



The Book for Learning Everyday Together (Book-LET): A Tool for Documenting and Planning Child Learning Opportunities in Group Settings

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This CASEtool includes a description of the development and use of the Book for Learning Everyday Together (*Book-LET*). The *Book-LET* is a documentation tool for tracking parent and child participation in early learning group activities. The tool is designed to be used by parents with the assistance of an early childhood educator to document children's interests, learning experiences, responsive parenting strategies used to engage the child, and future plans for engaging the child in other interest-based activities at home and in the community. The use of the *Book-LET* is intended to increase the likelihood that parents will reflect on the characteristics of activities that are engaging to their children and promote learning, and then emphasize those characteristics in a multitude of settings.

INTRODUCTION

The Book for Learning Everyday Together (*Book-LET*) is a tool to help parents and early childhood group facilitators document children's learning experiences and responsive teaching strategies used by parents during early childhood groups. The tool serves as an efficient mechanism for capturing the information necessary for planning future interest-based activities and for documenting changes in child participation in interest-based activities over time.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for the *Book-LET* is based on research regarding practices that promote parents' abilities to increase children's interest-based participation in a variety of everyday activities, which provide opportunities for child-initiated and child-directed learning. Referred to as Contextually Mediated Practices™ (CMP), this approach uses child interest to determine appropriate activities in which a child should engage, focuses on the learning opportunities the activity naturally affords, and emphasizes the responsive teaching strategies parents and caregivers use to maximize child participation and learning. This approach differs from more traditional approaches to early childhood education where adults often direct what and how a child learns (Dunst, Bruder, Trivette, Raab, & McLean, 1998; Raab & Dunst, 2006).

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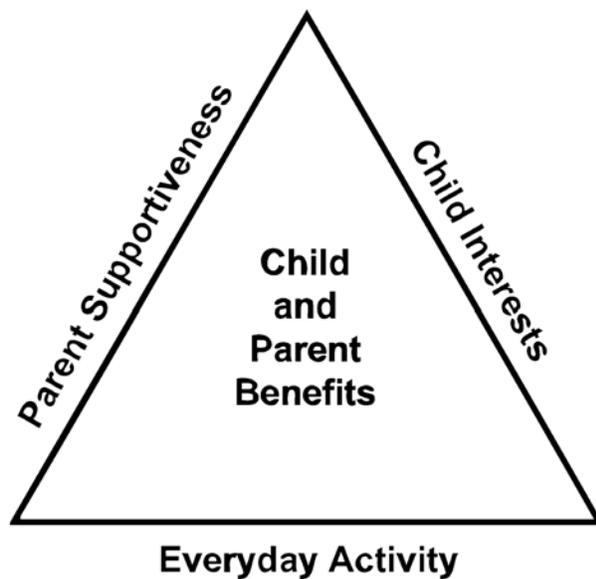


Figure 1. Three sets of person (child interests) and environment (everyday activity and parent supportiveness) factors contributing to child and parent benefits of Contextually Mediated Practices.

Child Interest

The *Book-LET* is based on the premise that interest-based activities are important sources of child learning opportunities because children tend to be and stay more engaged in activities that pose high interest. When children engage in interest-based activities they can experience hundreds, if not thousands, of learning opportunities (Dunst, Bruder, Trivette, Raab, & McLean, 1998). The *Book-LET* heightens parent and caregiver awareness of these learning opportunities and helps parents and caregivers plan and organize responsive strategies for supporting and enhancing child learning.

Interests can and do influence a child's involvement and learning in everyday activities, the ways in which he/she engages in activities, and his/her development of new understanding and abilities (Krapp, Hidi, & Renninger, 1992). Child interests can be used to encourage participation in everyday activities by increasing a child's opportunities to be involved in activities that match his or her interests (Dunst, 2001). A primary goal of early learning groups is to promote a parent's ability to increase his or her child's opportunities to participate in activities that provide interest-based learning opportunities. When a child's interests are used as the basis for his or her involvement in everyday activities, the child becomes occupied by playing, interacting and participating in the activity.

Child Learning Opportunities

A goal of the *Book-LET* is to draw parent and caregiver attention to the increased chances to participate in activities that provide interest-based learning opportunities. Research indicates that any one activity is a source of many different kinds of learning opportunities (Dunst & Bruder, 1999). Children who enjoy music can experience it in many different forms, locations, and contexts. Each of these variables, along with the age of the child, impacts the number and type of learning opportunities music can afford the child. For example, increasing the learning opportunities that music offers an interested child includes expanding the number of activities that provide opportunities for the child to express his/her interest in music, ensuring variety in the kinds of activity settings music exposure is offered (listening to music during meals, singing in the car, playing instruments with siblings), and increasing the frequency that music-related activities are available to the child (Dunst, Bruder et al., 2001).

Parent Responsiveness

Parents enhance children's learning by (a) increasing the number, frequency, and quality of interest-based child learning opportunities and (b) supporting children's interest-based participation. In parent-mediated child learning, early childhood group facilitators support child development by strengthening parents' capacity to understand, recognize, and use interest-based learning opportunities with their children. Parents can do this by:

Engaging the child in interest-based activities

- Help the child get started in the activity
- Make sure that people and appropriate toys are available to the child
- Give the child lots of chances to do what he/she can do and likes to do

Respond to the child's behavior

- Shift attention to match the child's interests
- Let the child change what he/she wants to do
- Make oneself part of the child's play
- Give the child a sufficient amount of time to respond
- Modify interactions to match the child's attention span
- Make sure the child is in the best position possible to interact with objects and people
- Comment on what the child is doing
- Arrange the play area to encourage the continuation of the activity

Encourage child to elaborate

- Use comments, suggestions, and questions to get the child to do new things
- Offer choices in materials, use gestures to encourage different use of materials, show something new with different materials, etc
- Play with and take turns with the child.
- Physically assist the child if necessary (M. M. Raab, Wortman Lowe, & Dunst, 1991)

The expected child benefits of using these strategies are increased child participation in activities (Shweder et al., 1998) and the increased ability to initiate and sustain interactions with objects and people in the environment (Dunst, Holbert, & Wilson, 1990; Dunst & McWilliam, 1988). Through interest-based participation in activities, children have opportunities to practice existing abilities, acquire and perfect new skills that are useful in participating in a variety of activities (Farver, 1999), understand the relationship between their own behavior and its consequences (MacTurk & Morgan, 1995), and become more involved in everyday activities in socially and culturally meaningful ways (Göncü, 1999).

USING THE BOOK-LET

The *Book-LET* can be completed by a parent or caregiver independently or with the assistance of an early childhood educator either during or after an activity. The *Book-LET* contains four components: (1) identify-

ing child interests, (2) learning opportunities, (3) parent/caregiver responsiveness, and (4) planning.

Identifying Child Interests

In this section of the *Book-LET*, parents or caregivers document child interests. Strategies for identifying a child’s personal interests include informally observing what a child does as part of his or her involvement in everyday activities, asking parents what they know and recognize about their children’s interests, and asking a child about his or her own likes and preferences. The following questions are useful for identifying child interests (Dunst, Herter, & Shields, 2000):

- What makes the child smile and laugh?
- What makes the child happy and feel good?
- What gets the child excited?
- What are the child’s favorite things to do?
- What things are particularly enjoyable and interesting to the child?
- What does the child especially work hard at doing?
- What gets and keeps the child’s attention?
- What “brings out the best” in the child?
- What does the child choose to do most often?

For example, during parent-child early learning groups, parents and facilitators might quickly check the items that are known to be of interest to the child before the group starts (figure 2). During the group, the facilita-

<u>Art</u>	<u>Games</u>	<u>Nature</u>	<u>Dramatic Play</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Clay	<input type="checkbox"/> Hiding	<input type="checkbox"/> Animals	<input type="checkbox"/> Dolls
<input type="checkbox"/> Coloring	<input type="checkbox"/> Table Games	<input type="checkbox"/> Bugs/Insects	<input type="checkbox"/> Drama/Acting
<input type="checkbox"/> Cutting	<input type="checkbox"/> Puzzles	<input type="checkbox"/> Flowers	<input type="checkbox"/> Dress Up
<input type="checkbox"/> Drawing	<input type="checkbox"/> Making Faces	<input type="checkbox"/> Sand	<input type="checkbox"/> Housekeeping
<input type="checkbox"/> Painting	<input type="checkbox"/> Bouncing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Water	<input type="checkbox"/> Pretending
<u>Fine Motor</u>	<u>Social Development</u>	<u>Sounds</u>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Building	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends	<input type="checkbox"/> Dancing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Collecting	<input type="checkbox"/> Helping	<input type="checkbox"/> Music	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sorting	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Playing with Others	<input type="checkbox"/> Singing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Stacking	<input type="checkbox"/> Being Held	<input type="checkbox"/> Whisper	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pouring	<input type="checkbox"/> Facing Inward	<input type="checkbox"/> Humming	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mixing/stirring	<input type="checkbox"/> Facing Outward	<input type="checkbox"/> Animal Sounds	
<u>Movement</u>	<u>Outdoor Activities</u>	<u>Topics/Specific Toys</u>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Climbing	<input type="checkbox"/> Digging	<input type="checkbox"/> Animals	
<input type="checkbox"/> Jumping	<input type="checkbox"/> Exploring	<input type="checkbox"/> Balls	
<input type="checkbox"/> Opening/Closing	<input type="checkbox"/> Fishing	<input type="checkbox"/> Bikes	
<input type="checkbox"/> Pulling/Pushing	<input type="checkbox"/> Gardening	<input type="checkbox"/> Boats	
<input type="checkbox"/> Riding	<input type="checkbox"/> Hiking	<input type="checkbox"/> Boxes	
<input type="checkbox"/> Running	<input type="checkbox"/> Picnics	<input type="checkbox"/> Cars	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sliding	<input type="checkbox"/> Planting	<input type="checkbox"/> Cooking	
<input type="checkbox"/> Spinning	<input type="checkbox"/> Playgrounds	<input type="checkbox"/> Farms/Farming	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tumbling	<input type="checkbox"/> Swimming	<input type="checkbox"/> Trains	
<input type="checkbox"/> Walking	<input type="checkbox"/> Swinging	<input type="checkbox"/> Traveling	
<input type="checkbox"/> Dancing		<input type="checkbox"/> Trucks	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Splashing			

Figure 2. Identifying child interests.

tor might call a new interest to the parent’s attention or ask the parent if s/he has noticed any new interests while the child is playing. Some early learning groups that use the *Book-LET* include a time to debrief as a group during which facilitators engage parents in a discussion about new or emerging interests and provide time for parents to document those on the *Book-LET*.

Matching Interest with Activities

Interest-based activities encourage children to use many different behaviors and provide enhanced opportunities for exploration and mastery. Before beginning the early learning group, the parent with or without assistance “checks” the interests that his/her child has. Space is available for parents to include interests that are not already listed. Once parents and caregivers use the *Book-LET* to document the array of interests a child has, this section provides information about activities that are best suited to support a child’s interests. This list includes activities that the child can engage in during the early learning group as well as activities the family might expose the child to at home or in the community (figure 3). During some parent-child early learning groups, for example, parents might choose to encourage a child’s participation in playing at the water table after having identified that the child enjoys and often works hard at pouring, mixing, stirring, and splashing. After a few minutes that parent might choose to offer soap or food coloring to the water to give the child even more

Activities Your Child Might Enjoy

When thinking about your child's interests, during what activities or experiences might your child be able to use these interests

Playing in water/swimming

Washing dishes/vegetables

Washing toys or things around the house

Figure 3. Matching child interests to activities that offer learning opportunities.

opportunities to engage in those interests and extend the amount of time the child is likely to stay at the activity.

Learning Opportunities

In this section of the *Book-LET* parents and/or caregivers indicate which learning opportunities the child participated in on a particular occasion by checking the box next to the learning opportunity in the appropriate column. Learning opportunities are the everyday experiences that provide opportunities for children to express their existing abilities as well as learn new competence. The *Book-LET* lists many learning opportunities that typically occur during activities in which young children frequently participate. Several spaces are also included at the bottom of the list for parents or caregivers to write in learning opportunities that children experience that may not already be on the list. Multiple columns accommodate documentation of learning opportunities over time (figure 4).

Dates	6-30-07	7-06-07	
Interacting with other children		✓	
Taking turns/sharing			
Experiencing music and rhythm			
Riding/Pushing/Pulling toys			
Experiencing new words/ideas		✓	
Crawling/Climbing/Running/Jumping			
Gaining exposure to literacy			
Communicating with others			
Taking things apart/putting them together			
Playing in sand, water, or beans	✓	✓	
Watching others play			
Making choices		✓	
Mixing colors	✓	✓	
Making bubbles	✓	✓	

Figure 4. Learning opportunities in which the child became involved.

For example, during an early learning group, the parent indicates that on a particular day the child pours, stirs, and splashes, and then the parent writes that the

child mixes colors and makes bubbles. This parent wants to be sure that she has captured some of the important learning opportunities that were particularly meaningful for the child. The next week when the child and parent come back to the group, the parent offers some of the same interest-based activities and because some other children were attracted to the activity as well, this child also had the opportunity to share materials, interact with other children, and be exposed to new language. The parent indicated the reoccurring learning opportunities as well as the new learning opportunities in the column assigned to the second week. At the end of eight weeks, the parent and facilitator look back on how the child's learning opportunities have expanded and increased the child's overall participation and engagement.

Parent/Caregiver Responsiveness

Parents can use the *Book-LET* to document the strategies they use on a particular occasion to support and encourage child participation and learning. The strategies for the parent documents should be those that are intended to support, sustain, and elaborate on participation in an interest-based activity and can be indicated by placing a check next to the strategies in the appropriate column.

During a parent-child early learning group, the parent discussed above might indicate that she noticed her child's interest in stirring and pouring, and then offered new materials that gave the child increased opportunities to engage in this interest. She might also indicate that she joined in the child's play initially to help the child get started and again when she introduced the new materials to show the child some new ways of using the materials (figure 5).

Dates	6-30-07	7-06-07	
Helped my child get started in play	✓	✓	
Played with my child	✓	✓	
Followed my child's lead			
Described what my child was doing			
Provided help when my child was frustrated			
Showed my child new ways to play		✓	
Added new toys or materials		✓	

Figure 5. Responsive strategies implemented by the parent/caregiver.

Planning

This planning section of the *Book-LET* prompts parents or caregivers to develop a plan to increase child participation in interest-based activities at home and in the community. Parents and caregivers document additional opportunities they intend to provide the child in order for him or her to participate in a similar interest-based activity and/or strategies the parent or caregiver plans to use to support the child's participation and enhance the learning opportunities the activity affords.

The parent in the example documented on her *Book-LET* that she planned to offer the water table again next week during the early learning group and that she would introduce whisks as a new way to stir (figure 6). The facilitator also suggested adding cups of various sizes and some with holes in the bottom to engage the child in learning that involved her interest of pouring. Additionally, the parent planned to extend the amount of time she allowed the child to stay in the bathtub each night and decided to bring some bowls and spoons from the kitchen into the tub for her child to enjoy.

The implementation of the *Book-LET* with families over time allows for thoughtful planning and intentional parent-child interactions that are based upon child interests. Facilitators of parent-child early learning experiences often make time to reflect with parents, individually or as a group, to discuss how the information parents documented promotes positive, development-enhancing interactions between parents and children. Although the *Book-LET* is divided into sections, facilitators are mindful to help parents understand the link between interest and learning opportunities and between learning opportunities and parent responsiveness. Facilitators also know how critical it is to help parents understand that this information i.e., (child interests, learning opportunities, and responsive strategies) establishes the criteria for planning additional learning experiences.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE *BOOK-LET* FOR PRACTICE

Although the *Book-LET* was originally designed to be used during parent-child early learning groups, the *Book-LET* may be applied to a wide variety of settings and situations where parents, teachers, or caregivers of young children are promoting child learning. For example, an Early Head Start program currently uses the *Book-LET* to promote parents' participation in weekly group socializations for their infants and toddlers. Parents document child participation in specific learning opportunities and record their own responsive strategies. At the end of the group socialization while the parents and

Planning		
Now that I know my child's many interests, I am ready to match these interests with fun activities I think s/he will like at the FRC and in our community.		
Date	What activities do you want to help your child participate in?	What will you do to help him/her explore her interests?
6-30-07	Water play at the Family Resource Center and at home	Add food coloring and soap Show Sally how to make bubbles
7-6-07	Water play	Keep giving bubbles and food color Add whisks and a variety of cups and kitchen dishes

Figure 6. Parents and facilitators plan new experiences to promote interest-based learning.

children are sharing a light snack, the group facilitator reflects with the parents on what children learned and the parents' role promoting the learning opportunities. This collective information is used to plan the following week's activities to ensure they are interest-based, to identify in advance what the potential learning opportunities might be, and to allow parents to document their plans for promoting their child's engagement in the opportunities.

As another example, a Family Resource Center uses the *Book-LET* to engage parents in systematic planning and documenting child participation in interest-based activities in early learning groups focused on providing kindergarten readiness experiences for preschool-aged children. Parents enroll in one of ten, eight-week groups and use the *Book-LET* to document all that the parent and child accomplish during the early learning group series. Families who reenroll for multiple series begin another *Book-LET* and continue to document accomplishments over consecutive sessions.

Other families use the *Book-LET* as the basis for a child portfolio that documents the child's changes in interests and participation in everyday family and community activities. Since the *Book-LET* accommodates information over multiple weeks it serves as an ideal strategy to track child interest and changes in abilities and participation over time. When facilitators periodically reflect with parents on the information contained in the *Book-LET*, they can also serve as an ongoing functional assessment and planning tool.

Teachers and child care providers can use the *Book-LET* to document the daily learning opportunities in which children engage as well as the individualized strategies the professional uses to engage the child and enhance learning opportunities. The *Book-LET* allows for individualized planning for each child and can be used in conjunction with any curriculum that includes interest-based activities as its foundation. Teachers and child care providers may use the *Book-LET* to foster a home-school connection by encouraging parents to document the learning that occurs during everyday home activities and routines.

Home visitors may find the *Book-LET* useful to document how parents are using interest-based everyday activities to promote child learning and development. Home visitors can focus on teaching families the strategies that serve to engage children in activities, documenting the plans parents make for increasing the opportunities children have, and refining the strategies parents use when interacting with their young children.

CONCLUSION

This CASEtool includes information about the use of the *Book for Learning Everyday Together (Book-LET)*. The *Book-LET* has been implemented by early learning group facilitators at Family Resource Centers operated by the Family, Infant, and Preschool Program for more than a year. Staff and families report that the *Book-LET* has been helpful in planning interest-based activities as

well as gathering information about child and parent participation and growth over time. This preliminary feedback suggests that the *Book-LET* and procedures for using them achieve our intent in developing a planning and documentation tool to support parent participation in early learning groups.

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Appendix

Lil' Chefs Book-LET
Play With Me Book-LET
Template Book-LET
