Minnesota Early Literacy Training Project: Final Report Highlights

By Theresa Lizakowski

Overview of the Minnesota Early Literacy Training Project (MELT)

An important goal for early childhood educators is to ensure that children enter school with the literacy and language skills needed to become competent readers. As most educators know, however, children who live in poverty who have limited English language proficiency, or who have learning disabilities are at risk of reaching kindergarten not ready to profit from instruction.

Environments that promote language and literacy growth can provide a solid foundation for future reading success. To give at-risk children access to such environments, The Center for Early Education and Development (CEED), in conjunction with a coalition of Minnesota early education advocates, launched the Minnesota Early Literacy Training Project (MELT) in August 2002. The project’s goal was to provide preschool educators with the skills and knowledge needed to facilitate literacy and language...
skill development through the creation of literacy-rich environments and interactions.

**Early Childhood Educator Training & Coaching**

Beginning in August 2002, four specially trained instructors provided training and coaching in an emergent literacy curriculum, The SEEDS of School Readiness©, to early childhood educators working in high poverty neighborhoods. This program, created by Kate Horst and piloted with the Minneapolis School Readiness Collaborative, prepares early educators to create literacy-rich environments in their classrooms. The program enhances teaching skills through demonstrations and the practice of specific techniques. A key component of the program includes participant goal setting and trainer feedback. The curriculum runs for seven sessions.

Thirty-six child-care centers in Minneapolis and 12 on the White Earth Indian Reservation in Minnesota received the SEEDS of School Readiness curriculum. A total of 264 teachers received training. Twenty-five of the centers in Minneapolis and six from White Earth took part in follow-up coaching. The four trainers were assigned to various centers and served as their coaches for the remainder of the project. The coaches met with center staff at least twice monthly to review training, model best practices, role-play new skills, and provide ongoing feedback to teachers. The coaches delivered services one-on-one, in small groups, and in large groups. To ensure the success of their efforts, the coaches made a point of establishing direct and personal relationships with the educators from the very start of the project. They accomplished this through regular classroom visits to conduct assessments, videotape, and continue relationship-building while delivering the SEEDS training curriculum.

**Providing a Literacy-Rich Environment**

Participant response to the training was overwhelmingly positive, both in terms of content and perceived effort expended by the trainers. Eighty to 90% of participants in the first three sessions reported that “more than some” learning occurred. For the remaining four sessions, 94% to 98% responded accordingly. Teachers reported that they felt they had received enough training to continue developing high quality activities on their own. Of those participating in coaching, all stated that the experience helped them create more literacy rich classrooms. In addition, all coaching participants found the coaching in goal setting to be helpful.

Early educators indicated that they preferred to receive coaching either one-on-one or in small groups. Most helpful was assistance in creating goals for projects, getting ideas for classroom activities, and gaining access to resources. They also highly rated receiving immediate feedback and encouragement from coaches.

The coaching centers saw a 57% increase in the extent to which a rich literacy environment existed in the classroom, as evidenced by such things as providing a book area, extent of book selection and use, and the provision of writing materials in the room.
and peers. Not surprisingly, participants found it least helpful when ideas did not work out and when they had to attend frequent meetings during staffing shortages.

A Teacher Report Card was developed by the coaching staff to measure teachers’ efforts and achievement in applying what was learned through training and coaching. This observational scale consisted of items covering two areas: 1) implementation of behaviors and tasks in the classroom that related to the SEEDS training and 2) skills and effort expended during the coaching process. Effort was defined in terms of the teachers’ apparent levels of commitment and participation.

Participants reported changes in their own teaching behavior and in the quality of the environments they provided over the course of the project. For example, many indicated that they had made physical changes to their environments, including the creation of word walls, writing centers, and reading centers. They also reported providing more activities for children such as making books, rhyming, and playing literacy-based games.

The trainers noticed changes as well. One observed that, “(The) ABC’s are now taught explicitly throughout the day, not just during group time. Teachers have created new games and songs to teach the alphabet.” Another trainer noted that the early educators “…have literacy on their minds, not only as a result of goals set in coaching, but also as part of their own initiative and their own style of teaching, like it is part of them now.”

These informal observations were backed up by objective measures. While both groups saw changes in their efforts to provide a more literacy rich environment, those participating in the coaching follow-up portion of the project demonstrated significant gains in both teacher behavior and the quality of classroom environments over the course of the project.

For example, using the Early Literacy and Language Observation Toolkit (ELLCO) to gather data about classroom environments and teacher behavior, raters noted that centers that received coaching increased scores on a measure of literacy activities (i.e., book reading and writing) by 38% compared to 16% for centers that received training without coaching. The coaching centers also saw a 57% increase in the extent to which a rich literacy environment existed in the classroom, as evidenced by such things as providing a book area, extent of book selection and use, and the provision of writing materials in the room. Centers that received training only improved just 6% on this measure.

Overall, coaching appeared to solidify learning and provide for more consistency in how learning translated into practice. Improvements in physical environments and the increase in literacy activities practiced in the coaching centers directly reflected key areas emphasized in coaching. In contrast, the training only centers
showed relatively little growth in these areas and, in fact, experienced a decline in literacy activities over the course of the year following training.

Parent perceptions of child literacy learning were also assessed during the course of the project. Ninety-three percent of parents with children attending coaching centers reported that their child learned new words daily or almost daily as a result of being at the center. Eighty-two percent said that their child read at least one book daily and 71% said that their child wrote letters or words once or more a day. Fifty-eight percent of parents indicated that their child’s center provided them with information about home-based learning activities to increase literacy and language skills. Over 80% agreed that the centers were helping their child get ready for kindergarten and 71% indicated that their center provided information regarding their child’s readiness for kindergarten. More than half had heard about MELT from teachers at the center.

**Child Readiness to Read**

Child reading readiness was assessed at five different intervals throughout the course of the project. Four measures were used, including a set of three Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs)--picture naming, alliteration, and rhyming; a comprehension measure developed specifically for the study; and selected items from the Concepts about Print measure. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III (PPVT-III.) provided a basis for norm-referenced scoring.

Every center received a score report at each assessment interval. Percentile charts based on the most recent assessment round and kindergarten readiness benchmarks derived from data received from the Minneapolis public schools were used to help centers interpret the scores they received. Educators then incorporated these data into lesson planning. In all, 1,135 children were assessed over the course of the study.

These data were challenging to summarize meaningfully because older children naturally tend to score higher than younger children on the variables measured. High family mobility also played a factor, underscoring one of the challenges that teachers face in working with children living in poverty. New children enrolled over the course of the first three assessment rounds and for each round, children left and returned, resulting in only 162 children participating in all five rounds. Nevertheless, it was possible to explore the hypothesis that coaching would result in greater gains for children as opposed to training alone.

Overall, children improved on the key literacy measures over the five assessment rounds for both the coaching and training only groups. No significant differences in child performance appeared to exist, however, between the two groups even after such factors as teacher education level, years of experience, number of hours coached, scores on the teacher report card, and quality of environment were taken into account.
Nevertheless, the children in the study entered school better prepared to learn how to read, regardless of whether they attended a training only or a coaching center. The IGDI scores for the two cohorts of children entering or preparing to enter kindergarten during the time of the study were compared with IGDI benchmarks for entering Minneapolis kindergarten students overall. The results showed that children from the study met or exceeded expected benchmark scores on three of four measures.

For the first cohort, 61% of students from the study met benchmarks for phonemic awareness (combined alliteration-rhyming score) and 71% met the benchmark for picture naming. This compared to 43% and 46%, respectively, for the average Minneapolis child entering kindergarten that year. For the second cohort, slated to begin kindergarten the following fall, 90% of students had already met the benchmark for phonemic awareness, compared to only 48% of entering students overall. Results were lower on the picture naming benchmark, with only 44% of study children scoring at or above the benchmark level, compared to 49% of students overall.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the results of the MELT study indicate that early literacy training and coaching positively affected the teaching behavior and classroom environments of the early childhood educators participating in the project. Teachers receiving both training and coaching were more likely to provide literacy-enhanced environments for the children in their care, increased literacy teaching behaviors, and implemented more new instructional strategies compared to early educators who received training only. Gains were observed for children as well. Whether they attended centers

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**Children from the study entered kindergarten ready to read at a rate 1-1/2 to 2 times higher than the average Minneapolis new kindergartner.**

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Planting a New CEED

by Scott McConnell and Rich Weinberg

A Timely Merger

Effective September 1, 2005, the Center for Early Education and Development and the Irving B. Harris Center for Infant and Toddler Development became one entity. The new organization retains the CEED name and benefits from both CEED and Harris Center expertise.

Early childhood advocates and professionals have long relied on both organizations for support in training, advocacy, and research. Now it will be easier to access that help by working with the new CEED. Partners and grantees can remain confident in the trust they have invested in both CEED and the Harris Center, as key staff remain integrally involved.

Key Staff and Functions

Rich Weinberg, former co-director of the Harris Center and long-time University faculty member and administrator, leads the CEED/Harris merger and is the new director of CEED. Rich’s long history with CEED, his clear and strong vision, and his commitment to “giving away child development knowledge,” make him an appropriate leader for this new organization. This ensures a smooth transition and keeps all partnerships and commitments secure, while freeing other staff to focus on their areas of expertise. Rich is joined in his leadership of CEED by a five-person Board of Directors —

• Karen Cadigan serves as director of
outreach and public policy, ensuring tight connections with our colleagues in the policy, advocacy, and early education communities.

• Martha Farrell Erickson (former director of the Children, Youth, and Family Consortium) serves as director of the Irving B. Harris relationship-based intervention and consultation programs, and with Byron Egeland (current co-director of the Harris Center), will continue to develop groundbreaking work in infant mental health and training of early childhood professionals.

• Scott McConnell transitions from being CEED’s director to become CEED’s director of community engagement and devote more of his time to the University’s Northside initiative. Scott will continue his research, training, and outreach in language and literacy development and early childhood education. He leads the new CEED presence on Minneapolis’ Northside, where he will focus on early childhood community-based research, outreach, and advocacy.

• Amy Susman-Stillman serves as director of applied research and training, bringing together work of the two programs to better understand and improve the quality of early care and education, and the quality of professional development efforts in our region and country.

• Christopher Watson, CEED’s former assistant director, serves as director of professional development and education, continuing his work in design and implementation of high-quality training activities.

Mission and Vision
The new CEED continues its work to improve developmental outcomes for children through applied research, training, and outreach. It will build on the past and existing work: research that identifies experiences and program options that promote young children’s development and the skills of individuals who serve them; training and professional development that brings this knowledge to individuals who can use it; and outreach to ensure a tight connection between what our communities want and what we offer — with a higher degree of integration across the early childhood years. It also will promote ongoing coordination and expansion of academic leaders interested in early education and development, and provide leadership in the University’s ongoing effort to engage the people and programs of Minnesota in ways that make real contributions to our quality of life. The new CEED is strong, vital, and positioned for an exciting future.

For more information about the new CEED, please contact us at 612-625-3058 or online at www.education.umn.edu/ceed.
Living in Poverty: A Clear and Present Danger to Early Literacy Development

By Karen Cadigan

Change may not always come easily, but the way in which poverty impacts reading is through variables that can be changed. Unfortunately, when it comes to quality of early environments the gap between what we know young children need and how public policies support children is wide and costly. What do we know about children’s home, neighborhood and early care/education environments? Not enough to call it a day on current research, but enough to get started today on ensuring that early literacy building blocks are in place for all children.

We know, for example, that preschool classroom quality predicts children’s cognitive and academic achievement, even when controlling for home environment (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994). Putting the literacy building blocks in place early is essential to changing later outcomes.

Here’s the not-so-good news of what we know about the early literacy environments of children in poverty: Children from lower income families have access to lower quality experiences at home, in their neighborhoods, and in child care (Barnett et al., 2004). Poor children have less exposure to books, visit the library less frequently, are less likely to attend quality daycare, are exposed to fewer stimulating experiences than their middle class peers, and have less experience with shared reading at home.

The good news is that these are environmental variables, not genetic codes.
Risley, 1995) and yet funding for the early childhood education programs has been lean such that “extras” such as home visits and outreach to immigrants is not often enough a reality.

We know that despite the importance of the home environment, preschool classrooms provide a critical – and for disadvantaged children, perhaps the singular - opportunity to access planned and varied early literacy experiences (Currie & Niedell, 2003). Yet even in states like Minnesota where federal Head Start dollars are supplemented with state funds, waiting lists for eligible children are long.

We also know that reading is a critical life skill. Children who read poorly are less likely to graduate high school, which puts them at greater risk for long-term poverty and/or dependence on welfare. Poor readers are more likely to receive special education services, less likely to be employed, have lower earnings than their peers, and are less likely to have a bank account.

Infants and preschoolers don’t choose to live in poverty. It is an American cliche that poor children will have choices and opportunities to move themselves out of poverty. Without the ability to read, however, the choices for these preschoolers once they become young adults are limited. Right now in the U.S. there are over eight million children under five in low-income families. The time to get each of these future parents, future citizens, future leaders off to a fair start, a reading start, is now.

When it comes to reading, where you start in relation to peers is most often where you finish.

Abbreviated References


Teachers Experiences with Literacy Training

By Theresa Lizakowski

Numbers are important but sometimes it helps to know what things were really like on the “frontlines.” We recently caught up with a few people involved in the Minnesota Early Literacy Training project (MELT) to hear what they found particularly memorable.

Roxana Linares, an early childhood educator with Siembra in Minneapolis, participated in both the training and follow-up coaching. When asked what she recalls from the project, Roxana commented on how well the training helped her and other Siembra teachers prepare children for school entry. “I believe SEEDS of School Reading © was a key factor in the success we had with screening from Minneapolis Public Schools. More than 90% of Siembra children scored above what was expected for their age.” She went on to add, “Having a coach that provides ideas and encourages our teachers has helped greatly to continue improving.”

One early childhood educator/director with Northeast Park Preschool, Jan Swanson, participated in an infant-toddler training class during the summer of 2004. Even with many years of experience under her belt, her enthusiasm for the program was contagious. She described the many ways that she and her teachers benefited from training. “We label things so much more than we did before. Instead of just pointing to colors and saying the names, now we put words under the colors for the children to see. The teachers have done such a marvelous job. Because we have to share space with other programs, we put our preschool materials away at the end of the day. The teachers come in half an hour early each day just to put up posters and set out writing materials for the kids.”

Jan mentioned, too, that where they used to have one dedicated writing center with paper and pencils for the children, now they incorporate literacy materials into other areas of the classroom as well. “There are so many things that we just never thought of before! We put paper and pencil in the play kitchen area by the telephone. We have a table with two chairs and some books about wheels next to the bicycle area so that children who are waiting for a turn can sit down and read with a teacher.” In reflecting on how the children have responded to the changes, Jan said, “I’m just amazed at how much they comprehend. I see the kids going around the room now during free play and pointing to the words on the posters and asking about them. Story time, too, has become so much more interactive.”

Lucy Arias, one of the MELT trainers and now a preschool supervisor for Reuben Lindh, confirmed how enthusiastic the teachers were to learn and how hungry they were for information. “Many of the teachers were natural to begin with but had fallen into set ways of doing things. For most, literacy meant some-
thing generally to do with writing and books.” Lucy shared several stories of how the early educators changed their teaching strategies in response to the training and the impact that this had in their environments.

For example, Lucy found that many of the teachers were intrigued with the idea of writing centers and worked to implement them in their programs. One daycare center, which already did a lot of preliteracy work, began daily “sign-ins” for the preschoolers. Upon arrival for the day, each child would find her or his name on a list and write it on paper to “sign in.” For one little girl, this exercise proved especially meaningful. Before, when she’d been asked to practice writing her name using a “connect-the-dots” exercise, she would write a couple of letters before veering off into meaningless scribbles. Patient encouragement from the center staff had no effect on her motivation. As soon as she began participating in “sign-in,” however, her writing blossomed, so much so that within a week she began writing her name everywhere and anywhere that she could. Finding a way to make the exercise personally meaningful gave her the focus she needed to learn.

According to Lucy, another new concept that resonated with teachers was that to build future learners, they needed to encourage language development through talking. One home daycare provider with many years of experience came to her first training session eager to learn. She had a nurturing style but hadn’t really included much that would be considered “academic” in her work. At the time, she had a 30-month-old-boy in her care who was still pre-verbal. His concerned mother was considering whether to get outside assistance. As training began, the provider quickly learned the importance of talking to all children—even those who were not yet able to respond verbally. She realized that she hadn’t been talking much with this particular child and consciously set out to do so. Every day she made a point of chatting with him, asking him questions, and naming objects for him in the environment. By the end of the seven week session, the child had begun to use one word utterances on a regular basis. Needless to say, both the provider and the child’s mother were delighted with the outcome.

Even teachers who weren’t quite sure they would benefit from training walked away with something new. Lucy recalled how one highly effective teacher thought that she would be leaving her center soon and wouldn’t benefit much from training. Now, Lucy reports that her teaching style has become much more literacy focused. “Shortly after the training, this teacher set up a writing table with paper, pencils, and word cards in her classroom. It turned out to be so popular with the kids that she set up a second table with manipulatives and books.” Lucy went on to describe how this teacher also began

Having a coach that provides ideas and encourages our teachers has helped greatly to continue improving.
to practice “read-write-talk” explicitly during group time. To help the process along, she found a cast-off chalkboard and had it installed in her group area. During group time, the teacher now writes words for the children on the board and gives them an opportunity to come up and practice writing letters on the board for themselves. A second recycled chalkboard is located on the opposite end of the room for the children to use whenever they want during the day.

Lucy remarked how much she and the other trainers including Carrie Johnson and Nydia de Alba-Johnson, enjoyed working with the early childhood educators. She especially welcomed the chance to forge strong personal relationships and watch the teachers transform themselves into skilled preliteracy advocates in their classrooms. “The teachers loved the training we provided. They couldn’t get enough and wanted even more in the future,” said Lucy. “And we would have loved to have provided it!”

**MELT, continued from page 5**

While the initial project has ended, the work of providing quality literacy education to early childhood educators continues. The Minnesota Childcare Resource and Referral Network, a key partner in the MELT project, continues to offer the SEEDS of School Readiness training online through E-LEARN, a service of the Network. CEED continues to partner with MNCCR&R in Greater Minnesota, White Earth, and Minneapolis to offer training and coaching. Recent efforts seek to train internal staff to serve as coaches and build capacity and sustainability. Family child care providers now make up nearly half the participants, and are coached through a monthly cohort group. MELT continues to examine program supports and barriers, as well as strategize ways to embed literacy training and to coach. In addition, CEED has collaborated with Minneapolis Community and Technical College to offer the SEEDS of School Readiness training for credit. To facilitate reaching early educators in outlying areas, 15 additional trainers have been prepared to deliver training and coaching services in rural Minnesota.

As an added incentive to early educators who might not otherwise pursue training, the Minnesota Childcare Resource and Referral Network provides access to a scholarship and grant program entitled TEACH (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps). Of those receiving scholarships during the time of the study, 25% had never before completed a college class and over 40% identified themselves as belonging to a racial community other than Caucasian. Over half of TEACH recipients working in childcare centers are in assistant teacher or aide positions and are likely to become candidates for advancement once completing their education. All recipients gained at least 8% in annual compensation in the year that they received a scholarship.

A Web site providing information about the MELT project and related resources is available at www.education.umn.edu/ceed/projects/literacy. Plans include further development of this website, including the possibility of an interactive component.

Hey Kids! It’s the Readmobile!

A Community Effort to Improve Early Literacy Skills of Children at Risk

By Maura Doyle Tanabe and Scott McConnell

About the Readmobile

The Children’s Readmobile of Hennepin County, Minnesota is a library “on wheels.” Every month library services and story times are provided to home-based preschool child care providers in the northwest suburbs of Hennepin County. As these services strive to integrate research and practice, Hennepin County Library has partnered with the Center for Early Education and Development to enhance early literacy services provided by the Readmobile. The goal of this study is to augment the role of the librarian as a mentor to early child care providers in order to help children develop early literacy and language skills.

Teaching Effective Story Time

Four librarians provided weekly story times and library services to 16 home child care providers, making a total of 205 visits from January through May. The librarians use the 10 components skills of Dialogic Reading (see table) to teach day care providers effective ways to read to children. Dialogic reading has been shown to enhance expressive language skills in children with low-income backgrounds and other risk factors. Using this style of reading, the child becomes the teller of the story and the adult becomes the listener, questioner, and audience for the children.

Readmobile Story Reading Skills

- Use routines for beginning and ending stories.
- Add animation and make eye contact when reading a story.
- Encourage designated story time each day.
- Provide age-appropriate book selection.
- Re-read stories.
- Hold the book effectively.
- Read with a warm and positive manner.
- Set the stage for reading time.
- Help children learn vocabulary by picture identification.
- Read the title of the book.

Evaluation Results to Date

Survey results from the 2005 Readmobile services show that all participating providers gained knowledge about dialogic reading. In addition, providers report changing their storytelling skills accordingly. “I learned to ask a lot of questions and use real-life connections to things we are learning in books,” reported one provider. Children’s vocabulary and rhyming skills as measured by the Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDI’s) increased, but without a control group it is uncertain how much of continued on page 14
this growth was due to the Readmobile intervention. Provider’s evaluations of the Readmobile noted that the variety of books, the librarians’ skills and rapport with children, and the weekly routine were strengths of the program. Future directions for the Readmobile evaluation include formalizing the assessment of providers’ knowledge and perspectives about reading, conducting direct observations of provider performance, gathering more child outcome data and evaluating librarians’ effectiveness as dialogic reading coaches.

For more information about the Readmobile services or evaluation, go to http://www.hclib.org/pub/info/readmobile.cfm or http://education.umn.edu/ceed/projects/readmobile/

**CEED Symposium: Early Research Matters**

**March 24, 2006**

8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m

At the Depot, 225 Third Ave. S., Minneapolis

Registration
Event fee is $85. Scholarships are available.

**Keynote speaker**
Senator John Hottinger, Chair of the Minnesota Senate Early Childhood Finance and Policy Division

**Breakout session topics:**
- Early literacy
- Infant mental health in child care settings
- Sharing our vision with policymakers
- Effective coaching models
- Building a bilingual classroom
- Bridging education and mental health
- Results from Chicago Parent-Child Center longitudinal study
How Can I Help My Young Child to Become a Reader?

Can parents help their young children become readers? Yes! Parents are their babies’ first teachers and can support their babies’ budding language abilities so that they develop good reading skills and enjoyment of reading as they grow older.

Learning to read is a skill that takes a long time to develop, and it begins during infancy. As you might guess, teaching a baby about reading is different than teaching an older child to read. Babies first start to learn about reading by learning to speak and understand language — in essence, by learning to communicate with others. Parents, by responding to their babies’ communication, help build babies’ language skills. As soon as babies hear language, their orientation to literacy has begun. Research shows that babies who hear many words in the first years of life and who are actively engaged in communicating have higher scores on achievement tests in elementary school than babies whose exposure to language is not as rich.

There are many different things parents can do with babies and toddlers to help develop the basic language and communicative skills that will prepare them to learn to read.

For Babies

Talk with your baby while feeding, bathing, and diapering
Language is the cornerstone of reading development, so the opportunities parents have to talk with babies — while feeding, during bath time, and when diapering — are important. When you talk to your baby during the course of the day, you are really giving him or her a double bonus! You are teaching language and letting your baby know that he or she is an important person to communicate with.

Tell nursery rhymes or sing simple songs with your baby
This provides infants with the opportunity to predict “what comes next,” an important part of literacy development.

Offer your baby cardboard books
Picture books created for babies provide the opportunity for infants to begin having independent experiences with reading materials. And, reading the books to a baby provides the literature exposure, the pleasure of the physical contact, and the opportunity to experience reading as a positive experience.

For Toddlers

Use books with your toddler to ask and answer questions
Toddlers’ rapidly expanding “wh” verbal skills (who?, what?, where?, why?) provide many opportunities for parents to use books to help children ask and answer questions. While reading books to toddlers, parents can ask questions that help them practice the new things they’re learning (“what does the cow say?”), learn about cause and effect (“what will happen?”), develop sorting and organizing skills.
Comment on things that happen around your toddler throughout the day
Adults help toddlers process their “wh” experience (who?, what?, where?, why?) by commenting on situations around them: “I wonder who lives there?”, “what does that sign tell us we have to do?”, “where’s the milk for breakfast?”, “why is this wet?”

Encourage your toddler to use crayons, markers, and pencils
Toddlers are developing the fine motor skills necessary to hold and use writing utensils. Because writing is part of the literacy experience, providing toddlers with supervised writing and marking activities is not only important, but also pleasurable, as toddlers explore their “I do it myself!” approach to life.

For Preschoolers
Create a “print-rich” environment for your preschooler
Preschoolers are very aware of the signs and symbols that represent their names, their ages, where they live, the materials that they use, and many other aspects of their daily living experience. Parents can help them become used to reading and writing by pointing out public signs (traffic signs, billboards, restroom and exit signs, etc.), asking preschoolers to help make grocery lists, and playing organized games (alphabet Bingo) and spontaneous games (“let’s all look for the letter B”).

Use grocery shopping to encourage reading
While grocery shopping with preschoolers can be challenging, looking for specific items and brands creates opportunities for children to “read” packages and aisle signs, and match coupons to corresponding products.

Use meal preparation to encourage reading
“Reading” a recipe, whether written or drawn, helps preschoolers learn the left-to-right orientation that is part of a reading experience. Children can also match the written language of recipes with the real materials involved, again helping them understand the relationship between printed material and the objects that the print represents.

The first years of a child’s life provide many wonderful opportunities for parents to cultivate their babies’ basic language and communication skills. Through simple, everyday experiences with language and with warm, loving caregivers, very young children will come to learn the joys of communicating, exchanging ideas and thoughts, and of the written word.

References

For More Information
For more information about helping your very young child become a reader, contact the Early Childhood Family Education program in your local school district or call 1-800-KIDS-709. Or go to http://www.zerotothree.org.

Questions About Kids is on the Web at —
http://www.harristrainingcenter.org
http://education.umn.edu/ceed
Introducing Four New Questions About Kids!

If you’re a parent or professional with questions about children’s development, *Questions About Kids* is for you! *Questions About Kids* are flyers that provide answers to important questions parents have about their children’s development.

We’re introducing four new *Questions About Kids* available in English and Spanish —

- Can a mom’s depression affect her baby or toddler?
- Can I help my baby remember?
- How can I help my baby or toddler to move around?
- What is meant by infant mental health?

All *Questions About Kids* address contemporary concerns and highlight the unique delights and challenges of the first years of life. Authors are child development experts at the University of Minnesota and in the Twin Cities community. Some of the *Questions About Kids* are available in Spanish, Somali, and Hmong. You can find *Questions About Kids* on the CEED Web site and through community health, social service, and parent education programs. We encourage you to use them as you see fit. Previous topics include —

- How can parents and caregivers support a baby’s healthy development?
- What’s going on in my baby’s brain?
- How do I get to know my newborn?
- How can trauma affect my young child?
- Am I spoiling my baby?
- What does it mean when my young child is “assessed”?
- Do dads really make a difference?
- How can I help my young child to become a reader? (see sample on next page)

*Questions About Kids* is a joint project of the Irving B. Harris Training Center for Infant and Toddler Development and the Center for Early Education and Development, University of Minnesota. *Questions About Kids* is on the Web at: http://education.umn.edu/ceed/publications.
The Year in Pictures: CEED 2005

January and March

2005 marked the first McEvoy Lecture Series on Early Childhood and Public Policy. These lectures (which are free and open to the public) aim to provide a frequent, contemporary perspective on early childhood policy issues confronting Minnesota and the nation to foster deep and deliberative discussion of the issues among academics and policy makers/advocates, and to promote development of policies and practices that will enhance development and well being for children. The lectures are part of the curriculum for the University of Minnesota’s graduate-level Early Childhood Policy Certificate and are funded by the H.B. Fuller Foundation. For more information, visit http://education.umn.edu/ceed/events/mmlectureseries.

April

The Light a Candle Award is presented every other year at CEED’s Minnesota Round Table to an individual or group that successfully promotes ties between research, policy, and practice to improve the lives of young children in Minnesota and throughout the world. The award was originally inspired by a speech given by the late Senator Paul Wellstone where he talked about the importance of seeing the possibilities that each and every child brings to the world and the role that each of us can play in lighting a candle of hope for that child. For more information about the award, visit http://education.umn.edu/ceed/events/roundtable/roundtable05.htm

Left to right: John Finnegan, Dean, School of Public Health, University of Minnesota; Don Fraser, former Mayor of Minneapolis, Co-Chairman of the Board, Ready for K; David Lawrence, President, Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, featured lecturer.

Left to right: John B. Davis, Don Fraser, Gerry Christenson, George Latimer
April

This year’s Round Table was a lively discussion on the Education of Young Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners: Language, Culture, and Practice. The Minnesota Round Table is a conference that brings together a panel of nationally recognized experts on children’s issues for a lively discussion of a topic at the forefront of research and practice. Following a unique format that has ensured its success for 30 years, colleagues sitting at the Round Table respond to questions posed by the moderator. They are encouraged to reflect, explore intuitive hunches, and challenge each other’s ideas in an open, constructive environment. For more information, visit http://education.umn.edu/ceed/events/roundtable

August

Dr. Art Rolnick, senior vice president and director of research at the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis, and other community partners from the Ready 4 K Board and staff joined CEED staff at the College of Education and Human Development’s booth at the Great Minnesota Get Together. Dr. Rolnick and his colleague Rob Grunewald have authored several papers (e.g., see http://minneapolisfed.org/pubs/region/05-06/ecd.cfm) about the economic benefits of investing in early childhood intervention.
CEED Events

2005-2006 McEvoy Lecture Series on Early Childhood and Public Policy
Cowles Auditorium, Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs, 301 19th Ave. S., Minneapolis. Lectures are free and open to the public, but registration required.

Cost-Effectiveness in Early Intervention, 1-4 p.m., Friday, Jan. 20, 2006; Arthur Reynolds, professor of child development, University of Minnesota; Judy Temple, professor of applied economics, University of Minnesota

Snapshot of Minnesota’s Policies and Best Practices, 1-4 p.m., Friday, March 3, 2006; Members of the Minnesota bipartisan early childhood caucus

Focus on Universal Preschool, 1-4 p.m., Friday, May 19, 2006; Libby Doggett, director of Pre-K Now

The CEED Symposium: A 360 View of Relevant Research
March 24, 2006. At the Depot, 225 Third Ave. S., Minneapolis. Registration fee $85 with scholarships available.

For more information:
http://education.umn.edu/ceed/events/ceedsymposium/

The Harris Forum
May 4, 2006, Harris Forum featuring a presentation by Bob Pianta, professor of child development at the University of Virginia, and distinguished alumnus of the Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota. Free and open to the public. At the Minnesota History Center, 345 W. Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul.

For more information:
http://education.umn.edu/ceed/events/ceedsymposium/

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