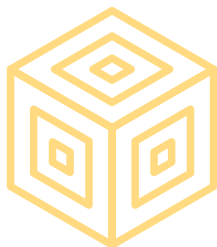




Early Literacy Learning

How important is literacy to each child's well-being?

It's crucial. From birth to age eight, children take the first steps in a lifelong learning journey. When you teach children to read and write—using research-based approaches at home, in schools, and in afterschool programs—you give them passports to explore a world of ideas. Strong literacy skills help children imagine exciting futures and hone the tools they need to turn their big dreams into realities.



Research shows that children's language skills begin to develop prenatally and continue to grow through responsive interactions with caring adults. Literacy skills start to develop when children first see and experience text, and expand as responsive adults guide them in starting to read and write on their own.

To support families and teachers in building children's early language and literacy skills, we conduct studies, provide resources, and carry out evidence-based programs that impact hundreds of thousands of children throughout the U.S. and around the world.

For example, based on decades of supporting improved literacy instruction in the U.S., and 15 years of creating literacy programs in resource-lean environments, EDC's Read Right Now program has helped 13 countries deliver effective literacy instruction on a large scale and with significant benefits.

For over 10 years, we have led research for the U.S. Department of Education and PBS that is providing new insights into how technology can help teachers and families promote early literacy and STEM learning, especially for children in low-income communities.



How can we help teachers support families in fostering children's literacy?

Culturally and linguistically responsive approaches and resources help educators engage families, and honor and support them in their important role as children's first teachers.

Literacy instruction is most effective when families and teachers are partners. We are working with Hartford Public Schools and the Connecticut Science Center to provide PreK–Grade 1 teachers and coaches with professional development that supports them in engaging 2,000 families—40% of whom are English learners—in children's literacy and early science learning. We are also offering family "toolkits" and events to help families explore language and science at home.

EDC is committed to creating resources that are based on language and literacy research, respond to the culture of students, and can be adapted to meet the needs of specific settings. We work with partners to make these resources accessible through high-distribution channels.

For example, during EDC's work in the Head Start National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness, we produced

dozens of research-based publications on how to support dual language learners from birth through age 5 at home, at school, and in the community. Now part of the *Early Childhood Dual Language Learner Toolkit*, published jointly by the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, these action-oriented fact sheets, curricula, guides, videos, and webinars are available in English and Spanish and are free of charge to educators and families.

For PBS, EDC developed Reading and Language, an online hub of family literacy resources on the PBS Parents website that clearly explains the stages of language and literacy development for children ages birth through eight. Reading and Language also gives families a wealth of ideas on how to weave early reading, early writing, and fun with language into everyday activities—planting the seeds to grow enthusiastic readers.

What training and tools do teachers need to support children's early literacy in classrooms?

All educators benefit from ongoing professional learning. Unfortunately, research shows that many teachers do not receive the support they need to learn and apply research-based practices.

Research shows that effective early childhood literacy teachers have a deep understanding of how children develop language and literacy skills within the context of their culture. Effective teachers also use high-impact teaching strategies to support children's ability to name letters, know the sounds associated

with those letters, and understand basic concepts about stories and printed words.

Simply training teachers on these concepts and strategies is not enough to instill research-based practices into teachers' repertoires. Instead, EDC has found that it is essential to supplement training with thoughtful



processes that build their capacity to reflect on their own teaching and improve and refine their practices. EDC's Literacy Environment Enrichment Program (LEEP), which has been used and evaluated in multiple initiatives funded by the U.S. Department of Education, provides a strong example. LEEP features credit-bearing, literacy-focused professional development and instructional coaching for preschool teachers. In this unique model, preschool teachers and their supervisors

participate in LEEP together—cultivating the habit of reflecting on their daily practice and forming partnerships to improve children's literacy outcomes. A randomized controlled trial of LEEP provided strong evidence for its positive impact on teacher practices in support of language and literacy development. Findings indicated that LEEP improved child outcomes—particularly related to print and phonological awareness—and enhanced general classroom climate.

What can we do to support *all* children's successful early literacy learning?

Early intervention is key to ensuring all young children become strong, confident readers and writers. Opportunity gaps between children from higher- and low-income households start before kindergarten and affect school readiness and success.

In addition to EDC's work to engage and support diverse families, we have a special focus on meeting the early literacy needs of children from disadvantaged communities, and on building the capacity of educators and communities to sustain improvements for these children.

We are committed to expanding the knowledge of practices that help narrow opportunity gaps and make a difference in children's language and literacy acquisition. For example, in EDC's U.S.

Department of Education-funded research on Ready To Learn, we examined the use of technology-rich supplemental classroom materials with 398 low-income children in 80 preschool classes in New York City and San Francisco. Our findings indicated that low-income children were better prepared for success in kindergarten when their preschool teachers incorporated educational video and games from public media. The early literacy skills of children in the study all increased significantly compared to children who did not participate in the curriculum supplement.





To support educators, program leaders, and researchers in examining and improving literacy instruction for all children, EDC developed the *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) PreK and K-3 Toolkits*. In use around the world, the *ELLCO* is one of only a few measures that provides detailed information on literacy instruction. UNICEF features the *ELLCO* on its website as a tool to monitor early education teaching and learning.



What can we do to sustain support for children's early literacy learning?

Comprehensive, systemic approaches are vital to sustaining support for teachers and families, ensuring high-quality instruction, and improving literacy outcomes for children.

EDC helps build strong systems to sustain support for children's early literacy learning. We refine our programs, product development, and research efforts to fit diverse domestic and international contexts. For example, our Selected Integrated Reading Activity (USAID/SIRA), provides leadership and support for early-grade reading and fosters community support for literacy in Mali. This effort is advancing goals to improve classroom instruction and increase parent, community, and private support for literacy.

In the U.S., EDC uses its leadership of Technical Assistance Centers and regional labs to provide system-building support to leaders. In Rhode Island, our Center for Early Learning Professionals has been a major force in a

comprehensive initiative to improve child outcomes in all content areas. Thousands of preschool teachers have completed courses based on the LEEP model and are using proven language and literacy practices in their classrooms with the support of coaches.

These are two of many examples. Around the world, EDC works to create strong, coherent PreK–Grade 3 systems and to advance knowledge of how to improve early literacy and learning. In partnership with federal and state agencies, private foundations, and community-based and direct-service organizations, we help educators, volunteers, and families give children the literacy tools they need to thrive throughout school and make their big dreams come true.