



EVERY CHILD A READER

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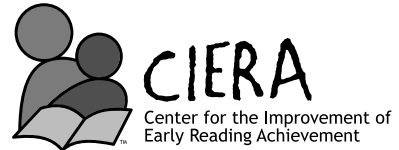


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EVERY CHILD A READER

TOPIC 7

Engagement and Interest in Reading

From the earliest storybook reading with an adult and the first proudly scribbled message, children enjoy reading and writing because of the social communication and signs of cognitive competence these activities provide. The key to attaining and using literacy, even when sustained effort and attention are needed, is the sense of personal pride that children feel when they succeed.

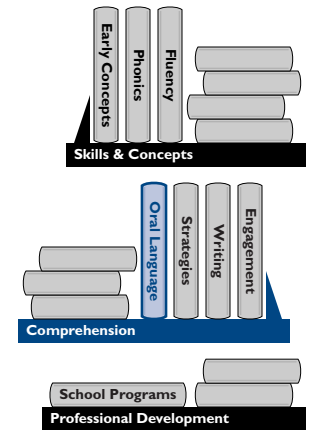
For children to become lifelong readers, they must be engaged in reading and writing as meaningful and enjoyable activities.

The ultimate goal of any reading program is to inspire children to use their literacy skills throughout their lives as tools for enjoyment, learning, and communication.¹ In order to attain that goal, children must be interested and engaged in what they are doing and feel a sense of pride in their accomplishments.

Children's involvement in reading and writing indicates their engagement: how eager are they to read and write new texts? Interest, variety, and relevance all play a role in engaging children in reading. When children are interested in what they are reading, they actively pursue reading and have fun with it. In order for children to become lifelong readers, they must engage in reading and writing as relevant tasks—the means through which they can pursue their own personal interests in dogs, dinosaurs, dolls, or a hundred other topics.

Either the adults in children's families or teachers can be the source for children's engagement in reading.² The best situation is when these two groups work together. Even when families have been active in promoting literacy, teachers are essential if children's accomplishments are to be integrated into school literacy. Teachers are also the source for ensuring that children's accomplishments at school are shared with their families and that school reading accomplishments are extended in homes.

Some children will depend on the school to learn about the rich reservoir of knowledge and enjoyment that literacy provides. For other children who have models of literacy among adults in their homes, their level of engagement also depends on the literacy environments of the classroom. Teachers are leaders in connecting the literacies of home and school and in creating classrooms where children thrive as readers and writers.



Accomplishments for Engagement in Reading³

KINDERGARTEN	FIRST GRADE	SECOND GRADE	THIRD GRADE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks adults to read to him/her • Listens attentively to books read to class by teachers • Has some favorite books and authors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates own written text to share with others • Reads on one's own for enjoyment • Identifies favorite books • Takes pride in ability to read aloud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoys reading silently at school • Seeks opportunities to read independently at home • Enjoys choral reading, poems, and dramatizations • Visits library and checks out materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reads voluntarily for own purposes • Responds to text with oral presentations, book reports, journal writing, and dramatization • Identifies favorite genres and topics for voluntary reading • Helps other children learn to read in cooperative and reciprocal arrangements

Engagement in reading—while rarely thought of as a reading skill—is prominent among the accomplishments for primary-level reading achievement. Cultivating interests and topics for reading is as much a part of becoming an independent third-grade reader as the skills and strategies of word recognition and comprehension.

Classrooms That Connect Reading at Home and School

For children to become truly engaged readers and writers, connections between schools and families are essential. These connections are critical for two reasons. First, when the literacy knowledge that children have acquired in their homes and communities is recognized in school, children are able to draw on their store of knowledge to complete school tasks. Equally important is the path from school to home: Children who apply reading and writing skills learned at school in their homes and communities are much more likely to be completely engaged in literacy.

By bringing the literacy events and materials of home into the classroom, children and families are recognized for their efforts.

When schools and teachers recognize the aspirations of families and efforts devoted to children's reading acquisition, they take an important first step in ensuring engagement. For example, many families work hard to teach the alphabet song to their young children. Featuring children's renditions of the alphabet song in share and tell during the first month of Head Start, preschool, or kindergarten lets children and their families know that their efforts are appreciated. Incorporating the community's written language—street signs, container labels, and business logos—lets children know that learning to read connects to things they already know. Even reading orally familiar books from their homes has proven to be an important home-to-school link for young children.

By extending school reading and writing events into homes, such as daily book reading, children develop lifelong reading habits.

By sharing literacy resources in communities with families, schools aid in increasing children's literacy engagement.

Many schools have home reading programs which encourage children to read at home daily. Such established efforts can be enhanced in other ways such as monthly newsletters that summarize the 10 favorite books of the class or the new publications by class members that have been added to the school library.

The support of schools in ensuring that children have books and a commitment to read during extended vacations is especially critical. Toward the end of the school year, children can write postcards to themselves about their goals for summer reading. The postcards can be mailed to the children at different points over the summer. Children can also create posters about summertime reading to be posted in local stores as a reminder to read.

Some families benefit from information on ways to promote engagement and interaction around literacy activities with their children. Parents can be coached about shared reading with beginning readers: how to share a book, ask questions, and provide feedback as they discuss stories.⁴ They can also be involved in their children's learning through parent-teacher communication journals.

Schools also serve as the liaisons for resources within communities aimed at supporting family literacy. Family literacy programs, such as Even Start, can share with families how to respond to children's interests and to express positive expectations and values for literacy. Many museums provide excellent programs that support reading as families explore exhibits. Libraries offer activities such as story reading that spark children's interest in ideas and books. Summer programs and materials (including book lists to guide families in trips to the library) offered by governmental agencies and other organizations can sustain reading habits built in schools.⁵

Classrooms That Engage Children in Reading

A recent survey of highly successful literacy teachers showed that they shared 7 practices, practices that enhance children's competence and engagement in reading and writing.

The results of surveys given to primary-level teachers who were identified by reading supervisors as successful in teaching children to read and write are summarized in a table on the next page.⁶ As the asterisks indicate, four of these successful teachers' practices are the focus of other topics of *Every Child a Reader*. These four practices deal with the competence of children as readers and writers. Competence is central to engagement in that struggling readers are less likely to read if it is tedious.

The three additional practices—literate environments, diverse activities, and engaging instruction—point to another aspect of engagement, the component of interest and motivation. Many children can read but choose not to. In classrooms of highly successful literacy teachers, children's interest in reading and writing is piqued through the environment, diverse activities, and engaging instruction.

7 Practices of Highly Successful Literacy Teachers⁶

- 1 Providing classroom literacy events in which all children participate, regardless of abilities, along with additional support for struggling readers*
- 2 Designing literate classroom environments
- 3 Modeling and teaching of decoding and comprehension processes**
- 4 Creating extensive, diverse reading opportunities for students
- 5 Teaching students writing processes such as planning, drafting, and revising***
- 6 Providing engaging literacy instruction so that children are eager to read and write
- 7 Monitoring children's progress in reading and writing****

Relevant information in *Every Child A Reader*:

- * English Language Learners and Struggling Reader sections of all topics, and Topic 8
- ** Topics 3, 4, and 5
- *** Topic 6
- **** Accomplishments section of all topics

A literate environment characterizes the classrooms of highly successful literacy teachers.

The classrooms of highly successful literacy teachers are full of books and writing materials and children's compositions and illustrations about favorite books are prominently displayed. Children's contributions may also be visible in the signs that signal places or chores such as the gerbil's feeding schedule. The classroom has an inviting place for reading books, including displays of favorite or focus books that have been chosen by teacher and children.

The literate environment is evident in the encouragement children get to make attempts even when they're uncertain of the answer. Children are not praised in a patronizing way for these efforts but they know that their teacher focuses on what these attempts show about reading and writing.⁷ For example, when a child reads *hope* for *hop*, the teacher may acknowledge the child's effort to apply information from a lesson on the silent *e* but will ask the child to think about the meaning of the text.

There are extensive, diverse reading opportunities in the classrooms of highly successful literacy teachers.

When children have ample opportunities for reading on their own in self-chosen books, their engagement in reading increases. Special book centers, free reading time, library visits, and puppets of favorite characters are some of the ways in which effective teachers invite children to read.

Some children are highly interested in reading when there is information to be gained, but may be put off by a preponderance of stories as part of reading instruction. In the first wave of literature-based reading instruction in the mid-1980s, literature was often equated with stories. Recently, schools and publishers have attempted to incorporate more informational text into reading instruction. The amount of good informational literature about nature is steadily increasing and is very interesting to many young children.

Highly successful teachers provide engaging literacy instruction, ensuring that children are eager to read and write.

Instruction takes many different forms in the classrooms of highly successful literacy teachers.⁸ Teacher-led discussions and lessons are a staple in these classrooms. Some of these teacher-led events encompass the entire classroom but there are also consistent times when children, especially struggling readers, meet in teacher-led, small groups. These groups may change in their composition over a term but struggling readers benefit from consistent instruction from their teachers in small groups.

There are also numerous occasions for independent reading and writing, times when children can read and write in a sustained manner and apply what has been taught. Many literacy activities motivate children by pairing them with partners. Children pay attention better and monitor strategies more when they are reading to a partner or coaching another child than when they read independently.⁹

Instruction for English Language Learners

The success of English language learners in attaining the goal of independent English reading and writing by the end of third grade depends on high levels of engagement as readers and writers.

English language learners' engagement is fostered when classroom libraries and teachers' read-aloud events highlight books on the cultures of English language learners in a school. Engagement with books is the primary means whereby English language learners will increase their vocabularies and comprehension.¹⁰ Lists of books on experiences of various immigrant groups to America can be found in professional publications or obtained from professional organizations.¹¹

Connecting to the literacies of their communities increases the likelihood that English language learners will come to see the value of English literacy in their daily lives. Getting English language learners to identify ways in which reading and writing are used in their homes and communities can be helpful. Letters written to and received from family in other countries; manuals and magazines in first languages and in English; favorite books, applications, and lists—artifacts of these reading and writing events can be featured in the classroom.¹²

Instruction for Children Who Are Struggling Readers

Reading instruction should build on children's interests and involve them in using reading in their lives and communities.

Literacy is not engaging when children spend their time copying letters and words in isolation or when reading is regarded as saying all the words in print correctly. Excessive drills and worksheets may turn children off to reading. Teachers can prevent this by using reading and writing as means of exploring and expressing children's interests.

In the Early Literacy Project,¹³ teachers engage children who are identified as at risk in literacy activities from the beginning of their school careers. After experimenting with different approaches and topics to stimulate informational writing, teachers found that the best topics for children were ones on which

they were “experts.” A child whose journal is full of references to his pets might be encouraged to write about the care of pets and qualities of different pets. A rollerblading enthusiast might write about equipment and safeguards for the sport and favorite spots in town to skate. Children develop areas of expertise through reading magazine articles and books. Youngsters classified as at-risk for failure often make great strides in reading and writing achievement—even on standardized tests—when they are engaged in literacy activities. Equally important, children become interested in literacy.

**EVERY CHILD A READER:
COMPANION READINGS**

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NOTES

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This topic is part of the series *Every Child a Reader* by E.H. Hiebert, P.D. Pearson, B.M. Taylor, V. Richardson, & S.G. Paris of the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA).

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