

by UPAT Parent Educator/Supervisor Connie Cook

Vernal Family Center

Literacy is a passion for me. Always has been, always will be. I have long realized that reading is everything related to learning. And that if you can incorporate learning literacy in fun ways when the child is very young; their ability to read then progresses almost naturally from those fun skills, into those that add more complex skills once they start school.

Early childhood professionals have long known the many benefits there are to physical activity, play, and learning. One thing they have keyed into is that young children are natural learners; that they need to move, and when they move they often learn along the way.

They often need to experience some concepts using their whole bodies to understand those concepts completely. So how does literacy play a part in all of the fun? ~ Research shows that there are six pre-reading skills that must be acquired before a child can learn to read. What are the six early reading skills?

1. **Vocabulary** - Knowing the names of things.
2. **Print motivation** - Being interested in and enjoying books.
3. **Print awareness** - Noticing print, how to handle a book, how to follow words on a page.
4. **Letter knowledge** - Knowing letters are different from each other, knowing their names and sounds.
5. **Narrative Skills** - Being able to describe things and events, and tell stories.
6. **Phonological awareness** - Being able to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words.

Following are some ideas you could, and possibly should, use that incorporate movement and active learning to promote these early emergent literacy skills.

1. Babies and young children retain language better when it is based on repetition. Finger-plays teach **vocabulary**. ~ These songs have repetition built in, and finger-plays are interactive, that keep the hands and fingers moving, and the songs help **vocabulary** to be retained better.

2. Print Motivation ~ If you begin very soon after a baby is born, and “read” to them daily, as they become toddlers, then preschoolers; reading is a part of their routine. Even if they run around as you read the story, they are still listening, and love the rhythm of your voice. “Stopping by” now and then, to have a “peek” at the pictures and words in the book. Their interest in books increases very easily and naturally. But don't stop reading; just because they won't sit still. Listening is an important literacy skill, as well, and who said you **HAD** to sit to listen; especially for little boys. They still learn about print in many other ways; environmental print is when they see words written in our communities, in the grocery stores as we run errands, at the Drs. Office, etc. Just point words out to them.

3. Singing brings a natural awareness of words, **Print Awareness**, as each syllable or sound in a word gets a different note. Young children notice print, they often understand it links to words they hear; when they follow print to learned nursery rhymes it helps them to connect the words with the music. Music is natural with most children; so as you sing the nursery rhyme with your child, show her the words in a book, they “read” along with you. Moving to a new word gives that word even more meaning to a young child.

4. Letter knowledge ~ Learning the ABC (Alphabet) song when young, you can also teach them the letters with their bodies, or with ASL (sign) Language. Along the way you incorporate the letter name and letter sound. Even very young children love to “ggg” for the letter “g” and possibly act out the movements of an animal that starts with that letter. Often they don't even notice that they are learning.

5. As infants, toddlers, and preschoolers learn action songs and finger-plays, they are also learning **narrative skills**, as they understand what comes next in the song. What fun it is to anticipate the “bzzz” of the bee in “Here is the Beehive”, or the “rain” falling in “Enzy, Wenzly Spider”, or “tickle time” in “This Little Piggy”. Then they learn what fun “retelling” it with you is, then on their own as they “act” it out.

6. Phonological Awareness ~ Adding music is a natural way to incorporate moving, and movements into some structured play, that helps them to understand how words are made up of different sounds. As you sing songs with them, syllables flow naturally with each note you sing; breaking down the different sounds the word makes.

VISIT: http://library.utah.gov/utah_kids/index.htm for more information on these reading skills.

But most of all . . . let your child move around as they learn any new skill, when possible. That learning then has more meaning to him/her, and they will retain what they have learned better. Using many areas of the brain simultaneously helps that learning to happen. You can't stop your child from learning, but what they are learning can depend very much on you. So move with them, and have fun with your child at the same time; maybe both of you will learn something along the way.