

# Using Preschool Literacy Environments to Develop Emergent Literacy of Children from 5 to 6 Years Old

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**ABSTRACT----** *A study was conducted on using literacy environment to develop children's emergent literacy with the participation of 32 teachers from 4 preschools in Hanoi including: Viet Uc, Hoa Mi, Quang Trung, Van Phuc. This survey uses questionnaires, ideas sharing and attendance in activities organized by teachers showed that; emergent literacy development is one of the most important duties of preschool before children receive formal literacy introduction in 1st grade. In many different methods, literacy environment is the most effective method to develop children's emergent literacy so that the teachers should build a literacy rich environment and utilize by suitable teaching methods so that children could get early interactions and experiences in that environment.*

**Keywords ----** preschool, environment, education, literacy, children

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Literacy is crucial to future school success. It is the foundation of learning and growing up with both knowledge and life skills for each student. It is also very necessary in the whole life as a tool of communication, activities and achievements in the literacy society, in long-life learning and in an intellectual economy. Before starting school, children begin to learn writing. However, the preparation should be in early childhood – preschool age. Preschool does not teach children how to write but prepare emergent literacy for children. This duty is performed in many different educational activities in which using literacy environments is an effective approach. In this paper, we share approaches to develop the emergent literacy of children at ages of 5 to 6 by using preschool literacy environments.

## 2. BACKGROUND

In 1996, educational researcher Marie Clay from New Zealand used the term of emergent literacy to describe how young children interact with books and materials and tools to intimate adults' reading and writing even though they could not read or write in the conventional sense [3].

Recent researches indicate that reading and writing development begin in early childhood, before the formal introduction of reading and writing in elementary school. Sulzby, E (1987) defines emergent literacy is the reading and writing behaviors that precede and develop into conventional literacy. Emergent literacy is nurtured by social interactions between children with adults and children with materials such as children books [9].

In agreement with above view, Teale, W (1986) emphasizes, emergent literacy is reading and writing which is emerging. That refers to the first phase of reading and writing development from birth to when children could read and write in the conventional sense [13].

According to Sulzby, E. and Teale, W. (1987), emergent literacy signals a belief that, in literate society, young children even one and two year olds are in the process of becoming literate. Emergent literacy is also considered as the first effort of a child to create and use letters intentionally, such as scribbling, imitating to write his name, arranging letters carrying a certain meaning [14].

Neuman & Roskos (1993) describe children's emergent literacy is the development of concepts of functional signs and symbols based on meaningful language experiences in communication with adults and surroundings [15].

Emergent literacy is described by the early development of understanding that symbols have meaning and that they are used for the communication of ideas. The concept of writing function is also developed at ages earlier than we know before : when a 3 year old child is asked to draw a picture, his drawing is very different in comparison with when we ask

that child to write his name [6]. (Neuman & Roskos (1993) note that reading and writing is thinking process, so emergent literacy is also considered as cognitive development [7]. Allington, R & Cunningham, P (1996) note that reading and writing is thinking process, so emergent literacy is also considered as cognitive development [1]. The theories of both J. Piaget and L.X. Vygotsky refer to emergent literacy and explain cognitive concepts performed by children. Emergent literacy is reading and writing abilities exposed in a certain extent. Children build their ideas to be able to read and write when they participate in activities relating to reading and writing [8]. Children's emergent literacy is developed through model behaviors and support from adults when adults encourage children to change and choose their ideas having conventional sense [15].

Most of researchers recognize emergent literacy is the beginning of writing and reading before children could read and write. It is the first effort of a child in reading and writing behaviors. It is also the important foundation for children's reading and writing at school later.

At preschool age, emergent literacy development includes: 1) Knowing the relation between spoken and written words. People could write as same as they say, each sound matches one word; 2) Knowing common symbols (toilet, entrance, stairs..); 3) Knowing letters: capital letter, small letter, space between two words, punctuation marks; 4) Knowing the direction of letters and how to write a letter; 6) Knowing letter sound and spelling meaningful words; 7) Knowing up – down signs (arrow) silent sign (finger tips over lips); 8) Reading and writing children's name; 9) Knowing what reading and writing can do; 10) Having good reading and writing posture : sitting, book holding, pen holding; 11) Getting benefits of reading; 12) Listening to books being read aloud: knowing how to read a book (from left to right, from up to down); 13) Choosing, looking at, holding and recognizing the beginning and the ending of a book; 14) Getting concepts of book : name, author , illustrator, cover, pages, first page and last page; 15) Comprehensive listening and reading , be able to retell one part or the whole story; 16) Pictures reading (based on memory); 17) Being interested in reading ; love , cheer, protect; 18) Be able to make simple books.

In which, using literacy environments gains special effectiveness. Being a part of educational environment, literacy environment includes all means, infrastructure serving reading and writing development. That is the logical arrangement in children's surroundings cultivating children's interest in reading and writing.

Literacy environment comprises: 1) Classrooms, corridors, school grounds, walls, etc. in preschools; 2) The literacy arrangement in children's surroundings based on educational purposes; 3) Library corner, writing corner; 4) Books, notebooks, pens, materials, tools for children to learn reading and writing; 5) All tools, toys, products of teachers and children containing letters or stimulating children to acquaint with reading and writing.

Literacy environment help children get the use of letters. Children who play and experience in literacy environment will pay attention to literacy naturally, utilize the advantage of children's unconscious memory and children's visual language is also stimulated. Literacy environment nurtures children's interest in literacy and bring children necessary preparation for children's formal literacy introduction in elementary school.

Literacy environment also comprises the close relation between children and peers, children and teachers in activities acquainting with literacy. Teachers guide and encourage children to explore literacy surroundings. They also let children participate in independent activities and experiences of reading and writing through interactions with environment. Teachers help children develop necessary skills and knowledge for later literacy introduction.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Our research indicates that most of teachers are lacking insight about literacy environment. They pay attention only to material but psychological environment, the relation between children and teachers, children and their peers in activities relating literacy as well as the literacy environment organization aiming to improve children's emergent literacy. Most of teacher does not get fully insight about the concept of emergent literacy. They only let children acquaint with letters, focus on children at ages 5 to 6 preparing to get literacy introduction in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. This affects educational results.

Teachers perceive the importance of using literacy environment to develop children's emergent literacy. However, when we researched the frequency of using literacy environment to develop children's emergent literacy. In preschools, teachers provide children with literacy environment but its content is not abundant and does not show concrete educational purposes. Literacy environment does not stimulate children to develop emergent literacy, and participate in independent activities and interactions between children and peers, children with surroundings. Teachers' activities aim to develop children's emergent literacy but mainly through activities in which children acquaint with letters, especially activities at corners do not show clearly the purpose of children's emergent literacy development.

### **Method to create a literacy environment for children's emergent literacy development**

*Method 1: Giving children more opportunities to interact with abundant prints stimulating children to participate in activities improving emergent literacy.*

Abundant print environment cultivates necessary skills of reading and writing, encourage children to pay attention to documents and literacy. Children identify symbols, signs and alphabet; get insight of written language to transmit information; get the function and the use of documents and print forms. Print environments help children to improve actively knowledge and skills relating early reading and writing.

Abundant prints are able to show in classrooms:

- Picture labels; stick labels on stools in classroom. Sign tables of principles at corners.
- Prints motivation encourage children to read and write everyday. Teachers show many kind of prints for children and help them to understand that is a part of daily life. Pictures having letters, notebooks, magazines, tables, alphabet, numbers, poems, riddles..
- Using prints to communicate in classrooms: signs exchanging and communicating are an important supply of letters to children. They are used as reading materials. One of the prints should be daily schedule, daily timetable, duty list, classroom's principles, list of children participating in activities... Using prints which was created by teacher and children in activities such as: one board for teacher and children to write structure of a story, a document on activities of children and teachers; stories told by children or stories imagined by children ...

*Method 2: ideas sharing and discussing to stimulate children to pay attention to literacy surroundings*

Ideas sharing and discussing draw the attention of children to literacy surroundings, stimulate children to participate actively in interactions with literacy environment, to get enjoyment of literacy, to know the relation between written language, spoken language and images; to enrich vocabulary, and to build close relation with peers.

Exchanging, and discussing with children about literacy surroundings. Help children to overview literacy environment, motivate children's activities.

*Method 3: encourage children to participate in independent activities and experiences in reading and writing through library corner, literacy corner*

At library corner, literacy corner children can get interest in books, eager to acquaint with literacy and experience in early reading and writing. We need to ensure that all corners are rich in books, tools relating to reading, writing.

Teachers could organize following activities:

- Children can make books which they are discovering by drawing, writing, cutting and pasting pictures, letters from old magazines and then display these books on the shelves.
- Library Opening: children can borrow books everyday.
- Children read aloud books for friends
- Children introduce new books
- Children write to familiar people; write message to each other, participate in letter play games at literacy corners.

*Method 4: vocabulary walls*

Vocabulary walls are the collection of vocabularies for children to improve reading and writing. There are many kind of walls which are suitable to use in classrooms as: letters and words in one theme. Teacher launch activities in which children identify words and sounds. Vocabulary walls also help children to develop emergent literacy skills and know the relation between literacy and oral language.

Teachers create a vocabulary wall in the class. That wall includes capital letter and small letter arranged in a certain order. All letters are in suitable size so that children can see. Below each letter is all words relating to a theme. Words are written on papers which children can take out and stick easily. Vocabulary walls should be colorful but words are attractive. Teachers can change themes and introduce children 5 new words each week. Teachers should organize activities interacting with vocabulary walls; reading, pronouncing and rewriting words or finding familiar words, words relating to learned stories, children can participate in play games on alphabet, retell stories based on given words...

*Method 5: give children chances to experience in daily reading and writing activities in literacy environment.*

Using activities to help children experience in daily reading and writing activities naturally. Help children to practice, and improve reading and writing skills. Activities includes: daily duty assigning, morning messages; classmate list checking,

principles in class, in activities; children's written products displaying; daily news; give children chances to experience in writing: write names of playing corners, names of food...

Teachers also should organize activities such as: reading aloud books for children; children participate to create activity corner with teachers (choose the name for corner, tools, materials.); find out the name of an object, one letter...in classroom, in corridors, school ground; use vocabulary walls. Teacher should expand interested activities for children to acquaint with alphabet as: write down the name of a child on the paper and read out loud, find his name or objects, etc.

Above methods are applied in some preschools in Hanoi. Initial results showed these methods are feasible and bring positive educational effectiveness.

### CONCLUSION

Emergent literacy development is one of the most important duties of preschool before children receive formal literacy introduction in 1st grade. In many different methods, literacy environment is the most effective method to develop children's emergent literacy. Teacher should build a literacy rich environment and utilize by suitable teaching methods so that children could get early interactions and experiences in that environment. With that condition, children's emergent literacy will be developed and create foundation for children to get formal literacy introduction in elementary grades.

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