

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

## Best Practices

ELA teacher practices are to be used within a context of the multiple domains of learning and are focused on the development of the “whole child”, including their Mathematics Skills, Social Skills, Physical Development, and Approaches to Learning, among other areas. They are not meant to be isolated into a single domain of learning or within a segmented part of the day. ELA teacher practices are intentionally embedded in an integrated and play-based approach to learning. All preschool environments, activities, and interactions should be designed to encourage speaking and listening, literacy exploration, and emergent reading and writing activities.

### *Reading: Literature*

#### **Key Ideas and Details**

##### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Create cozy, comfortable reading areas with a variety of age-appropriate printed materials (e.g., at least 15- 20 books in a display case, changed every two weeks, along with magazines, catalogs, newspapers).
- Read aloud to each child individually and in small and large groups two or more times a day in different settings using age-appropriate high-quality books and texts (e.g., picture storybooks including the Caldecott medal books, picture information books, traditional literature including folktales, fantasy, poetry and rhyming books, big books, books that are predictable and repetitive, culturally diverse books and an assortment of alphabet books and number books).
- Organize routines of the day with children to ensure that children are aware of their opportunities for read alouds with the teacher in whole, small group or one-on-one as well as times of the day that they can use the classroom library and self- select books for their reading enjoyment.
- Prepare children for listening to a new book during read alouds by building on background knowledge (e.g., make appropriate connections to children’s work and interests, predict topic by looking at front cover illustration, look at a few illustrations throughout the book to build anticipation, identify title, author, and illustrator and the roles of each).
- Read aloud the entire book with few interruptions and use motivating expression appropriate to story line.
- Read and reread favorite books followed with a discussion guided by the particular objectives for reading the book with higher level questioning techniques (e.g., What

was the problem? How did he solve the problem? Did he learn something new or a lesson? Tell me more.). Refer back to story to clarify difficult parts.

- Follow up a read aloud and discussion with a range of auditory, visual, movement and role play opportunities in multiple contexts throughout the day to guide beginning understanding of main events, topics, setting, and characters (e.g., model story retelling and role-playing with props and dialogue in dramatic play, sing songs related to stories, use flannel board and puppets to reenact characters and plot, prepare recipes related to stories, read other books during the day related to stories).
- Place books to extend center play in different centers (e.g., a book about bridges in the block area).
- Create displays that focus on classroom studies and projects (e.g. during a project on “How Plants Grow” a bookcase was dedicated to children’s individual pots of growing plants, samples of garden tools that could be used in dramatic play, children’s fiction and non-fiction books on growing plants, a class book titled *Growing Grass*, children’s science journals that included week-by-week observational drawings of potted plants and an experience story with shared writing and pictures by the teacher and the children titled “Our Trip to the Garden Store”).

## **Craft and Structure**

### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

#### **Effective preschool teachers:**

- Embed ongoing strategies to clarify new word meanings during read alouds, small group activities, conversations, play, or writing (e.g., use props, gestures and voice to emphasize meaning, pair a similar and familiar word to define the unfamiliar word, point to the illustration that gives clues to new word).
- Encourage children’s questions about unfamiliar words and their meanings.
- Model and encourage use of new and interesting words read in books by using new words frequently throughout the day in conversations, songs, rhymes, activities, and discussions.
- Compare and contrast examples of favorite and familiar story or poetry books by identifying each type as either a story or a poetry book and discuss simple characteristics of each. When children are familiar with a few characteristics of each genre, discuss how the examples (story and poetry book) are alike and how they are different. Begin to let children identify the genre (story or poetry) on their own.

## Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Follow up a discussion of illustrations in favorite books with offering similar art materials at the art center (e.g., after reading *Kitten's Full Moon* [Henkes, '06] make the connection between the work of the artist/illustrator and the child's own art work by offering black and white pastels with black markers to explore night drawings at the art center).
- Connect the role of author and illustrator of a book read aloud to the work of the child in the writing and art centers (e.g., after reading *A Snowy Day* [Keats, '64] "There are many blank books and interesting papers at the writing table. Let's look at the winter books on display at the writing center and look closely at the illustrations and see how we can draw and write about winter too.").
- Compare and contrast the major elements of an adventure of two familiar storybook characters. Discuss how the main characters or their adventures are alike and how they are different (e.g., In the books *My No, No, No Day* [Patterson, '12] and *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* [Viorst, '72] How are the adventures in these two stories similar? How is the day that Alexander is having like Bella's day? How is Alexander's day different?"

## Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Select high quality literature that, when read aloud, engages individual, small groups or large groups of children. Books should be selected based on a child's familiarity with the topic, background knowledge, interest, complexity of sentences, difficulty of vocabulary, and length of the story.
  - Provide preschoolers who have had minimal exposure to reading, shared reading and read alouds, short books of high interest that include language, words, and topics with engaging rhythm or rhyme, high predictability and simple illustrations in order to develop the willingness and motivation to listen to stories (e.g., *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* [Carle, '70]).
  - As children gain experience with book read alouds, add more challenging language, length, illustrations, and appropriate topics that are not immediately present or familiar (*Blackout* [Rocco, '12]).
- Invite children's participation in rich, supportive conversations about stories read to increase engagement and provide the requisite skills and background information to comprehend the story.

- Encourage back and forth exchanges, ask open-ended questions, scaffold, repeat and expand vocabulary (e.g., after reading *The Mitten* [Brett, '89], "Yes, his winter mittens are many different colors. They are multi-colored.").
- Encourage problem solving, comparisons, and connections that can be related to personal experience (e.g., after reading *Olivia and the Missing Toy*, [Falconer], "What is the biggest challenge or the problem Olivia is having now? How do you think she'll solve the problem? Have you ever had a day like Olivia's?").
- Analyze illustrations and make predictions (e.g., "I see a clue in the picture that helps me guess what will happen on the next page. Do you see it?").

## ***Reading: Informational Text***

### **Key Ideas and Details**

#### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Compare and contrast favorite story books and favorite informational texts and discuss which book is fiction (e.g., tells a story) and which book is information (explains or shares real information).
- Integrate opportunities for read aloud experiences using both literature and informational texts throughout the day followed by rich discussions (e.g., morning circle, small group time, center-time, naptime, closing circle) to extend and make connections between key concepts in science, social studies, math, music, art, movement, and social and emotional development (e.g., "In our read aloud today, we read about earthworms. Last week we read many books about snakes. Who can tell me how an earthworm and a snake are similar? Yes, both the earthworm and the snake are long and squiggly and crawl on their stomachs").
- Read and reread favorite informational texts. Give children hand-held props for unfamiliar words that prompt new information. During the follow-up discussion have children identify the name of their prop and an accompanying fact (e.g., from *The Tiny Seed*, [Carle, '00] children respond, "It's a bean plant. First, you plant a bean seed in dirt so it grows. Then it grows beans.").
- Model and encourage using new and interesting topical words from informational text throughout the day in conversations, songs, rhymes, activities and discussions.
- Encourage informational book discussions that includes questions, conversations and discussions about topical book information. Refer back to original text to cite evidence or to clarify difficult or new information.

## Craft and Structure

### *Preschool Teaching Practices*

Effective preschool teachers:

- Model and encourage questions about unfamiliar words in a text and point out context clues (e.g., “Great catch Abby! Abby always asks me when she hears an unfamiliar word that she doesn’t understand. Let’s look at the pictures and read the words again around the new word to see if we can find clues to help us understand the new word.”).
- Connect experiences with actual objects and props to identify positional phrases such as in back of, in front of, under, on, over, etc. Identify front and back of book when reading and begin to have children identify the front and back cover of books.
- Connect the role of author and illustrator (or photographer) of children’s favorite informational books to children’s writing activities (e.g., after reading *Colors Everywhere* [Hoban ‘95] children discuss Tana Hoban’s role of author and photographer/illustrator. Following the discussion, children took photographs of familiar school objects to create an informational class book *Colors at School*).

## Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

### *Preschool Teaching Practices*

Effective preschool teachers:

- Read and reread several informational books on topics of interest to children. Compare and contrast books and illustrations (e.g., “Both books *My Big Truck Book* [Priddy, ‘11] and *Trucks and Cars and Things that Go* [Scarry, ‘98] are books about cars and trucks. Mr. Priddy’s book uses pictures or illustrations from photographs for his book. These pictures are like the photographs we take. Mr. Scarry’s book has pictures or illustrations that are painted. These illustrations are like the paintings we make at the easel.”).
- Create information class books and discuss how each information book is alike or different than other information books in the classroom library. Discuss how pictures or illustrations in information books describe the writer’s words. Connect classroom library books to children’s book-making. With teacher support, ensure that children have an opportunity to write (dictation, drawings, scribble-writing, letter-strings, or invented spellings) and illustrate (drawings, paintings, photographs) topics of their own choosing for class books.

## **Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity**

### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Select high quality informational text and books that engage individual or groups of children at their level for read alouds. Books should be selected based on a child's need and familiarity with the topic, background knowledge, interest, complexity of sentences, difficulty of vocabulary, and length of the story.
- Provide children who have had minimal exposure to books or read aloud experiences, first experiences with high interest topics that include engaging photographs and illustrations in order to develop the willingness and motivation to attend to the topic. Adjust language, length of text, and interactions between child and text if needed.
- As children gain experience with preschool informational books, continue to add more challenging topics, language, and length including topics that are not immediately present or familiar.
- Invite children's participation in rich discussions of informational books to guide comprehension and make connections to a topic (e.g., after reading *What Lives in a Shell?* [Zoehfeld, '03] "Why does the hermit crab have a shell? Does their shell grow with their body? How are the hermit crabs in the classroom aquarium like the snails Ms. Green brought in today? How are they different?").
- Stock new and interesting manipulatives and props throughout centers to extend concepts from informational books read aloud. Demonstrate and role-play their use (e.g. after reading and discussing *26 Letters and 100 Cents* [Hoban, '87], children match alphabet props to printed letters in the fine motor/manipulatives center).

## ***Reading: Foundational Skills***

### **Print Concepts**

### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Draw children's attention to the functions and features of print during read aloud discussions, small group activities, and incidentally throughout the day (e.g., point out that the person whose name is on the helper chart starts with an uppercase letter "R," or during a read aloud discussion point out that the words in the title of the book are separated by spaces).
- Display printed labels and other print examples throughout the classroom environment that has meaning to children during their daily activities. Draw attention to the print (e.g., center labels, rebus labels and stories, picture recipes, traffic signs) and encourage activities and interactions where children interact with the displayed print (e.g. "Yes, the label in the hat has the word for Tyrek's name. Can you put it in Tyrek's cubby please?").

- Ensure authentic opportunities for reading and rereading environmental print during the day and while reading track the print with finger to ensure understanding of left to right and top to bottom progression.
- Display relevant print and writing examples at children's eye level.
- Provide relevant, topical literacy props that include print throughout the classroom (e.g., empty food and household containers, menus, recipe cards, phone books, order pads, signs and labels, office forms).

## **Phonological Awareness**

### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Use rhythm sticks, claps, snaps, or body motions to segment the syllables in children's names and other words.
- Engage children in activities, read storybooks and poems, sing songs and chants that have repetitive patterns, alliterations, rhymes, and refrains that are engaging and playful (e.g., sing, "Liz, Liz, bo-biz, banana-fana fo-fiz, fee-fi-mo-miz, Liz! Liz can get her coat.").
- Read and reread rhyming books and texts to children. Encourage children to make up their own rhymes and alliterations.
- Draw children's attention to the sounds children hear in words (e.g., by asking for the children whose names start with the "m,m,m..." "M" sound to go wash their hands for snack).
- Provide activities where children sound match (e.g., show a picture of snake, a dog, or a house and ask children which one starts with the "s-s-s..." "S" sound).

## **Phonics and Word Recognition**

### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Integrate activities throughout the day that draw attention to the printed letter and the sounds letters make (e.g., at the writing center, "I see you and Sabir pointing to the letters that your names begin with on the alphabet chart. Can you also make the sound for the first letter 'S' in your name? Yes, S-s-s-sabir.").
- Encourage participation with materials that promote identification of the letters of the alphabet including alphabet books, charts, blocks, games, and puzzles.

- Provide name game activities (e.g., recognize child's name with and without graphic support, differentiate among names, visually match specific letters) throughout the day for children to learn to recognize their names and the letters in their name.
- Find opportunities to read and write children's names daily. While writing the name, spell each letter aloud and invite children to read the name and spell each letter with you.
- Encourage children to discuss and interact with functional print materials (labels, signs, directions with pictures) and child-generated writing samples (class books, signs on block buildings, notes to teacher, labels with pictures on shelves and drawings that incorporate children's writing).

## **Fluency**

### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Share reading and rereading favorite books giving children the opportunity to read along the parts of the story they remember. Choose some books based on the use of repeated phrases, refrains, and strong patterns and predictability so children can participate with the reading.
- Engage children in conversations about their favorite books and texts. Ensure that individual children's favorite topics are well represented in the classroom library (e.g., books about trains, sharks, animals). Update books frequently and use information about individual preferences to extend the reader's engagement to new and more challenging literature and informational text.
- Ensure ample time for individual and group use of the library and books (e.g., before the day begins, at center time, before, during or after naps, after outdoor play, before and after transitions).

## ***Writing***

### **Text Types and Purposes**

#### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Model teacher writing in a variety of genres throughout the day and encourage children's writing (e.g., guide children to write their names on their work, share writing lists, messages, charts, forms, signage, labels, invitations, letters, and model pretend roles in dramatic play activities that include writing such as a doctor in the doctor's office charting patient health information, etc.).
- Provide shared writing opportunities (e.g., the children volunteer the ideas and letters or words and the teacher elaborates on the ideas and writes the words). Display interactive



examples of writing (including pictures) at children's eye level for intentional follow-up activities.

- Take dictation for a child by writing exactly what the child says and making sure the child can see what you are writing. Read the dictation back to the child tracking their words with a finger.
- Encourage individual and small groups of children's writing at the writing center and other centers independently or with teacher support (e.g., provide exciting writing and book making materials, provide examples at the writing center of printed letters, words, names, and phrases that children frequently use in their writing, encourage writing notes to a family member, model or share writing signs for the block and manipulatives centers, model and support recording and making observations at the science center, model and encourage writing numbers at the math center and during other activities).
- Model the process of classroom bookmaking by using different sizes and shapes of paper, varied and interesting colors, etc. Ensure exciting bookmaking materials are readily available at the writing and art centers. Make classroom book topics simple and predictable. Frequently share classroom books and display in library and throughout the room. Have children share or buddy-read with a partner and take a copy home to share or "read" with families.

## **Production and Distribution of Writing**

### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Encourage children to share their writing or teacher dictation at all developmental levels with a partner, small-group, class and family.
- Respond positively to all writing efforts at all levels (e.g., dictation, scribble-writing, letter strings, and invented spellings) and display children's writing samples on the wall at children's eye level.
- Provide a variety of writing tools (e.g., pencils, crayons, chalk, markers, and keyboards) and surfaces (e.g., paper, writing easels, and computer surfaces) throughout the classroom.

## **Research to Build and Present Knowledge**

### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Expand, elaborate, and guide children's ideas and interests to create projects or studies where children ask questions, brainstorm, problem solve, plan, learn new vocabulary, investigate a topic, and produce documentation (e.g., after an investigation where children and teacher researched the topic of a class pet by visiting a pet store, the library, and children's sites online, the classroom documented their observations and experiences by producing *Bubbles*

*the Betta* class book. The children drew pictures and with teacher assistance and support “wrote” about their experience and shared “reading” the book with the other preschool classrooms and their families.).

## ***Speaking and Listening***

### **Comprehension and Collaboration**

#### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Read and reread favorite books and texts so that children can become familiar enough with the story or text to be successful in identifying important information with some detail (e.g., after reading and rereading *A Sick Day for Amos McGee* [Stead ‘11], the children were able to discuss the questions who, what, when, where, and why with simple detail and were able to connect experiences in the story to their own experiences).
- Create a climate of discourse that values conversations, dialogue, questions, and reflections, including “wait-time” (e.g., at least once a day, the teacher has personal conversations with each child to build relationships and encourage multiple back-and-forth exchanges).
- Provide activities and props throughout the classroom that encourage interactions, conversations and support connections to concepts learned (e.g., in dramatic play, the “auto service shop” provides children the opportunity ask and answer questions about pretend roles, use topic vocabulary, “write” service orders at various developmental levels, and creatively act-out roles).
- Revisit classroom rules that support classroom discussions (e.g., “Boys and girls, we have a classroom rule about one person talking at a time. Why did we make that rule?”).

### **Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas**

#### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Provide opportunities for discussions that include details of familiar people, places, and things and events with individual children, and in small and large-groups (e.g., after the read aloud *No, David!* [Shannon ‘98], children discuss with detail each of David’s experiences and why David’s mother said “No, David!”).
- Offer individual, small and large group opportunities throughout the day to express and share activities, ideas, feelings, or other information in a classroom climate that values discourse (e.g., discussions, project development, brain storming and predicting, book conversations, discussing and learning names for feelings, conflict resolution and show and tell).

# ***LANGUAGE***

## **Conventions of Standard English**

### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Respond to children using their words (“reflect back”) with the correct plural forms, tenses, prepositions and in complete sentences. Also, add new and rich vocabulary to the response when appropriate.
- Ensure that children have interesting opportunities to practice language using plural forms, prepositions, complete sentences, and question sentences by using props and toys in engaging individual, small and large-group opportunities (e.g., the use of props to identify positional phrases such as in back of, in front of, under, on).
- Provide individual support to each child to write their name on their work throughout the day. Allow children who need it ample time to move through the developmental stages of writing (e.g., teacher dictation, scribble-writing, letter-like forms, a combination of upper and lowercase letters).
- Encourage children to use their emergent writing skills independently or with teacher support by providing ongoing and motivating up-to-date materials and activities at the writing center based on individual and group interests including written models of the alphabet and printed words with pictures that children currently use and request for writing projects (e.g., “Mom,” “no,” “love” “Save!”). Support children during the writing process by referring to the letter construction chart and prompting with letter construction and letter sounds when needed.
- Build oral language and writing skills through read aloud extension activities in classroom centers (e.g., after reading a collection of *Thomas and Friends* [Awdry, 1975] brainstorm ideas for props for a train station in the dramatic play area. Share writing a list with children of materials and supplies needed).
- Draw children’s attention to examples of written words with pictures at eye level including children’s drawings and writing, teacher and child-generated writing, class-generated books that exemplify varied purposes of writing and provide written models for children to refer to if needed during writing activities.

## **Vocabulary Acquisition and Use**

### ***Preschool Teaching Practices***

Effective preschool teachers:

- Use new vocabulary introduced in conversations, reading, projects and studies and other activities in context multiple times throughout the day.

- Match visual and auditory prompts with gestures to reinforce the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., there is an *enormous din* in here [hands over ears and eyes closed tight]. It is so noisy!).
- Model excitement and the playful use of new words (e.g., “What the frog said was *ridiculous*! The toad had never heard of anything so *preposterous*.”).
- Sort words, props, topics, materials, etc. into categories (e.g., “Gallop is an action word like crawl, walk, or jump. It is the movement that a horse makes when it wants to go fast. Let me show you how to gallop.”).
- Use props and other visuals with oral language to compare and contrast and describe simple opposites (e.g., colored cards that illustrate black and white, objects that are big and little, placements on wall that are high and low, voices that are loud and soft).
- Make connections between a child’s experience and the meaning of new vocabulary and how it is used (e.g., “This is my very loud voice that I use outside and this is my very quiet voice that I use during rest time.”).
- Provide opportunities for finding out the meaning of words and phrases through connecting information (e.g., after a read aloud, “Looking at these two pages in the book *Anansi the Spider* [McDermott ‘73] what do the words ‘he fell into trouble’ mean? What happens to Anansi on the next few pages to help us understand what ‘he fell into trouble’ means?”).