

Keyboarding with Kids

Literacy-Rich Experiences

What is the practice?

Most children show an interest in computers as early as age 3. Computer-based learning is one way that young children can develop their language, reading, and writing skills.

What does the practice look like?

Experiences with computers need to be appropriate to the child's age. They should provide him with chances to manipulate words, sounds, or characters, experiment with different activities, and discover new things. Software programs that have characters and topics that interest children will work best. The activities should match their age and skill level. Research shows that children learn better from certain types of software programs. These include ones that let children control activities and make choices, use clear instructions, and have increasing levels of difficulty. There are keyboards made especially for young children which can be used instead of traditional keyboards. They have large keys, color-coded command keys, and other features that make typing easier for pre-readers.



How do you do the practice?

When choosing software programs for preschool children, it is best to select ones that children can use independently. The programs should include familiar objects and words. You can help children use computers to learn language and literacy skills as part of their daily routines:

- Place the computer on a low table or cart at the right height for the children.
- Select a low-traffic and well-lit area for the computer center. This should be away from direct sunlight, to avoid glare on the screen.
- Keep software organized. Use a CD album. It will allow children to flip through the collection and select the software they would like to use.
- Provide several software choices that feature animated activities and sound effects and that have characters that interest children.
- Sit with children and show them how to do simple computer tasks. Type the letters of a word chosen by a child or use the mouse to press a button on the screen.
- Encourage children to work together at the computer. Computer games can be a great opportunity for young children to practice taking turns and working together.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Do your children spend time using the software programs?
- Have they progressed in level of skill difficulty?
- Do they use more vocabulary or recognize more words?

Take a look at more keyboarding fun

Super Approach!

Five-year-old Michael's preschool teacher has noticed his interest in superheroes. She has found a computer program for children in which they interact with superheroes. When Michael's teacher first shows him the program and computer, she helps him use it. She shows him how to use the mouse to explore the many activity options. Michael chooses an activity that lets him pick different options to create his own superhero. "Okay, first we have to pick a special power," says the teacher. "What should it be?" Michael quickly chooses to be able to fly. The teacher helps Michael guide the mouse to select that choice. Michael continues making choices until the hero is complete. "Now he needs a name," says the teacher. Michael enthusiastically says "Michael!" "What letter comes first in "Mmm-Michael?" asks the teacher, emphasizing the first letter. "M is for Michael!" he says proudly. "That's right!" says his teacher. "Can you find the letter M on the keyboard?" She waits patiently for Michael to locate and press the key. "Great! You found it!" says the teacher. "Now let's figure out the next letter." She helps Michael identify and locate each letter in the name. Then she lets him take the lead in creating adventures for Michael the Superhero.



Picture-Word Software

Four-year-old Mara goes to the computer center in her early childhood classroom. She flips through the software case until she finds a picture of the reading rabbit that she likes. She takes the CD from its pocket under the picture, and her teacher helps her load the program. Mara uses the mouse to move the cursor on the screen. When the cursor is over an activity picture that she wants, she clicks the choice. She begins to play a game. When she clicks on a picture, it animates and displays the spelling of its label. "Cat" says Mara, as the cat on the screen meows. "That's right, very good," says her teacher, "Those letters spell the word cat." Mara smiles and clicks another picture. "Cookie," she says as the cookie image rolls. "Yes, those letters spell the word cookie," the teacher agrees. "Both of those words start with the letter C. It makes a Ccc sound. Do you see any other words that start with the letter C?" Mara looks and clicks another picture. "What is that word?" asks the teacher. "Cake!" says Mara excitedly as the cake image dances around and the word is displayed. "Good job!" says her teacher as Mara continues to "read" the rest of the words.



Listen Up!

Three-year-old Tyra, who has visual impairments, loves to have stories read to her. Her interventionist gave her parents a software program that will read stories aloud. The interventionist made tactile cues on the computer mouse. She showed Tyra's parents how to help Tyra learn to move the mouse on a pad inside a cardboard box. This helps keep the cursor in the screen area. When Tyra moves the mouse over the icons on the screen, the computer reads the titles aloud. By stopping the mouse when she hears the story title that she wants, Tyra can use the tactile cues on the mouse to click and start the story. She enjoys climbing into one of her parents' lap and snuggling while the story she picked is read to her. She laughs at the different voices and sound effects that the computer makes as it tells the story.

