10 Integrating Literacy Skills Into the Play Centers

PLAYING "BEACH TRIP"

At an early education program for low-income families in the inner city, a teacher has just finished reading a story about a trip to the beach to a small group of children. The children appeared familiar with the story, and the teacher presented the information from the book using the dialogic reading technique, which allows the teacher to have conversations about the book with the students. (Information on dialogic reading will be presented later in this chapter.) Specifically, the teacher and students were discussing the use of rhyming words throughout the story, the main ideas of the story, and their own personal experiences of taking a trip to the beach or a lake.

The teacher told the children that they would be transitioning soon and that they needed to think about which center they wanted to go to next. Three of the children asked if they could play "Beach Trip," and she gave them permission to do so. Next, the teacher got all the children's attention in the room by singing "The waves at the beach go splash, splash, splash" to the tune of "The Wheels on the Bus." She then alerted them that they would need to be ready to transition to a new center in a few minutes.

She also mentioned that she was going to introduce two new activities. First, she pulled a bag out of her backpack and told the children that she and her friend had taken a trip to the beach over the weekend and that she had brought some things from the beach to their classroom. She asked the children to try to guess what could be in the bag. After about 10 appropriate guesses, the teacher said that at the beginning of center time she would be over at the Science Center with the bag. Children could come there if they were interested in seeing what she had.

Second, she announced that a group of children had asked if they could play "Beach Trip," and that this activity would be happening over by the door. She then announced again to the children that they had to clean up and be at a center in five minutes. She set a timer and began to circulate around the room with the other adults, encouraging the children to begin preparing.

(Continued)

(Continued)

The three children who were interested in playing "Beach Trip" went over by the door and opened a large plastic box. They enthusiastically took the following items out of the box: three beach towels, two pairs of sunglasses, one hat, two pails, two shovels, suntan lotion, a blue sheet (which they said was the ocean), a snorkel, a pair of goggles, a life jacket, approximately eight blocks (which they said would be the sand), and a plastic basket with plastic food. As they took the items out, they made comments about them to each other.

While the children were examining the items and commenting, one of the children, who was learning English, said that she wanted to use the "water glasses." The teacher, who was standing close by, approached the girl and said, "I'm trying to think of the special name that the glasses had in the story that we just read." Another child responded with, "They're goggles. I know—I have some." With encouragement from the teacher, the first child referred to them quietly as "goggles."

One child then announced that he was going to find rocks in the water. He began to empty the basket of its food when another child said "No, no. We need that for the food." The child with the basket responded that he needed the basket and the food because he was going into the water to get the rocks. He began to jump around on the blue sheet. Another child jumped onto the sheet with a zucchini and, holding the zucchini up high, then said, "I went down and found a fish!"

Children in today's early education classrooms come from a variety of background experiences and have varying literacy skills. Some children enter classrooms having interacted with print every day in a meaningful manner and understanding the power of print in their lives. Others—and this number appears to be rapidly growing (Resnick & Snow, 2009)—come from backgrounds that could emphasize oral stories and communications more than traditional print. These children might not feel as comfortable as other children around text-based materials. Therefore, programs cannot merely offer literacy experiences that only use print from books and on paper. Instead, all children must be afforded daily opportunities to actively and more broadly engage in familiar and meaningful print activities, so that they can be self-motivated to gradually cultivate and advance their literacy skills in a personal manner.

Play activities are developmentally appropriate activities that allow children to use self-motivation to enrich some literacy skills. Through the integration of play and literacy activities, like the ones described in this chapter's opening scenario, children can develop an early literacy foundation that will enhance successful academic skills throughout their formal educational years. Similar to the discussion in the *Harvard Education Letter* about older children's learning (Rothman, 2012), young children do not learn through isolated, domain-focused activities. Instead, learning is an interconnected process that transpires across various developmental domains (NAEYC, 2009a). Professionals need to access early learning standards or foundations when designing self-motivating learning activities for children.

This chapter answers the following questions related to integrating play and literacy development:

> Why is it important to integrate Early Learning Standards and Kindergarten Common Core Standards into play activities?

> What are some of the common skills that are enhanced in both play and early literacy activities?

> How can developmentally appropriate play activities be used to further enhance literacy skills?
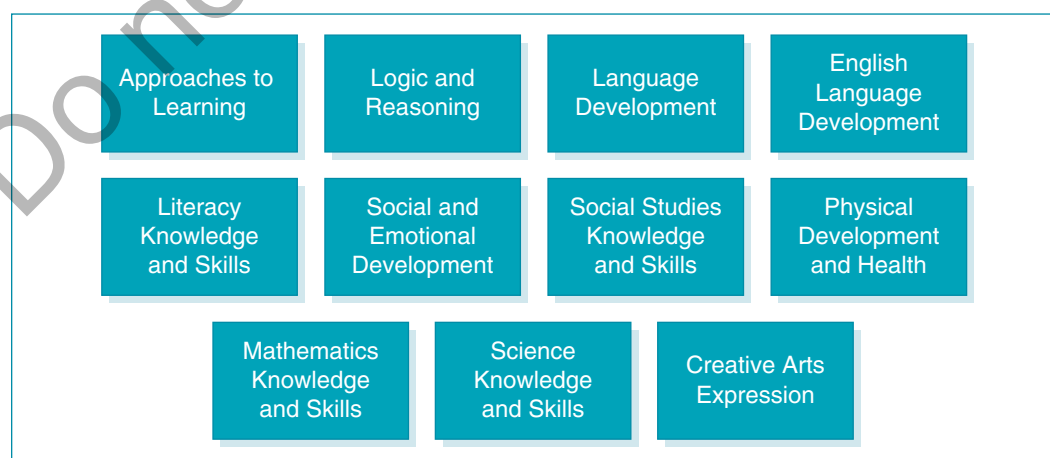
The Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework

Most states have early learning standards or foundations. However, it is not feasible for this book to illustrate all the different ones adopted by the states. Although most of these standards or foundations are solidly grounded in research and incorporate an evidence-based sequential development of skills, each state chooses a unique method for presenting that information. Furthermore, the states use inconsistent language in describing the various standards.

To reflect the broadest approach possible, this book references the learning standard outcomes from the *Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework* (Head Start, 2011) to illustrate strategies for integrating standards into playful activities. The **Head Start Framework** consists of 11 essential learning elements that can be used for collecting data to determine developmental progress and to identify areas of focus for further learning activities. It includes what are termed "sequential elements" instead of "standards" for guiding the development of children between the ages of 3 and 5. The framework does not provide either specific benchmarks or a list of skills to be accomplished. The framework is not comprehensive and should not be used as a checklist to assess learning. Instead, supporting the NAEYC concerns about using standards with young children, the developmental and learning elements are sufficiently broad to assist with establishing readiness goals, monitoring progress, aligning curricula, and planning activities. Additionally, although the elements are organized in specific developmental and learning areas, the Head Start Framework does not imply that compartmentalized learning should occur for young children. Instead, it promotes programs that address learning in "an integrated way, using intentional instruction and scaffolded learning throughout the day" (Head Start, 2011, p. 2).

Under each of the elements is a list of examples of behaviors that support those elements. Therefore, the 2011 Head Start Framework is a tool for analyzing children's skills and for collecting data to determine developmental progress and identifying areas of focus for future learning activities. Other assessment tools and curricula should also be used when determining and designing the day-to-day activities for young children. The Head Start Framework can be found online at: http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/eecd/assessment/child%20Outcomes/revised-child-outcomes.html. Head Start organized young children's competencies into the 11 domains of development illustrated in Figure 10.1.

Figure 10.1   Head Start Early Learning and Development Elements

Approaches to Learning	Logic and Reasoning	Language Development	English Language Development
Literacy Knowledge and Skills	Social and Emotional Development	Social Studies Knowledge and Skills	Physical Development and Health
Mathematics Knowledge and Skills	Science Knowledge and Skills	Creative Arts Expression	

This book takes those 11 domains and associates them with a variety of learning centers that are typically found in early education classrooms: socio-dramatic play, science/health, mathematics, social studies/book, and creative arts/motor centers (see Figure 10.2). At the center of the Figure 10.2 diagram are the socio-dramatic play centers where, as discussed in Chapter 6 of this book, all other center activities should be related either to the theme and/ or to the children's demonstration of socio-dramatic play skills. Note that the diagram uses double arrows, indicating and supporting NAEYC's belief that learning is not compartmentalized at this age.

K–12 Common Core State Standards

As children transition into their formal academic careers, they will be expected to build on their early learning foundation and to demonstrate enhanced reading, writing, speaking

Figure 10.2 Overview of Learning Centers and Integrated Learning Elements/Standards

and listening, and language skills. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)** are now being used by most teachers in kindergarten through high school throughout the country to integrate language arts, math, and literacy across the curriculum. The standards for kindergarten allow teachers to design formal and informal instructional opportunities in which language arts and mathematics skills are developed through small and large group activities. These standards are lists of skills that children should develop by the end of the designated grade.

Figure 10.3 demonstrates the transitions in the area of literacy development that children progress through when moving from preschool to their kindergarten year. The six Early Developmental Domains that relate to literacy development directly relate to the four CCSS English Language Arts (ELA) of speaking/listening, language, reading, and writing.

Unfortunately, the Common Core State Standards do not provide skills and competencies in the area of social and emotional development. In their joint statement on the Common Core State Standards, NAEYC and NAECS/SDE (2010) expressed concern about the developers of those standards focusing only on two content domains and strongly urged "the addition of social and emotional development . . . as the next area for high-quality, developmentally and grade appropriate common standards work" (p. 2). Because they are not currently available, social and emotional standards for kindergarten have not been included here.
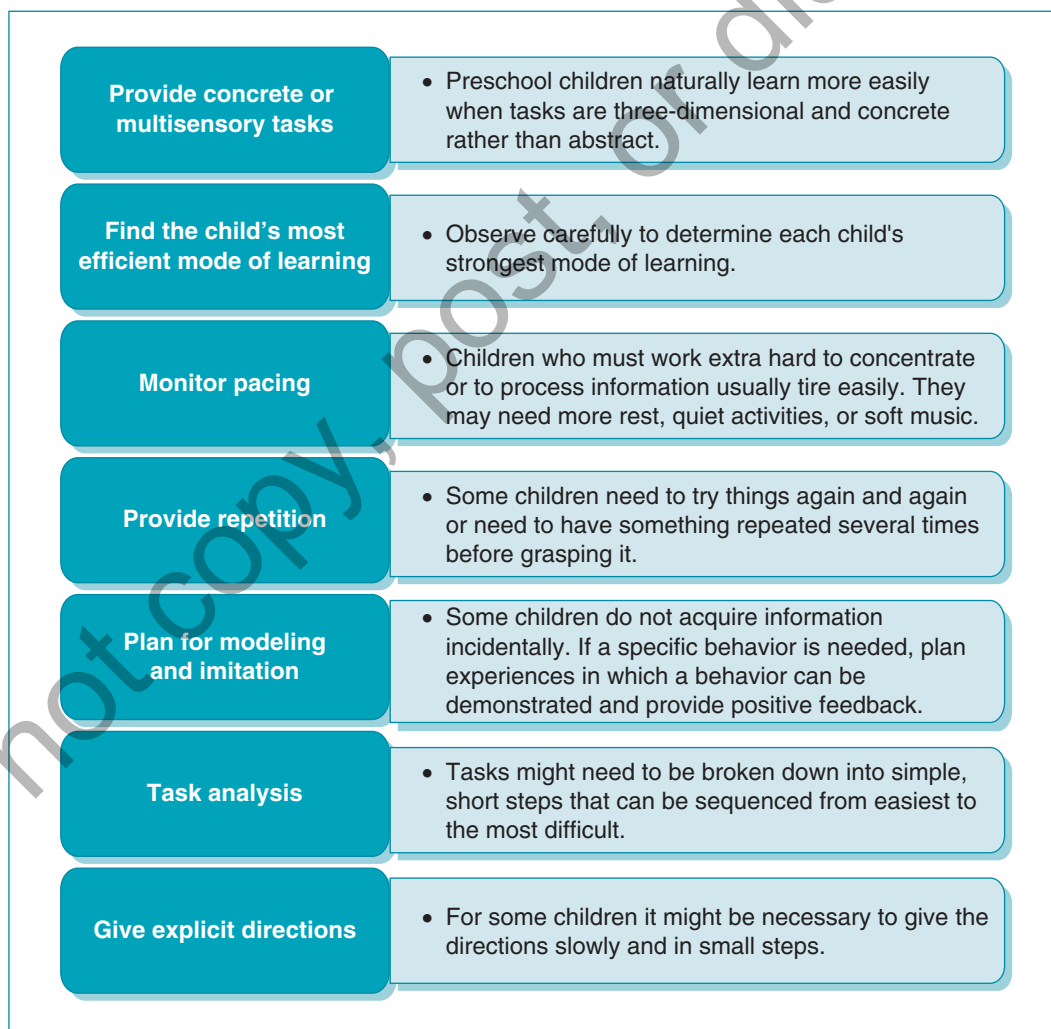
Additionally, the International Reading Association (IRA) (2012) has cautioned that the Common Core State Standards establish a "one-size-fits-all" approach to learning

Figure 10.3   Transitions From Head Start Elements to Common Core State Standards
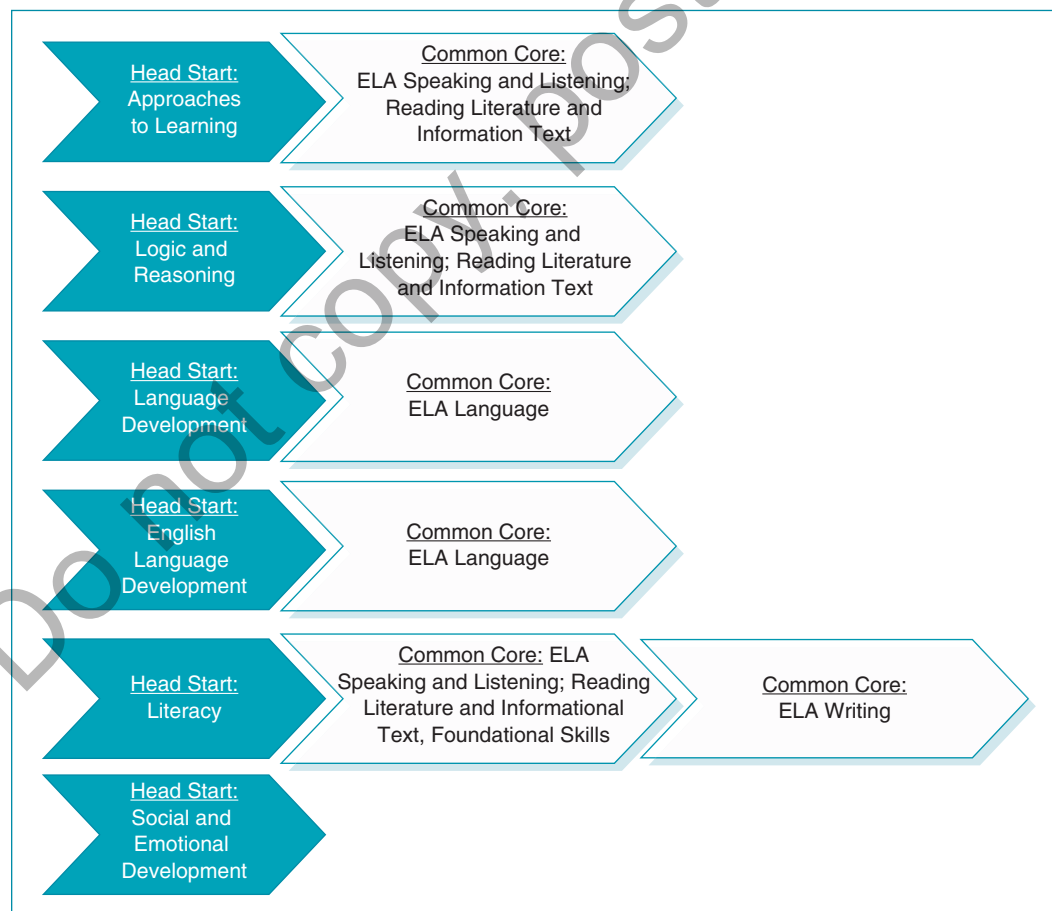
for all students. However, as presented in Part I of this book, the students attending schools today exhibit great differences, and it is impossible to believe that all students will similarly develop these learning skills, the way the CCSS suggest. The CCSS standards set a base of "what" all children must work toward but they do not dictate how to facilitate learning to meet the standards. The instructional decisions by teachers to support a diverse student body remain flexible. Differentiation continues to be an integral part of the CCSS standards in supporting all students to learn at high levels. IRA recommends more financial support that focuses on the dissemination of information addressing the wide range of needs of diverse students. Obviously, some students will require more intensive inputs than others. Figure 10.4 provides suggestions for accommodations that could assist young children who exhibit challenging learning behaviors (Cook, Klein, & Chen, 2012).

Figure 10.4 Considerations for Children Needing Extra Time or Spaced Practice

Provide concrete or multisensory tasks	• Preschool children naturally learn more easily when tasks are three-dimensional and concrete rather than abstract.
Find the child's most efficient mode of learning	• Observe carefully to determine each child's strongest mode of learning.
Monitor pacing	• Children who must work extra hard to concentrate or to process information usually tire easily. They may need more rest, quiet activities, or soft music.
Provide repetition	• Some children need to try things again and again or need to have something repeated several times before grasping it.
Plan for modeling and imitation	• Some children do not acquire information incidentally. If a specific behavior is needed, plan experiences in which a behavior can be demonstrated and provide positive feedback.
Task analysis	• Tasks might need to be broken down into simple, short steps that can be sequenced from easiest to the most difficult.
Give explicit directions	• For some children it might be necessary to give the directions slowly and in small steps.

Source: Adapted from Cook, R. E., Klein, M. D., & Chen, D. (2012). *Adapting Early Childhood Curricula for Children With Special Needs* (p. 136). New York, NY: Pearson.

REFLECT AND APPLY EXERCISE 10.1

Social and Emotional Standards

Reflect

Assume that the Common Core State Standards it agrees with the NAEYC that kindergarten children must have Social and Emotional Standards.

Apply

You have been asked to serve on the task force that will design these standards. Review the Social and Emotional Head Start Elements and Examples that are listed on this link: http://eclkc .ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/eecd/assessment/child%20Outcomes/revised-child-outcomes.html. Choose three of those examples that you believe should be continued in the kindergarten year and explain why they should be continued.

Play and Literacy

Part I of this book presented information on how learning at a young age is interrelated in a variety of developmental areas and should not be presented in fragmented and isolated activities outside children's natural, everyday learning contexts (Singer et al., 2006). For example, the opening scenario for this chapter illustrates how creating a beach trip context affords children a variety of natural learning opportunities to expand skills suggested in the Head Start Framework:

- **Logic and Reasoning Skills:** As stated in Chapter 2, play allows children to logically create more sophisticated symbolic representations. In this chapter's opening scenario, the children use a sheet for the ocean, the blocks for rocks, and a zucchini for a fish.
- **Learning Skills:** As stated in Chapter 2, children become comfortable acting out familiar schemas through play interactions. Children in the opening scenario are becoming more familiar with the schema of a "Beach Trip" as they act it out.
- **Language Skills, consistent with Second Language Learning Skills:** As stated in Chapter 4, play provides children a safe opportunity to develop language and vocabulary. The "Beach Trip" scenario allows the children to hear and use new vocabulary in a comfortable environment—for instance, goggles.
- **Literacy Skills:** Chapter 4 also describes how play enhances children's opportunities to develop well-sequenced stories. The children in this chapter's opening scenario are creating a beach trip story that has appropriately sequenced activities such as jumping into the ocean and finding rocks.

Reading and understanding informational text becomes self-motivating when children are involved in collaborative activities.

Thinkstock/Stockbyte/Thinkstock

- **Social and Emotional Skills:** Chapter 3 explains how play assists children in developing skills for negotiating and compromising. In the opening scenario for this chapter, the children are negotiating the use of the plastic food basket to catch fish or to contain lunch.

These playful opportunities contribute to an expansion of literacy skills through well-planned and carefully guided socio-dramatic play activities. For example, in the opening scenario, the teacher had specific beach items that she wanted to carefully introduce to children and, therefore, she announced that she would be opening her backpack at the science center. As previously stated, she chose to present these items in a organized situation when she could focus on new vocabulary and language structures instead of just placing the items in the Beach Box or freely giving them to the children. Most likely, once the children are familiar with the items and their purposes, the teacher will then allow them to be used to create pretend play narratives.

Chapter 4 demonstrates how children use pretending and metacommunications to develop play narratives that gradually become more *decontextualized* as children's skills improve. **Decontextualized narratives** are stories that are removed from the everyday, tangible, and familiar experiences within an immediate context (McKeown & Beck, 2006). They require children to make sense of the language that they hear by building on their own ideas about the words used.

Becoming comfortable with decontextualized information is vital for the development of literacy competence and academic success. Literacy activities require children to read decontextualized print to understand a story or use decontextualized printed or spoken words to develop a story. As children develop as socio-dramatic players, they design stories that are more decontextualized—that is, more dependent on shared metacommunications rather than on actions or objects. Similarly, young children's books, which gradually replace visual illustrations with printed words, are an example of the use of decontextualized print.

For example, beginning players enact stories about kitchen activities and usually use realistic-looking objects to assist with narrative creation. However, as they become more experienced players and language users, children become capable of transforming an ordinary cardboard box into a rocket ship, using language and pretending to create a complex trip to the moon story. Similarly, the young children's books, such as *The Napping House* by Audrey Wood, have pages that are mostly covered with visual illustrations, along with a small area that contains the print for the story. As children develop they become successful at reading decontextualized chapter books, such as E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web,* which have very few pictures and require children to create their own picture story based on the print they are hearing or reading. Becoming familiar with using decontextualized narratives and proficient at understanding them is a major source of learning and lies at the center of all academic achievement.

Children's thrilling and dynamic socio-dramatic play activities can significantly contribute to the expansion of decontextualized language, the enhancement of early literacy skills, and the increase of academic abilities. Consequently, adults must understand how to adapt all classroom centers into play centers that provide the following:

1. Opportunities for children to implement engaging socio-dramatic activities across the learning curriculum, and

2. Activities that foster high-quality learning by integrating early literacy learning standards into these play enactments.

## Common Characteristics of Play and Literacy

As discussed in Chapter 3, young children who are involved in socio-dramatic play are *self-motivated* to use decontextualized *language* and *symbolic representations* so that they can

co-construct play narratives reflecting their *knowledge of the world*. Similarly, Chapter 4 demonstrated that early literacy development depends on children being *self-motivated* to use print, which consists of the *symbolic representation* of letters and sounds, and *decontextualized language* to construct narratives that reflect *knowledge of their worlds*. Consequently, socio-dramatic play and literacy share the following common characteristics.

- **Reflect world knowledge.** Children are able to create a play narrative or understand print when they are familiar with the topic.
- **Require self-motivation.** Children must be intrinsically motivated to continue creating a play narrative or to use print meaningfully.
- **Enhance language development.** Children can safely expand their language and vocabulary when they are involved in play enactments and are exposed to print that relates to them.
- **Involve symbolic representations.** Children create symbolic action, role, and object substitutions in play, and they identify letter symbols and their sounds when interacting with print.

These similarities between play and literacy are summarized in Figure 10.5.

Figure 10.5 Common Characteristics of Play and Literacy
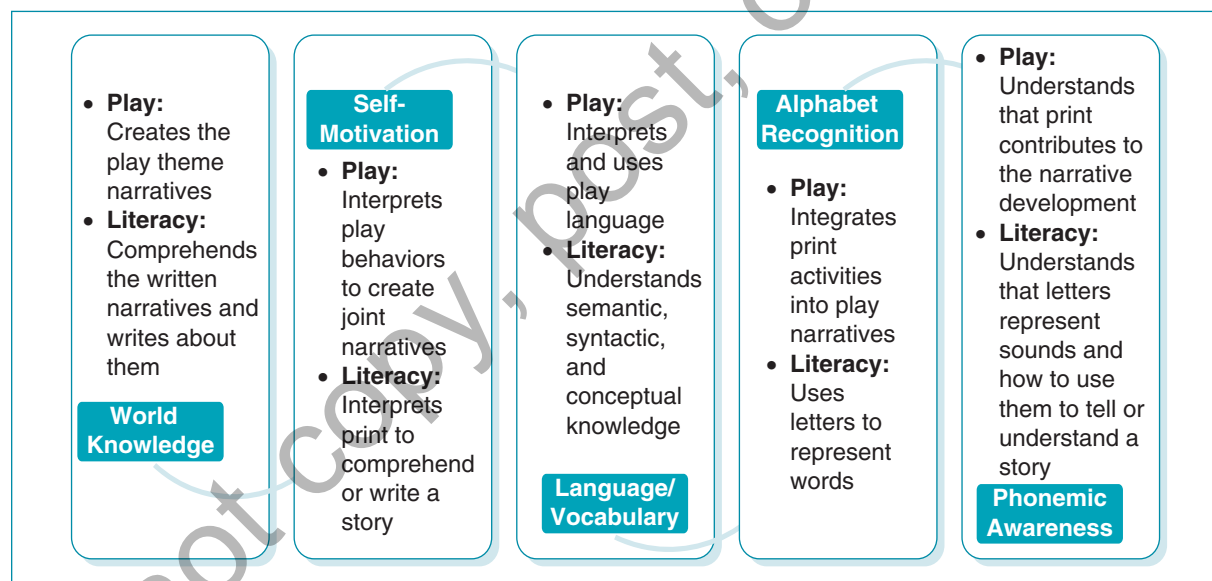
Therefore, by integrating early literacy skills into meaningful and comfortable playful activities in the classroom learning centers, children are self-motivated to expand their early literacy skills (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Pellegrini, 2011; Roskos & Christie, 2000; and Chapter 4 of this book). For example, the "Beach Trip" scenario at the opening of this chapter could be expanded into two other socio-dramatic play centers. One could be the "Surf and Sand Rental Stand center," which might be located outside, and the other could be the "Beach Burger Snack Stand." The following are objects that could be included at the Sand and Surf Rental Stand. Such items could be purchased at yard sales or thrift shops.

Beach chairs

Umbrellas (small)

Hats/visors

Goggles/fins

Towels

Fishing poles/nets

Life jackets

Buckets

Beach balls

Order pads/pens

Cash register

Money

Through involvement in the beach renting scenarios and decontextualized activities with the play objects, the skills listed in Figure 10.6 could be enhanced.
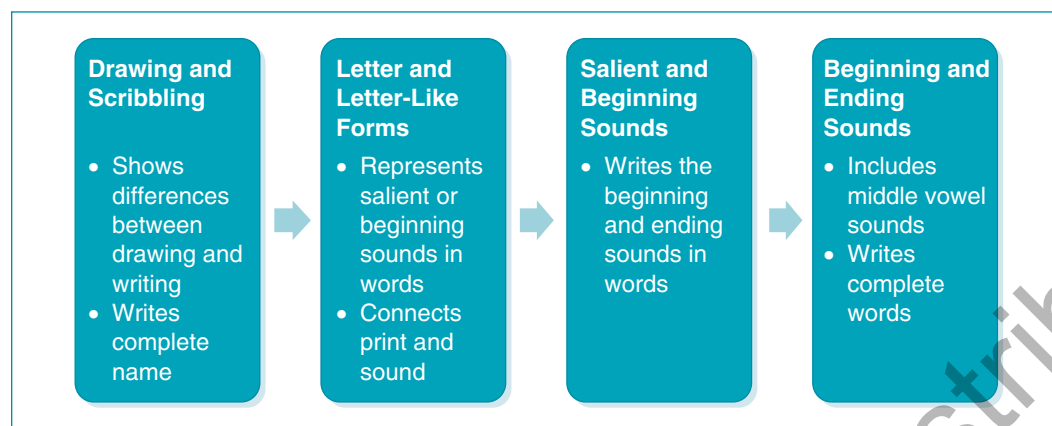
Early Writing Skills

In preschools today, the diversity of children's writing skills is a challenge to teachers (Cabell, Torterelli, & Gerde, 2013). Additionally, recent research indicates that very few preschool teachers know how to move children from one step of early writing to the next (Gerde & Bingham, 2012). Early writing includes the following:

- The physical act of making marks
- The meanings that children provide for their markings
- The understanding that written language represents spoken language

Although children learn at different rates, they tend to gradually progress through certain stages for writing. Figure 10.7 provides a summary of the stages as determined by

Figure 10.6   Skills That Could Develop Through Play Activities

Rental Stand	Enhanced Skills
Organizing the rental stand	Math: Classifying/ordering
Chairs and umbrellas	Motor: Opening and closing
Length of fishing poles	Math: Measuring
Size of life jackets, hats	Math: Numbers
Renting objects	Math: Numbers and money
Using beach balls	Motor: Kicking/tossing
Folding towels	Motor: Eye-hand coordination
Making sale signs	Literacy: Printing letters
Goggles/fins	Language: Vocabulary

Figure 10.7   Levels for the Development of Writing

Drawing and Scribbling	**Letter and Letter-Like Forms**	**Salient and Beginning Sounds**	**Beginning and Ending Sounds**
• Shows differences between drawing and writing • Writes complete name	• Represents salient or beginning sounds in words • Connects print and sound	• Writes the beginning and ending sounds in words	• Includes middle vowel sounds • Writes complete words

Source: Cabell, S. Q., Torterelli, L. S., & Gerde, H. K. (2013). How Do I Write. . . .?: Scaffolding Preschoolers' Early Writing Skills. *Reading Teacher, 66,* 650–659.

Cabell et al. (2013). Teachers can use some of the guiding strategies that are presented in Chapter 8 to scaffold successful writing experiences for children.

To foster literacy skills through play, however, teachers must plan the play centers and cautiously monitor the activities there. As Chapter 7 demonstrated, early learning standards or foundations can be used to guide professionals in planning high-quality learning activities that will enhance each child's individual learning potential.

Spoken Language

All children must be provided with opportunities to participate in speaking activities during the day. These activities can be structured conversations, where adults have planned to focus the children's discussion of a specific topic. They can also be unstructured activities that are typically child-introduced, unplanned conversations.

During the structured conversations, the adult continues to direct the children's attention toward concepts, vocabulary, and grammatical structures that are appropriate for the group. Some of the more familiar activities that support structured conversations are the following:

What's in the Box/Bag? Place a specific object in a container and ask the children to guess what the object could be based on clues provided and answers to guesses.

Follow the Directions: Ask a child to do a number of tasks with items in the classroom. For example, "Take the truck and place it under the table in the art center. Next, put four large paint brushes in that truck. Finally, drive the truck back to us and tell us what you did."

Book Critics: Show the children a specific book that they are familiar with and ask them who liked the story and why. Then ask the other children why they didn't like the story and how could it be changed so that they would like it.

It Does/Does Not Belong: Tell children about two objects that are related or not related. Have them tell you why they belong or do not belong together. For example, you can say, "a bus ticket and suitcase" or "a hat and a glass of water." Although children might not give you the response that you were thinking of, if they can logically defend their choice, they are correct.

What Belongs at the Learning Center: Choose a learning center and have the children talk about the different items that they might find there and why those items are at that center. Along with enhancing spoken language skills, this activity also assists with reinforcing concepts and vocabulary that are being featured in the different centers.

During unstructured conversations, the children take the lead, and the adult supports them by asking open-ended prompts to learn more about what information they want to share. The following are suggestions for more child-centered spoken language activities:

Share Time: A special day when children can bring in some favorite item from home and talk to the class about it.

Story Starters: The adult starts a story and then the children continue it and develop the character, plot, and sequence of events for that story.

Interviewing: Have one child interview another child about something that might have happened at school or at home. The use of a play microphone will assist with this activity.

Spoken Language Activities and English Language Learners

The following are suggestions to keep in mind when working on spoken language activities with children who do not use English as a home language:

- For group activities, match English language learners with children who have strong English language skills. Also, make sure that all the children who speak the same home language are not grouped together.
- Provide opportunities for unstructured conversation activities so that English language learners can choose activities of interest that involve their language abilities.
- Provide prompts for children when they are talking. When they need to find the truck, have a picture of a truck to show them if they are not yet familiar with that word.
- Use open-ended prompts that can have multiple answers, so English language learners can expand their utterances. Use, "Which hat do you like the best?" instead of "Why do we wear this hat?"

Creating Play Centers to Expand Literacy Skills

Part I of this book and the previous section of this chapter discussed the different theoretical aspects of play and literacy development. Additionally, Chapters 6 and 7 described how to design classroom learning centers. This next section presents information on three strategies to consider when designing play centers that enhance children's literacy skills.

Creating Multifaceted Learning Opportunities

As Part I documented, socio-dramatic play behaviors do not begin in preschool. These multifaceted, highly developed skills start to develop in children at a very young age. Infants, who are busy learning about the real world around them, begin to engage in frequent play activities when provided with realistic-looking toys. Therefore, during infancy, dolls should look life-like and be accompanied by real-looking bottles, cradles, and blankets. Additionally, trucks should have an item or two placed inside them.

Toddlers typically increase their small and large muscle coordination. They also become physically capable of moving items around in their environment and arranging them in a way that is self-pleasing. They use these developing fine and gross motor skills to put on clothing, open purses and briefcases, handle small dishes/cups, hammer pegs, and coordinate the movement of rakes and brooms. The development of these motor skills directly impacts a toddler's ability to more actively participate in creating play narratives. Children at this age are able to dress up and "become" other people, and to manipulate objects into becoming other items.

As the cognitive abilities of preschool children are enriched through everyday participation in problem-solving activities, their ability to plan, negotiate, and coordinate evolves. Typically, special spaces are dedicated in the home and classroom where children participate in the planning, negotiating, and coordinating of pretend enactments. These spaces usually include props and toys that assist in the development of activities focusing on specific play themes—for example, housekeeping, workshop, medical clinic, and so forth. In these centers, teachers can guide children's development of language and literacy skills by integrating literacy objects and open-ended objects.

By using complex language structures and enhanced vocabulary, older preschoolers and kindergarteners are capable of generating complex, abstract, and engaging play stories through coordinated interactions with multiple peers. These interactions present a natural and rich opportunity for children to acquire language. These well-planned, intricate, and decontextualized stories involve the use of sophisticated symbolic representations.

Selecting Appropriate Socio-Dramatic Play Themes

Children arrive at school with some understanding of home-life and family interactions. Therefore, setting up a center with literacy items that reflect what different children would find in their homes affords opportunities for the children to re-enact those literacy activities through pretend behaviors with peers. When those familiar activities are linked with early learning standards, children receive multiple opportunities to learn, practice, and combine literacy concepts and skills.

However, once children become familiar with play activities that focus around home life, the center theme should be changed. Chapter 7 provided a number of methods for determining different play themes, and the following are four suggestions of factors to consider:

- **Not all themes are appropriate for all ages.** If a class consists of children of mixed ages, one center might be designated for the younger children and another for the older children.
- **Integrate the theme and encourage the levels of pretense and narrative development in other learning centers.** Because of the impact of socio-dramatic play on language and literacy development, pretend narratives should be encouraged in all the learning centers, not just the socio-dramatic centers.
- **Remember to change center themes throughout the year.** If behavior problems are being noted in the center, then the children are most likely bored with the activities. So change the center's theme.
- **Do not allow stereotyping based on gender.** All children should be allowed to explore any role that they choose.

Depending on the interests of the children and the topics that are being covered in the program's curriculum, Figure 10.8 suggests 20 different themes that can be used, along with suggestions for realistic objects.

Of course many more themes can be used. Furthermore, the objects listed are just a beginning of the process of creating carefully planned socio-dramatic play centers. To get ideas for

**Figure 10.8**   Realistic Objects That Can Be Included in Play Centers

Play Theme	Realistic Objects
Bank	Calculator, money, cash box, teller windows, checks, rubber stamp
Beach	Umbrella, pails, shovels, shells, lotion, towels, goggles, picnic basket, hats
Beauty Salon	Brushes, smocks, mirrors, spray, appointment book, hair dryer, towels
Camping	Tent, sleeping bag, back packs, flashlight, canteen, binoculars, maps
Car Wash	Rags, buckets, tricycles, hose, squeegees, specials signs, money
Fire Station	Uniform, stepladder, engine, hose, boots, phone, dog, megaphone
Gas Station	Tools, money, work clothes, tire gauge, oil/funnel, gas can, tire pump
Hardware Store	Pipes, tape, screws, tool kit, truck, rags, flash light, manual
Medical Center	Computer, eye chart, cotton, bandages, gloves, x-rays, gauze, smock
Outer Space	Flag, rocket ship, walkie-talkies, stars, food, air tank, helmet
Paint Store	Brushes, paint cans, rags, stepladder, sheets, tape, sand paper, stick
Photo Studio	Camera, tripod, film, pictures, case, photos, computer, magazines
Pizza Parlor	Oven, pans, boxes, cash register, play pizza cutter, phone, pizzas
Post Office	Boxes, tape, labels, rubber stamps, envelopes, string, computer, scale
Rock Store	Rocks, trays, cash register, order pads, rags, name tags, polish
Shoe Store	Shoes, boxes, sale receipts, floor mirror, sale signs, price tags
Theater	Tickets, projector, money, popcorn, candy, sodas, movies
Travel Agency	Tickets, tablets, maps, travel books, atlas, posters, passports
Veterinarian Office	Prescriptions, smock, stuffed animals, examining table, x-rays, carrier
Zoo	Tickets, broom, shovel, animals, blocks, peanuts, feeding schedules

more themes and objects, just look around the communities where the children live, ask the families, and listen to and watch the children!

Organizing Socio-Dramatic Play Materials

As mentioned in Chapter 7, children should be provided with play spaces that are easily organized and do not contain an excessive amount of materials at any one time. Figure 10.9 illustrates how an area can be organized by placing wooden pegs or hooks that children can reach and from which clothing can hang. Additionally, attaching a piece of pegboard with hooks to a wall of the center allows children to hang jewelry/purses, equipment, and cloth bags that are labeled for specific items that might be difficult to hang (e.g., shells and rocks, medical items, household items, beauty items). Organizing the play materials in a specific manner also assists in encouraging children to think through enactments and produce orderly sequences, instead of randomly grabbing items and pretending. Finally, having three-tiered plastic baskets, with each dedicated to certain household categories of items (e.g., beach things, table things, and rock polishing things), also contributes to well-planned play activities.

Many of these organizational materials should be labeled with pictures and/or print. For example, the hooks from which the clothing is hung can be labeled with general words such as "jackets," "dresses," "shirts," "uniforms," "aprons," and "hats." Two or three hooks may have the same label or one general label over them. Think carefully about the children's language abilities and how you will label the items. This is an excellent opportunity to introduce new and meaningful words to the children and, as the children begin to use those words

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Figure 10.9 Storage Suggestions for Socio-Dramatic Play Clothing and Objects

Pegboard	Hooks

Three-Tiered Baskets

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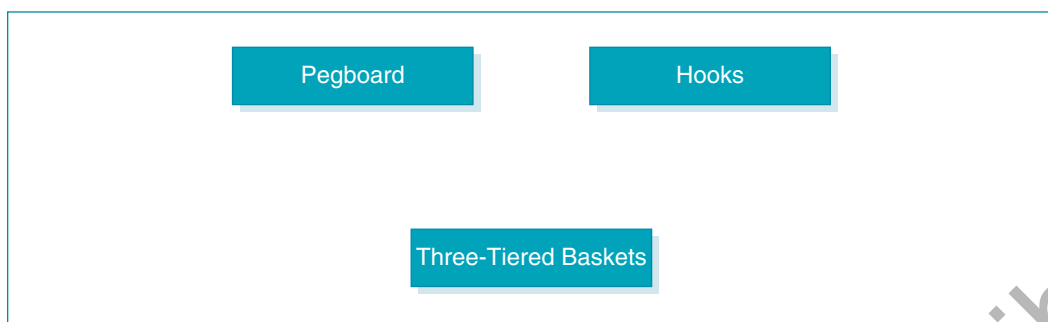
naturally, to change them so that the children are continually exposed to new words to say and read. For English learners, seeing the labels in English next to familiar items helps them use their primary language skills and language to support learning English.

Another method for organizing play activities for young children is to make sure that the play area is not overwhelmed with props. Very young children should have just a few, realistic-looking articles familiar from household environments. Then, as children enhance their world knowledge, centers can focus on community events and include items that are more abstract and that require children to use their imaginations to determine an item's function. Finally, materials associated with literacy-based activities should always be included—such as appointment books, rubber stamps, paper, pens, calendars, file folders, magazines, clipboards, maps, instructions, and measuring items.

Integrating Literacy Activities Into Play Center Activities

With careful planning and sensitive guidance, all children can develop skills that support both the Head Start Language Arts Elements and the Kindergarten Common Core State Standards when they are involved in creating socio-dramatic play narratives and when they are working with adults on small group learning activities. Small group activities provide opportunities for adults to guide children toward the independent production of target skills. As stated in Chapter 7, such activities allow an adult to work with a group of 3 or 4 children to develop their individual skills. This activity can occur while other adults in the classroom guide children at the learning centers toward achieving higher quality learning abilities.

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Providing literacy objects encourages literacy activities when children play.

Chapter 7 also suggested that, every day, the teachers could schedule themselves to work with two groups of 3 or 4 children for about 20 minutes each during the approximately one hour of time scheduled for the individualized learning center. Working in a couple of small groups with a total of eight children a day on their unique literacy skills allows all the children in a class of 20 to interact with the teacher at least twice a week. During those times the teacher can guide them on the individual development of literacy skills.

The following are descriptions of four research-based, guided literacy activities that can be used in conjunction with play center activities while children are involved in small group

activities with an adult. The adult integrates individualized literacy learning elements or standards into these activities. The guided strategies are: (1) planning play activities, (2) searching for words, (3) dissecting words, and (4) reporting a story. Again, as with all learning at a young age, children are self-motivated to learn if pretense is integrated into the activities. Therefore, when working on these activities, pretend props should be included. The following are suggestions:

Guided Activities	Themes	Props	Reason
Guided Activity #1: Planning Play Activities	Construction worker	Construction hats Building plans	Good plans will construct a sturdy play enactment
Guided Activity #2: Searching for Words	Detective	Magnifying glasses Hats	Words can be found all around the environment
Guided Activity #3: Dissecting Words	Scientist	Lab coats Plastic tweezers (if appropriate)	Words can be dissected into syllables, letters, and sounds
Guided Activity #4: Reporting Stories	News reporter	Microphones Cameras Notepads	Play enactments produce news-worthy events

Guided Activity #1: Play Plans

Child-created *play plans* offer a vehicle for integrating many developmental skills into play activities.

What are play plans? As mentioned in Chapter 9 on Assessment, **play plans** are proposals for what children want to do during play activities. They are created just before children participate in various play activities (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). This activity is also similar to the HighScope Curriculum concept of *Plan-Do-Review* discussed in Chapter 2. When working with children on constructing play plans, the adult might want to use the metaphor of being a construction worker who is designing a building plan. Similar to the construction worker, children will need to think through what they want to do, how they want to do it, and with whom they will engage during the activity. Having them wear construction work hats and showing them what building plans look like could encourage their motivation to design their own written plans.

How to construct play plans:

1. A group of children who want to play together in the socio-dramatic play center decide on what narrative they want to create.

2. While collaborating with play partners, each child depicts a plan of what they will do by drawing a picture on an individual piece of paper to record information about what they plan to do during the play activity.

3. Once all the children have recorded marks on their papers, they are asked to share their plans with their fellow players. After the children have done so, the adult writes the following prompt at the bottom of the paper: "I am going to _____." Then, the blank portion of the prompt is completed by the child.

4. When the play plans are completed, the children are free to implement them. Play plans should be displayed on a wall so that, when the children finish their play time in that center, they can immediately review their play plans with an adult and decide if they want to continue the same activity on the following day.

5. If the children decide to continue with their activity, they can discuss with their peers and the adult whether any further props might be needed to enhance their play. They will then modify their plans accordingly.

Figure 10.10 presents the simplified sequence for developing a play plan.

Constructing play plans with preschoolers. Preschool children are typically able to design scribble play plans or drawn play plans. In Figure 10.11, the first two descriptions are of typical preschool plans (Bodrova, Leong, Paynter, & Hensen, 2003).

Constructing play plans with kindergarteners. As children develop their literacy-related skills, they are able to work more independently with their peers and produce markings that closely reflect the letters of the alphabet. Therefore, to enhance the Common Core ELA Writing Standards, they should be encouraged to design Buddy Play Plans, as described in Figure 10.11.
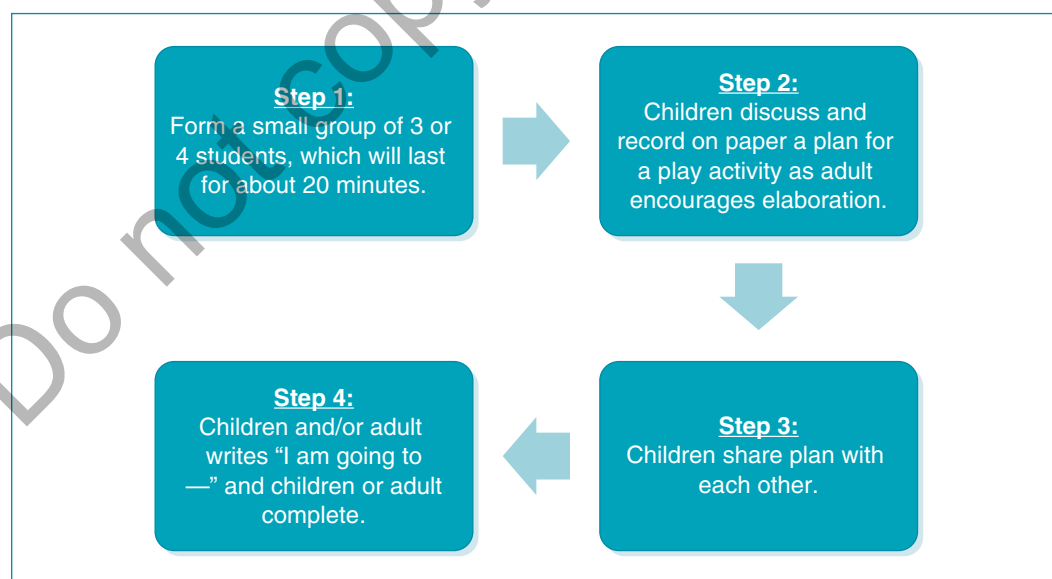
Additionally, the sentences from the play plans can either be cut up into separate sentence strips or written on sentence strip cards. Then, those sentences can be cut up into words, and kindergarten children can work on a number of Common Core ELA Reading: Foundational Print Concepts, Phonological Awareness, Phonics and Word Recognition, and Fluency skills.

Using differentiated instruction when constructing play plans. The concept of designing play plans is a learning activity based on a child's play interests and literacy abilities. Therefore, because the language used reflects the child's skills, differentiated instruction is naturally embedded in this activity.
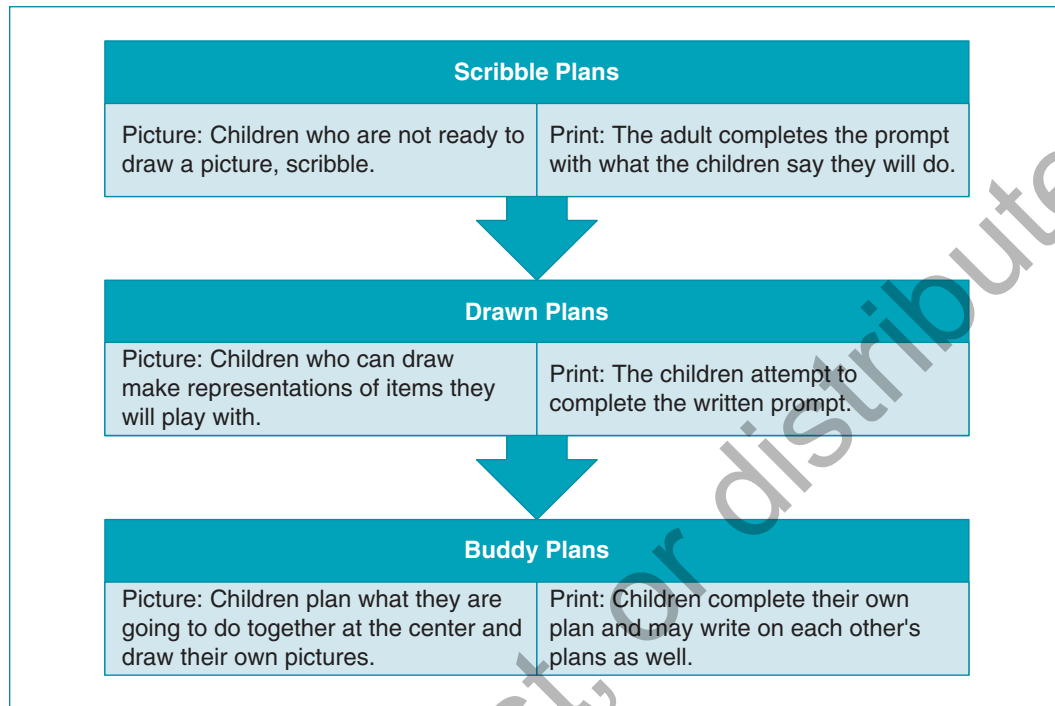
Further points about play plans. No matter what age group adults are working with, they must be aware that the main goal of play plans is not simply to adhere to the plan. Rather, the goal is to guide children into producing higher quality symbolic play representations and more complex play narratives. Additionally, the adults are focused on individual language arts skills. Finally, play plans allow adults to encourage children to develop a feeling of continuity in their day-to-day learning and language arts play activities.

Bodrova and Leong (2007) suggest that play plans not only contribute to children's understanding of the relationship between talk and print, they also assist the following

Figure 10.10 Play Plan Sequence

Step 1: Form a small group of 3 or 4 students, which will last for about 20 minutes.

Step 2: Children discuss and record on paper a plan for a play activity as adult encourages elaboration.

Step 3: Children share plan with each other.

Step 4: Children and/or adult writes "I am going to —" and children or adult complete.

Source: Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. J. (2007). *Tools of the Mind.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Figure 10.11   Different Types of Plans

Scribble Plans

| Picture: Children who are not ready to draw a picture, scribble. | Print: The adult completes the prompt with what the children say they will do. |

Drawn Plans

| Picture: Children who can draw make representations of items they will play with. | Print: The children attempt to complete the written prompt. |

Buddy Plans

| Picture: Children plan what they are going to do together at the center and draw their own pictures. | Print: Children complete their own plan and may write on each other's plans as well. |

Source: Bodrova, E., Leong, D. J., Paynter, D. E., & Hensen, R. (2003). *Scaffolding Literacy Development in the Preschool Classroom*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

types of children who tend to encounter challenges when creating collaborative peer play enactments (p. 151):
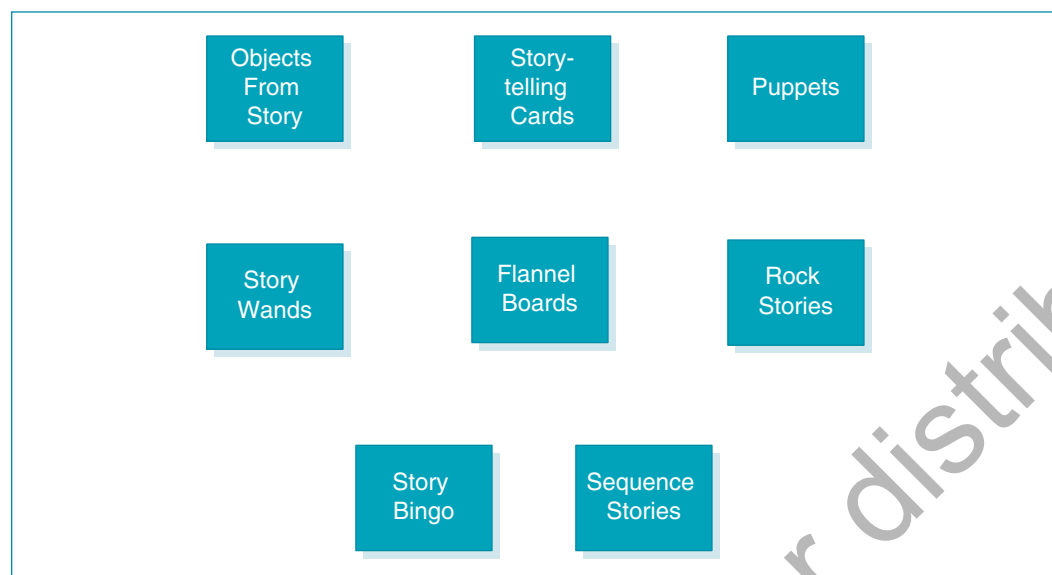
- Children who may not seem to be playing a distinct role
- Children who may not stay in a particular role
- Children who may not talk to each other as they play
- Children who may be playing but might be losing the thread of the play

In addition, adults can consider using some of the suggestions presented in Chapter 8 to guide children's play behaviors from both outside and inside the play context. In particular, adults can coach individuals who might need help, suggest or model how to weave together play themes, model appropriate ways to resolve disputes, and encourage more advanced players to mentor less advanced players (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).

Through using play plans, children expand their understanding of the connection between oral language and written print. Figure 10.12 provides suggestions of games and items that can also assist in enhancing this skill. The items can be made by adults, and purchasing an extra copy of the storybook to cut up will make it easier.

Guided Activity #2: Searching for Words

Word searches encourage children to focus on environmental print both in and outside the classroom. This activity can use the vocabulary that the children are learning in the socio-dramatic play centers or use new vocabulary words.

Figure 10.12 Suggested Games for Extending Spoken and Written Language Relationship

Objects From Story	Story-telling Cards	Puppets
Story Wands	Flannel Boards	Rock Stories
	Story Bingo	Sequence Stories

What are word searches? The adult has a card with a word written on it, and the child must match that word with the same word posted somewhere in the environment. Children become self-motivated to participate in this activity if they are told that they must act as detectives and are provided with magnifying glasses (which can even be made out of cardboard) to go around the classroom to search for these words.

How do children search for words? The words used in word searches should be of interest to the children and relate to activities in which the children have been engaged. The classroom and outdoors should have items labeled, and printed information should be posted on all the walls.

The word search proceeds as follows:

1. The adult shows the children a card with a word on it and reads it to them. They then discuss the word and how it relates to what the children are learning at school. To support English learners, a picture can be added to the card to solidify comprehension of the term and help them search for the word in the room.

2. The adult then asks a child if he or she would like to search for the word in the classroom. However, before going on the search, the child can be offered the option of having a friend join in. Additionally, before leaving on the search, the child is asked to think about where this word might be posted in the room. Asking this question enhances the concept of using environmental print as a meaningful tool to provide information about a specific context.

3. The child then begins searching for the word. After finding the word, the child is allowed to take it from its place and bring it back to the table.

4. After the child(ren) return to the table, a discussion begins on topics similar to the following:

   - What letters are in the word and what sounds do the letters make?
   - Are the two words similar or different?
   - How does the word compare to other words that children have searched for in the room?
   - Do those words have letters or sounds similar to other words in the environment?

5. Use the checklist below to determine if the child can name the letter and sound.

Child's Name: _____   Date:_____

Teacher's Name:_____

Letter	Date	Comment	Letter	Date	Comment
A a			L l		
F f			Q q		
K k			M m		
P p			D d		
W w			N n		
Z z			S s		
B b			X x		
H h			I i		
O o			E e		
J j			G g		
U u			R r		
C c			V v		
Y y			T t		

Source: Adapted from University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. (2002). *National Head Start (S.T.E.P.) Teacher's Manual.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Human Development Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Head Start Bureau.

Word searches with preschoolers. When preschoolers compare the model word card with the card that was located in the environment, their questions should focus on skills such as the following taken from the Early Learning Elements:

- Identify the beginning, middle, and end sounds of the word
- Identify the letters in the word
- Identify the word and the syllables of the word

Word searches for kindergarteners. By the end of the kindergarten year, the children should be successful at skills such as the following Common Core Standards:

- Identifying a rhyming word
- Isolating and pronouncing initial, middle, and final sounds
- Writing the words
- Identify long and short vowel sounds

Using differentiated instruction when searching for words. Some children may need to be matched with a more experienced reader if they are in earlier stages of literacy and language development. Additionally, the card could also have the word written in text, which would assist the child in focusing on the English term. Finally, continuing to discuss the word and what it means for those who might be exposed to it for the first time or for those who may be

using their primary language skills to support their English language development enhances their learning of the word or phrase.

Using Word Walls. Word Walls are an organized collection of words that are printed on cards and displayed on a specific wall of the classroom. These collections of words teach children to read and spell words, see patterns and relationships in words, and apply letter-sound relationships. Through these "visual maps" children remember connections between words and characteristics that relate to the category of all the words on the wall. Word Walls can focus on different types of words, for example Theme Walls, ABC Walls, Known Words Walls, and Help Walls (for challenging words) as seen in Figure 10.13. Often words from the Word Wall can be used when playing word search games.

Figure 10.13 Different Types of Word Walls
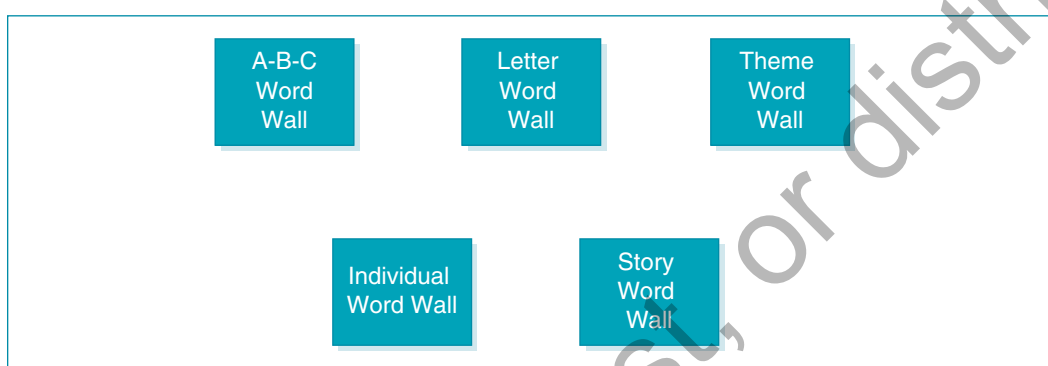
Guided Activity #3: Dissecting Words

Dissecting word activities involve having children dissect words, phrases, and sentences, and then reassemble them.

What are dissected words? Children examine a word, phrase, and/or sentence of interest that is written on a card, and then talk about the meaning, letters, sounds, and punctuation. The model card has an accompanying envelope or baggie that has in it either the sentence cut up into words or the word cut up into letters. When **dissecting words**, an activity where children take apart words, phrases, and sentences, and then reassemble them, they can pretend to be scientists by wearing laboratory coats, which can simply be old, white dress shirts.

How do children dissect words:

1. The adults select words or phrases of interest for each child. They print the word or phrase on two cards. They then take one card and cut up the individual letters (if it is a single word) or the words (if it is a phrase). The cut-up words or letters are placed in an envelope or baggie, and attached to the model card with a paperclip.

2. The child and the adult examine the model word or phrase card. They discuss what the words or letters mean, why they are important to them, and when they would use them. They then read the letters or words on the uncut card.

3. Next the children empty the contents of the envelope or baggie that has the cut-up items in it and attempt to match the individual pieces to the model.

4. This same activity can use the sentences or words from the children's own stories that are created through play plans or shared writings. Children are delighted to see some of their own work dissected and then put back together.

5. This is a very easy and inexpensive activity, so children can take the items home and show their family what they can do. Also, these cards can be kept in a box or manila envelope for each child and, when they have a few minutes, they can use them on their own.

6. Children enjoy it if you mix a few extra letters or words in with the cut-up cards. Additionally, two children can play with one model card. They can be given an equal number of cut-up cards, some of which will match and some of which will not. They can then take turns pretending that they are scientists and, one-by-one, put the dissected pieces together to make a word, phrase, or sentence.

Dissecting words with preschoolers. Many preschoolers do better if you start with sentence strips and cut-up words, instead of words and cut-up letters. Using the sentences provides more contextualized clues for younger children who are just becoming aware that language can be broken into words. Specifically, preschool children can work on skills similar to the following Early Learning Elements:

- Identifying individual words of a sentence
- Identifying letters of the alphabet
- Identifying beginning, middle, and ending sounds of words
- Identifying the syllables of a word

Figure 10.14 provides other suggestions for ways children can playfully develop sound and syllable awareness.

Dissecting words with kindergarteners. With this age group, emphasis should be placed on more sophisticated phonics and word analysis skills such as the following Common Core Standards:

- Counting, pronouncing, blending, and segmenting syllables and sounds
- Identifying one-to-one letter-sound correspondence
- Identifying high-frequency sight words
- Identifying upper- and lower-case letters and punctuation marks

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Figure 10.14   Games for Developing Syllable and Sound Awareness

Clapping Syllable

Explain to the children they will clap the beats of words they speak.
Clap to the children's names.
Clap to other words that children know.
Let children provide words.
Say a sentence and then ask children to say the same sentence as adult claps.

Guess Which Object

Hold up two objects that children know and that begin with different sounds.
Identify the objects.
Tell children one beginning sound and have them guess the object.
Tell them you are thinking of a word and give them the individual sounds —/h/ /a/ /t/. Have them say the word.
Leave off beginning sound —/a/ /t/

Source: H. K. Yopp & R. H. Yopp. (2009). Phonological Awareness Is Child's Play. *Young Children, 64*(1), 1–9.

The following is a checklist for the identification of sight words.

KINDERGARTEN SIGHT WORDS

Child's Name: _____

Teacher's Name: _____

Word	Date	Comment	Word	Date	Comment	Numbers	Date	Comment
1A			**2B**			two		
The			at			five		
To			him			one		
And			with			four		
He			up			three		
An			all			six		
I			look			eight		
It			is			seven		
Of			her			nine		
In			some			ten		
You			there			**Colors**		
1B			**2B**			blue		
Was			out			green		
Said			as			red		
His			be			yellow		
That			have			white		
She			go			gray		
For			we			purple		
On			am			orange		
They			then			brown		
But			little			black		
Had			down			pink		

Using differentiated instruction with dissecting words. For children who need more support while engaging in this activity, using a picture on the card with the word will assist them in feeling comfortable with the printed form. Additionally, printing the word in the home language and in English also provides support. However, remember to remove the extra clues gradually so that children can begin to feel comfortable with decontextualized print.

If children are having difficulty with this activity, dissecting a shared story into individual sentences, an activity discussed below, might assist. Using sentence strips with pictures to

re-create the story provides many more clues to children who might find their initial exposure to print dissecting activities to be challenging.

Bradley and Jones (2010) suggest that teachers should point out that the most common sound that a letter represents is often the first sound of the letter name. One example is the "t" sound in the word "train." They suggest that letters can be grouped into five categories (p. 71):

- Letter sounds at the beginning of the letter name (B, D, J, K, P, Q, T, V, Z)
- Letter sounds at the end of the letter name (F, L, M, N, R, S, X,)
- Letter names that represent a sound but also represent another sound (A, E, I, O, U)
- Letter sounds at the beginning of the letter name, but the letter also represents another sound (C, G)
- Letter names that do not contain the sound that the letter represents (H, W, Y)

Examples of games that relate to dissecting words that children can play are presented in Figure 10.15.

Guided Activity #4: Reporting Shared Writings

Shared writing is a practice that implements a Vygotskian (1978) perspective of learning skills. The children first learn socially and then learn internally.

What are shared writings? Shared writings are reading texts that are composed from children's own oral language with the written support of the teacher (Vukelich & Christie, 2009). They have long been used in school programs (see Morrow, 2005). Children enjoy engaging in this activity if they are allowed to pretend that they are news reporters, and they can use a pretend microphone to be interviewed or pretend to take a picture of the story theme.

How are shared writings reported? Shared writings are about children's personal experiences. They involve talking with the children about activities that took place and then writing a story around what they said.

The child dictates to the teacher a story about a personal experience that he or she experienced in the socio-dramatic play center. The teacher concurrently takes what the child says and turns it into a written story.

The adult reads the story back to the child and asks for any edits to the story.

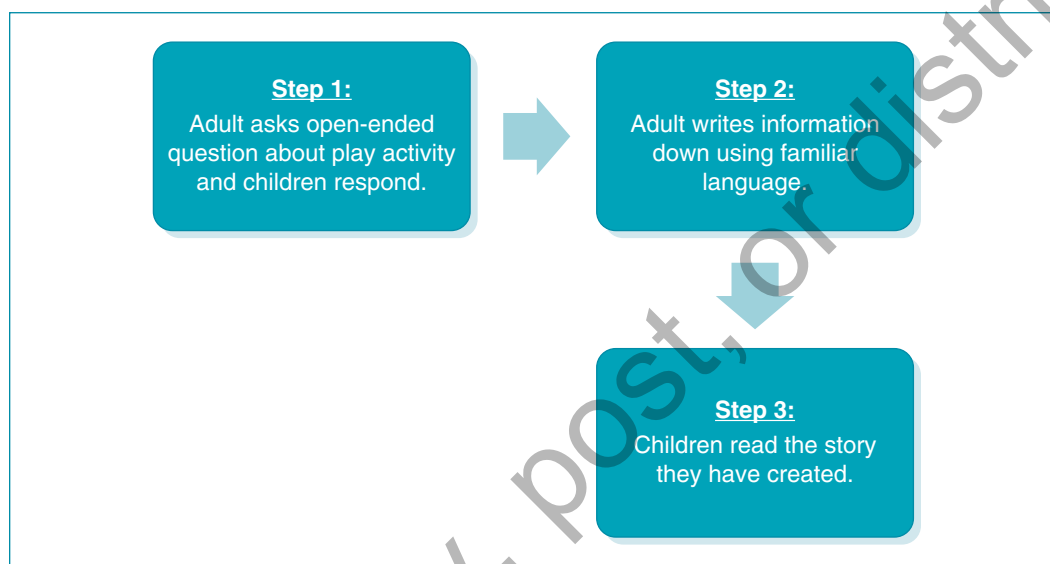**Figure 10.15**   Examples of Dissecting Words
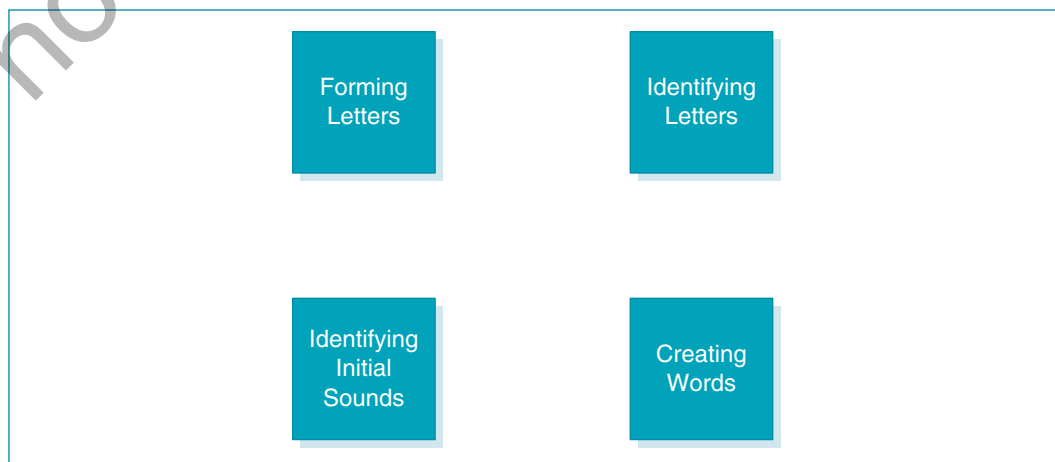
The adult then offers the child the opportunity to read the story to the adult or to other children.

Once the story is fully composed, it should be displayed around the classroom and referred to when appropriate.

If children have the skills, they can convert the story into a book for the book center or to take home to share with their families. If a child does not yet have these skills, then an adult can write the story while the child watches and interacts with the print.

Figure 10.16 provides a summary of the steps for shared writings.

Figure 10.16 Shared Writings Sequence

Step 1:
Adult asks open-ended question about play activity and children respond.

Step 2:
Adult writes information down using familiar language.

Step 3:
Children read the story they have created.

Shared writings with preschoolers. This strategy can be used with children as young as 2 or 3 years old and with children who are language delayed (Morrow, 2005). When working with children in these groups, the adult would write down some of the single words that the children said and then use the written format to reinforce vocabulary.

Older preschoolers can use shared stories to develop skills such as the following Early Learning Elements:

- Recognize that writing is a way of communicating for a variety of purposes
- Ask and answer questions and make comments about print materials

Shared writings with kindergarteners. For older children, skills relating to the following Common Core Standards can be encouraged:

- Retelling familiar stories using key details
- Asking and answering questions about unknown words in the text
- Engaging in group reading activities with purpose and understanding

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Children provide the language for the shared writing stories.

Using differentiated instruction with shared writings. Similar to the play plans activity, shared writings consist of stories that are differentiated according to each child's abilities and language. Depending on the child's skills, these stories can range from sequencing pictures with a minimal amount of print to composing stories with print only.

LEARNING FOR ALL CHILDREN
Print Awareness and Poverty

Neuman (2004) found that parent involvement varied dramatically among early readers from low socioeconomic communities. In this study, all of the families of early readers were living in poverty. Some provided very few resources to their children, while other families provided opportunities for and encouragement to the young children to read. However, all of the children in this study attended childcare programs that stimulated the early readers' interest and curiosity about learning to read. Although the childcare programs were frequently located in places such as church basements, storefronts, or rooms in old factories, they supported the development of literacy in many natural ways, such as the following (p. 91):

- **Print-rich environments:** Signs and symbols that communicated important messages were a central part of the daily activities.
- **A library corner:** The programs included a comfortable center where children could sit on pillows and read by themselves, to others, and to dolls.
- **Literacy-related play areas:** Literacy props such as paper, notebooks, pencils, and cookbooks assisted in using print in a natural way.
- **Interactive circle times:** Instead of being read to, teachers would stop and ask questions, encourage discussions of ideas, or raise new questions for children to ponder.
- **Interactive meal times:** Teachers sat with the children and engaged in conversations with them during snack and meal times. Often the children would talk about things at home, and this conversation would allow the teacher to connect home events with school events.
- **Small group activities:** Teachers would engage in reading, writing, handwriting, or math in small groups.

In sum, the Neuman study found that high-quality early education programs could impact the development of early reading skills in much the same way that a family impacts that development. Therefore, the link between low income and poor achievement can be broken. Early education professionals can make a difference in the literacy and academic achievement of many of these young children. Professionals need to focus on each child's talents by encouraging them to develop literacy skills through natural, daily activities at school and in the homes.

Further points about shared writings. Although shared writings can be developed with large groups, small groups are the ideal format for working on this task with children who have varying abilities. Small groups allow the teacher to individually focus on enriching each child's sentence structure, vocabulary, alphabet recognition, and phonemic awareness skills, while involving the child in a self-motivating and personal activity. A chalkboard, large chart paper, or regular-sized paper can be used to record the story.

Shared writing is also used for assisting children in associating oral language with written print. The technique reinforces the concept, discussed earlier in this chapter, that print can be similar to speech. Because the writings consist of the children's own language and experiences, reading them is easier and more interesting for children who might otherwise have difficulty adjusting to the use of print (Vukelich & Christie, 2009).

According to Morrow (2005), shared writings allow children to base their stories on the following premises (p. 128):
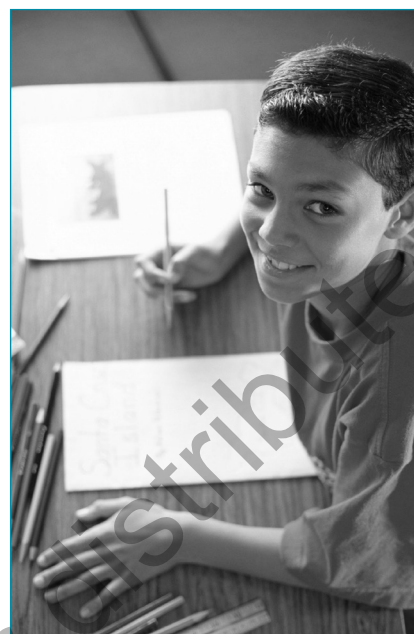
- What I think is important.
- What I think, I can say.
- What I can say can be written down by me or by others.
- What is written down can be read by me or by others.

A three-step process is involved in working with children on the development of a shared writing. First, shared writing typically begins with the adult asking an open-ended question of a small group of children who have been playing together at a center. For example, the adult might say something similar to "I heard some laughing coming from the block center earlier today. Could you tell me what happened?" During this step, the adult must be ready to accept all the responses by the children. The adult should not directly correct the child's grammar while he or she is talking; however, during the writing that occurs thereafter, the adult can use paraphrasing to model appropriate language.

At a very young age, children enjoy authoring books.

Second, once the children have discussed their experiences in the small group, the adult begins to write the information down using grammatical structures and vocabulary that are familiar to the children. Traditional formation of letters should be followed with spacing between words and lines to enhance readability. Additionally, the adult should make a point of writing legibly and using the correct formation of letters so that children do not become confused. Illustrations should be added whenever possible to provide children with a supporting context for the print.

As the adult writes the text, he or she should discuss some of the mechanical aspects of print. Appropriate statements that the adult can use include, "I'm going to end this sentence with a dot that we call a period" or "Can someone tell me the name of the first letter in Henry's name?"

The last step of shared writings focuses on letting the group of children read the story together that they have created or allowing different children to read single phrases or sentences. As children advance toward their kindergarten year, sentences from the shared stories can be reproduced on sentence strips without picture cues, and the children can sequence the strips in the correct order. Additionally, words from the sentences can be placed on individual cards, and children can begin to learn to read those separate words. Examples of different types of shared stories are illustrated in Figure 10.17.

Figure 10.17   Examples of Shared Writings
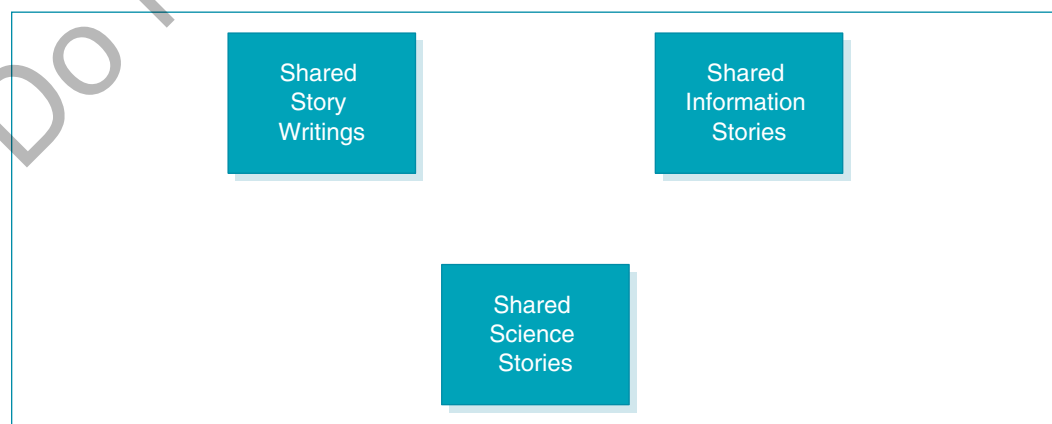
The following is a checklist of 10 general literacy skills that can be identified while children are constructing play plans or reporting shared writings:

Skill	Date Not Observed	Date Observed With Guidance	Date Observed Without Guidance	Notes
Interest in print				
Print is meaningful				
Left-right and top-bottom sequence				
Shows alphabet awareness				
Shows phonemic awareness				
Sentence starts with capital letter				
Sentence ends with a mark				
Spaces between words				
Spelling conventions				
Sight vocabulary				

REFLECT AND APPLY EXERCISE 10.2

Implementing Play Plans

Reflect

Both play plans and shared writings are activities designed to enhance children's literacy skills. Think about how you could use these activities in an early education classroom.

Apply

How would you use play plans when the children in the scenario at the beginning of the chapter asked if they could play "Beach Trip"? What early literacy skills would you focus on developing? Additionally, how could you have used shared writings after the play enactment? What early literacy skills might you have focused on then?

In summary, the four activities, play plans, word searches, dissecting words, and shared writings, will increase the literacy skills of children when they are involved in socio-dramatic play activities. These activities expand children's understanding of the function of print and of how print can be used in their everyday lives for planning, sharing thoughts and information,

and enjoyment. Additionally, through the integration of pretense with print, children are self-motivated to enrich their world knowledge, vocabulary, alphabet recognition, and phonemic awareness. Used daily, such an individualized enhancement of early learning skills affords children the opportunity to develop a strong platform for transitioning to more decontextualized and formal academic work during the elementary years.

One of these four activities could be used with the children each week. At the end of four weeks, the children will have completed activities involving all four strategies. This is the time when the socio-dramatic play center theme should be changed and children can then participate in these activities using another play theme.

Chapter Summary

Socio-dramatic play centers provide the core themes for the other learning centers. Socio-dramatic play centers assist children's development in a variety of situations that motivate them to physically and mentally construct narratives based on their background knowledge. These narratives use abstract symbolic representations that encourage children to develop language. Through pretend social peer interactions, children share these narratives with their play partners.

The skills used to create these play narratives are similar to those used to develop early literacy skills (e.g., motivation, background knowledge, language, and symbolic representations). Research now demonstrates that teachers can guide children in enhancing their early literacy skills by engaging them in four types of early literacy play activities: play plans, word searches, dissecting words, and shared writings.

HOME AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Integrating Literacy Skills Into the Play Centers

When reading books to your children at home, sit them on your lap while reading. Point out the pictures as you read the text and ask them to observe what they see in the pictures.

CHAPTER 10 FIRST-PERSON INTERVIEW

All Children Can Create Stories

Beverly Charsha

Director of a university toddler inclusion program, Carson, CA

One of the things that I like to do with children and that I believe truly assists them with expanding their literacy skills is to tell them that I am wondering about something. Young children are always wondering, so it feels very natural to them when we are all together in a group and I say things like, "Yesterday, I noticed that Maribel and Erika were in the play house sewing, and I began wondering if maybe they wanted to have some more fabric in that area?" Just by having me present that statement, we start talking about the play story they were enacting yesterday and expanding that story by planning new activities around the sewing and thinking of different symbolic representations that they could use. It's amazing how their language increases with a conversation like this.

One thing I have noticed is that you really need to be honest with children in conversations. They know it when you contrive

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things. Therefore, you have to be up front with them and listen to what they say and respond honestly to their comments and questions. If you stay with them and respond honestly, they will continue to think about things, and this is when learning happens.

An activity that I enjoy doing is getting a tablet and pen, and sitting down and watching the children play. While they are playing, I will write down things that they say. The children love to look over at me when I am doing this, but they still continue with their play. Periodically, they will come over to look at what I have written down, and try to read it with me. They know that I am writing about them and they really want to know what those letters and words say. It is such a fun activity because they are beginning to understand that print can represent what someone does or says. Their interest really comes alive when they begin to understand they can make their own stories. I do a similar activity when I am working with toddlers. I love to take pictures of them while they are playing. Then we look at the photos, and they talk about what they were doing. Sometimes I will put a little print next to the picture and revisit their words. Again, doing this helps children see that what they are doing can be created into a story by using print and pictures. This is the core of literacy development.

Children like to use materials that they can play with when working on expanding their literacy skills. For example, they love puppets and play props, so I use a lot of puppets and props to create stories with the children. All you really need is one object, and you and the children can create an entire story around that object.

They also like making stories using the flannel board and flannel characters and shapes. It is wonderful to use flannel with children and then to let children use the flannel among themselves. I always make two sets of flannel characters—one set for me to use with the children, and one set for the children to use with each other. Children love to use real materials that they have seen the teacher using. It's real important to provide children with pieces of flannel that are different sizes and shapes so that they can make up their own story. One thing that I like to do with flannel shapes is to make stick figures that represent children in the classroom. While I am creating the character on the flannel board, I tell a story about why I think he or she decided to wear a red shirt to school that day or how their pink shoes are really magical dancing shoes. I never say the child's name while I am creating the stick figure. I always have the children try to guess who the story is about, and they love doing that. They also love playing this activity among themselves. It is wonderful to see them playing together and telling stories that use complex and new words.

Finally, I have always loved gardening with the children. I really believe that this is one of the best ways to teach them so many skills, especially literacy skills. We spend days talking about what we will plant and the sequence we need to follow for planting it. We also make lists of what we need from the market and what tools we will need. We are continually looking up photos of vegetables, fruits, and flowers and talking about what we will plant. At the same time, we talk in a very natural way about the print that we are using, the words that we are learning, and the sequence that we are following.

Children will create stories around anything. I am currently working with some young toddlers with disabilities. Although they have very little verbal language, I see them putting a block up by their ear and walking around acting as if they are talking to someone on their cell phone. I just love seeing that! It's exciting to see toddlers who may not have verbal language still expressing themselves through symbolic play.

Sample Learning Activities

Curricular Area: Language and Literacy

Core Vocabulary: Book, pages, title, author, illustrator, letters, words, sounds

Guide Questions:

What do you like to read?

What do you like to write about?

What happened in the story?

How are books put together?

How can we send a message?

Resources:

Adams, Pam. (2007). *There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly,* Child's Play International.

Blake, Quentin. (2013). *Quentin Blake's Nursery Rhyme Book,* Trafalgar Square Publishing.

Keiko, Kasza. (2005). *My Lucky Day,* Penguin Young Readers Group.

Numeroff, Laura. (2008). *If You Give a Cat a Cupcake,* HarperCollins.

Rosen, Michael. (2003). *We're Going on a Bear Hunt,* Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing.

Core Text: I Like Myself, by Karen Beaumont

- Skills: Rhyming words, sight words (I, like, me), punctuation (periods, exclamation marks), recall details
- Levels of Questions: Who is the main character in the story? What does she like about herself? Tell me a little about you? What do you like about yourself? What things do you like to do? Why is it important to feel good about yourself?
- Product: Create a self-portrait, an "All About Me" book.

Learning Centers:

- Explore through literacy: Writing materials, abundant classroom library, listening center of songs and chants
- Create: Materials for making books: Construction paper, scraps, glue, scissors, crayons, water colors, easel and paint (for self-portrait)
- Outdoor Play: London Bridges, Ring Around the Rosie, and other singing and chanting activities
- Dramatic Play: At the library

  o Can I help you find a book?
  o What are you reading?
  o Which book are you checking out today, what is the title of it?
  o What is your book about?

Student Study Site

Visit the Student Study Site at **www.sagepub.com/selmi** to access additional study tools including mobile-friendly eFlashcards and links to video and web resources.

Key Terms

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)   play plans

decontextualized narratives   shared writings

dissecting words   word searches

Head Start Framework

Some Children's Books About Home and Literacy

Alphabet Under Construction, by Denise Fleming

Chicka Chicka Boom Boom, by Bill Martin and John Archambault

City Signs, by Zoran Milich

Goldilocks and the Three Bears, by Valeri Gorbachev

Max's ABC, by Rosemary Wells

Mother, Mother, I Feel Sick, by Remy Charlip

Pretend Soup, by Mollie Katzen

Stone Soup, by Marcia Brown

The Three Little Pigs, by Paul Galdone

Useful Websites

Books about disabilities: http://www.amazon.com/Best-Childrens-Books-on-Disability/lm/2Q14RZ7KB6IET

Information on Inclusion: http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200903/BTJWatson.pdf

Reflective Questions

The profession of Early Childhood Education is divided between having specific learning standards for young children or not. Go to the following website and read the NAEYC and NAECS-SDE response to the Common Core State Standards:

http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/policy/NAEYC-NAECS-SDE-Core-Standards-Statement.pdf

Do you agree with NAEYC and NAECS-SDE on all of these points? Are there some that you disagree with? State your reasons why. Support your opinion with research from this chapter or from other articles that you have read.