

Everyday Learning Series
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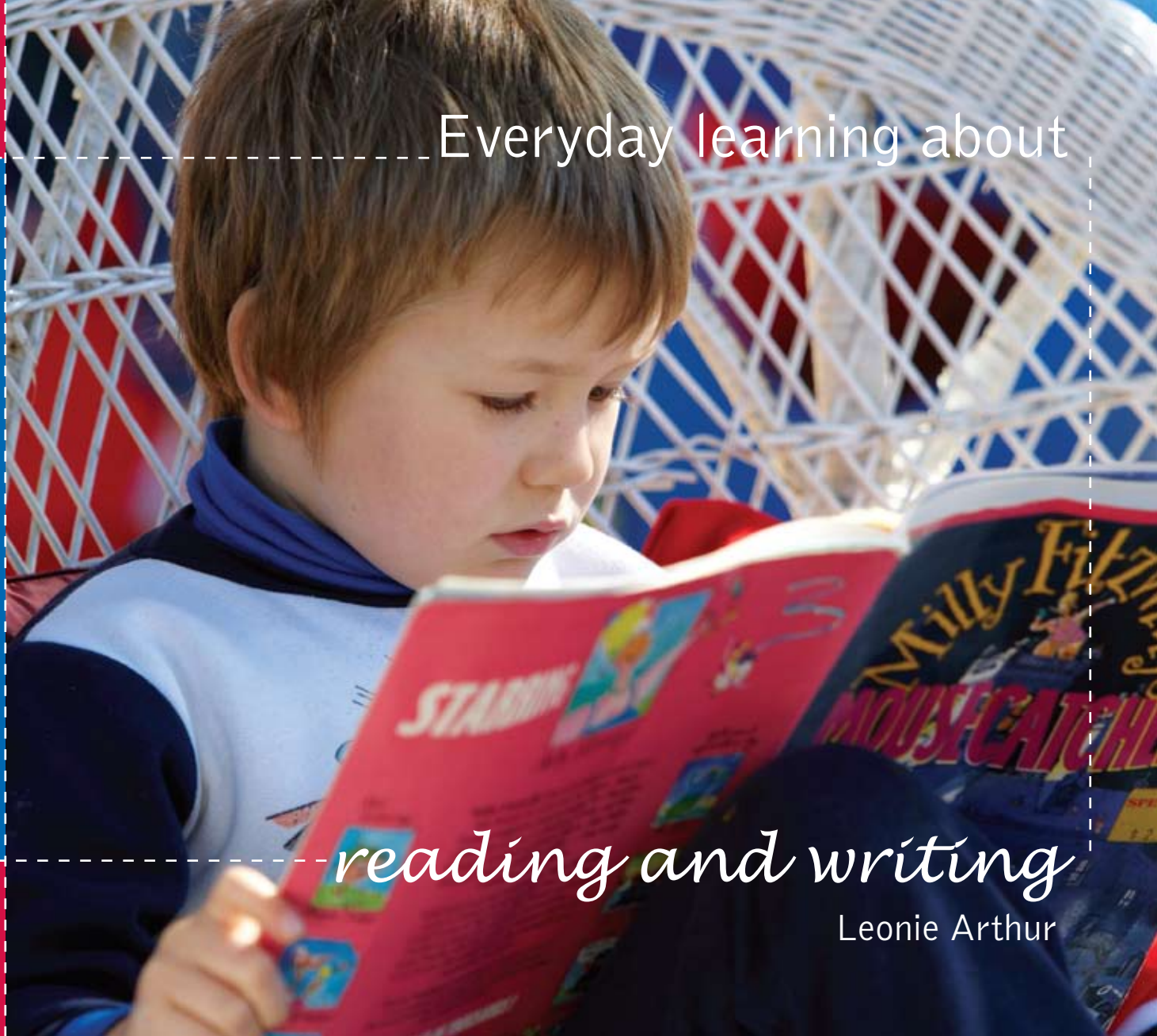
About babies
toddlers and
preschoolers



Everyday learning about

reading and writing

Leonie Arthur





About the author

Leonie Arthur

Leonie Arthur has worked with children in long day care and preschool settings as well as in the early years of school. She is currently working in the tertiary sector in teacher education programs, where she teaches and researches in the area of young children's literacy learning. She has worked on a number of projects related to children's literacy learning with early childhood staff and families, and has written books and articles on early literacy for teachers and parents, including *Learning to read*, another title in the *Everyday Learning Series*.

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About Early Childhood Australia

Early Childhood Australia actively promotes the provision of high-quality services for all young children from birth to eight years and their families, and supports the important role of parents. Early Childhood Australia is also the national umbrella organisation for children's services and a leading early childhood publisher.

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The most important early learning happens through day-to-day life experiences, and the **Everyday Learning** books are about how parents and carers can make the most of these experiences.

What an exciting responsibility it is to be helping build the foundations for the future of young children!

- › The first years of life are the foundation for all later growth, development and learning.
- › Every experience counts! Babies and young children are learning all the time, with most learning taking place in relationships.
- › Research shows that what happens in these years is the key to:
 - being able to relate confidently and effectively with others
 - mental and emotional health
 - educational success.

Babies and young children are learning all the time.

What do babies and young children need, to get the best start for living and learning?

To learn best they need parents and carers (their first teachers) who:

- › are warm and caring
- › know each baby or child very well and appreciate what is special about them
- › take time to understand the child's messages (cues) and to respond to them with encouragement, praise, comfort, independence and rest as needed
- › are able to see, share and celebrate the big and small joys and achievements of the children in their care.

Adults provide:

- › *responsive and sensitive care*
- › *a safe and interesting place to be.*

They follow children's lead by supporting their exploration and the things they like to do.

There is no set list of things to teach babies and young children.

Living is learning and children learn through living. All children and babies have their own abilities and interests. Follow the child's lead.

Watch and listen; provide opportunities; give support; build on each child's strengths. Babies and children also come from family and cultural backgrounds that are part of the way they are and need to be included in their experiences. These books will help you to provide the best start for the children in your care.

Reading and writing in the twenty-first century

As the world around us changes, so does literacy. Literacy – being able to read and write for everyday purposes – is still essential to making choices and living a full life.

But the 'things' we view, listen to, read and write are very different now, and so are the skills young people need to access and use information wisely. These 'things' are often called 'texts' – visual, audio and multimodal pieces of communication exchanged between people via print, film or digital means.

In today's technological world, literacy often involves screen-based texts such as internet sites, computer games, television and DVDs. There is a greater use now of images such as photographs, signs, symbols and drawings. Literacy nowadays is as much about 'reading' the visual as it is about reading words. Today's literacy is also about *creating* multimodal texts – texts that combine images, sounds and written words – rather than just writing.

'Literacy nowadays is as much about "reading" the visual as it is about reading words.'



To function effectively in the twenty-first century our children need to be competent:

- › speakers
- › listeners
- › viewers
- › creators of visual images and multimodal texts
- › critical thinkers
- › readers
- › writers.



Literacy is part of everyday life. As we take part in daily routines we are reading, viewing, creating texts, speaking, listening and thinking critically. For example, we are using literacy when we read the price of petrol at the service station, check the train timetable, write a shopping list, compare movie reviews online, or send a text message on our mobile phone.

Literacy is about communicating with others. It involves people sharing and making meaning with spoken and written language as well as with images such as photographs and drawings.

Literacy also involves thinking critically about what we hear, read and view. We need critical literacy skills to help us locate and evaluate information from a range of sources. We also need to understand the ways texts are created to present particular points of view, or to sell products. Critical literacy is particularly important, as much of the information we access is via technologies such as the internet and television, where the sources and reliability of information are not always clear.



There are many different types of texts that are part of our everyday lives, including:

- › Newspapers
- › Comics
- › Street directories
- › DVDs
- › Online videos
- › Television programs
- › Magazines
- › Photographs
- › Jokes
- › Stories and information books
- › Email, chat, instant messaging
- › Websites
- › Video console games
- › Computer games
- › Shopping catalogues
- › Food packaging
- › Menus
- › Assembly instructions
- › Greeting cards
- › Birthday invitations
- › Television guides
- › SMS text messages
- › Online social networking sites such as Facebook and Myspace
- › Street signs
- › Billboards and advertising
- › Logos and symbols on clothing
- › Songs, rhymes and chants

Children encounter many of these texts as they go about their daily lives with their families and communities. The kinds of texts available and the ways of interacting with texts differ in different families and communities. Families might have a strong focus on storytelling, on sharing jokes and rhymes, or on exploring together in the backyard or park and talking about what they find. Some families may spend time together watching television and DVDs or playing computer games. Other families may borrow books from the library and read bedtime stories.

In many families and communities, interactions occur in a language other than English. In these circumstances children will be learning the spoken and written characteristics of the language, as well as the beliefs, values and ways of interacting embedded in that language. It is important to support children and families in continuing to use their home language while introducing English as a second language, as this helps to maintain cultural identity and family relationships.



There is no one way of 'doing literacy'. Families support children's literacy in different ways, and children develop different sorts of literacy understandings depending on their family experiences.



'Families support children's literacy in different ways, and children develop different sorts of literacy understandings depending on their family experiences.'

How do children learn to read and write?

Children learn through interactions with others – family members, carers and other children. These everyday conversations are essential for children's language learning and later reading and writing. There is considerable evidence that the quality of the conversations young children experience is deeply influential in forming their ideas, understandings and language competence, which, in turn, affects their learning and school success in quite dramatic ways.

When parents and carers sing songs, recite chants and rhymes and tell stories, children enjoy and learn about the sounds and patterns of language. This helps them to recognise sounds and language patterns when reading. Experiences with songs, rhymes and stories also build an appreciation for language and story, as well as a positive attitude towards language and literacy learning.

Children also learn by observing others. Parents and carers can model everyday uses of literacy (such as filling out forms or using a recipe) so children see that literacy is meaningful and functional. It is particularly beneficial if children see male family members and friends using reading and writing for pleasure or to get things done.



'Everyday conversations are essential for children's language learning and later reading and writing.'



Everyday learning about reading and writing

Reading and writing are important parts of our everyday experiences, and essential to living a full life. Therefore, it is important to provide strong literacy learning environments for young children, and nurture their literacy skills from birth.

The early childhood years are a period of rapid learning. From the moment they are born children are learning about language and how to communicate with others, and parents and carers play a key role in supporting early literacy.

Everyday learning about reading and writing is an invaluable resource that will assist in incorporating early literacy learning into day-to-day experiences in the home. The book provides helpful advice on how to:

- make children aware of the everyday uses of literacy
- be prepared for when children learn to read and write
- provide educational and fun literacy play opportunities
- encourage children to start thinking critically about literacy
- inspire children to view literacy as meaningful and functional.

Author Leonie Arthur researches and teaches in the area of early childhood literacy education, and uses her extensive knowledge to demonstrate how to support early literacy from birth to school-age.

