Overall, the **Foundations of Literacy Study** found that early childhood teachers can play a crucial role in fostering young children’s emerging literacy and language skills. Teachers strengthen children’s skills when they

- Value their role in children’s literacy and language development
- Regularly engage children in literacy and language enhancing activities
- Organize the classroom to support literacy and language
- Actively engage parents in the school
- Are role models for literacy

**About the Study**

The Foundations of Literacy Study was conducted through a grant from the Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station, NEV00625. This report was written by Dan Weigel and Sally Martin, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.

**For More Information...**

The foundation for literacy is set during the preschool years. It is during this time that young children develop the skills that will help them be successful in school and in life. “Although reading and writing abilities continue to develop throughout life, the early childhood years—from birth through age 8—are the most important period of literacy development” (Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children.) We know that...

Children’s literacy refers to their developing ability to read and write, as well as talk and listen. These skills develop together.

Children’s literacy and language skills are some of the strongest predictors of school success and reduced involvement in at-risk behaviors. Unfortunately, not all children get off to the same start.

The foundation for literacy is set during the preschool years. Some children have many opportunities to develop language skills, gain knowledge of the forms and functions of written language, and practice their emerging literacy skills, while others lack these experiences.

The child care setting can play a vital role in the development of preschool children. Over one in three children in Nevada ages 3 to 4 attend licensed child care centers, preschools or family care homes. Many others are cared for by relatives, neighbors, babysitters and nannies.

The quality of child care in the preschool years has been shown to benefit children’s performance in areas that relate to school success. Early childhood teachers have the opportunity to ensure that young children reach their potential as readers and writers.

Purpose
The purpose was to identify the key aspects of the home and child care settings that most strongly foster young children’s literacy and language skills. The study took place in western Nevada and was funded by a grant from the Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station.

Participants
Participants included 56 teachers and 150 families (parents and children) from 56 child care classrooms.

What data we collected
We examined a variety of aspects of the home and child care settings, including:

- the characteristics of parents and teachers that help set the environment within which literacy and language takes place
- aspects of parent and teacher activities that expose children to models of literacy, such as adults’ own reading enjoyment and behavior
- parental and teacher efforts that directly involve children in activities that foster literacy or language development, such as shared book reading and language activities
- the types of beliefs and attitudes parents and teachers hold about children’s literacy and language development

For children we used standardized assessments of their:

- knowledge of print
- emergent writing
- expressive language
- receptive language

How we collected the data
We collected data from children who were at least 3 years of age but not yet in kindergarten, as well as from their parents and early childhood teachers. Teachers were recruited first, and then distributed flyers inviting families in their classrooms to participate in the study. Teachers were interviewed and answered questionnaires in their classroom. Most family interviews took place in homes. We interviewed families initially and then again one year later to check for lasting impacts.

For more detail on the study, see:
Children do better when teachers and parents form a strong partnership.

Supportive Family-Center Connection

Children do better when teachers become good role models for literacy and language.

Teacher Characteristics

Children do better when teachers report that parents...

- Help in the classroom
- Participate in discussions or parent-teacher conferences
- Bring snacks for all the children in classroom
- Help with newsletters
- Act as guest speakers
- Participate on advisory or parent boards

Children do better when teachers...

- Feel effective and satisfied about their conversations with parents

The Study

We assessed the early literacy and language skills of preschool-aged children (ages 3-5) in 56 early childhood classrooms in western Nevada. We examined children’s speaking and listening skills, concepts of books and print, interest in reading and beginning reading skills. We also interviewed the early childhood teachers.

On average, these teachers...

- Had been in the field a little over 8 years
- Had been at their present child care center over 3 years
- Were 35 years old
- Were high school graduates with some college or additional training

We found that five key early childhood factors lead to improvement in children's skills.

Literacy & Language Development

Classroom Literacy & Language Activities

Classroom Routines & Activities

TeacherBeliefs

TeacherCharacteristics

Supportive Family-Center Connection
Children do better when teachers...

**Believe in the importance of reading.**
These teachers believe that...
- Children learn new words, colors, names, etc. from books
- Reading helps children become better talkers and listeners
- Stories help build children's imagination
- Children learn lessons and morals from stories
- Reading helps children learn about things they may never see in real life
- Children learn important life skills from books
- Children are never too young to learn about books

**Believe that sharing books with children is fun.**
These teachers believe that...
- Reading with children is enjoyable
- Reading with children is a special time to share
- Reading with children is a time to feel close
- It is interesting and fun to read to children

**Believe in the importance of the teacher's role.**
These teachers believe that...
- Children learn many important things from them
- There is much they can do to help children get ready to do well in school
- They have the abilities to help children learn
- They can help children increase their early literacy and language skills
- Helping children develop strong literacy and language skills is one of the most important things they do as early childhood teachers

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**Children do better when teachers use specific techniques to help them get the most out of books.**

**Classroom Literacy & Language Activities**

- Read to children often (once or twice a day)
- Enjoy reading books with children
- Let children help pick out books to read
- Make sure all children can see the book
- Try to sound enthusiastic when reading so the children stay interested
- Talk about the pictures in the book
- Encourage children to help tell the story
- Allow children to ask questions about the book
- Try to make the story real to the children by relating it to their lives
- Ask children questions about the story
- Extend the reading with follow-up literacy and language activities

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**Children do better when teachers organize the classroom to encourage children's literacy and language development.**

**Classroom Routines & Activities**

- Plan regular time during the day to read to children
- Have lots of books to read
- Have a quiet place in the classroom for reading
- Allow children to look at books and read on their own
- Allow children to do literacy and language activities on their own
- Encourage children to draw, color and write