



# Extended Literacy Adventure: Let's Write with Ants!

*Language Experience Approach (LEA)*

*Aventura: ¡Escribamos sobre las hormigas!*

**Age Range:** K + up

**Group Size:** flexible

**Time Range:** 45-90 min



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## Adventure Goals:

Our goal in every adventure is for children to have fun with books and reading! In this adventure kids will observe, explore and experience an adventure with the group and create a written piece together. Then, kids will create their own text that they can read, re-read and extend with the help of their families or caregivers.



## Measurable Objectives and Outcomes:

**Objective:** In order to promote reading and writing, participants will use a shared experience as a prompt to collectively create, revise and extend a written text with the help of the facilitator.

**Outcome:** After sharing a fun experience with others, participants will write about their experience and in turn, read their own writing.

*\*Note: this adventure is one that can be repeated multiple times by simply changing the observation activity and then writing about it with the participants.*



## Adventure Outline:

Writing together about a shared experience helps to engage children in the creation and reading of a text, by [scaffolding talk](#), documenting the experience, revisiting the experience, pulling out rich vocabulary, expanding the experience through writing, and using the experience for further comprehension and content learning. In this adventure we will:

- Create a shared, concrete and comprehensible experience with the participants (e.g., watch a short video clip, observe animal/insect behaviors, do a dance, etc.) [see “Tip”](#)
- Narrate the concrete experience while the facilitator writes on chart paper or a whiteboard, possibly focusing on a [particular skill or strategy](#) in writing (see *Extended Learning*)
- Read or write using the created text as the [mentor text](#); can use [choral or guided reading](#), revising, editing, or use as a model to guide participants in writing their own texts



## Supplies:

- Images, a shared story or book, an animal (stuffed or real), a video clip, or shared experience
- A collection of books and photographs about your chosen topic for the adventure
- Magnifying glasses for observing (optional)
- Chart paper, a large white board or other projection device
- Markers for the facilitator
- Pencils for all participants
- Sticky notes or half-sheets of paper (enough for the whole group)
- Writing paper (a variety, if possible)



## Adventure Considerations:

- The size of the group may determine how you create the shared experience. An outside adventure may require extra adults and/or fewer participants.
- Keeping the adventure or “shared experience” short will allow enough time for writing as a group, and then on their own or with their families.
- If you are limited on space and/or time you could watch a short video clip from one of the following sites as your “shared experience”:
  - [www.arkive.org](http://www.arkive.org) (e.g. octopus)
  - [www.thekidshouldseethis.com](http://www.thekidshouldseethis.com) (e.g. ice)
  - [www.wonderopolis.org](http://www.wonderopolis.org) (e.g. sprouting seeds)
- Always allow enough time for building background through the exploration of books and images as well as time to talk with peers about what they see, observe and learn.



# Adventure Plan

## Hook: Adventure in Observation (10 min)

**Say:** *Today we are going to take a walk outside to see \_\_\_\_\_ (ants, slimy slugs, frogs, a rain or wind storm, fall leaves, etc.)*

### Let's Think About This! Ants—Think, Pair, Share

**Think:** What do we know about ants? What do we wonder about them?

- **Say:** *I'll bet many of you already know a lot about **ants**. We can find ants just about anywhere! Let's take a minute to think about where we might have seen an **ant** before, what it looked like, and what it was doing... Let's think about all the things we know about **ants**!*

To build background, make connections and generate ideas for participants before the discussion begins, you may want to show some of the images from the books or photos of the particular object students will observe.

**Pair:** Allow participants to share what they know about what they are about to explore. At this point invite them to share their ideas with a partner, or if you prefer, with the whole group as a discussion about the topic.

- **Say:** *Now, I know you ALL know a little something about **ants**. Let's take a minute to share with a partner (or whole group). You can use these prompts to get you going if you wish. Talk together in whatever language feels most comfortable to you. Let me show you with my own idea...*
  - *One time I observed an ant...walking quickly on a log.*
  - *Una vez observé a una hormiga...caminando rápidamente en un tronco.*
- Sentence Prompts:
  - One time I observed an ant...
    - ◇ *Una vez observé a una hormiga...*
  - I know that ants like to...
    - ◇ *Sé que a las hormigas les gusta...*

## Navigation



**Tip:** Ideally you will share an experience with the children so you have a common and highly comprehensible “story” to draw from. Examples could include: taking a walk outside to study ants/insects, listening to the sounds that the open air provides (dogs, birds, traffic), or even passing around a special creature or object that the children can help you describe.

### Translanguaging:

Encouraging participants to use their entire language repertoire to discuss and make meaning supports multilingual children's language development, social emotional growth, and affirms their cultural and language identities.

**Sentence prompts:** Sentence prompts give structure that supports young children, reluctant speakers, and those learning English to share their ideas. You can allow participants to alter and/or deviate from these prompts depending on their need.

- Ants are interesting because ....
  - ◇ Las hormigas son interesantes porque...

### Share:

- Encourage participants to expand upon their ideas as needed. Use the sentence prompts to guide participants to provide details.
- Try to enhance language without making participants feel corrected. Repeat back what a participant says to expand on their thoughts or to express the thought using appropriate grammar and syntax.

## Getting Started: Observe, Study, Experience (15-20 min)

Take the group for a short walk or pass around the special creature or images for the children to study.

**Say:** *Let's talk about what we might see when we go on our walk outside. Earlier today I was walking about and I found some ants moving around in the garden (bushes, flowers, etc.) outside. I wondered what they were doing...where they were going. Are you ready to help me find out?*

### Set the expectations

**Say:** *Just as a doctor uses a stethoscope as a tool to help her listen to a patient's heartbeat, observers and scientists use tools too. We will use magnifying glasses as a tool to observe the ants. A magnifying glass is a convex lens that is used to produce a magnified image of an object. See how I can move the lens to make the object look bigger? Let's take care of these special tools so we can use them again and again.*

Talk to the participants about expectations for using the tools as well as be clear about any behavior expectations you may have while on your walk.

**Say:** *Are you ready to study some ants? Let's go see what we can find!*

Allow children to share what they observe with one another in a natural, unstructured way. Ask [open-ended questions](#) (see [Additional Resources](#)) that encourage language and open sharing of ideas among the participants. You may want to listen in to assess what they say/know about the topic and what languages you hear in order to best help direct the conversation, and the writing when it's time.



**Tip:** Oral language is built naturally, so encourage conversation among the children during the walk (unless they are listening to something). Hearing and using informal language will help all children develop oracy and literacy skills, and is particularly important for children who speak languages other than English.



**Tip:** [How to use your phone as a magnifying glass](#) to foster joint media engagement. ([Link to Library Program Models: Key Finding 10](#))

# Adventure: Let's Write! (20 min)

**Before Writing:** Pass out sticky notes (or half-sheets of paper) and pencils and have children draw what they observed. You can model any part of this in front of the children.

**Say:** *Let's take a minute to remember what we just observed (saw, explored). Watch me sketch a \_\_\_\_\_ so I can share it with my friend/mom/grown-up later.*

Create a drawing based on your observations. Model how to create a quick sketch, as this is not the main focus of the activity. Some participants will draw along with you, while others will wait to see what you do first.

**Say:** *Okay, go ahead and write or draw on your own sticky note. We will share this in a minute.*

Give them just a minute to do this task.

**Say:** *Now that most of you are finished, find a partner and share your drawing or idea.*

Monitor how much conversation or oral language is being used by the children. Allow for natural conversation but be ready to offer some [sentence stems or prompts](#).

- I observed...
  - *Yo observé...*
- When I saw \_\_\_\_\_, I thought...
  - *Cuando yo ví \_\_\_\_\_, pensé que...*

Invite children to share any ideas with the group.

## **During Writing:**

**Say:** *You did such great work observing and drawing/writing down your ideas. Now we're going to narrate the story of our walk as a group! Narrating a story means retelling it in your own words. I'm going to need your help! Let's make a sentence about what happened first.*

At this point have children talk with their partner to formulate a sentence. Monitor and adjust by listening and prompting with a [sentence stem](#) when needed.

**Say:** *Who is ready to share their sentence with the whole group?*



**Tip:** Modeling the activity in front of participants supports comprehension and understanding and lowers anxiety about performing a task. This is particularly important for those learning English as a new language.



**Tip:** When we create a text as a writer, we receive a reading lesson. Evidence shows that high-quality writing instruction

- Now you can begin to write down the sentence shared by one of the partnerships.
- Remember, you are modeling English (or Spanish) syntax, content and some writing conventions. Be sure to say the words as you write them so participants can make the connection between oral and written language.
- OPTIONAL: You can also “think aloud” by asking yourself/the children, “*Now how does that word start? What sound/letter do you hear at the end of that word? Here’s where my space goes. Now how do we end a sentence?*”
- Be sure to reread each sentence chorally (with the whole group) as you finish writing. You are practicing hearing the sentence structure as well as keeping their eyes on the print.
- Continue sharing sentences until you have a “story.”

**After Writing:** Chorally read the whole story, adjusting anything that doesn’t make sense. The final read should be smooth. You could ask participants to come up and point to the words as you read it together (particularly helpful to involve active children). Remember to celebrate with a special clap or “pat on the back” for their good work.



can improve students’ reading comprehension, reading fluency, and word-solving skills (Graham & Hebert, 2011).



**Tip:** If kids aren’t having fun or seem to think the activity is too much like school, adjust! For example, write down the sentences shared without thinking aloud and reread each sentence aloud yourself instead of chorally.

Extended Learning:

Programmer can give a mini-lesson on a particular skill or strategy about writing (modeling the difference between letter/ syllable/word/sentence, writing on the line, complete sentences, main idea and supporting details, etc.)



**Tip:** Allow for approximations or “kid language.” However, you may need to reshape the sentence to make it standard English.



**Tip:** You may only get one or two sentences down and that is fine. The idea is to demonstrate how participants can do this on their own, at home and with their grown-up.

## Transition: Now You Try! (10-15min)

Allow participants to try writing about their adventure on their own.

**Say:** *We just created our own story based on our own observations of the ants. What great observers and writers we are! Now you get a chance to do some writing on your own about our ant adventure. You can use the ideas we just wrote together, or you can come up with some of your own. You decide!*

- Allow children to choose if they'd like to work alone, with a partner, with you in a small group or even with their designated adult.
- You might ask each child to tell you their first sentence as they go off to write, depending on the size of the group. If their idea is said aloud then they are more likely to remember and stay focused on their own words as they write.
- Providing participants with some of the language from the group activity can help them feel more successful on their own. Be sure to keep the group text visible during this independent time.
- If possible, have a variety of writing paper available and allow the participants to choose as they go off to write.
- Having a variety of alphabets or letters displayed or available for children to use while they're writing is often helpful, especially for those new to English, or those not experienced with our Latin alphabet.
- Encourage participants to write as much or as little as they wish. They also may wish to illustrate if they "finish" and there's still time.
- If a kid is struggling, invite them to draw instead of write. Also, consider pairing a confident artist with a confident writer.
- Walk around and assist participants as needed.
- Remember, the priority is to create positive experiences around reading, writing and learning, so monitor and adjust as you go!



**Tip:** A variation may be to have clipboards available so children can write while sitting on the floor. They could also go find their caregiver to write together.



**Tip:** Accepting all writing is important in building a child's confidence in his/her own writing abilities. It's okay if it doesn't make sense to us as long as it makes sense to the child.



**Tip:** Pulling a group of less independent writers together to create another shared piece of writing is also acceptable and a good way to differentiate for different needs.

## Wrap Up: Let's Share! (5-10 min)

### Share-out

Bring the group back together and invite participants to share their writing with a partner (another participant, caregiver, parent or guardian) and/or the whole group:

**Say:** *Now, at the end of an adventure, I like to ask these three very important questions! I'll give you a hint: the answer to these questions is always... ¡Que sí! Or Yes!*

1. Are we happy to help you find good books to read? (Yes!)  
*¿Nos gusta ayudarte a encontrar buenos libros para leer? (¡Que sí!)*
2. Do we love to talk about books with you? (Yes!)  
*¿Nos gusta conversar sobre los libros contigo? (¡Que sí!)*
3. Is all reading good reading? (Yes!)  
*¿Toda lectura es buena lectura? (¡Que sí!)*

### Celebration & Movement

If time and space allow, sing The Ants Go Marching with the group, involving families and caregivers, marching in place or around the learning space.

### Take Home

Invite participants to take home writing paper to continue their story or create a new narrative based on a shared experience with someone at home.



### Variation/Extending Learning:

Create a text based on the observation but change the point of view of the "character" to first-person by becoming the ant (leaf, octopus, etc.)

[The Ants Go Marching:](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2S_fbCGwOM)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2S\\_fbCGwOM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2S_fbCGwOM)

## Book Browsing (10-15 min)

A child's literacy development is dependent on the interconnection between reading and writing. Have books available for general browsing that reflect the theme, topic, teaching point (point of view), etc. See [Additional Resources](#) below for book suggestions.

## ICON KEY



Key Element



A Tip



Time



Spanish word



Choice



Variations/  
More ideas

# Variations and Extended Learning

*Consider some of these tips for engaging participants of various ages, cultures, languages and abilities.*

## Hook: Adventure in Observation

### Short on Time?

- Skip the final group share. Introduce the question, model using a prompt, have participants think briefly about their idea, and then have them pair up and share their idea.
- Set a time limit and prompt pairs to switch who is talking with a bell or call and response hand clap.

### Variation:

- The text you collectively create can simply be a series of photographs or images with captions.

## Getting Started: Observe, Study, Experience

### Short on Time?

- Lead the participants on a guided walk, pointing out what exactly you want them to see.
- Choose a short video clip to watch (1- 2 minutes) or read a few pages in a nonfiction text. This kind of shared experience will be sufficient for the group writing experience.

### Variation:

Visit the following sites for short video clips:

- [www.arkive.org](http://www.arkive.org) (ex. octopus)
- [www.thekidshouldseethis.com](http://www.thekidshouldseethis.com) (ex. ice)
- [www.wonderopolis.org](http://www.wonderopolis.org) (ex. sprouting seeds)



## Adventure: Let's Write!

### Short on Time?

- Skip the sticky note activity. It is good to give each child an opportunity to share in their own way,

which sometimes means drawing to express themselves instead of talking. However, this is not critical to the task.

- Keep the group writing short—one to two sentences will be fine.

### Extending Learning:

- The programmer can give a mini-lesson on a particular skill or strategy about writing (modeling the difference between letter/syllable/word/sentence, writing on the line, complete sentences, main idea and supporting details, etc.)

### Variation:

Create a text based on the observation but change the point of view of the “character” to first-person by becoming the “ant.”

**Say:** *We just created our own story based on our own observations of the ants. What great observers and writers we are! Now we are going to become the ant and you are going to write about what just happened to you. This is called point of view; it's when we become the very thing we just observed and we tell the story from his/her perspective, using his/her words. I'll get us started...*

- Model thinking of and sharing orally the first sentence from the perspective of the ant. E.g. I was walking along the sidewalk and then bumped right into my friend!
- Allow children to laugh and play with the ideas they have about becoming the ant. Have a few of them share out to the whole group.
- When they're ready they can raise their hand, find their paper and go off to write

## Passive Programming Ideas:

- Set up short video clips on a laptop or tablet for children to peruse and then ask them to write about what they observed or experienced. See [Variations and Extended Learning](#) for suggested sites.
- Put a collection of items with fine details (e.g. leaves, flowers, shells) and magnifying glasses, invite people to take a closer look and write or draw what they observed. Consider creating a magnifying discovery board: <http://alittlelearningfortwo.blogspot.com/2011/06/magnifier-discovery-board.html>
- Make available pictures and photos of interesting animals, a detailed scene or a series of scenes that might lend themselves to become a writing prompt. Encourage children to write about what they observe in the photos.
- What fun adventures have you been on with your family? Create an interactive board using a map,

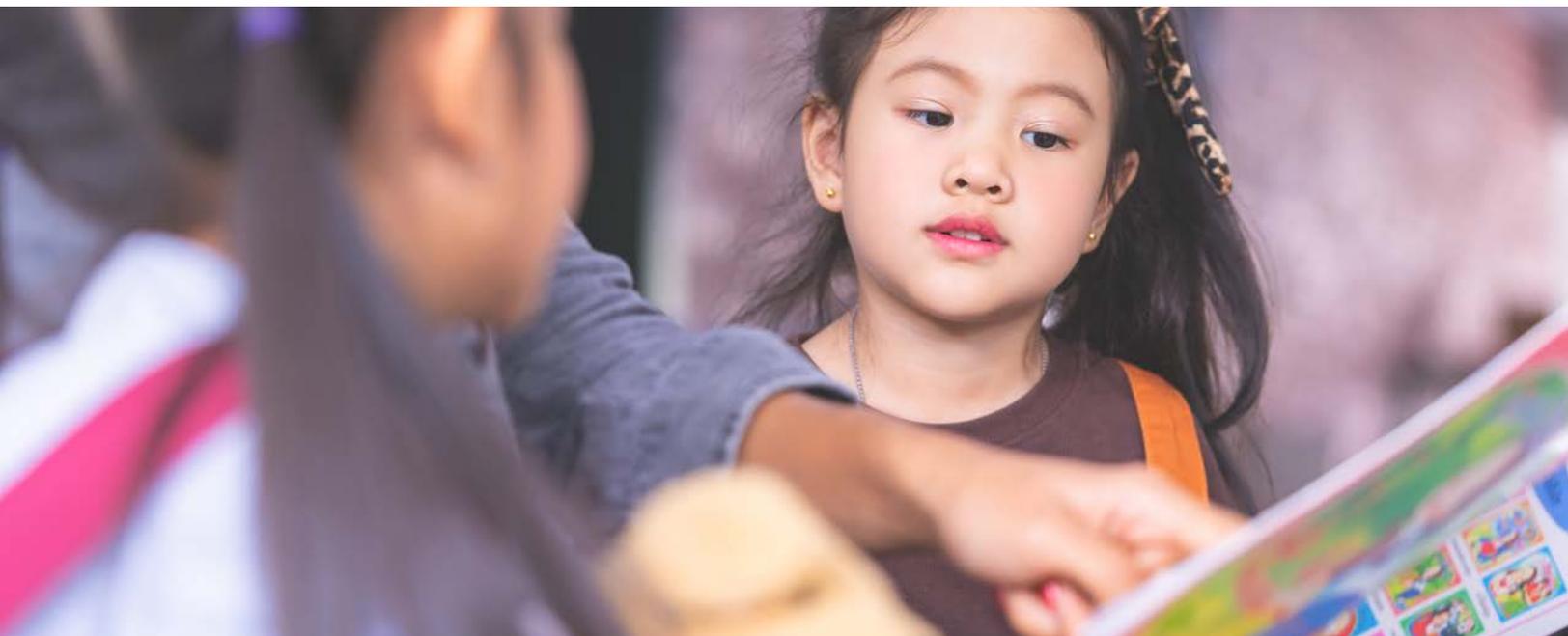


pins and a small slip of paper to note the location/name and the participant's name. Write a sentence or two about the adventure and then display for all to read.

- Bring in photos or draw pictures from a summer adventure and...write about it!
- Select a theme (what I eat for breakfast, my family, where I sleep, my pet, etc.) and ask clients/participants to bring in photos (or drawings) to share, compare and write!

## Beginning Readers Storytime Integration:

- Share a book based on the adventure (e.g. about ants) to help participants make connections to what they learned in previous sessions.
- After reading, elicit ideas and write a sentence or two (or three) with the group based on the book. Some ideas could include:
  - Three things we learned are...
  - Three questions we have are...
  - Let's change the ending
  - Let's pretend we are different character in the book
  - The best part of the story is when...
  - We like this book because...
  - We didn't like this book because...
  - The author's message
- Be sure to reread what you wrote together and celebrate your great ideas!



# Adventure Supports



## Vocabulary

**Language Experience Approach:** The LEA exemplifies integration of reading & writing, taking advantage of an initial highly comprehensible, shared experience that students then narrate to the teacher, modeling the move from oral language to print.

**Sentence Prompt (or Stem):** A tool when using expressive language (speaking or writing) to help to get an idea going without the added pressure of thinking how to start. Similar to sentence frames, sentence prompts (or stems) are meant to be open-ended to elicit a variety of responses. E.g. “When I saw \_\_\_\_\_, I thought...”

**Scaffolding Talk:** Supports designed for communicating ideas, which are particularly important for English language learners. Some scaffolds may include sentence frames, norms for discussions, time for thinking and time to process with a peer.

**Mentor Text (Anchor Text):** Any text that can be used as an example of good writing for writers and readers.

**Choral Reading:** A group of voices expressively reading a text in unison. Rehearsal of reading aloud with a group is a great way to practice oral reading and fluency.

**Guided Reading:** Coaching readers during the reading process to problem-solve as they read a new text. The text should be at the edge of their development. The goal is to support the reader as they work toward reading independently.

## Additional Resources:

### Book Suggestions:

- Hey Little Ant, Phillip Hoose, 1998
- One Hundred Hungry Ants, Elinor J Pinczes, 1993
- Ant Cities, Arthur Dorros, 1987
- Two Bad Ants, Chris Van Allsburg, 1988
- Next to an Ant, Mara Rockliff, 2004
- El camino de la hormiga, Gustavo Roldán
- La hormiga que canta, Laura Devetach & Juan Lima
- Descubre el mundo de las hormigas, Alejandro Algarra Pujante, 2014
- Rosie’s Walk, Pat Hutchins, 1967

- El paseo de Rosie, Pat Hutchins (traducido por Alma Flor Ada), 1997
- Diary of a Spider, Doreen Cronin, 2005
- Diary of a Worm, Doreen Cronin, 2003
- El diario de una lombriz, Doreen Cronin

### **Videos:**

Visit the following sites for short video clips:

- [www.arkive.org](http://www.arkive.org) (ex. octopus)
- [www.thekidshouldseethis.com](http://www.thekidshouldseethis.com) (ex. ice)
- [www.wonderopolis.org](http://www.wonderopolis.org) (ex. sprouting seeds)

*The Ants Go Marching* video clip: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2S\\_fbCGwOM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2S_fbCGwOM)

[Using Open-Ended Questions When Reading With Kids](#)



## Family Engagement

### *Messages for Caregivers*

#### **Open-ended questions**

Open-ended questions are questions that can't be answered with one word, like "yes" or "green." Asking kids [open-ended questions](#) helps them develop language as well as critical thinking and communication skills.

#### **Respond positively to kids' early efforts at writing -- doesn't need to be perfect yet!**

Children who are learning to speak don't start out talking perfectly, and we don't expect it -- nor do we expect them to keep quiet until they've mastered all the elements of language! Well, it's the same with writing. As kids experiment with expressing their ideas through writing, they won't start out with perfect skills in grammar, spelling, letter formation, and punctuation. But they will start out with enthusiasm, and we adults can keep that enthusiasm and motivation going by responding positively to children as they experiment with writing their ideas down to share with others.

#### **Connecting reading to real life**

Asking kids to connect what they are reading to past experiences, or to people, places, and things they know, increases comprehension and makes reading meaningful.

#### **Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) help kids develop verbal literacy through visual literacy**

Asking kids what's going on in an image, what they see that makes them say that, and what else they see, are three simple questions that help to stimulate critical thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy.

# Supporting Research

- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 1:** Understanding and supporting beginning readers' development of foundational phonics skills supports reading growth and comprehension.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 4:** Gradual release of responsibility is the most effective way to foster comprehension.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing**
- **Key Finding 9:** Differences exist in initial literacy progression, English vs. Spanish.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 10:** Stages of emergent writing from oral language to print can differ for (1) monolingual English, (2) monolingual Spanish and, (3) bilingual children.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 11:** Teaching oracy is instrumental to better reading and writing.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 12:** Opportunities for oral language are essential for reading development in the second Language.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 13:** Using Language Experience Approach (LEA) allows for shared and meaningful experiences that connect to print.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 15:** Embracing the multilingual perspective is essential for literacy learning (vs. the monolingual perspective).
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 16:** Children developing biliteracy in the US will draw on all of their linguistic resources when they write.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 17:** Translanguaging acknowledges and utilizes the bilingual child's complex language repertoire as a resource.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 18:** To acquire language children need to be immersed in meaningful and authentic language opportunities.
- **Best Practices in Reading and Writing Key Finding 19:** Building and incorporating background knowledge aids in engagement.
- **Library Program Models Key Finding 10:** Encouraging joint media engagement between children, caregivers, and educators increases literacy benefits of digital tools
- **Library & Afterschool Program Models Key Finding 17:** Since writing is key to reading/literacy, libraries should offer playful creative writing programming for K-3 kids.
- **Family Outreach and Engagement Key Finding 1:** Reaching out is essential to family engagement.
- **Family Outreach and Engagement Key Finding 3:** Reinforcing actions families can take to support learning is essential to family engagement.
- **Child Social Emotional Development Key Finding 3:** Children learn through play & libraries are apt spaces for children to learn through play.

- **Equity Key Finding 2:** Library is well-positioned to confer public legitimacy on bilingualism/biliteracy (and translanguaging).
- **Equity Key Finding 7:** Latino families from a range of backgrounds have a preference for activities that build and maintain cohesion within the family.

## Credits



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