



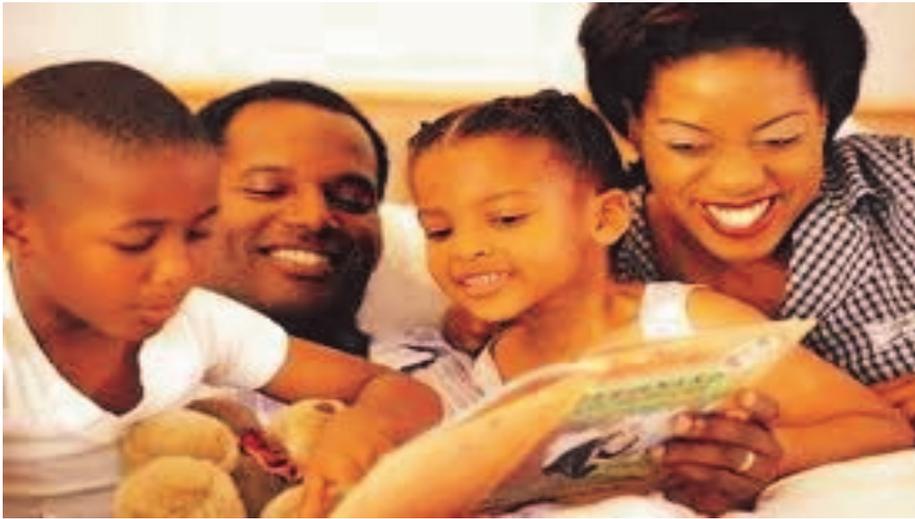
# The Literacy Connection

## How Does Learning Happen?

*What a great question! And equally important - "how do we, as early learning professionals, help it to happen?" Read on...*

A Newsletter for  
Early Learning Professionals from  
Toronto's  
Early Literacy Specialists

## How Does Learning Happen When We Read With Children?



### What Research Has to Say

Studies show us there are wide differences in preschoolers' knowledge about the forms and functions of print.

For example, in a group of 4-year olds, some will know all the letters in the alphabet, while others may not be able to name a single letter.

Letter recognition and print awareness are important, because "children's

knowledge about print, particularly their knowledge of letters, is one of the more reliable and robust indicators of the ease with which they will progress as readers."

We also know that the quantity and quality of child-parent interactions with story books is a key to later reading success. However, when preschool children look at storybooks, "they direct about 98% of their visual attention to illustrations within the text."

Yes, as we know, for children it is all about the pictures! Adults may rarely focus the child's attention on the print, but there are opportunities in many children's books that we can use. *(continued on p. 2)*

**What Research Has To Say**  
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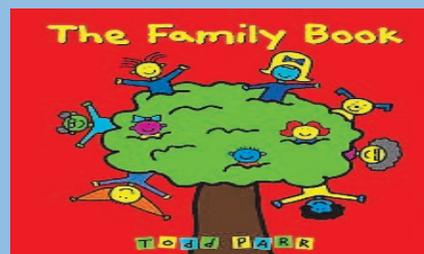
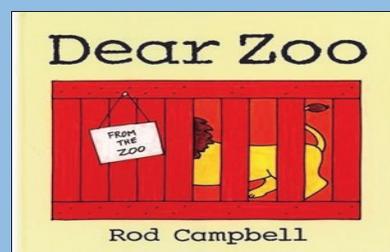
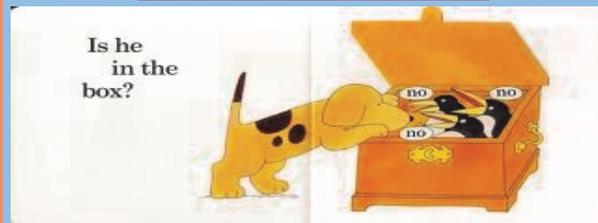
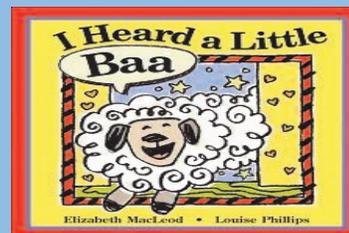
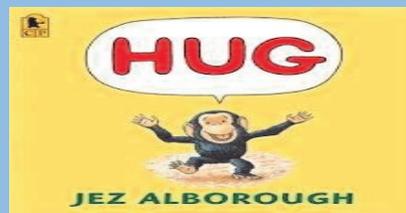
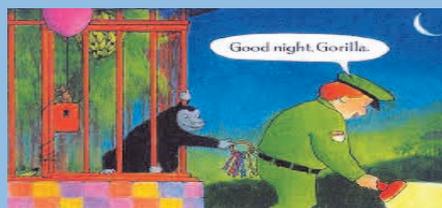
Although the researchers do not suggest that print should be the main focus when reading with children, they do have these very practical ways to draw children’s attention to text in a meaningful and natural way while sharing picture books:

- 1) **Visible Sound** Draw the child’s attention to text when it represents a visible sound (eg: “moo” is printed beside the picture of the cow)
- 2) **Visible Speech** Support the child’s curiosity about meaning by pointing out words that are in the speech bubbles (eg: “Goodnight Gorilla”, “Hug!”, “I Heard a Little Baa”, the Spot books)
- 3) **Environmental Print** Point out illustrations that are labeled (eg: the word *taxi* is on the side of a taxi, or the word “Stop” in a stop sign.) See examples in “Dear Zoo”
- 4) **Change of Font** Point out when the print changes in colour or size (eg: Robert Munsch’s “Mortimer”, Todd Parr’s “The Family Book”)

Always remember - reading with children should be FUN for both of you !

*This information is from “Developing Children’s Print Knowledge through Adult-Child Storybook Reading Interactions: Print Referencing as an Instructional Practice”, Laura Justice & Shayne Piasta The Handbook of Early Literacy Research (ISBN 978-1-4625-0335-3)*

**Books Mentioned in the Research Article**



## How Do We Set Up Our Programs to Help Learning Happen?

### What OEYC Staff Have to Say

At our Literacy Leaders Meeting on June 17, 2014, OEYC staff from over ten centres worked together in small groups to reflect upon the early literacy environment.

We reviewed the excellent four page article “The Environment Is a Teacher”, by Karyn Callaghan (easily accessed online <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/Callaghan.pdf>).

The groups were then encouraged to share and reflect upon what is working well at their centres, and what might be improved.

Here are some of the highlights of this discussion. For the full notes, contact your Early Literacy Specialist.

### Use of the Physical Environment – Inside the Centre

**Use materials that invite open-ended collaboration**, such as:

- puppets
- balls, hula hoops
- small see-saws, slides
- tents, tunnels, sheets
- stepping stones

**Encourage investigation** – such as mixing of paint colours

When children have the opportunity to explore materials, they become curious and will ask questions.



### Use of the Outdoor Environment

Some OEYCs reserve time at their local daycare playground.

Others make use of community gardens. Some OEYCs take field trips all over the city. Some have “Books in the Park” events.

One centre has a very popular weekly routine – “The Marching Parade”. And where do they march? Around the block!

Parents help children dress up for the parade. Children use shakers and other percussion instruments from the centre.

Everyone sings and gets a little exercise and has a lot of fun.

### Building Relationships

One of our participants noted that “real work together is the best way to build up relationships with parents”. “This happens when we are gardening, decorating, or preparing for special events.”

Other great suggestions were:

- Have a Reading Time all together with books spread around the mats in an enticing display
- Have consistent staff to run the same programs
- Become familiar with the names of all the participants
- Have staff that speak to participants in their own languages
- Keep an up to date display of staff pictures and names by the entrance. Include volunteers and placement students.
- Offer different cultural activities
- Host potluck lunches (“Saturday bar-b-ques bring out dads”)
- Sing songs in home languages during Circle Time

## Why is it important to build relationships with families?

When we work together with parents while gardening, cooking or preparing for an event, we are truly engaging with our participants.

Through conversation as we prepare a potluck or a display, we build bridges and form a bond of trust.

This is the key to engagement and dialogue. When parents get to know you, they are more ready to consider you to be a trusted member of the team that is concerned about their child's development.

When we partner with families we strengthen our ability to meet the needs of young children. Caregivers will be more likely to ask questions about their child's language skills. They will be more open to receiving family literacy tips or reviewing our checklists.



## Are you a Centre that does not have a lot of space for gross motor activities?

Think about how you can use your outside neighbourhood.

A parade around the block is a wonderful idea. But how does this help young children with their development?

Marching and singing with families incorporates all of the ELECT domains: Social, Emotional, Physical, Cognitive and Communication!

When partnering with families and communities we strengthen our ability to meet the needs of young children.

## How to Make “Book-Time” for Toddlers come *ALIVE* at your OEYC

Toddlers are actively discovering the world all round. How can we encourage them to enjoy books in our busy, stimulating OEYC environment?

- Use mats and move furniture to create a comfortable space
- Use cozy cushions, carpets, and pillows to muffle noise
- Make an announcement, (sing: “five more minutes left to play!”)
- Announce the clean-up time, and encourage everyone to help put toys and apparatus away or to cover distracting materials and equipment with sheets
- Use a soft whistle or bell, or turn down lights to draw attention
- Fill your space with attractive, colourful, age appropriate children’s books
- Bring out the books with a flourish!
- Your **enthusiasm** is **essential!**

The book-time does not need to be a long session. Ten minutes may be enough for this age group. Some children may choose to stay longer. Remember – this is a parent/caregiver and child activity. Encourage parents to share a book with their toddler.

When you lead by example, showing interest in the books and the children, the activity will be successful. Students and volunteers should be encouraged to actively read with the children.

Toddlers enjoy looking at chunky board books with clear pictures of everyday things. By age two, they are often learning how to be careful with books that have regular paper pages. When we read with young children they learn vocabulary and sentence structure. They learn how a story works.

They learn information about the world around them such as the names of animals and dinosaurs. But most importantly, when children discover picture books that inspire their imaginations, they develop a love of stories and books – and this love will stay with them throughout their lives.



## How Does Learning Happen?

### What the Ministry of Education Has to Say

In the past 18 months, two important documents have been produced by the Ontario government. Both of them expand on the philosophy of the ELECT framework.

The first is "Think, Feel, Act – Lessons from Research about Young Children"

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/researchbriefs.pdf>;

More recently, we have the "How Does Learning Happen?" document (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/HowLearningHappens.pdf>);

Both documents are required reading in all Ontario ECE courses and are recommended reading for all professionals who work with young children.

They can be easily accessed online, and are, we are pleased to note, very reader friendly!

You can also watch a Webinar of "How Does Learning Happen" via this link ...

<http://events.digitalmedia.telus.com/ops/051314/index2.php?page=register>).

### Good bye and thank you Ruth. Welcome Heather!

Ruth Gayle, Early Literacy Specialist for the north quadrant since 2009, has assumed a management position at Macaulay. Ruth is the new Supervisor of Community and Prevention Services, where she is responsible for a range of programs for parents and children in the community. Congratulations Ruth!

Our new ELS is Heather Finch, who will be serving the North Quadrant of Toronto. Heather brings a wealth of experience to the team. Most recently, she taught future ECEs at George Brown College, and served as research project coordinator at SickKids Hospital in the Community Health Systems Resource Group. Welcome to the team Heather!

## Toronto's Early Literacy Team

Maria Velasquez - West Quadrant x 327

Heather Finch - North Quadrant x 338

Cathy Webb - East Quadrant x 329

Dave Page - South Quadrant x 328

Susan Gowans – Program Manager x 235

Macaulay Child Development Centre

2010 Eglinton Ave. West, Suite 400

Toronto, Ontario M6E 2K3

416-789-7441 [www.macaulaycentre.org](http://www.macaulaycentre.org)

Please contact your Early Literacy Specialist if you would like to be on our direct mailing list. You will receive invitations to the Literacy Leaders meetings, e-copies of this newsletter,