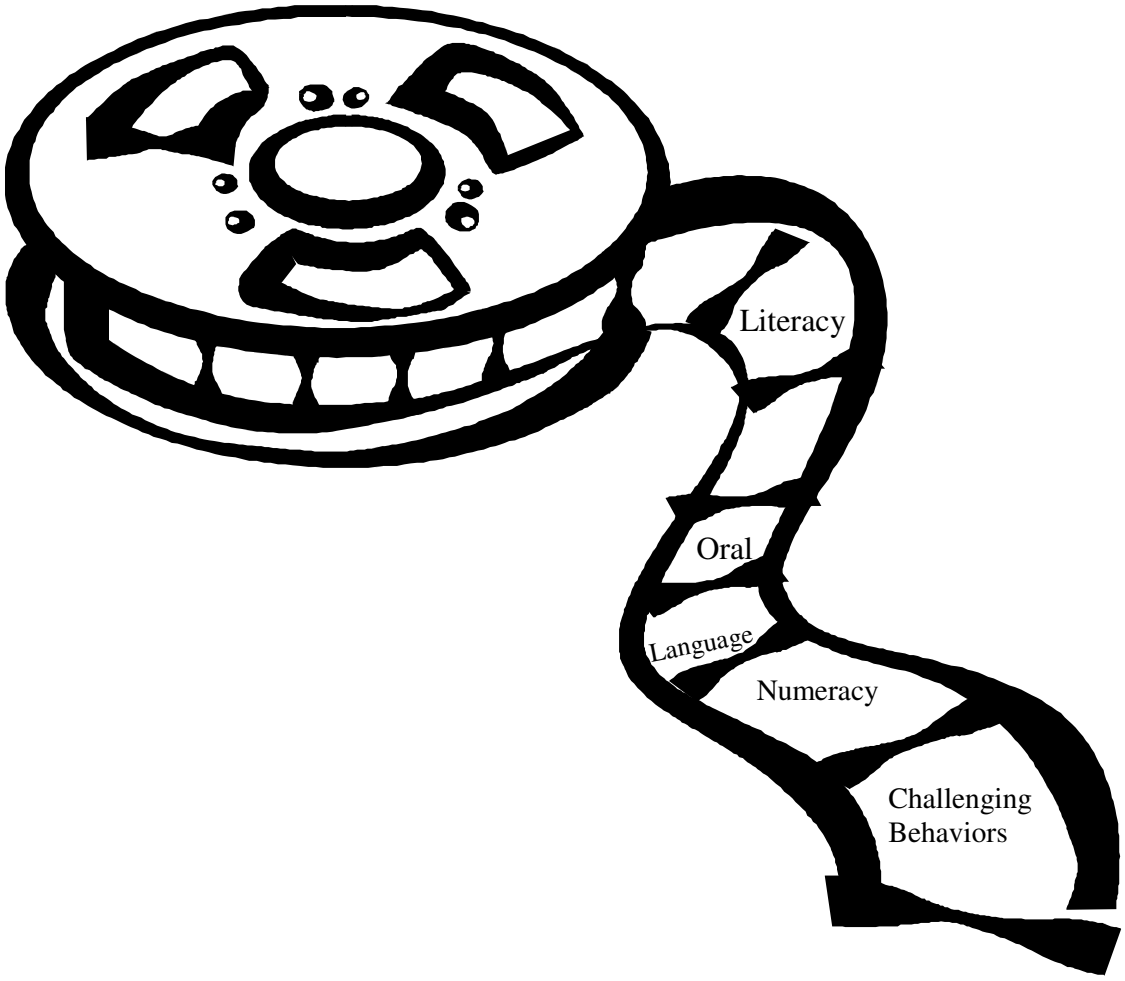
# Project REEL

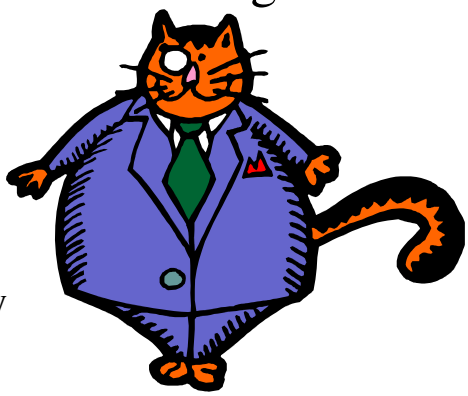



## Resources for Early Educator Learning

# 5 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)<br>Aligned with The Creative Curriculum© Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5** | |
|---|---|
| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5)**<br><br>**Section 2: Early Literacy**<br>**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)<br>Aligned with The Creative Curriculum© Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5 | |
|---|---|
| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5)**<br><br>**Section 2: Early Literacy**<br>**Component: Visual Discrimination**<br>**Component: Visual Whole-Part-Whole Relationships**<br>**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)<br>Aligned with The Creative Curriculum© Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5 | |
|---|---|
| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5)**<br><br>**Section 2: Early Literacy**<br>**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

**List of training materials:**

- **participant manuals**
- **double set of laminated name cards**
- **model of a "Who's Here?" Velcro name strip**
- **model of a name puzzle envelope**
- **laminated letter cards**
- **texts on chart paper (children's dictation, poems, recipes, etc.)**
- **sorting cards (pictures on front, beginning alphabet letter on back)**
- **Velcro board for modeling**
- **alphabet fish examples and magnetic fishing pole**
- **environmental print**
- **A-B-C books**
- **dry erase board, marker, and orphaned sock**
- **grocery store ads, newspapers, and highlighting markers**
- **laminated letter cards for "letter jump"**
- **miscellaneous alphabet materials: felt letters, plastic letters, letter tiles, letter stamps, magnetic letters, etc.**

# 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.

**Letter Detectives**

Here is another letter matching activity that involves children reading names that are not their own: it involves again the children's laminated name cards.

1) Place two to four name cards out on a table or on the floor.

2) Show a letter card and identify the letter. Ask, "Can you find this letter in any of these names?" Many children will be able to visually match letters that are not in their names, although they may not be able to identify those letters in isolation.

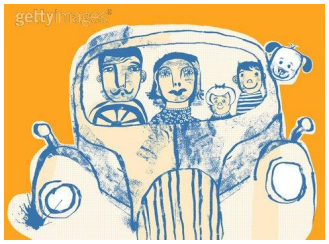
3) To add on a challenge, ask the children to identify two names that begin with the same letter, that have the same letter in the middle of the name, or have letters in common that end their names.

Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004, p. 70-71.

## Songs and poetry for alphabetic awareness

♫ Point at letters when you **sing the Alphabet Song** so that children can connect the name of the letter with its appearance. How many of us in our early days thought that "elemenopee" was <u>one</u> letter?! This might have happened because we didn't see the letters when we were singing the song. Consider having alphabet charts for each child so that s/he can point to the words in the rhythm of the song. You can sing this song very slowly or very fast, and children enjoy using different voices when they sing: with a high, squeaky mouse voice, with a low bear's voice, with a soft or LOUD voice, with an angry or a surprised voice, etc., etc. We've also seen teachers count on their number lines in different voices: of a teeny, tiny woman; of an old, old man; of a laughing or crying person, etc.

✎ **Copy short poems for young listeners on chart paper** in large enough letters that can be seen at 15-20 feet. Here's a delightful poem I would copy onto chart paper so that all children could see text. It's entitled "Going in the Car," and it's from a book named <u>Good Morning, Sweetie Pie and Other Poems for Little Children</u>, by Cynthia Rylant:



Going in the car today
going into town,
little Girl and Papa
with the windows halfway down.
Waving to the paperboy,
waving to the train,
waving to the kitty cat,
waving to the plane.
Papa plays the radio
and sings a Papa song.
Little Girl and Mrs. Bear,
they always sing along.
Stopping at the grocery store,
stopping for the mail,
stopping at the hardware now,
'cause Papa needs a nail.
Going in the car today
going into town.
Little Girl and Papa
with the windows halfway down.

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:

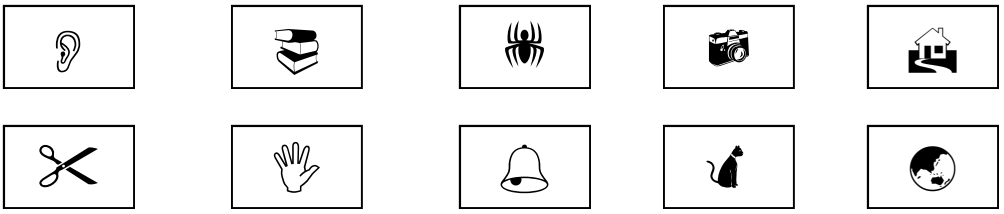
- listen for the rhyming words (phonological awareness) in the words: paperboy, train, cat, and plane;
- come up to the chart to find any repeating words that begin the lines (going, waving, stopping
- come up to the chart with their letter magnifying glasses (a pipe cleaner in the shape of a magnifying 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.

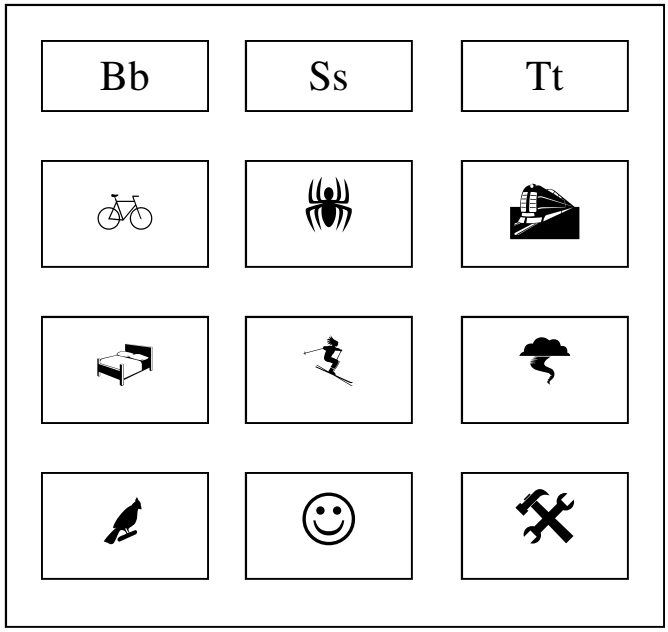
The fronts of cards would look like this:



The backs of the cards would look like this:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ee<br>Ear | Bb<br>Books | Ss<br>Spider | Cc<br>Camera | Hh<br>House |
| Ss<br>Scissor | Hh<br>Hand | Bb<br>Bell | Cc<br>Cat | Ee<br>Earth |

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: **a**nts, **b**abies, **c**andy, **d**ogs, **e**ars, **f**eet, **g**rass, **h**ouse, 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]:

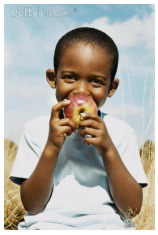
- tunnels or holes (n and o)
- short or long sticks (n and h)
- open or closed curves (c and b)
- one or two humps (n and m)
- one or two valleys (v and w)
- capital or lower case (M and m)
- can or cannot hold water (u and n)
- short or tall (t and c)
- sticks, curves, or both (t, c, and b)
- slanted 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.<br><br>Some families have small pets like gerbils, hamsters, guinea pigs, or mice.<br><br>Some families have regular pets like dogs and cats, birds, and fish.<br><br>Some families have unusual pets like iguanas or snakes or pigs! |

| Our Valentine's Day Party |
| --- |
| We had a wonderful February 14th celebration!<br><br>After we gave out our cards, Emily's mama brought in cupcakes with pink frosting and red candy hearts on them.<br><br>They were soooo good! Some of us had pink frosting on our noses!<br><br>We all got a box of candy hearts with messages on them.<br><br>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:

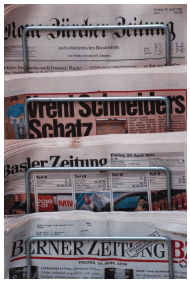
- What do you notice about these cereals?
- Which cereal is the corn flakes? How do you know? Which box contains the oat squares? How do you know?
- How could the words on the box help you know what cereal is inside?
- Does anyone see a word they know on the box? A letter? Do any of the letters in the 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

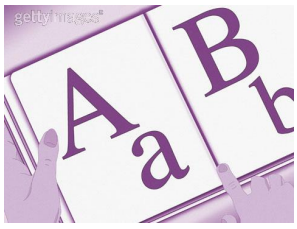
In a small group give each child a section of the **newspaper and a highlighting marker** or crayon. (Of course, demonstrate first how to hold a marker or crayon and how to use it on the paper.) After your demonstrations, ask the children to highlight or circle letters that they know, perhaps the letters 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 chose 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 relation ships 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.

# FOCUS ON INTEREST AND MOTIVATION THAT LEADS TO COMPREHENSION


"A major contribution of the story-reading experience is the pleasure that it can bring. First of all, stories are often very interesting. . . . To enter into the world of stories on their own is something that many children want to do once they have experienced the joy that stories can bring. Thus, experience with stories can build a positive attitude toward reading and can develop a strong desire to learn to read."

Schickedanz (1999), p. 86

| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (Birth to Age Three)** |
|---|
| **Section 2: Early Literacy**<br>**Component: Book Handling Skills**<br>**Component: Looking and Recognition Skills**<br>**Component: Picture and Story Comprehension Skills**<br>**Component: Early Writing Behaviors and Skills** |
| **LEARNING EXPECTATIONS:** |
| Eyes focus on simple pictures in books or drawings (0-4 mos.) |
| Begins to explore the physical properties of a book (5-8 mos.) |
| Holds a board, cloth, or plastic book and manipulates the pages (5-8 mos.) |
| Shows increased involvement and enjoyment with books (9-12 mos.) |
| Begins to interact with story and recognize pictures of everyday familiar objects (9-12 mos.) |
| Begins to make associations about familiar objects (9-12 mos.) |
| Begins to recognize symbols for objects (9-12 mos.) |
| Begins to show interest in exploring writing tools (9-12 mos.) |
| Begins to show interest in exploring books (13-18 mos.) |
| Begins to show awareness and interest in familiar pictures (13-18 mos.) |
| Begins to recognize "favorite books" and repeatedly requests to read them (13-18 mos.) |
| Pretends to read books (13-18 mos.) |
| Shows increased interest in exploring writing tools (13-18 mos.) |
| Shows interest in exploring books (19-24 mos.) |
| Shows awareness and interest in familiar pictures (19-24 mos.) |
| Begins to interact with story through familiar hand motions and expression of emotions (19-24 mos.) |
| Enjoys books that relate to personal experience (19-24 mos.) |
| Enjoys looking at book by self, while sitting by peers or when being read to by an adult; begins to connect familiar books to play experiences (19-24 mos.) |
| Begins to use writing tools to make marks on paper (19-24 mos.) |
| Begins to understand the connection between books and personal experiences (2 – 2 1/2 yrs.) |
| Recognizes and enjoys reading familiar books (2 – 2 1/2 yrs.) |
| Uses a variety of writing tools to make scribbles (2 – 2 1/2 yrs.) |
| Is aware of and can identify many sounds in the environment (2 – 2 1/2 yrs.) |
| Begins to distinguish between words with similar phonemes, such as *pat* and *path* (2 – 2 1/2 yrs.) |

| |
|---|
| Begins to recite from memory familiar books (2 1/2 – 3 yrs.) |
| Scribbles and draws intentionally (2 1/2 – 3 yrs.) |
| Is aware of and can identify many sounds in the environment (2 1/2 – 3 yrs.) |
| Continues to distinguish between words with similar phonemes, such as *pat* and *path* (2 – 2 1/2 yrs.) |
| Discriminates among sounds based on volume and pitch—loud vs. soft, high vs. low, long vs. short (2 1/2 – 3 yrs.) |
| Engages in and enjoys word play with silly sounds and real and nonsense words (2 1/2 – 3 yrs.) |

| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5)<br>Aligned with The Creative Curriculum© Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5** | |
|---|---|
| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5)**<br><br>**Section 2: Early Literacy**<br>**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)<br>Aligned with The Creative Curriculum© Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5** | |
|---|---|
| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5)**<br><br>**Section 2: Early Literacy**<br>**Component: Visual Discrimination**<br>**Component: Visual Whole-Part-Whole Relationships**<br>**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 patterns of a 3-dimensional objects | 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)<br>Aligned with The Creative Curriculum© Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5** | |
|---|---|
| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5)**<br><br>**Section 2: Early Literacy**<br>**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**

- ✓ model for young children how to use the elements of story grammar to talk about storybooks: setting, characters, problem, plot events, and resolution
- ✓ offer multiple opportunities for children to retell stories through creative drama, puppet play, toys, felt boards, dry erase boards, storytelling, buddy retellings using book illustrations, etc.
- ✓ model for young children how to talk about interesting parts and important details and "what they learned" from informational books
- ✓ demonstrate how to use new vocabulary words found in stories and informational books
- ✓ match developmentally appropriate books to readers (one word per page for inexperienced readers, repeating lines of a predictable pattern book for more experienced readers)
- ✓ read aloud to children multiple times a day in both fictional and informational texts: storybooks, poems, informational books, environmental print, children's own writing, etc.
- ✓ integrate choices for young children in the daily literacy activities of the setting
- ✓ demonstrate an awareness of individual children's "zone of proximal development": that is, teachers will use a child's present knowledge/abilities to offer appropriate learning challenges for that child
- ✓ demonstrate their knowledge of the critical role of social collaboration in the learning process by working with young children on book-related and print-related activities and by offering paired and small-group literacy experiences so that children may learn from each other
- ✓ demonstrate their knowledge of the critical role of success in young children's motivation by encouraging and praising children's approximations in literacy efforts (emergent oral language, reading, writing, and numeracy efforts)

## List of training materials:

- participant manuals
- examples from Project REEL books of fiction, information, and poetry
- examples of environmental print and child-authored texts
- Project REEL books for modeling wide variety of strategies (think aloud, questioning, K-W-L, elements of comprehension, etc.)
- several varieties of story maps from Project REEL books
- chart paper and markers
- materials to model retellings (picture sequence retellings, puppets, small plastic toys, dry erase boards, etc.

Research suggests that children are likely to be **motivated** when they are provided the following:

1. **Choice**
   Children need to feel responsibility and control over the situation.
2. **Challenge**
   If a task is too easy, children become bored. If it's too hard, they become frustrated. Children do best with **some** challenge.
3. **Social Collaboration**
   Children are more highly motivated when they work with teachers and peers, than when they work alone.
4. **Success**
   If children perceive themselves to be successful—even when the task is not exactly correct—they are more likely to continue as motivated learners. Attend to what children are doing correctly, rather than what they done incorrectly. Remember, children who write "red" for "read" have accurately spelled 75% of the word!

   --developed from Morrow, Literacy Development in the Early Years (2001)

Also, children's interest and motivation to use and create print materials in their environment is based on their being able to **comprehend** the materials. If the material is not comprehensible to the young child, then she is not going to maintain interest or be motivated to participate in something confusing to her.

A child can demonstrate comprehension of a text when he or she:

1) Uses a storybook to create a retelling that has a clear beginning, middle, and end
2) Actively participates in the teacher read-aloud by labeling and making statements about the text
3) Can compose a retelling without the book
4) Includes elements of story structure in the retelling (setting, characters, plot, problem, solution)
5) Talks about the content of the story after the reading
6) Learns new vocabulary from the story and uses it in oral language and writing
7) Uses books to find information

This session will focus on both on interest and motivation of the young children, as well as how teachers can support the child's comprehension of oral and written texts.

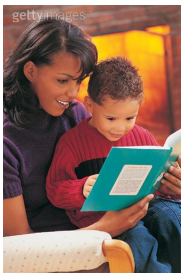
# IDEAS TO HELP BUILD INTEREST AND MOTIVATION IN LITERACY EXPERIENCES AND TO DEVELOP READER COMPREHENSION

## Teacher Read Aloud Strategies

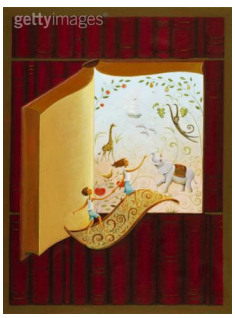
If reading aloud to children is the most important element of their literacy development, then let's read to them multiple times per day. Let's shoot for reading aloud five times daily: read a **story book**, an **informational text** (from a book, newspaper, brochure, magazine article, etc.), a **poem**, a piece of **environmental print**, and a **child-authored** piece of writing (even if it was dictated to you). These readings do not have to be long, and in fact, children will perhaps lose interest if they are too long. Reading aloud multiple times each day will

1) increase children's understanding of oral language;
2) increase their own production of language;
3) increase their vocabulary;
4) increase their understanding of the different ways that text is constructed (informational books, story books, poems, advertising, etc.); and
5) increase their interest and motivation because it is comforting to children to be able to predict what will happen in a familiar print experience.

Along with the writing materials in each center, make sure that you include books and print that are appropriate for that center: cook books in the home living center, construction books in the block center, gardening magazines in the nature center, etc. (See interest areas/learning centers descriptions in the workshop addressing "Concepts about print.")



**Be enthusiastic** about books yourself! You can remember the teachers you liked most when you were coming through school. They were the ones who clearly demonstrated that they loved you and they loved teaching. Be that person for a young child. Show your enthusiasm about reading, show your happiness in finding a really fun book, and share humorous and exciting books with your children. It's not enough to "just" read books (especially with a hint of boredom in your voice); you need to demonstrate that reading adds to the quality of your life and brings you pleasure. They will be convinced that you're right!



"Skilled teachers need to be attuned to children's understanding, to **find places in a book that are likely to be confusing**, and to engage the group in conversations that are challenging but that they can understand" (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001, p. 177).

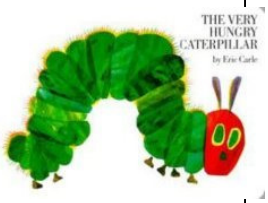
Children **learn best from being read to in small groups or individually**. Schedule your classroom activities to allow for at least three read-aloud experiences for children in small groups, and during free play you can read to individual children. Small groups work best with between three and five children at a time.

If your schedule becomes too full on any given day, drop some other activity from your plans but **keep your read aloud times as critical** experiences for your children.

Use **shared readings from Big Books and charts** that you have created to help build children's listening and reading comprehension. When you read from the book or chart, point at each word as you read it (while still reading with fluency and expression). This will help children understand that words that are spoken can be written down, and will help children who are developmentally ready to start recognizing words. Again, talking about books is the most important element of supporting children's comprehension, so talk about the book **before** you read, **during** your reading, and **after** the reading (see the "B-D-A" read aloud suggestions in the workshop on "Concepts about books."

**Echo reading**, in which you read a phrase, a line, or a sentence of a Big Book or chart and then the children repeat that same line, aids in the development of word recognition and fluency, necessary components of comprehension.

**Choral reading**, in which every one "reads" a familiar text simultaneously, is a positive comprehension strategy much like echo reading. The "reading" by the children may come mostly from memory or from the picture clues, but this is certainly the beginning of more conventional print-based reading skills. Choral reading also helps with word recognition and fluency in both oral language and book-related language.



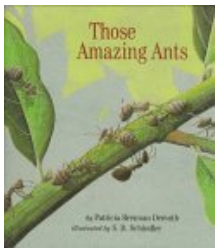

Spend **equal time reading fictional and informational books**. One of children's biggest problems as readers is often in 3rd or 4th grade when they are faced with the format and content of books in science, social studies, and math. Very often this is because their experience lies exclusively in storybooks, not informational book structure. If we begin sharing informational books with toddlers and preschoolers, the genre will become very familiar to them, and the shift from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" may not be so difficult for them.

Use **many different kinds of books**: predictable pattern books, picture storybooks, informational books, poetry, child-authored stories, class stories, etc. Remember that in many instances "literacy" is gender-related: boys often don't care much for fantasy stories, but they are very interested in books about dinosaurs, heavy machinery, animals, construction, weather, basketball/football players, etc.

## Building Background Knowledge: How to Get Children Ready to Read/Listen

When the room is organized into **learning centers** (see the workshop on "Concepts about print"), children have the chance to "play" while learning the uses of books and print. Children's use of language is more complex when they are in pretending in adult roles (baker, fireman, doctor, veterinarian, teacher, etc.) (Vygotsky, 1978). Set up multiple centers (post office, travel agency, grocery store, firehouse, etc.) where the children can "try on" adult roles and use the complex language and vocabularies associated with these different roles. "Because children can select what they want to do, and whom they do it with, the motivation and desire to read and/or write are high. The atmosphere promotes cooperative and collaborative behaviors" (Morrow, 2001, p. 162).

Children will have trouble comprehending a text for which they have no background knowledge. **"Picture walks"** with young children helps them make predictions and build background knowledge based on this visual information. Before reading a text, go through the book page by page. If it's a fictional book, discuss what the story might be about. If the read-aloud is an informational book, talk about the book's format (chapter headings, subheadings, vocabulary in bold, etc.) and what children see in the photos, illustrations, diagrams, charts, graphs, etc. Read what the captions say about each. Move children into using these strategies in their paired and independent reading.




**K-W-L** (Ogle, 1986) is a strategy for supporting young children's comprehension. It builds children's background knowledge before the reading, and supports their thinking about the book after the reading. K-W-L stands for What Do We **K**now, What Do We **W**ant To Learn, and What Did We **L**earn. Before you read the book to children, you would ask what they already about the topic of the book. Let's say that you're going to read a wonderful book entitled Those Amazing Ants, by Patricia Brennan Demuth.

1) Ask the children what they already know about ants, and write down their responses just the way they said them.
2) Then ask the children what they would like to learn about ants from the book that you are going to read to them. Write down their responses as accurately as you can.
3) Read the book to the children, making sure that you stop periodically to talk about interesting vocabulary and what the children are learning from the book.
4) After you have read and discussed the book, write down the children's statements about what they learned from the book. Your K-W-L chart might look something like this:

| What we know about ants | What we want to know about ants | What we learned about ants |
|---|---|---|
| Kerry said, "They are so tiny and they crawl on the table in the kitchen." | Jesús asked, "What do they eat?" | They live in tunnels and rooms below the ground. |
| Nathaniel said, "They like sugar!" | Nikki asked, "How do they get into our houses?" | The ant hill is made from the dirt pushed out when they make tunnels and rooms. |
| Kahlil said, "They got in my sandwich and I had to spit it out." | James asked, "Where do they live underground?" | All of the ants we see are girl ants. |
| Camille asked, "Don't they live in ant hills outside in the yard?" | Charlene asked, "Why do they bite us?" | Male ants have wings. |
| Tracey said, "They go bite, bite, bite on your feets and it hurts a whole lot." | Kerry asked, "Can they crawl in your ears and and sting your brain?" | The queen has lots and lots of babies. |
| | Kahlil asked, "How do they carry things over their heads that are as big as them?" | Some ants are babysitters for the larvae. |

**Important note: Make sure that you correct any false statements in the "what we know" column, and make sure that you go back to read your "want to know" column to see if all of the children's questions were answered by the book. If they weren't, and the children are still curious about the topic, then find another book on the subject. Very often one book can spark the children's imaginations, and their interest will lead you to a thematic unit to explore!

## Supporting Children During the Reading/Listening Event

Children are motivated to participate in **"sound stories"** because they get to become a part of the story, and when they participate they are more likely to comprehend the story. Before reading a story that takes place on a farm, for example, practice farm animal sounds with the children and tell them, "When you hear me say the word 'cow,' you need to give a quiet, low mmmmmmoooo. When you hear me say the word "sheep," you need to use a high voice and make a 'baaaaaaaa' sound. When you hear me say the phrase 'when the wind blew," you all need to make a blowing sound with your mouths." This comprehension strategy gives them a purpose for listening carefully and involves them actively in the story.

**DLTA (Directed Listening-Thinking Activity)** (Stauffer, 1976) is a predicting strategy that teachers demonstrate and children adopt into their independent reading. This is a strategy that gets children actively thinking about and anticipating the story.

1) Show the book you will read and ask the children, "What do you think a book with this title, The Long Winter's Nap, might be about?" The teacher then accepts the answers of three or four students before proceeding. The teacher may want to write these predictions on a chart to demonstrate the oral language to print language connection.

2) Read the first paragraph or to a reasonable stopping point. Ask the children whether their predictions were accurate. For example, "Do you think the story is still about bear cubs?" After students are allowed to respond, make more predictions about the next "chunk" of the story.

3) Continue through the book, asking children for their predictions, then reading a portion to the children, then checking whether their predictions were accurate or not. The teacher continues to ask questions such as "were you correct?" or "what do you think now?" or "what do you think will happen?"

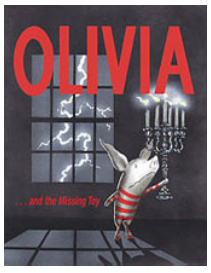
Demonstrate to children how you use **story mapping** to keep track of story structure (setting, characters, problem, plot events, resolution). Your demonstrations now will help them immensely in kindergarten and beyond. Story mapping is easy; you just need to write down information about the various elements that make up a story. You can do it in several ways.

Here's a story map for one of our Project REEL books, *Olivia and the missing toy*, by Ian Falconer:

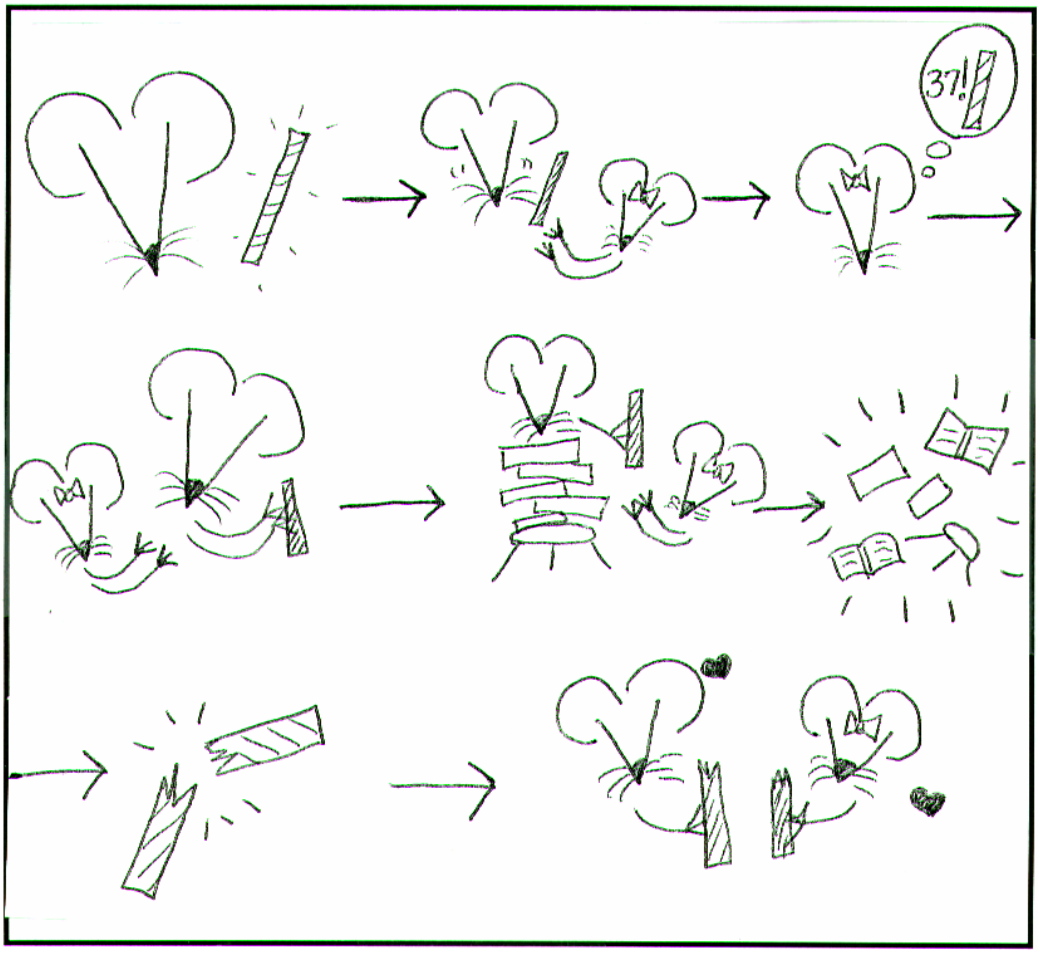
| | |
|---|---|
| **Setting:** | Olivia's house |
| **Characters:** | Olivia, Olivia's mom and dad, little brothers Ian and William, and Perry the dog |
| **Problem:** | Olivia's favorite toy is missing |
| **Plot events:** | 1. Olivia asks her brothers where the toy is. |
| | 2. She find Perry the dog chewed up her toy. |
| | 3. She tells her mom and dad. |
| **Resolution** | 4. She fixes her toy and is happy again. |

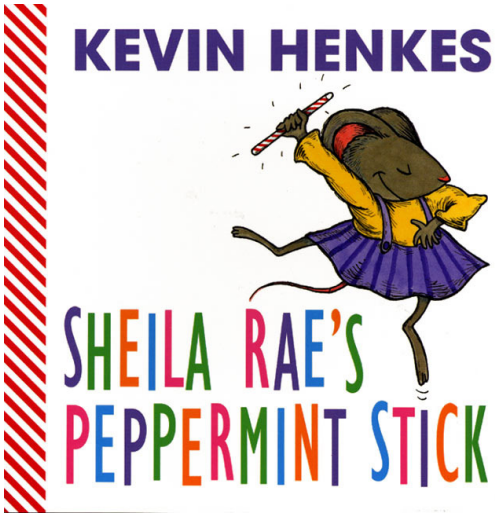
You can fill out a simple chart that lists setting, characters, problem, events, and solution that you write on a white board or chart paper:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **What will happen in the story?** (Predictions) | **Where does the story happen?** (Setting) | **Who are the characters in the story?** (Characters) |
| **What is the problem that arises?** (Problem) | **What happens in the story?** (Events) | **How does the story end?** (Resolution) |



Or . . . you can do a story map by relying heavily on illustrations and words to show how the story progressed. See the story map below for Sheila Rae's Peppermint Stick, by Kevin Henkes:



Regularly use **think alouds** to show children how an effective reader thinks when reading a book. Think Alouds (Davey, 1983 in Tierney, et al., 1995) are particularly helpful with children who are still developing their understandings of what "goes on in the head" of a reader during the reading process. All your children will benefit from your demonstrations that "reading is thinking." It's an easy process for the teacher--you simply say everything that you are thinking as you read a text--and the regular modeling of thought processes will lead to children use those same thinking processes when they read.

a) Begin by modeling making predictions and asking questions about the text from the title, photographs, table of contents, etc.
b) Stop and tell children what you are thinking as you move through the text chunk by chunk--any confusions, questions, connections, etc.
c) As you read each paragraph or chunk of text, share with the children how you are using your background knowledge to understand the book.
d) Talk about any confusing points and show how check for comprehension.
e) Demonstrate "fix-up strategies" of reading ahead, re-reading, reconsidering previous understandings, etc.

For a "down and dirty list" of things you should demonstrate, show them how you:

**Predict** from chunk to chunk what will happen next

Teacher: "I think Trixie is going to be very upset when she finds out that her Knuffle Bunny was left at the laundry."

**Make connections** between your own life and the book, or the book with other books

Teacher: "This character of Olivia reminds me of Lilly in one of our favorite books, Lilly's purple plastic purse! She is very independent and confident and doesn't worry too much about how others think of her."

**Create visual images** in your head

Teacher: "I can see in my imagination a monkey using his tail to swing through the trees. His tail holds onto vines hanging from the branches and helps keep him from falling onto the ground."

**Ask questions** ("Why did the character do that? What is he thinking? How will the author solve that problem?")

Teacher: "I wonder what it was about the yellow marshmallow chick that Owen liked so much?"

**Find important details**

Teacher: "I think it's important that Webster J. Duck is asking other grown-up animals if they are his mother. He needs to find a grown up to help him."

**Make inferences** (how you "read between the lines" when the author doesn't tell you something directly)

> Teacher: "The author doesn't directly tell us that David is angry, but we can see his red face in the illustration and he knocked over the blocks he had been carefully building. Then he ran out of the room! All of that makes me think that David is ready to cry."

**Summarize** (retell the story a chunk at a time)

> Teacher: "Well, Lilly just spent time in the uncooperative chair because of her bad behavior at school. She wouldn't leave her new purse alone and Mr. Slingerland had to take it for the day!"

**Use fix-up strategies** (re-read when something doesn't make sense, re-read when you don't know a word, try to find a word or a chunk of a word in the unknown word, etc.)

> Teacher: "What could I do if I didn't know what these words meant: uncooperative chair? Well, I can re-read the sentence. (Does so). No, that didn't help. I can look at the illustration. She's sitting in the corner and looks very frustrated. I can guess that the uncooperative chair is like a time-out chair, because she could not keep her purse to herself when Mr. Slingerland was trying to teach."

If you will make these kinds of comments in these categories on a regular basis, you will be demonstrating the critical elements of reading comprehension that they will use for the rest of their literate lives!

## Extending the Book Event After Children have Read/Listened

One way you can show your enthusiasm for books is in **creating retelling tools** for use after you have read a book. Retellings are powerful for supporting comprehension, and they help children learn to sequence and summarize information. Use the children as your retelling partners and have them share the beginning, middle and end of the story. You can provide visual support by using felt board characters, puppets, toys, or dry erase boards to quickly draw the story events.

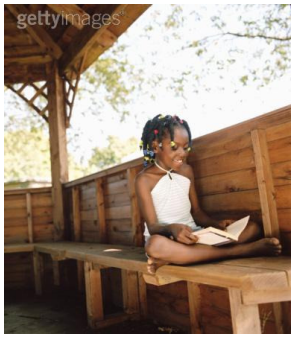
Encourage **children's retellings of favorite stories through manipulatives**: puppet play, felt board, or small plastic figures. After they have observed your demonstrations of how retellings "sound" and how to do them with storytelling tools, they will want to do these with peers during center time.

**Repeated readings are invaluable** for children, and they naturally know to ask for books to be read to them over and over (and over), often to the boredom of the caregiver or teacher! However, children NEED to hear stories repeatedly, for many purposes:

1) It builds children's confidence to be able to predict a book's content and language;
2) They are gaining new meanings from the story every time it is read;
3) They are learning more about how stories are organized & sequenced;
4) They are learning new vocabulary words every time the book is read;
5) They are developing new language patterns that will be helpful in other book readings; and finally
6) They will begin to recognize words that appear over and over again in the readings.

**Creative drama** in the learning classroom is one of the most important strategies you can use to support children's comprehension. You don't need to know anything about the theatre! Just give your children the opportunity to act out stories that you have read to them, or original stories that they have told or written. This is "play" for the most important of reasons: to bring stories to life that will help form children's perceptions of story structure, character intentions, and how problems are resolved. Puppet play is also within the realm of creative drama. Very often puppets can be the voices for shy children.

Sometimes the best response to having listened to a book is to spend some time reading on your own. After you have modeled how children are to use the library/reading center, the materials in it, and their behavioral responsibilities, give them meaningful time every day to **quietly read books independently**. "Children need time to look at books and become immersed in literature independently during the school day. Therefore, time should be provided for periods of independent reading and writing in social cooperative settings, with activities viewed as ones in which they can succeed" (Morrow, 2001, p. 184). Children need time to practice what they are learning in reading instruction and need to concentrate on the text and/or illustrations. Children have the opportunity to select books that are interesting to them, and for those who are already reading the print, they can choose a "just right" book for their individual needs. Make sure that you have designed private places (large cardboard boxes) and comfortable seating (bean bag chairs & pillows) so that reading independently is a physically enjoyable experience, as well.



**Use picture sequencing** to support children's understanding of the events of a story. Make photocopies of four or five illustrations from the book. Choose ones that best show the major events of the story. This will help children construct their retellings of the story, and you will be able to informally assess their comprehension of that book.

Support **children's creation of original artwork** (pencil sketches, crayon drawings, stamp art, painting, etc.) to express their comprehension of the story. Avoid children wasting their time coloring pre-prepared forms that require no critical thought and take time away from more important literacy experiences. Children's original drawing is valuable; coloring black line masters is not.

**Using open-ended questions** with picture storybooks to talk/think deeply about a text and support comprehension (National Research Council, 1999). Open-questions are those that inspire more than one word answers from children. You also cannot anticipate the answer of an open-ended question. For example, if you asked, "What was the little mouse girl's name in our book today?" you are anticipating one right answer: Lilly. If you asked an open-ended question like: "Tell me about the characters in our book today," you will inspire much more talk from children. You will learn much more about their understandings of the book when you ask questions that don't have one right answer. Some open-ended questions for fiction and informational books follow:

**Questions for fiction:**

Tell me about the place where the story happened.
Is the setting of this book like any place you've ever been?
How did the story begin?
What problem did the characters have?
Tell me about the beginning of the story. What happened next?
Did you like the ending of the story? Why?
Tell me about the characters in the story.
Did anybody change during the story?
Did any of the characters act like you or one of your friends?
How did the illustrations help you know what was happening in the story?
What was the most exciting or interesting part of the story?
Tell me about your feelings you had at that part of the story.
What would you ask the author if s/he were here?
Tell me about your favorite part.
Tell me about any part that you would want to change if you rewrote the story.
Did this story remind you of another book? Which one(s) and why?

**Questions for informational books:**

What did you learn?
What was the most surprising or interesting thing you learned?
Did the pictures help you understand the book?
Would you change something in the book? What do you want to know more about?
Did the book make you think about any story you've read or movie that you've seen?
What in the book reminds you of something that has happened to you or one of your friends?
What part was the most interesting to you? Why?
Would you want to meet the author of this book? If so, why? If not, why?
What questions would you ask if the writer were here?

-developed from Routman, Invitations (1994), p. 118-119.

****Important:** Many young children will have difficulties answering some of the questions above. Always be prepared to model the answers; children will participate on their own developmental "time table" and may be ready to answer abstract questions after multiple opportunities to listen to teacher modeling.

**Children need to ask questions!** After children gain experience in question formation from your demonstrations, have them ask YOU questions to check YOUR comprehension! This "turning of the tables" is important for several reasons:

1) It is empowering to children to become the Question Makers;
2) They must think deeply about the book to be able to formulate questions;
3) You are still able to "check" their comprehension by the quality of their questions; and
4) There is some evidence that if children cannot form syntactic questions (those that begin with who, what, where, when, why, how, did, do, etc.), by the end of the first grade, they will experience difficulties in reading in subsequent grades.

Don't assume that because **some children have less competence in storytelling** that they are less intelligent than those who have experience in creating narratives. Some children simply have less experience in expressing themselves in a narrative sequence. Help children find the language they need to construct a narrative that has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Remember that differentiating instruction doesn't mean lowering expectations. All children need individualized high expectations to grow in their knowledge and competencies.

## Suggestions for evaluation:

✎ You can track a child's progress in comprehension 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. You may wish to record information about whether a child can:

- answer literal questions about the text
- paraphrase text when asked what it was about
- give the main idea of a story
- answer questions critical to understanding the text
- ask questions when the meaning of a text is not clear

developed from Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp (2000)

✎ You might wish to tape children's retellings of a story after they have listened to it or take detailed notes on the story elements they include (or exclude) in their retelling. A child's ability to retell a text is a main indicator of comprehension. You will want to indicate the presence or absence of the following story elements. Does the child mention the following in his/her retelling?

Setting?
Characters?
Problem?
Plot events?
Character reactions/feelings?
Main idea or theme?
Author?
Illustrator?
Connections to personal experiences?

## Strategies for ESL learners:

◔ Research supports that reading aloud to ESL learners in small groups "is one of the best ways to ensure a rich resource of language. Children learn new words by listening to stories and by talking to others about them" (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000, p, 120).

◔ Give children who are not yet fluent in English diverse opportunities to respond to a text. They need to express themselves and their reactions to books or other experiences in a variety of ways: "through art, music, dramatization, and even block building. . . . Children's strengths should be celebrated, and they should be given numerous ways to express their interests and talents" ("Responding to linguistic and cultural diversity," a position statement of NAEYC, 1995).

◔ Try to find books in the child's home language and ask parents to come to your classroom whenever possible to read those texts to their child. If you cannot find any texts in that child's language, perhaps the parents will have books that they can bring or send with the child.

## Working with parents:

⌂ Children are highly motivated to learn the many reasons for reading, writing, and talking when they perceive that their **parents value literacy** and are proud of their children's efforts. In fact, "the values, attitudes, and expectations held by parents are other caregivers with respect to literacy are likely to have a lasting effect on a child's attitude about learning to read" (National Research Council, 1998). Help parents to become involved in supporting their children's literacy at home by sharing what you've learned in our workshops and what you know about weaving reading, writing, talking, and listening into the fabric of the home.

Children whose parents read aloud to them acquire understanding about print, about letters, and about the characteristics of written language. A print-rich environment in the home (which includes books, newspapers, magnetic letters, writing materials, and more) has been linked to children's increased knowledge about print. Promote the idea to parents of "reading as entertainment," which will be highly beneficial to their children (National Research Council, 1998).

Suggest to parents that when they are reading books to their children, it would help their children to talk about the new words that are introduced to the child through the book. Parents know their children's situations and understandings better than anyone, so they will know best how to connect that new word to something that the child will understand.

We cannot overestimate the power of literacy demonstrations of older siblings for the preschool population. Share with parents how important the influence is of literacy demonstrations from older siblings. Suggest that they encourage their older children to work with their younger children in playing literacy-related games, writing invitations, drawing maps, writing notes and letters, writing birthday lists, rides at the amusement park, etc.

# A FOCUS ON EMERGENT WRITING

"For young children, knowledge of functions of print is important because it provides the foundation for all literacy exploration. When children know what written language can do for them, they want to use it, and they want to learn to use it conventionally. If children do not understand why we use written language, then there is little reason for them to read or write."

from Owocki & Goodman (2002), p. 78

"Children who feel the power of writing and feel positive about themselves as writers are likely to want to write, and to make an effort to learn to communicate effectively in writing. Children who come to see their writing as something that is not neat enough, not conventional enough, not connected to their lives, or not meaningful in the real world are likely to be unmotivated to write, and if their experiences are negative, they may avoid taking the risks that are requisite to their growth."

from Owocki & Goodman (2002), p. 88

| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5)<br>Aligned with The Creative Curriculum© Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5** | |
|---|---|
| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5)<br><br>Section 2: Early Literacy<br>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)<br>Aligned with The Creative Curriculum© Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5 | |
|---|---|
| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5)**<br><br>**Section 2: Early Literacy**<br>**Component: Visual Discrimination**<br>**Component: Visual Whole-Part-Whole Relationships**<br>**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 patterns of a 3-dimensional objects | 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)<br>Aligned with The Creative Curriculum© Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5 | |
|---|---|
| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5)**<br><br>**Section 2: Early Literacy**<br>**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**

- ✓ offer infants and toddlers opportunities to be "writers" (make marks on paper)
- ✓ value the reading/writing approximations made by young children by praising their efforts as if they are already in the adult conventional form
- ✓ model throughout the day how writing is both necessary (for information) and entertaining
- ✓ show children that reading and writing are connected by reading a wide variety of texts and supporting children's efforts to write similar texts (labels, signs, letters, notes, menus, lists, original books, etc.)
- ✓ support children's narrative writing by helping children expand their own oral storytelling, then offering to write the stories down on paper
- ✓ demonstrate their knowledge of the developmental continuum of children's writing by accepting children's efforts in initial scribbling, letter formation, spacing, and sound-letter correspondences
- ✓ model the writing process for children through writing aloud and shared writing demonstrations
- ✓ support young children's efforts at independent writing by praising their efforts and guiding them to more complex understandings
- ✓ create a rich writing center (if none exists) or improve a writing center by integrating a wealth of writing materials and supplies, along with books for modeling purposes

### List of training materials:

- **participant manuals**
- **examples from Project REEL books of fiction, information, and poetry**
- **examples of environmental print**
- **child-authored texts that show a variety of genres**
- **Project REEL books for modeling wide variety of book genres (poetry, information, fiction, predictable pattern, etc.)**
- **materials for modeling writing (letter stamps, magnetic letters and cookie sheet, dry erase boards/markers, etc.)**
- **chart paper and markers**

**A bit of history of writing instruction/support in the early childhood setting:**

"Recognition of the reciprocity of reading and writing has been a fairly recent occurrence (Clay, 1991, 2001; Morrow, 2001). For many years, beginning writing was taught in the elementary school only after children learned to read, which was toward the middle of first grade. Educators believed that children could not be expected to use letters, words, and sentences until they had learned how to read (decode). The essential component of expressing thoughts and ideas was not addressed.

Fortunately, this belief changed during the 1980s and 1990s when [researchers] began to examine and reconstruct early reading and writing behaviors and teaching methodology (Clay, 1991; Morrow, 2001). The term *emergent reading and writing* signaled a new way of looking at the capabilities of young children as they started to take on literacy skills.

. . . Teachers and researchers soon found that by experimenting with the writing process—by trying to encode with letters and symbols—children became more able to decode as well as write. Thus, the reciprocity of reading and writing behaviors in young readers was recognized as an essential component of early literacy instruction."

(Venn & Jahn, 2003, p. 99)

This workshop will focus on supporting young children's writing. One critical understanding of preschool literacy is the importance of emphasizing the functions of print over the particular form of the writing. Too often in preschool and early grades education we see children practicing letter formation (at the insistence of a teacher) before they have a concept of the multiple reasons **why** they need to write and why it is enjoyable to write.

Studies suggest that children "first begin to explore with a pencil or crayon between 18 and 24 months of age" (Schickedanz, 1999, p. 98).

Learning to write for a young child involves understanding

- the purposes for writing the text
- the multiple conventions associated with the purposes
- the way print is organized on the page
- the sounds of speech that alphabet letters represent
- that the writer must consider his/her reader

Schickedanz (1999)

Perhaps the most important thing for early childhood teachers to remember is that writing is **NOT** handwriting. Too many children in the early years of exploratory writing perceive that writing is accurate letter formation. Writing is communication in print for a particular purpose and audience. We need to expose children to all the reasons to write, all the ways to do it, and all the different audiences those different kinds of print may have.

**What we know about children's writing, both in letter formation and usage:**

- "The child uses oral language skills to express ideas or thoughts that he or she wants to communicate to others" (Venn & Jahn, 2003, p. 99).

- "The child must have phonemic awareness [and alphabet-sound awareness] to produce a speech sound and attach a symbol or letter to that sound" (Venn & Jahn, 2003, p. 99).

- "Young children have great difficulty making controlled movements and precise lines" (Schickedanz, 1999, 112)

- Even children who have a lot of knowledge about letters and words may have difficulty constructing them (Schickedanz, 1999).

- It takes significant visual skills/spatial coordination to make their writings "fit" the space (Venn & Jahn, 2003).

- Children experience the challenge of having only 26 letters but 44 sounds.

- It's hard to remember what side of the stick the ball should be on! *b*'s and *d*'s, *p*'s and *q*'s are a challenge. There are many other letters, too, that are quite difficult to reconstruct from memory or even from example. Don't be concerned about transpositions and "backwards" letters. This only means that children need more experience, and they could even be experimenting with their writing.

- Children need to see teachers forming the letters in their own writing. When you do a language experience chart or create a sign or a list, stop to talk about some of the letters and how you form them. You may sometimes want to teach a mini-lesson in the writing center on forming a particular letter <u>as children need it</u>. When you see a child using a "comb" for her *E*, this would be a good time to show how the letter is formed with three lines coming out from the "stick."

- When you are demonstrating how to write a letter (in the context of real writing), you might want to create chants for the formation. You might say in a rhythmic way when writing an <u>S</u>, "curve to the left, curve to the right, curve to the left again!" or with a <u>B</u>, you might chant: "Straight line down. Half circle at the top! Half circle at the bottom."

- Many children learn best by using their whole bodies. You might want to experiment with "air letters," in which children practice their letters in the air with their hands or even with their feet lying on their backs, and it becomes nearly a total body experience. It's also a good suggestion that on the playground children could "walk, walk, walk" over the shape of a letter.

**Children will exhibit some or all of the following characteristics on their way to conventional writing. This is NOT a sequential list, as individual children will take their own unique path to matching the characteristics of adult writing:**

Scribbles (although their drawings do look different from their "print")

↓

drawing simple shapes

↓

using marks as letters

↓

assigning a message to own letters

↓

uses left to right directionality
(if written language in the home uses left to right processing)

↓

a few letters appear in the scribbles (often ones from the child's name)

↓

mock letters and some real ones (mock letters use the same line segments as real ones)

↓

writing with and practicing letters (only real letters are used; usually consonants & long vowels appear first)

↓

writes with spaces (or some place holder) between words

↓

writes own name

↓

writes some known words

↓

working toward conventional spelling

↓

writes with some punctuation

↓

conventional spelling

(Schickedanz, 1999; Venn & Jahn, 2003)

***Important point to remember:** "It is rare for preschool children to move beyond the beginning stages of semiphonemic spelling [some ability to match letters with the sounds of the oral words]. Most will not progress to fully phonemic spelling until kindergarten, and many children will persist with semiphonemic spelling even into first grade. Preschool teachers should be aware of the full progression of early childhood writing development so that they can support the continued growth of all children in their classrooms, wherever they fall on the developmental continuum of emergent writing" (Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2004, p. 40).

Semiphonemic spelling might look something like this:

NE SRS MOG

Child's reading: "And he saw some ghosts"

Although the example below is from Daniel's kindergarten year, he likely would not have composed these texts over a five month period without his strong preschool experiences in writing:

9/3 WT PRT DANiEL
("Once upon a time Daniel")

10/29 WS Put thi WZEWF
("Once upon a time there was a werewolf")

11/10 WS PN TM A TM Th WS A YLO EG
("Once upon a time there was a yellow egg")

11/12 Wa PN TM TH WS TH RKT IT BlSu OF.
("Once upon a time there was a rocket. It blasted off.")

11/17 WS Ept N TEM the WS I Gost N the Gost WS KEVR
("Once upon a time there was a ghost and the ghost was covered [with slime].")

1/6 WUS U PUN U Tim ThAR WS U GOST. iN YOU no Wut TA GOST DiD. HE CiD N U TRE.
("Once upon a time there was a ghost. And you know what that ghost did? He climbed in a tree.)

(Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2004, p. 53)

"One day, after finishing an alphabet puzzle, a child who was almost five years old asked his teacher, 'Are these all the alphabet letters in the whole wide world?' She asked what made him think that this might be all of them. 'Because,' he said, 'I see the same ones everywhere!'

Once children have attained the insight that there are just a few letters, not an endless number, mock letters seldom appear in their writing, except perhaps during dramatic play, where it is sometimes necessary to generate a lot of writing in a short amount of time."

(Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2004, p. 20-21)

**We need to use the multiple ways to write in a setting when working with young children who need to see a great deal of modeling:**

- **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 writing awareness of 1) a variety of reasons to write, and 2) the thinking that leads to writing. Children have the opportunity to watch and listen to an expert writer talk through the mental process of writing.

- **Shared writing** (in which the teacher writes down what the children say) is a foundational strategy in supporting knowledge of writing conventions. The teacher pauses during the writing process and calls children's attention to
  - beginning writing at the top of the page
  - beginning writing at the left side of the page
  - progressing across the page from left to right
  - beginning sentences with capital letters
  - ending sentences with periods
  - identifying beginning letters that match beginning letters of children's names

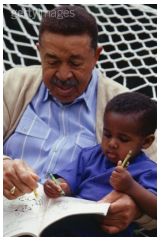
  etc.

- **Guided writing** (in which the teacher is supportive of children's early attempts at writing) is a foundational strategy in supporting young children's perceptions of themselves as writers. Teachers praise children's approximations of both letter formation (*b*'s for *d*'s, "combs" for *E*'s, and backward *s*'s) and writing genres (lists, menus, prescriptions, phone messages, etc.)

## STRATEGIES/ACTIVITES FOR SUPPORTING EMERGENT WRITING WITH INFANTS AND TODDLERS

"Crawlers and walkers can hold and use fat crayons to scribble**. Introduce crayons and paper to babies.** Begin by showing them how to use crayons too make marks on large pieces of paper. Tape the paper to the table so that it will stay flat. If babies try to color on walls, floors, and tables, gently redirect them back to the paper. They will soon learn that crayons and paper go together." www.ed.gov/Family/RSRforCaregvr/crawlers.html

"Sit with babies while they scribble, to help and **show your interest in their efforts** and accomplishments. 'Azim, look what you did. You made those marks on the paper.' Allow babies to decide when they are finished. Then put away the crayons and paper. Bring them out later for another scribbling session." www.ed.gov/Family/RSRforCaregvr/crawlers.html



## STRATEGIES/ACTIVITES FOR SUPPORTING EMERGENT WRITING WITH PRE-KINDERGARTNERS

✎ Remember that preschoolers may create many writings that have no specific message. Many teachers report of children's lengthy original books (14 pages long!), but when the child is asked what the writing says, they report, "Nothing."

✎ **Children's temporary spelling**, also known as "invented" or "developmental" spelling, has been a topic of concern for teachers for years. Here's how one respected early childhood educator weighs in on the issue:

> "Children learning to read need to grasp the concept that words are composed of a series of sounds, and they benefit from many opportunities to practice detecting these sounds in the order in which they occur. Trying to spell words presents children with one of the best opportunities to learn to segment words into their constituent phonemes." (Schickendanz, 1999, p. 125)

We must find a balance between encouraging and accepting children's approximations, and responding to their query of "Is this right?" This is one of many instances in which you must individualize instruction. For the child who is just beginning to take risks in communicating on paper, you will want to encourage his most remote approximations. For children who are already experienced at many letter-sound relationships, you will want to scaffold them to more conventional writing. You might say to the more experienced child who asks, "Is this right?": "This is very good kid spelling. I can see that you were working hard to find the right letters for the sounds in this word. Would you like me to write that word in adult spelling?" We will still want to encourage this child to work through finding letters that match the sounds he needs to use in his writing. There will be times, however, when a child KNOWS her word is spelled incorrectly and will insist on knowing the conventional form. She will deserve your respect and your high expectations.

When children are still in the scribble stage in which their drawings look a great deal like their writings, we should be cautious about how we respond to their work. Instead of asking them, "What did you draw, Hakeem?", we need to request instead: "Tell me about your work, Hakeem" or "Describe what's on your paper, Hakeem." We could be in error if we assume that something is a drawing or a piece of text, and we need to avoid disappointing them with our misunderstandings!

✐ **Preschool is not the place to begin editing** children's work or attempting to elicit their revisions. Young children are not equipped to respond positively to "errors" circled with a red pen. If we are to convince children that they are competent "do-ers" of this business called writing, we must be accepting at face value what they have constructed. Again, if they are prepared to move forward into more conventional writing forms or more conventional spelling, and if they ask us for guidance, then we can gently provide suggestions for them. However, if we in any way propose that what they have done is not "good enough," they may become frustrated and shut down their experimentations in communicating in print.

## Teacher Demonstrations

✐ **Writing aloud** is an excellent demonstration to children of all the reasons we have to write. You read about several strategies in this manual in the "Concepts about print" section, and you might want to refresh your memory by going back to that section. Writing aloud is like thinking aloud: you simply need to bring your thoughts as you're writing to oral language! For example, you might want to show preschool children how to write in their daily journal by writing in your own (keep your daily journal on chart paper, so all can see):

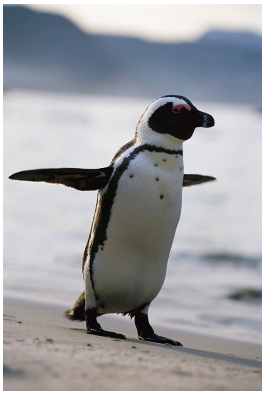
> Teacher: (thinking out loud and writing on chart paper) I want to write in my daily journal now, and I'd like to write down some of the thing we did today so I'll be able to remember what happened, even if I don't read this again until next year! I think today was a happy day, so that's what I'll write. (Teacher writes.) "Today was a happy day." Oops! I almost forgot to write the date. Journal entries need a date. If you can't remember the date or how to write it. it is always written above our calendar. (Teacher draws out the sounds of the letters as she writes, "January 8th, 2003"). Okay, now I want to say what we did as a class that made me happy. I know! I'll write about Thomas's mother bringing in their new puppy. "Thomas's mother brought Max the puppy to meet our class." Now I want to say something about Max. "He was wiggly and very soft." Now I want to end my journal entry with something that Max did when he was here. "He licked us all and made us giggle!" Do you see this mark I made here? Instead of using a period, I used an exclamation mark. An exclamation mark shows that I was surprised or excited or really happy. Do you think I was surprised that Max licked us or do you think I was really happy? Yes, Max licking us made me happy, so that's why I used an exclamation mark there to end the sentence."

Your demonstrations to the children of your own writing process, <u>while you talk about what you're doing and why</u>, will greatly benefit your preschoolers. Show them your thinking as you write grocery lists, inventories, directions, signs, labels, instructions, setting/playground expectations, letters, invitations, email messages, phone messages, reminder notes, notes home, setting newsletters, etc., etc. "This gives [children] an opportunity to use writing and reading in the real world, which helps them to see the purposes of both" (Hill-Clark & Cooley, 2002, p. 10).

**Shared writing** (also known as creating "language experience" charts) is the strategy you are using when you write down the children's language. You read about several strategies in this Manual in the "Concepts about print" section, and you might want to refresh your memory by going back to that section. Any time you write the children's words on chart paper for all to see and re-read together is a shared reading, or language experience chart. After you have read a book about penguins, for example, you might want to do a shared writing entitled, "What is important to know about penguins?" in which you write each child's name first and then write what they said

As you write each sentence, read the sentence back to the child to make sure you captured her words accurately. Then ask that child to join in with you as you read the sentence, then ask all children to join in the reading. This is a fun and educational experience of the children.

The following might represent one of the charts you would create using the shared writing strategy:



**What is important to know about penguins?**

Kandice said, "They live at the bottom of the world."

Tristan said, "They can't fly cause their wings don't work."

Tivoli said, "They are black and white and have feathers."

Shania said, "They have to keep their eggs on their feet or they'll freeze and die."

Monique said, "The father throws up into the baby's mouth! Eeoouuu!"

Etc.

Anytime you write what the children say onto paper (chart or otherwise), you are using the shared writing strategy, Remember that the value of writing the children's words is both in developing concepts of print and gaining reading experience as you point at the words and reread the charts multiple times.

Let's make sure that the children don't think that we write for them on language experience charts because they can't. Let's remind them that there are lots of ways to write, and this is just one of them.

In **guided writing** teachers consider all the different opportunities that they can offer to children as reasons to write. Of course, first we demonstrate, and then children will have the freedom and the knowledge to create their own "approximations" of these adult writings.

- After rich teacher modeling the children write their own **labels and signs** for the classroom.
- After watching the teacher write **descriptive captions** for their artwork, children write their own explanations of their drawings.
- After the teacher has read aloud multiple texts by one author, a child (or children) decide to borrow ideas from that writer to **craft their own stories**.
- After the teacher has read multiple books on one topic, a child (or children) decide to share what they've learned in an **original informational book** or poster.
- After the teacher reads aloud multiple alphabet books, children help create a **class alphabet book.**
- After showing multiple examples of advertisements, children are invited to write an **advertisement** for something the class has done, for something they'd like to buy, or something they'd like to sell in the setting. Perhaps they helped bake cupcakes that they can advertise, or they're opening an art gallery of their work for family viewing, or they want to advertise a book they've read.
- When a new baby is born to a sibling in your setting the children could craft **birth announcements.**
- After viewing multiple examples the children **create greeting cards** for multiple occasions in the setting.
- Children contribute to the writing of a **newsletter** to let parents know of the literacy activities occurring in the setting.

There are dozens more reasons to write; just demonstrate thoroughly and show the children examples of the format:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ____ | autobiographies | ____ | instructions | ____ | nonfiction from theme study |
| ____ | bills | ____ | invitations | ____ | pamphlets |
| ____ | book jackets | ____ | journals & logs | ____ | phone messages |
| ____ | comics | ____ | labels | ____ | plans for events (parties, etc.) |
| ____ | charts | ____ | letters, notes, cards | ____ | poems and songs |
| ____ | checks | ____ | lists | ____ | price tags |
| ____ | coupons | ____ | maps | ____ | programs |
| ____ | diagrams | ____ | menus | ____ | receipts |
| ____ | restaurant orders | ____ | book reviews | ____ | recipes |
| ____ | rules | ____ | schedules | ____ | reports |
| ____ | signs | ____ | stories | ____ | tickets |

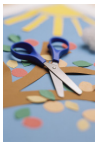
-from Owocki & Goodman (2002), p. 116

This is not an exhaustive list, but it will get you started in planning your demonstrations of writing functions and formats. It will also help you look for children's diverse uses of print in their social interactions in your setting.

## Independent Writing Time for Children

Provide lots of materials, and then **give children time to explore their writing** using these tools. Recognize all the opportunities when you can suggest to a child: "Logan, why don't you go write a note to your mother and remind her that you need to get some Fruit Roll-Ups at the store this afternoon?" Have these materials available:

Drawing pencils (regular & colored)
magic slates
acetate sheets/wipe-off cloths
stencils
stapler
scissors
pencil sharpener
stationery (w/ stickers)
white boards w/ dry erase markers
laminated alphabet strips or cards



markers (wide & fine tipped)
alphabet stamps
paper (white & colored, lined & unlined)
index cards
hole punch
paste & glue stick
book of wallpaper samples for book covers
envelopes
chalk boards & chalk

Offer the opportunity for children to use **letter cards or letter stamps** to help them in their spelling. The act of creating a letter is often difficulty for children because of unrefined small muscle control. Having letter cards out on the writing table that children can use will help them spell familiar words without having to worry about the physical act of writing the letters.

One way to bring letter formation into the block area is to create large (6" to 12" high) letters on laminated paper for Race Car Letters (Venn & Jahn, 2003). Teachers model how to "drive" the race cars over the shapes of the letters.

Another tactile way for children to "rehearse" the formation of letters is with sandpaper letters. Children can trace the rough surface with their fingers in the writing center or do crayon rubbings of the letters by placing a sheet of white paper over the letter and then coloring like crazy until the image of the letter forms.

All good painters begin by copying a famous painter, and **all good writers begin by copying** a favorite author. Encourage children's imitations of favorite books. "Borrowing" characters and plots from well-known authors is a great way to give children control over constructing a story. Changing a familiar book pattern to something the class or the child has created gives confidence and pleasure to a young child.

For example, we could take the predictable language from Bill Martin, Jr.'s Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?, and the children could select the animals and colors explored by the text. So instead of a yellow duck and a blue horse, the children might choose a green bird and a purple worm. Perhaps you could suggest the categories, like "Things With Wheels," and you could write a text that explores different vehicles: "Red jeep, red jeep, what do you see? I see a green tractor looking at me. Green tractor, green tractor, what do you see? I see a yellow motorcycle looking at me." The children will treasure the version that you create together.

Again, model, model, model to children how we can borrow ideas from other writers, and then let them loose in the writing center to make their own magic.

As we suggested earlier, having a **post office** near/in your writing center will create a real reason for children to write. Cut the top off of half-gallon cardboard milk containers and you have your post office boxes easily prepared. This post office opportunity will make even more sense to children after you've taken them on a field trip to the post office. They are well prepared for educating even the very young about the how the postal system works, Plan this trip right before you intend to introduce the post office boxes, and then model, model, model! Every day try to write three or four very brief letters and place them in children's boxes. This will inspire them to write back to you and to one another (make sure that all the staff has mailboxes, too!).

The **"plan-do-review process"** is a three step process that helps children think through their plans for the day. First thing in the morning children take paper and pencil and make a plan for the day, then sharing with the teacher and their peers. The teacher helps them with the content of the plan, but the children are responsible for drawing or writing what they will do. They are challenged to take responsibility for their own actions and make choices. In this way children can have some predictability and control over their lives. Simultaneously that are using writing for a very real and personally important purpose.

**A few words about the pencil/crayon/marker grip of young children:**

"When children use pencils, markers, or crayons to make letter formations, we help them to grasp their tools correctly. This means helping each child have a three-point grasp on the writing instrument so the tool is held between thumb and forefinger and rests on the middle finger. If the child grips the pencil with all four fingers, a simple way to change this behavior is to provide very short pencils or chalk, and a three-point grasp will naturally evolve. While writing, the child should rest his or hand on the table, although many young children will turn their writing hands so they hover above the table. This hovering is very tiring and difficult to maintain. We help the child hold the writing instrument by the bottom one third of the tool and place dots or lines on it, if necessary, to help the child see where to grasp it. In addition, if a teacher observes children curving their hands into a hook position, it is advisable to provide inclined or vertical surfaces, such as chalkboards, for each child to write on. The incline will naturally bring the child's wrist down into its proper position."

(Venn & Jahn, 2003, p. 116)

**A final nifty quote about young children and writing:**

"'Writing' may be so much fun for children because they get to change something. They get to take pristine white sheets of paper and cover them with color and designs—in exactly the way they like. Now, this is pretty powerful stuff for children who may be used to hearing 'no' all the time. They get to set the agenda and do as they wish (as long as they don't get too exuberant and start using the walls as their palette). They are also learning (albeit slowly) about how much pressure they need to use (Remember all those first-grade papers that came home with holes? That's from pressing too hard.), how to hold their fingers and hand, and how to create straight versus curved lines. These are obviously all things children will need to know for school."


(Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003, p. 119)

## Suggestions for evaluation:

✍ "Records of children's writings at various stages, kept in writing folders, may be used for many purposes. Teaches can examine children's understandings of stories, their spelling development, and their developing concepts of print. They can also ask children about their personal reflections about any piece they have completed. These materials provide the basis for teacher/child conferences on individual needs and progress over a period of time" (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000, p. 106).

✍ Another good idea: have your children sign in every day from the first day of their attendance at your site. Post the date clearly, and put each day's sheet in a folder. The children's progress will be eye-opening for them when you show them their progress over weeks or months, and their name writing will indicate their progress to you and to their caregivers.

✍ You might wish to create checklists that you complete regularly (perhaps monthly) on the children to note their progress over a period of time. For example, a writing checklist might look something like this:

| Child's name:_____ | Age:_____ | Date of observation:_____ | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | (circle one) | |
| Can grasp/manipulate writing tools | Usually | Sometimes | Not yet |
| Uses drawing for writing | Usually | Sometimes | Not yet |
| Uses pictures & scribbles for writing | Usually | Sometimes | Not yet |
| Uses scribbles for writing | Usually | Sometimes | Not yet |
| Uses letter-like forms for writing | Usually | Sometimes | Not yet |
| Uses letter forms randomly | Usually | Sometimes | Not yet |
| Uses invented spellings | Usually | Sometimes | Not yet |
| Uses conventional spellings | Usually | Sometimes | Not yet |
| Puts spaces between words | Usually | Sometimes | Not yet |
| Experiments with punctuation | Usually | Sometimes | Not yet |
| Writes/recognizes own name in print | Usually | Sometimes | Not yet |

## Strategies for ESL learners:

ESL children's oral language will develop before their academic competency. This means that children who are fluent speakers of English may not be able to write in English or perform other written tasks in English. Just because a child is speaking a language does not make him/her proficient in the language. Vocabulary skills, auditory memory, problem-solving skills, and the ability to follow sequenced directions in English may be challenging to the ESL child, which can result in over-referrals to special education ("Responding to linguistic and cultural diversity," NAEYC, 1995).

## Working with parents:

Share the following information with parents about their involvement in their child's writing: "Make writing materials available to your child and encourage their use. Help your child learn to write his/her name and other important words or phrases. Gradually, help the child learn to write more and more letters. At first, most children find it easier to write upper case letters" (http://ericec.org/ptips.html).

Suggest to parents that they involve their child in writing letters to absent family members, thank you notes for gifts, lists of all kinds, memos to household members, etc. Children need generous opportunities to connect what they are doing in school to their home environment, and vice versa.

**Supporting research for trainers:**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- Owocki, G., & Goodman, Y. (2002). *Kidwatching: Documenting children's literacy development.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
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- Schickedanz, J.A., & Casbergue, R.M. (2004). *Writing in preschool: Learning to orchestrate meaning and marks.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

- Strickland, D.S., & Schickedanz, J.A. (2004). *Learning about print in preschool: Working with letters, words, and beginning links with phonemic awareness.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

- Venn, E.C.,, & Jahn, M.D. (2003) *Teaching and learning in preschool; Using individually appropriate practices in early childhood literacy instruction.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

- Vukelich, C., & Christie, J. (2004). *Building a foundation for preschool literacy: Effective instruction for children's reading and writing development.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

- www.getreadytoread.org

- www.zerotothree.org/brainwonders/EarlyLiteracy