

Building Foundations for Literacy in the Early Years




CIRCLE Nursery Literacy Rich Environment Tool

Literacy Rich Environments

A child's literacy experience can be enriched by the people and the physical environment around him/her. A literacy rich environment emphasises the importance of using materials and interactions which facilitate literacy opportunities. in the areas of language (talking, listening, vocabulary); pre-writing skills (drawing, creative use of materials, writing); and emergent reading skills (use of books and stories, ideas, sounds, letters and words).




Using the Tool

- The CIRCLE Literacy Rich Environment Checklist can be used to help you consider strategies that are in place and possible areas for development.
- The tool can be completed either by one person or by a team.
- Environments can be individualised for each child. You are not expected to identify all of these areas as being in place in every setting.
- Support should incorporate independent and directed experiences.
- We recommend that up to three areas for development are chosen and a plan is made for when and how to put new approaches into place.
- Use symbols to represent your judgement about how well you fulfil each item in the tool.

Key - Fill in the relevant shape	
In place and working well	
Partially in place	
An area for development	

Early Years Setting	Signed	Date

A. Selection of "books" and stories

			
Do the books match the interests of the children?			
Do the children have favourite stories, which they are allowed to read often?			
Are more than 15 books available to children (not just in a book corner)?			
Are the books circulated every 4 weeks?			
Are there 3 or more books related to the current theme in nursery for each child's level?			
Are some of the same books at home and in the early years setting?			
Are there story manipulatives available (felt board and characters/ puppets/ props/ symbols)?			
Are there new books available as well as some old favourites?			
Are books sent home for bilingual children, before or after reading them in the early years setting?			
Does the range of books available suit the needs of all stages of learners in your setting?			
eg Board books, picture and photo books, lift the flap books, noisy books, rhyming and alliteration books, books related to themes, story books, repetitive books, alphabet and counting books, catalogues, brochures, comics, home made books, fiction and non-fiction books, poetry, books about different cultures, TV related books, cookery books, home-made recipe books, phone books, large books			

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B Environmental print




	★	✓	+
Are there signs / labels with pictures around the room in the early years setting? (eg labelling areas - story corner/water ...)?			
Are signs and labels visually clear and in a large size of print or handwriting?			
Is there a variety of writing on display? (e.g. hand written, printed, other languages, Braille, child's writing/drawing)			
Is print representative of multicultural groups present? (e.g. boxes in junk corner, boxes with script other than English)?			
Is children's artwork/writing displayed?			
Is there an attractive alphabet frieze visible at child height?			
Are written rules with meaningful pictures visible? (e.g. 3 people at the brick corner, 10 minutes each on the computer, no hitting, don't touch this cupboard)?			
Is written descriptive language visible (e.g. of child's picture; or a written description about a photo of an event)			
Are tools for reading and writing available for use in play and routines?			
Is there a calendar and timetable that children can engage with daily?			
Are there paintings/posters on the walls with favourite story characters/a favourite story tree?			

C. Arrangement: display, location, book area




	★	✓	+
Is there a dedicated book area/corner?			
Is the book area inviting, with a range of colours and sizes of books, and space for sitting?			
Are books displayed prominently in the classroom? (and if related to current topics, beside other props, e.g. book about an enormous turnip placed beside Harvest vegetables)?			
Are literacy topics that are addressed in the early years setting then put up on the walls (eg rhyming verses/songs)?			
Are there examples of print in the environment placed at children's eye height?			
eg Menus at snack time with words and pictures, phone book in the house corner, maps and simple visual directions; signing in register, recording snacks, feeding pets; recording the weather; input into personal learning plan folder or all about me book or making own books.			

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D. Encouraging writing

			
Is there a variety of materials available for writing and drawing? eg Whiteboard, chalk board, paint, magnetic letters, crayons, pens, pencils grips, adapted scissors, card, coloured paper, lined paper, white paper, computer.			
Are tools fit for purpose (eg are they safe, are pencils sharpened, is playdough fresh)?			
Do adults scribe children's ideas and stories for them?			
Are children involved in making written props (eg shopping lists)?			
Are there examples of writing in scripts relevant to the children?			
Is at least one area set up to be used for drawing and writing?			
Is writing and drawing encouraged across learning (eg tools to make menus in the house corner, brushes with water outside)?			
Are there materials for children to make their own books?			
Can children play with the alphabet (eg hiding letters in sand/jelly; letter cookie cutters or stamps, puzzles):			




D. Encouraging writing (contd)

			
Is there a place where children know they can find their name to copy or to stick on a picture they have created?			
Are children encouraged to read/write and communicate with others for a purpose?			
Is there a multi-sensory approach to learning to write? Eg writing in sand, using stencils or rubber stamps, encouraging pincer grip through playing with pegs, opportunity for sensory play with playdough, shaving foam, gluck, typewriter			




E. Planning and Reflection

			
Is there a system for recording books that have been read and enjoyed?			
Is there a system for recording best ways to engage each child in literacy activities?			
Is use of the book corner monitored and evaluated?			
Do you audit which children engage with the book corner independently and who only do so in adult organised activities?			
Are literacy targets (for each child with an identified literacy need) displayed and accessible to all in the room?			
Are literacy targets shared with parents?			
Do staff carefully observe children and record their responses to literacy activities?			
Is story time planned in advance and books selected with clear aim?			




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F. Adult support to participate in literacy

			
Do adults talk about the letter sounds as well as letter names?			
Do adults tell/make up stories about their own life experiences?			
Do adults refer to concepts of print (eg pointing out the right way up to hold the book, the author, title, start, end etc)?			
Do adults use language levels suited to the children and model good language use?			
When adults tell stories, are all of the children enjoying and engaged in the story?			
Can all of the children see the book easily (eg is story time tiered, some on chairs, on cushions and some on the floor)?			
Is there more than one story group, to accommodate different needs?			
Do you invite specialist storytellers or take children to story telling sessions in the library?			
Do you invite parents/older children regularly to do dual language storytelling to all children?			
Are children encouraged to take an active role in story group time in a group setting?			
Eg choosing books, commenting, asking and answering questions, holding up props, all joining in repeated line, covering parts of the book and asking questions, letting children fill in gaps.			




G. Frequency of literacy experience

			
Are children invited to share books/stories several times daily?			
Are there opportunities for 1:1 and small group stories, song and rhyme times as well as whole group activities?			
Are there lots of opportunities to hear, sing and discuss rhymes in relevant other languages?			
Can children always put their name on things they make? (eg writing/making a mark/sticking on a printed name/putting in a tray with their name on)?			
Do children have opportunities to see their name in English, and their home language (eg daily on coat peg)?			
Do words have a relevant photo or picture beside them?			
Are story and writing sacks used between home and nursery?			
Do parents understand how to use story/writing sacks in English and in their home language?			
Are there spontaneous opportunities to enjoy jingles, word, play, jokes and singing rhymes?			
Do staff read and refer to the print which is displayed?			
On outings do adults point out environmental print?			
Are adults available in the book corner outwith formal story time activities for 1:1 stories?			
Are children taken on visits to the library?			




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H. Listening and Talking

			
Are children encouraged to talk and share experiences?			
Do staff use children's own experiences and interests to promote communication, conversation and expression?			
Do staff listen attentively to children to extend their learning and encourage children to participate in dialogue?			
Do children have opportunities to listen and talk as individuals, in small groups, big groups and play contexts?			
Are children encouraged to explore events and characters in stories and other texts and to share their learning imaginatively?			
Are children encouraged to talk about their likes and dislikes relating to stories and other text?			




I. Phonological Awareness

			
Do staff promote opportunities for children to enjoy the rhyming components of songs and rhymes?			
Are children given opportunities to listen and respond to the sounds and rhythms of words through clapping and music games?			
Are children given opportunities to use sounds and letters of the alphabet (eg My name begins with...: I spy with my little eye...)?			
Are children encouraged to explore and play with patterns and sounds of language?			
Eg clapping games, jingles, alliterative rhymes and stories, rhyming snap, tongue twisters			

CIRCLE Literacy Rich Environment Tool

Scoring and interpreting results

- First, complete the tool and decide which aspects of the environment are

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- Then transfer your judgements onto the summary sheet. Shade the star, tick or cross for each item. From this you see the result summary and you may see that a particular area would benefit from development. The judgements can then be interpreted to indicate particular strengths and areas for development.

Making a Plan

- The summary can be used to make a plan.
- The Plan can then be used to summarise discussion within your team about steps to be taken in the coming weeks and months.
- Think about things people want to change and how much work will be involved in the change.

- Try to set achievable and realistic goals
- Consider the potential barriers and how you might address them.
- Don't change too much at once - you may choose one big thing like revamping the whole story corner or setting up and making story sacks.
- Alternatively, it may make more sense for your setting to select a few smaller things which are changed easily.
- Change can always be challenging and it will be important to build in strategies for maintaining and building on positive changes. For example, write down, How will all staff know about the plan? How will you all be reminded to work on the plan? How will you know when the change is in place and if it's working? How will you celebrate your success?
- Identify who in your setting will make changes and who you may need to enlist for support from partner agencies, for training, resources or information.
- Identify a time to review progress

CIRCLE Literacy Rich Environment Summary

		★	✓	+
Selection of Books and Stories	Books match children's interests			
	Favourite stories read often			
	More than 15 books available			
	Books circulated			
	Books related to themes			
	Same books at home			
	Story manipulatives available			
	New books available			
	Books home for bilingual children			
	Books at all stages			
	Environmental Print	Signs and labels with pictures		
Signs and labels large and clear				
Variety of writing displayed				
Print is culturally representative				
Work is displayed				
Alphabet frieze visible				
Rules have meaningful pictures				
Descriptive language visible				
Reading/writing tools available				
Daily calendar/timetable				
Arrangement, display, location, book area	Dedicated book area			
	Inviting space			
	Books displayed prominently			
	Literacy topics on wall			
	Environmental print positioning			
Encouraging Writing	Variety of materials available			
	Tools fit for purpose			
	Adults scribe			
	Written props			
	Scripts relevant			
	Area set for drawing and writing			
	Writing and drawing encouraged			
	Materials to make own books			
	Alphabet play			
	Name available to copy/stick			
	Read/write with purpose			
Planning and Reflection	Multi sensory approach			
	Recording system for books			
	Recording systems for engagement			
	Monitoring and evaluation			
	Audit			
	Literacy targets displayed			

		★	✓	+
Planning and Reflection (contd)	Targets shared with parents			
	Observations			
	Planning with clear aim			
Adult support to participate in literacy	Letter sounds/letter name			
	Tell/make up stories			
	Refer to concepts in print			
	Vary language level and model			
	Enjoyment and engagement			
	Children can see book			
	More than one story group			
	Storytellers/library sessions			
	Dual language storytelling			
	Active role for children in groups			
Frequency of Literacy Experiences	Sharing books during day one to one and group opportunities			
	Hear/sing and discuss rhymes			
	Placing name on work belongings			
	See name			
	Relevant photo or picture			
	Writing / story sacks			
	Home language story sacks			
	Spontaneous opportunities			
	Read and refer to print			
	Point out environmental print			
	Staff available outwith story time			
	Library visits			
Listening and talking	Talk and share experiences			
	Use of child's interests/experiences			
	Staff use attentive listening			
	Listen/talk as individuals			
	Explore events and characters			
	Explore likes/dislikes of story			
	Rhyming opportunities			
Phonological awareness	Listening/response opportunities			
	Sounds letters of the alphabet			
	Explore/play with patterns/sound			
Early years setting:				
Date:				
Signed:				

CIRCLE Literacy Rich Environment Summary

<p>You could make a plan, below by writing down which areas to target based on the summary</p>	
<p>Date:</p> <p>Environment considered:</p> <p>Date for review:</p>	<p>Areas to Target</p>
<p>Write down aspects of the literacy environment that are in place and work well</p>	
<p>Write down aspects of the literacy environment that could be better</p>	
<p>Select one thing you would like to change and write down the steps that are needed to make progress; who will</p>	<p>Thing to change</p>
	<p>Who will be involved</p>
	<p>Resources / training needed</p>
<p>What we will do to create successful change</p>	