Skill 1.1 Identify the content of emergent literacy (e.g., oral language development, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, decoding, concepts of print motivation, text structures, written language development)

Emergent literacy refers to a child’s speech and language development. It begins at birth and continues into the preschool years, during which time the child learns how to use and understand language in order to communicate. In the school age years, emergent literacy refers to the child’s connection between the spoken language and how it relates to reading and writing.

SEE also Skill 1.2 and 1.3

In 2000, the National Reading Panel released its now well-known report on teaching children to read. In a small way, this report put to rest the debate between phonics and whole language. It argued, essentially, that while word-letter recognition is important, understanding what the text means is equally important. The report’s “big 5” critical areas of reading instruction are as follows:

- Phonemic Awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Comprehension
- Vocabulary

Learn about the National Reading Panel

http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/
Areas of Emerging Evidence

1. Experiences with print (through reading and writing) help preschool children develop an understanding of the conventions, purposes, and functions of print. Children learn about print from a variety of sources and in the process come to realize that print carries the story. They also learn how text is structured visually (i.e., text begins at the top of the page, moves from left to right, and carries over to the next page when it is turned). While knowledge about the conventions of print enables children to understand the physical structure of language, the conceptual knowledge that printed words convey a message also helps children bridge the gap between oral and written language.

2. Phonological awareness and letter recognition contribute to initial reading acquisition by helping children develop efficient word recognition strategies (e.g., detecting pronunciations and storing associations in memory). Phonological awareness and knowledge of print-speech relations play an important role in facilitating reading acquisition. Therefore, phonological awareness instruction should be an integral component of early reading programs. Within the emergent literacy research, viewpoints diverge on whether acquisition of phonological awareness and letter recognition are preconditions of literacy acquisition or whether they develop interdependently with literacy activities such as story reading and writing.

3. Storybook reading affects children's knowledge about, strategies for, and attitudes towards reading. Of all the strategies intended to promote growth in literacy acquisition, none is as commonly practiced, nor as strongly supported across the emergent literacy literature as storybook reading. Children in different social and cultural groups have differing degrees of access to storybook reading. For example, it is not unusual for a teacher to have students who have experienced thousands of hours of story reading time, along with other students who have had little or no such exposure.
**Knowledge of Text Structure**

Often in non-fiction, particularly in textbooks, and sometimes in fiction, text structures give important clues to readers about what to look for. Often, students do not know how to make sense of all the headings in a textbook and do not realize that, for example, the side-bar story about a character in history is not the main text on a particular page in the history textbook. Teaching students how to interpret text structures gives them tools for tackling other similar texts.

**The Concepts of Print**

The concept that print carries meaning is demonstrated every day in the elementary classroom as the teacher holds up a selected book to read it aloud to the class. The teacher explicitly and deliberately thinks out loud about how to hold the book, how to focus the class on looking at its cover, where to start reading, and in what direction to begin. Even in writing the morning message on the board, the teacher provides a lesson on print concepts. The children see that the message is placed at the top of the board and then followed by additional activities and a schedule for the rest of the day.

When the teacher challenges children to take a single letter and make the items in the classroom, their home, or their knowledge base that start with that letter, the children are making the abstraction that print carries meaning concrete.

Teachers must look for the following five basic behaviors in students:

- Do students know how to hold the book?
- Can students match speech to print?
- Do students know the difference between letters and words?
- Do students know that print conveys meaning?
- Can students track print from left to right?

To understand concepts of print, students must be able to recognize text and understand the various mechanics that text contains. These mechanics include the following:

- All text contains a message.
- The English language has a specific structure.
- In order to decode words and read text, students must understand that structure.

When reading to students, teachers also discuss the common characteristics of books such as author, title page, and table of contents. Asking students to predict the story based on the cover teaches students about the importance of the book cover to the story. Pocket charts, big books, and song charts provide ample opportunity for teachers to point to words as they read.
**Instructional Strategies**

1. Using big books in the classroom

   The teacher gathers the children in a group with the big book placed on a stand so that all children can see the words and pictures. The teacher reads and points to each word. By using a pointer, the teacher does not cover any other words or part of the page. When students read from the big book on their own, they can also use the pointer for each word.

   When students begin reading from smaller books, they can transfer what they have learned about pointing to the words; they can use their fingers to track the reading. Observation is a key point in assessing a student’s ability to track words and speech.

2. A classroom rich in print

   Having words from a familiar rhyme or poem in a pocket chart lends itself to the following activity: the students arrange the words in the correct order and then read the rhyme. This instructional strategy reinforces concepts of print. It also reinforces punctuation and capitalization and matching print to speech.

   Using highlighters or sticky tabs to locate upper and lower case letters or specific words can help students isolate words and develop concepts about the structure of language that they need for reading.

   The classroom should have plenty of books for children to read on their own or in small groups. While students read on their own, the teacher should note how the child holds the book and tracks and reads the words.

3. Word Wall

   The use of a word wall is a great teaching tool for words in isolation and with writing. Each of the letters of the alphabet is displayed with words under each one that begin with that letter. Students are able to find the letter on the wall and read the words under each one.

4. Sounds of the letters

   In addition to letter names, students should learn the corresponding sound of each letter. This skill is a key feature of decoding when a student is beginning to read. The use of rhyming words is an effective way to teach letter sounds.
Teachers should expose students to daily opportunities for viewing and reading texts. By engaging the students in discussions about books during shared, guided, and independent reading times, teachers provide this exposure. The teacher should draw the students' attention to the conventions of print and discuss with them the reasons for choosing different books. For example, teachers should let the students know that it is perfectly acceptable to return a book and select another if they think the first book is too hard for them.

Predictable books help engage the students in reading. Once the students realize which words are repeated in the text, they will eagerly chime in to repeat the words at the appropriate time during the reading. Rereading of texts helps the students learn the words and helps them read these lines fluently.

**Development of Oral Language**

Oral language begins to develop during the earliest vocal interactions in fact with their caregivers and it is an ongoing process. Through their youngest years, children observe oral communication in their home, their schools, and their interactions with others. During the preschool years, children acquire cognitive skills in oral language that they later apply to reading comprehension. Reading aloud to young children is one of the most important things that an adult can do because adults are teaching them how to monitor, question, predict, and confirm what they hear in the stories.

Oral language is said to develop in three stages: Protolinguistic, Transition, and Language. Around the time a child learns to crawl, they are often also in the protolinguistic phase of oral development which includes baby noises, physical movements, and interactions with others. In the Transition phase (around the time the child begins to walk), the child begins to move beyond baby language in order to mimic words and sounds in their native tongue. Finally in the final stage, Language, the child is able to communicate about shared experiences with another. They are aware that there is more in the world than just what they experience, and they can begin to use language to learn and share about the experiences of others.

Once the Language Phase is reached, children can then begin to see how language, in all of its forms, plays a role in the world around them. Reid (Reid 1988, p. 165) described four metalinguistic abilities that young children acquire through early involvement in reading activities:

1. Word consciousness. Children who have access to books can tell the story through the pictures before they can read. Gradually they begin to realize the connection between the spoken words and the printed words. The beginning of letter and word discrimination begins in the early years.
2. Language and conventions of print. During this stage children learn how to hold a book, where to begin to read and the left to right motion, and how to continue from one line to another.

3. Functions of print. Children discover that print can be used for a variety of purposes and functions, including entertainment and information.

4. Fluency. Through listening to adult models, children learn to read in phrases and use intonation.

**Motivation**

Readiness for subject area learning is dependent not only on prior knowledge, but also on affective factors such as interest, motivation, and attitude. These factors are often more influential on student learning than the pre-existing cognitive base. Since motivation is essential to student learning, instructors should recognize and understand the important elements of student motivation.

Motivation can be put within the activity to encourage the child without direct intervention of an adult. Self-motivation is the best tool for learning. Children need to challenge themselves through constant exploration and experimentation. The activity should suit the developmental age of the child so that he/she can perform it with minimal outside assistance. An adult should act as an assistant who provides help only when it is required.

For more information on **decoding**, **alphabet knowledge** and **phonological awareness**, SEE Skill 2.1

For more information on the **development of writing**, SEE Skill 4.1
Skill 1.2 Identify instructional methods for developing emergent literacy

Strategies for Promoting Awareness of the Relationship between Spoken and Written Language

- Write down what the children are saying on a chart.
- Highlight and celebrate the meanings, uses, and print products found in the classroom. These products include: posters, labels, yellow sticky pad notes, labels on shelves and lockers, calendars, rule signs, and directions.
- Intentionally read big-print and oversized books to teach print conventions such as directionality.
- Use practice exercises in reading to others (for K-1/2), where young children practice how to handle a book, how to turn pages, how to find tops and bottoms of pages, and how to tell the difference between the front and back covers of a book.
- Create search and discuss adventures in word awareness and close observation where children are challenged to identify and talk about the length, appearance, and boundaries of specific words and the letters that comprise them.
- Have children match oral words to printed words by forming an echo chorus. As the teacher reads the story aloud, they echo the reading. Often this works best with poetry or rhymes.
- Have the children combine, manipulate, switch, and move letters to change words and spelling patterns.
- Work with letter cards to create messages and respond to the messages that the children create.

Methods used to teach these skills are often featured in a “balanced literacy” curriculum that focuses on the use of skills in various instructional contexts. For example, with independent reading, students independently choose books that are at their reading levels; with guided reading, teachers work with small groups of students to help them with their particular reading problems; with whole group reading, the entire class will read the same text, and the teacher will incorporate activities to help students learn phonics, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary. In addition to these components of balanced literacy, teachers incorporate writing so that students can learn the structures of communicating through text.

For more information on Balanced Literacy

http://comsewogue.k12.ny.us/~rstewart/k2002/Teachers/Balanced_Literacy/balancedliteracy.htm
Design Principles and Instructional Strategies for Emergent Literacy

Conspicuous Strategies
As an instructional priority, conspicuous strategies are a sequence of teaching events and teacher actions used to help students learn new literacy information and relate it to their existing knowledge. Conspicuous strategies can be incorporated in beginning reading instruction to ensure that all learners have basic literacy concepts. For example, during storybook reading, teachers can show students how to recognize the fronts and backs of books, locate titles, or look at pictures and predict the story, rather than assume children will learn this through incidental exposure. Similarly, teachers can teach students a strategy for holding a pencil appropriately or checking the form of their letters against an alphabet sheet on their desks or the classroom wall.

Mediated Scaffolding
Mediated scaffolding can be accomplished in a number of ways to meet the needs of students with diverse literacy experiences. To link oral and written language, for example, teachers may use texts that simulate speech by incorporating oral language patterns or children’s writing. Teachers can also use daily storybook reading to discuss book-handling skills and directionality - concepts that are particularly important for children who are unfamiliar with printed texts. Repeated readings will provide students with multiple exposures to unfamiliar words or extended opportunities to look at books with predictable patterns, as well as provide support by modeling the behaviors associated with reading. Teachers can act as scaffolds during these storybook reading activities by adjusting their demands (e.g., asking increasingly complex questions or encouraging children to take on portions of the reading) or by reading more complex text as students gain knowledge of beginning literacy components.

Strategic Integration
Many children with diverse literacy experiences have difficulty making connections between old and new information. Strategic integration can be applied to help link old and new learning. In the classroom, strategic integration can be accomplished by providing access to literacy materials in classroom writing centers and libraries. Students should also have opportunities to integrate and extend their literacy knowledge by reading aloud, listening to other students read aloud, and listening to tape recordings and videotapes in reading corners.
Primed Background Knowledge
All children bring some level of background knowledge (e.g., how to hold a book, awareness of directionality of print) to beginning reading. Teachers can utilize children’s background knowledge to help children link their personal literacy experiences to beginning reading instruction, while also closing the gap between students with rich and students with impoverished literacy experiences. Activities that draw upon background knowledge include incorporating oral language activities (which discriminate between printed letters and words) into daily read-alouds, as well as frequent opportunities to retell stories, looking at books with predictable patterns, writing messages with invented spellings, and responding to literature through drawing.

Emergent Literacy
Emergent literacy research examines early literacy knowledge and the contexts and conditions that foster that knowledge. Despite differing viewpoints on the relation between emerging literacy skills and reading acquisition, strong support was found in the literature for the important contribution that early childhood exposure to oral and written language makes to the facility with which children learn to read. SEE Skill 1.1 for areas of emerging research.

Reading for comprehension of factual material—content area textbooks, reference books, and newspapers—is closely related to study strategies in the middle/junior high. Organized study models, such as the SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review) method, a technique that makes it possible and feasible to learn the content of even large amounts of text, teach students to locate main ideas and supporting details, to recognize sequential order, to distinguish fact from opinion, and to determine cause/effect relationships.

Instructional Strategies

1. Teacher-guided activities that require students to organize and to summarize information based on the author’s explicit intent are pertinent strategies in middle grades. Evaluation techniques include oral and written responses to standardized or teacher-made worksheets.

2. Reading of fiction introduces and reinforces skills in inferring meaning from narration and description. Teacher-guided activities in the process of reading for meaning should be followed by cooperative planning of the skills to be studied and of the selection of reading resources. Many printed reading-for-comprehension instruments as well as individualized computer software programs exist to monitor the progress of acquiring comprehension skills.
3. Older middle school students should be given opportunities for more student-centered activities, individual and collaborative selection of reading choices based on student interest, small group discussions of selected works, and greater written expression. Evaluation techniques include teacher monitoring and observation of discussions and written work samples.

4. Certain students may begin some fundamental critical interpretation: recognizing fallacious reasoning in news media, examining the accuracy of news reports and advertising, and explaining their reasons for preferring one author’s writing to another’s. Development of these skills may require a more learning-centered approach in which the teacher identifies a number of objectives and suggested resources from which the student may choose his course of study. Self-evaluation through a reading diary should be stressed. Teacher and peer evaluation of creative projects resulting from such study is encouraged.

5. Reading aloud before the entire class as a formal means of teacher evaluation should be phased out in favor of one-to-one tutoring or peer-assisted reading. Occasional sharing of favored selections by both teacher and willing students is a good oral interpretation basic.

**Emergent Literacy Links:**

- [http://idea.uoregon.edu/~ncite/documents/techrep/tech20.html](http://idea.uoregon.edu/~ncite/documents/techrep/tech20.html)
Skill 1.3 Identify common difficulties in emergent literacy development

Literacy refers to oral language, reading, and writing activities, all of which are intertwined. Emergent literacy is the concept that young children are emerging into reading and writing with no real ending or beginning point. This stage of reading development occurs when the reader understands that print contains a consistent message. Reading to children strengthens oral language and introduces them to various forms of discourse such as stories, fairy tales, and poetry. Reading signs, labels, or thank you notes helps them understand relationships between oral and written language and emphasizes meaning.

The approach for many emergent readers focuses on the idea that children develop their ability to construct meaning by sharing books they care about with responsive peers and adults. Some characteristics of emerging readers include 1) the emergent reader can attend to left-to-right directionality and features of print, 2) an emergent reader can identify some initial sounds and ending sounds in words, 3) the reader can recognize some high-frequency words, names, and simple words in context, and 4) pictures can be used to predict meaning.

As young students enter and work through this stage of literacy, the teacher may notice some common difficulties. Some of these common problems include:

- Difficulty in processing information
- Frustration with not being able to understand the text
- Word recognition
- Limited vocabulary hindering comprehension
- Poor visual-motor integration
- Printing difficulties

Sometimes young students experiencing emergent literacy difficulties do not like being read to because they cannot process all of the information at once. In these cases, we suggest that parents and teachers read the pictures and reduce the language level so that the child comprehends the text. The extensive reading of pictures can build vocabulary acquisition, descriptive language, and the basis for simple narratives. From a single action picture (e. g., a child eating a bowl of Cheerios), a teacher can ask countless questions about the bowl, the cereal, how the cereal might taste, the kinds of cereal the child does or does not like, as well as simple inferential questions.
In order to strengthen whole word recognition teachers and parents can read to children and ask them to find letters or words that look the same. For an independent activity, students can cut out a page from an old magazine and then circle the words that look the same. Teachers might also highlight a high frequency word such as the, and ask the student to find others that look the same. Early writing is also an important part of emergent literacy.

Many preschoolers enjoy pretend writing, which is an important part of literacy development. Invented spelling is also encouraged as a part of meaningful writing which is an essential step in developmental spelling. The student is beginning to identify certain sounds and associating them with letters. However, many young children with emergent learning difficulties may have problems with visual-motor integration. In this case, teachers may purchase or make templates (stencils) from cardboard so the child can trace inside the boundaries making basic shapes and simple outlines of figures such as an apple, a kite, or a fish. Parents and teachers can also assist by having children draw figures in sand, make designs with finger paint, etc. Still, some young children may not be able to grasp a pencil or draw even the simplest figures. In these cases, an occupational therapist or specialist in learning disabilities may be needed.

The typical variation in literacy backgrounds that children bring to reading can make teaching more difficult. Often a teacher has to choose between focusing on the learning needs of a few students at the expense of the group and focusing on the group at the risk of leaving some students behind academically.

**Skill 1.4 Identify methods for prevention of and intervention for common emergent literacy difficulties**

For students experiencing problems with concentration, make sure their desks are away from distractions and that their overall learning environment is comfortable and well lit. Try to encourage the student to work for set amounts of time, and then as the student’s concentration improves, increase the amounts of time.

To help students to select appropriate reading material, it is often helpful to organize your classroom library by level. For example, simpler texts may be labeled with a yellow dot, grade-level texts may be labeled with a red dot, and challenging texts may be labeled with a green dot. This helps students see which books may best suit their comfortable reading needs.
Books can be considered one of three levels for each student: Easy, Just Right, or Challenging. Students should be encouraged to read mostly books that are a “just right” fit for them. Matching young children with “just right” books fosters their reading independently, no matter how young they are. The teacher needs to have an extensive classroom library of books. Books with which emergent readers and early readers can be matched should have fairly large print, appropriate spacing (so that the reader can easily see where word begins and ends), and few words on each page so that the young reader can focus on all-important concerns of top-to-bottom, left-to-right, directionality, and the one-to-one match of oral to print.

Students should be permitted to read easy books once in a while, as well as receive support in reading challenging books from time to time. In a reading log or journal, students can record titles of books they’ve read and the level of the books. This way, teachers can monitor the reading to ensure that a student is meeting the individual reading needs.

When students become frustrated and feel they don’t understand the text, encourage them to break down the text into chunks. Then, after each chunk, encourage the students to ask themselves questions about what they have read to improve understanding.

Limited vocabulary can often get in the way of a student’s comprehension of a text. Have the students focus on the structure of words to help decode unfamiliar words. A helpful tip is for students to record new words in a notebook to create a personal glossary for each student. This way, students can refer to a dictionary with their list of words when necessary to help build their vocabulary.

**Additional Strategies**

Reading aloud to children helps them acquire information and skills such as the meaning of words, how a book works, a variety of writing styles, information about their world, differences between conversations and written language, and the knowledge of printed letters and words along with the relationship between sound and print. Using different types of books assures that each child will find at least a few books that meet his or her interests and preferences.

Children’s storybooks are traditional favorites for many young students. Some children may prefer to see books that have informational text, such as those about animals, nature, transportation, careers, or travel. Alphabet books, picture dictionaries, and books with diagrams and overlays (such as those about the human body) catch the interest of children as well. Some children particularly enjoy books containing poetry, children’s songs and verses, or folktales. Offering different types of books also gives flexibility in choosing one or two languages in which to read a story.
Illustrations for young children should support the meaning of the text and language patterns, and predictable text structures should make these texts appealing to young readers. Illustrations can be key supports for emergent and early readers. Teachers should not only use wordless stories (books which tell their narratives through pictures alone), but can also make targeted use of Big Books for read-alouds, so that young children become habituated in the use of illustrations as an important component for constructing meaning. The teacher should model for the child how to reference an illustration for help in identifying a word in the text the child does not recognize.

The content of the story should relate to the children’s interests and experiences, as the teacher knows them. The story should include lots of monosyllabic words and lots of rhyming ones. Finally, children, particularly the emergent and beginning early readers, benefit from reading books with partners. The partners sit side by side and each one takes turns reading the entire text. Only after all these considerations have been addressed, can the teacher select “just right” books from an already leveled bin or list.

**Children with Special Needs**

Introducing language and literacy experiences through concrete, multisensory approaches will provide many children with disabilities with the supports they need to build the necessary foundation for decoding words and understanding meaning. Having access to early literacy activities as part of the curriculum is key to the educational success of all children, including children with mild to severe disabilities. Each child’s unique learning needs should be considered in a comprehensive approach to early literacy.