PREPARING YOUNG ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS TO READ AND WRITE:
A PRESCHOOL TEACHER’S GUIDE TO LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

A Project

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by

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Department of Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
Abstract of PREPARING YOUNG ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS TO READ AND WRITE: A PRESCHOOL TEACHER’S GUIDE TO LITERACY DEVELOPMENT by Kumudini Wickramasinghe

Statement of Problem

Across the United States children from diverse families are enrolling in preschools and elementary schools in record numbers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Preschool programs represent an important opportunity to promote children’s language and literacy development in these critical years. However, preschool teachers are often ill prepared to support early literacy in their young students.

Recently, the proportion of South Asian students in U.S classrooms has increased dramatically. The four largest South Asian groups in America are Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan communities. The majority of these children have had limited or no exposure to English. When they enroll in preschool, they are often met by teachers with little understanding of their home language and culture.
Sources of Data

The researcher developed a handbook for preschool educators to enhance their knowledge of young children’s language and literacy development. The handbook also addressed the needs of English language learners, with a focus on learners from South Asia, mainly India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Development of the handbook was based in part on survey input from preschool teachers and parents of preschool aged children in South Asian families.

Conclusions Reached

The early childhood years are a critical period for children’s literacy development. Preschool teachers must be equipped with the knowledge of research and best practices needed to support their preschoolers’ emerging literacy knowledge. The handbook developed in this project provides teachers with skills and strategies to support early literacy and includes much needed information on language and cultural practices for teachers with children from South Asian families.

______________________________, Committee Chair
Dr. Susan Gomez

______________________
Date
DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to all the little children who inspire me daily, and reveal the “secret of childhood” in every task they undertake. It never fails to give me added strength to serve the child to the best of my ability, and to know how blessed I am to be living my life amongst little children.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my three children, Anusha, Leshanta, and Lalindra for their support, encouragement, and words of inspiration that always carried me through even in the darkest days of doubt, whether I could accomplish this great adventure in education, at a much later period in my life than most others. Thank you for cheering me on so I could accomplish my dream.

I thank my parents, especially my beloved appachchi (father) for all the words of wisdom you filled my life with, and encouraging me to always strive for the highest achievements, as “…nothing is impossible, if you only try.”

I thank Kaz and Joan McFarland, for pushing me on to achieve the higher goal every time I reached what I thought was the end of the road for my higher education.

This project would not have been possible without the support, guidance and feedback of my wonderful sponsor, Dr. Gomez, and my second reader Dr. Alexander. Thank you so much for reading, revising, and editing my writing. Thank you, Dr. Horobin, for paving the pathway for higher education for me, in the field of Child Development. I would also like to thank Dr. Garcia-Nevarez, Dr. Cervantes, Dr. Hembree, Dr. O’Hara, and Dr. Raskauskas, for empowering me with a deeper knowledge of child development.

I would also like to thank all the parents and teachers who willingly helped me to gather important information for this project.

Last not least, I would like to thank my two little grandchildren Devindra and Domenica who reveal to me daily, the wonders of childhood.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Project</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Project</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Terms</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the Project</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework for the Project</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Language Development</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Literacy Development</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and Literacy Development in English Language Learners</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Practices that Support Language and Literacy</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B. Parent Input Questionnaire...........................................131
Appendix C. Teacher Input Questionnaire........................................134
References ......................................................................................138
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tables</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Areas of Literacy Knowledge Requested by Teachers</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Areas of Language and Cultural Information Requested</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Across the United States of America children from diverse families, both native English speakers as well as those who are not, are enrolling in preschools and elementary schools in record numbers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). A majority of these students will spend two or more years in preschool before entering kindergarten. Preschool programs represent an important opportunity to promote children’s language and literacy development in these critical years before kindergarten.

Early childhood education programs such as Head Start were established by the federal government to give children, particularly those in lower income families, an opportunity to be better prepared for academic success in elementary schools. Yet 2009 statistics from the Nation’s Report Card for reading assessments indicate that 33% of fourth graders still perform below the proficient level in reading (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2009).

According to Dickinson and Tabors (2001), children’s academic success in later school years is related to their experiences with literacy during early childhood. Thus the few years that children spend in preschool classrooms are crucial for native English
speakers as well as those who are learning English as their second language, as these are the sensitive years during which children lay the foundation for later success in literacy.

Figures from the California Department of Education (2013) indicate that English Language (EL) learners make up about 23% of the school population in the state of California, with the majority of these students in preschool and elementary programs. These EL learners represent over 50 different language groups, with Spanish as the most common. However, a growing number of children in preschools across the state are speakers of one or more South Asian languages from countries such as Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

Preschool teachers play a very important role in the academic success of their students. Preschool teachers must have the knowledge, practice skills, and understanding of all aspects of how language and literacy develop in young children, in order to help them master the English language and prepare for success in school (Brice & Brice, 2009). But preschool teachers typically have lower levels of educational requirements than those required for teaching elementary school, and many preschool educators may lack the requisite knowledge and skills to support children’s emerging language and literacy. In addition, teachers often have little experience or knowledge of the language and cultures of students from other countries, in particular South Asian cultures.
Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to develop a handbook for preschool teachers that will enhance their knowledge of young children’s language and literacy development, and help teachers to acquire an appropriate and effective set of research based practices to support young children’s early literacy. The content, strategies and resources in the handbook addressed the following topics with a particular focus on supporting developing literacy for English language learners from South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka).

- Theory and research about children’s developing knowledge and skills in early language and literacy during the early childhood years in the areas of vocabulary, phonological and phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, print awareness, reading and writing.

- An overview of language and literacy development in young English language learners.

- Research based practices for the preschool classroom that best support children’s literacy development in vocabulary, phonological and phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge and print awareness, reading and writing.
- Cultural and linguistic information for teachers of children from South Asian cultures, including an overview of cultural practices and a glossary of frequently used words.

**Significance of the Project**

The early childhood years are a rich period of rapid development in young children’s language and literacy learning. This learning is nurtured within the socio-cultural contexts where children spend most of their time, namely, the home and school environments. The body of research in early literacy over the past two decades has identified many important developmental achievements during the period before children enter kindergarten. For example, infants show a preference for listening to speech and by the age of 12 to 14 months, begin to produce words. Children’s vocabulary will typically reach hundreds of words by the time the child reaches three years of age (Rose, Feldman & Jankowski, 2009).

In the preschool years, children increase their vocabularies dramatically by learning almost twelve words per day (Bjorklund, 2005), and they acquire words into their receptive vocabulary more than twice as fast as they do in their productive vocabulary. During this period, children also acquire important written language skills such as alphabet knowledge, print awareness and phonological awareness. Yet another important milestone in language development in this period is that preschoolers begin to
rely more heavily on decontextualized language in the construction of meaning (Curenton & Justice 2004).

Sociocultural theories recognize that individuals construct knowledge by engaging in interactions. The processes of constructing language and literacy skills are embedded within social events where the child interacts with other individuals, objects, and events in a collaborative environment (Vygotsky, 1924/1986; Wang, Bruce & Hughes, 2011). Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory highlights the influence of sociocultural interactions and processes in children’s development of language and literacy.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979/2004) bioecological theory of human development describes how children’s development is nested and nurtured within ecological systems. In the case of early language and literacy, children are constructing their knowledge by engaging in interactions between individuals, objects, and events in both the home and school environment.

Despite the rapid progression and wide range of literacy learning that occurs in the early years, current research studies show that more and more children enter the early elementary school years still unable to read and write at grade level (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2009). The gap in literacy performance in kindergarten between the students that enter school with some proficiency in literacy and those with little to none widens as the years of school progress (Lee, Grigg & Donahue, 2007). Long term, the impacts of this gap can result in negative outcomes such as higher school dropout rates (U.S Census, 2010). Providing a strong foundation in early literacy during the
preschool years can help to narrow or eliminate the literacy gap for children entering kindergarten and possibly eliminate longer-term negative effects.

Children come to preschool with an established base of language and literacy knowledge. But given the diversity of language and cultures in today’s population, it is often the case that the child’s language base is not the same as the one used in the preschool’s daily routine, or the language of the school curriculum. Although many schools and programs have adapted to the needs of the larger second language groups, teachers are still often unprepared for students from smaller minority language communities. Children and families speaking South Asian languages represent one such language group. According to U.S. Census statistics (2010), approximately half of elementary and secondary school students having difficulty learning to speak English are native speakers of a South Asian language. In these instances, teachers must be equipped with the necessary skills to facilitate children’s language and literacy development as well as some knowledge, if possible, of the child’s home language and culture.

Research has confirmed that a well-trained and knowledgeable teacher plays a crucial role in student’s literacy acquisition (Cooper, Kiger, Robinson, & Slansky, 2012). Dickinson and Tabors (2001) underscored the significance of preschool education as a predictor of effective reading at first grade. With mounting evidence to support this premise, more and more educators, child development experts and others related to early childhood education are emphasizing the importance of intentional instruction in early literacy learning, especially at the preschool level. But efforts to successfully promote
children’s language and literacy in preschool settings depend on the knowledge base of the teachers as well as the quality of the curriculum and learning experiences.

A continuing issue in supporting young children’s language and literacy development is the lack of formal education among the early care and education workforce. The state of California requires that an elementary teacher (kindergarten- 6th grade) must have a Multiple Subject Teaching Credential which authorizes the holder to teach all subjects in a self-contained classroom (California Department of Teacher Credentialing, 2013). In comparison, the California Department of Social Services Manual of Policies and Procedures for Childcare Center Licensing requirements (California Department of Social Services, 1998) states that an individual who desires to be a preschool teacher for children aged 3-5 years must have completed only 12 postsecondary semester units in early childhood education and six months of work experience in a licensed child care center or similar program.

This limited educational requirement is an indicator that there are many preschool teachers in need of additional knowledge and practice skills in order to effectively support the language and literacy development of California’s youngest students. This is particularly critical for the many English learners in California who come to preschool with vastly varied early experiences based on cultural beliefs, customs, languages and skills learned from their home environment. Culture influences how children approach learning, as well as become language and literacy users (Espinosa, 2005). These processes are learned from the home, and are influenced by each child’s own unique
culture, practices and beliefs. Young children from diverse cultural and linguistic groups who go to preschool enter an environment that celebrates vastly contrasting cultural practices and beliefs. Espinosa notes that discrepancies between the culture and beliefs practiced in the child’s home and those practiced in the child’s classroom result in cultural discontinuity for the child and create vulnerabilities that hamper the child’s academic progress. It is therefore critical for the teacher to understand the children’s home language, cultural experiences and expectations (Espinosa).

**Methods**

The purpose of this project was to create a handbook for preschool teachers to enhance their knowledge of young children’s language and literacy development, and also help the teacher to design and implement effective classroom practices to support young children’s early literacy in a culturally diverse population. Development of the handbook was based on a review of the related literature, as well as the researcher’s previous experience working with South Asian preschool children in Sri Lanka and America. The researcher’s aim was to provide teachers with an expanded knowledge base about how literacy develops in the early childhood years, including information from the research base. Second, the handbook presents teachers with evidence based classroom practices that provide children with an effective foundation in early language and literacy so that they can successfully transition into the academically oriented grade school. In
addition, the handbook contains cultural and linguistic information addressing the needs of English language learners, with a particular focus on learners from the South Asian countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

In order to inform the content of the handbook, the researcher sought input from preschool teachers and South Asian families in the form of brief surveys or conversations. Thirty-five teachers were recruited from two state funded preschools, three Head Start programs, one privately owned preschool program and four Montessori programs. The teachers were asked to indicate from a list of items what types of information about early literacy development (e.g., alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness) they would like included in the handbook. Second, teachers were asked to indicate what types of information about the home language and cultures of the South Asian families should be in the handbook (e.g., frequently used words, cultural practices). Parents (n=58) of South Asian children were asked to specify the family’s home country and language background. They were also asked to provide suggestions for frequently used words in their home language/s that could be added into the glossary of the handbook. The participating parents were from the countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka, and the home languages included Sinhalese, Tamil, Urudu, Hindi and Telegu.
Definition of Terms

Alphabet knowledge is the ability to recognize and identify the names, shapes and sounds of the letters of the alphabet, and it is a skill necessary for reading and writing development (Irwin, Moore, Tornatore & Fowler, 2012).

English Language (EL) learners are individuals whose first language is not English and who are in the process of learning English as a second language. For the purposes of this project, this term primarily refers to children ages 2-5. The California Department of Education (2009) describes preschool English learners as, “. . . (1) a child whose first language is other than English and as a result is learning English as a second language; or (2) a child who is developing two or more languages, one of which may be English. During the preschool years from birth through five years of age, most children are still acquiring the basic knowledge of their home language, even when that language is English,” (p. 2).

Oral reading is the process of decoding written language into verbal speech. Although decoding is a necessary skill of reading, true reading occurs only when the reader constructs meaning by interacting with the text (Cooper et al., 2012).

Phonological awareness refers to a child’s ability to recognize that words are made up of individual sounds as well as the ability to detect and manipulate these sounds (California Department of Education, 2009). These skills have been identified as important precursors to reading (Bornstein & Lamb, 2011).
Vocabulary refers to the words within a language that are known by an individual. A person’s vocabulary includes both receptive (listening) and expressive (speaking) words. Children generally acquire a substantial oral language vocabulary by the time they reach school age. Vocabulary is a critical aspect of learning to read (O’Leary, Cockburn, Powell & Diamond, 2010).

Writing is the process of conveying meaning or ideas by using graphic symbols. Emergent writing is also a precursor to skilled and fluent reading (Cabell, Justice, & Zucker, 2009). Young children’s writing often takes the form of drawing, scribbling and/or labeling pictures (Cooper et al., 2012).

**Limitations**

There were several limitations which may influence the efficacy of this project. First, the handbook was limited in scope to literacy development in young children. The content and classroom exercises would not be applicable to older students beyond the age of five. In addition, the cultural and linguistic information provided was limited to the South Asian languages specified above, and therefore the glossary and other resource materials did not include information or vocabulary for other languages and cultures. Although the information in the first sections will be applicable to all, preschool teachers who do not have South Asian students in their classrooms will not have an immediate need to use the South Asian component included in this handbook.
Although the handbook includes a wide range of information for the preschool teacher, using this material in the classroom requires the teacher to incorporate the activities, literature, and strategies outlined into her daily curriculum. Since the researcher did not conduct any follow up interviews with any teachers, it is not possible to report how successful teachers might be in implementing the knowledge and strategies in the handbook. Simply providing preschool teachers with a handbook in early literacy development does not guarantee the successful implementation of the strategies and skills outlined therein. A workshop or some other form of professional development designed to acquaint teachers with the research based knowledge and practices in the handbook might better facilitate their support of preschool children’s language and literacy learning and make the handbook a more useful tool.

**Organization of the Project**

This chapter has presented an overview of a project to produce a handbook for preschool teachers which will guide them to develop a successful curriculum in their classroom to support young children’s early literacy. The content, strategies and resources in the handbook also addressed the literacy needs of English language learners from South Asia. Chapter 2 entails an extensive review of literacy development in preschoolers as well as a discussion of how the preschool teacher can implement research based practices to support young children’s early literacy. Chapter 3 describes the
methods used to create the early literacy handbook including the project design, setting and participants. Chapter 4 contains a discussion of the completed project and recommendations for future directions for improving the quality of preschool language and literacy curricula in the classrooms. The Appendices include the complete handbook as well as copies of the teacher and parent survey forms.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The early years are an important period for children’s development of language and literacy skill. Many young children today are spending these sensitive years in preschool settings. Thus the readiness of early educators to meet the needs of all young children in gaining the necessary skills in literacy acquisition should be a priority. Preschool teachers must have the knowledge, practice skills, and understanding of all aspects of how language and literacy develop in young children in order to prepare them for success in school (Brice & Brice, 2009; Hamre, Pianta, & Burchinal, 2012).

The purpose of this project was to develop a curriculum guide that would help preschool teachers to acquire an appropriate and effective set of research based practices to support young children’s early literacy. The content, strategies and resources in the handbook addressed the topics of theory and research related to early literacy development, cognitive processes involved in children’s learning to read and write; and research based practices to support early literacy. In addition, the guide included information specific to supporting literacy development for English Language (EL) learners from South Asia. The following chapter provides a review of the research
related to these topics that provided the foundation for design of the project.

**Theoretical Framework for the Project**

Diverse methods and teaching techniques aimed at promoting language and literacy learning are based on various theories of human development (Eun & Lim, 2009). Understanding these different theories and their application to language and literacy is critical to supporting children’s acquisition of language and literacy in the preschool classroom.

**Bioecological Model of Development**

One of the most influential theories is Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). According to bioecological theory, children’s development is influenced by both immediate and distant systems that impact each other. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) presents a model of development as a result of processes and interactions that occur within and across a series of related systems. The Microsystem, the immediate system in which the child is embedded, includes family, school, place of worship, and friends, and has the most influence on the child’s development at this early formative stage. Children’s initial beliefs, customs, skills and language learned from home come with them to school. In the case of EL learners, their home language and cultural experiences
may be vastly different from other children who have grown up in a typically American household where English is the primary language.

The Chronosystem refers to the events that occur within the life of the child. These experiences include both environmental events and major transitional events in life as well as the proximal processes within the chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) emphasizes that human development takes place through these extended proximal processes that take place on a fairly regular basis between the developing child and the persons, objects and symbols in their immediate external environment. Parents are the first individuals in the chronosystem who engage in continuous proximal processes of interactions through which the child constructs his own world view. Leaving the security and familiarity of home to enter preschool represents a major event in the chronosystem for young children. The teacher now becomes a significant individual engaging in proximal processes with the child. When the child enters the preschool environment he comes in contact with a particular world-view, which may be totally different from that which his peers have constructed in their own home settings (Hirsto, 2001).

This transition can be even more difficult for South Asian students as they must often make the separation from significant other caretakers including not only parent but also grandparents, aunts and uncles. Immigrant children from South Asian countries in particular are acculturated into a collectivist oriented society. Most of these children live in households that contain extended family members such as grandparents, aunts and
uncles, and cousins who take equal responsibility in the care of the young child. In many families, the child leaves this behind and comes to live in a country where his household is comprised of only his immediate family. Some of these children may have witnessed violence if leaving war torn countries such as Sri Lanka. These events may cause serious traumatizing impacts on the child’s development, and children may have to go through a readjustment process to be ready for acculturation in a new land. Teachers must be observant to identify any behaviors that may warrant interventions, and be sensitive to the children’s struggles in adjusting to the new world.

The expectations in a linguistically and culturally different setting such as the preschool classroom place new and different demands on the young immigrant child, who is faced with understanding, altering, and learning these new concepts. Teachers need to understand this dilemma in order to support the easy transition of these children. One important step is for teachers to acknowledge and support the beliefs, teachings and practices of their students’ home language and culture.

**Sociocultural Theory**

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1924 /1978) focused attention on the learner as a social being and on the important role adults or more knowledgeable others play in a child’s language and literacy learning. Language and literacy acquisition begins long before formal schooling (National Early Literacy Panel, 2009) as children engage in and learn language and literacy through processes of socialization with adults or others in the
community. One way in which adults socialize children into language and literacy is through scaffolding. As a teaching strategy, scaffolding originates from Lev Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and his concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is defined as the space between what children can do by themselves and the learning they can do with the support provided by a more knowledgeable adult or peer. According to Vygotsky, the child can bridge the ZPD through social interactions which occur with a skillful or more knowledgeable other. The more knowledgeable adult or peer may model behaviors, provide verbal instructions and/or gestures to scaffold the child through the ZPD. Scaffolding is a type of support that is meant to be temporary, and ultimately the responsibility is transferred to the learner.

In the classroom, teachers utilize the ZPD when they challenge children with concepts slightly beyond their current levels of development or skill. Challenging children in this way can help move them to the next level of development or learning (Rogoff, 2003). Scaffolding also facilitates a student’s ability to build on prior knowledge and internalize new information. Studies have confirmed the efficacy of scaffolding and have also demonstrated that the absence of guided learning experiences and social interaction may hinder learning and development (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000). For the young EL learner, scaffolding experiences may be best facilitated by an adult, older child or peer who is somewhat familiar with the child’s home language and culture, if possible.
Piagetian Theory

According to Piaget’s theory of development, experiences where children interact with and manipulate their environment help children construct knowledge. While different cultural backgrounds may create culturally unique experiences for individual children, the concepts and cognitive strategies they acquire are universal (Piaget, 1926/2008). A child who has emigrated from one country to another encounters novel objects in the environment of the preschool (maybe a food, a clothing item or a toy) may be unable to assimilate this new knowledge into the existing schema. According to Piaget the child is in a state of disequilibrium that may gradually lead to accommodation of new knowledge. This is a crucial concept that preschool teachers need to understand, in particular with regard to EL earners. When young children are withdrawn or quiet they may be experiencing a state of disequilibrium during which they are trying to accommodate new concepts into their existing knowledge. With sufficient understanding and care by the teacher and more knowledgeable others, young English learners will be able to more easily accommodate and assimilate the new information they are being exposed to at school (Piaget, 1926/2008).

Language Acquisition

Early theories of language acquisition have often been characterized as representing a dichotomy between innatist and environmentalist perspectives (Beller, 2008). The environmentalist view is exemplified in the theories of B. F. Skinner (1957),
who described language acquisition as a process fueled by reinforcement from others in the environment. In contrast, Noam Chomsky’s theory of language acquisition (1975) posits the existence of innate structures and knowledge that children draw upon as they acquire language. According to Beller (2008), more recent cognitive-interactionist theories of language and literacy acquisition acknowledge both biological and environmental factors in language and literacy development. In this perspective, children construct their knowledge of language and literacy through concrete and social interactions with their environment.

Theories of bilingual language acquisition have attempted to describe the processes of language learning in bilingual speakers. Beller (2008) notes that most theories of bilingualism focus on processes of acquisition in cases of successive bilingualism, where an individual is learning a second language (L2) sometime after learning the native language (L1). Similar to theories of L1 acquisition, nativist, behaviorist and interactionist perspectives are all represented among the various theories of L2 acquisition (Beller).

The interactionist perspective in L2 acquisition is exemplified in the work of Cummins, who proposed the hypothesis of interdependence. Cummins (1981) argued that a speaker’s proficiency in the second language is related to and built upon his or her competencies in the home language. He based this premise on the knowledge that cognitive and language skills used in L1 acquisition are transferred into the learning of the L2. For young children, the acquisition of one or more languages involves exposure
to and use of language in both informal and formal interactions. For example, most children learn everyday informal uses of language through play based interactions with family and peers. Cummins termed this language “basic interpersonal communications skills” (BICS). Children must also learn the academic language and skill of classroom discourse, which Cummins termed “cognitive academic language proficiency” (CALP) through more formal instruction. According to Cummins, basic communication skills lay the foundation for the child’s ability to develop cognitive academic language skills.

Cummins’ theory emphasizes the need for providing opportunities for peer conversations and play interactions between the monolingual English speakers and English language learners in the classroom as an important way to facilitate their understanding and use of the more cognitively demanding language of instruction and learning in the classroom.

Ecological, sociocultural and cognitivist theories of development provide a framework for understanding early language and literacy development as a process of knowledge construction facilitated by social interactions within the developmental context of the environment. As children enter preschool, the classroom environment becomes an important context for language and literacy learning. In order to foster this learning through the proximal processes that take place in the classroom, teachers must possess the knowledge of how children learn language as well as strategies for promoting literacy. For EL learners, teachers must also understand the processes of L2 development along with an appreciation of the unique cultural characteristics of their EL students. The goal of this project was to provide teachers with a handbook of content and strategies to
help prepare them to meet these needs of their young language and literacy learners, including EL students.

**Early Language Development**

Language provides the foundation upon which a child’s literacy development is built. Both language and literacy learning begin long before any formal education (National Early Literacy Panel, 2009; Weikle & Hadadian, 2004). Hearing words, being read to, listened to, and talked to from birth introduces the child to the magical world of words. Socialization is the process that enables children to participate effectively and appropriately in the community, thru the medium of language (Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002). This socialization process begins at birth when babies and their caretakers engage in sharing gazes, smiles, joint attention, grunts, and later, words and conversations (Akhtar & Gernsbacher, 2007; Vuksanovic & Bjekic, 2013).

Researchers examining language socialization of young children have focused mainly on caregiver child interactions, and these studies imply that differences in language experiences are responsible for the equally varied differences in vocabulary growth and other language outcomes seen in children before age three (Bornstein & Lamb, 2011; Hart & Risely, 2003). Exposure to higher levels of language input in the early years leads to increases in children’s vocabulary and other language structures (Cabell, Justice, Piasta, Curenton, Wiggins, Turnbull, & Petscher, 2011; Hammer,
Scheffner & Miccio, 2006; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2005). Studies have also established a clear link between early language experiences and children’s literacy in later school years (Dickinson & Porche, 2011).

**Early Literacy Development**

Literacy is the ability of children to speak, listen, read, write, and think. Early literacy development builds on and then integrates with the child’s developing oral language skills (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Wasik, 2010). This continuous process comes about by children participating in a variety of everyday literacy activities which are enhanced by direct or explicit instructions (Cooper et al., 2012). Research has identified a number of early literacy skills necessary for learning to read and write, including the ability to understand and use words (Irwin et al., 2012; O’Leary et al., 2010; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Phonological awareness skills involve the sensitivity to sounds and the understanding that sounds make up words (Yopp & Yopp, 2009). These skills also play a crucial role in learning to read (Das, Georgiou, & Janzen, 2008; Goodman, Libenson & Wade-Woolley, 2010; Lonigan, Anthony, & Phillips, 2009). The ability to know and name letters, and the knowledge that letters are associated with sounds is also foundational to early literacy (Girolametto, Weitzman & Greenberg, 2012).
Vocabulary

Vocabulary represents one of the most important areas of language development, and children generally acquire a substantial oral language vocabulary by the time they reach school age. However, research focused on early language socialization suggests children growing up in households of lower socio economic status (SES) show differences in their vocabulary development such that children with limited language experiences in the early years of development lag behind others in their vocabulary size (Hart & Risley, 1995, 2003; Weigel, Lowman & Martin, 2007). In a three year study, Hart and Risley recorded family conversations in the home with 42 Kansas families. Their results indicated that the amount of parent talk with children was a predictor of children’s language abilities and academic achievement in the school age years. Other studies confirm that children from higher SES and more educated families receive more instruction at home in language and literacy structures. These differences in quality and quantity of language development are evident when children enter elementary school and widen as they advance onto higher stages in language development and literacy (Bornstein & Lamb, 2011).

Vocabulary knowledge is a critical aspect of learning to read (O’Leary et al., 2010). There are many ways in which teachers can enhance vocabulary development in preschoolers. Story book reading is a powerful means of promoting vocabulary development, especially for at risk learners (Pollard-Durodola, Gonzalez, Simmons, Kwok, Taylor, Davis . . . Simmons, 2011). According to Doyle and Bramwell (2006),
conversations that occur during repeated readings of stories and the direct instruction of word meanings both enhance children’s vocabulary development. One simple strategy is to insure that there is ample conversation between teachers and students. In a study conducted with preschool age English language learners and their monolingual classmates, Bowers and Vasilyeva (2010) found a positive relation between the children’s vocabulary growth and the number of words uttered by the teacher. Coyne, McCoch and Kapp (2007) noted that vocabulary growth is also enhanced when students have opportunities to extend the meanings of words they are learning in stories to multiple other contexts beyond that of the story.

**Reading**

Reading is one of the most important skills to be learned, as children’s academic success is based on the successful learning of reading (Lonigan, Anthony, Phillips, Purpura, Wilson, and McQueen, 2009). Although typically developing children generally learn to speak their native language proficiently, all children do not learn to read proficiently. Converging evidence suggests alphabet knowledge, concepts about print, phonological awareness, and expressive vocabulary are skills that best prepare children for later reading (Das et al., 2008; Goodman et al., 2010; Irwin et al., 2012; Lonigan et al., 2009; Lonigan et al., 2009).

In their cross-sectional study, Lonigan et al. (2009) examined the phonological awareness abilities necessary to the process of learning to read. These included
phonological awareness, phonological memory, and phonological access to lexical memory. The participants included one group of 129 younger preschool children aged 27 to 47 months. The second group included 304 older preschoolers aged 48 to 71 months. The researchers tested children individually on eight measures of phonological awareness, two measures of phonological memory, three measures of lexical access, two measures of oral language, three measures of nonverbal cognitive abilities, two measures of letter-knowledge, and two text reading measures. The results of the study confirmed the importance of phonological processing abilities for the development of reading skills.

Oral reading is the process of decoding written language into verbal speech. Although decoding is necessary, true reading occurs only when the reader constructs meaning by interacting with the text (Cooper et al., 2012). Most preschoolers are competent in producing and comprehending language, but this competence does not automatically lead to successful reading (Holopainen, Ahonen & Tolvanen, 2000). In their 2004 study, Silliman and Wilkinson found a connection between oral language and learning to read for both native English speakers and EL learners. Children who have developed a strong base in oral language have formed prior knowledge of concepts and ideas that are critical in learning to read and write (Cooper et al., 2009; Pressley, 2000).

**Phonological Awareness**

Another precursor to reading is the child’s ability to recognize that words are
made up of individual sounds (California Department of Education, 2009). Phonological awareness (PA) is the understanding that words are made up of individual units of sounds (phonemes) and that these sounds can be manipulated to create words. Children are born with the innate capacity to distinguish the phonemes of all languages. As they grow and develop children become attuned to the specific phonology of their home language (Bornstein & Lamb, 2011; Sousa, 2011). Phonological awareness also provides a foundation for acquisition of reading (Halopainen, Ahonen, Tolvanen & Lyytinen, 2000). Research has also demonstrated that oral language and phonological awareness competencies at age three are predictors of word recognition in grade one and reading comprehension in grade three (National Institute of Child Health Care Research Network, 2005).

In their 2010 study, Cardos-Martins, Mesquita, and Ehri investigated whether children benefit from letter name knowledge and phonological awareness in learning letter-sound relations, which is a critical skill in learning to read and write. Study participants included 32 children ranging in age from 3.8 years to 4.7 months. Pairs of children were matched for age, gender, letter name knowledge, and receptive vocabulary and the pairs were randomly assigned to an experimental or control group. Children in the experimental group were taught letter names and shapes, while the ones in the control group learned only the shapes of the letters. The findings demonstrated the phonological awareness training made it easier for young children to learn letter sounds (Cardos-Martins et al.).
Researchers have emphasized the importance of intervention with preschool children who exhibit deficits in phonological processing abilities in order to remediate future reading difficulties (Lonigan et al; 2009). A number of developmentally appropriate phonological tasks have all been associated with marked improvements in young children’s phonological awareness, including rhyming words and alliterations (Cardoso-Martins, Mesquita & Ehri. 2010; O’Leary et al., 2011); identifying objects using letter sounds, blending sounds, sound segmenting, or sound deletion (Maslanka & Joseph, 2002; Zanobini, Viterbori & Saraceno, 2011); and clapping/counting to mark syllables (Craig, 2003; Nelson, Sanders & Gonzales, 2010). These results highlight the crucial need for phonological awareness instruction in preschool settings.

**Alphabet Knowledge**

As children are exposed to written materials and literacy experiences at home and in preschool settings they learn about the mechanisms of print and begin to develop knowledge of letters and their sounds (Hammer et al., 2006; Lonigan, et al., 2009; Mol & Bus, 2011). Studies have shown that as parents reference alphabet letter names during book reading they are building the child’s knowledge of letters (Lachner, Zevenbergen, & Zevenbergen, 2008). Other research confirms the importance of alphabetic knowledge (knowledge of letter names and sounds) as a specific skill essential in successful reading and writing development (Irwin et al., 2012; Molfese, Beswick, Jacobi-Vessels… & Molfese, 2010). In their study, Lachner et al. (2008) examined how parents referred to
alphabet letters during shared book reading with their preschool aged children. The researchers recorded and analyzed book reading episodes between 44 parent-child dyads. Results indicated that the frequency of parents’ references to letters during book reading was a predictor of children’s letter knowledge.

**Emergent Writing**

Writing is the process of conveying meaning or ideas by using graphic symbols. Evidence suggests that emergent writing is a precursor skill to fluent reading (Cabell et al., 2009). Children’s early stages of writing take the form of drawing, scribbling and/or labeling pictures (Cooper, et al., 2012).

Puranik and Lonigan (2009) conducted a study to examine young children’s ability to write letters, the development of written language across different writing tasks, and how writing features develop in preschool children. The study included a cross-section of 372 preschool children aged 3 to 5 years attending private and public childcare centers in Florida. The children were assessed on five writing tasks that included writing a set of 10 letters, writing their names, writing CVC words (e.g., hen), a descriptive writing task and a sentence retell task. The study results indicated that young children begin to learn about writing before they begin school or receive formal instruction. The children’s writing-related skills increased and became more stable as their age increased. However, even children as young as 3 years of age demonstrated universal and language-specific knowledge of writing.
Research has identified a link between the development of writing skills and the development of reading. Molfese et al. (2010) studied the alphabet and writing skills of 157 female and 129 male children enrolled in Head Start preschools with an average age of 53.62 months. The children’s writing development was tracked from the time of beginning preschool to the start of kindergarten. The researchers compared children’s name writing, letter writing and other writing skill scores over the time period using rubrics based on letter formation, letter orientation and letter sequencing. The main finding of this longitudinal study was that children’s letter writing scores were related to children’s word reading scores in kindergarten.

Children are learning about many different early writing skills between the ages of three and five, including alphabet and letter name knowledge, composing abilities and universal properties of writing. Treiman, Cohen, Mulqueeny, Kessler and Schechtman (2007) conducted four experiments on two groups of preschool children between the ages of three and six. In this study, children as young as four years of age who were not yet able to read even simple words showed some knowledge of writing skills such as horizontal orientation of English names, the letters that make them up, and left to right directionality. When children grasp the meaning that written letters systematically represent spoken words (alphabetic principal), they begin to use their knowledge of letter-sound correspondence to write words (Cabell, et al., 2009). Studies conducted with preschool-aged children suggest a strong connection between alphabetic knowledge skills and writing (Molfese et al., 2010). Alphabet knowledge, print knowledge, phonological
awareness, and name writing have all been identified as positively associated with letter writing in preschool age children (Puranik, Lonigan & Kim, 2011).

The extensive body of literature related to early literacy development demonstrates that children are capable of acquiring a range of critical literacy skills in the early childhood years if they are provided adequate support and exposure to literacy from parents and teachers. The skills learned in this period form the foundation for children’s later success in academic literacy and learning. One aim of the handbook designed for this project was to provide teachers with an understanding of this literature base to inform their understanding and support of children’s literacy development.

**Language and Literacy in English Language Learners**

All typically developing children come to preschool with an established language base, which may or may not be the same language the school is trying to teach. Classrooms throughout the state of California include students who are EL learners. According to the California Department of Education (2013), there are approximately 1.5 million EL learners in California public schools, which is about 23% of total school enrollment. Approximately 70% of these students are in preschool and elementary programs. According to the latest census data in 2011, there are over 50 different language groups among the state’s EL students, with Spanish at 83% representing the largest single group. The 2011 census also recorded the fastest growing
ethnic population in the U.S. as Asian, identified as individuals originating from countries in South Asia or India (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

A growing number of children in preschools across the state of California are speakers of one or more South Asian languages from a variety of countries. Specifically these languages include Bangla (Bangladesh), Hindi, Telegu and Tamil (India), Urdu (Pakistan) and Sinhalese (Sri Lanka). In recent years, the proportion of South Asian students in U.S. classrooms has increased dramatically. According to the fact sheets compiled by the organization South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) census data from 2012 indicate that there are 3.4 million South Asians living in the United States (SAALT, 2013). The four largest South Asian groups in America are Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan communities. South Asians are the fastest growing Asian group in California, with the largest population concentrations in the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas. Educating preschool teachers about the diverse languages of communication, cultural beliefs and practices of these South Asian families would be immensely important for creating successful relationships between teachers, children, and families at this crucial stage of a child’s development (Kohnert, Yim, Nett, Kan & Duran, 2005). In consideration of this need, the handbook in this project included information for teachers about the languages and cultural practices of South Asian families.

One of the greatest challenges facing the teacher in the preschool classroom is that of successfully instructing EL learners (Michael-Luna, 2013). Michael-Luna’s two year ethnographic case study explored parents’ beliefs about their bilingual children’s
language development and use, and how this information can help teachers to create linguistically appropriate support for young bilinguals and their families. The participants in this study were 39 bilingual children from middle class families enrolled in a private dual language (Italian-English) preschool in a major metropolitan area. The researcher conducted home language surveys, classroom observations, and interviews with teachers, parents, and administration. The findings indicated that parents cited both home language and culture as presenting potential effects on their child’s language use and test performance at school. The researcher also concluded that using a home language survey as well as information collected during parent-teacher conferences can help teachers to form a full understanding of each bilingual child’s language production.

Regardless of their home language, EL learners must learn English in order to be successful in their academics. Preschool-aged EL children who come to school while still in the most dynamic stages of language acquisition are at risk for losing the skills of their first language. According to Thomas and Collier (2013), in the absence of systemic support of their first language, the process of learning a second language may result in incomplete acquisition of language and early literacy skills for both languages. Even with proper support, acquiring English can be a lengthy process for most children. According to Cummins (2000), EL learners generally need up to two years of English instruction to develop basic interpersonal communication skills and five to seven years longer to achieve cognitive academic language proficiency.
Researchers have used brain imaging to examine neural processes involved in learning a second language; these studies have determined that the neural systems involved are the same as those involved in learning the first language (Newman-Norlund, Frey, Petitto & Grafton, 2006). Using techniques such as neuroimaging, lateral eye movements, dichotic listening, and visual field tasks, neuroscientists have constructed an understanding of how the human brain acquires and organizes a first and a second language (Danesi, 1994). Studies suggest that a common neurobiological marker may be responsible for both first and second language acquisition (Sebastian-Galles, Rodriguez-Fornells, de Diego-Balaguer & Diaz, 2006). Some researchers suggest a sensitive period in a child’s first and second language acquisition from birth to around ten years (Krashen, 1975; Montessori, 1995; Uylings, 2005).

Early childhood educators therefore have an opportunity to enhance preschool students’ learning, by studying and understanding this available information on how the brain learns and processes language. In order to support this understanding, the handbook for this project includes summaries of the relevant research related to the cognitive processes of language in first and second language learners.

There seems to be general agreement that the challenge of learning a second language is easier if the attempt is made at a younger age. In their study, Bleakley and Chin (2008) found that immigrant children who learned English between the ages of one and five years were able to reach a higher proficiency of the language than those who
learned it later. The level of proficiency dropped if English was learned after six years and the drop was even more significant for those who learned English after nine years.

Swaab, Baynes and Knight (2012) used electroencephalographs to measure the brain’s response to concrete and abstract words. In their study, image loaded words produced more activity in the frontal lobe, the part of the brain associated with imagery. This suggests that teachers should use concrete images when presenting an abstract concept. Similarly, Sousa (2011) noted that an EL student’s understanding of a word in another language maybe closely related to whether the word can generate a mental image.

Despite popular concerns about lags in English language acquisition in non-native English learners, research has shown preschool-aged children can successfully learn two (or more) languages. In fact, studies confirm that promoting the learning of English only at the expense of the child’s home language will lessen the cognitive benefits the child gains in learning both languages concurrently (Duran, Roseth & Hoffman, 2010; Espinosa, 2005). Research in language acquisition processes has described the interdependence of first-and second-language academic skills (Colina & Garcia Mayo, 2009; Cummins, 1981). In one study, researchers identified a relationship between Spanish phonological awareness skills and English word reading abilities, suggesting that abilities in one language transfer to the other (Scarpino, Lawrence, Davison, & Hammer, 2011).

Beyond the influence of first language learning on second language acquisition, the child’s first language also plays a key role in their social and personal development.
and behavior (Yazici, Ilter & Glover, 2010). A child’s first language is intimately connected to the family and the family’s home culture. Studies indicate that how families socialize their children into language and literacy varies considerably amongst different cultural groups (Espinosa, 2005). Young children therefore have culturally shaped expectations and attitudes about language. Families model values and behaviors for when, how and whom children can and should talk to, and what is appropriate language for addressing adults and peers (Chang, 2003).

Comparative studies have identified other differences in language acculturation and practices. Winskel, Luksaneeyanawin and Yangklang (2006) described differences in language elicitation strategies between English speaking and Thai speaking caretakers. In asking children to provide narratives of past events, English-speaking caretakers provided more information, requested more evaluation, expressed more agreement and approval, and revised and corrected children more frequently. Thai speaking caretakers used more contextual and temporal information. This finding suggests that children come to the preschool environment having learned culture specific styles of narrative skills. It is important for teachers to understand these cultural differences as these narrative skills have been found to be one of the best predictors of later literacy success (Chang, 2003).

Because of these cultural differences in language acquisition, EL learners come into the preschool setting and are met with expectations and values that are vastly different from their home environment. This cultural discontinuity can create
vulnerability for the young child. The teacher’s role is to be aware of the home practices and support them in the classroom setting in order to ease the home school transition (Espinosa, 2005). Kohnert, Yim, Nett, Kan & Duran (2005), suggest that the school’s speech and language pathologists provide services to linguistically diverse preschool-age children in a manner that supports the child’s first language. In some instances, teachers also need to be aware of how differences between English and the child’s home language may impact the child’s acquisition of language and literacy skills. Cross-linguistic studies suggest the development of phonological awareness, for example, depends on the phonological structures of the child’s home language, and how phonological knowledge is transferred across structurally similar as well as different languages (Miller, Heilmann, & Nockerts 2006). These studies emphasize the importance of the role first language plays in the learning of the second language.

Often, learning a new language also involves learning the associated culture. Preschool teachers must not only teach EL students the language but also the sociocultural beliefs and behaviors of the classroom. In order for children to successfully acquire the mainstream discourse of the classroom, teachers should adapt the preschool environment to foster school-home language and cultural continuity. In addition, teachers must become cross-culturally competent in understanding and respecting ethnic, sociocultural, and linguistic diversity (Espinosa, 2005). Finally, these cross-cultural competencies must be translated into teaching practices appropriate to multicultural and multilingual settings.
In order to effectively support young EL learners, teachers must be equipped with knowledge of language and literacy development in EL learners, as well as an appreciation of the cultural backgrounds and practices of their EL families. In designing the handbook for this project, the researcher included information relevant to these topics so that preschool teachers can be better prepared to meet the linguistic and cultural needs of their South Asian EL students.

**Classroom Practices that Support Language and Literacy**

Considerable research recommends a comprehensive and balanced approach to literacy instruction which combines teacher-directed instruction and student-centered activities to ensure that all children, both native language learners and second language learners, achieve success in literacy (Cooper et al., 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Classrooms that provide and encourage ongoing discourse amongst preschool-age peers as well as between adults and children create a context within which children develop the cognitive tools necessary to achieve literacy (Alfassi, 2009; Fisher, 2005; Piker & Rex, 2008). Teachers can use open-ended questions that encourage children to express themselves as well as prompt questions which pose more opportunities for conversation and expand the child’s language (Wasik, 2010). Classroom discourse also plays an important role in the development of vocabulary for both native and non-native speakers.
Piker and Rex (2008) conducted a 2-year ethnographic study of a Head Start preschool classroom in a midwestern city. The authors focused on the social nature of teachers’ interactions with students and whether these interactions support or hinder the students’ language learning. The majority of the 17 students (90%) spoke Spanish as their primary language and all were 3-5 years of age. The head teacher was a monolingual European-American English speaker and her assistant teacher a Mexican-American bilingual speaker. As part of this study the authors identified two girls and two boys as their primary student cases. The researchers observed and documented classroom practices for 30 days. The analyses were focused on the video recordings of free play events in the classroom and centered on language use. Results indicated that the Spanish primary children’s acquisition of English was influenced by their social interactions with peers and teachers. Piker and Rex posited that positive social interactions play an important role in second language learning, and that teachers can assist EL learners in building social relationships that support sharing, playing, and spending time with more proficient English speakers. Through these social relationships, same-language and different-language peers can serve as resources for assisting the EL learner in successful participation in classroom activities.

The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP, 2009) summarized the research on children’s early literacy development. The 2009 report identifies several areas of early literacy knowledge that are critical to children’s later success with literacy during the school age years. These include: alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, letter
knowledge, letter-sound correspondence, ability to write letters, story comprehension and memory, conventions of written language and vocabulary knowledge. In order to support children’s acquisition of this knowledge, the report also provides recommendations for classroom practices that support literacy development for each area, for example:

- Play alphabet games.
- Using rhymes or poems to help children become aware of sounds.
- Practice writing letters or names.
- Having conversations about topics of interest to children.
- Providing examples of print, signs and logos in the classroom.
- Reading books that include opportunities for learning vocabulary and asking children questions.
- Creating opportunities for children to write or dictate stories.

The NELP report (2009) and other documents in the literature offer teachers direction in the skills necessary for supporting children’s literacy development. But many teachers do not understand the strategies necessary to explicitly teach these literacy skills to young children. This lack of teacher training can be especially problematic for students likely to be at risk for academic difficulties in later school years, including EL learners (Hamre et al., 2012). Numerous studies confirm that the training and experience of the teacher is a critical factor in predicting program quality at the preschool level (Sheridan, 2007). With respect to literacy, the role of the teacher is to implement effective, developmentally appropriate curricula, and to provide children experiences and
materials that support instruction and interactions in the classroom (Hamre et al.). The value of the teacher as the expert who delivers and mediates the curriculum content cannot be overstated (Wasik, 2010). The teacher must create an environment that promotes interplay, participation, communication, and reciprocity, which encourages the children to ask questions, to participate and learn where children seem happy, and help each other (Sheridan).

The role of the teacher in supporting literacy is also that of a keen observer, evaluator, and a supporter of young children. Teachers must be vigilant to seize upon, and use often natural, unplanned events that present opportunities to scaffold children’s language and literacy development. In order to insure that teachers are well prepared for supporting early literacy, the NELP (2009) report also includes suggestions for promoting teacher development, including sharing information about current research and best practices through staff meetings, one on one conferences, mentoring or coaching.

The diversity in today’s classrooms means that teachers must adjust and develop instruction to meet the needs of all children. This is particularly important for EL learners trying to acquire English and adjust to the language of the classroom. Studies in preschool classrooms have identified strategies effective in supporting the development of young EL learners. Bowers and Vasilyeva (2010) found a positive relationship between total number of words uttered by the teacher and vocabulary growth in preschool EL learners. Piker and Rex (2008) noted that the English development of Head Start preschoolers was positively influenced by their interactions with peers and teachers.
They further recommended opportunities for language development that allow EL learners to use both receptive and expressive language and literacy abilities.

In its resource guide for teachers working with EL preschoolers, the California Department of Education presents a set of core principles to guide teachers’ support of young EL learners (pp. 3-4):

- Understanding the English learner requires gathering as much information as possible about the child and his or her family and community.
- There is an important relationship between language, culture, and learning.
- Language is a tool for learning.
- There are multiple paths to childhood bilingualism.
- Language development and learning are shaped by children’s experiences.
- Second-language acquisition is a complex process.
- Acquiring oral language fluency in English differs from acquiring academic English, the formal language of the school.
- Being able to communicate in more than one language empowers children in a multicultural society.

These principles provide a foundation for the classroom practices recommended in the guide, which focus specifically on the needs of EL learners. For example, teachers should recognize that children from different cultures may have different ways of responding to teachers in classroom settings. Including examples of children’s native language in the classroom environment make all children and families feel welcome.
New words can be introduced within a meaningful context and when possible connected to the same word in a child’s home language. Visuals and props such as puppets or pictures help EL learners understand and participate in classroom conversation. It is also important for teachers to make the effort to learn some of the frequent words or phrases in their students’ home language (Espinosa, 2005).

These and other practices in the NELP report and the PEL resource guide provide many strategies for preschool teachers to support the language and literacy development of their EL students. The handbook created for teachers in this project incorporated many of these principles and strategies into the content and teaching activities. However, the NELP report and PEL guide do not offer cultural and linguistic information specific to particular populations of EL learners, including those from South Asian cultures. Therefore the project handbook incorporated information for teachers on the languages and cultural practices of South Asian families.

**Summary**

As the numbers of children enrolled in preschool programs continues to rise in the U.S., preschool teachers must be provided with a stronger understanding of how to promote the development of early literacy skills in their young students. These early skills are the foundation for success in literacy and academic achievement in the school age years. With the low levels of education required for most preschool teachers, it is not
uncommon for teachers to lack the knowledge of research and practices that best support early literacy development. The handbook developed in this project was designed to provide teachers with this information in order to support their implementation of research based literacy experiences for preschoolers.

In states with high numbers of English language learners, teachers must also be prepared to support literacy learning for their EL students, while also supporting and respecting the child’s home language and culture. Yet most teachers remain uninformed about the languages and cultural practices of their immigrant children and families. South Asian families represent a growing segment of EL students in California’s preschool programs. In order to help teachers become familiar with the language and culture of families from these countries, the handbook was also designed to include information and resources on languages and cultural practices for these families as well. The following chapter describes the methods used to develop the handbook.
Chapter 3

METHOD

Project Design

This project was a handbook designed for the use of preschool educators to enhance their knowledge of young children’s language and literacy development. The handbook for preschool teachers had three goals. The first goal was to provide preschool teachers with a summary of some of the latest research on children’s literacy development. A second goal was to offer preschool teachers guidance in designing and implementing effective developmentally appropriate curricula and classroom practices to support young children’s early literacy learning. The final goal was to address the needs of preschool English language learners from the South Asian countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Setting and Participants

The early literacy handbook developed in this project was targeted to preschool programs - Head Start, state or private - in Placer County, California, with a particular
focus on those programs serving English language learners from South Asian countries.

In order to inform the design of the handbook and to identify possible sites for later dissemination, the researcher developed a list of Head Start, state and private preschool organizations in various locations in Placer County. The program administrators were contacted so that the researcher could invite the teachers in each program to participate in informal discussions. In these discussions the researcher asked teachers to complete a brief questionnaire that the researcher provided (see Appendix C). Of the 40 teachers contacted, 35 teachers chose to participate. The researcher visited the teachers in the different venues, over several dates. Discussions with the teachers as well as the questionnaire focused on two general topics: a) what kinds of literacy information the teachers would like included in the handbook; and b) what information about English language learners, specifically South Asian students, they would like in the handbook.

At separate times, the researcher also invited parents of preschool aged children whose first language was the targeted South Asian languages to participate in informal sessions which included a brief questionnaire prepared by the researcher (see Appendix B). The researcher contacted several parents from each South Asian country who had preschool aged and younger children in the preschool programs. These parents were then invited to recruit other South Asian parents by telephone and/or electronic mail. Parent meetings took place in several locations on different dates. Questionnaires were distributed to a total of 63 parents, and 60 of these questionnaires were completed and returned. The groups of parents who participated in the informal discussions and/or
returned questionnaires were comprised of 8 Telugu speaking parents who emigrated from India, 15 Tamil speaking parents who emigrated from India, 13 Hindi speaking parents who emigrated from India, 13 Urdu speaking parents who emigrated from Pakistan, 2 Bangla speaking parents who emigrated from Bangladesh and 12 Sinhalese speaking parents who emigrated from Sri Lanka. Discussions with the parents focused on two general areas of information: a) the families’ home country and language; b) commonly used words and phrases in the home language/s.

At each meeting the researcher gave a brief introduction explaining the project. The questionnaires were then handed out to each participant. The participants were given the choice of either completing the questionnaires at the venue and handing it to the researcher, or completing it and returning it to the head teacher or parent who organized the event. The researcher set the return dates a week from the date of the event. Most of the preschool teachers and parents opted to fill out the questionnaires the same day, and the researcher gathered the information at the end of the event. The researcher returned to the preschools to collect those surveys that were not completed the same day.

Responses from Parent and Teacher Surveys

Responses to the parent and teacher surveys were entered into a database. The researcher tallied the responses and drew on the results to compile the handbook.
Teachers

The 35 participating teachers were asked to respond to two questions. Each question gave an itemized list from which the teachers could check their choices. The first question asked teachers to indicate what areas of children’s language and literacy development they wanted included in the handbook. The teachers were allowed to select any or all of the choices listed in the table.

Table 1

*Areas of Literacy Knowledge Requested by Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Knowledge</th>
<th>Percent of Teachers Requesting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alphabet knowledge and print awareness</td>
<td>88.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary development</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting English language learners</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive processes in reading/writing</td>
<td>62.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonological and phonemic awareness</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a literacy rich classroom</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story reading and comprehension</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second question asked teachers to indicate what areas of information they would like included in the handbook related to the South Asian students’ home languages and cultures. The teachers were allowed to select any or all of the choices listed in the table.

Table 2  
*Areas of Language and Cultural Information Requested by Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language and Cultural Information</th>
<th>Percent of Teachers Requesting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key vocabulary words</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation guide</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently used words or phrases</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on cultural practices</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonly used adjectives and nouns</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of children’s books</td>
<td>60.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graphic alphabets of languages</td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recommendations from the teachers were used by the researcher in determining what information and resources to include in the handbook.
Parents

The parent questionnaires were comprised of two sets of questions. In the first set, parents were asked to identify:

- Which country are you from?
- What is your home language?
- What language/s do you speak to your child?
- Is your child exposed to the English language? If so how?
- Are there any other languages your child has been exposed to?

Of the 60 responding parents, 32 were from India, 13 from Pakistan, 13 from Sri Lanka and 2 from Bangladesh. The parents spoke the following home languages: Tamil (n = 14), Hindi (n = 13), Sinhalese (n = 12), Urud (n = 11), and Telagu (n = 8).

All the parents said that at home they spoke exclusively to their young children in the home language, and only occasionally used a few words of English. Eight of the children were exposed to more than one target language at home (from parents and grandparents speaking in other languages). Fifty-seven of the children were exposed to the English language on the television and occasionally at home. In the conversations that the researcher had with the parents, they all expressed concern that their children would be unable to comprehend or converse in the English language if they entered a preschool in America as the teachers and peers only spoke and understood English.
The second section of the parent questionnaire was comprised of a list of frequently used English words or phrases provided by the researcher. The parents were asked to write in the equivalent words in their child’s home language.

**Procedures**

In compiling the handbook the researcher began with a review of the previous and current research relevant to language and literacy development in preschool aged children. This information was used to develop a summary of the research for teachers to be included in the handbook.

The researcher then gathered information on current California state language and literacy standards and classroom practices as laid out in the 2008 *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Preschool Learning Foundations Vol. 1*. The researcher also drew upon her own knowledge of language and literacy development in creating activities for use in the preschool classroom. Input from the teachers was also used to help determine what areas of literacy knowledge and research would be included in the handbook as well as what types of classroom strategies would be presented in the activities sections.

Information gathered from South Asian parents was summarized in a section of the handbook related to cultural practices. In addition, parent feedback was used to compile a list of frequently used words and phrases for the South Asian languages.
**Structure of the Handbook**

The researcher organized the handbook into sections by the three main goals of the handbook as well as by topics of interest indicated by preschool teachers in the questionnaire. The first section presents an overview of recent research in children’s language and literacy development in the areas of reading, phonological awareness, vocabulary, print knowledge, alphabet knowledge, shared book reading and emergent writing. The next section provides a review of research and best practices for supporting language and literacy development in English language learners. A section on the cultural practices of South Asian families is also included, along with a list of commonly used words for each of the languages. The section on classroom practices provides examples for activities that support children’s learning in all areas of literacy knowledge. The last section presents a bibliography of references included in the handbook.

**Role of Researcher**

The researcher in this project has been the owner and head teacher of a Montessori preschool in Placer County for thirty-one years. Over these years of experience the researcher has realized the importance of teachers’ understanding the theories and research in the domain of early literacy in order to be an effective preschool teacher. The lack of such knowledge by early childhood educators may render
irreversible damage to the development of the child. The limited and basic educational requirements specified for the role of a preschool teacher does not qualify the individual to provide the necessary developmentally, and culturally accepted, activities to the preschool children in their classrooms. The development of the handbook in this project was designed to contribute towards this need of professional growth of the preschool teachers in the county.

During the period of time the researcher has worked in her Montessori preschool she has also witnessed a marked increase of families from South Asian countries moving into the county. In working with these families, the researcher recognized the lack of resources that would allow preschool teachers to support the needs of these families as they attempt to integrate into the drastically different educational system, and equally contrasting cultural beliefs and systems of a new country. Since the researcher is also from South Asia and speaks two of the targeted languages, there were more and more families that gravitated to the preschool where she was teaching.

After repeated discussions with parents from these regions over the past years, the researcher concluded that South Asian families and children often encounter a difficult transition when the child first begins to attend preschool. Parents expressed concerns about the need for preschool teachers who were knowledgeable and understanding of the language and cultural beliefs of these ethnic groups in order to facilitate the transition of their children from home to preschool. The same concerns were expressed by most of the preschool teachers and trainees that the researcher met in her professional activities. The
researcher compiled the handbook to fulfill this crucial need of both parents and preschool teachers.

**Dissemination of the Project**

The preschool teachers and the parents surveyed for this project were very eager to participate and expressed a strong interest in receiving copies of the completed handbook. The Placer County Office of Education has invited the researcher to present the contents of this handbook at the fall 2013 professional growth workshop for preschool teachers. Sierra Community College has also requested a presentation of the handbook to the preschool teachers who participate in the college’s mentor teacher program. The researcher will also present the handbook to teachers participating in the Montessori teacher training school. In addition, the researcher has made contact with several other preschools in her native country Sri Lanka where the handbook can also be distributed.

**Summary**

This chapter has described the methodology used by the researcher to create a handbook for preschool educators to enhance their knowledge of young children’s language and literacy development as well as effective developmentally appropriate
curricula and classroom practices to support young children’s early literacy learning. The handbook also addresses the needs of English language learners, with particular focus on learners from South Asia, mainly India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.
Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

The early childhood years are a critical period for laying the foundation for children’s literacy development. Yet preschool teachers are often not equipped with the knowledge of research and best practices to support their preschoolers’ emerging literacy knowledge. Rising numbers of immigrant children present teachers with the added challenge of facilitating language and literacy learning in children who speak a variety of different languages and who come to school from a diversity of home cultures. Students from South Asian countries are a small but growing sector of preschool enrollment. Most teachers are unfamiliar with the languages and cultural practices of families from these countries. The handbook developed in this project was secondarily aimed at providing teachers with skills and strategies to support these families. The following chapter provides a discussion of the development, dissemination and limitations of the project, along with recommendations for future research and classroom practices.

Development and Dissemination of the Project

The handbook in this project was developed in order to address an emerging need in the early childhood education programs in Placer County. After reviewing the body of research related to early language and literacy development and numerous
observations made by the researcher over three decades in county preschool classrooms, this researcher was led to the conclusion that preschool teachers needed to enhance their knowledge of early literacy development. In addition, teachers needed particular skills and strategies to address the needs of South Asian English language learners entering their classrooms. During the development of the handbook, the researcher spoke to preschool teachers as well as parents of South Asian children who confirmed the need for a resource to support teachers in developing children’s early literacy and to also provide a resource for information about South Asian languages and cultures.

The handbook was presented to Placer County preschool teachers, staff members in the Placer County Office of Education and several instructors at Sierra Community College. Several presentations are also scheduled for early childhood educators in Yolo and Sacramento counties. The researcher will also present the handbook to early childhood educators in Sri Lanka in July 2014. The researcher is also pursuing opportunities to print copies of the handbook in order to distribute it throughout the United States and Sri Lanka. The content and activities in the handbook can be used in any part of the world as a guide to help early childhood educators create developmentally appropriate curricula and set up language rich preschool classrooms in order to support the early literacy development of young preschool children. The handbook also gives teachers of English language learners helpful guidelines to ease the transition of these children from home to the preschool setting.
In future, the handbook might be expanded to include a more comprehensive section on the cultural practices and beliefs of South Asian communities. This is an extremely important topic that preschool teachers should be educated about so as to have a deeper understanding of the lifestyle of the child, parents and families. Another useful revision that could be made in the future would be to add more sections that address other major languages spoken in South Asian communities, such as Kannada, Kerala, Oriya, Bengali and Punjabi. Many families speaking these languages are currently residing in Northern California. Although the researcher limited the present edition of the handbook to a few languages and countries, some of the families interviewed showed a keen interest in having these other languages in future versions of the handbook.

Limitations

The handbook developed in this project provides a useful resource for preschool teachers, but its implementation must be considered within the limitations of the project. The target audience of this handbook was preschool children aged 3-5 years. This eliminated the crucial early years of language development (0 to 3) and also the elementary school age years of 5 to 8.

Yet another limitation is the content of the handbook. The researcher focused on the development of early literacy only, and omitted by design other vital areas of development such as social and emotional development. The handbook provides a
summary of some of the key research in language and literacy development but this information is not meant to be an exhaustive review of all the literature on early literacy. Similarly, the researcher presents an overview of the research related to English language learners which is not intended to be a comprehensive examination of the research in this area.

One unique aspect of the handbook is the inclusion of information for teachers on the languages and cultural practices of South Asian families from a particular group of countries and language groups. However, the handbook does not present similar information for other equally important cultural groups represented in the preschool classrooms in the area, such as Hmong, Filipinos, Latinos, East Europeans, Vietnamese and Thais. These groups could be included in future editions of the handbook.

Finally, the handbook provides many suggestions for classroom practices that teachers can use to support children’s early literacy. It was beyond the scope of the project to follow up with teachers to determine whether or how the teachers might be implementing practices that are included in the handbook, or how useful the handbook was for the teachers.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Enrollments in preschool programs are continuing to increase, with many more children coming to school from a diversity of languages and cultures. Preschool teachers
in general are not adequately prepared to support children’s early literacy development, and they are often ignorant about the home languages and cultures of their English language learners. Although this handbook is designed to address these needs, there are other steps that can be taken to support teachers and families.

Professional development is one avenue through which new skills and strategies could be introduced to the teachers. Both the teachers and the South Asian parents that the researcher interviewed confirmed the need for preschool teachers to understand both the language and the culture of their students. If this need was met, it would ease the anxieties that the children, their parents, and teachers all face when these children first come into the preschool classroom. Thus, program administrators can create opportunities for dialogue between teachers and these families, as well as make efforts to develop their own materials to educate teachers about families’ languages and cultures. Parents and other family members can be recruited to assist in these activities.

An important way to build relationships between teachers and families is to bring in family members to demonstrate cultural practices, introduce ethnic foods and clothing, and even to introduce a few common words in their language such as *hello, good bye, my name is... etc.* to all the children in the classroom. This will help all children to familiarize themselves with and learn about respect the different cultural practices of their own teachers has been on elementary grades.
Although the current literature on English language learners classmates. These encounters also help make families and children feel more accepted in the new classroom environment.

Traditionally, professional development for teachers is conducted in the form of workshops that last a few hours to one day, with little to no attention to following up whether teachers implement any of the new concepts they learned in the training (Putman, Smith & Cassady, 2009). In programs where the researcher has disseminated the handbook, or in programs which elect to share the handbook through professional development workshops, it is recommended that steps be taken to follow up and mentor teachers as they implement these early literacy strategies into their classroom curriculum.

**Future Research**

Continued research must be conducted to address the emerging literacy needs of monolingual as well as English language learners entering preschool classrooms today. This research must include aspects of early literacy development in young children, and in particular, English language learners. It is especially critical to include English learners from the many new language groups enrolling in preschools. Second, future research must continue to identify effective classroom strategies that can be incorporated to establish high-quality programs serving the early literacy needs of all young children. Finally, researchers must continue to examine teaching processes and practices among
preschool teachers. This is particularly important since the focus of most of the research is substantial, there is very little research on the sociocultural and linguistic needs of the South Asian immigrant population, the fastest growing group of immigrants in the United States. Studies of early language and literacy development must include students and families from the range of South Asian language and cultural groups represented in today’s preschools to expand our understanding of early literacy acquisition in this unique group of English language learners.

**Conclusion**

Learning to read and write is a critical skill that predicts success throughout the school years and life. Improving the literacy skills of children in the United States continues to be a topic of grave concern and debate. As a result, reading proficiency in school children remains in the forefront of educational debate. Many initiatives such as Goals 2000, the Educate America Act of 1994, and No Child Left Behind in 2001 have been enacted in order to help children achieve a level of reading proficiency which is on par or exceeds that of children in the rest of the world.

However, research suggests that achieving this school age reading proficiency depends on children’s developing foundational literacy skills before the formal school years. Early literacy skills such as phonological awareness, vocabulary, letter naming, and word manipulation are all precursory skills necessary to successful reading (Missall,
Thus it is increasingly evident that the preschool and kindergarten years are the most opportune times to promote early literacy development (Girolametto, Weitzman & Greenberg, 2012). Although early childhood classrooms have the potential to be an important context for literacy experiences, many teachers lack the expertise in literacy knowledge, strategies, and curricula to support their students’ emerging literacy skills.

Today, schools are recognizing that children who come to school speaking a different home language face additional challenges in acquiring literacy skills. However, programs have been slow to respond to the increase in English learners from South Asian countries among the student population in California preschools and elementary classrooms. The education system has not provided a supportive system to address the challenges faced by South Asian children and families, or to educate the preschool teachers that are entrusted to support the developing needs of these children.

All preschool children, including those from smaller and newer language and cultural groups such as South Asia, deserve to have teachers who are well equipped to support literacy development in general and to support their home culture and language in particular. Teachers must understand that families and children from South Asian backgrounds have unique linguistic structures and diverse cultural needs. These children and families face the challenge of transitioning into the linguistic and sociocultural practices of an individualistic society that is in stark contrast to their collectivist linguistic and socio cultural practices.
Supporting the literacy development of the growing numbers of South Asian preschool children will require that preschool teachers expand their knowledge in three important areas. First, teachers must have a thorough understanding of the literacy skills and knowledge that young children can acquire during the preschool years. Second, teachers must understand the processes of literacy development in young English language learners. Finally, teachers must possess an understanding of the home languages and cultures of all their students to support their transition from the language learning of home to the literacy learning of the classroom. The handbook developed for this project provides a valuable resource to expand preschool teachers’ knowledge in these critical areas, and in particular to provide information to support the growing numbers of South Asian students in preschool classrooms today.
Appendices
Appendix A

Promoting Language and Literacy Development in Young English Learners: A Preschool Teacher’s Guide
Promoting Language and Literacy Development in Young English Language Learners:

A Preschool Teacher’s Guide

Kumudini Wickramasinghe

Montessori House of Children

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction

II. Language and Literacy in Preschoolers: An Overview
   Vocabulary
   Alphabet Knowledge
   Phonological Awareness
   Print Knowledge
   Reading
   Writing

III. Language and Literacy Development in EL Learners

IV. Language and Culture of South Asian Families

V. Classroom Activities to Support Early Literacy
   Vocabulary
   Alphabet Knowledge
   Phonological Awareness
   Print Knowledge
   Shared Book Reading
   Writing

VI. Commonly Used Words for South Asian Languages

VII. Bibliography
I. Introduction

The early childhood years are a period of rapid language and literacy learning for most young children. The language and literacy experiences a child has during these years are a strong indicator of how well he or she will be able to read in first grade (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). Recognizing the importance of these early literacy experiences, early childhood policy makers and educators in many states, including California, have developed Preschool Learning Foundations that describe what kinds of literacy knowledge young children should be acquiring during the preschool years. These documents provide teachers with some guidance for establishing a literacy rich classroom as well as suggestions for research based teaching strategies.

Despite these efforts, current research studies show that more and more children are entering the early elementary school years still unable to read and write at grade level (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2009). This gap in literacy performance in kindergarten between students
who enter school with some proficiency in literacy and those with little to
none widens as the years of school progress (Chatterji, 2006). Long term,
the impacts of this gap can result in negative outcomes such as higher school
dropout rates (U.S Census, 2009).

Well-trained and knowledgeable teachers play a crucial role in
children's early literacy development (Cooper, Kiger, Robinson & Slansky,
2012). Mounting evidence supports the importance of teachers providing
children with intentional instruction in early literacy learning, especially at
the preschool level (Dickinson & Neuman, 2005). But efforts to successfully
promote children's language and literacy in preschool settings depend on the
knowledge base of the teachers as well as the quality of the curriculum and
learning experiences that are provided in the preschool classroom. Many
preschool teachers may lack the training or background knowledge in
understanding the processes of children's early literacy development. In
addition, teachers may not have access to the latest research-based
recommendations for classroom practices that will support children's
literacy learning.
This handbook is a resource for preschool teachers in supporting the early literacy development of young children. Besides the introduction, the handbook includes sections on the following topics:

- An overview of language and literacy development in preschoolers, including the areas of alphabet knowledge; vocabulary, early reading, phonological and phonemic awareness, early writing and print knowledge.
- Language and literacy development in English language learners.
- Information about the language and culture of South Asian children and families, a growing segment of the preschool population.
- Classroom activities to support children's early literacy development.
- A list of commonly used words and phrases in South Asian languages.
- A bibliography of resources for teachers.

In each area of literacy development, the handbook presents a summary of the most recent research. This information will help to expand teachers' knowledge and understanding of how literacy develops in the early years. The classroom activities section includes teaching strategies for
incorporating each area of literacy into your classroom practices. These strategies and activities are designed to assist preschool teachers in creating language and literacy rich environments and to implement practices that support language and literacy in the preschool classroom.

Preschool classrooms today include children from many different cultural and language backgrounds. For these children, language learning in preschool often means learning English as their second language. Many schools and programs have adapted their curriculum and teaching practices to meet the needs of English Language (EL) learners from the larger second language groups (such as Spanish).

Research suggests understanding individual differences in families and their relation to environmental cultural and ecological factors is important to effective teaching (Lahman & Soyeon, 2004). But preschool teachers are often unprepared for students from smaller minority language communities. Children and families speaking South Asian languages represent one such language group. In these instances, preschool teachers must be equipped with the skills to facilitate South Asian children's language and literacy
development. In order to provide teachers with information about children and families from South Asian cultures, the handbook provides resources designed to help preschool teachers communicate with South Asian children and their families. This includes a list of frequently used words or phrases in the South Asian languages of Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, Urdu, Bangla, and Sinhala. These are languages commonly spoken in the countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. There is also some information about cultural heritage and practices for each country.

It is my fervent hope is that teachers will utilize the rich material that is included in this handbook to further enhance the language and literary environments for the preschoolers in your classroom.
II. Language and Literacy Development in Preschool Children

Literacy is the ability of children to speak, listen, read, write, and think. The National Early Literacy Panel (National Early Literacy Panel, 2009), noted that early literacy skills show a strong relationship with later literacy skills such as decoding, oral reading, comprehension, writing, and spelling. It is these reading and writing skills that serve as the cornerstone to acquiring knowledge in other domains, throughout life.

Studies of cognitive development and brain function have identified particular cortical regions of the brain that are uniquely pre-wired to support language acquisition and development. Other researchers (Chomsky, 1957), have proposed that there exists a unique and specialized language acquisition device that facilitates development of language in young children.
Foundational Skills of Early Literacy

A growing body of research highlights the preschool years as the critical period in which the development of important early literacy skills takes place. The early foundational skills necessary for learning to read and write are:

- **Oral Language** plays a critical role in early literacy development. Listening and speaking contribute to vocabulary development (Wasik, 2010), and later learning to read and write (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001).

- **Vocabulary**, which is the ability to understand the meaning of and use words (O’Leary, Cockburn, Powell, & Diamond, 2012., Irwin, Moore, Tornatore & Fowler, 2012).

- **Alphabet Knowledge** is the ability to recognize and name letters, and the knowledge that letters are associated with sounds (Irwin et al., 2012).
- **Phonological Awareness**, which refers to a sensitivity to sounds and the understanding that sounds make up words (Yopp & Yopp, 2009).

- **Print Knowledge** refers to young children’s understanding of the print, or orthographic, structure of written language, including the names of each letter of the language, and the way print is organized and carries meaning in text (Justice & Vukelich, 2008).

- **Oral Reading** is the process of decoding written language into verbal speech. Although decoding is a necessary skill, true reading occurs only when children can also construct meaning from the text (Cooper et al., 2012).

- **Writing** is the process of conveying meaning or ideas by using graphic symbols. Young children’s writing often takes the form of drawing, scribbling and/or labeling pictures (Cooper et al., 2012).
Vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to the ability to understand and use words to acquire and convey meaning. Vocabulary is the primary component of language comprehension (Leung, Silverman, Nandakumar, Qian and Hines, 2011). Generally children acquire more words into their receptive (listening) vocabulary much faster than into their productive (speaking) vocabulary. In general, ages and rates of acquisition of words into the vocabulary is as follows:

- 9-12 months: First word produced
- At 1 year old: Approximately 5 words (individual children may have non to 30 words)
- 2 years old: Approximately 150 words (individual children may have 10-450 words)
- 6 years of age: Approximately about 14,000 words
What We Know About Vocabulary:

- Children acquire vocabulary by listening to others speak, and by practicing the pronunciation of these words by incorporating them into their conversations with others.

- Children's oral language vocabulary provides the foundation for their learning to recognize and decode written words, and to use their knowledge of these words to understand what they read.

- Direct teaching of words provides young children with words to make sense of their environment, enables them to comprehend text in which the words appear, and improves children's oral and written communication skills (Graves, 2006).

- The California Preschool Curriculum Framework (2008) recommends that vocabulary teaching should be focused on understanding and using words for: "Objects, actions, and attributes; categories of things and actions; and simple and complex relations between objects" (P.117).
As children are exposed to more experiences with language, their mental lexicons grow dramatically. When they begin to read simple phrases or short sentences, they grasp the meaning of what they are reading by associating these with the oral word forms already stored in their brain.

**Alphabet Knowledge**

Alphabet knowledge is the understanding that letters or letter clusters represent sounds in spoken language. Letter name knowledge is another fundamental skill that is critical in children’s learning to read and write (Furnes & Samuelsson, 2010; Drouin, Horner & Sondergeld, 2012).

**What We Know About Alphabet Knowledge:**

- Knowledge of letter names is important in the development of reading as many words have letter names in their pronunciations (examples:
A/a as in ape, B/b as in beetle).

- To be able to read, the brain must store in its memory a set of symbols (the alphabet) and learn to identify which symbol (grapheme) corresponds to the phoneme (the smallest unit of sound in the word) that is already stored in the brain's memory.

- In the English alphabet, 22 letters have the phoneme they represent in their names (examples: B/b, P/p begins with the phoneme b and p; and M/m, N/n with phoneme m and n).

- How fast child learn to read or spell depends on the rules of spelling that govern that particular language (orthography).

- Preschool children are most likely to learn letters and letter sounds that are embedded in their names, especially when they were taught the sounds of the letters along with the letter's shape and name (Cardozo-Martins, Mesquita & Ehri, 2010).

- Preschoolers are better at recognizing initial and final letters (and sounds) and have more trouble with learning middle letters and sounds.

- Training in phonological awareness can boost young children's ability to
learn letters and letter sounds, irrespective of position in the word 
(Cardoso-Martins et al., 2010).

- Alphabet knowledge is a strong predictor of children's reading skills at 
  kindergarten level (National Early Literacy Panel, 2009).
  "...recognizing letters in their own names, recognizing their own name 
  and a few common words, naming many upper case and lower case 
  letters, and recognizing that letters are assigned specific sounds 
  predicts later success in word recognition" (p. 140).

**Phonological Awareness**

Phonological awareness (PA) is a critical skill that enables the child to 
learn to read (Lundberg, Larsman and Strid, 2012). Phonological awareness 
refers to a child's recognition that words are made up of sounds as well as 
the ability to accurately identify these sounds in spoken words.
What We Know About Phonological Awareness:

- Phonological awareness knowledge includes recognizing the segments of spoken language: words, syllables, beginning sounds (onsets), ending sounds (rimes), and individual sounds in a word (phonemes).

- Developmentally appropriate early literacy experiences with phonological awareness are beneficial for children at-risk for reading failure (Nelson, Sanders & Gonzalez, 2010).

- A child's PA skills are commonly measured by tasks requiring matching, rhyming, blending, deleting, and counting sounds within words. This ability to detect, apprehend or manipulate the smaller sounds of oral language help children make the connection between the sounds and the letters that represent them in print.

- The California Preschool Curriculum Framework (2008) specifies the following phonological awareness skills to be mastered by preschool children: "Blend and delete words and syllables without picture support, and blend onsets, rimes, and phonemes and delete onsets with picture or object support of pictures and objects," (p.133).
Print Knowledge

Print knowledge refers to young children’s understanding of the print, or orthographic, structure of written language, including the names of each letter of the language, and the way print is organized and carries meaning in text. Children must also acquire the important understanding that print is used to convey specific meanings.

What We Know About Print Knowledge:

- Print knowledge includes “...book handling behaviors and knowledge about print conventions, and understanding that print can be read and convey specific meanings” (California Preschool Curriculum Framework, 2008. p. 129).
- Print knowledge includes the way print is organized, the names and distinctive features of the letters in the alphabet.
• An important way that young children learn about print is the process of shared book reading. When choosing a book to read to the children examine the accuracy and detail of the print images.

• Research suggests that what matters most to children's development of print knowledge is not the frequency of shared book reading, but the quality of the interactions (Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, and Hunt, 2009).

• Asking questions about the print, tracking one's finger along text while reading and commenting about the print help children show larger gains in print and alphabet knowledge (Justice et al., 2009).

**Reading**

Reading is a cognitive process of decoding written language into verbal speech. Reading proficiency is a critical factor that influences young children's future academic success.
What We Know About Reading:

- Although all typically developing children learn to speak their native language proficiently, all children do not learn to read proficiently.

- As children are exposed to print, young children form basic concepts connecting spoken words to written words. This in turn leads to their ability to recognize written words.

- In order to be successful readers, children need to learn letter (grapheme) to sound (phoneme) correspondence of the language.

- Shared reading experiences with teachers or parents expose the child to print, which in turn stimulates language and reading development (Fletcher & Reese, 2005).

- Reading development also depends on the development of phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, print concepts, vocabulary, and oral language.

- When teachers or other adults ask more questions during shared book reading episodes, children themselves ask more questions.

- Since the majority of conversation during shared book reading centers on
the pictures or plots, it is a good practice to repeat reading the same books often.

- The ability to read strongly depends on the vocabulary that children acquire by listening to others, and by practicing the pronunciation and usage of new words children have gained in conversation with others.

- Beginning reading is started to be more successful if most of the reading materials contain the words that children are already using.

- When children are aware that speech is composed of *phonemes (individual sounds)* and recognize the *alphabetic principal* (that written words are spelled by letters of the alphabet) they are ready to begin reading.

- The English language does not have an exact one-to-one correspondence between alphabet letters (graphemes) and individual sounds (phonemes) in the spoken language. In contrast, most south Asian languages have a very close correspondence between letters and the sounds that they make, which would make it easier for a child to learn to read.

- Children must also discover that the same symbol can have different sounds depending on the letter that precedes it, follows it or even when
it stands by itself. For example the letter /a/ makes a different sound in each of these words: *cat, late, far.*

- Beginning readers decipher printed words by linking them to words that they already know. This process is known as *decoding.*

- In the early stages of decoding children match symbols in their environment to concrete objects in contextual situations. For example, children will recognize the golden arches as *McDonald's,* but they will not be able to read the word *McDonald's* out of context. Shared book reading gives both the teacher and the child to be involved in a meaningful exchange which can serve as an ideal context for scaffolding. The teacher can gauge the child's understanding of particular concepts such as the role of print in telling a story, word concepts. The teacher can then extend the understanding through discussions and provide the support they need to work at a level, which is higher than their capabilities.

- Shared book reading encourages the active participation of the child in by creating a dialogue with the teacher, taking turns to turn pages, asking
and/or answering questions, and pointing to pictures and words. Shared book reading is an excellent way to introduce new vocabulary and print knowledge particularly to the ELL.

- Research suggests that shared storybook reading with young children provides young children with opportunities to learn about book orientation, directionality, oral language knowledge, and creating and confirming predictions.

**Emergent Writing**

Children's acquisition of writing skills progress in stages. Preschoolers appear to progress along a continuum from scribbling to conventional spelling. Emergent writing skills can be recognized in children's scribbles. Then children begin to combine letter like markings, drawing and coloring pictures which also convey meaning and understanding. Although these cannot be recognized as meaningful letters or words by the reader, with the experiences and opportunities that the child is presented in the home
and the preschool environment the scribbles and drawings progressively become recognizable letters and letter like symbols. Gradually over time, the child is able to recognize and represent all sounds in a word with the corresponding letters. As children's writing abilities progress, writing samples will reflect language specific features such as directionality, symbol shapes, and spaces between words.

**What We Know About Emergent Writing:**

- Preschool children in the classroom will write strings of letters with the purpose of conveying meaning to the reader.
- Alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, print knowledge, and letter-sound knowledge all contribute to preschool children's early writing attempts such as name writing, letter writing and spelling (Puranik, Lonigan & Kim, 2011).
- Print knowledge is especially important for emergent writing skills as children need to understand what print is, and how it functions before they can begin to write.
- A child’s alphabet knowledge and understanding of letter name-sound correspondence enables the child’s to retrieve the visual shapes, names, and sounds of letters in his writing attempts.

- Children who are exposed to print rich environments become more accomplished in their writing skills.
III. Language and Literacy Development

In English Language Learners

All typically developing children acquire the language of the social group and culture in which they live. The term “English Language (EL) learner” typically refers to children who come to school from a home in which a language other than English is the primary language being spoken. In this case, the child will be learning English as a second language in the school environment.

Supporting English Learners’ Home Language

As EL learners are beginning to learn English in the preschool classroom, it is important to bear in mind that children at this age have not yet completely mastered their native language. Therefore it is critical that preschool programs make efforts to support children’s acquisition of English
while supporting the maintenance of the home language. Researchers agree that a very important way parents and educators can help children learn English as a second language is to support the continued development of their first language.

As Justice and Vukelich (2008) noted, raising children in an environment in which their native language is not valued can negatively affect the child’s overall academic progress since second language learning is dependent on a strong foundation of native language knowledge. Teachers should be aware that English only programs can negatively impact the child’s native language growth especially if the native language is not present in his home either. For EL learners to successfully acquire English, it is imperative for the preschool teacher to encourage, value, and promote the native/home language use at home, especially if the language cannot be provided in the classroom.

Supporting EL children's native language development in preschool also supports the foundation of English language acquisition. This in turn facilitates the EL learner’s later literacy development and academic
achievement. Promoting children’s native language also reinforces children’s cultural identity and healthy social emotional development (Justice and Vvukelich, 2008).

**Stages in Second Language Acquisition**

Research tells us that bilingual children’s language development follows the same progression as monolingual children. Tabors (2001) described the developmental sequence that preschool EL learners pass through in learning the second language.

- **Speaking the home language:** At this stage the EL learner will speak their home language to those who speak their home language as well as to those who do not (English language speakers).

- **Nonverbal or Silent period:** The child begins to realize that the teachers and peers do not understand his native language because they speak a different language. At this stage the child stops communicating in words, and instead will resort to pointing, mimicking, gesturing, whimpering and
other means to communicate. But the child is also observing, listening and collecting knowledge of the second language.

- **Telegraphic speech:** The child begins one-word utterances in the second language, such as *hi, bye, no, me, or mine, count*, and may also attempt to recite the alphabet.

- **Productive language:** By this stage the child has begun to use simple phrases. These are typically short phrases or parts of sentences that he hears in the environment, and may not be grammatically correct.

- **Code switching:** Bilingual children often blend the two languages to express themselves. The child may speak English with a few words of his native language mixed in. This is rather a complex and sophisticated language skill.

### Phonological Awareness in EL Learners

The development of phonological awareness in EL learners depends on the phonological structures of the child’s home language, and how these
structures can be applied to the features of the second language. As with native speakers, knowledge of letter-sound correspondence underpins successful reading acquisition for EL learners (Castles, Coltheart, Wilson, Valpied & Wedgewood, 2009).

**Vocabulary**

This is an area of language development that is crucial for EL learners, especially children from lower socio economic homes, where the exposure to literacy experiences and language skills maybe minimal. These children are at risk for failure in acquiring both first and second languages, and therefore at risk for later academic failure. The preschool teacher must aggressively address the building of vocabulary in EL learners, since they typically have a far less extensive English vocabulary than do native English speaking children. Some strategies suggested for EL vocabulary teaching are:

- Repeated story book reading and daily exposure to targeted vocabulary
words.

- Teachers can also share books and other material related to the thematic lessons going on in the classroom with the parents so the material can be discussed by the parents and children at home in the native language.

**Phonemic Awareness, Letter Knowledge and Print Awareness**

These three skills are as important to literacy development in EL learners as they are for native English speakers, and are strong predictors of reading achievement for EL learners. Evidence suggests that these skills do transfer from the native to the second language, and teaching these skills in two languages does not confuse children or delay reading acquisition (Shanahan & Lonigan, 2010). These areas can be addressed in the classroom by:

- Incorporate words from the native language into ongoing classroom activities.
- Get the help of parents in obtaining a list of words from them which are the parallels to those you will be using/targeting in the daily routine of the classroom as well as in thematic activities.
- Get acquainted with the orthographics of the children's native alphabet.
- Display environmental print in the classroom in English as well as the native language/s spoken by the EL students. If the teacher does not speak the native language she can involve parents in writing labels of key words in the native language to be displayed in the classroom such as words for *table, chair, book, pencil, cup, toilet,* etc.
- Display books and pictures of the culture, of native foods and dresses, celebrate cultural holidays, and taste ethnic foods. The parents can be requested to help the teacher in all these activities.

**Teacher's Role in Helping EL Learners**

The development of early literacy is a continuous process that comes about by children participating in a variety of literacy activities, which are
enhanced by direct or explicit instruction from the teacher. The preschool teacher plays a very important role in the academic success of their students. Preschool teachers must have the knowledge, practice skills, and understanding of all aspects of how language and literacy develops in young children in order to help young children master the English language and prepare for success in school (Brice & Brice, 2009; Hamre, Pianta, & Burchinal, 2012).

**Supporting Children in the Nonverbal Stage**

Children who come to preschool speaking a language other than English enter into an alien environment. At the beginning the child might use his native language to try and interact with the teacher and peers, but soon learns that they are not versed in his language. The child then enters the *silent period*, a difficult and frustrating period. The child may be lost, unresponsive, sad, lonely or even declare he dislikes school. During this period, there are several things that teachers can do to support EL learners:
• Pair the child with another EL peer or a teacher who knows both languages. In the absence of this, another peer who is more adjusted to the preschool classroom can be paired with the EL learner to help him overcome this period, by engaging with him in activities and play.

• Encourage the use of gestures and non-verbal language to communicate.

• Establish predictable classroom routines.

• Use some key words from the child's native language.

• Visual aids and involving the child in small group activities are some helpful aids which will help the EL learners to feel more comfortable in the classroom.

• Routinely using English words and phrases along with the native language will help the child to overcome their initial fears. For example:

  Teacher: *How are you, Priya?* (The teacher displays three visual choices: Sad face, happy face, and quizzical face.

  The child points to one.

  Teacher: *Priya is happy today! Happy.*
Supporting Children in the Telegraphic Stage

Once children experience and know more of the English language and become more comfortable with using the second language they begin to use single words or chunks or phrases of the English language. At this stage children need longer periods of time in which to formulate answers or express themselves. Strategies teachers can use include:

- Label objects in the classroom and draw the child's attention to these, reading the words for him.
- Read short stories with more pictures and less words, sing short poems, share these books and songs with the parents to be repeated at home.
- Since the child may use grammatically incorrect sentences to communicate, model the correct order or pronunciation while avoiding explicit correction. For example: In the playground, Priya is grabbing the ball from her friend's hand saying,

  Priya: “Me want, me want”.
Teacher: “Priya, I want, I want”. Teacher turns to Michael, holding out her hands says “Michael, please give me the ball, I want the ball”, emphasizing the last utterance. Then encourage the child to use the correct words.

- When teaching new vocabulary, provide more repetition, more hands on activities, more modeling by both teacher and peers, and many opportunities to display/ practice the vocabulary they are learning,

**Connecting Home and School**

A critical element in facilitating English learners’ school success is developing healthy connections between home and school. These connections help children to maintain the use of their home language, and demonstrate respect for families’ cultural beliefs and practices. Teachers can create a culturally sensitive environment where English learners feel comfortable in the classroom.
• Display books written in children's native language as well as charts that contain the native alphabet.
• Encourage children to bring items of personal interest and significance and talk about them e.g. books in their language, ethnic foods, clothing, utensils used for eating and cooking, objects of worship etc.
• A variety of picture books with no words or very few words should be made available. These books allow the child to actively use their prior knowledge in comprehension.
• Invite a parent to come in and teach the children a song in the family's home language.
• Encourage the parents to volunteer in the classroom.
• Celebrate the child's holidays in the classroom.
• Taste the ethnic foods of the families and cultures in your classroom.
IV. Language and Culture of South Asian Families

All typically developing children come to preschool with an established language and cultural base, which may or may not be the same language and culture the school is trying to teach. Classrooms throughout the state of California include an increasing number of students who come to school from a variety of language and cultural backgrounds:

- According to the California Department of Education (2013), there are approximately 1.5 million EL learners in CA public schools, which is about 23% of total school enrollment. About 70% of these students are in preschool and elementary programs.

- According to the latest U.S. census data in 2011, there are over 50 different language groups among the state’s EL students, with Spanish at 83% the largest single group (Ryan, 2013).

- However, a growing number of children in preschools across the state are speakers of one or more South Asian languages from a variety of countries (South Asian Americans Leading Together, 2013). Specifically
these languages are: Hindi, Telegu, Tamil (India), Urudu (Pakistan), Bangla (Bangladesh), and Sinhalese (Sri Lanka).

**South Asian Cultures and Collectivism**

The most important factor that teachers from the Western world should know about South Asian children who come into their preschool classrooms is that these families are acculturated in a collectivist culture. Unlike individuals raised in individualistic cultures such as America and Europe, members of collectivist cultures are encouraged to achieve success for the betterment of the family and society, as opposed to achieving success for themselves as individuals. The rights of families and communities supersede the needs and rights of individuals, and everyone is raised to support and help each other. Independence is not valued as much as it is in Western cultures; in fact, independence is often viewed as a rebellious act that can bring potential shame upon the family and society.
Family Structure

The nuclear family of South Asian cultures is composed not only of a mother, father and siblings but also grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. In most parts of India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, families live together in one household compound. Many adult family members help to raise the children, with grandparents taking the lead. Adults teach the children their prayers, family and societal values, religious rituals, and cultural practices and norms. The elderly are revered and most people seek the advice of their elders before making major decisions. Children are brought up to respect all elders and not address any elder by their name (so teachers, please remember not to ask these children to address you by your name but as Miss, Mr. or Mrs., followed by your name, when they address you). Children from South Asia might at first appear to be shy and slow to warm up; this is not because they are socially awkward, but because they are raised to respect adults and not talk a lot in their presence.
Food Practices

The majority of children from India and Sri Lanka are vegetarians. They do not eat any meat or meat products. For very strict vegetarians this also includes foods that contain Gelatin (derived from hoofs of animals).

Children from Pakistan are non-vegetarian, but since most of them are Muslim they will not eat any pork products. Ask the South Asian parents whose children are in your classroom about their dietary habits, and respect them. Please pay attention to the foods that you serve at lunch, snack, parties and treats.

Teachers may also notice that South Asian children are very dependent on adults to take care of them in their daily routines such as going to the bathroom and wiping themselves, eating, dressing and putting their shoes on. They are also used to attention being poured on them by the adults in their families, and usually want to be hugged, carried, and loved, especially if they just fell down in the playground or hurt themselves in some way! This is more common in young preschoolers who are new to the
classroom. Teachers must take some extra time to help ease the transition of these children into the schoolroom. They learn fast, and would soon be attending to their needs themselves and getting more independent as they observe and interact with their American-raised peers.
V. Classroom Activities to Support Early Literacy

The following sections provide ideas for classroom activities to support young children's early literacy development.

**Vocabulary**

Vocabulary instruction should be intentional and preplanned as well as incidental.

- **OBJECT TALK** - Talk about objects that the children are playing with, show an interest in or bring objects of interest to small or large groups. Talk about the objects in interesting rich vocabulary. "Are you trying to open the box? We have to first try the lid. What shape/color is the box? Let's look around the classroom and find other boxes. What other objects have lids?" etc.
OBJECT LOCATIONS - Bring a chair and a stuffed animal or doll or any other object to the group of children and ask them to "place the object on the chair, behind the chair, besides the chair," etc.

BODY COMMANDS - In small/large group give a command to each child one at a time going around the circle "Michael can you jump? Priya can you smile? Raj can you hop? Maya can you bring me a book?" etc.

OBJECT COLORS AND SHAPES - Bring a tray of colored objects (limit to two or three colors) and three vessels that differ in shape, color, or size. Ask the child "...can you put a blue bead in the small/ red/ circle vessel? Can you put a red bead in the large/ green/ triangle vessel? etc.

SHARED BOOK READING - enhances children's vocabularies by focusing on word meaning. Point out to the three bowls on the bear's table in the book, "...can you point to the large bowl? Which is the smallest bowl?" Etc.

THEMATIC VOCABULARY - Targeted words incorporated into thematic units, these can be represented in books, pictures, and posters. A "fish" theme might include target words such as gills, scales, ocean, lake, river,
fin, fresh water, salt water, etc.

- USE CONCRETE OBJECTS - For the “fish” theme, visit a local fish market, bring a large fish into the classroom and let the children examine it. Bring a live fish into the classroom so they can observe the fish in the water, pointing to the gills and the fins etc. Real objects enrich children's learning of vocabulary.

- OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS - Ask the children open ended questions and encourage them to ask questions in return. Compare and contrast key vocabulary, for example, the habitat, food, features of a land animal with a fish. Engage children in conversation, selecting appropriate words and elaborating and extending on word meanings.

- PICTURES - One-word picture presentations and identification help children learn and recognize new words.

- REPEATED EXPOSURES - Give young children repeated opportunities to hear “rare words” (words that they do not encounter in everyday speech).

- EXPLICIT DEFINITIONS - Providing children with explicit definitions of words, discussing words in various contexts, and reviewing words often
are all strategies to promote vocabulary knowledge.

- **READING MATERIALS CONTAINING KEY VOCABULARY** - reading materials in the classroom should contain words that preschool children are already using.

- **TEACH EL LEARNERS VOCABULARY OF THEIR PEERS** - Since monolingual English speakers and EL learners acquire words in the same order, teaching children with limited vocabulary those words known by their peers who have a more advanced vocabulary helps EL learners to catch up with their peers.

- **FOCUS ON HIGH USAGE OR HIGH INTEREST WORDS** - Select vocabulary from the books children are reading, words that children already know, words that are useful to children in multiple contexts, and words that are interesting to children.

- **TEACH VERBS AND NOUNS WITH CONCRETE OBJECTS** - Verbs and nouns can be taught with concrete objects and actions whereas other words may require extended discussions and explanations.
Alphabet Knowledge

Alphabet knowledge is the ability to name a letter of the alphabet that someone else has pointed to, or identify a letter that someone else names from an alphabet chart.

- **LETTER SHAPES** - Comparing and contrasting shapes of several letters at a time, and introducing the first letter of the child’s name are preliminary activities that the teacher can introduce for basic letter recognition.

- **LETTER GAMES** - Surround the children with letters, letter games, and alphabets. If they ask what the name is tell them, and invite them to write/trace them on a paper.

- **ALPHABET POSTERS** - Have posters of upper case and lower case letters of the alphabet on display in the classroom. Refer to them each day by pointing to each letter and saying the name and sound of each, instructing the children to repeat after you.

- **SANDPAPER LETTERS** - Tracing sandpaper letters, and naming and
sounding each letter. The teacher prepares a sand paper card for each lower case letter of the alphabet. This is an individual activity, and the child is introduced to a letter at a time by showing him how to trace the letter and say its name and sound. “This is s (naming the letter) let’s trace the letter s.” She then offers the letter to the child, guiding the tracing, and prompting him to say the name and sound. If the child does not say the name or sound say it for him. Begin introducing continuous sounds such as s/, m/, and f, that are easier to pronounce and later the stop such as p/, t/, and k.

- **NAMING LETTERS** - When the child is able to identify the letters, place 4-6 letters in front of him and ask him to name the letters as fast as he can.

- **LETTER PAIRS** - Ask child to pair lower case and corresponding upper case letters.
Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the understanding that spoken words are made up of sounds, and becoming aware of how those sounds are structured in words.

- **ALLITERATIONS** - These are words that begin with the same sound such as bus, baby. Give the children a word and ask them for words that begin the same.

- **SORTING BEGINNING SOUNDS** - Bring a tray of familiar pictures on cards, and ask the child to sort them according to the beginning sound. This activity can also be played using objects of different categories such as farm animals, pets, forest animals, household items, fruits, vegetables etc.

- **SONGS AND POEMS** - Sing songs or read poems containing alliterations.

- **RHYMING** - Rhymes are words with the same ending sounds. Nursery rhymes, children's rhyming songs and storybooks that contain rhyming
words are good sources that should be read to the children on a daily basis. At the beginning sing the rhyming song/ read the storybook with the children and when they are familiar with the song/story begin to focus their attention on the rhyming words. Examples: Sing a familiar song such as “Hickory dickory dock, the mouse ran up the clock” or a story book such as “There’s a wocket in my pocket”.

- MATCHING A RHYMING WORD - Give the children a word and ask them to give a corresponding rhyming word. Extend this activity by omitting a rhyming word and asking them to complete the sentence with another rhyming word.

- CHOOSE THE RHYMING WORD - Give children a word, and ask them to identify what word rhymes with it by presenting two other words, only one of which rhymes with the word presented.

- RHYMING SENTENCES - Use a sentence such as, “The bear is combing his .... (blank), can you give me a word to rhyme with bear?” Whatever word that the children say, the teacher then repeats the whole sentence “yes, the bear is combing his hair”. Repeat with a few more sentences.
You can also invite the children to make up their own sentences.

- **SYLLABLE SEGMENTATION** - this skill helps children understand that words are divided into units of spoken language called syllables. Clap hands for each syllable while saying the words, and counting each clap. Start with one-syllable words and gradually increasing to two and three syllables. Let the children become aware that the word *dog* contains one syllable (one clap), *baby* contains two syllables (two claps), *hamburger*, three syllables etc. The teacher can also do the same with each child’s name.

- **PHONEME ISOLATION** - Present children with a series of words and ask them to identify the phonemes that are alike. Start with initial sounds, such as, “*Baby, ball, bunny all begin with what letter/sound?*” These are more easily identifiable for young children than ending or middle sounds.

- **ONSET-RIME** - This is the ability to identify similar ending sounds. Ask children, “*what sounds do you hear at the end of cat, rat and mat?*” Or, ask children to complete the series, “*bed, head, ........*” (red, led, fed, etc.).
• PHONEME BLENDING - Ask children to practice blending individual sounds (phonemes) to make a word: "d/-o/-g says what...? (dog)."

• PHONEME SEGMENTING - Ask children to take a word and break it out into individual phonemes: "What sounds do you hear when I say mop?"

• BLENDING WORDS - Some compound words can be easily divided or combined. Give children two words and ask them to put them together to make one word. "If I say sun and shine what word can you make when you put the two words together"? If the child has difficulty the teacher puts a few compound words together by saying the words first such as, "base - ball, makes baseball; hair - brush makes hairbrush; rain-drop makes raindrop" etc. Another variation would be to say, "Rainbow, what word will it make if I take away the word rain, or take away the word bow" etc.

• PHONEME DELETION - Show a word card, or say a word, such as "fall" and ask the child, "What word can you make if you take away the "f"?"
Print Knowledge

Print knowledge involves the recognition that print is made of up letters and words and that print appears in a particular format on the page.

- **IDENTIFYING LETTERS AND WORDS** - Use the words *letter* and *word* regularly when engaged in shared reading. Point to a word and say “*This is a word,*” and point to a letter “*This is a letter*”. Show isolated letters and ask a child to name it. Ask children to point to a word or letter.

- **BEGINNING AND ENDING SOUNDS** - Say a word and ask children to identify the beginning sound and ending sound.

- **JOINT WRITING ACTIVITIES** - Ask children to write or narrate a short description of what they have drawn. Guide the child by repeating the word slowly, naming the letters and exaggerating the sounds contained in the word. This activity presents the opportunity for the teacher, to show the child that print carries meaning, how print is written, the names of letters and their sounds.
• QUESTIONING - Asking the child questions about letter sounds such as "What sound do you hear first? What comes next? etc.

• LETTER IDENTIFICATION - Show isolated letters ask the child to name it.

• LABELING - Label furniture and other objects around the classroom.

• NAME JAR AND DISPLAYS - Display children's names on their cubbies, lunch table, etc. Keep a "name jar," and pull a name card each time from a jar announcing "the child whose name I pull out of the jar can line up for the toilet" or "can choose your activity" etc. Show the name card to all the children and ask them to sound out the letters and come up with the name on the card. Teacher can assist if needed, but most children will recognize their own name.

• BOOK FEATURES - Before reading a book identify the title of the book, running the index finger along the words while reading loud, “This is the cover and the title of this book is little red hen.” Point to and identify the author and illustrator before you begin to read: “That's the name of the author he/she wrote the book. That's the illustrator's name he/she
drew the pictures in this book”.

- FINGER TRACKING - Turn the pages slowly and deliberately tracking each word from left to right with the index finger, while reading. His help makes children aware that reading progresses from left to right and top of the page to the bottom. At the end of a page ask the children “where should I begin to read now?”

- LOGOGRAPHIC PRINT - Have a basket of logos identifying environmental print such as Cheerios, McDonalds, stop sign, local grocery store, local clothing store, Pizza Hut etc.

- WRITING MATERIALS - Always have writing material in the pretend play and other center areas of the classroom for children to practice and explore.

**Shared Book Reading**

In the preschool classroom, opportunities should be provided for one to one reading, small group readings, and large group reading every day.
• WORD TRACKING - Read slowly and track each word you read with your index finger.

• WORDLESS PICTURE BOOKS - Show wordless picture books and ask the children to make up their own story by pointing to each picture.

• SOUND QUESTIONS - While shared reading, teacher can ask questions such as "what sound do you hear first when I say dog?" When the child has responded "yes, d d d," the teacher can ask the child to say another word that begins the same as dog?

• WORD COUNTING - Ask the children to count the words in the title or in a short sentence.

• WORD/LETTER IDENTIFICATION - Point to a word and ask what the beginning/ending letter is. Then ask for the sound of that letter. The teacher can ask other questions such as: What is this letter? Whose name begins with this letter? Is this a word or a letter? How many letters does this word have?

• **STORY EXTENSIONS** - Extend stories by changing the plot or substituting different animals for the characters in the story.

• **USE OF PROPS** - Always extend children's interests by bringing in props, books, posters, maps, and other objects related to the topic of interest.

• **WORD CARDS** - Introduce a few picture cards with matching phonic word card such as *dog, cat, pig, mop, sun etc.* Ask the child to name the picture and match it with the name word.

• **WORD MAKING** - Make a box of letters available to the children and encourage them to build simple phonetic words.

• **BOOK NOOK** - Create a cozy book area where children can relax, and browse thru a variety of books. Be sure to include story-books, science books, books written in other languages, books depicting ethnically diverse lifestyles of other cultures, encyclopedias and informational books that will arouse the curiosity of the child. Leave only a few of books in the area at a time, so as not to overwhelm the children with choice, and rotate the books periodically, so as to provide a variety of experiences.
- Speak clearly and use grammatically correct sentences. Avoid usage of slang words.

- Model for children how to express their ideas in complete sentences.

**Writing**

Children should be free to express their own ideas, interests and values in their writing. Regardless of differences in levels of sophistication of expression, understanding or materials used, children are furthering their understanding and knowledge of print and words when they express their thoughts in writing.

- **CLASSROOM WRITING MATERIALS** - Display a well-stocked, wide range of writing equipment and materials that appeal to children's interests and encourage creativity. This material should be displayed at the child's level and be easily accessible to every child. The materials should include blank writing paper, ruled writing paper, colored construction paper, writing boards and chalk boards, writing pencils, color
pencils, color crayons, washable felt-tip pens and chalk, paints and brushes, scissors, glue and paste.

- STORY WRITING AND DICTATION - Encourage children to draw or write their own stories, experiences, name etc. The teacher can ask questions such as: “Tell me what it says here, what does this say, tell me about this person you drew, who is that?” pointing to each part of the child’s writing. When a child draws a picture ask the child to explain the picture and write the child’s words on it. Recording children’s experiences as they narrate them is a powerful way to teach young children that print communicates through sound.

- WRITING FAMILIAR WORDS - Leave a box of small cards with a familiar word written on each. Encourage the child to examine them, write them, and attempt to read them. If the child asks what the word is read it to them.
## VI. Commonly Used Words in South Asian Languages

<table>
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<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Hindi</th>
<th>Telegu</th>
<th>Tamil</th>
<th>Urdu</th>
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<td>come here</td>
<td>yanha aao</td>
<td>ikkadiki raa</td>
<td>engawaa</td>
<td>ider aao</td>
<td>ekhane asho</td>
<td>mehe enda</td>
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<td>stop</td>
<td>ruk jao</td>
<td>aagu</td>
<td>nil / niruthu</td>
<td>ruko</td>
<td>thama</td>
<td>nawaththanna</td>
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<td>pee</td>
<td>soo-soo</td>
<td>soosoo</td>
<td>soo-soo</td>
<td>peshab</td>
<td>proshrab</td>
<td>choo</td>
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<td>sandas</td>
<td>kakka</td>
<td>aayah</td>
<td>kaho</td>
<td>kora</td>
<td>kakka</td>
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<td>sandas jao</td>
<td>vellu bath room</td>
<td>toilet po</td>
<td>bath room jao</td>
<td>paikhanay jao</td>
<td>bathroom yanda</td>
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<td>table</td>
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<td>table</td>
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<td>chair</td>
<td>putuwa</td>
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<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
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<td>don’t</td>
<td>rona</td>
<td>edvadu</td>
<td>azhatha</td>
<td>roe</td>
<td>kanna</td>
<td>adannna epa</td>
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<td>cry</td>
<td>nehi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>nahi</td>
<td>karona</td>
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<td>tuze</td>
<td>etthukona</td>
<td>thookikayu</td>
<td>godi</td>
<td>dharte</td>
<td>wadaaganne</td>
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<td>you?</td>
<td>pakadun</td>
<td></td>
<td>ma</td>
<td>a jao</td>
<td>pary</td>
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<td>amma</td>
<td>amma</td>
<td>ammi</td>
<td>maa</td>
<td>amma</td>
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<tr>
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<td>pita</td>
<td>nana</td>
<td>appa</td>
<td>baba</td>
<td>baaba</td>
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</table>
VII. Bibliography


Appendix B

Parent Input Questionnaire
Please provide the necessary information in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTIONS</th>
<th>ANSWERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Which Country are you from?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  What is your home Language (Mother Tongue)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  What language do you speak to your child at home? (Please list all).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Is your child exposed to English language?</td>
<td>Please indicate the ways in which your child is exposed to English:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Are there any other languages your child has been exposed to?</td>
<td>Family Conversations at home:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Television:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends or neighbors:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please list common words used by you and your child that will help the preschool teachers learn and use in the classroom to help your child make the transition from home to Preschool:
List of words

1. Milk
2. Water
3. Food
4. Thirsty
5. Hungry
6. Nap
7. Blanket
8. Play
9. Yes
10. No
11. Eat
12. Drink
13. Sit Down
14. Come here
15. Stop
16. Urinate
17. Bowel Movement
18. Go to the toilet
19. Table
20. Chair
21. Go to Bathroom
22. Don’t cry
23. Can I hold you?
24. Mom/Dad will come soon
25. Child’s Favorite Food
26. Child’s Favorite Drink
27. Child’s Favorite Toy

28. How do I ask your child “Is it hurting?” /”not well?”/ “Are you ok?”
Appendix C

Teacher Input Questionnaire
My name is Kumi Wickramasinghe. I am a graduate student at Sacramento State University. I am presently conducting research to compile a handbook for early childhood educators to be used as a curriculum guide that will enhance their knowledge of young children's language and literacy development and help teachers to acquire an appropriate and effective set of research based practices to support young children's early literacy learning. The content, strategies and resources in the handbook will address a variety of relevant questions prevailing in the language and literacy of young children, with a particular focus on supporting developing literacy for English language learners from South Asia.

The preschool years are an important opportunity for children to begin acquiring language and literacy skills in English. Today many preschool programs are enrolling children from many different cultural and language backgrounds. One such cultural and linguistic group is the growing number of preschool students from South Asian cultural and language groups. Often teachers do not have all the skills and knowledge required to support these children's literacy development. In addition, they often do not know much about the child's home language.

The purpose of this survey is to gain teachers' input about what kinds of information would be useful to you, that I could include in the curriculum guide.
1. The primary focus of the handbook will be on promoting children's language and literacy development. Please check ALL of the areas listed below for which you would like more information included in the curriculum guide:

___ vocabulary development
___ phonological and phonemic awareness
___ alphabet knowledge and print awareness
___ story reading and comprehension
___ cognitive processes involved in learning to read and write
___ strategies for supporting early literacy in English language learners
___ creating a literacy rich classroom environment
___ websites that provide information and materials related to literacy

2. Please list any other ideas or suggestions you have for topics, materials and resources to be included in the curriculum guide.

3. A second purpose of the curriculum guide is to provide teachers working with children from South Asian cultures information about the language background of these students.

Please check ALL of the areas listed below which you would like included in the curriculum guide:

___ key vocabulary words in the child's home language
___ pronunciation guide for commonly used words and phrases
___ a list of frequently used words or phrases (hello, come here, etc.)
___ commonly used adjectives, nouns, greeting, commands,
___ graphic alphabets for the language/s
___ suggested children's books
___ list of frequently used words and phrases in native language
___ cultural practices

4. Please list any other ideas or suggestions you have for topics, materials and resources related to children's cultural and language background which you would like included in the handbook.
References


knowledge. *Early Education and Development, 19*(4), 541-559. DOI: 10.1080/104092802230981


