

The classroom

Amanda taught an all-day kindergarten class with 16 native-English-speaking Latino and African American children in a Title I school. Most children had not attended a child care program or preschool the previous year.

Daily literacy activities included reading aloud, guided reading, sustained silent reading (SSR), and journal writing and sharing. The literacy-rich environment included posters, lists of children's names, sight words, books of different levels and interests, and displays of children's journal entries.

When Amanda enrolled in a graduate course in January, Shelley, the instructor, introduced the use of environmental print in literacy instruction (Xu 1998). Amanda initially did not make a connection between environmental print and her teaching until she noticed Billy copying in his journal *Happy Birthday* from a poster listing the birthdays of all the children in the class. Billy's journal entry celebrated the birthday of his friend José. Before he had often drawn pictures and

written strings of letters in his journal, but he never seemed to like writing. After noticing Billy's journal entry, Amanda wondered if environmental print would also help other children learning about writing.

Because children have concrete and personal connections to environmental print, its use in classrooms can make reading and writing experiences meaningful and developmentally appropriate.

Gathering environmental print items

Amanda first brought to class a granola bar wrapper and some other environmental print items and pasted them on an EP board (Christie, Enz, & Vukelich 1997)

Environmental Print—Everywhere, from A to Z

advertisements
(department stores,
supermarkets, etc.)

books, billboards (for
example, at road-
side, gas station),
building/store names,
bumper stickers

calendars, catalogs,
comics, coins/bills,
containers (for ex-
ample, milk cartons,
soda cans, tooth-
paste tubes), cou-
pons

data, directions

ecumenical publications, enter-
tainment materials (for example,
movie posters, programs for
performances, concert tickets)

flyers, fortune cookies

greeting cards, grocery/shopping
bags

hotel toiletries



Courtesy Amanda L. Rutledge

instructions (such as for assem-
bling furniture, operating a
computer, taking medicine)

journals, junk mail

keyboards, keys, kitsch

labels (for example, classrooms,
public facilities), license plates

magazines, maps, menus

name tags, newspaper
headlines

office supplies

photocopies

posters, price tags, public
notices, programs for
performances

quilts, quotes

recipes, receipts, road signs
(for example, Detour,
Speed Limit 30, Yield)

snack bags, stationery (writ-
ing paper, pencils, crayons,
etc.), street names

telephone books, tickets (for con-
cert, bus, etc.), *TV Guide*

utility bills

vacation literature/souvenirs

Websites, wrappers (for instance,
for foods, household items)

yard sale signs

zoo brochures

labeled We Can Read. The children, however, paid little attention to most items except for those they recognized. Lack of interest in the teacher-created board made Amanda realize that she needed to actively involve the children in collecting EP items that were familiar and meaningful to them.

During a walk to the school garden three blocks away, Amanda directed the children's attention to the STOP sign at an intersection. She explained, "The words we see along the street, like *stop*, are environmental print. The words we see in a supermarket, like *pull* and *push* on the door or *Apple Juice* on a bottle, are environmental print. The words we see in your house, like *Corn Chex* on a cereal box, are also environmental print. We can see all kinds of print around us in the environment."

When they got back to the classroom, the class gathered in front of the We Can Read board. Amanda continued, "Juice boxes and cereal boxes are environmental print items. The words on them, like *orange* and *raisins*, are environmental print. I want you to bring your EP items to school. Look around your house, find something you can read, and bring it to school—like coupons, a magazine cover, bread bags, or an advertisement for something you like. Also ask your parents to save you a cereal box about this size [holding up a cereal box]. Your cereal box will be your EP box. You can keep your EP items in the box or paste them on the EP board."

Amanda also sent a note to the children's families:

Dear Families:

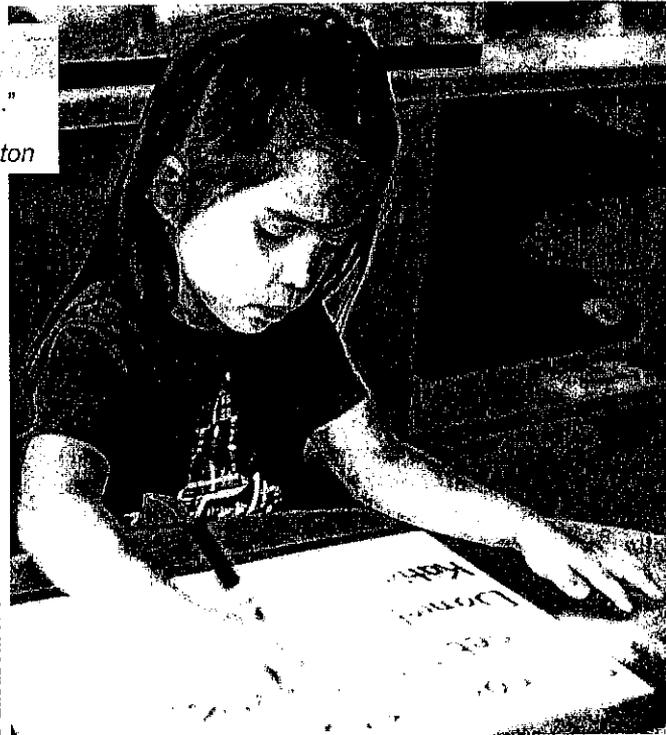
Please look around your house with your child. Look for items with words that your child can read, like milk on a milk carton. Ask your child to bring these items to school. Also, please send in an empty cereal box. Thanks.

— Ms. Rutledge

In the weeks that followed, the children brought in items from home and hunted for others during school breakfast and lunch times. Some even went to their friends in other grades or looked on the playground for EP items.

The items that the children collected soon filled up the We Can Read board. Amanda put individual children's EP boxes in an environmental print center. After the children and teacher gathered environmental print items that were uniquely meaningful to them, they were ready for EP show-and-tell and group and class word-logo matching activities.

"Learn as much by writing as by reading."
— Lord Acton



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Doing an environmental print show-and-tell

Unlike a traditional show-and-tell session in which children focus on the physical features and sentimental values of an object, during an EP show-and-tell, each child reads or talks about the print on an item. The audience interacts with the child during the presentation.

Juan: I want to show you my Cheerios [pointing at the cereal box logo].

Amanda: Juan, can you tell me the *chunk* we are studying? Remember, we've talked about how two consonant letters come together and make one new sound. The new sound is called a chunk.

Juan and others: C-h, /ch/.

Amanda: That's right! Any other words that have the c-h chunk?

Reggie: *Crunch* in Cinnamon Toast Crunch has a c-h chunk [holding up his cereal box].

Amanda: Is the c-h chunk in *Crunch* in the same place as in *Cheerios*?

Children: No, c-h is at the beginning of *Cheerios*. C-h is at the end of *Crunch*.

José: Hey! *Chunk* has a c-h chunk!

In this example, Amanda encourages Juan and others in the class to make a connection between the c-h chunk in *Cheerios* and in other words the children know. Such instruction on print knowledge is natural, meaningful, and context embedded. Since the talk involved their familiar EP items, the children had a strong sense

of ownership for this activity. Amanda observed that children who rarely participated in other literacy activities were motivated to bring in their EP items and eager to talk about them.

Doing environmental print word-logo matching activities

While EP show-and-tell supports children in disassociating print from its concrete logo context, usually only three or four children can show and tell about their items within a 20-minute period. Because Amanda wanted every child to have an opportunity to talk about print, she decided to experiment with small group and whole class word-logo matching activities.

Selecting the words

In this article we define *logo* as a broad context in which environmental print appears. To allow the children to interact with a variety of items in the EP center and yet to conserve storage space, Amanda decided to keep only the front of large items (for example, tissue boxes). She pasted small logo items (stickers from oranges and bananas, for example) on cards and then laminated them so the children could use them over and over.

During an environmental print show-and-tell, each child reads or talks about the print on an item. The audience interacts with the child during the presentation.

When Amanda selected words for the matching activities, she followed two rules of thumb. The first was not to select too many words from a logo. She wrote just one or two words in large print on individual three-by-five-inch index cards. A logo usually does not have much print; thus, the children were not overwhelmed by many unfamiliar words. Instead, they could pay attention to a few words during the matching activities.

As children became more familiar with the activities, Amanda increased the number of words from logos and also the number of logos from which she selected words. She also involved children in selecting words so they would feel a sense of ownership.

The second rule was to select a word to serve multiple instructional purposes (see Table 1). For

Table 1. Purposes for Selecting Environmental Print Words

To address	Examples
Children's interests	Amanda selects the word <i>chicken</i> from a newspaper advertisement because she has noticed that the children talk a lot about Chicken Jane, a cartoon character in the PBS show BETWEEN THE LIONS. She wants the children to know the word.
Children's backgrounds	Amanda highlights the word <i>tortilla</i> from a tortilla wrapper, because the word designates a staple of many Latino households. The word holds important meaning for the children.
Word families	Amanda takes the word <i>fat</i> from "2 grams of fat" on a cracker box because it rhymes with <i>cat</i> and <i>hat</i> which children have learned from Dr. Seuss's <i>The Cat in the Hat</i> .
Phonics	Amanda cuts out the word <i>wheat</i> from a Wheat Chex box because it starts with the chunk w-h that the children are currently learning.
Sight words	Amanda selects the word <i>bread</i> from "Fresh and Hot Bread" on a supermarket advertisement. She and the children have talked about the word while reading Linnea Riley's <i>Mouse Mess</i> . Amanda wants to know if they can recognize the word without seeing a picture of bread.
Compound words	Amanda cuts out the word <i>popcorn</i> from a popcorn bag. She wants to use it as a springboard to introduce the concept of compound words.
Study topics	Amanda chooses the word <i>zoo</i> from a bag of animal crackers because the word is related to the children's study of zebras.

example, Amanda selected the word *chicken* for two purposes: (1) to introduce the written label for a farm animal and (2) to help children learn a new word that started with the chunk c-h.

Modeling

Amanda first explained to the children what a logo card and a word card were.

Amanda: [holding up a word card] This card with the word *fruit* is a word card. I've selected *fruit* from this logo [holds up the Mixed Fruit logo]. A logo sometimes has many words and pictures. To match a word card with a logo, find the word on the logo. Now, let's do one word-logo matching activity [places on the easel a box logo containing the words *Natural Fruit Flavor*, then holds up the word card for *fruit*]. How can we find *fruit* on one logo?

Children: Look at the pictures [pointing at the box logo].

Amanda: Yes, pictures can give us some clues. There are some words on this logo. So where is the word *fruit*? What other clues can we use?

Carole: A beginning letter!

Amanda: Right. What is the beginning letter for *fruit*?

Children: F.

Amanda: F is our important clue. Let's look on the logo for the words beginning with *f*. [Children point at *fruit* and *flavor*.] Do we need other clues?

Children: Look at other letters and sound out the word.

Group word-logo matching

The group EP word-logo matching activity involves a small group of children. All word cards and logos are in two separate piles. Children first pick up a word card from one pile and then find the matching word on a logo.

Amanda noted that her children used knowledge of letters to find their words on logos. For example, Annie picked up the word card *corn* and started searching through five logos on the floor.

LaTasha: [pointing to the word card] You look at the first letter. What is it?

Annie: C.

LaTasha: That's right. Then you look for words that have a *c* in the beginning [pointing at the logos on the floor]. Here is one word with a *c* [pointing at *creamed* on a creamed-corn can logo]. Here is another word with a *c* [pointing at *corn* on the logo].

Annie: Now we have two words. But we are only looking for one word. Right?

LaTasha: Right. Let's see the word on the card [putting the word card next to the logo]. See, the word on the word card has an *n* at the end. [Pointing at *corn*] This word on the logo does not have an *n* at the end. This is not the word. It must be this one [pointing at the word *corn*]. It says /k/-/o/-/r/-/n/.

Annie: Like the word *horn*.

LaTasha: Yeah. They rhyme.

LaTasha was among the children who could use a word's initial letter to match the word on the word card to the one on the logo. She could also apply the strategy of sounding out an unknown word. She made her thinking process explicit for Annie, who then made a connection between the words *corn* and *horn*.

A logo usually does not have much print; thus, children are not overwhelmed by many unfamiliar words.



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Whole class word-logo matching

During the whole class word-logo matching activity, the class was divided into Group A and Group B. Each child in Group A received a word card; each child in Group B received a logo. Those with word cards looked for their partners with logos to match their words, and then each pair of children talked to the whole class about the words. If children made mismatched partners, the children and Amanda talked about the print on the word card and the logo and discussed why the mismatch occurred.

For example, Maria held up the word card *with* next to Shawn's logo of a tissue brand with the phrase "White Facial Tissue."

Amanda: Maria, what is your word?

Maria: /w/-/i/-/th/—*with*. Like "I am with you now."

Amanda: Good! Where can you find this word on Shawn's logo?

Maria: Right here [points at the word *white*].

Amanda: What does this word say?

Children: [sounding out *white*] White. It is the color white.

Amanda: Are *with* and *white* the same word?

Billy and Will: Yes. They have *w*, *h*, *i*, and *t*.

Amanda: Yes, they do, but look again carefully. Are the letters in the same order?

Rashand: *With* has *h* in the end. *White* has *e* in the end.

Amanda: Great observation! What is after *w* in *with*? What is after *w* in *white*?

Brandy: I-t-h.

Shawn: H-i-t-e.

Amanda: So *i*, *t*, and *h* in *with* are in a different order when they are in *white*. If the same letters are in different orders, they make up different words—like *no* and *on*. Now, Maria and Shawn, do you two need to look for new partners?

Billy: Hey, Maria, you are with me! See my logo [holds up a logo for cheese crackers, where "Made with Real Cheese" appears].

When Billy, Will, Rashand, and Brandy helped Maria and Shawn, they provided powerful peer modeling and also demonstrated their knowledge about print in a meaningful context. The talks about print offered the

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appreciate others' linguistic and cultural heritage. They also learn how all languages serve similar social functions and have similar conventions (Xu 2003).

Environmental print offers meaningful, familiar, and powerful material for literacy teaching. Teachers and children have easy access to most EP items. The activities described in this article and in Table 2 are developmentally appropriate for kindergartners and first-graders, but some can be modified for preschoolers

(three- and four-year-olds). For example, instead of teaching specific linguistic elements (like the /ch/ sound or the *at* phonogram in *cat*), during show-and-tell of environmental print items, teachers can help young children understand various

print concepts: words are used to label something, words are read from left to right, and words serve different functions. In so doing, we help young children develop basic concepts of print, a solid foundation for early literacy.

The talks about print offered the class multiple opportunities to learn about paying attention to a whole word, not just part of it.

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• I find television to be
• very educating. Every
• time somebody turns on
• the set, I go in the other
• room and read a book.
• — Groucho Marx

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