

Development of Literacy Skills

How Teachers Can Work with Families to Support the Development of Literacy Skills and Love for Reading and Writing

A major goal of SEAL is to develop academically proficient and literate students who are skilled at and who love reading and writing! SEAL advocates a text-rich curriculum and environment that engages children with books and the printed word to develop confident and motivated learners who can work their way through complex texts, who appreciate the written word, and are able to use writing as a vehicle for expression. Children become proficient readers and writers when those skills are developed through exposure to a variety of written materials, genres and meaningful text. And they become lovers of reading and writing through being read to, through exposure to wonderful literature, and by discovering their own authentic reasons to write.

It is important that children be exposed to wonderful literature and high-level informational text. Reading instruction helps children learn to read. But they become readers as they engage with books that interest them. Teachers select books with high-interest graphics, rich vocabulary, and that represent diverse human experiences. Teachers in SEAL classrooms read aloud a variety of books related to the theme. Reading is always accompanied by discussion. Books are read multiple times, allowing students to check their comprehension and make connections, deepen their familiarity with the narrative, promote awareness of the language the author has used, and to facilitate vocabulary development and high-level writing. Teachers use a variety of story-telling strategies and story retell activities to develop student comprehension and to teach story structure and elements (e.g., setting, characters, plot). Through Interactive Read-Alouds, children predict, summarize, retell and talk about their responses to what they are learning.

Vocabulary comes alive in new ways. Foundational literacy skills of phonemic and phonological awareness develop through awareness of spoken words and through being read to - actually hearing the words and associating them with print. Students learn "good reader" strategies such as predicting, summarizing, paraphrasing, relating prior knowledge to the content of the book, and asking and answering questions about the text. During free-choice time, children can look at and read books of their own choosing from the classroom library and "researcher center" linked to the theme.

Reading and writing are closely related. From the beginning of their school experiences, children should be engaged in actively producing "text." Children see themselves as authors, and see the connection between their own words and text. What they say can be written down, and what they write can be read. Beginning in SEAL preschools, children draw pictures and dictate to adults, who record their words. Preschool and kindergarten classrooms have writing centers (with paper, pencils, notebooks, envelopes, and mailboxes) to encourage children to write. Adult volunteers are available to capture student stories. Students regularly write in a notebook about topics of their own choice. Student writing is laminated and bound, and photographs of classroom activities illustrate students' books. Children literally "see" themselves in books.

Reading, writing, speaking and listening are closely related. The emphasis on oral language in SEAL classrooms in the early years is the foundation for literacy. Children learn pre-writing and emergent writing skills through oral language by creating books with their own drawings or photos about their own experiences, dictating to adults who write the words as children narrate. They see how spoken words can be turned into print - and that printed words can be read aloud. This is a basic understanding in early literacy. From oral dictation with drawings, evolves writing. Daily journal "writing" is an important practice.

Beginning in Kindergarten, children work collaboratively to write narratives and informational text about what they are learning. They learn to edit and revise their writing, and develop understanding about what constitutes good writing. In SEAL classrooms, books, posters and other printed materials are visible and accessible in English and in the home language of the students. Around the room, materials contain rich language, objects are labeled, and children's writing is prominently displayed.

What Parents Can Do

- Read books to their children, and be interactive while they read. Talking about the books being read, and asking questions that build children's skills as "good readers" not only deepen enjoyment of the books, but also build academic language. These good readers skills include:
 - **Prediction** *Looking at the cover the book: "What do you think this book is going to be about?" Later in the story, "What do you think will happen next?"*
 - **Inference** *"I wonder what ___ is feeling? What do you think?"*
 - **Connection** *"Has anything like that ever happened to you? Tell me about it."*
 - **Recounting** *"Let's think back, what just happened?"*
 - **Paraphrasing** *If something might be unclear in the story, or language is used that the child might not understand, rephrase what just happened and say "In other words, _____."*
 - **Summarizing** *At the end of the story, give a quick summary of the main things that happened... "In this story _____."*
 - **Extending** *"If the story kept going, what do you think would happen next?"*
- Help children notice writing in their world. Ask them to locate specific letters or words, or to read simple signs aloud. (e.g., "Can you find a word on the cereal box that starts with the same letter as your name?", "What's the name of this street, can you sound out the name from the street sign?")
- Ask children to help make lists or write notes.

- Set up a writing box or "place" at home with paper and pens/pencils, envelopes and other items that will encourage a child to write. Consider a notebook or journal.

Encourage children to tell stories or to draw pictures, and then to dictate so an adult can write their words on paper.