

Everyone's a reader – 10 top tips to create engaging-rich literacy environments for all



These are needed for children to be able to read by breaking words into the sounds they contain.

2

Make time to sing and dance together. Play with rhymes, make up your own or repeat rhymes and beats. Provide opportunities to remember, repeat and join in with rhymes and rhymes, as they support our children's books to make connections needed for early reading. Children need to sequence and remember sounds to read words, so lots of memory games and repetition, enables them to practice skills needed and strengthen connections in their brains.

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So, what are my tips to help children to develop the skills needed, to build a foundation upon which later literacy skills can grow, whilst maintaining the fun, passion, and enjoyment for us all?

1

The importance of providing as many opportunities for young children to enjoy and experience language and literacy is well established as fundamental to later literacy development. But how can we make the time for this? How do we ensure that we start building up the routines from a young age, that make harnessing our children in rich literacy environments easy and doable?

Learning to read is one of the most rewarding and enjoyable skills that we can learn, yet we know that it can also be one of the most difficult to achieve. For young children, the process of learning to

Focus on developing children's understanding of sound and their ability to listen, these are key for early literacy development. Support your child to identify and understand sound, investigate, explore and discriminate between different sounds. Provide time for them to recognise your voice and the difference between the voices of others. An understanding of oral language is fundamental to reading. The ability to hear, identify and play around with sound, provides children with the essential skills required in early reading.

4

Increase children's exposure to hearing language in many situations and be aware of how important these are. These

could include playing songs, audio stories, nursery rhymes CDs during nappy change time, talking time, story CDs during long drives and so much more. Read stories, poems, nursery rhymes, instructions, or any text you come across lists, labels to babies and young children. Linking print and language in a meaningful and engaging situation is key, so read everything!

5

Become storytellers. Take time to make up stories together, tell stories about things that have happened and encourage our children to make up and tell stories based on things they have experienced. The power of storytelling, and narrative is culturally and historically proven as it creates connections in our brain, causing important physical changes. Create story journeys, use events, objects and people to bring stories to life!

6

Increase children's understanding of a wider range of words and vocabulary. This has a direct impact on their reading ability and later success. So, celebrate words, draw attention to unusual words and make it fun! I love the "Word Collector" that focusing on a young boy who collects lots of interesting and unusual words. Watch a [link here](#)

7

Be passionate about reading, make books part of family life, the icons, newspapers, eBooks, audio books, magazines, books that you don't love on Argos catalogue. Model yourself reading and show our children how much you enjoy it. Don't forget that audio books are fabulous too, for us and our children. My mum was and is an amazing storyteller, but some of my richest memories were of listening to story tapes from the local library with her. I remember talking about the story, as we

listened, both enjoying the shared time.

8

Make the most of opportunities to be involved in books and language in the community. Join the library, attend play groups, mix with other young children, watch local plays/dramas, listen to the singing/dance, and be involved in language rich activities.

9

Make the most of what children enjoy, follow their interest, and use it to gain their attention or motivate them to listen and take part in activities. We love Christmas in my house, so we sing carols, give books and make the most of the live events that happen during the time. Look at this link for book ideas <https://moodsonline.org.uk/activities/the-art-of-reading-book-list/>

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Make activities fun, enjoyable and rewarding. Praise and make participation as much as you can, while providing challenge but removing anxiety or stress. Remember to embrace the joy of literacy!

Here some useful links to find out more

[Speech and Language](#)

[Literacy Trust](#)

[Reading Rockets](#)



Sarah Moseley

Dr Sarah Moseley is an Educational Consultant and specialises in raising outcomes for all learners with SEND. She works with a wide range of organisations, as well as families and learners, providing face-to-face and online training, coaching, support and advice. Sarah is passionate about making a positive difference to the lives of all users and outcomes of those who may struggle to learn. Based on a belief that every individual has a difference, she wants to bridge the gap between theory and learning, to create a culture where high expectations thrive, inspiring activities for all pupils.

Sarah has over 10 years' knowledge and experience within special and mainstream education from teaching assistant to headteacher, as well as being a parent of a 7-year-old. She has a solid research background, worked within the psychology of learning. Her Masters and PhD were in Special Education and focused specifically on the teaching of reading and self-esteem. Sarah has represented education internationally and is a published author.

The teaching of English to learners with SEND

Her forthcoming publication on the teaching of reading to learners with complex needs is due March 2023

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The individual and collective nature of learning stories

The content of this article was inspired by personal experience which is often the encouragement one needs to put pen to paper. Having observed and listened to people close to me whom children started of new settings the past September,

I've been struck by the relevance of emotions felt, and the eagerness (and at times desperation) for feedback from the practitioners who now spend almost every day caring for and teaching little people who not long ago were being noddled in arms and sleeping in cots, their every move anticipated and known.

And what came to mind is how careful stories are in our relationships with parents, and how crucial they are in terms of building positive partnerships and community.

What is children's learning – all our learning – if not a story? Interestingly, in New Zealand's, Te Whāriki early childhood curriculum, learning stories are, in fact, a technique used to assess children's learning whereby teachers write narratives based on their on-going observations of

the children: a particular incident, a period carrying out a certain activity or a group event. Interpreting the children's actions and resultant learning by considering their competencies and attitudes in these given situations. This documentation, often consisting of photographs or video, along with the composed learning stories, are shared with the child and their family, with the documentation also forming part of the child's portfolio.

Viewing learning as a collection of stories and in fact, viewing the and others through what I call a story lens is an effective way to cultivate greater compassion and strengthen connection. It is simply a way of seeing the people around us in terms of their lived stories and as we begin to do this, it often changes the way we relate to them.

On a practical level, this means committing to:

- Honouring the stories of the children – Asking 'What has their journey - to date - been?' My youngest niece



was born at twenty-six weeks and endured a long battle for survival in an NICU unit. At merely a year old, she had already endured a vast range of medical procedures and physical trials. Her early years have been about overcoming many obstacles.

What is essential in terms of her learning journey is that she is seen in the context of her whole story, for the hero that she is. Indeed, every child in a setting, no matter their cultural, religious or socio-economic background, brings with them a history, and rich knowledge of some kind. It is through respecting that the stories that we can begin to facilitate their learning to ensure the best possible journey for them.

• Honouring the stories of the parents – What has their journey with their child entailed? What emotions do they carry as their children attend school?

We cannot address learning and behaviour at school without some awareness of what the stories are being told outside of it. Importantly, what learning stories have been written in the lives of the parents? Are they negative tales that they wish for their child never to repeat? Or have they been fortunate characters in positive tales that they now wish for their child/children to experience and possibly emulate? Both visions require a backdrop of passion – a strong communication of the child's individuality, and a gentle reminding that this is a new story that is being crafted.

• As practitioners, identifying the collective stories of the child and their family, understanding that the individual children in our care form part of a far larger story as members of a family, with siblings,



aunts, uncles, grandparents and of communities outside of the school itself. As the children grow and learn, they become individual contributors to a larger collective with the work of teachers hoping for-reaching effects.

• As practitioners, ensuring we share the stories of the children accurately – both the stories of success and of struggle. Having the courage to communicate truthfully whilst also employing hope which asks, 'Can tomorrow be better than today? Is there a way to make it so?' Can I stay the course to not to make it so?

Parents are often aware that there may be challenges to face in terms of children settling in and socialising, learning, and achieving. What they require from us as practitioners is transparency. We know that time is of the essence in a child's earliest years as we look to support their development, and early diagnosis of learning difficulties is key in obtaining the best outcomes. This therefore requires detailed observations taken over time, along with considered input gathered in consultation with other professionals working in the environment to be passed on with great wisdom and compassion. What we are looking to do, in every circumstance, is to work in partnership with parents to ensure that we implement the best strategies for their child.

• As adults in the lives of children, sharing stories of joy - the word 'joy' means to give joy and comes from the word rejoice. We need to ask ourselves, 'Are the children enjoying learning?' Are we facilitating this by rejecting in their discovery and their learning? Are they able to give joy to themselves and to others? Or are we either sharing stories of struggle? Where children should behave in certain ways and should meet certain standards, with these should stories often based on the cultural and traditional stories that we hold onto?

Some of the deepest learning of my adult life has been that the 'shoulds' we judge by often lead to shame on the part of the children in our care. And the evidence to this, the behaviour of the children, is in the embracing of their uniqueness: in the acknowledgment of the precious stories they hold, and in the desire to walk along with them as co-learners as they uncover joy in their learning.

At this festive time, there is much rejecting and hope around stories that are second to us. May we be reminded of the sacredness of all stories, considering how deeply each person's perspective matters, and may the narratives we tell be infused with these same qualities: those we believe about and tell the children and their families, and those we tell to and with our colleagues.

Wishing you stories filled with wonder as we look to the new year.

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She authored a chapter on using the process of narrative to develop empathy in early childhood in the book, 'Developing Empathy in the Early Years: A Guide for Practitioners' and then with the book, 'Using Stories to Support Learning and Development in Early Childhood'. She is passionate about developing healthy educational storylines to meet the needs of every learner, and about ethics.