

Enriching a Child's Literacy Environment

ECLE is a unique approach to teaching young children in order to take advantage of their innate learning ability. ECLE provides parents with [activities and experiences](#) that strengthen their children's thinking abilities, build confidence in social situations, develop their children's oral language and motor skills, and help their children interact with adults in meaningful ways.

ECLE provides parents with the tools they need to expand their children's learning environments, ensuring that all important aspects are covered in preparing them to enter and excel in school.

ECLE is also used by many preschools around the country. If you are interested in using this program in a preschool or similar agency, we offer training programs to help you implement the program. [Click here for more information.](#)

We also have several [articles](#) about ECLE that have appeared in various publications available for you to read online.

If you are interested in [purchasing](#) the ECLE manual, we offer several different ways of doing so.

If you would like any additional information about ECLE, please contact us via [e-mail](#), or call at 1-800-468-3274.

Large Muscle Coordination

The ECLE manual contains numerous activities to use to enhance a child's large muscle coordination. A few examples are listed below.

Wheelbarrow Walk

Children follow brightly colored tape in the shape of zigzags, lines and circles. Someone must pick up the child's feet while he/she walks on his/her hands. This develops upper body strength--especially the pectoral and dorsal muscles.

Materials Needed - Red, yellow, and blue masking tape.

Hop Like a Rabbit

This activity requires the children to jump on both feet which leads to hopping on one foot and skipping. This activity also requires endurance. Place paper feet cut from construction paper on the floor. Have the children hop like rabbits and follow the farmer's feet to his carrot patch. The children should continue to hop around the room following the path. At the end of the path the children could nibble on carrot sticks.

Materials Needed - Construction paper cut in the shape of the bottom of a shoe. Also, carrot sticks for those who make it to the end of the path.



Scissor Step on Low Balance Beam

Have the child stand sideways on the low balance beam. The child picks up one foot and moves it along the balance beam. Then, the child moves the other foot to meet the foot that moved until the child is in an upright standing position. Have the child continue to move one foot to the side and move the second foot to meet the first foot.



Materials Needed - 2" x 6" x 8' board.

Up, Up, Up

This activity develops eye-hand coordination skills. Provide each child with a balloon. Have the child hit the balloon in the air. The child should keep the balloon from falling to the floor. Provide enough room for children to move without colliding.

Materials Needed - A balloon for each child. Note: Supervise carefully any activity that involves the use of balloons by children. The rubber can lodge in a child's throat.

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Small Muscle Coordination

The ECLE manual contains numerous activities to use to enhance seven aspects of a child's small muscle coordination: scissors grasp, radial-digital grasp, inferior and fine pincer grasp, turning of wrist, assembly skills, pre-writing skills, and coordination of general skills. A few examples are listed below.

Salt Shaker Fun (Inferior and Fine Pincer Grasp)

Put several empty salt shakers on the Small Muscle table. Give each child an empty salt shaker. Have the child pick up toothpicks and fill all the holes in the salt shaker with the toothpicks. Have each child remove the toothpicks and place them back into the box when he/she is finished.

Materials Needed - Salt shakers and toothpicks.



Bean Bag Play (Turning of Wrist)

Each child doing this activity should have at least one bean bag.

However, one bean bag for each hand is better. The children shake the bean bags they are holding. A fun "Follow the Leader" game could be played. Shaking the bean bags high above the head or stooping down and shaking them near the floor or out to the side could be modeled by the "leader." The others follow and shake their bean bags however the leader does. The shaking movement encourages the turning of the wrist.

Materials Needed - Bean bags for every child.

Paper Clip Chains (Assembly Skills)

Provide a variety of colors of paper clips (silver, gold, blue, and red). Each child connects paper clips to make a long chain. The chain can be made into a necklace and worn.

Materials Needed - Paper clips in different colors.

Vegetable Prints (Radial-digital Grasp)

Cut a variety of vegetables in half. Large mushrooms, onions, green peppers, and celery make

interestingly shaped prints on paper. Other vegetables such as carrots, potatoes, leeks, egg plants, and acorn squash can also be used. Mix poster paints so the paint is thick enough to pour onto flat plates. Have the children dip the cut end of the vegetable into poster paint and make a print on white construction paper.

Note: The child should pick up the halved vegetables between the thumb and finger tips to dip into the poster paint.

Extra slices of vegetables should be served to the children before making the vegetable prints. This enables the children to taste the food before they begin to paint.

Materials Needed - A variety of vegetables cut in half such as green peppers, celery, carrots, potatoes, leeks, egg plant, and acorn squash. Thickly mixed poster paint. Use bright colors such as red, magenta, yellow, orange, blue, red for the paint. Plates for poster paints. White construction paper. Plastic aprons for the children.

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Sensory Stimulation

Sensory stimulation provides a child with a wide range of auditory (hearing), tactile (feeling), visual (seeing), olfactory (smelling), and tasting experiences. As the child performs these activities, the goal of the teacher is to provide active verbal exchange with him/her. The main objective of sensory stimulation time is to increase the oral language of the children, enabling them to describe themselves and their environment effectively. An example of this would be in describing a piece of spaghetti. The teacher could point out that the spaghetti is hard, smooth, long, cylindrical, and brittle as the children feel and break dry spaghetti. Each activity listed in this section is classified by the sense that it is to stimulate. Note also that besides the explanation of the activity and the list of materials needed, the vocabulary to be developed is listed. Try to use these words (and as many others as you can add) as you and the children experience sensory stimulation and talk about it. A few examples are listed below.

Flower Smell (Olfactory)

This activity allows children to smell fresh flowers and describe what they smell. Flowers can be obtained from the children's home gardens or from a florist. A trip could be made to a florist shop or into different persons' yards. Flowers can also be brought to school. Provide a carnation, chrysanthemum, rose, hyacinth, violet, tulip, daffodil, and lilac. Other varieties can be used. Have the children discuss the different fragrances of the fresh flowers.



A special field trip could be made to a local green house. Also, florists might come to the school as resource persons to describe the flowers they bring with them. They could also help the children with the vocabulary needed to describe the different smells of the flowers.

Materials Needed - A fresh cut rose, carnation, chrysanthemum, hyacinth, tulip, daffodil, violet, lilac. Place flowers in water to keep them fresh.

Vocabulary - Distinctive, fragrant, perfumy, delightful, sweet, ambrosial, pleasant, heavy, mild, rose, carnation, chrysanthemum, hyacinth, violet, tulip, daffodil, lilac, dull, spring, strong.

Relate the book *The Plant Sitter* by Gene Zion (Book #59 in Children's Literature section) to this activity.

Flashlight Fun (Visual)

This visual activity also involves eye-hand coordination. Place six to eight pictures that are familiar to the children (zoo or farm animal pictures, for example) on the wall or a door. Provide several children with flashlights. Tell the children to shine a light on an animal. (Tell the name of the animal.) Or, you could tell one child to shine his/her flashlight on one animal, and tell another child to shine his/her flashlight on another animal. This activity is fun for children, especially when they get better at handling the flashlight!

Holiday Ideas: At Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and other special holidays, seasonal pictures instead of animal pictures could be used.

Materials Needed - Flashlights, seasonal pictures, animal, toy, or clothing pictures.

Grape Day (Tasting)

Grape Day is always fun! This activity provides children with opportunities to taste many different products that come from the same source. This will also help with classification skills. Provide grape juice, both white and purple, raisins--again both white/light and dark. Also, buy fresh grapes, if available. The seedless green and red grapes are excellent since many children don't like seeds in their food. Grape leather, grape jelly and crackers, grape popsicles, raisin bread, and oatmeal cookies with raisins are other products to have children taste.

Materials Needed - Grape juice (Concord and white), raisins (white and dark), fresh grapes (red and green), dried grape leather, grape jelly and crackers, grape-flavored popsicles, raisin bread, oatmeal raisin cookies.

Vocabulary - Chewy, gummy, juicy, sweet, delicious, tangy, flavorful, light, cold, crisp, tart, sticky, grape, dark, luscious, mild, savory, delicate.

Zoo Animal Sounds (Auditory)

Distinguishing between different sounds aids in the development of auditory discrimination skills. It helps focus children's attention to auditory stimuli. Records or tapes of wild animal sounds are available from local libraries. Listen to the sounds BEFORE presenting them to the children. Try to find pictures of the animals to which you will be listening. As the children and you listen to the sound of a lion roaring, for example, ask, "What animal makes a roaring sound like this?" Then, after the children have told you what animal they are hearing, hold up a picture of that animal.

If the children are unable to match the sound of an animal with its name, do not let them keep guessing incorrectly. Instead, as you listen to a sound, hold up the picture that represents the animal making the sound and say, "This is the sound of an elephant trumpeting."

Materials Needed - A tape or record (available at local libraries) of zoo animal sounds and pictures that correspond to the animal that produces the sound on the tape.

Vocabulary - Roar, bellow, squeal, squeak, grunt, whistle, growl, trumpet, hiss, buzz, swish, wheeze, croak, snarl, bark, howl, yowl, squawk, shriek, screech.

Say: "You were able to tell the animal because you listened to the sound. You heard the (roar or whatever). You used your ears to hear the sounds."

Wet and Dry (Tactile)

This activity encourages children to make comparisons by feeling objects and deciding how they are different. Place the following items on a table: dried spaghetti and noodles and cooked spaghetti and noodles, a dry sponge and a wet sponge, dried flowers and fresh flowers, dried peas and fresh or frozen peas, dried leaves and fresh leaves, a potato chip and mashed potatoes, cookie dough and a baked cookie. The children touch each set of different objects and describe how they feel. The children should tell how the objects are the same (e.g., the same shape or color) and how they are different.

Materials Needed - Like objects that differ only in one being wet and the other dry. This could include: dried and cooked spaghetti or other noodles, dried flowers and fresh cut or growing flowers, dried peas and fresh or frozen peas, dried and fresh leaves, a potato chip and mashed potatoes, cookie dough and a baked cookie, wet or moist clay and hardened clay. There should be enough containers and plates for each item, napkins and plastic aprons for the children for easy clean up since this is a tactile activity and children will be touching the items. Bake extra cookies for the children, and tell the children that since the items will be touched it would be best not to eat any of the food, but that afterwards they could eat the extra cookies.

Vocabulary - Brittle, hard, pliable, squishy, gooey, wet, dry, moist, crunchy, stiff, pliant, impliable, bending, soft, supple, rigid, petrified, willowy, flexible, unbending, firm, unyielding, stiff, malleable.

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Music and Rhythm

Children have an abundance of energy that can be directed during movement time. Children at the preschool age feel uninhibited to try new things. They are eager and curious and love to receive attention from adults.

The teacher should provide many different opportunities for children to move freely. This can be done through movement activities. Movement incorporates many skills: physical, sensory-motor, and emotional which build creative imagination and social skills. Social skills will grow as the children enjoy activities together.

Provide sufficient space for children to be able to move freely their arms and legs. Make sure there is room for the children to run, skip, crawl, and leap.

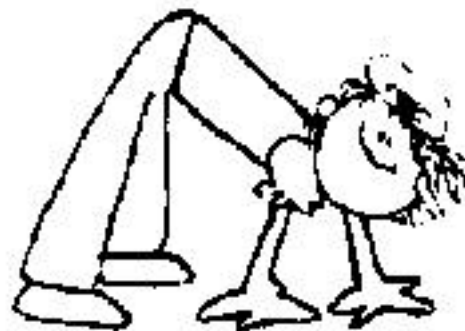
If a pianist is available, use him/her! If not, select many types of recorded music. Sounds of animals, sirens, trains, etc., can be found in local libraries. Tapes of any fast, slow, soft, or loud music can be used.

A few examples are listed below.

Inch Worm Fun

Model for students so they can become an inch worm like Leo Lionni's *Inch by Inch*. Have the children lie on their tummies and move their feet up to their hands.

Then, they slide their hands out in front of them until they are once again lying on their tummies. Play fun, snappy, sliding music for children to "inch" around the room to.



Make Your Own Music

Children should be allowed to make their own musical instruments. Materials such as paper towel rolls, cylindrical oatmeal containers, wooden dowels, old pipes, band-aid boxes or plastic containers, bottles with lids, dried beans, elastic bands, glasses filled with water, or sandpaper could be used.

- The paper towel roll can be used as a "horn."
- Cylindrical oatmeal containers make excellent drums. Cover with construction paper or paint. Pencils or 12" dowels can be used as drumsticks.
- Old or new 1/2" - 3/4" pipe cut at different lengths makes chimes. Drill two holes opposite each other at one end of the pipe. Tie a string through both holes. File cut edges so they are not sharp. The pipe can be held by the string. Mallets to strike the pipe can be made from pencils or wooden dowels.
- Plastic containers with lids or band-aid boxes make excellent rattles. Fill with beans. Close top. Cover with construction paper or paint.
- Small cardboard boxes 4 1/2" x 4 1/2" without a lid can be wrapped with elastic bands to make resonators. The elastics can be strummed. The width of the band determines its pitch.
- Glasses filled with different amounts of water make a xylophone. A pencil makes a good mallet.

Organize a band. Have all children with rattles play. Then, all children with drums play. Next all children in both groups play together. Have the children with chimes play. Then, the children with resonator boxes. The children with water xylophones play next. All instruments could be played separately so everyone can hear the unique sound each type of instrument makes. Have the children play loud, soft, fast, and slow.

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Print Awareness

Research has shown that a child's ability to identify letters by name (letter knowledge) is one of the most important predictors of the child's success in learning to read. Phonemic awareness is also a predictor of subsequent reading and spelling performance. Children should be given every opportunity to learn the names of letters as well as the sounds that the letters represent. Children should be provided opportunities to hear the rhythm and beauty of their language through literature and, especially, poetry. Repetition of poetry aids in memorization of the poems.

Poetry should be recited each day by the teacher until the children can say it with the teacher. A copy of the poem can be placed on the back of an appropriate picture. The picture keeps the children's attention as the teacher presents the poem. And the poem printed on the back of the picture will aid the teacher in memorizing the poem.

Each month a list of letter names, sounds, and words is identified that can be introduced to the children. Use velveteen letters to teach the names of the letters and the sounds. Words are written on sentence strips in the same manuscript letter style as the velveteen letters. A model or picture of the object that the word represents is also helpful to show the children as the word is being introduced. For example, when the word "cat" is taught, a picture of a Halloween cat is shown to the children.

Children respond orally with the teacher. By responding orally they are able to retain the information longer. Overt responses (responses that can be seen and/or heard by the teacher) increase the accuracy, the retention, and the comprehension of the learner. The oral response also helps the teacher know which child is responding confidently and which child needs more practice.

A quick pace is maintained. The children are exposed in brief, quick exercises that letters do have names, that they represent sounds, and that sounds can be blended into words. The children are not necessarily learning the names, sounds, or words--although some children will.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Great music refines the ear; great art refines the eye; and great literature refines the mind. When children are read to by parents and teachers, they develop a sense of literary and artistic appreciation. They hear the changing sounds and feel the rhythm in their language.

A teacher should make a conscious effort to provide reading materials for the children in the classroom. Not only should hard cover books be available, but soft cover books, magazines, catalogs, and newspapers should be placed in a special part of the room. Small chairs and tables, or bean bag chairs or mats could be placed in the "book area" so children can stay and browse through many books if they wish.

Children should be read aloud to daily. Reading to children makes them curious, provides added experiences, and aids in the acquisition of early reading skills.

A few examples are listed below.

***Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak.**

A story of Max, who dreams he becomes the king of all wild things.

Vicarious Experiences: Max and wild thing dolls could be displayed during the reading of the

story. Place the dolls in the "book corner" so children can enjoy them later. Around Halloween time let children make masks of wild things and have a wild rumpus of your very own--complete with dancing and growling!

***The Popcorn Book* by Tomie de Paola.**

Have you ever wondered about the best way to store popcorn? Or, how many types of corn there really are? How old is the oldest popcorn ever discovered? The Popcorn Book is an informative and entertaining book that answers these questions and more!

Vicarious Experiences: Follow one of the popcorn recipes found in the back of The Popcorn Book. Place popcorn kernels in an oil popcorn popper. Put the popper on a clean sheet on the floor and keep the children away from the hot oil. Ask the children how far they think the popcorn will pop. Let the popcorn pop around the room. Remove the popper once the corn is all popped. Gather up the kernels that landed on the sheet and put into a bowl for the children to eat.

***Gregory, the Terrible Eater* by Mitchell Sharmat**

Gregory, a goat, likes to eat fruits, vegetables, eggs, fish, bread, and butter. Gregory's parents are worried. Gregory should be eating shoes, newspapers, tin cans, old coats, and junk! What will they do?

Vicarious Experiences: Give each child a 16" x 22" piece of finger paint paper. This will be a placemat. Have the child glue a paper plate in the center of the finger paint paper. The child should also glue a plastic fork, knife, and spoon to the placemat. Provide buttons, shoelaces, old socks, bottle caps, yarn, newspaper, and pieces of burlap for the children to glue on the plate. They will be creative as they fix a meal for a goat.

Related Books: *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs* by Judi Barrett and *Bread and Jam for Frances* by Russell Hoban.

***Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* by William Steig**

This Caldecott Award book tells the story of Sylvester, a young collector of pebbles. One day he finds a pebble that is flaming red, shiny, and perfectly round, like a marble. To his surprise, it's magical! Read this story to find out the predicament in which Sylvester finds himself. Will he ever get home?

Vicarious Experiences: Give a flaming red, shiny, and perfectly round like a marble, pebble to each child. Purchase a bag of marbles. Spray them with fire engine red paint. Let dry. Turn over and spray the opposite sides. After reading the story, give the pebbles to the children and ask what they would wish for if they had a chance. If you can find real pebbles or stones that are almost perfectly round, paint those instead of the marbles.

***Miss Rumphius* by Barbara Cooney**

Miss Rumphius thinks of a way to make the world more beautiful. An excellent message of our

responsibility to leave the world a better place. Barbara Cooney's illustrations add to the charm of this book.

Vicarious Experiences: Make the school grounds or a yard more beautiful by planting flower seeds. (Just like Miss Rumphius did.) Give each child a packet of seeds. Annuals have a life-span of one season. They will reach their full potential immediately and have a brilliant show of color the first year they are planted. Perennial plants return year after year. There will be limited color from perennials the first year. During the second and subsequent years the flowers will bloom best.

This book could also be read in the fall. Plant five bulbs in a pot. Tulip, daffodil, hyacinth, or crocus bulbs could be planted. Make sure each child chooses and plants a bulb. Place the pots in a cool, dark place for 8 to 12 weeks, and after that put them on a sunny window sill and watch them bloom!

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Number Awareness

The purpose of the math activities in this section is to familiarize the child with number concepts, directions, space and time relationships, and to develop an understanding of likenesses and differences in his/her world by comparing objects.

Each activity is designed to help the child build recognition and verbal ability in dealing with numerals, numbers, and math concepts. Children need to be able to recognize likenesses and differences when dealing with mathematics. Opportunities should be provided to develop appropriate vocabulary such as: longer, shorter, bigger, smaller, more, less, heavier and lighter. This will aid the children when formal mathematical training begins.

The preschool teacher should present the material on cards using a quick pace. Daily review will aid the children in retaining what has been presented. Children using these activities should feel comfortable and confident in answering orally. To accomplish this, please refrain from testing the child. Present the material in a friendly, supportive manner. If a child answers incorrectly, listen carefully to the child. He/She might be answering another problem. Reteach or model the correct answer for the children.

Other math activities that use hands-on experiences and help in the development of math vocabulary might not proceed at the brisk pace that working with shape cards would.

A few examples are listed below.

Shape Cards (Spatial Relationships)

For the first month use the patterns for the following shapes: circle, triangle, square, and rectangle to trace onto red construction paper.

Cut out the shapes. The red color catches the children's attention. Mount the shapes on 9" x 9" oak tag. Write the name of the shape on the back of the card in the upper right-hand corner. These cards will be used each class period, so to extend the use of the cards, it is advisable to laminate the set. Practice the recognition of the shapes throughout the year.

Hold up the card and say, "This is a circle." Hold up the next card and say, "This is a triangle." Tell the children what the shape is while they are looking at the card. After a session where the children hear the words, then point out the number of sides that each shape has. Look at the shape of the circle. After another few sessions, ask the children to respond after you tell them the shape. Also, after a few sessions, you can begin to find shapes that are similar in the room--such as the square table.

Materials Needed - Shape cards. These are 9" x 9" oak tag cards with shapes cut out on red construction paper. These are then laminated. The size of the shapes is made by using the patterns found in the pattern portion of the book.

Will It Fit? (Spatial Relationships)

This activity provides practice in comparing different-sized objects. The children must determine if an object is volumetrically big enough to hold another object. Place large and small pots, pans, boxes,

bottles, and cups on the math concept table. Have the children see if a different sized ball, or straw, dowel (cut to four inches in length), etc., will fit into the pots, pans, boxes, bottles, cups. The children should be encouraged to describe what they are doing. "The ball is too large/big to fit into the cup." "This ball fits in the box. It isn't too big." "The cylinder (cut dowel) fits into the pop bottle, but the ball is too big to fit." This activity gives children the opportunity to experiment with the knowledge gained from Activity #2 presented in the first month: "Bigger Than-Smaller Than."

Materials Needed - Large and small pots and pans, boxes of different sizes, bottles, plastic catsup bottles, cups, etc. These objects are to be used to hold the following items: different-sized balls, straws, wooden dowel pieces cut to 4" in length.

Time of Day (Time)

This activity requires the child to identify which activity takes place at night and which takes place during the day. Cut and mount simple pictures of a child asleep in bed, a child playing ball, a child waking up, a child at school, a child putting on pajamas. Ask the children to tell what time of day it is when these activities occur.

Materials Needed - Pictures of a child asleep in bed, a child playing ball, a child waking up, a child at school, and a child putting on pajamas. Mount the pictures on oak tag or stiff paper and laminate to increase durability.

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Concept Development

The term "know" is a very difficult concept for children to acquire. "Know," of course, has several meanings, but the one most commonly thought of in a school setting is the, "I know that is true." It is the recognition that something is a fact. It can be proved to be true.

In teaching children what is true or a fact, it is important to recognize that they must find it out for themselves. A teacher cannot tell them that something is true and have the children know it for themselves.

A "concept" is an idea formed in the brain. A concept cannot be handed from one person to another. Words may not give another person a clear picture at all. In fact, they may confuse the learner.

Each person has to make his/her own concepts. The easiest way for children to obtain a concept of something is to have an experience with it--not through listening to someone else's words.

It is extremely important for the teacher to understand just how a person gets his/her actual personal knowledge of the things in his/her world. Teachers often resort to "talking to" or "telling" a class, instead of literally "showing" them the subject. This can be avoided by providing experiences for children in which they participate. They use one or more of their senses as they learn. They learn by "doing" and "saying."

The sensory stimulation activities provided earlier will assist children in recognizing the different sensory organs with which they learn.

Through a light wave, or a sound wave, or some form of taste, touch, smell, an impression is picked up and lodged in the mind. There is no literal picture in the mind, but there is an impression that begins to form a picture as continued experiences accumulate and meaning grows.

Throughout the year, teachers should provide activities that help children to obtain concepts in science, math, social studies, art, and music by providing concrete or vicarious experiences.

An example follows.

Air Is Real

Understanding or concept to be obtained: Air is everywhere, and it is real even though it cannot be seen.

First, give each child a straw, paints, and white construction paper. Have the children place paint drops on the paper and blow them with a straw. Ask, "What is making the paint drops move?" "Can we see what is moving the paint?"

Next, blow up a paper bag. Ask, "What is in the bag?" "What made it get bigger?" "How do you know air is in it?"

Finally, have the children expand their chest size by inhaling. Place a piece of yarn around the child's chest while standing quietly. Next, have the child take a deep breath, hold it, and again measure around the chest with a second piece of yarn. Compare the lengths of yarn. Have each child compare the lengths of their two pieces of yarn. Have them feel their chests expand as they fill their lungs with air.

Materials Needed: Straws, paint, white construction paper, yarn, paper bags.