



**Cymru**  
National Day Nurseries Association

# Factsheet

A photograph of a male teacher with a beard, wearing a light green shirt, leaning over a table and reading a book to three young children. The children are looking at the book with interest. The background shows a bright, modern nursery setting with white shelves and plants.

## Literacy Development in the Early Years

Curriculum for Wales

# Literacy Development in the Early Years

*“Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and listen in a way that lets us communicate effectively and make sense of the world.”*

*National Literacy Trust*

Literacy, along with digital competence and numeracy, are mandatory cross-curricular skills across the whole curriculum, and it is our responsibility to ensure children develop and progress in these skills. When planning learning experiences, we should ensure that children have opportunities to apply, develop and extend these skills in meaningful contexts, using the five developmental pathways.

This factsheet aims to give you a better understanding of literacy development within the early years.

## What is literacy?

A set of skills, including speaking, listening, reading and writing, which enable us to make sense of the world around us. Literacy is essential. Literacy is the foundation for accessing the world around us, socialising with others, problem-solving, making decisions, developing independence, managing money and working. Children’s early literacy skills are underpinned by their speech, language and communication development and vital to their overall progress and development.

## Literacy development and Curriculum for Wales

Literacy development is an integral part of Curriculum for Wales. Competence in literacy is essential for learning across the curriculum, not least because of the fundamental role of language in thinking. These developed skills will be essential and transferable to the children’s future as well as their work life.

## Embedding literacy development across the Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings

The Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) introduces the skills that children need to learn and develop. The literacy aspect of the framework includes skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Early literacy development focuses on how language and communication is key to children’s learning. The literacy experiences that children have in the early years form powerful brain connections. These connections are used for language, thinking and understanding.

Literacy in the early years includes talking about books, print in the environment, early mark-making and writing, as well as sharing books and reading. Without experiences like talking, singing, reading, rhyming, scribbling and drawing, the brain doesn’t develop these important connections.

Literacy development is embedded across the five developmental pathways within the Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings. This means, that if you focus on developing your learners through the ways described in the pathways in a holistic manner, then you will cover the skills required in the LNF for children ages 3 to 4 years and will not need to access the literacy framework as an individual document.

## Literacy development resources

Before children can learn to read and write, they need to develop early literacy skills that enable them to communicate, understand, observe and mark-make. To support with development of these skills, children need experience with pictures, objects, letters, words, sounds and mark-making opportunities.

One of the best ways to improve literacy skills is by encouraging a love of books and stories. Children should be provided with books and authentic reading materials, including those created by the children themselves. These reading materials should be available throughout the environment and not confined to one reading space.

Children should be given opportunities to develop pre-requisite skills for mark-making, such as manipulating clay and dough, and through messy play and experiences that help to develop grip. As well as given opportunities for mark-making itself across a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes, with a range of tools and media.

Learning to communicate is one of the most important early literacy skills that children develop. Enabling adults are the central resource in developing these skills. When enabling adults play, listen, and engage in communication with children, they help them develop their own communication skills. Enabling adults should actively engage children in playing with language and communication that uses commentary, discussion, modelling, questioning, pondering and explanation.

## Literacy development in practice

Literacy skills should be developed holistically through real-life authentic experiences and play opportunities. Children should be immersed in rich language experiences and learning opportunities to develop their listening, speaking and communication skills. When developing language and communication, we should ensure that children are given time to process what they hear and see, before responding, reflecting and revisiting. We must understand that some children will also communicate by means other than speech.

Effective environments should be communication rich and focus on promoting emerging communication skills and developing them further. The environment should ensure that children have access to a broad range of authentic resources to help build vocabulary and facilitate concept development. Children need to hear and use speech in meaningful daily contexts. Children learn about oracy, reading and writing as they observe and become actively involved in real, purposeful literacy experiences in their everyday lives.

There are many aspects of practice that are useful in developing children's literacy skills. It is important that enabling adults recognise those opportunities and take advantage of them. Some examples of these may be:

- Daily routines: self-registration, name places, songs, rhymes
- Environment access: labels, symbols, directions and instructions
- Experiences: games, recording children's descriptions of their creations/learning; looking for a recipe, reading and following it; sharing 'all about me'
- Play environments: books, mark-making, role play, puppets, provocations and invitations
- Story time/circle time: stories, poems, rhymes and songs, story bags/sacks/boxes
- Sustained shared thinking: questioning, pondering, extending, exploring.

As children are drawn into literacy practices in their everyday lives they learn about both the forms and functions of oracy, reading and writing.

## Professional development

It is important to consider the knowledge of the adults in the setting. If the role of the enabling adult is to facilitate, enable and discover with the children- are they confident in their own literacy skills? When expecting practitioners to engage confidently in developing children's literacy skills, it's important to consider learning and experience in order to offer support and training if necessary. This doesn't have to be costly, sometimes it can be achieved through supervision and peer observation. What is important is that all practitioners know where to get further support and understand the importance of developing children's literacy skills to support their overall growth and ensure they reach their full potential.

### Reflective questions:

- How do you allow children time and space to play, explore and develop their mark-making skills?
- How do you facilitate literacy focused experiences through planning and responding to children's interests?
- How do you provide a range of literacy focused experiences in a variety of contexts?
- How do you engage children in sustained shared thinking?
- How do you introduce children to new concepts and vocabulary?
- How do you support children to develop a love of books and reading?

## Further support and information:

- Curriculum for Wales – NDNA <http://www.ndna.org.uk/CFWAdditionalElements>
- Curriculum for Wales – Hwb <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/>
- Talk with me – Welsh Government <https://www.gov.wales/talk-with-me>
- BookTrust Cymru - <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/booktrust-cymru/>
- National Literacy Trust - <https://literacytrust.org.uk/early-years/>
- myNDNA resources - <https://ndna.org.uk/my-resources/>



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for early years

# Factsheet

Our factsheets are written by early years experts for the early years workforce. Most NDNA factsheets are free to our members.

NDNA is the national charity and membership association representing children's nurseries across the UK. We are a charity that believes in quality and sustainability, so we put our members' businesses at the very heart of ours.

We are the voice of the 21,000-strong nursery sector, an integral part of the lives of more than a million young children and their families. We provide information, training and advice to support nurseries and the 250,000 people who work in them to deliver world-class early learning and childcare.

See the full range of NDNA factsheets at [www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets](http://www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets)

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