

PAT Alaska

A Special Feature with Information on Parents as Teachers (PAT) Involvement and Early Childhood Development

Update

Parents as Teachers Curriculum and The Foundations of Literacy

The foundations of literacy are laid in the earliest years of a child's life... long before encountering the formal educational setting of kindergarten. Parents and other caregivers greatly influence the child's attitudes about reading and writing, as well as development of skills related to later reading and writing proficiency. The opportunities for positive impact are great. With the right information and encouragement, parents can provide experiences that will lay a solid foundation upon which strong literacy can be built when a child arrives at the school doors.

Often we think that a path to literacy begins in pre-school or kindergarten settings. However, recent research makes it clear that the environment encountered by a child in the first three years will influence the reading and writing skill development that takes place much later. Literacy development actually starts at birth, perhaps even before birth, as a baby begins to hear the sounds of speech with the good things that come along with Mom and Dad talking to him. It involves parents sharing books with a child, and the child seeing parents and others reading books, magazines and papers. Sharing songs, rhymes, and fingerplays give the infant/toddler the chance to listen carefully to the sounds of rhythm and speech. Watching adults write lists, notes and letters gives a child an introduction to sharing ideas through writing. Vocabulary grows as parents describe a child's world, ask and answer questions. In these ways, and many, many others, during the early years a child develops important knowledge and skills related to later literacy such as:

- **Oral language development:** the first vocalizations (e.g. cooing and babbling), using an increasing number of words, and learning the syntax of language
- **Phonological Awareness:** awareness of the sounds of language, rhyming
- **Listening skills:** ability to listen and follow directions; listening to stories
- **Conversational competence:** understanding and using "turn-taking" in conversation; ability to relate stories and describe things, events, even feelings
- **Book Awareness:** learning how to handle books; recognizing books by their covers
- **Print Awareness:** pretending to read; noticing and recognizing environmental print (e.g. the "golden arches" = McDonald's); asking parents to read books
- **Attention to book content:** understanding that pictures represent actual objects; talking about characters, objects and themes in stories; labeling pictures
- **Pre-Writing:** scribbling, drawing and "writing"
- **Letter awareness:** beginning to understand that letters are different from pictures; beginning to recognize letters and the sounds associated with them

(Shaklee, H., Hardin, J. Clinton, T., & Demarest, D., 2003)

Parents as Teachers

A fun, early learning program for soon-to-be parents and parents with children up to five years of age.

Research Shows:

PAT children outscored their peers on measures of school readiness and later school achievement.

PAT children were more advanced than other 3 year-olds in language and social development, problem-solving, and other intellectual skills.

PAT children performed better than non-PAT children in elementary school.

PAT parents took a more active role in special education; lower incidence of abuse and neglect.

What We Do:

Personalized home visits with a certified Parent Educator, trained in child development, who is eager to help parents give their children the best beginning.

Family Play Times where families can learn new things about children parenting and share experiences with other parents.

Regular Developmental Screenings to ensure children's development is on track and to detect possible delays

A Resource Network that can help parents find services in their community, if needed, that are beyond what PAT can

How to Contact Us:

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More on the Foundations of Literacy

A great deal of the early foundation for literacy happens without the adults in a child's life thinking about it...*however*, when the adults **do** think about it, so much more can be made of these early years of opportunity. Research indicates that children from lower income homes and communities are less likely to encounter literacy opportunities. They are less likely to share books with adults in the home and less likely to have the opportunity to listen and share their new language skills with adults. Parents as Teacher can help *all* parents from all communities learn what they need to know and develop the skills they need to give each child an enriched pre-literacy environment.

A project undertaken by Harriet Shaklee and her associates at the University of Idaho demonstrated the clear connection between information and strategies related to the emergent literacy and the *Parents as Teachers Born to Learn Curriculum Prenatal to 3 Years*.

The curriculum was analyzed for literacy content by coding each lesson plan and parent handout, for aspects of the following categories:

- Print awareness and understanding: information about the stages of reading and writing and strengthening reading and writing skills,
- Oral language development: strategies to encourage language skills in the early years and developmental stages of language,
- Literacy related development: development of skills related to symbolic thought, social emotional skills and motor skills,
- Neuroscience: brain development and the part it plays in developing language and literacy.

The results were impressive. Literacy content was represented “forty or more times in 92% of the monthly lesson plans” (Shaklee, et al., 2004, p. 3). Describing the results the researchers reported:



“...from the very first lessons the Parents as Teachers *Born to Learn Curriculum Prenatal to 3 years* introduces parents to core concepts of language and literacy development, including the four major areas of neuroscience, oral language development, print awareness and understanding and literacy-related development. In fact, every monthly or weekly lesson over the three-year period includes content within at least 3 of those 4 areas.”

(Shaklee, et al., 2003, p. 3)

In further analysis of the PAT model, Shaklee and her associates found that, as well as offering parents sound information and strategies for enhancing their child's early literacy environment, six principle strategies known to be effective with adult learners are employed. These six strategies, as described by Shaklee et al., 2003, include:

- Just in Time Training
- Anticipatory Guidance
- Embedded Content
- Distributed Learning
- Concept to Action
- Literacy Environment

By building trusting relationships with parents and providing them reliable research-based information in the informal atmosphere of the personal visit, playgroups and the group meetings, PAT meets parents where “where they are” and gives them what they want and need to give their children the best start in life.

Dr. Shaklee reports, “The Parents as Teachers program is ideally positioned to address issues of emergent literacy through their parent education and support program for parents of young children. The curriculum focus on the parent practices is supported by research to develop strong language and literacy environments for their children.”

(Shaklee, et al., 2003, p.2)