



raring to read &

write

Whatever else you may have planned to teach today, your children will be practising their literacy skills all day long. They will be speaking or listening, and maybe reading and writing as part of every activity that they do.

Combining aspects from different parts of the curriculum is recognised as good practice. You might be talking (CLL) about the size (PSRN) of the giant's boots as you work together (PSED) to make a model (CD). Combining activities makes sense for you and your planning as it's an efficient use of your time and resources. More importantly, it helps children make sense of their learning.

Teaching literacy as part of other curriculum areas ensures that the skills children are practising will be set in a context, and have importance. Writing a letter to Father Christmas or replying "Yes, please" to a birthday party invitation brings its own rewards beyond the initial sense of pride in successfully putting words down on paper. Giving children a purpose for writing helps to build their confidence in themselves as writers.

Making learning as interactive as possible creates a sense of fun and involvement which will carry the children's interest and enthusiasm in productive ways. It becomes part of children's play, and it's as they play that children challenge themselves and attempt more.

Gill Coulson and Lynn Cousins suggest ways to develop children's literacy skills as they play...

Sharing ideas

Children's writing and reading is built on their ability to express themselves verbally. As they retell events from real life or stories, they are recalling details and sequencing key events.

Giving children opportunities for conversations and discussions helps them learn to take turns as they listen and respond to others, widens their vocabulary and encourages precision in their use of language.

TRY:

■ Encourage a small group of children to negotiate by giving them a large piece of fabric and some string or pegs. Challenge them to create a shelter outdoors to keep the hot sun off them. Where will it be? How will they fasten it on? Be ready to help with this. Take notice of the group dynamics as they work to spot, e.g., those children with lots of ideas, or those who can persuade others.

■ Provide a selection of dressing-up clothes and accessories as part of your work on 'people who help us'. Take it in turns to pose behind an old picture frame and have a photograph taken.



Reading, writing and role-play:

- Leave a note on the table from Mummy asking Red Riding Hood to take the basket of fruit to her Grandma.
- Write letters, postcards and envelopes in the post office.
- The Ugly Sisters can write a list of jobs for Cinderella to do.
- Write an enormous letter from the giant for the children to find in Jack's cottage.



TRY:

- Cover a display board in your book area with a bright, spring-like colour. Add some yellow cushions. Display

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Help the children to form a sentence to describe their photo, "This is Saskia and she is a firefighter." "My name is Jake and I am a nurse."

- Put a selection of small world toys in a basket and ask three of the children to choose one each. Explain to the group that they're going to make up a story involving the three chosen objects. Remind them of familiar story openings. Then take it in turns to make up

the story, adding to each other's ideas as you go along. Will it end 'happily ever after'?

World of books

Sharing books with young children is recognised as a vital, motivating first step on their journey to becoming readers. Creating an attractive book area will encourage children to take an interest, and helping them to respond to labels, names and notices introduces the idea that print communicates information. Using non-fiction books to explore a favourite topic or follow a recipe also reinforces this.

some pictures of ducks and the words of the rhyme Five Little Ducks. Share a selection of books, fiction and non-fiction, about ducks with the children. Leave these on display and encourage the children to find others to add to the collection. Perhaps they would like to bring in a toy duck.

- When you have some new books delivered, write their titles onto individual pieces of paper. Pin these up where the children can reach them. Provide stickers in three colours.

Explain to the children that they're going to find out which books are the most popular. Throughout the week children share the books with an adult, either at home or in the nursery. How much did they enjoy it? Put the sticker of your choice on that book's paper.

- ✓ Green = I really enjoyed it.
- ✓ Yellow = It was OK.
- ✓ Red = It wasn't my favourite.

Making books

It's exciting being an author of a book – children love to see their name on the cover. Making books helps them learn how a book works and provides reading material special to the child.

Don't stick to the traditional format!

- Try extra-large shared books where children complete separate pages.
- Make tiny books for toys and dolls.
- Fold strips of card to make concertina books.
- Create 'lift-the-flap' books.
- Produce one on the computer.
- Cut the book into a simple shape reflecting the theme, e.g. a tall, thin lighthouse or a sturdy teapot.
- Display the finished books attractively in your book area – e.g. penguin-shaped books sitting on an iceberg. Encourage the children to take their books home to share them with their family.



When everyone has had a chance to read and grade the books, count up the stickers and declare the winner.

■ Make some labels for the beds in the hospital, and name badges for doctors and nurses. Can the children put the dolls into their allocated beds, or find their own name badge when they get dressed up to play? Make a doctor and a nurse badge for each child so that they can choose the role they want to take.



Writing it down

Young children need fun ways to develop their fine motor skills, strengthening their fingers and encouraging them to make marks, before learning to form the basic letter shapes. Don't forget that children also learn by watching you modelling the writing process. Opportunities for experimental and freely-produced early writing demonstrate the changes, from random marks and symbols to groups of letters or even words, as the children's understanding of letter formation and phonics develops.

TRY:

- Provide the children with a variety of writing tools for writing outside. Before you go outside, remind them to start from the left side. Who knows which side that is?
- ✓ Use blunt sticks in damp sand
- ✓ Draw with chalk on hard surfaces.
- ✓ Make letter shapes on the grass with pebbles, cones and leaves.
- ✓ Squirt water from washing up bottles onto dry hard surfaces.

This activity should be well-supervised to encourage good writing habits and for the children's safety.

■ Help the children make welcome cards for the new children joining your setting. Create the letter together on the computer, leaving spaces for names. Print out the letters, one for each new child. Help the children select the name of one of the new children for writing on the top of the letter, or encourage individual children to write their name at the end. Decide what's most suitable for your children's abilities.

■ Write name labels with the children and use them to create a seating plan for a wedding. Explain that the bride and groom

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plan where their guests will sit for the celebration meal. Collect together all the name cards, then encourage the children to choose two of them to be the bride and groom, and select a good place for them to sit. Take turns to set out the rest of the name cards around the tables. Now help the children to find their own name and sit in their place.

Try other arrangements:

- ✓ Different children could be the bride and groom.
- ✓ Boys and girls could sit alternately round the table.
- ✓ Boys and girls could sit opposite each other, or at separate tables.
- ✓ More able children could use a simple, drawn seating plan to position the name cards on the table.

And finally...

As you do your planning, collect together storybooks, non-fiction books, poems and rhymes, songs and music that will support your chosen theme of work. Take every opportunity to enjoy these books together.

Have a similar collection for the activities that occur most days: put a basket of train-related books near the train set, or the words of *Little Bo-Peep* near the farm set. Make a tape of dance music to play alongside a collection of long skirts and fabulous scarves and jewels for those children who prefer to communicate through movement.

Use these throughout the day so that the children have the chance to see the place and importance of literacy and communication in their everyday life.

find out more

The activities in this article are based on those found in Gill Coulson and Lynn Cousins' *Games, ideas and activities for Early Years Literacy*, which is published by Longman. The book includes over 150 activity ideas, which focus on talking, reading and writing in the early years, and are cross-referenced to other aspects of the EYFS. *Games, ideas and activities for Early Years Phonics* by the same authors is also available. Visit pearson-books.com

Book smart

Support early literacy skills with these three resources...

The perfect start
Encourage early literacy skills and ignite a passion for reading in the children in your setting with the help of StartRight. Choose from a huge range of storytelling aids, alphabet and phonics games, posters, puppets and much more. Visit LFCstartright.co.uk



Wonderful words
Exposure to quality books and games from the earliest age plays a vital role in developing literacy and communication skills in children. A visit to Child's Play's website will allow you to choose from an innovative and award-winning programme of both, plus Storysacks and supporting materials. Head to childs-play.com or call 01793 616 286 for more information.

Listen and learn
StoryPhones' award-winning MP3 players allow children to listen quietly, out loud or record. The robust StoryPhones players have supporting software and exclusive access to the BookShelf download store full of wonderful audio resources. Visit storyphones.co.uk or call 0845 652 0906 for details.

