



Children with LD as Emergent Readers: Bridging the Gap to Conventional Reading

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This article provides an overview of how an emergent literacy perspective may serve as a framework for better understanding the reading and writing behaviors of preschool children and young elementary-age children with LD. For children who are at risk for reading failure, teachers can facilitate the exploration of emergent literacy elements, including the sounds of language (phonological awareness), an awareness of print and book conventions (print awareness), narrative development, and early writing skills. Specific intervention techniques are given to help teachers provide rich, meaningful emergent literacy opportunities in the classroom.

When President Clinton announced the national mandate, "All students will read independently and well by the end of third grade" (U.S. Department of Education, 1997), he not only challenged teachers of children developing typically, but also teachers of children with special needs. This challenge in particular has implications for teachers of children with learning disabilities (LD), as many of these children are not identified as such until third grade. By this time, their reading ability often lags far behind that of their typically developing peers. There may be a sense of urgency about the child's reading development, such that everyone wants the child to become a "real" reader as quickly as possible. The child with severe LD, however, although 7, 8, or even 9 years of age, may developmentally be considered as an emergent reader. Thus, any intervention designed for a child such as this should be embedded in an overarching perspective of emergent literacy and discusses its implications for younger typically developing children and for the child with LD.

Emergent literacy refers to the reading and writing behaviors and concepts of young children that precede and develop into conventional literacy. Conventional literacy refers to those reading and writing behaviors that the members of a culture have implicitly or explicitly agreed upon as denoting traditional reading and writing. Typically developing older preschool children and kindergartners often move between emergent literacy and conventional literacy stages, depending on the difficulty of the task (Sulzby, 1990). The following example may clarify how this happens.

Scribbling and drawing behaviors of typical preschool children are emergent writing behaviors. Writing one's name or writing simple sight words are the beginning stages of conventional writing. Kindergartners may write their names on their papers and be able to write "I love Mom" on a valentine. Yet they may also draw a picture of themselves and say, "I wrote a letter to my grandma." Very likely the teacher will reinforce this task, perhaps even confirming the use of the word *write*. The teacher may say something like, "Wow, you wrote her a really nice letter!" For a younger child, vacillation between conventional literacy and emergent literacy is not seen as unusual or problematic.

In contrast, if a young school-age child with LD vacillates between emergent and conventional literacy, it may be perceived that the child is "not trying." In response to the child with LD who produces a picture and the statement, "I'm writing a letter," the teacher may be tempted to say, "You know how to write, you don't need to draw a picture." However, if one takes an emergent literacy perspective, it may be argued that drawing is literacy and that all of the child's attempts at literacy should be reinforced. A more appropriate response for the child struggling to read and write may be "Great! Sometimes we can draw a picture to tell people what we want -- and you did a super job!" This statement supports the child as an emergent writer but also contextualizes his response (i.e., sometimes we draw and that is literacy, and sometimes we use letters and words).

This article is meant to clarify aspects of emergent literacy for preschool teachers as well as for teachers of elementary-age children with LD. With this perspective, teachers will better understand how emergent literacy and conventional literacy development are interrelated at the early stages of reading. In the next sections we provide a historical perspective of emergent literacy, discuss the subskills of emergent literacy -- including practical implications for each area -- and offer suggestions for structuring a classroom to support early literacy development.

Historical perspective

Historically, only limited attention has been directed toward understanding preschoolers' acquisition of literacy. Many educators are familiar with the doctrine of "reading readiness," a perspective that grew out of early research dating back to the 1930s suggesting that written language acquisition followed oral language attainments. As such, it was believed that the process of literacy acquisition was not initiated until oral language was well developed. Generally speaking, it was thought that children were not considered ready for "learning to read" until school age.

It has since been well documented that typically developing preschool children rapidly acquire an emergent literacy framework from which they are able to interact with and respond to written language (Chaney, 1992; Snow, 1983; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Indeed, children acquire a number of important skills during the preschool years that form the foundation upon which subsequent higher-level literacy acquisitions will be built. These emergent literacy skills have received increased attention in the developmental literature as their important role in the process of learning to read has been more fully recognized.

These foundational skills of literacy are broad-based and span both the child's home and preschool environments. Preschool literacy experiences and achievements in the home and the classroom serve as strong predictors of children's later reading and academic performance (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1992; Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). Likewise, it is probable that deficits in early literacy skills and experiences can affect children's subsequent attainment of higher level linguistic abilities such as reading and writing (Schuele, & van Kleeck, 1987). As a result, early childhood educators and providers are increasingly being encouraged to develop strategies for stimulating early literacy development and for addressing children's deficits in these areas.

Areas of acquisition

Children's emergent literacy abilities often are categorized into clusters of subskills, although these skill areas reflect interrelated and highly interactive components of emergent literacy (Chaney, 1992; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Distinct areas of acquisition that have been identified include phonological awareness, the ability to reflect upon and manipulate the sound system of one's language (Ball, 1997), and the acquisition of print awareness. This latter category includes the child's awareness of the form and function of print as well as the child's increasingly sophisticated understanding of how one uses, positions, and interacts with books and other literacy materials (Goodman, 1986; Hiebert, 1981). Other important areas of emergent literacy include emergent writing development, the child's exploration of the abstract features of print (Clay, 1985), and narrative development, the internalization of and ability to use a story frame or structure with causal and temporal links (Liles, 1993; McCabe & Peterson, 1991). All of these skill areas develop dramatically and reciprocally in the preschool years for children who are developing typically. Children with severe LD may demonstrate emergent literacy behaviors in only some of the subskill areas, whereas others will present as emerging readers and writers across all areas. Each of these skill areas is described in the following sections.

Developing phonological awareness

Emergent literacy perspective

Many teachers of children with learning disabilities are aware that a child's ability to segment words into phonemes (the individual sounds in a language) is strongly associated with a child's ability to read (Liberman, Shankweiler, Fisher, & Carter, 1974). What is less well known, however, is that children's phonological awareness skills are reciprocally related to their ability to discover the alphabetic principle-- that print represents the sounds of the language. Instruction in the correspondence between letters and phonemes facilitates growth in phonological awareness; individual sounds that facilitate learning the letter names (Perfetti, Beck, Bell & Hughes, 1987). In the emergent stages of literacy development, children typically develop phonological awareness skills and learn letter-sound relationships through self-discovery and word play.

Early signs of phonological awareness have been observed in the speech of children as young as 2 and 3 years of age (Snow et al., 1998). This is shown in the rhyming games that occur spontaneously in the conversation of preschoolers ("I see your boots, toots, woos!"). The texts of many books for preschoolers take advantage of these developing skills. For example, storybooks frequently base their text on rhymes and alliteration (sequencing words that start with the same sound, as in "It was a dark, and dank, and dreary night!").

Preschoolers who are typically developing also will begin to hear the differences between words as they learn to identify the initial sounds in words ("That word says the sound in my name!"). So preschool teachers facilitate this development by having days where one student, perhaps Susan, is the "star" for the day, and her classmates try to say or draw other words that start with "Susan's sound." On another day, an "alien" puppet is made to talk so that every word he says starts with the p sound. Within the preschool setting, the emphasis typically is on the fun exploration of sounds and the discovery of differences and similarities between words (Cunningham, 1995).

A somewhat later-developing phonological awareness skill is the ability to blend and segment words into separate phonemes. When this skill emerges, typically developing children can play "Simon-Says" even when the teacher says, "I want you to touch your n-o-z [nose]," (sounding out the word with pauses between the letters). Likewise, preschool children can pick what color of candy they would like to have by saying the name of the color of candy like this: *r-e-d*. Again, for children who are developing typically, these phonological awareness skills can be developed through daily fun interactions and an attitude of exploration.

But there may be major differences in the phonological awareness training that occurs for the early elementary child with LD as compared to typically developing younger children. For the former, the task of learning to hear the differences and similarities between words and working to develop phonological blending and segmentation skills becomes serious business. Certainly the child with LD cannot be taught solely by (and probably won't learn enough) through a game-only approach. Yet it is important to remember that the LD teacher must continue to nourish the fun aspects of word play, even for the older child. This is where knowledge of the emergent levels of literacy development can be very helpful.

Practical implications for instruction

Phonological awareness problems are one of the most common barriers in learning to read effectively (Chard & Dickson, 1999). An LD teacher with an emergent literacy perspective will attempt to facilitate development of this subskill through exploration and word plays, as well as through direct instruction.

Initially, the LD teacher needs to assess the child's phonological awareness abilities. One excellent assessment tool is Torgeson and Bryant's (1993) Test of *Phonological Awareness*. Studies suggest that children at risk for reading failure who have been assessed for their level of phonological awareness development will benefit from highly direct and systematic instruction to develop phoneme awareness and phonics skills (Lyon, 1999). This work will become a focus of the reading program for a child with severe LD.

However, a teacher maintaining an awareness of the relationship between emergent and conventional literacy development will still want to provide opportunities for the fun exploration of sounds and words. The challenge in this task is to make the activities age-appropriate and motivating for the older child. Luckily, popular culture gives us several opportunities to play with words in ways that can be fun and age-appropriate.

One excellent opportunity to rhyme is to provide the older child an opportunity to write "rap" music. The teacher provides the rap background tape and the topic or the students can develop their own topic. The goal is both to rhyme and to keep syllable length in a metered format. For example:

- A video game is fun to play.
- I can play it every night and day.
- My brother is good, but I'm the best.
- I'm better at games than all the rest!

It is easy to see how writing ›and performing‹ this activity would be motivating to a child who sometimes forgets why it is important to hear the differences and similarities in words.

Many other activities that come from our everyday culture can be used to develop phonological awareness. For example, students can use alliteration to develop commercials. They practice picking words that start with similar sounds, for example, writing a commercial about popcorn and using lots of p sounds. Another example would be to write slogans for T-shirts or posters. Students can have a contest for the best slogan, and the winning slogan can be printed on real shirts.

The ideas listed here are summarized in Table 1. Writing rap songs and commercials are just two ways to include more contextualized phonological awareness tasks into the remedial programs of children with severe reading disabilities. Tasks like these heighten children's awareness of the sound elements within words, complementing the phonological awareness learned in more structured drill activities.

Acquisition of print awareness

Table 1. Overview of Classroom Applications	
Emergent literacy skill area	Classroom activity suggestions
Phonological awareness	• Writing songs that rhyme (i.e., rap songs) • Developing commercials based on alliteration
Print awareness	• Using print-referencing behaviors during shared reading • Making collages of environmental print • Exploring books of many genres
Emergent writing	• Playing 20 questions (all writing forms encouraged) • Writing to "alien" pen pals
Narrative development	• Telling stories written from pictographs • Telling stories or preparing puppet shows for younger children

Emergent literacy perspective

Most children entering school will already have acquired a great deal of knowledge about the form and function of print and the organization of books. Primarily, children acquire their awareness of print concepts and book handling conventions through interactions with print in storybooks under the guidance of an adult, such as a Parent or teacher. Through interactions with adult readers, children discover that books are read from front to back, that print runs from left to right and top to bottom, and that print carries meaning. These skills form the basis for the child's emerging knowledge of print awareness. Print awareness transcends not only the role of print in book reading, but also print's role in carrying messages within the surrounding environment, such as on signs in the grocery store and trademarks on clothing items and other products. A child's emerging awareness of print is evidenced when she points to her favorite book and "reads" the title or when she points to the writing above a door and says "That says 'Go Out!'"

Children's acquisition of print awareness typically emerges in the second and third years of life. The earliest stage of print awareness is responding to situational or contextualized print (Goodman, 1986). Goodman has suggested that the very first stage of reading acquisition is the "development of knowledge about print embedded in environmental settings" (p. 7). This refers to the child's ability to "read" print that occurs in highly contextualized situations, such as the word *Cheerios* on a box of cereal or the word *Burger King* above a storefront. For most children, their ability to read such print diminishes as contextual features are reduced; however, with environmental support, the child is able to interact with and respond to print at very early ages. As also noted by Goodman, most children at this early stage of reading acquisition will deny that they are able to read. It also seems that many Parents are unaware of the extent to which their children are able to respond to or recognize common environmental print at these early stages of acquisition.

By ages 4 and 5, most typically developing children will have acquired an awareness of the general organization and function of written language, especially as it pertains to storybook reading. For example, many 4-year-old children will have an understanding of the function of print or that print carries meaning. Teachers and Parents can easily gauge a child's awareness of the function of print by asking a child "Where do I read?" during a shared storybook reading. The child who points to the pictures (a common choice in younger children) clearly has not yet mastered his or her understanding of the function of print. Future acquisitions will build upon the foundation of learning print's function, for once children learn that print carries the meaning and words of a story, the next step will be to learn that oral language (or speech) maps onto written language (or print). Other print awareness skills typically acquired in the preschool years include directionality of print, rudimentary awareness of word and letter boundaries, and the use of metalinguistic terms that describe written language, such as *letter*, *word*, and *write* (Clay, 1985; Goodman, 1986).

Young children with LD may not acquire knowledge of print concepts and book reading conventions at the same rate as their peers. For example, research has indicated that preschool children with language delays demonstrate delays in responding to environmental print, even in highly contextualized depictions (Gillam & Johnston, 198 5). On entering school, children with LD, many of whom may have experienced delays in oral language acquisition, may not have acquired the sophisticated understanding of print's directionality or the organization of storybooks that may be observed in their typically developing peers. From an emergent literacy perspective, teachers of young children with LD should be prepared to assist these youngsters' acquisition of the early foundations of print awareness prior to instruction in beginning or formal reading.

Practical implications for instruction

As previously noted, typically developing children acquire print awareness and knowledge of book conventions through incidental, everyday experiences with books and environmental print. For the child with LD, more explicit and intensive exposure may be required. A common assessment tool used to examine children's acquisition of print concepts is Clay's (1985) *Concepts About Print Test*. Teachers can use this test as a means to assess and monitor children's acquisition of these key early-literacy skills. To encourage children's acquisition of print concepts, children with LD must be provided myriad opportunities to interact with written language in meaningful daily activities.

Perhaps the most salient strategy for encouraging print awareness is through everyday participation in adult-child shared reading interactions. Within this activity, the adult may use print-referencing strategies (Ezell & justice, 2000) to encourage children's interactions with written language. These strategies include verbal behaviors, such as questions, comments, and requests about print, as well as nonverbal behaviors, such as pointing to print and tracking the print when reading. By using these behaviors, the adult can encourage the child's verbal interactions with print. Consider the following shared book reading interaction between a Parent and her 5-year-old daughter:

- Parent: Do you see a letter here that's in your name?
- Child: Yeah, that one and that one-and that one too.
- Parent: Excellent! What sound does that letter make?

Child: That's /w/, like in Wyatt's name.

Parent: You're right! And look-these two words start with the same letters!

Child: These two words are just the same.

For the child with LD, the adults' use of such scaffolding techniques may play an important role in guiding the child's interest from the illustrations to the role of print in storytelling. It is important to note, however, that an adult's use of print-referencing strategies should be used in balance with other verbal interactions regarding the illustrations and the relationship between the text and the child's life, as such interactions can play an important role in enhancing children's overall language abilities as well as their enjoyment of the activity.

Children with LD also should be provided with opportunities to interact with environmental print during play activities and other daily classroom functions. Recent research by Vukelich (1994) indicated that exposure to contextualized print within play settings (i.e., a classroom post office or restaurant) significantly enhanced children's ability to respond to environmental print. Such activities might seem more appropriate to a preschool or kindergarten classroom, but for the child with LD, exposure to highly contextualized print within meaningful play and classroom activities can be an important vehicle to promoting interactions with print. Teachers should ensure that the classroom provides a print-rich environment, with ample displays of teacher- and student-generated print.

An example of a classroom activity that can be used with young children with LD to promote print awareness is formal interaction with contextualized, environmental print. Teachers can ask students to bring in magazine advertisements, food product boxes, and any other print material from the home. Children can make individual poster displays of the print materials. Subsequently, the teacher can assist each child to print in block letters each of the words from the printed items, and children can match the printed words (decontextualized) to contextualized representations on their posters. This activity will allow children to interact with print in high- versus low-context depictions of environmental print. Activities such as this model more formal interactions with written language while supporting the child's emergent interactions with written language.

To enhance children's awareness of book conventions (i.e., directionality, role of print versus pictures), children with LD should be given opportunities to actively explore books of many genres. Important features of books that may stimulate children's understanding of print and book conventions include large narrative print, repetitive text, and contextualized print embedded within the illustrations. One example of a book meeting these requirements is *Spot Bakes a Cake* (Hill, 1994), in which environmental print is embedded within the illustrations. For example, one illustration depicts a shopping scene with a sign that reads "Special Today Chocolate." Although books such as this may seem "too young" for the elementary school child with LD, it has been our experience that children (and many adults) enjoy interacting with storybooks that present appealing illustrations and storylines. The teacher of children with LD can use these books within a curriculum that features a wide variety of book genres supporting readers at both the emergent and conventional stages of literacy. Table 2 provides a list of books that include features amenable to promoting print awareness in children who are in the early stages of reading development.

Emergent writing development

Emergent literacy perspective

Children learn to write by shaping and reforming their understandings of print (Au, Mason, & Scheu, 1995). Figure 1 provides an overview of this process. At first, children form letter shapes or marks that are similar to the characteristics of the conventional literacy system in their culture. Thus, a child learning English is likely to make different kinds of scribbles or letter shapes than a child who lives in a community where Hebrew is spoken and written (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984).

Table 2. Children's Storybooks for Promoting Print Awareness

Title (author)	Features
<i>Feathers for Lunch</i> (Ehlert, 1990)	Contextualized print, appealing illustrations
<i>It's the Bear</i> (Alborough, 1999)	Contextualized print, appealing illustrations, rhymes
<i>Nine Ducks Nine be</i> (Hayes,1990)	Contextualized print, appealing illustrations, rhymes
<i>Pinkerton, Behave</i> (Kellogg, 1979)	Contextualized print, appealing illustrations
<i>School Bus</i> (Crews, 1984)	Contextualized print, repetitive text
<i>School Days</i> (Hennessy, 1990)	Contextualized print, large narrative print
<i>Spot Bakes a Cake</i> (Hill, 1994)	Contextualized print, large narrative print
<i>This is the Bear</i> (Hayes,1986)	Contextualized print, appealing illustrations, rhymes
<i>This Old Man</i> (Jones, 1990)	Contextualized print, repetitive text

Although writing does not develop in an invariant order and children will move back and forth between developmental levels, depending on the task (Sulzby, 1990), overall, children's drawing and scribbling gradually will include more letter-like forms, as shown in Level 2 in Figure 1. Sometimes in the same composition, children will use a variety of forms, including both wavy scribble and more letter-like forms (Sulzby, 1990).

A child will continue to use letters and letter forms in different ways (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982). Writing with letters usually begins late in Year 2, but more often in Year 3 (Sulzby, 1990). Children have been observed to (a) copy letters over and over from words that they can observe in the classroom, (b) use letter patterns (e.g., using two or three letters over and over in sequenced strings), and (c) invent their own letter forms (Sulzby, 1990). Initially, the child's writing is formed of long letter strings that have no phonetic connection to the child's composition. However, children who are developing typically will gradually begin to demonstrate a correspondence between the word they want to write and the letters they use. One step in this development is shown at Level 3 in Figure 1. Here the child uses a letter to stand for each syllable in a word.

Gradually, as they develop phonological awareness and the alphabetic principle, children developing typically will begin to use more than one letter to represent a syllable. This is shown in Level 4 in Figure 1. This stage is the beginning of what often has been called "invented spelling." Although Parents sometimes worry that letting their child use invented spelling will mean he or she will be a poor speller, research suggests that the use of invented spelling is not in conflict with teaching correct spelling (Snow et al., 1998). Finally, children will begin to use letters to represent all the sounds they hear in a word. This stage is shown at Level 6 in figure 1.

Levels of Emergent Writing	Examples
Level 1. Drawing/scribbling Children at first draw and then scribble. They begin to reproduce characteristics of the writing system in their environment/culture.	Click to see an example of drawing/scribbling
Level 2. Letters/letter-like units Children begin to use letter forms or pseudo letters. Letters are used in non-phonetic strings (they do not correspond to sounds in the words)	Click to see an example of letters/letter-like units
Level 3. Beginning stages of invented spelling. At first the child uses a letter to stand for each syllable. Often the letters correspond to the beginning sound in the word.	Click to see an example of beginning stages of invented spelling
Level 4. Later stages of invented spelling. Children begin to demonstrate increasing knowledge of letter-sound relationships. They begin to demonstrate awareness of the sounds within Syllables.	Click to see an example of later stages of invented spelling
Level 5. Conventional spelling. Children use letters to indicate all the sounds in a word. Words may still be misspelled.	Click to see an example of conventional spelling

Figure 1. Emergent writing development (Adapted from Au, Mason, & Scheu, 1995; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Sulzby, 1990).

It is important to remember that at the emergent literacy stage of writing development the child views all of these forms as "writing" and uses his or her writing to communicate as a literate individual in the world. For example, a young child playing "grocery store" might scribble forms on paper and say, "I made my grocery list, and I'm going to the store!" Understanding that writing can be used to facilitate everyday activities is a significant step in a child's literacy development. It is this enthusiasm to use writing to function in daily life, to simplify tasks, and to communicate that is particularly important to foster in the older child with LD who struggles to write and read.

Practical implications for instruction

It is important to share the different kinds of written forms that can be viewed as "writing" with an older child with LD. He or she is struggling to bridge the gap between emergent and conventional writing. It can be an important affirmation to a child who feels discouraged to say, "Sometimes we can draw a picture to show people what we mean." It can be difficult to express an emergent literacy perspective with an older child with LD because he or she is under constant pressure to imitate the literacy levels of his or her typically developing peers. However, at least some opportunity needs to be available for the child to be held to a less rigorous standard of conventional literacy where the goal can be to communicate and to share ideas using a variety of writing levels.

One activity that has been useful to the authors is to play the game "20 Questions." The teacher thinks of an object or person, and the student has 20 chances to guess the object or person the teacher has in mind. We encourage students to ask general questions at first (e.g., "Is the person living or dead?"), then write down the answers we give so that they will remember what questions they have asked and what information they already know. We encourage students to write down their information in any way that is useful for them (e.g., draw, use invented spelling, or use any emergent writing forms). We emphasize that the writing goal in this activity is to accomplish the task, not to see how well they write or spell. The function of literacy becomes the goal rather than the form.

Another activity that can be motivating to an older child with LD is to have a special "pen pal." At times, we have suggested that this secret pen pal is an alien who doesn't speak our language very well and has trouble reading and writing. We encourage the children to write their pen pal a letter but not to worry about how they write because their pen pal is also learning to read and write letters. Needless to say, we respond to the children under the alien alias! We have found that this activity encourages children to do their best and to use writing as a means to communicate; it also frees them from their sometimes anxious pursuit of conventional literacy. A teacher with an emergent literacy perspective understands the difficulties faced by the child challenged to function at increasingly higher levels of conventional writing. The teacher knows that sometimes a child with severe LD may be able to complete a higher-order task (i.e., composing a letter to a friend) if he or she is able to perform at an earlier level of writing development.

Narrative development

Emergent literacy perspective

A child's ability to provide an oral narrative is one of the best predictors of school success (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987; Feagans & Appelbaum, 1986). One of the tasks required to produce this narrative relates to the child's understanding of the requirements of decontextualized language (Kaderavek & Sulzby, 2000), by which we mean the child's ability to provide the necessary information that permits the listener to follow and understand the story. For example, if a child says, "He went there, and they did it," he or she has only provided contextual information. The listener must know to whom the child is referring and what happened before understanding the child's production. A decontextualized version of this sentence would result in the child saying, "The boy went to the ball game, and the team won the game." By introducing the characters and objects through specific nouns, the information is decontextualized and the listener understands what the child is trying to say. Producing decontextualized language is one of the important emerging skills in narrative development during the preschool years.

A second narrative task is being able to tell a story with a beginning, middle, and end using temporal and causal links (Liles, 1985). This skill is not evident in the child who simply tells a sequenced ordering of events, such as "I went to the zoo, I saw a lion, I ate some ice cream, I went home" (Hudson & Shapiro, 1991). This listing of events is sometimes called a "chronology" (McCabe & Rollins, 1994). Although a chronology does not have the elements of a plot or story that is required for a sophisticated narrative, children of all ages produce chronological narratives. This type of oral "story telling" is often elicited if the child is asked, "What did you do at the zoo?" or "What did you do at the birthday party?"

McCabe and Rollins (1994) described a protocol and method for analyzing the narrative productions of preschool children. They suggested that the teacher tell the child a simple narrative, as *telling* a story is one of the best ways to *elicit* a story. The best story prompts are those that center on being hurt or being scared. After telling the child a simple narrative, the teacher asks, "Has anything like that ever happened to you?" McCabe and Rollins suggested analyzing the longest narrative after three narratives have been elicited. Stories about trips or birthday parties should be avoided as they tend to elicit chronologies instead of more sophisticated narratives. The teacher should respond to the child with relatively neutral prompts, either by repeating a few words of the child's last statement, by saying "Uh-huh," or saying "Tell me more" or "Then what happened?" Table 3 lists the different kinds of narratives that are frequently produced by preschool children and the ages at which these developmental levels of production are reached by children who are typically developing.

Practical implications for instructions

The LD teacher with an emergent literacy perspective recognizes the importance of facilitating the oral production of narratives in the older child with LD. Developmentally, the oral production of narratives precedes written narrative production; thus, the older child who struggles with narrative development needs to continue to practice to be useful in stimulating more sophisticated narrative production.

Ukrainetz (1998) developed a pictographic alternative to conventional writing, which she called "stickwriting." Stickwriting is an idea that combines the forms of drawing and writing. The teacher, and later the child, create simple, schematic pictures to represent the significant events in a narrative. Figure 2 illustrates a child's narrative in which the child is playing with his dog, his dog runs away, the child is sad, and the dog is found sitting by the back door. Children are encouraged to keep their stickwriting story very simple, in contrast to making it an artistic effort. Students may need assistance in sequencing and "breaking" their story into manageable pieces. Ukrainetz reported that in contrast to children's written narratives, oral narratives coupled with stickwriting improved time sequencing and content focus, as well as stimulated longer narratives.

Table 3. Development of Oral Narratives

Type of narrative	Example	Developmental ages
One-event narrative	Only one past tense event is described: "I heard a noise."	Children begin to refer to real past events at around age 2.
Two-event narrative	Two past tense events are described: "My aunt was at the store and she falled on the ice."	At age 3 1/2 years, children generally can combine only two events.
Leap-frog narrative	This kind of narrative has more than two events but events are described out of sequence: "I saw a doctor 'cause I hurt my arm, my cousin, you know, don't have a dog, see I Just fall down."	Often produced by 4-year-old boys who are typically developing. By age 5 most children will be able to sequence events in their narrative. This kind of narrative is problematic in a child over age 6.
End-at-high-point narrative	This narrative form has at least two past tense events as well as a climax or high point in the story: "I heard a noise, and I got up, and it was really, really, really scary!"	This narrative structure is most common in children at age 5 although about 21 % of 5-year-olds produce a classic narrative.
Classic narrative	The child produces a resolution that "winds up" the story after the high point: "I was swinging and fell off the swing, and my lip got cut, and I got stitches, but now it's all better"	This form of narrative is typically used by children age 6 and older.
Chronological narrative	A series of events described in sequence but without a highpoint: "I went to the party, I ate cake, I played games, I sang a song, I went home."	This kind of narrative is produced by children of all ages and adults. It is typically produced as an overall description of an event that has occurred many times, instead of a description of a specific event.

Note. Adapted from McCabe and Rollins (1994). These analyses were completed on White, English-speaking children. Cultural differences influence the structure of children's narratives (see Heath, 1998).

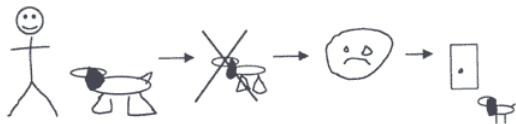


Figure 2. An example of stickwriting used to facilitate an oral narrative.

A second technique to facilitate narrative development is to have older children with LD prepare puppet shows or oral storytelling sessions for younger children. The teacher can remind the older students to "keep it simple and clear" so that the younger children can follow the story. Now the focus becomes the listeners' needs, rather than the older child's deficiencies in narrative development and chronological sequencing of story events. The older students can use note cards and the stickwriting technique as reminders concerning the elements of their narrative. Again, an emergent literacy perspective emphasizes the overall usefulness of narrative production as a literacy event and minimizes expressing this task through conventional literacy forms.

Supporting emergent literacy

Providing emergent readers and writers with rich, meaningful opportunities to interact with written language within the classroom is critical. From an emergent literacy perspective, teachers of preschool children and older children with LD should provide opportunities for students to explore the sounds of the language (phonological awareness), to acquire an awareness of print and book conventions (print awareness), to develop narrative skills, and to experiment with early-writing modalities. As previously indicated, children with LD who are 6,7, and even 8 years of age may still be acquiring the foundations of literacy that will serve as the bridge to the acquisition of more formal reading and writing processes. Teachers who support these children's early attempts at literate behaviors and understand that these behaviors serve as the "roots of literacy" will play an important role in promoting these children's forthcoming attainment of conventional literacy.

Practical suggestions for forging emergent literacy abilities in young children have been threaded throughout this article. Table I summarizes these suggestions. Beyond this, however, a systematic analysis by teachers of the print environment in their classrooms is warranted to ensure that all children have opportunities to interact with print in meaningful ways. What follows is a set of questions that teachers may use to analyze the environmental support for emergent and conventional literacy attainment within the classroom environment. The reader is also referred to Dowhower and Beagle's (1998) description of a more formalized assessment protocol for examining the print environment of early childhood classroom settings.

1. Classroom Reading Center. Is there a clearly defined classroom library? Are books available for home lending? Is there a large selection of books featured on open racks? Are there a wide variety of book genres available (i.e. concept books, wordless picture books, alphabet books, first readers)?
2. Classroom Writing Center. Is there a clearly defined classroom writing center? Do children have open access to writing and drawing materials? Are a wide variety of materials available (i.e., pens, crayons, markers, construction paper, paints)?
3. Classroom Literacy Activities. Is there a group shared book reading session each day? Are there opportunities for children to participate in small group and one-on-one shared reading sessions with adult readers? Are book-reading activities supplemented by book-sharing discussions before and after? Do children participate in group and individual writing/drawing sessions on a daily basis? Do the children participate in literacy-related field trips (i.e., to the library)?
4. Print Exposure. Is the alphabet prominently displayed? Are children's names displayed? Are examples of children's writings and drawings displayed? Are classroom items labeled in print? Are posters with commercially generated print on display?
5. Play Settings. Do children's play settings feature environmental print? Are children encouraged to use print and literacy materials in play activities?

If a teacher is able to answer "yes" to these questions, he or she is well on the way to creating a rich classroom literacy environment. Learning to read and write can be a complex and difficult undertaking for children with LD, but a classroom with the components described in this article will nurture and support the excitement and fun of literacy learning.

This article describes the importance of an emergent literacy perspective for both teachers of young typically developing children and teachers of older children with LD and summarizes the practical implications for the subskill areas of phonological awareness, print concepts, writing development, and narrative development. It is essential that teachers understand the course of literacy development and their roles in facilitating this growth. An awareness of the earliest patterns associated with these areas of emergent literacy can help the LD teacher nourish children's beginning explorations of literacy.

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