
- A variety of activity centers that encourage children to interact and communicate with adults and peers
- Props, books, materials and manipulatives for telling and retelling events and stories
Strategies to Support Speaking and Communicating

Teaching with Intent Throughout the Day:

- Use advanced language with children by extending their language and using new or unfamiliar vocabulary:
  
  Teacher: “Tell me about your new coat.”
  
  
  Teacher: “You have many different colors on your coat. It’s a multicolored coat!”

- Use open-ended questions that require children to put together language to communicate complex ideas such as, “Tell me about…”, “Share your story with the group,” or “What do you think?” and “How do you know…”

Supporting Children with a Wide Range of Abilities:

- Use alternate modes of communication when needed (sign language, Braille, gestures, visual cues, picture communication boards, voice output devices).

- Point to pictures when using a communication board with a child with communication needs; encourage the child to make choices and communicate with others.

- Teach peers how to interact and communicate with child with communication needs.

- Include adapted books with manipulative and voice output tools throughout the learning environment.

Supporting English Language Learners:

- Incorporate children’s home language(s) whenever and wherever possible.

- Avoid speaking to the children in English and then immediately repeat the same information in the home language. Many experts caution that simultaneous interpretation may be distracting or confusing to children.

- Utilize small group situations to support children learning English, and facilitate conversation among children and between children and adults.

- Learn key words and phrases in each child’s home language.

- Assess children’s progress in acquiring their home language and English.

- Utilize technology to offer activities in other languages such as apps that translate words in many languages.

Supporting Children from a Variety of Cultures:

- Create an open and respectful dialogue with the child’s family about first and second language development and ways to support child’s home language and culture development.

- Encourage people to share items representing their culture and communicate about it.
Phonological Awareness (LL.03)

Widely Held Expectations

- Child shows knowledge of phonological awareness (the ability to hear and understand the different sounds of language)
  - Recognizes matching sounds and rhymes in familiar nursery rhymes, songs, stories and poems
  - Spontaneously repeats songs, rhymes and chants, and creates nonsense words
- Child progresses in listening and telling differences in phonemes (smallest parts of sound in a spoken word)
  - Identifies words that begin with the same sound (alliteration)
- Child recognizes the connection between spoken and written words
  - Shows growing ability to hear and discriminate separate syllables in words
  - Isolates beginning and ending sounds of printed or spoken words

Learning in Action: Examples

The Child:
- Listens to two words and determines whether or not they rhyme
- Notices that several words or names begin with the same sound
- Claps hands for each syllable in words
- Plays with sounds to create new words

The Adult:
- Provides opportunities for children to hear sounds in their home language
- Gives children the opportunity to create rhymes with familiar words (bat, hat, cat)
- Gives children the opportunity to repeat sounds in their names and other words
- Draws children’s attention to the separate sounds of spoken language through playful songs, games and rhymes
- Models appropriate language, communication, reading and writing
- Incorporates phonemic and alliteration awareness within children’s activities that are based on their interests and developmental levels rather than using rote memorization such as flashcards or worksheets
- Uses story time to teach literacy concepts (rhyming, alliteration)
- Writes what children say so they see the connection between their spoken word and how it looks in writing
The Environment Includes:
- A quiet place where children may listen to a variety of nursery rhymes and stories
- Materials like magazines or catalogs for children to find pictures of items that begin with the same letter or same number of syllables or rhymes with child’s name
- Opportunities for children to make visual connections with rhyming words and word/letter families (word wall, pocket chart, collections of materials that start with same letter)
- Picture books that have easy-to-follow stories, rhymes, repetition and simple language

Strategies to Support Phonological Awareness

Teaching with Intent Throughout the Day:
- Create a rhyming collection: Help children find objects that rhyme and place them in a container (sock, rock, block.)
- Recite nursery rhymes with your child. Create different rhyming words that can substitute for the ones in the nursery rhyme (Hickory Dickory Dock, The Mouse Ran Up the Sock.)

Supporting Children with a Wide Range of Abilities:
- Support participation in awareness of rhyming sounds, encouraging children to participate on any level possible, using their multiple senses and adaptations if needed.
- Pair spoken words with items you can see or touch to learn rhyming sounds (point to picture while saying that word.)

Supporting English Language Learners:
- Use gestures, body languages, props, and other visual cues to help aid children’s comprehension of rhyme and alliteration.
- Accept minimal responses such as the nod of the head or a smile when asking children if words rhyme or if words begin with the same sound.
- Model language by narrating actions using self-talk strategies (“I am putting these two together because they rhyme. They sound the same; cat, bat.”)

Supporting Children from a Variety of Cultures:
- Include diverse cultures and languages in the environment and the curriculum.
- Ask families for words that rhyme in their home language, if applicable, or words that start with the same sound.
Book Knowledge & Appreciation (LL.04)

Widely Held Expectations

- Child demonstrates interest in and appreciation of reading-related activities
  - Shows interest when stories are read
  - Relates events in story to own knowledge and experience
- Child increases knowledge about books and how they typically are read
  - Holds book right side up
  - Turns pages front to back
  - Knows specific words related to books such as author and illustrator
  - Understands that the print describes what is happening in the picture
- Child learns to sequence, predict, and retell a story
  - Picture reads; tells about the story from the pictures on the cover or in the book

Learning in Action: Examples

The Child:
- Asks people to read stories, signs, notes
- Answers questions about a story that has been read or repeats parts of the story
- Chooses a favorite book
- Pretends to read book titles/simple stories
- Tells stories to others, real and imaginary
- Demonstrates an interest in different types of literature: nonfiction, poetry, etc.
- Knows how to care for books

The Adult:
- Provides print-rich environment and reads to children, both individually and in small and large groups throughout the day
- Places books and signs/posters in all interest areas on topics that are relevant
- Reads books with rich descriptive vocabulary, exploring and extending children’s understanding of the meaning of new words
- Assists children in relating stories to events in their own lives and in making predictions
- Uses story time to teach literacy concepts such as author, illustrator, title page, directionality and print to picture match
The Environment Includes:

- Soft, cozy place for looking at books (with pillows, comfortable chairs, rugs)
- Many types of children’s books; reference books, audio books, electronic books, big books, board books
- Some books displayed on accessible shelves with covers facing outward
- Books and displays that celebrate the differences of all children and families, including those who are not represented in the learning environment

Strategies to Support Book Knowledge & Appreciation

Teaching with Intent Throughout the Day:

- Make books with children that include all the parts (front and back covers, title page with their name as author and illustrator, drawings with words).
- Have children share a favorite book that they have read. Create a location where they can display that book for others to read.
- Make real-life connections to activities and events to books that you read.

Supporting Children with a Wide Range of Abilities:

- Modify activities and materials to enable participation. For example, page puffers added to books enable children to turn pages without help, and sign language and Braille dots can be added to books.
- Use book holders and page turners if child is unable to hold the book independently.

Supporting English Language Learners:

- Provide access to many types of children’s books, reference books, audio books, electronic books, in home languages.
- Use actual names of people and objects rather than pronouns when looking at and reading books.
- Be observant: notice what children are interested in, what they might want to talk about, and what they know, and provide books which reflect those interests.
- Continue to read and interact when reading to children even though the children do not offer verbal responses.

Supporting Children from a Variety of Cultures:

- Provide a variety of books and magazines that portray men and women of all ages and different ethnic groups engaged in jobs that are familiar to most children in the community.
- Use materials related to your children’s cultures. Children respond when they see books, topics, characters, and images that are familiar.
Print Awareness & Concepts (LL.05)

Widely Held Expectations

- Child shows an awareness of print as a form of meaningful communication
- Follows the print on the page, moving eyes from left to right and top to bottom
  - Identifies some letters and numbers
  - Recognizes and begins to write own name
  - “Reads” familiar environmental print such as logos, posters, signs
- Child understands that each spoken word can be written down and read
- Child recognizes words as a unit of print and understands letters form words

Learning in Action: Examples

The Child:
- Asks people to read stories, signs, or notes
- Begins to recognize several words including own name, or a few simple phrases or sentences
- Points to words using a left to right progression when “reading” picture books
- Recognizes and identifies specific letters from their name when looking at book titles or environmental print
- Wants to read (pretend or recall) stories to others
- Begins using print for communication in play activities, or to label artwork

The Adult:
- Writes children’s explanations or labels on projects, artwork, block constructions
- Encourages children to help read the job chart, program rules, and daily schedule
- Encourages children’s interest and their attempts to copy or write their own name
- Plans literacy activities that are relevant and meaningful for children. For example, when learning about pumpkins, the letter “P” would be explored and learned about

The Environment Includes:
- Many books, pictures and visual examples of written words, such as printed messages, ideas, pictures and print created by children
- Pictures, posters, labels on cubbies, materials, toy shelves
- Easily accessible writing area filled with a variety of materials (books, journals, children’s names, signs, children’s stories, labels, alphabet charts, word wall, pencils, markers)
Strategies to Support Print Awareness and Concepts

Teaching with Intent Throughout the Day:

- When reading to children, run a finger along the lines of print, and point out and enunciate words.
- Take children’s dictation on art work, labels, messages, stories, songs, rules, shared experiences, and plans. Ask where to write on the paper when taking dictation and to reinforce print concept. Read the dictation back to them verbatim.
- Create an environmental print wall. Have the children collect a variety of cereal boxes, juice cartons, coupons, etc., with print that they can read. An adaptation of this could be to create an A to Z environmental print book.
- Use simple, easy to read font; cutesy fonts can confuse learners.
- Use upper and lower letters correctly, and be sure spelling is accurate.
- Use print from left to right, as this is how children are learning to read; avoid stacking letters even if the item is tall and slender.

Supporting Children with a Wide Range of Abilities:

- Support print awareness through modification of print using multisensory means. Raised print and addition of sign and Braille symbols helps create a memory of letters and words for children.
- Pair print with pictures and use a gesture with print to help a child associate new information with known information.
- Ensure that auditory and motor skills are used with print/visual information, which helps children to create an association that leads to a stronger memory.

Supporting English Language Learners:

- Label the environment in the home language of the children as well as in English (in different, but consistent colors).
- Label the environment with pictures and words from each language in a different color, for example, English in black and home language in blue.
- Read books that are developmentally appropriate and visually stimulating, which match their interests, out loud and often.

Supporting Children from a Variety of Cultures:

- Learn how to pronounce and write each child’s name correctly.
- Ensure children and families can experience their written home language in the environment whenever possible.
Early Writing and Alphabet Knowledge (LL.05)

Widely Held Expectations

- Child shows an interest in early writing
  - Uses scribbles, shapes, or pictures to represent specific thoughts, ideas, stories
- Child progresses in the identification of letters
  - Identifies some letters and numbers
  - Uses pretend writing in play as a purposeful activity
- Child recognizes and/or writes own name on artwork or possessions
- Child recognizes that letters represent sounds

Learning in Action: Examples

The Child:
- Uses magnetic letters, stamps, or other alphabet materials to form own name
- Labels a drawing with several randomly placed, letter-like shapes
- Copies letters from signs and labels posted around the room
- Experiments with various writing tools and materials
- Recognizes that writing is a way of communicating for a variety of purposes such as giving information, sharing stories, or giving an opinion

The Adult:
- Displays children's names on artwork, cubbies, and all personal supplies
- Models the use of writing and drawing in everyday activities
- Promotes literacy-related play activities and respects children's attempts at writing
- Provides opportunities for children to express their thoughts and ideas through the developmental stages of scribbles to conventional print

The Environment Includes:
- A variety of writing materials to encourage children's attempts at writing
- Books and writing tools, from crayons to computers, in each area of play
- Displays of children's work that reflect meaningful experiences (art, beginning attempts at writing, response to books or experiences) around the room at child's eye level
- Displays of the alphabet and environmental print at child's eye level
Strategies to Support Early Writing and Alphabet Knowledge

Teaching with Intent Throughout the Day:

- Provide writing materials of all kinds throughout the room (colored pencils, markers, pens, crayons, chalk, and chalkboards, unlined paper, notepads, sticky notes, labels, wallpaper samples, grocery bags).
- Model how to hold writing tools and scissors while referring children to one another for help. Children may learn dexterity and coordination skills better by watching and imitating their peers.
- Go on a letter hunt. Choose a letter of the alphabet (possibly the same letter that the child’s name begins with), and find objects that begin with that letter. Have children say the name of the object out loud to make sure that it begins with the right sound. This letter hunt is fun to do indoors and outdoors.

Supporting Children with a Wide Range of Abilities:

- Support early writing and letter knowledge through a multisensory approach. For example, form letters with play dough, build letters out of blocks, write with many types of tools, cut letters out of sandpaper, write letters with finger in flour or shaving cream.
- Provide opportunities for children to write with their fingers as well as many modified writing tools to help them understand the relationship between scribbles and the written word.
- Incorporate sign language and Braille dots as needed in the media a child encounters.

Supporting English Language Learners:

- Display alphabet and environmental print in home and English languages, at child’s eye level.
- Be observant; notice what children are interested in/what they might want to write about.
- Use actual names of people and objects rather than pronouns and encourage children to write those names.
- Offer one-on-one assistance as children experiment with writing tools.
- Help children write about their world by labeling objects in the environment in both their home language and English.

Supporting Children from a Variety of Cultures:

- Create an environment in which children encounter objects, pictures, and people that they can identify with.
- Connect activities to what children experience in their homes and communities (oral stories, environmental print, family recipes.)
Print Resources


Early Dual Language Learning, Fred Genesee (2008).

Early Childhood Calendar: Suggestions, ideas, and tips to help prepare children for kindergarten through literacy-based play and interaction. Nebraska Department of Education www.education.ne.gov/read.

English Language Learners in the Preschool Setting DVD, Designing Curriculum to Meet Standards with Evidence-Based Practices, Arlitt Instructional Media, University of Cincinnati (2011).


Learning To Read And Write : Developmentally Appropriate Practices For Young Children, Susan B. Neuman, Carol Copple, and Sue Bredekamp, NAEYC (2006).


So Much More Than ABC’s: The Early Phases of Reading and Writing, Judith Schickedanz (2012).

Use Your Words: How Teacher Talk Helps Children Learn, Carol Garhart Mooney (2005).

What Teachers Need to Know About Language, Carolyn Temple Adger, Catherine E. Snow and Donna Christian (2002).

These resources, and many others, may be available for Nebraska residents to borrow from the Early Childhood Training Center’s Media Center by visiting http://www.education.ne.gov/oec/mediactr.html or by calling 1-402-557-6885 or 1-800-89CHILD.
Online Resources


Annotated Bibliographies (click on link below for a description of topical resources available through the Early Childhood Training Center’s Media Center):

- Early Language and Literacy, updated on 1/23/12


Early Childhood Research Institute on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services http://clas.uuiuc.edu/.


PBS Parents Play & Learn: theme-based interactive games and simple hands-on activities that connect math and literacy skills to everyday experiences; designed to build on a child’s natural curiosity about his or her everyday world and to encourage dialogue between kids and parents http://pbskids.org/mobile/pbs-parents-play--learn.html.

Reading strategies, lessons, and activities designed to help young children learn how to read and read better http://www.readingrockets.org/, http://www.literacyconnections.com/Parents.php.

Starting Young English Language Learners on the Road to Success- Stepping Stones: 100 free lessons, available in both English and Spanish, around early learning themes or units http://www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/items/early_childhood103.html.

Supporting Literacy in Natural Environments and On-the-Go Resources: 14 home and community activities show how to promote language, and early literacy during everyday activities, in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Somali and Russian http://www.walearning.com/resources/.

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<td>004.05A4 004.05B 004.06C 004.06D 004.06E</td>
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<td>Literacy 16a.4.</td>
<td>Literacy Knowledge &amp; Skills: Alphabet Knowledge</td>
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<td>Literacy 16b.2.</td>
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<td>Literacy 19a.5.</td>
<td>Literacy 19a.6.</td>
<td>Literacy Knowledge &amp; Skills: Early Writing</td>
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