Given that 85-90% of cognitive development takes place in the first 5 years of life, Child Care teachers are in an optimal position to help the youngest learners reach their potential during their first years. *Literacy in Early Learning Spaces* provides ongoing professional support for Early Childhood Educators who teach in a Child Care setting. The program provides Professional Development sessions in Literacy and Language Development topics, and bi-monthly coaching with an Early Childhood Literacy Specialist for STAR 1 and 2 teachers of ages birth-5 years. The program provides book nooks, books, and literacy materials for classrooms. *Literacy in Early Learning Spaces* also helps Child Cares host Family Engagement events twice a year for parents to receive books and learn fun ways to support their child’s literacy and language development at home.

During the first implementation year of *Literacy in Early Learning Spaces*, an evaluation team from Abt Associates collected and analyzed data from Director and teacher interviews, teacher surveys, professional development feedback forms, classroom observations, and parent/guardian feedback forms.

### Materials and Supplies

During baseline observations of classrooms at the 14 centers that participated in Year 1, LiELS staff observed nearly all programs had books in classrooms. Yet, observers documented a range in the number, quality, and age appropriateness of books across classrooms. Eight of the 54 participating classrooms had no books when they first joined the program. By the end of the first year of the program, each participating classroom had received approximately 77 books for the classroom library.

**BEGINNING OF THE FIRST YEAR** (14 centers)

- Classrooms varied in the number, quality, and age appropriateness of books

**BY THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR**

- Each participating classroom had received approximately 77 books tailored for their classroom library

All of the teachers interviewed reported receiving materials to support language and literacy activities, and they reported that the coaching successfully helped them learn how to incorporate the materials into activities in their classrooms.

“[The supplies] are awesome. They gave us these little containers filled with books and things in case the child tears a book or something. ... I see that a lot of [the children] are learning a lot of things and recognizing letters. ... I see a big change, since all of the supplies. They are utilizing and loving the supplies.”

– LiELS teacher

Teachers indicated that specialists were effective in identifying and meeting material needs in the classrooms.

- Nearly all teachers who were surveyed reported they “agreed” (30%) or “strongly agreed” (68%) their literacy specialist helped them learn how to use the materials or tools in the Resource Binder, such as blank lesson plans, resource charts, finger plays, songs and nursery rhymes, and circle time songs that could be used in conjunction with the books and supplies given to classrooms.

Half (50%) of Directors reported that without the Literacy in Early Learning Spaces Program, they would not have been able to get needed literacy materials or resources for their classrooms. Books and supplies provided by the program have been extremely well-received, and some directors report

“[The book nook] was a big help. We always wanted books nooks but because of the budget, we couldn’t. Our children love the book nooks and pillows. They showed us how a library should be set up so it helped us out.”

– Center Director
dramatic transformations in the classrooms in their centers. The book nooks, with all their supplies, books, and furnishings, have been the most notable feature of the transformed settings. Directors reported:

• Soft furnishings and new books made book areas more appealing to children and increased the popularity of book areas (and reading in general); and
• Children have quickly taken to the book nooks, seeking out books to “read” on their own or with friends while lounging on the cushions in the dedicated area.

Professional Development

Professional development (PD) sessions seemed to be targeted correctly, both in terms of content and frequency. Nearly all directors (10/12) reported that all or nearly all of the teachers in their centers attended all of the PD sessions. Most teachers who were interviewed were excited about how practical the trainings were, and they reported being able to apply what they learned in the trainings in their classrooms right away.

Directors and teachers reported the following training topics and activities were the most useful:

• Coaches modeled techniques for read-aloud.
• Coaches provided strategies for increasing the richness of activity/interest centers.
• Coaches gave specific examples of how to integrate literacy throughout the classroom.
• Coaches demonstrated and provided support materials for planning purposefully.

Directors and teachers who attended the professional development sessions completed feedback forms after each of the four sessions. Most participants who attended the professional development trainings:

• reported the activities and resources shared during the sessions were “helpful” (12-30%) or “very helpful” (70-88%);
• “agreed” (9-21%) or “strongly agreed” (78-90%) the session helped them understand the importance of the session topic; and
• reported they felt “prepared” (17-30%) or “very prepared” (61-82%) to implement the activities and strategies from the trainings.

Nearly all of the teachers in the centers attended all of the PD sessions

“Because I’m getting more experience in this training and learning how to be more engaged, we’re all excited for the story. I want to engage with [the children] more and I am able to do that more now than before because I didn’t have all the stuff and material presented to me.”

– LiELS teacher

10 out of 12 DIRECTORS REPORTED that

“To me, every time I went to the session, it left a big impact on me – there’s stuff I’ve heard that I’ve never heard before and different ideas that I would try in my class, for instance, how to communicate with my parents and to inform them about their child. I took everything I got from those sessions. If it’s even one thing, I would try to move it over into my classroom. Every time I visited, it helped me in more ways than one.”

– LiELS teacher

Nearly all participants were in agreement about several features of the four professional development sessions

The purpose of this professional development was clearly defined.

Participant and interaction were encouraged.

The content was organized and easy to follow.

I will use what I learned in my classroom.

I feel comfortable asking my Early Childhood Literacy Specialist for help if I have questions about today’s professional development.

I plan to attend future professional development sessions offered by the Early Childhood Literacy Specialists.

Note: Responses were obtained from feedback forms collected after four professional development sessions. The total number of respondents per question ranged from 310 – 313.
Coaching

Directors reported that coaches have been accessible and flexible, and teachers reported they received at least one visit per month from their coach. All directors reported that coaches have provided individualized modeling (customized for the teacher as well as for different age groups), which has generated interest and enthusiasm in the classroom among children and teachers. Literacy specialists maintained a balance between a focus on improvement and building skills and a willingness to meet participants (directors and teachers) where they were, to meet their immediate needs.

Directors and teachers reported the specialists most frequently engaged in the following activities when they visited classrooms:

- modeling behaviors and strategies for teachers;
- providing resources for integrating literacy across interest centers in the classroom;
- modeling reading with children and teaching children how to care for books;
- helping teachers improve circle time by making it more engaging and reducing sitting time;
- providing support in lesson planning; and
- helping teachers with the classroom setup/organization

In addition, coaches helped teachers with using thematic teaching, using puppets, and adapting activities for children of different ages. Learning techniques for making storytime more engaging was the topic teacher interviewees most commonly cited as helpful. How to interact effectively with children was the next most commonly cited helpful topic.

Directors reported that without the LiELS program, their center would not have been able to: obtain needed ongoing support (25%); improve teaching (25%); and/or introduce order in the classroom (25%). Directors were able to provide many examples of the ways in which teachers had applied what they had been coached on by specialists. Directors observed teachers making changes in their classrooms – from organization and establishing a daily schedule to using engagement strategies for shared reading – as a result of the coaching.

Teachers said that both they and the children in their classrooms enjoyed the specialists’ visits. Teachers are grateful for the current, relevant, and readily applicable support that they have been receiving from the project, and all of the teachers enthusiastically said they would recommend the program to other teachers. All teachers interviewed reported they are excited to continue with the program in the coming years.

ALL DIRECTORS REPORTED that

Coaches have provided individualized modeling which has generated interest and enthusiasm in the classroom among children and teachers

Surveyed Teachers Reported:

My literacy specialist / coach...

... gave me ideas about how to schedule the day to make sure I use key developmental areas (fine motor and gross motor, sensory, read aloud, circle time, etc.) each day.

... helped me organize classroom and centers for learning.

... helped me understand how to support infants’ and young toddlers’ use of books.

... modeled literacy and language development activities in my classroom (for example, storytime, circle time, literacy activities in centers).

... encouraged me to extend conversations or ask open-ended questions of children throughout the day.

... gave me suggestions for incorporating literacy during lunch/snack time and during outdoor play.

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“Literacy is going on! The main thing I noticed about the teachers is the confidence. Their teaching style and not doing all the talking and allowing the children to open up…. The teachers are enjoying the process, it’s like little lightbulbs going on. That came from [the literacy specialist] saying that they are doing a fabulous job, but she is helping the teachers do their jobs better. Even with people monitoring them, they are nervous. But they know and are applying strategies, and they are more confident.”

– Center Director

Year 1 Evaluation Highlights
Family Literacy Events

Prior to participating in the LiELS program, slightly more than half (8) of the centers reported hosting family engagement events. During Year 1, each center hosted 2 family literacy events. These events featured read aloud demonstrations from the literacy specialists, literacy-related activities for parents/guardians to complete with their child(ren), and age appropriate books and other resources that families could take home for their home libraries.

Parent/Guardian Feedback

“"It's a fun way to spend time with your child. I believe it also helps your child to love reading and further learn how to interact with others."”
– Parent participant

167 parents/guardians completed feedback surveys at the family literacy events. 98% of respondents reported they:

- definitely (93%) or probably (5%) will use the literacy information and resources they received with their child(ren); and
- definitely (88%) or probably (10%) will attend another event like this in the future.

What types of information and resources would you like to receive from the Literacy in Early Learning Spaces program? Check all that apply.

- Handouts with literacy tips 55%
- Suggestions for books to read with my child(ren) 71%
- Information about community events and activities related to literacy 62%
- Tips about how to involve literacy in daily activities 58%
- Books for my child(ren) 73%
- Activities or games to play with my child(ren) 71%

The information or resource parents/guardians most commonly requested was books for their children (73%), followed by suggestions for books to read with their children and activities or games to play with their children (71% each).

Director and Teacher Feedback

Directors and teachers interviewed were enthusiastic about the family literacy events and reported they were a great success. Nearly all interviewees reported that the parents/guardians enjoyed the events and learned a lot from participating in them. Directors and teachers emphasized the value of families receiving books to take home. Approximately one-third of teachers interviewed shared specific examples of parents spending more time with their children on literacy as a result of the family literacy events.

Directors valued the effort and expertise that the literacy specialists put into planning and executing the family literacy events. All directors are willing to host family literacy events in the future, but nearly all reported they would need substantial support from LiELS staff to plan and host their own event.

Classroom Observations

During initial observations of classrooms at the 14 centers that participated in Year 1, LiELS staff noted very few classrooms included literacy centers, while slightly more classrooms had centers for blocks, art, or dramatic play. By the end of the first year in the program, most classrooms supported by the specialists had designated activity/interest centers. More than half of teachers surveyed reported most (30%) or all (24%) of their activity/interest centers now include books or activities to support literacy and language development.

At the end of Year 1, formal observations were conducted in a sample of 22 classrooms using the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) and Literacy Environment Checklist instruments. All but one of the classrooms (94%) observed had an area set aside just for book reading and included books that ranged in difficulty level and had at least some charts, big books, or other evidence of full-group literacy activities. About one-third of classrooms had a distinct area set up and functioning for writing (29%), included many varieties of teacher dictation on display in the classroom (33%), and included many varieties of children’s writing on display in the classroom (28%).

AT THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR

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Changes to Classroom Practice and Children’s Engagement

Nearly all teachers interviewed provided examples of how the PD, coaching, and materials received through the LiELS program have changed their classroom practice. Several described changes to their read aloud behaviors, with nearly half of the teachers reporting specific examples of puppets, scarves, music, and movement activities to make reading more engaging for children.

More than two-thirds of teachers surveyed reported doing the following more often now than before the coaching and PD:

- select books, songs, or fingerplays that support a daily or weekly theme (77%)
- model and teach children how to handle books (76%)
- use advanced read aloud behaviors (facial expressions, props, ask open-ended questions) during storytime (72%)
- use scarf songs during circle time (72%)
- use weather songs, the weather puppet during circle time (67%)

Directors expressed broad consensus that children have become more engaged in literacy activities since the start of the LiELS project. Directors specifically mentioned that they had observed more instances of children engaging with books, including being interested in doing things with books, independently seeking out books, choosing reading as an activity, and taking care of the books. Directors also reported that teachers are now more often suggesting that children use reading a book in the book area as a strategy to calm themselves. Several directors – and teachers—mentioned they were previously reluctant to allow children to handle books in the classroom, but that the LiELS program made them feel more relaxed about this by helping teachers learn how to teach their children to handle books and to fix books using the “book hospital” provided by the literacy specialists.

“The program has given us a lot more structure in each classroom. I don’t think that the structure in the classrooms now would’ve ever been fixed if it wasn’t for this program.... Our parents even, they come in and they compliment the teachers every day, and I don’t think that they would’ve if it wasn’t for this program.”
– Center Director

“The program has changed how the teachers have read the books to the children...It’s not just reading a book, it’s getting into the book and asking about feeling and colors... getting more into the meaning of the book and using different voices high and low. It’s benefitted, overall, the whole center.”
– Center Director

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The majority of teachers surveyed agreed or strongly agreed:</th>
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<tr>
<td>I feel more confident in my ability to teach literacy and language development after participating in Literacy in Early Learning Spaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of Literacy in Early Learning Spaces, I have changed the way I incorporate literacy and language development into my classroom teaching.</td>
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“They showed us how to read a book to the child, how to make sure the front is shown, how to hold a book, what questions to ask while you are reading a book. There were a lot of things that I learned and that I incorporate.”
– LiELS teacher