

Play-Based Learning in Early Childhood Classrooms



A teacher's role is to be a facilitator or "guide on the side." They create an appropriate learning environment, ask guiding questions, set up investigations and challenges, offer ideas, and give feedback. While children play, teachers are hard at work observing, documenting, assessing learning, and planning for the next "just right" experience.

Play-based learning is not simply free play all day with no rules. Instead, teachers set clear rules and boundaries, and stick to consistent routines so that there is no need to "control" children's behaviors. When children actively engage in meaningful play, they build self-regulation and cognitive flexibility.

Lexia® LETRS® for Early Childhood Educators and Play-Based Learning

Unit 1, Session 1

- * Research highlights the importance of developmentally appropriate teaching strategies within playful learning and intentional play. The hallmark of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is intentionality.

Unit 1, Session 2

- * Assessment characteristics: The use of nonstandardized assessments allows educators to observe children in their natural environments, such as a learning center or play area.
- * Predictive indicators across the developmental domains: Self-regulation is the internal mechanism that underlies intentional and thoughtful behavior.

Unit 2, Session 6

- * Show and Tell: The use of less structured times, such as intentional free play, encourages children to extend their ideas and use new or novel vocabulary in conversations.

Intentionally helping young children develop self-regulation leads to growth in other executive functioning skills and in all of the developmental domains.

Unit 3, Session 8

- * Initial sounds: Focus on initial sounds and building upon these during the day.
 - I.e., play with children's names and point out things that begin with the same initial sound as their names. Or, in a guessing game, say, "I'm thinking of something (or someone) that starts with . . . [say a speech sound]" or, "I need someone whose name starts with . . . [say a speech sound]."
- * Activities across the linguistic hierarchy: Use games and the existing environment to segment words at appropriate linguistic levels.

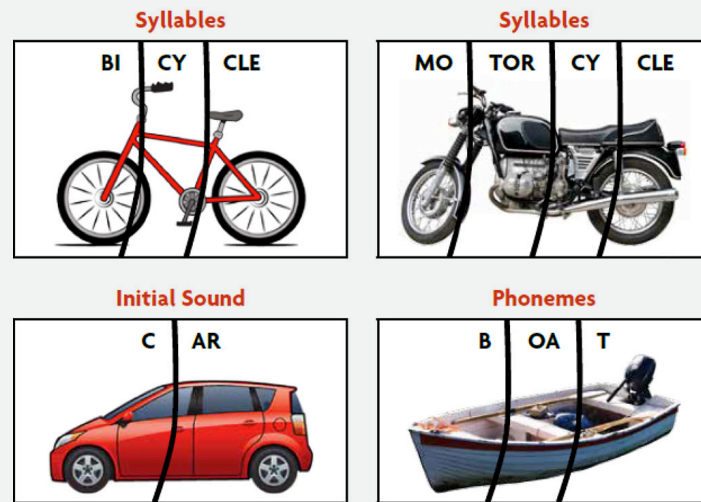


Figure 3.5 Picture Puzzle Formats for Blending and Segmenting

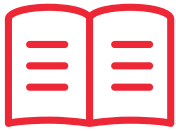
Unit 4, Session 9

- * Intentionally draw children's attention to symbols: Using students' environment, educators can provide many opportunities to engage in play that incorporates literacy tools.
- * Embed ABC and XYZ instruction: Educators can expose children to letters through different media forms—alphabet puzzles, letter-shaped cookie-cutters for pushing into Play-Doh, and magnetic letters. They can also play matching and memory games with individual letters written on cards.

Unit 4 Session 10

- * The progression of children's writing: Along with learning about the concepts of print and the alphabet, young children also learn how print works in writing. When they see others pick up a pen or pencil and write, they want to do the same. Much of their "writing" is a kind of exploratory play.
- * Writing activity examples: There are many opportunities to embed writing into everyday routines in early childhood classrooms. Children should have regular opportunities to write their names, write alphabet letters to learn how to shape them, play with letters in making words, and otherwise use their "kid" writing.

Benefits of Play-Based Learning in Early Childhood



Enhanced literacy skills

By integrating literacy into play, children develop foundational skills in a way that feels natural and enjoyable. This approach helps build a strong base for future reading and writing success.



Holistic development

Play-based learning supports all areas of development, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical. This holistic approach ensures that children are well-rounded and prepared for the challenges of formal education.



Increased motivation and engagement

When learning is fun and relevant, children are more motivated and engaged. This positive attitude towards learning can lead to better outcomes and a lifelong love of education.

Learn more about Lexia® LETRS® for Early Childhood Educators and how play-based learning can create a rich, engaging, and supportive learning environment for children.