

such interaction among young children. Teachers support dramatic play, such as spontaneous pretend play, dramatizing their own and other people's stories, and reenacting literature, as an important way to help children develop literacy skills. Teachers might have children create group morning message charts as well as individual and group stories, and then share them aloud in order to understand better the connection between what is said and what is written. They might also use class poems and songs as a further means to reinforce these connections. Accomplished early childhood teachers might use interactive writing to begin to teach the conventions of written language.

### ***Listening and Speaking***

Accomplished early childhood teachers understand that literacy is developed by building on every young child's oral language skills, including the development of listening comprehension skills, a rich oral vocabulary, the ability to understand and express complex thoughts through spoken language, and the ability to reflect on language. Although these skills develop naturally, teachers use explicit instruction and rich language experiences based on children's individual needs to expand children's use and appreciation of oral language. Teachers foster and model listening and speaking. They also explicitly teach speaking and listening skills without hindering children's natural expressive abilities, diminishing the importance of their families' primary language, or dampening their desire to continue learning. (See [Standard V—Assessing Children's Development and Learning](#).)

Accomplished early childhood teachers know that listening is more than just the physical act of hearing; it is the process of receiving and attending to meaningful auditory stimuli, processing sounds, and comprehending auditory messages. Teachers know that attending to the speaker is fundamental to listening. Therefore, teachers model for young children how to stop what they are doing when someone begins to speak, look directly at the speaker, listen for main ideas, and ask questions for clarification. Teachers encourage children to pay attention to such non-verbal cues as body language and facial expressions in order to understand better and relate to others. Accomplished teachers explain that various cultures have differing conventions for nonverbal communication, and they help children interpret these differences when they arise.

Accomplished early childhood teachers are knowledgeable about distinct purposes for listening, such as informational, critical, appreciative, relational, and discriminative. They provide experiences that allow young children to listen for all these purposes, and they help children develop listening strategies to match each purpose. For example, interactive listening activities such as call and response foster question-and-answer interactions.

Accomplished early childhood teachers are well versed in the literature that examines the connection between oral language development and the acquisition of reading and writing skills, both for native English speakers and for those learning English as a new language. Teachers use this knowledge base to design appropriate

learning experiences for children of different ages and with different levels of language and literacy in their first language and in English.

Accomplished teachers provide children with opportunities to participate in rich and varied experiences with spoken language. They engage children in meaningful conversations. They retell what they have seen and restate what they have heard, and they encourage children to do the same. They provide activities and materials that promote children's conversations with peers and adults, both one-on-one and in groups. They encourage children to discuss stories, the things they are learning in school, and their own experiences. Teachers invite children to play with words and sounds through such vehicles as rhymes, chants, and songs, and they foster children's awareness of the rhythmic patterns in language. Accomplished teachers are constantly working to expand and enrich children's vocabulary. They support children's presentation of information in clear and well structured ways, model for children how to adjust their speech and language depending on their audience and purpose, and provide an environment in which children feel safe communicating their thoughts.

Accomplished early childhood teachers show respect for diverse language traditions. They demonstrate the importance of oral traditions to various cultures by teaching fables, fairy tales, folktales, folk songs, and legends in age-appropriate ways. Teachers extend opportunities to people of many cultures to share their rich oral histories with the class. For example, an accomplished teacher might invite family and community members to sing a traditional song or chant from their native culture. Accomplished teachers provide the necessary support for children whose first language is not English, and they understand the issues that arise when standard English is not the language a child speaks on a regular basis. Accomplished teachers make the effort to understand how literacy is understood and used in the child's home culture and family, and they apply their findings in ways that increase children's prospects for success.

Accomplished early childhood teachers accept and value young children's unique modes of expression and distinctive dialects as they guide them toward conventional speaking. Teachers recognize that mastering the conventions of formal language is one key to children's future success. Accomplished teachers model standard English in the classroom and find appropriate ways to incorporate enriched language in their speech. When children's utterances are fragmentary or vague, accomplished teachers recast those utterances as complete sentences containing precise and vivid language, and they do so in a way that is natural and respectful, helping children see how to use oral language in a more sophisticated way. Teachers also use their knowledge of oral language development to identify children who may benefit from assessment by a specialist. In the case of children who need speech and language interventions, accomplished teachers collaborate with specialists and families and provide related support in the classroom.

## **Reading**

Accomplished early childhood teachers recognize that in order for children to become proficient readers, teachers must provide a comprehensive, balanced approach to instruction which includes explicit, systematic reading skills development. Teachers of younger children incorporate the components of teaching early literacy (print awareness, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, vocabulary, and comprehension) and teachers of older children incorporate the components of teaching reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension and fluency) every day.

Accomplished early childhood teachers know the broad range of print-awareness skills and provide children with opportunities to acquire these skills. When reading to preschool and kindergarten children, teachers focus children's attention on such features as book concepts, print directionality, and differentiating pictures from print. Because they understand the challenges young children face when attempting to map spoken language onto print, teachers often point to the text as they read in order to help children track the text. Teachers of primary-aged children help learners begin to understand how authors use headings, graphs, and pictures to aid readers in constructing meaning from the text.

Accomplished early childhood teachers know that explicit instruction in phonological awareness is important to children's development as readers and that children's knowledge progresses from the whole (words in sentences) to the smallest parts (sounds in words). While teachers provide children with opportunities to acquire the full range of phonological awareness skills, including separating sentences into words, clapping syllables in words, and blending, segmenting, and substituting phonemes in words, accomplished teachers of preschool and kindergarten children emphasize learning opportunities focused on early phonological awareness skills. Teachers of primary-aged children emphasize the phonemic awareness that will help children decode unknown words.

Accomplished early childhood teachers know that alphabet knowledge includes identifying and naming letters and producing letter-sound associations, and they know the role that alphabet knowledge plays in children's ability to decode and spell words. Teachers provide young children with both playful learning opportunities and explicit teaching strategies to help them learn letter names, often beginning with the letters in the child's name. Teachers know that although children learn some letter-sound associations when they learn some letter names, primary-aged children also need explicit phonics instruction. Teachers provide phonics instruction and help children learn how to apply this knowledge to decode written words. Early childhood teachers are aware of issues that affect the alphabet awareness of English language learners. They know that not all children's home languages have a written form, that not all languages are written alphabetically, and that some children will not have experienced all the sounds of English in their home languages. Accomplished teachers are sensitive to the ways in which children's diverse language backgrounds affect their ability to learn sound-letter associations in English and provide extra support when necessary.

Accomplished early childhood teachers know that the size of a child's vocabulary is a strong predictor of reading comprehension. Therefore, early childhood teachers use a variety of research-based instructional strategies, such as repeatedly reading books with rich vocabularies, providing child-friendly definitions of words while reading to children, and creating word walls to increase children's expressive and receptive vocabularies. Teachers also recognize the importance of providing explicit vocabulary instruction.

Accomplished early childhood teachers recognize that the primary goal of reading is comprehension. They help young children master reading comprehension skills, such as identifying main ideas and key details, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, understanding the sequence of events, comparing and contrasting ideas and details within and across texts, and analyzing literary elements such as plot and theme. Teachers understand that children need to apply a wide range of strategies, such as predicting, generating questions, rereading, creating graphic organizers, discussing, and summarizing to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, compare, and appreciate texts. Teachers encourage children to ask and answer questions before, during, and after reading. Teachers model for children how to make connections that link text to self, text to text, and text to the world. Accomplished teachers of preschool and kindergarten children begin young learners' acquisition of these comprehension skills and strategies through regular read alouds. As children transition to reading texts themselves, they learn to apply these skills and strategies in their independent reading.

Accomplished early childhood teachers know that fluency involves more than the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression; fluency also contributes to comprehension. Teachers read aloud regularly in class to model fluency, and they have young children read to each other, sometimes rereading texts. Teachers have children read aloud a variety of texts, such as stories and poems, and in a variety of formats, such as reader's theatre. Teachers understand the importance of teaching children to vary their reading rate depending upon the type of text and the purpose for reading.

Accomplished early childhood teachers create a print-rich environment. They make ample use of functional print in the environment, such as posters explaining how to use equipment. They also use environmental print, such as arrows showing how to turn lights off and on, because they know that young children engage in reading environmental print, such as road signs, restaurant logos, or pictures on packages, before they read print in books. Teachers use environmental print to foster young children's understanding of concepts about letters, words, and messages. They provide children with a wealth of appealing reading materials in a range of formats, including print and digital, and at varying levels of complexity. They expose children to texts that represent diverse topics, genres, cultures, and time periods, and they expose children to reading for both information and enjoyment. They use literacy stations or learning centers to provide children with opportunities to reinforce reading skills and strategies, and they share their own love of reading, model good reading habits, and instill the love of reading in children.