

The Power of Language: Environmental Print



What is environmental print?

- Environmental print incorporates the logos, shapes, signs, and everyday words that children observe in their home and school environments.
- Environmental print that is prominently displayed around your classroom helps support young children as they begin to recognize letter shapes in a diverse group of different words, photos, and contexts.

To incorporate environmental print into your classroom, consider the following:

- Add environmental print and logos predominantly to a dedicated classroom word wall.
- Fill the dramatic play area with examples of environmental print items like:
 - Cereal boxes and cracker boxes.
 - Build an age-appropriate matching game where young children match environmental print logos with the correct letter (e.g. UNM logo to the letter U).
 - Create puzzles using donated cereal or cracker boxes that young children can solve in developmentally appropriate ways.

To teach literacy using environmental print, try these activities:

- In your classroom's dramatic play center, collect empty boxes of popular cereal brands, meal replacement bars, fruit snacks, crackers etc. Encourage your students to engage in pretend play with these materials and point out specific letter shapes. Support older children as they begin identifying brand names, specific letters, and their corresponding sound. Extend your student's learning by allowing them to "shop" in the dramatic play area.
- Support family engagement by creating a classroom restaurant book that includes photos of your students' and their family's favorite restaurant signs and logos. Students can discuss their favorite restaurant and share the logo with their peers.
- Use your smart phone or a digital camera to take pictures of different signs around your community. Consider taking photos speed limit signs, stop signs, do not enter signs, exit signs around your school or facility. Use these pictures to make a small book for your child to explore and learn how to "read."



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Some things to think about:

- Environmental print can be incorporated into every learning center in an early childhood classroom.
- Build puzzles for your students using the front of donated cereal or cracker boxes.
- Add photos of traffic signs to your classroom's block area.
- Add a classroom word wall somewhere special that encourages to interact with print items, logos and letters. To engage children, have each child bring in their own examples to put up on the word wall. Remember that the most important group of letters for children to learn are those in their first name.

You may do this by reflecting on the following ideas:

- Using environmental as learning experiences, supports meeting common developmental milestones or NMELG indicators in an intuitive way. When children are included in their learning, they can form concrete ideas about the world as it pertains to them, and their understanding of print and symbols.
- Literacy lessons should be built around children's needs and developmental abilities.
- Allowing and encouraging children to explore literacy concepts — can support their cognitive development. How children relate to print often depends on their cultural background and language. It's important for teachers to honor these values by creating a print rich environment.



More ideas and more can be found by accessing the New Mexico Early Learning System: www.nmels.org.
