

Play Before Print: Lighting the Way for Early Literacy Through Voice, Play and Connection

Abstract (Workshop – 60 minutes)

Early literacy begins long before children learn to read and write. This interactive workshop aligns with the conference theme “*Lighting the Way for Literacy: Empowering Voices, Thinking Critically, Creating Communities*” by positioning early literacy as a socially situated, relational and play-based process that empowers children’s voices, builds foundations for critical thinking, and strengthens learning communities in the early years.

Participants will engage in hands-on, small-group games and practical demonstrations that model evidence-informed strategies for supporting early literacy through oral language, phonological awareness, dialogic reading and shared meaning-making. The session draws on current research and theory, including sociocultural perspectives on learning and early literacy development, and will incorporate practical insights gained through participation in the National Preschool Outcomes Measure (POM) trial, highlighting how observation, intentional teaching and responsive practice can support children’s communication and literacy development in authentic contexts.

The workshop will be structured into short interactive cycles: participants will first experience each activity as learners, then critically unpack the theory and pedagogy underpinning each strategy. Facilitated discussion will support reflection on equity, access and inclusion in early literacy, and how educators can intentionally “light the way” for children who may not have equal access to language-rich environments. Time will be provided for participants to adapt activities to their own contexts, including early learning services, pre-service teaching placements and research-informed practice.

By the end of the session, participants will leave with a practical toolkit of low-cost, high-impact literacy games, clear links between theory and practice, and strategies for creating inclusive literacy communities that empower children’s voices and strengthen foundations for lifelong learning.

Outcomes for participants:

Ready-to-use tools, implementation guidance, and practical strategies to embed playful, intentional literacy practice in diverse early learning contexts.