

Child Care & Early Education RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

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Precursors to Early Literacy A Key Topic Resource List

June 2007

Research Connections conducted a comprehensive search of its collection for resources focused on precursors to early literacy. This Key Topic Resource List includes an overview of the early literacy literature, as well as a listing of selected resources on the topic.

Search results are grouped into four broad areas:

- Reviews and Evaluations
- Early Skills and Oral Language
- Home Environment
- Social Emotional Factors and Play

From the many results, *Research Connections* selected a limited number of resources of various types including reports and papers, executive summaries, and reviews. Selection criteria included topic relevance and relatively recent publication. The full results came from basic searches on each of the following terms: "predictors of conventional literacy", "emergent literacy", "early literacy", "play and literacy", and "precursors to literacy."

Within each category, resources are organized according to publisher type and publication date. *Research Connection's* one-sentence description is included for each resource on the following list. For complete citations, which include abstracts and full text for some resources, click on the titles.

Overview:

Precursors to early literacy has become a prominent research topic, particularly with schools' heightened accountability under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Children are encouraged to enter kindergarten with more advanced skills that facilitate the process of learning to read. Research supports that pre-reading skills are built through a broad range of early developmental experiences including-- a child's play which establishes language and communication, nurturing adult (and peer) relationships which lay a strong socio-emotional foundation for learning, and through activities such as shared reading.

Precursors to early literacy are children's activities and behaviors related to reading and writing before they can actually read and write, including talking, singing, and looking at story books (e.g. holding them properly and 'pretending' to read). Programs like Head Start incorporate a variety of classroom-based literacy interventions--often with parental involvement components--to teach children preliteracy skills so they are "ready to learn" when they arrive in kindergarten. These interventions include a strong focus on academic skills such as letter and word recognition, and phonemic awareness instruction (i.e. associating letters and syllables with speech sounds). Other programs look to home interventions and even library-based interventions to lay the foundation for early literacy.

The research on precursors and early literacy includes questions such as the following:

- What specific strategies are successful in improving children's language and literacy skills during the preschool years and beyond?
- What role can public libraries play in improving children's literacy skills?
- What is the relationship between early childhood literacy experiences and later reading acquisition? How are literacy and oral language related?
- What types of home literacy activities are children exposed to and how do these early experiences contribute to early literacy and later reading acquisition?
- What is the relationship between socio-emotional development, dramatic play (e.g. housekeeping and kitchen area play, dress up), and literacy development?

Reviews and Evaluations

Government

- Celano, Donna C., & Neuman, Susan B. (2001). [The role of public libraries in children's literacy development: An evaluation report](#). Harrisburg: Pennsylvania, Office of Commonwealth Libraries.
A report evaluating the effects of library exposure on Pennsylvania children's literacy development, using both qualitative and quantitative data
- National Reading Panel (U.S.). (2000). [National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction \[Executive summary\]](#). Bethesda, MD: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.
A summary and critical evaluation of the research literature related to beginning reading skills, including environments and early developmental interactions.

Journal

- Lonigan, Christopher J. (2006). [Development, assessment, and promotion of preliteracy skills](#). *Early Education and Development*, 17(1), 91-114.
A review of current research findings on the development of skilled reading in early elementary grades, its developmental precursors, and advances in the early identification of children at risk for reading difficulties.

University and Research Organizations

- Halle, Tamara, Calkins, Julia, Berry, Daniel, and Johnson, Rosalind. (2003). [Promoting language and literacy in early childhood care and education settings](#). New York: Child Care & Early Education Research Connections.
A review of research assessing the impact of programs to promote language and emergent literacy among young children.
- Gunn, Barbara K., Simmons, Deborah C, and Kameenui, Edward J. (1995). [Emergent literacy: Synthesis of the research](#). Eugene: University of Oregon, National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators.
A literature review examining developments in emergent literacy research.
- Burns, M. Susan, Midgette, Katya, Leong, Deborah Jane, and Bodrova, Elena. [n.d.]. [Prekindergarten benchmarks for language and literacy: Progress made and challenges to be met](#). New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.
An examination of current prekindergarten benchmarks and their appropriateness for building literacy curriculum and assessing children's language and literacy competence.

Early Skills and Oral Language

Journal

- Hart, Betty, & Risley, Todd R. (1995). [The early catastrophe: The 30 million word gap by age 3](#). *American Educator*, 27(1), 4-9.
A summary of the results from a longitudinal study observing young children in their homes from 7-9 months to 3 years to determine which factors in early experience might account for the development of vocabulary skills.
- Oliver, Bonamy R., Dale, Philip S., and Plomin, Robert. (2005). [Predicting literacy at age 7 from preliteracy at age 4](#). *Psychological Science*, 16(11), 861-865.
An examination of how young children's preliteracy knowledge and early literacy experiences affect their literacy skills at age seven
- NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. (2005) [Pathways to reading: The role of oral language in the transition to reading](#). *Developmental Psychology*, 41(2), 428-442.
Explores the role of oral language in reading competence during the transition to school as well as a discussion of how best to conceptual 'oral language' in this context.
- Poe, Michele, Burchinal, Margaret, and Roberts, Joanne E. (2004). [Early language and the development of children's reading skills](#). *Journal of School Psychology*, 42(4), 315-335.
A longitudinal study of African American children's language and reading development to examine the relations among phonological awareness, language skills, print processing skills, and reading development in prekindergarten and in second grade.
- Dickinson, David K., McCabe, Allyssa, Anastasopolous, Louisa, Peisner-Feinberg, Ellen S., and Poe, Michele. (2003). [The comprehensive language approach to early literacy: The interrelationships among vocabulary, phonological sensitivity, and print knowledge among preschool-aged children](#). *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(3), 465-481.
An evaluation of Head Start preschool children's vocabularies, phonological sensitivities, and print knowledge to examine the relationship between oral language and developing literacy.
- Lawhon, Tommie, & Cobb, Jeanne. (2002). [Routines that build emergent literacy skills in infants, toddlers, and preschoolers](#). *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 30(2), 113-118.
A discussion of strategies for using literacy routines to develop and improve infants, toddlers, and preschool children's emergent literacy skills.
- Lonigan, Christopher J., Burgess, Stephen R., and Anthony, Jason L. (2000). [Development of emergent literacy and early reading skills in preschool children: Evidence from a latent-variable longitudinal study](#). *Developmental Psychology*, 36(5), 596-613.
An exploration of the predictive significance of the oral language, print knowledge and phonological sensitivity for later emergent literacy and reading.

University and Research Organizations

- Strickland, Dorthy, & Riley-Ayers, Shannon. (2006). [Early literacy: Policy and practice in the preschool years](#). New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.
A policy brief synthesizing research on early literacy and offering early literacy policy recommendations.

Other

- Senechal, Monique, Ouellette, Gene, and Rodney, Donna. (2006). [The misunderstood giant: On the predictive role of early vocabulary to future reading](#). In D. K. Dickinson & S. B. Neuman (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research (Vol. 2, pp. 173-182)*. New York: Guilford Press.
An analysis of the contribution of oral vocabulary skills to phonological awareness, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension in children from kindergarten through grade 3.
- Whitehurst, Grover J., & Lonigan, Christopher J. (2001). [Emergent literacy: Development from prereaders to readers](#). In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research (Vol. 1, pp. 11-29)*. New York: Guilford Press.
An article exploring the influence of different skill domains on the development of early literacy
- Watson, Rita. (2001). [Literacy and oral language: Implications for early literacy acquisition](#). In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research (Vol. 1, pp. 43-53)*. New York: Guilford Press.
An article exploring the interrelationship between oral language complexity and literacy development.
- Snow, Catherine. (1999). [Facilitating language development promotes literacy learning](#). In L. Eldering (Ed.), *Effective early education: Cross-cultural perspectives (Vol. 11, pp. 141-162)*. New York: Falmer Press.
An examination of the primary factors affecting literacy development, specifically the role of language skills in the process of literacy acquisition.

Home Environment

Journal

- Foster, Martha A., Abbott-Shim, Martha, McCarty, Frances, and Franze, Sarah. (2005). [A model of home learning environment and social risk factors in relation to children's emergent literacy and social outcomes](#). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 20(1), 13-36.
An examination of the relationship between home environment and social risk factors and children's early literacy and social functioning.

- Roberts, Joanne E., Jurgens, Julia, and Burchinal, Margaret. (2005). [The role of home literacy practices in preschool children's language and emergent literacy skills.](#) *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 48(2), 345-359.
An examination of the impact of home literacy activities (frequency of shared book reading, maternal book reading strategies, child's enjoyment of reading, maternal sensitivity) on low income, African American preschool children's language and emergent literacy skills.
- Weigel, Daniel J., Martin, Sally S., and Bennett, Kimberley K. (2005). [Ecological influences of the home and the child-care center on preschool-age children's literacy development.](#) *Reading Research Quarterly*, 40(2), 204-233.
A longitudinal study that examined the relationship between home literacy environments and the child care literacy environments and their interactions with preschool children's literacy and language development.
- Bennett, Kimberley K., Weigel, Daniel J., and Martin, Sally S. (2002). [Children's acquisition of early literacy skills: Examining family contributions.](#) *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 17(3), 295-317.
An examination of the impact of family environment on young children's emergent literacy and language skills using three theoretical models (Family as Educator, Resilient Family, and Parent-Child Partnership).
- Sonnenschein, Susan, & Munsterman, Kimberly. (2002). [The influence of home-based reading interactions on 5-year-olds' reading motivations and early literacy development.](#) *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 17(3), 318-337.
An examination of the effect of home reading interactions (quality, comments made while reading) on low income children's literacy development (phonological awareness, print orientation, story comprehension) and reading motivation.

Other

- Jalongo, Mary Renck, Fennimore, Beatrice S., and Stamp, Laurie Nicholson. (2004). [The acquisition of literacy: Reframing definitions, paradigms, ideologies, and practices.](#) In *Contemporary perspectives on language policy and literacy instruction in early childhood education* (pp. 57-78) Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
A discussion of a contextual theory of literacy acquisition, which views literacy as related to an individual's construction of self and environment.
- Landry, Susan H., & Smith, Karen E. (2006). [The influence of parenting on emerging literacy skills.](#) In D. K. Dickinson & S. B. Neuman (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (Vol. 2, pp. 135-148). New York: Guilford Press.
A review of research into the influence of parenting behaviors, as moderated by personal and social characteristics, on young children's early literacy development, and the effectiveness of parent intervention programs

Social Emotional Factors and Play

Journal

- Doctoroff, Greta L., Greer, Joseph A., and Arnold, David H. (2006). [The relationship between social behavior and emergent literacy among preschool boys and girls](#). *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 27(1), 1-13.
A study of the sex differences in the relationship between social behaviors and emergent literacy among preschoolers.
- Ostrosky, Michaelene, Gaffney, Janet S., and Thomas, Dawn V. (2006). [The interplay between literacy and relationships in early childhood settings](#). *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 22(2), 173 – 191.
A discussion of strategies to help emphasize the interplay between literacy and relationships (with peers and adults) in order to support young children's emergent literacy.
- Miles, Sarah B., & Stipek, Deborah J. (2006). [Contemporaneous and longitudinal associations between social behavior and literacy achievement in a sample of low-income elementary school children](#). *Child Development*, 77(1), 103-117.
A longitudinal study following low-income children from kindergarten through fifth grade to explore the relation between aggression and prosocial behavior and literacy achievement.
- Saracho, Olivia N. (2004). [Supporting literacy-related play: Roles for teachers of young children](#). *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 31(3), 201-206.
A research study investigating teacher roles in children's literacy-related play.

University and Research Organizations

- Espinosa, Linda M. (2001). [The connections between social-emotional development and early literacy](#). In *The Kauffman Early Education Exchange: Vol. 1, No. 1. Set for success: Building a strong foundation for school readiness based on the social-emotional development of young children* (pp. 30-44). Kansas City, MO: The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.
One of six commissioned papers based on the first Kauffman Early Education exchange conference. Contains a discussion of the importance of nurturing relationships and responsive social environments, including play, for language and literacy development.

Other

- Pianta, Robert C. (2006). [Teacher-child relationships and early literacy](#). In D. K. Dickinson & S. B. Neuman (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (Vol. 2, pp. 149-162). New York. Guilford Press.
An examination of the connections between literacy development and children's relationships with parents, caregivers, and teachers with a theoretical model of the role of the teacher child relationships in literacy-related outcomes.

- **Morrow, Lesley M., & Schickedanz, Judith A. (2006). [The relationships between sociodramatic play and literacy development](#). In D. K. Dickinson & S. B. Neuman (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (Vol. 2, pp. 269-280). New York: Guilford Press.**
A review of studies on the interaction between children's dramatic play and literacy development, including the role of adult engagement, in the context of evolving theoretical perspectives on play.

To suggest additions to this Key Topic Resource List, please email us at contact@researchconnections.org.

To view and sort the full search results from which these resources were selected, you may use the [Recreate Complete Search](#) function.

This Key Topic Resource List was developed by staff of Child Care & Early Education *Research Connections*. Special thanks to intern Andrea Anushko and Lisa Klein, Principle of Hestia Advising.