Research Connections conducted a comprehensive search of its collection for resources focused on precursors to early literacy. This Key Topic Resource List includes an overview of the early literacy literature, as well as a listing of selected resources on the topic.

Search results are grouped into four broad areas:

- Reviews and Evaluations
- Early Skills and Oral Language
- Home Environment
- Social Emotional Factors and Play

From the many results, Research Connections selected a limited number of resources of various types including reports and papers, executive summaries, and reviews. Selection criteria included topic relevance and relatively recent publication. The full results came from basic searches on each of the following terms: “predictors of conventional literacy”, “emergent literacy”, “early literacy”, “play and literacy”, and “precursors to literacy.”

Within each category, resources are organized according to publisher type and publication date. Research Connection’s one-sentence description is included for each resource on the following list. For complete citations, which include abstracts and full text for some resources, click on the titles.
Overview:

Precursors to early literacy has become a prominent research topic, particularly with schools’ heightened accountability under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Children are encouraged to enter kindergarten with more advanced skills that facilitate the process of learning to read. Research supports that pre-reading skills are built through a broad range of early developmental experiences including--a child’s play which establishes language and communication, nurturing adult (and peer) relationships which lay a strong socio-emotional foundation for learning, and through activities such as shared reading.

Precursors to early literacy are children’s activities and behaviors related to reading and writing before they can actually read and write, including talking, singing, and looking at story books (e.g. holding them properly and ‘pretending’ to read). Programs like Head Start incorporate a variety of classroom-based literacy interventions--often with parental involvement components--to teach children preliteracy skills so they are “ready to learn” when they arrive in kindergarten. These interventions include a strong focus on academic skills such as letter and word recognition, and phonemic awareness instruction (i.e. associating letters and syllables with speech sounds). Other programs look to home interventions and even library-based interventions to lay the foundation for early literacy.

The research on precursors and early literacy includes questions such as the following:

- What specific strategies are successful in improving children’s language and literacy skills during the preschool years and beyond?
- What role can public libraries play in improving children’s literacy skills?
- What is the relationship between early childhood literacy experiences and later reading acquisition? How are literacy and oral language related?
- What types of home literacy activities are children exposed to and how do these early experiences contribute to early literacy and later reading acquisition?
- What is the relationship between socio-emotional development, dramatic play (e.g. housekeeping and kitchen area play, dress up), and literacy development?
Reviews and Evaluations

**Government**

  A report evaluating the effects of library exposure on Pennsylvania children's literacy development, using both qualitative and quantitative data.

  A summary and critical evaluation of the research literature related to beginning reading skills, including environments and early developmental interactions.

**Journal**

  A review of current research findings on the development of skilled reading in early elementary grades, its developmental precursors, and advances in the early identification of children at risk for reading difficulties.

**University and Research Organizations**

  A review of research assessing the impact of programs to promote language and emergent literacy among young children.

  A literature review examining developments in emergent literacy research.

  An examination of current prekindergarten benchmarks and their appropriateness for building literacy curriculum and assessing children’s language and literacy competence.
Early Skills and Oral Language

Journal

  A summary of the results from a longitudinal study observing young children in their homes from 7-9 months to 3 years to determine which factors in early experience might account for the development of vocabulary skills.

  An examination of how young children's preliteracy knowledge and early literacy experiences affect their literacy skills at age seven.

  Explores the role of oral language in reading competence during the transition to school as well as a discussion of how best to conceptual ‘oral language’ in this context.

  A longitudinal study of African American children’s language and reading development to examine the relations among phonological awareness, language skills, print processing skills, and reading development in prekindergarten and in second grade.

  An evaluation of Head Start preschool children's vocabularies, phonological sensitivities, and print knowledge to examine the relationship between oral language and developing literacy.

  A discussion of strategies for using literacy routines to develop and improve infants, toddlers, and preschool children’s emergent literacy skills.

  An exploration of the predictive significance of the oral language, print knowledge and phonological sensitivity for later emergent literacy and reading.
University and Research Organizations

  A policy brief synthesizing research on early literacy and offering early literacy policy recommendations.

Other

  An analysis of the contribution of oral vocabulary skills to phonological awareness, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension in children from kindergarten through grade 3.

  An article exploring the influence of different skill domains on the development of early literacy.

  An article exploring the interrelationship between oral language complexity and literacy development.

  An examination of the primary factors affecting literacy development, specifically the role of language skills in the process of literacy acquisition.

Home Environment

Journal

  An examination of the relationship between home environment and social risk factors and children's early literacy and social functioning.


**Other**


Social Emotional Factors and Play

Journal


- **Ostrosky, Michaelene, Gaffney, Janet S., and Thomas, Dawn V. (2006).** The interplay between literacy and relationships in early childhood settings. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, 22*(2), 173 – 191. A discussion of strategies to help emphasize the interplay between literacy and relationships (with peers and adults) in order to support young children's emergent literacy.

- **Miles, Sarah B., & Stipek, Deborah J. (2006).** Contemporaneous and longitudinal associations between social behavior and literacy achievement in a sample of low-income elementary school children. *Child Development, 77*(1), 103-117. A longitudinal study following low-income children from kindergarten through fifth grade to explore the relation between aggression and prosocial behavior and literacy achievement.


University and Research Organizations


Other


A review of studies on the interaction between children’s dramatic play and literacy development, including the role of adult engagement, in the context of evolving theoretical perspectives on play.

To suggest additions to this Key Topic Resource List, please email us at contact@researchconnections.org.

To view and sort the full search results from which these resources were selected, you may use the Recreate Complete Search function.

This Key Topic Resource List was developed by staff of Child Care & Early Education Research Connections. Special thanks to intern Andrea Anushko and Lisa Klein, Principle of Hestia Advising.