Learning About the ABC’s…Teaching about Letters in Words in Authentic Contexts

“Simply training children to memorize letters without providing learning in a larger literacy context has proven unsuccessful as a predictor of beginning reading success” (Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004, p. 8)

Children’s Concepts of Print, Alphabet Knowledge, and Phonological Awareness are key predictors of later reading outcomes (National Early Literacy Panel, 2004)

Definitions:

Concepts of Print: Children’s understandings about the functions (e.g., practical uses), structure (e.g., printed words are separated by spaces), and conventions (e.g., left-to-right, top to bottom sequence) of written language.

Concept of Word: The understanding that words are composed of letters and separated by spaces.

Concept of Letter: The understanding that letters have distinct shapes, have names, and form word.

Early Learning Standards for NC’s Preschoolers:

**Alphabet Knowledge**

Children begin to…

Know that letters of the alphabet are a special category and are different from pictures and shapes.

Recognize and name some letters of the alphabet, especially those in their own name and in the names of others who are important to them.

**Alphabetic Principle**

Children begin to…

Understand that letters function to represent sounds in spoken words.

Make some sound-to-letter matches, using letter name knowledge (e.g., writes “M” and says “This is Mommy”).
Alphabet Knowledge Development (Portfolio Rating Scale: The Bridge, Pierce, Summer, O’DeKirk, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>How does interact with/use letters of the alphabet?</strong></th>
<th><strong>Explores and plays with alphabet materials</strong></th>
<th><strong>Knows that letters are different from pictures and shapes</strong></th>
<th><strong>Recognizes first letter in their name (says, writes, points to)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Recognizes other letters in their own and/or other’s names</strong></th>
<th><strong>Identifies specific letters in their own or other names</strong></th>
<th><strong>Identifies at least 10 letters</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
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**Alphabet Knowledge Teaching Strategies**

**ABC Materials Around the Room:**

- Gel Gems Letters (thegelstore.com) (on windows, mirrors, white boards)
- ABC cookie cutters for dough and play dough (art, writing, pretend play, sand box, water table)
- ABC magnets (can make your own!) (white boards, refrigerator, sand box, water table)
- ABC sponge, rubber, plastic, tile letters (art, writing, water table)
- ABC puzzles (gummylump.com, ) (manipulative center)
- ABC pillows, posters, rugs, curtains, covers, carpets (Kaplan.com; ABCs on the ceiling, shine a flashlight on them and have children name, find Children’s dictionaries (enchantedlearning.com; ) (group time, all centers)

Children’s ABC Books (place in associated learning centers):

- (readinga-z.com; innovative-educators.com)
  - **ABC** by William Wegman (writing center)
  - **Alligators All Around** by Maurice Sendak (science center)
  - **Alpha Bugs** by David A. Carter (science center)
  - **The Butterfly Alphabet** by Kjell B. Sandved (science center)
  - **Chicka Chicka Boom Boom** by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault (writing center; computer center if you have Chicka Chicka Boom Boom software; or art center if you have alphabet letters)
  - **Eating the Alphabet, Fruits and Vegetables from A to Z** (snack, lunch area; dramatic play “kitchen” area)
  - **Ellsworth’ Extraordinary Electric Ears and Other Amazing Alphabet Anecdotes** by Valerie Fisher
  - **The Graphic Alphabet** by David Pelletier (art, writing)
  - **The Icky Book Alphabet Book** by Jerry Pallotta
  - **On Market Street** by Arnold Lobel (dramatic play)
  - **Potluck** by Anne Shelby
  - **26 Letters and 99 Cents** by Tana Hoban
  - **The Z Was Zapped** by Chris Van Allsburg
  - **Where is Everybody?** By Eve Merriam

Make personal and class ABC books!

Look at these strategies for teachers and families from Foundations: Early Learning Standards for NC’s Preschoolers and Strategies to Guide their Success:
Example Strategies for Educators:
- Draw children’s attention to print in the environment and discuss what it is communicating (e.g., instructions, labels, menus).
- Assist children in creating their own books, class books, and stories.
- Reread books multiple times, changing the approach as children become familiar with the book. On occasion, ask questions that tap their understanding of why characters are doing things and talk about the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- Discuss letter names in the context of daily activities (as opposed to teaching one letter per week) and provide opportunities for children to hear specific letter sounds, particularly beginning sounds.
- Provide opportunities to explore letters and sounds (e.g., with literacy tools and models such as magnetic letters, rubber stamps, alphabet puzzles, sponge letters, clay, ABC molds, and alphabet exploration software).

Example Strategies for Families:
- Read and reread books that have rhymes and refrains. Encourage your child to join in.
- Recite nursery rhymes. Sing songs. Play word games.
- Share alphabet books. Put magnetic letters on the refrigerator. Point out letters in familiar names and signs.
- Use your home language when reading, singing, and playing word games. You will be helping your child learn and enjoy the time you spend together.
- Use children’s names in daily routines (e.g., to mark turns, keep track of who is present, etc.) to help them become familiar with the letters in their names.
- Discuss letter names in the context of daily activities (as opposed to teaching one letter per week) and provide opportunities for children to hear specific letter sounds, particularly beginning sounds.
- Provide opportunities to explore letters and sounds (e.g., with literacy tools and models such as magnetic letters, rubber stamps, alphabet puzzles, sponge letters, clay, ABC molds, and alphabet exploration software).
- As you read, call attention to the many different kinds of written materials in your home (labels, newspapers, magazines, cereal boxes, recipe cards, greeting cards) and in the outside world (billboards, menus, signs).
- Give children magazines, menus, lists, notes, tickets, and other print materials to use in make-believe play.
- Make books available in children’s home languages.

Other ABC strategies/resources:
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Name Games: finding, matching, signing in, putting together from individual letters
Example of a name song:

I have a friend whose name is ____
We have fun together,
We learn and play at school,
Learn and play at school,
Learn and play at school,
In any kind of weather (adapted from a Creative Curriculum, 2004)

Post office—children send receive notes, cards, letters

Other Name Games:
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Logo Mania:

Logo puzzles in a box

Word walls/trees with logos

Make “billboards” for outdoor play

Have “find the logo” scavenger hunts

Logo menus, labels, games

Other Logo Ideas:
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Pretend/Model:
Look up words that you “don’t know” in a children’s dictionary, emphasizing the initial letter;

Look up names, stores, delivery in phone book, emphasizing the initial letter;

Look up movies, shows in paper or TV guide, emphasizing the initial letter;

Make lists of everything!

Help children “file” their work by letter of first name

Engage children in shared writing activities (hand out) and class journals

Websites:

www.abcteach.com


www.learningplanet.com/act/abcorder.asp

www.literacy.uconn.edu/pkhome.htm

www.sesameworkshop.org/sesamestreet/sitemap

Others:

Curricular Programs:

Letter Land (www.letterland.com)

Letter People (www.letterpeople.com)

Others:

Print Resources for Adults:

Letter Links
High Scope press, ISBN # 1-5739-143-1


Other Ideas/Resources:

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pierce, p. 9/04
They need also to learn words in context, not stand alone lists that come and go each week. Of course the way we learn words in context, or implicitly, is by reading, then reading some more. Seeing vocabulary in rich contexts provided by authentic texts, rather than in isolated vocabulary drills, produces robust vocabulary learning. Such instruction often does not begin with a definition, for the ability to give a definition is often the result of knowing what the word means. Word-learning strategies include dictionary use, morphemic analysis, and contextual analysis. For students whose language shares cognates with English, cognate awareness is also an important strategy.