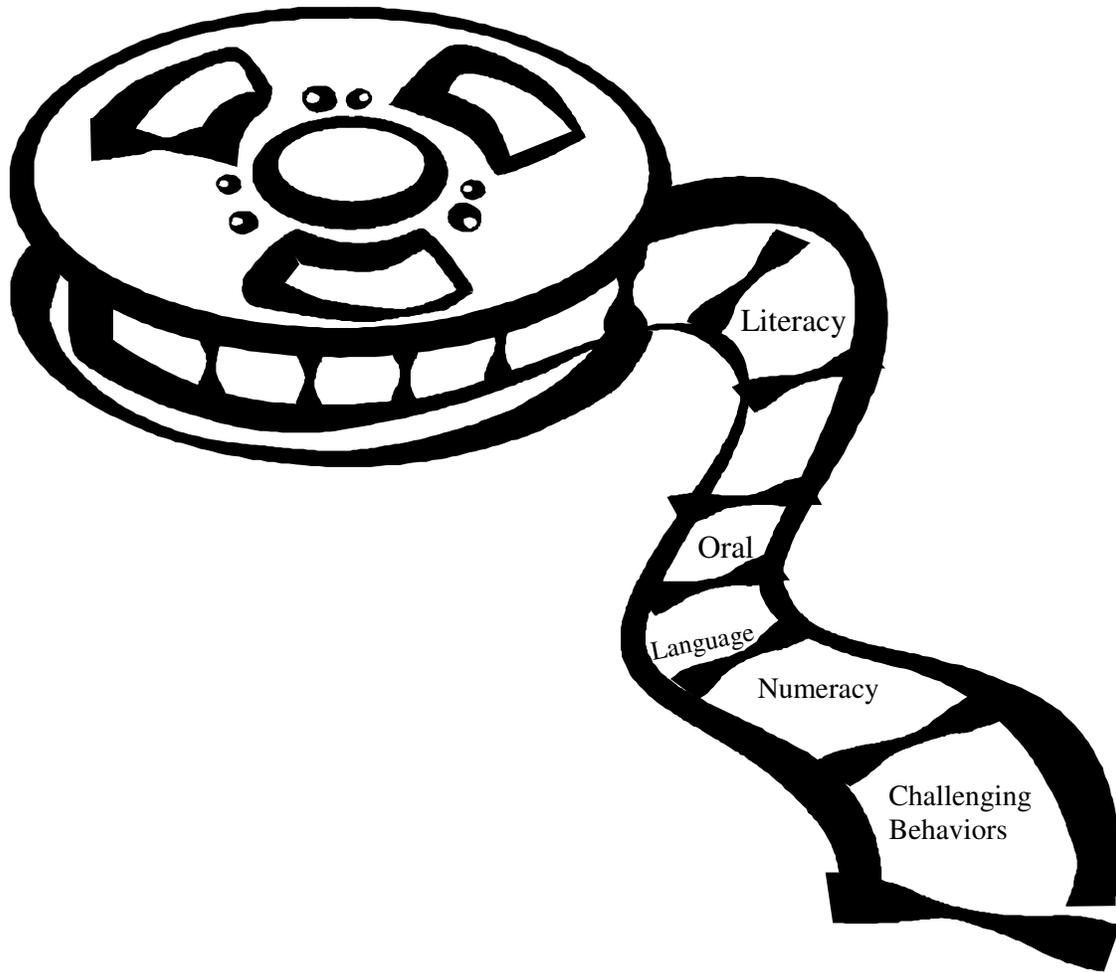


Project REEL



Resources for Early Educator Learning

FIVE BIG FAT IDEAS

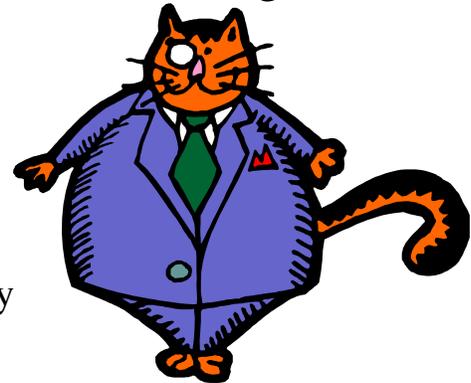
to remember about young children's learning:

1. Children learn best in a social setting.

Therefore, avoid independent seat work.

2. Children learn best through play.

Therefore, immerse them in a richly active play and avoid worksheets.



3. Children learn best when they are allowed to approximate adult behaviors.

Therefore, demonstrate adult practices and accept children's attempts at those adult practices **as if** they were already conventional efforts.

4. Children learn best in an atmosphere of respect where their dignity is protected.

Therefore, establish appropriately high expectations for children, focusing on positive guidance instead of punishment.

5. Children learn best when they have daily opportunities to use diverse social, language, literacy, and numeracy practices and receive extensive feedback from the caring adults in their classroom.

Therefore, offer children time to use new ideas and respond to them in ways that enriches their understandings.

Project REEL: Workshop 5 A FOCUS ON ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE



We must remember that

“Many young children who cannot yet identify individual letters of the alphabet are able to read. . . . It is easier for a young child *initially* to learn whole words already familiar through oral language, rather than learn abstract letters. . . . Children, of course, need to learn the alphabet to become independently fluent readers and writers. However, there is no evidence that alphabet identification should be treated as the first skill in early literacy . . .”

Morrow (2001), p. 255

“‘Learning the alphabet’ is an essential part of early learning about literacy. Letter name knowledge is a very good predictor of success in beginning reading. . . . However, distinguishing between letters and learning their names is not all there is to ‘learning the alphabet.’ Knowing how alphabet letters function in writing and knowing specific letter-sound associations are crucial. Otherwise, children cannot use the letter-name knowledge they have.”

Schickedanz (1999), p. 145

“Among the readiness skills that are traditionally evaluated, the one that appears to be the strongest predictor on its own is letter identification. . . . Just measuring how many letters a kindergartner is able to name when shown letters in a random order appears to be nearly as successful at predicting future reading, as is an entire readiness test.”

--National Research Council (1998)

| Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5) Aligned with The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5 | |
|---|--|
| Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5) Section 2: Early Literacy Component: Print Awareness | The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5 |
| LEARNING EXPECTATIONS: | |
| Demonstrates interest in books and what they contain | See #45 |
| Understands how books work and the way they are handles | See #45 |
| Begins to attend to print in the environment, especially own name | See #47 |
| Shows awareness that print conveys a message, that print is read rather than the pictures | See #45 |
| Understands concept of spoken and written word and that alphabet letters have individual names (ages 4-5) | See #s 45 & 46 |
| Shows interest in purposeful writing (ages 4-5) | See #49 |
| Shows good understanding of conventions of print (ages 4-5) | See #45 |
| Demonstrates good word awareness, calls attention to print in the environment, and recognizes some common words (ages 4-5) | See #47 |
| Routinely engages in purposeful reading and writing (ages 4-5) | See #s 44, 49, & 50 |

| Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5) Aligned with The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5 | |
|--|--|
| Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5) Section 2: Early Literacy Component: Visual Discrimination Component: Visual Whole-Part-Whole Relationships Component: Visual Sequencing (Patterning) | The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5 |
| LEARNING EXPECTATIONS: | |
| Discriminates likenesses/differences in real objects | See #s 27 & 28 |
| Discriminates likenesses/differences in pictured objects | See #s 27 & 28 |
| Develops awareness of parts and wholes and how the parts relate to the whole | See #s 32 & 47 |
| Uses left-to-right and top-to-bottom scanning and observes and reproduces each element in a pattern of a 3-dimensional object | See #s 30 & 45 |
| Discriminates likenesses and differences in black & white shapes, figures, and designs with subtle differences in detail or orientation (ages 4-5) | See #s 44, 49, 50 |
| Discriminates likenesses and differences in symbols (ages 4-5) | See #s 27, 28, & 47 |
| Further develops awareness of relationships of parts and wholes using more abstract figures (ages 4-5) | See #s 32 & 47 |
| Uses left-to-right and top-to-bottom scanning; observes and reproduces a pattern with 3-dimensional objects by using a 2-dimensional paper model (ages 4-5) | See #s 30 & 45 |

| Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5) Aligned with The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5 | |
|--|--|
| Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5) Section 2: Early Literacy Component: Letter Recognition | The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5 |
| LEARNING EXPECTATIONS: | |
| Begins to recognize beginning letter of familiar words or environmental print | See #46 |
| Attempts to "write" his/her own name | See #s 49 & 50 |
| Begins to recognize letters (ages 4-5) | See #46 |
| Begins to recognize frequently occurring uppercase and some of the most frequently occurring lowercase letters (ages 4-5) | See #46 |

TRAINING OBJECTIVES:

Early childhood educators will

- ✓ describe the value of children’s alphabet knowledge in the pre-kindergarten setting
- ✓ integrate strategies and activities into their settings that focus on alphabet identification and naming by pre-kindergarten children
- ✓ acknowledge that children often recognize whole words before they are able to identify specific letters in those words (they know that the bag says “McDonald’s” without being able to name individual letters in the word)
- ✓ demonstrate in their teaching that children begin letter identification through important words like their names as opposed to unrelated experiences such as “letter of the week”
- ✓ demonstrate in their teaching that children often learn letters from environmental print, such as familiar logos, labels, and signs
- ✓ integrate letter formation experiences (“This *b* looks like a stick with a ball beside it”) through writing aloud, shared writing, and guided writing with young children
- ✓ model the sound-symbol relationships with letters so that children know that *Bryan* and *Breanna* have names that begin with the same letters and sounds



IDEAS FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT OF ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE

Several important points to remember in addressing the alphabetic principle with young children:

- Most strategies and activities involved in supporting children's understandings of the alphabet that makes up words are appropriate **only for four- and five-year-olds**.
- **Writing aloud** (in which the teacher demonstrates to children her thinking that is involved in writing a list, note, set of directions, label, menu, etc.) is a foundational strategy in supporting young children's alphabet awareness when s/he stops to identify letters that appear in children's names and other familiar words.
- **Shared writing** (in which the teacher writes down what the children say) is a foundational strategy in supporting letter identification when the teacher stops during the writing process and calls children's attention to specific letters.
- **Guided writing** (in which the teacher is supportive of children's early attempts at writing) is a foundational strategy in supporting alphabet awareness when she calls a child's attention to individual letters that the child is attempting to create.
- **Shared reading** (in which the teacher and children read from the same script in a Big Book or on chart paper or environmental print) is a foundational strategy in supporting letter identification when the teacher calls children's attention to particular letters in the text.

Alphabet knowledge using children's names



“A child's name often provides the definitive context in which he or she learns letters. Early childhood teachers have learned over time that presenting new letters in isolation in an approach such as the letter of the week, is not meaningful for children. Conversely, initiating letter learning through children's names, classmates' names, and environmental print is both motivating and purposeful” (Venn & Jahn, 2003, p. 224-225).

Name Match

Name games can be played with small or large groups, and only take a few minutes to focus on the letters that are most meaningful to children.

- 1) Make a pair of identical name cards for the preschoolers in the setting. Hand each child his/her name from one set and keep the other yourself.
- 2) Hold up one card at a time and ask, “Whose name is this?” Have the children match their cards to the name card you are holding.
- 3) Children may need the scaffolding of a picture on the name card to be able to “read” the card. This is an acceptable modification; later, the picture can be removed when the child/children begin to recognize the letters of his her/their names.

(Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004, p. 68)



Who's Here?

This attendance strategy will help children begin to recognize the names of other children in the setting.

- 1) Hang a strip of Velcro near the entry door. Have each child's name on a laminated card in a small basket by the strip.
- 2) When the children arrive, ask them to find their name cards and attach them to the hanging Velcro strip. During small group time, read the names together to see who is present and who is absent.
- 3) Select two or three names to read a second time, pointing to each letter as you go and encouraging children to join in.

Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004, p. 69

Guess the Name

This game will help children notice the beginning letters of words, one of the strongest features of a word and of critical importance in word identification.

- 1) Using the children's laminated word cards, select two or three. Cover up with a sticky note all of the letters EXCEPT the first letter of the name.
- 2) Ask questions such as, "Whose name could this be? It starts with the letter J. Charles, could this be your name? Jamal, could this be your name? Who else's name could this be?" etc.
- 3) At first, children can hold their own name cards, but once they begin identifying the teacher's card, you may wish to do the activity without the children's card matching opportunity.



Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004, p. 69

Name Puzzles



Affix an open envelope (a library book envelope would be perfect) to a piece of foam board. Write each child's name on a separate envelope, and place individual letter cards in the envelope so that children can de-scramble their names. They can use the outside of the envelope to check their work.

This poem offers rich opportunities to talk about riding in the car with our family members and where we like to go. With repeated readings the poem also offers multiple ways we can support children's attention to the letters and words that make up this poem. It is predictable because of the pattern of the phrases, but it also rhymes, which is a nice touch! Preschoolers could:

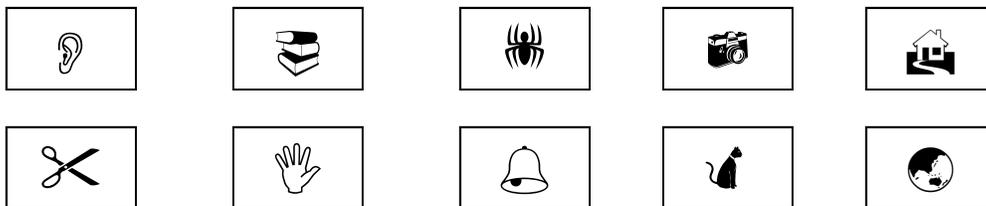
- listen for the rhyming words (phonological awareness) in the words: paperboy, train, cat, and plane;
- come up to the chart to find any repeating words that begin the lines (going, waving, stopping)
- come up to the chart with their letter magnifying glasses (a pipe cleaner in the shape of a magnifying lens) to find a capital "G" or a lower case "w" or the letters that make the sound "st," etc. (or just have them put their fingers on either side of the focus letter/sound)
- come up to the chart and read any letters or words they might know

Sorting Opportunities for Children

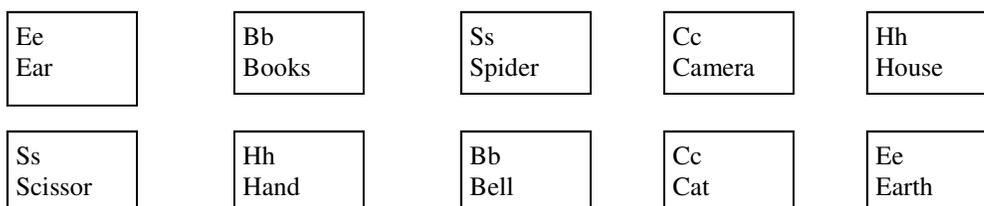
We looked at the game "**Concentration**" earlier in the phonological awareness workshop to help children identify the beginning sounds of words or rhyming words. We can play this same game by adding letters to the picture cards:

- 1) Gather pictures (from magazines, catalogs, etc.) of familiar objects that begin with the same letter and mount them on cards. Laminate them (if you can) for durability. Tell the children that they need to place the cards with the pictures facing up.
- 2) In small groups a child turns over any two cards face up to decide if the initial letters of the pictures' names are a match. If the initial letters match, the child keeps the pair and gets to try again.
- 3) If the letters do not match, the child turns the cards back over and the next child attempts a match.

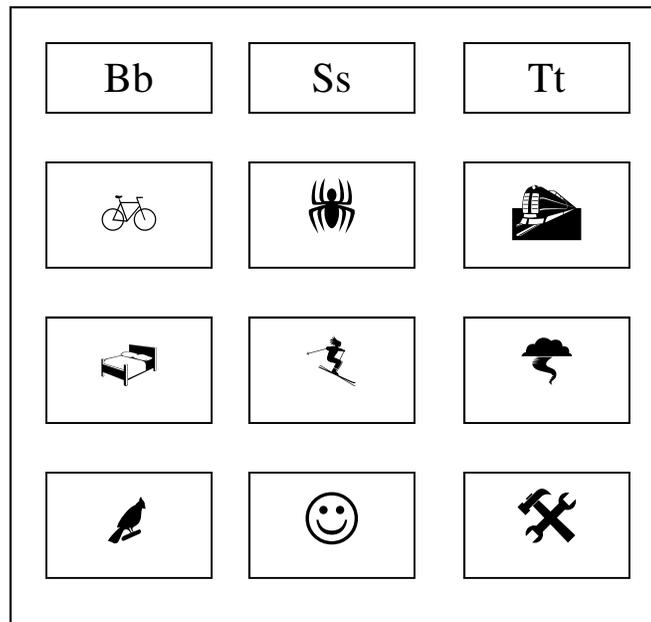
The fronts of cards would look like this:



The backs of the cards would look like this:



Children can practice their beginning letter knowledge by experiencing **word sorts**. Give children a stack of cards with pictures on the front and several initial consonants under which they must categorize the card. If you use small circles of Velcro to attach the cards to the foam board, then you can easily change the letters by which children sort. One of your boards (after the children have sorted the pictures into the right category) might look like this:



There are free graphics that you can print off to use for these cards. Just log on to a site like www.clipart.com and type in your search for clip art. It will show you sheets of images to choose from. For example, if you type in “ant” you are offered over 400 images to choose from! Choose beginning letters that have meaning to most children: ants, babies, candy, dogs, ears, foot, gras, house, etc. Google has an images search (see the tab above the initial search box), as do many other web sites, for the sorting cards that you create. Children often recognize photographs with more accuracy than they do drawings, as drawings have a tendency to be more open to interpretation.

“Letter sorts are a powerful way to reinforce letter formations and help children as they begin to discriminate between the finer features of similar letters. The following list offers some characteristics by which children can sort magnetic letters [or letter cards]:

- tunnels or holes (n and o)
- short or long sticks (n and h)
- open or closed curves (c and b)
- one or two humps (n and m)
- one or two valleys (v and w)
- capital or lower case (M and m)
- can or cannot hold water (u and n)
- short or tall (t and c)
- sticks, curves, or both (t, c, and b)
- slanted or straight lines (w and l)”

Venn & Jahn, 2003, p. 129-130.

Teacher-Made Charts

 Write on chart paper and reread multiple times some simple **tongue twisters** that use your children's names and are based on a shared experience, like a picnic. Have children listen for the common beginning sound:

- “Amanda ate an apple.”
- “Brandon boldly bit a big brownie.”
- “Carmela carefully carried a cold Coke.”
- “Daniel doesn't drink diet drinks.”
- “Ella easily eats every egg.”
- etc.



Display the chart somewhere in your room (or if you don't have much wall space, put your charts on chart paper with spiral binding so that you can flip back and read the previous charts).

 A **Language Experience Chart** is child-dictated work that is written by the teacher on chart paper so that all children can see the print. These are often written in response to a book or a class experience. Talk with the children first as to what they remember about the book or experience, then write down their sentences just as the children say them (because children need to be able to match their speech to the print). Go back into the chart to reread multiple times and to engage in letter identification activities. Perhaps you will want to have multiple children come up with their magnifying glasses (a pipe cleaner in the shape of one!) and find words that begin with the letter T or M or S or that begin with the first letter of their name. You will want them to find letters in the middle and ends of words, as well.

Perhaps you have created a chart on the pets you have studied, the Valentine's Day party that you experienced, or the trip to the park that you made:

Different Kinds of Family Pets

We have learned about the many different pets that families may have.

Some families have small pets like gerbils, hamsters, guinea pigs, or mice.

Some families have regular pets like dogs and cats, birds, and fish.

Some families have unusual pets like iguanas or snakes or pigs!

Our Valentine's Day Party

We had a wonderful February 14th celebration!

After we gave out our cards, Emily's mama brought in cupcakes with pink frosting and red candy hearts on them.

They were soooo good! Some of us had pink frosting on our noses!

We all got a box of candy hearts with messages on them.

We had a happy Valentine's day.

After the teacher has written the chart with the children’s help, and after multiple readings, the teacher might focus on the alphabet by making suggestions such as the following:

Teacher: “Who wants to come be a letter detective and find a word that begins with a capital “S”?”

Teacher: “Who wants to be a letter detective and find a word that begins with a capital “V”?”

Teacher: “Who wants to find a word that appears on this page several times?”

Teacher: “Who could find a lower case “c” on our chart?”

Etc.

Etc.



Our Trip to the Park!

Jeremiah said, “I runned right over to the swings!”

Susannah said, “I liked the horses that went boing, boing, boing!”

Terrance said, “Did you see that bridge with the chains and it was swinging?”

Luis said, “I not want to go first, but then I like it. I like the thing . . . the slide.”

Etc.



Children appreciate seeing their names by their statements about the experience. You might wish to begin their contributions by writing their names. This is a good opportunity to discuss “talking marks” that show that you are writing another person’s exact words. Remember that we must write exactly what the children say, as they must be able to match their oral text with the written one.

Environmental Print

Make a large **wall display out of products** with print that the children can read. Put one product (like a Gatorade label under “G” and a Ritz cracker box under “R”) under each letter of the alphabet, write the name of the product on a 3x5 card underneath the product, and then read the products daily. When all of the children can read the products, remove the products and leave the 3 x 5 cards, so that children will be required to read the print and not rely on the contextual information of the color and pictures on the product itself.



Children often have surprising background knowledge about **environmental print**. Retrieve 3 empty boxes of cereal from the grocery center and examine them with a small group. Ask children such questions as:

- What do you notice about these cereals?
- Which cereal is the corn flakes? How do you know? Which box contains the oat squares? How do you know?
- How could the words on the box help you know what cereal is inside?
- Does anyone see a word they know on the box? A letter? Do any of the letters in the words on the boxes match the letters in your name?
- Who wants to find the Ts in the word Total? One is a capital letter, and the other is lower case.

Ask the children to bring in the empty cereal boxes that they can read.

Pre-schoolers will love playing "**I Spy**" with letters on Bi-Lo ads (write the letter you ask them to identify on a white board). With children working in pairs within a small group (no more than 6 children), they can respond to your statements by putting their fingers on the letter or their "I Spy pointer" (a plastic doll's eye at the end of a craft stick):

Teacher: "I Spy with my little eye something that is yellow, is shaped like the crescent moon, is loved by monkeys, and begins with the letter B. Yes! It's a banana! Everybody put their finger on the B of the word *banana*."

Teacher: "I Spy with my little eye something that is the meat food group, it is red before it's cooked, it's served on a bun, some people like it with mustard/ketchup/lettuce/& tomato, McDonald's sells millions and millions of them, and it begins with the letter H. Very good! It's *hamburger*. Everybody put their finger on the H of the word

In a small group give each child a section of the **newspaper** and a **highlighting marker** or crayon. (Of course, demonstrate first how to hold a marker or crayon and how to use it on the paper.) After your demonstrations, ask the children to highlight or circle letters that they know, perhaps the letters that begin or are in their names. Have children then share their letters with the rest of the group, and if they are ready, they may want to write the letters they found on personal chalk boards or wipe-off boards.



Using Books and the Writing Center for Alphabet Experience



Read aloud an A-B-C book every day and talk about the letters and objects that the authors have chosen to represent that letter. There are hundreds of great alphabet books in libraries; try to change your collection every several weeks so the experiences stay fresh. Storybooks and informational texts remain a critical element of your everyday classroom literacy work, so ensure that they remain the focus even when your children are beginning to recognize and use letters.

Children love writing on **dry erase boards**! As you are reading an alphabet book you might wish to stop and have children write the letter on which you are focusing. If children bring a orphaned sock from home, then they can put their socks on their free hands and erase the letters when it's time to practice a new letter.



Read aloud multiple A-B-C books and then **create your own alphabet books**, using children's drawings of objects that begin with that letter or by cutting out pictures from magazines and gluing them on the appropriate page. At the preschool level it will be best if you create a Big Book with the children's cut out images. Children love to "re-read" books that they have helped make, so bring out this Big Book frequently and have the children identify the letter and the objects on the page that begin with that letter. You might also want to put the book in a center where children can work together in pairs to identify the letters and talk about the content.



Read **Big Books** whenever possible so that children can see the enlarged illustrations and text. Continue to show children and talk with them about concepts about print as you read the text. After you read the text and your objective is to focus on the alphabet, have children find beginning letters. They can use fingers to isolate the letter, place transparent color sticky tabs (found at any office store), use bracelets to encircle the letters, or place colored pipe cleaners or Wikki Stix “magnifying glasses” over the letters you have chosen to find.

Make your own Big Books! Big Books are quite expensive; when they aren’t on sale you might pay \$25.00 for one book. A great solution to the high cost of Big Books is to make your own! You could write an original story dictated by the children, or you could do a “Twice Told Tale” in which you use another author’s format (like Brown Bear, Brown Bear) but your children modify the text to make it their own. You type or write the print on the page, and the children illustrate. These will be the favorite books in your classroom because the children have constructed them and they feel a sense of ownership over the resulting product.

Use **multiple manipulative materials** in your writing or library center. Be sure to include as many as you can:

- alphabet puzzles
- magnetic upper and lower case letters with a cookie sheet or other magnetic board
- wooden letters
- felt letters and felt board
- alphabet games
- letter stencils
- letter stamps
- alphabet books
- small chalk boards and chalk for letter formation
- small white boards and dry erase markers for letter formation
- play dough for shaping letters
- pipe cleaners for shaping letters



Games for alphabet focus

Fishing for letters

This game will help children name the alphabet letters.

- 1) Cut out 26 fish shapes from construction paper. Have the children decorate one side of the fish. On the other side, write one letter of the alphabet.
- 2) Slide a paper clip onto each fish’s tail.
- 3) Make a “fishing pole” with a wooden dowel rod, a string, and a magnet tied to the end of the string.
- 4) Scatter the fish on the floor with the letter side down. Have the children try to “catch” a fish with the fishing rod and say the name of the letter on the fish.

(from www.getreadytoread.org)

Sandy (or ricey) letters

This game will help children name the alphabet letters.

- 1) Place 10 plastic letters (perhaps beginning with those that begin children's names in the setting) in the sand at the sand table (or rice table).
- 2) Teacher models by closing her eyes, searching for a letter, trying to guess the letter by its shape, and then opening her eyes to confirm the letter's name.
- 3) Give the child clues if s/he is having difficulty identifying the letter.
- 4) For more advanced children, have them match the letters they find to words printed on a piece of paper or on the children's laminated name cards.



(from www.getreadytoread.org)

Letter jump!

This game will help children name the alphabet letters.

- 1) Laminate 8x11 sheets of paper that have large upper-case and lower-case letters on them. Select letters that begin children's names in the setting, and later move on to less familiar letters.
- 2) Tape the letter cards to the floor in a safe path across the floor.
- 3) The teacher says the letter, and the child jumps to that letter and reads the letter.
- 4) The teacher and the child can take turns saying a letter, with the child jumping to each one.

(from www.getreadytoread.org)

A final point to remember:

"Some researchers suggest that alphabet knowledge is a byproduct of extensive early literacy experiences. Therefore, simply training children to memorize letters without providing learning in a larger literacy context has proven unsuccessful as a predictor of beginning reading success" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, in Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004).

Suggestions for evaluation:

 You can track a child's progress in learning the alphabetic principle by taking brief notes on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. You may wish to take notes on 2-3 children per day; one easy way to do this is to record your notes and the date on Post-its. Then you only have to place that note in the child's folder, and you will have ongoing documentation of a child's development in a particular area. You may wish to record information about whether a child can:

- recognize the visual form of the letters and name them
- identify initial consonants of words in context
- identify rhyming words
- recognize some spelling patterns and use them in their writing
- recognize some high-frequency words

developed from Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp (2000)

 Let's not forget that children need to be consulted to talk about their own growth. What is **their** assessment about their progress? Have interviews with children, use a set of alphabet cards, and ask them what they know about their growth in recognizing and creating letters.

 Another good idea to get a sense of a child's understandings about letter-sound relationships is to ask the child to draw a picture and then write about it in his/her own words. You will learn a great deal about their awareness of letter formation, sound-symbol correspondences, spelling patterns, etc. (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000).

Strategies for children with special needs:

 "Some children may need more tactile experiences. Forming their names with plastic letters or other types of three-dimensional letters may help them develop alphabet knowledge" (Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004, p. 72)

 "All children enjoy hearing the same book over and over again. For children who are developing more slowly than most, repeated readings of the same alphabet book can be very beneficial. Encourage parents and other home caregivers to read a particular alphabet book to their children each night. Parents who have limited literacy skills often feel comfortable with this type of activity. Encourage them to let their children take the lead as often as possible" (Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004, p. 75).

 "For children who are developing more slowly than most, recognizing letters and remembering letter names will take much more time. Concentrate on the letters in each child's name first. Gradually extend to other words important to the child—mom, dad, names of siblings, and so on" (Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004, p. 77).

Working with parents:

-  Suggest that parents talk daily with children about letters that they see in context (in environmental print like cereal boxes and signs and fast food labels).
-  Parents can print off alphabet letter cards from the computer for free (Jan Brett has a wonderful web site at www.janbrett.com with her book characters on the letter cards). Although it is not recommended practice to use these as “flash cards” for children’s immediate recognition, they would be useful for children’s sorting in the categories of “I know this letter” and “I don’t know this one yet.” Parents and children can also sit together and talk about the cards and practice letter formation with their fingers running over the letter shape.
-  Ask parents to consider putting magnetic alphabet numbers and letters on the refrigerator or cookie sheet so that children can identify letters and make words while the caregiver is preparing food (Campbell, 1998).
-  Make this suggestion to parents, perhaps in a newsletter: “Play games with line segments where children try to guess which letter you are writing as you draw parts of the letter one at a time” (Early Childhood-Head Start Task Force, 2002, p. 21).
-  Ask parents to find alphabet puzzles and games that they can play together. Perhaps you could tell parents in a newsletter what puzzles and games you have been using in the classroom with their children. Parents can then help children learn their letters in the home environment, which will support in important ways the children’s work in the pre school environment.
-  Perhaps most importantly, suggest that parents take their children to the library to find alphabet books. These should be shelved together in the children’s section of the library, but suggest that parents ask a librarian to point them out so that children may pick out the ones they wish to take home.