



Play-Based Learning: Building Language & Literacy in Kindergarten

By: Rebecca De Santo



table of contents

how to use this resource.....page 3

the continuum of play.....page 3

vocabulary.....page 4

narrative.....page 5

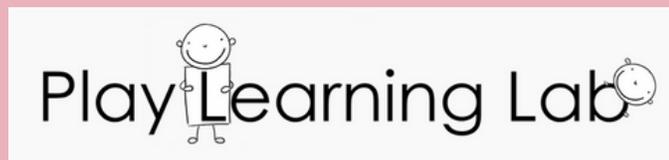
phonological awareness.....page 6

print knowledge.....page 7

references and resources.....page 8

a note to teachers:

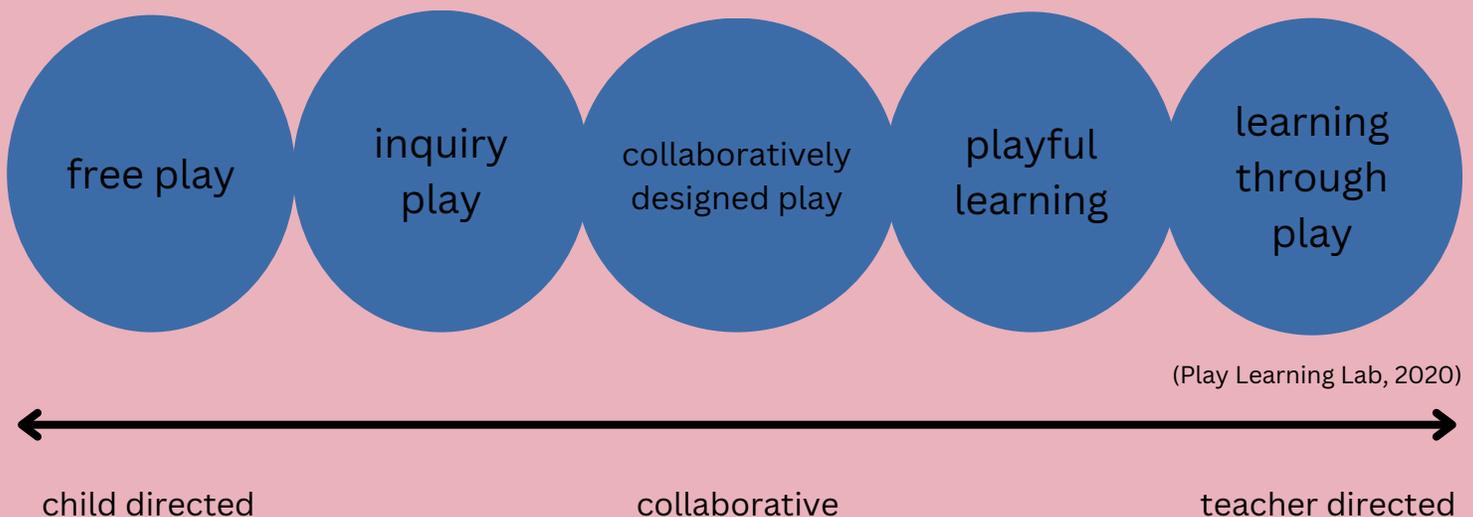
This resource was created to summarize and combine information gathered from the research of the Read It Again! program and the Play Learning Lab. Their individual work is listed on the references page if you would like to learn more!



how to use this resource:

Research shows that there are benefits for children to learn through play. According to work published by Pyle and Danniels (2016), there are developmental and educational benefits to play-based learning when combined with teacher-directed instruction in kindergarten. There are many critical skills that children learn from preschool to kindergarten that will support their language, communication, and academic learning. This guide was created to summarize current research findings and include ideas for teachers to implement effective play in the classroom to build various foundational skills of language and literacy.

continuum of play-based learning



The continuum of play outlines the different kinds of play that might be present in a classroom. On one end of the spectrum, free play is child directed where children can foster self-regulation and independence. On the other end, teachers direct children by learning through games to meet curriculum in engaging ways. In the middle of the spectrum, teachers provide natural yet playful activities that serve a learning purpose (Play Learning Lab, 2020). There are appropriate times for each type of play but learning can be fostered and enhanced with teacher-directed play to build the following language and literacy skills. The next section of the guide will summarize research findings from the Read It Again! (2023) program by highlighting 4 main areas of language/literacy learning. This guide also provides recommendations, applying the continuum of play, from an SLP perspective to classroom teachers.



Vocabulary

Vocabulary is one principle at the basis of language and literacy acquisition. A child's ability to understand and use their language with different types of words is defined as vocabulary (Justice, 2023). By kindergarten we expect children to use a variety of language word classes including, nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions, and adverbs (Justice, 2023). The Read It Again! program highlights that a child's vocabulary size has a direct correlation to their development of reading comprehension skills (Justice, 2023).

The following chart provides a few guiding objectives for vocabulary intervention from the Read It Again! program, followed by examples of how teachers can implement this goal into play. A visual example of the how these goals can translate to activities found online or from the Play Learning Lab are also provided.

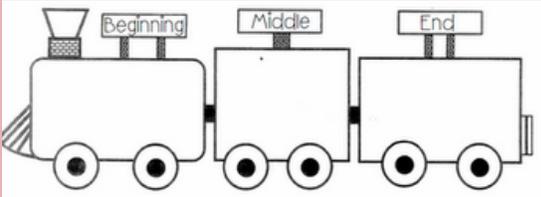
Objective	How to target in play	Photo example
<p>To understand and use new words representing spatial concepts (e.g., above, beside, over, under).</p>	<p>Teacher directed approach to introduce these concepts. Provide models throughout the day. Can fade teacher involvement by using adaptive books that the children can manipulate with during time at play centres.</p>	
<p>To understand and use new words such as, unfamiliar nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.</p>	<p>Teacher directed approach to introduce the students to new words. During story reading, prompt the students to talk about what the characters were doing, model and highlight the various target words that might be new.</p>	 <p>See example book from Read It Again! - <i>Even Superheroes Have Bad Days</i> by Shelly Becker</p>
<p>To understand and use new words representing feelings (e.g., cheerful, confused, frustrated, upset).</p>	<p>In addition to the teacher leading discussions about how the characters in the above story are feeling, a collaborative play activity can be used. The teacher can provide pairs of students with emotive faces to draw and talk about.</p>	

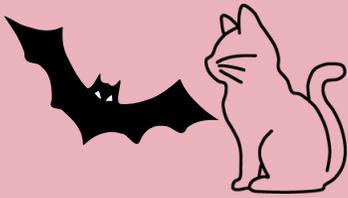
Narrative



Narrative is the next guiding principle at the basis of language and literacy acquisition. A child's ability to understand and expand on stories whether real or fiction is defined as a narrative (Justice, 2023). By kindergarten expect children to have the ability to describe events in different tenses including, the past, present, or future (Justice, 2023). The Read It Again! program also highlights that narratives require children to consolidate all they have learned about language including, grammar, morphology, pragmatics, and vocabulary (Justice, 2023). The ability to engage in narratives during kindergarten is an important skill for children to relate to events, share their experiences, and comprehend non-fictional and fictional stories that will later support reading comprehension (Justice, 2023).

The following chart provides a few guiding objectives for narrative intervention from the Read It Again! program, followed by examples of how teachers can implement this goal into play. A visual example of the how these goals can translate to activities found online or from the Play Learning Lab are also provided.

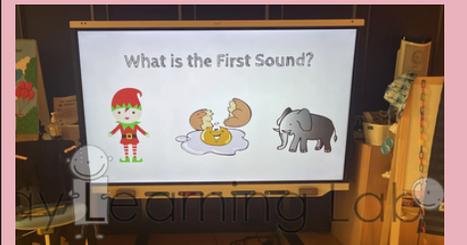
Objective	How to target in play	Photo example
<p>To identify and describe the setting, characters, and one or more events in a story.</p>	<p>At the playful learning stage, the teacher can lead a reading activity of a book and can implement identifying characters by pairing the book with visuals.</p>	
<p>To produce a fictional story that has settings and characters.</p>	<p>Teachers can lead a reading of a story. Then, have the students make the characters out of clay and draw the setting. The students can retell the story to each other using their creations.</p>	
<p>To produce a fictional story that has a clear beginning, middle, and end.</p>	<p>At the teacher directed stage, the students can create their own story using toys/figurine characters and a train. The train serves as a visual cue to represent the 3 main parts of the story.</p>	



Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the next guiding principle at the basis of language and literacy acquisition. A child's understanding of sound and structure of language is defined as phonological awareness (Justice, 2023). By kindergarten children who have better-developed phonological awareness skills will do better in early reading and phonics instruction (Justice, 2023). The Read It Again! program highlights that children who build foundational phonological awareness skills will be better prepared for blending and segmenting skills that will lead to later developing decoding and spelling skills needed for reading and writing (Justice, 2023).

The following chart provides a few guiding objectives for phonological awareness intervention from the Read It Again! program, followed by examples of how teachers can implement this goal into play. A visual example of the how these goals can translate to activities found online or from the Play Learning Lab are also provided.

Objective	How to target in play	Photo example
<p>To identify and produce words that share a rhyming pattern.</p>	<p>This activity is structured at the playful learning stage. The teacher will lead the instruction of creating a list of rhyming words and then encourage the students to listen for these words in a story. Once the rhyming words are identified, the teacher can encourage the students to come up with more words that share the same pattern.</p>	
<p>To segment words into syllables and then blend syllables into words.</p>	<p>This teacher directed activity allows students to use manipulatives (e.g., beads on a string or buttons) to segment the various sounds in word and then blend them together again.</p>	
<p>To identify and produce words that share the same first sound.</p>	<p>At the learning through play stage, the teacher can set up this game to target specific words that start with the same first sound. The teacher can provide 3 pictures on the screen and instruct the students to label each word/talk about the first sounds. Then the teacher can cover the last photo or leave a space for the students to come up with 1 more example of a word with the same sound.</p>	

Print Knowledge



Print knowledge is the fourth guiding principle at the basis of language and literacy acquisition. Print knowledge is defined as using print units (e.g., alphabet letters) and combining letters to make words and written language (Justice, 2023). In kindergarten children continue building their familiarity of the alphabet and will start pairing these letters with sounds (Justice, 2023). The Read It Again! program explains that the understanding of print and alphabet knowledge are 2 of the most important predictors of later reading success (Justice, 2023).

The following chart provides a few guiding objectives for phonological awareness intervention from the Read It Again! program, followed by examples of how teachers can implement this goal into play. A visual example of the how these goals can translate to activities found online or from the Play Learning Lab are also provided.

Objective	How to target in play	Photo example
To recognize common sight words, including environmental print.	Recognizing sight words can be modelled through repetitive book reading where the teacher points out a common word and provides opportunity for the students to identify. Labels around the classroom with a word and visual can be used to help build knowledge around print for common words.	
To recognize that print carries meaning and distinguish it from pictures.	This type of “I spy” activity and book reading is seen on the continuum as learning through games. Here, the students can build vocabulary and practice visual discrimination as the books include words and pictures. The teacher can model reading the word and pointing to the pictures.	
To recognize the difference between letters and words.	This type of activity builds on knowledge from the previous phonological awareness activities. At the learning through games stage, students can label various words, sound out the first letter, and sort them into different categories. Using magnetic letters the teacher can model spelling these words and talking about the differences between letters and words.	

References

- Allen, S. (2021, July 15). “*where is the puppy?*” The Autism Helper. <https://t.ly/hxjlS>
- Becker, S. (2016). *Even superheroes have bad days*. amazon.ca. <https://www.amazon.ca/Even-Superheroes-Have-Bad-Days/dp/1454913940>
- Eastman, P. D., Silverstein, S., Hopkins, L. B., & Shulman, M. (n.d.). *Elkonin Boxes*. Reading Rockets. <https://www.readingrockets.org/classroom/classroom-strategies/elkonin-boxes>
- Justice, L. M., & McGinty, A. S. (2023, November 13). Read It Again! Read It Again - The Ohio State University . <https://readitagain.osu.edu/>
- Misskindergarten. (2015, July 15). *Utilizing color for classroom organization*. Miss Kindergarten. <https://t.ly/7Zmsw>
- Ms. M. (2012, February 21). *Beginning, middle & end*. Ms.M’s Blog. <https://msk1ell.blogspot.com/2012/02/beginning-middle-end.html>
- Pyle, A., & Danniels, E. (2016). A continuum of play-based learning: The role of the teacher in play-based pedagogy and the fear of hijacking play. *Early Education and Development*, 28(3), 274–289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2016.1220771>
- Pyle, A. (2020). *Examples of Play*. Play Learning Lab <https://www.playlearninglab.ca/examples-of-play>
- Sharp, A. (2023). *Decodable CVC word sliders segmenting & blending sounds fluency practice*. TPT. <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Decodable-CVC-Word-Sliders-Segmenting-Blending-Sounds-Fluency-Practice-1812478?st=fabbc0704e10aa66258b628cf0432d95>