Chapter Five

Literacy Instruction for Beginning Readers and Writers

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Bob Daemmrich/PhotoEdit
In this Chapter, You Will Discover

- The rationale for an early literacy program
- The importance of reading both fiction and nonfiction to early readers and writers
- How to develop the knowledge and skills young children need to be successful readers
- How to develop and assess linguistic knowledge, concepts of print, and literacy-related knowledge and skills

Activating Your Schema

Think back to when you were very young. Do you remember how you learned to read? Was it your mother, father, a grandparent, or a teacher who taught you? What do you remember? Jot down your recollections. Based on what you experienced, how do you think young children learn to read? Would this be true for all children?

Concept Map
Courtney's parents always read to her when she was little, so by the time she entered kindergarten, she was ready to approach books in a new way. On the first day of kindergarten, Mr. Young read Michael Rosen's *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* to the class, but this was no ordinary read-aloud. *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* is a fun, interactive story of a group of people swish-swashing through tall grass, splash-sploshing through a river, stumbling and tripping through a dark forest, and tiptoeing through a narrow cave in search of a big, scary bear. With Mr. Young's direction, the excited kindergartners participated in the story by performing various actions and sounds to mimic the events on the journey. They rubbed their hands together to make a swishing sound as they felt their way through the grass, and they tapped their feet on the ground to tread carefully through the cave. When they met the bear at the end of the story they covered their faces, cried out in glee, and frantically stamped their feet on the floor as they retraced their route back to their safe and warm beds. At the end of the day, Mr. Young gave each student a copy of the book to take home to read with their parents.

When Courtney got home that afternoon, armed with her own copy of the book, she told her parents all about the story Mr. Young read to the class. When her dad read the book aloud, Courtney showed them the movements. She was so excited about reading that her parents decided to follow Mr. Young's example and make reading a little bit more enjoyable for their daughter. That night, when Courtney's mother read *Clifford the Big Red Dog* to her, she made sure to point out places where Courtney could bark and thump her "tail" on the bed.

Through the social interactions that occur in the classroom, Mr. Young invites all of his students to be readers on the first day of school. In this classroom, no one is excluded from joining in. Mr. Young recognizes that when young children identify themselves as part of a community of readers and writers and are accepted as such, they will build on the literacy knowledge they bring to school. Confidence with print breeds competence.

If children are to understand reading and writing and what these literacy processes are for, they must read and write in meaningful and purposeful ways. In other words, children must perceive themselves as readers and writers and in turn be perceived by others as readers and writers. The opening vignette about Courtney suggests the importance of providing children with opportunities to build and extend their knowledge and awareness of language and literacy in fun yet purposeful ways.

In the last chapter, we told you about how reading and writing develops and about the essential skills needed for young children to become successful readers and writers. We know a lot more today about the beginnings of literacy. However, it hasn’t always been that way.

**A Look at Literacy Programs for Beginners**

Starting in the 1930s and lasting into the 1980s, many believed in a concept called *reading readiness* that was based on maturation. It implied that there is a best time for children to benefit from reading instruction and that schools taught children how to read when they were *ready*. The idea of a ready, or best, time often translated into
one-dimensional indicators of reading readiness such as a child’s mental maturity as reflected by a score on an intelligence test. The importance of mental age, for example, was supported by the views of Morpeth and Washburne (1931). For many years, a 6.5 mental age became the benchmark for deciding matters of reading instruction. Reliance on a single readiness test score, or mental age, tends to minimize the differences that children bring to reading instruction and negates a developmental view of learning to read. Although early proponents of reading readiness contended that children must reach a certain level of physical, mental, and emotional maturity to profit from teaching, there has been a dramatic shift from a maturational perspective to an instructional emphasis.

In 1986 Teale and Sulzby challenged the idea of reading readiness. They argued reading readiness, as institutionalized by schools, curricula, and publishers of tests and instructional programs, was no longer an appropriate way to conceptualize instruction for beginners. In its place, they suggested emergent literacy as a developmentally appropriate view on which to build literacy curricula, instructional practice, and assessment for beginners. Table 5.1 compares reading readiness to emergent literacy. In Box 5.1 Braydon shares what he knows about beginning to read.

Emergent literacy, as we began to develop it in Chapter 4, is a concept that supports learning to read in a positive home environment where children are in the process of becoming literate from birth. Emergent literacy assumes children are always becoming readers and writers and that they are born ready to learn about literacy and continue to grow in their understandings throughout life (Bennett-Armistead et al., 2005). According to this social constructivist view, literacy acquisition has much in common with oral language development. The acquisition of reading should be as

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Theoretical Perspective</strong></th>
<th><strong>EMERGENT LITERACY</strong></th>
<th><strong>READING READINESS</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children are in the process of becoming literate from birth and are capable of learning what it means to be a user of written language before entering school.</td>
<td>Children must master a set of basic skills before they can learn to read. Learning to read is an outcome of school-based instruction.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Acquisition of Literacy Skills and Strategies</strong></td>
<td>Children learn to use written language and develop as readers and writers through active engagement with their world. Literacy develops in real-life settings in purposeful ways.</td>
<td>Children learn to read only after they master skills arranged and sequenced in a hierarchy according to their level of difficulty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship of Reading to Writing</strong></td>
<td>Children progress as readers and writers. Reading and writing (as well as speaking and listening) are interrelated and develop concurrently.</td>
<td>Children learn to read first. The skills of reading must be developed before introducing written composition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Functional-Formal Learning</strong></td>
<td>Children learn informally through interactions with and modeling from literate significant others and explorations with written language.</td>
<td>Children learn only through formal teaching and monitoring (i.e., periodic assessment) of skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Development</strong></td>
<td>Children learn to be literate in different ways and at different rates of development.</td>
<td>Children progress as readers by moving through a scope and sequence of skills once they enter school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
natural as oral language development, given ideal learning conditions. Unfortunately, not all children are raised in an environment that is language rich and filled with adult interactions with reading and writing for real purposes. The challenge of working with beginners lies in scaffolding learning and weaving together experiences that build on children’s knowledge of language and their previous interactions with texts. Working with beginners requires knowing about the book experiences they have had, their desire to read, and their awareness of concepts related to print. Because young children come to school with diverse literacy backgrounds, their acquaintance with texts will vary dramatically. Some will have little or no prior knowledge or experience with books and little interest in learning to read. Others will have rich experiences and considerable desire to extend what they already know about print. Many will fall somewhere between the two extremes.

Those with little experience with literacy won’t come to school ready or able to take full advantage of the available learning opportunities. Although these children indeed have some knowledge of literacy, research shows that they are far behind their peers in significant ways (Hart & Risley, 1995). We know today that in order to learn how to read easily, children need to develop knowledge and skill in core language and literacy areas.

Teachers of young children need to ask three questions that underlie instruction and assessment in an early literacy program: (1) What do children already know about print? (2) What reading behaviors and interests do children already exhibit? and (3) What do children need to learn? Once these questions are answered, teachers can plan literacy instruction for children that will meet their individual needs in a nurturing, print-rich environment in both large and small group settings. When effective teachers provide opportunities for children to engage in meaningful literacy activities through interaction with adults and peers, and some explicit instruction, children become conventional readers and writers. Vukelich, Christie, and Enz (2008) have created a set of principles that should guide early childhood teacher’s instruction in preschool and kindergarten classrooms (see Box 5.2).
Core Language and Literacy Skills

In Chapter 4 we introduced a set of skills identified by research as those that young children must master in order to become successful readers (Snow et al., 1998): oral language comprehension, vocabulary, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, developmental writing, and print knowledge.

As young children experience each of these foundational aspects of literacy, they begin to understand how print and language work together. Gaps identified in any of the core areas need to be taught to children explicitly. In preschool and kindergarten classrooms, this explicit instruction often takes place through play and during classroom large and small group activities. In this next section we take a look how reading to and with children helps develop these critical skills in a fun environment.

Reading aloud to children is powerful. Books unlock the mysteries of reading, rivet children’s attention to print, and provide models of writing that build on and extend the young child’s concepts of texts and how they work. Because books expose children to words beyond those they hear in their everyday lives, books both build vocabulary and allow children to experience people and places in situations they may never come across otherwise, building background knowledge. Repeated readings of books help children recognize words and connect speech to print. Repetitions help students move...
to deeper levels of word knowledge—from "never heard it," to "sounds familiar," to "It has something to do with..." And then to "well known" (Dale, 1965).

There has been much documentation on reading aloud and how it helps children become familiar with language (Cazden, 1983; Chomsky, 1972; Sulzby & Teale, 1987; Wells, 1986, 1987). Interactive dialogue, in which teacher and students discuss content during read-alouds, is a way to support vocabulary development (Durkin, 1972; Teale, 1986). According to Dickinson and Smith (1994), read-alouds can support children's developing the ability to reason for themselves and with others if these events actively involve the children in discussions about the book being read. As children experience print through read-aloud events from adult models that use expression and enjoyment of the text, they are motivated to interact within a social context to share information about books.

Immersing beginners in storybook experiences, which include read-alouds and readalongs, interactive writing, rereadings of favorite texts, and independent reading and writing, helps accomplish a variety of instructional goals:

- To motivate beginners to want to read and write
- To interest beginners in listening to, reading, and writing stories, with emphasis on predicting, sharing, and extending personal meanings
- To help beginners understand what reading and writing are all about
- To encourage beginners to respond to stories by drawing, writing, and dramatizing their explorations of texts
- To invite beginners to construct meaning through the use of picture cues and storybook illustrations
- To help beginners gain familiarity with "book language" and the meaning of terms that figure in literacy instruction
- To teach beginners about directionality—the left-to-right, top-to-bottom orientation of written language
- To teach beginners the meaning of word and the function of space in establishing boundaries between words
- To teach beginners alphabetic principles of written language
- To teach beginners to predict words that "must come next" in a sentence
- To teach beginners to recognize words that they are interested in learning or that occur frequently in meaningful contexts

These goals are not sequential in the sense that one must be accomplished before another is attempted. In classrooms where storybook experiences are an integral part of the school day, several or more may be accomplished over time in combination or simultaneously.

In the next sections we take a look at big books and e-books as text for young children. But before we do, let's look at some suggestions for planning rich read-aloud experiences regardless of the form of text used:

- Select high-interest books with rich language, well-developed plots and characters, and multiple layers of meaning. Great stories will engage students in numerous opportunities for learning.
- Select nonfiction books that extend vocabulary and have high-quality, realistic pictures.
- Preview the book before you read it. This will help you spot material you may want to shorten, take out completely, or expand on.
- Read books several times to yourself before reading them aloud to children. Think about a story's structure (e.g., the setting, the sequence of events leading to plot conflict and resolution), characters, descriptions, illustrations, themes, and the author's use of language if it's a piece of fiction. Consider how you will use your voice to convey meaning as you read.
- If the story is nonfiction, thing about the features and structures you want to point out in the text, or what questions you want to ask.
- Determine which, if any, instructional goals for the interactive reading, including reading strategies, might be developed. Think about the questions you want to ask during the reading and what comments you want to make.
- Decide on points in the story where you might pause to ask children to make predictions. Also anticipate where you may need to build children’s background knowledge so that they will understand concepts with which they may not be familiar.

Opitz (1999) tells us we need to be mindful to include books for beginning readers that represent their cultural heritage, as well as provide children with opportunities to learn about similarities and differences among people. By doing so, we provide the necessary support while personalizing the experience for children of diverse backgrounds.

Immersing beginners in experiences with books, which include read-alouds and readalongs, rereadings of favorite texts, and independent reading and writing, helps accomplish a variety of instructional goals young children need in order to become successful readers. Many key language and literacy skills can be built into storybook reading which makes it a critical component of an early childhood classroom. Teachers need to read often with children, read a variety of books, and reread favorites in order to maximize storybook reading’s impact on children’s language and literacy development. Box 5.3 highlights the essential skills learned through reading to young children.

**The Importance of Reading Nonfiction**

Traditionally, the majority of early childhood teachers have used narrative text that tells a story during read-alouds or story time (Duke, 2003). This is probably due to the assumption that children will understand and make sense of a story that is fiction before

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**Box 5.3**

**Research-Based Practices**

**Essential Early Literacy Skills: The Benefits of Reading Aloud**

- **Vocabulary.** Reading to children exposes them to the rich language presented in books. It also teaches beginners to recognize words that they are interested in learning or that occur frequently in meaningful contexts.
- **Print Knowledge.** Beginners learn about “book language” and the meaning of terms that figure in literacy instruction; concepts of directionality such as left-to-right, top-to-bottom orientation of written language; the meaning of word and the function of space in establishing boundaries between words; how to predict words that “must come next” in a sentence; and how to construct meaning through the use of picture cues and storybook illustrations.
- **Oral Language Comprehension.** Reading to children helps beginners in listening to, reading, and writing stories, with emphasis on predicting, sharing, and extending personal meanings.
- **Phonological Awareness.** Stories that rhyme or those filled with alliteration are a wonderful venue for developing phonological awareness.

*Source: Based on Oral Language and Early Literacy in Preschool: Talking, Reading, and Writing, by K. A. Roskos, P. O. Tabors, & L. A. Lenhart (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2009).*
they will be able to comprehend text that is nonfiction, that is, the belief that narrative text is easier for the young emergent reader to understand.

However, the use of nonfiction with young children is getting more attention today than ever before. Children need to be exposed to fiction, but they also need to be exposed to nonfiction print, too. Think about what you’ve read over the past few days. How much of it was fiction, and how much of it was nonfiction such as a recipe, newspaper article, text message, magazine article, or blog? Most of the reading that goes on outside of school is nonfiction, so it only makes sense that children need to be exposed to nonfiction at an early age. And many children—particularly boys—enjoy reading informational books a great deal (Stead & Duke, 2005).

Are there other reasons to use nonfiction with young children? Research shows that nonfiction text is developmentally appropriate for young readers; they are able to have success with it (Duke, Bennett-Armistead, & Roberts, 2002). Some of the benefits of nonfiction include the expansion of background knowledge, an increase in vocabulary, high interest to children, connections to other content areas (such as science and social studies), and practice for the content area reading that is needed later in the intermediate grades (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003). In addition to these benefits, reading quality informational books and other nonfiction texts provides a venue for children to think about the world around them, which encourages critical thinking.

**Big Books**

In Chapter 4, we explored the value of reading aloud, repeatedly reading familiar stories, and sharing reading experiences around the use of big books—enlarged versions of books. Big books are designed to further children’s explorations with texts and to develop concepts related to print as well as strategies to construct meaning. The construction of meaning, or comprehension, is always the goal and therefore should be emphasized.

Reading big books is one of the easiest and most effective ways to get beginners involved in the exploration of texts. The use of big books as an instructional resource began in the late 1960s in New Zealand, when teachers began to make their own big books from heavy brown butcher paper. Teacher-made big books retold nursery rhymes, poems, and popular stories such as “The Gingerbread Man.” The critical feature common to these big books was that the stories and poems provided beginners with strong rhythms and predictable patterns of language. Roskos and colleagues (2009) have this to say about big books in the early childhood classroom:

“In the early childhood setting, a big book or other enlarged text is used to share a story with the whole class or a small group of children. The big book allows all children to participate actively in the reading of the story. If there are English-language learners in the class, keep in mind that a shorter reading session or one that is tailored specifically for them may work best. (p. 56)

The predictability of the plot and language of narrative big books makes them easy to understand and remember. For example, after two or three readings, most children easily memorize Mem Fox’s Hattie and the Fox or Bill Martin Jr.’s Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? Big books such as these, with their simple, repetitive refrains, colorful illustrations, and cumulative plot endings, allow children to make predictions and participate immediately in shared reading experiences.

In addition to the pleasure and enjoyment that children get when they participate in shared readings and rereadings of big books, big-book formats are versatile in helping to achieve all of the instructional goals for beginners. The chart in Figure 5.1 suggests some of the activities that teachers and children engage in when they use big books.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT THE TEACHER DOES</th>
<th>WHAT THE CHILD DOES</th>
<th>OBJECTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before Reading</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulates discussion about relevant content and concepts in text.</td>
<td>Talks and listens to others talk about relevant content and concepts.</td>
<td>To focus listening and speaking on vocabulary and ideas about to be met in print. To activate background knowledge related to text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reads aloud title and author; uses words <em>title</em> and <em>author</em> and briefly explains what they mean.</td>
<td>Notes what the words on the book cover represent.</td>
<td>To build vocabulary and concepts: title, author, authorship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks children what they think story might be about, based on title, cover. Or thinks aloud about what she or he thinks this story might be about.</td>
<td>Uses clues from title and cover together with background knowledge to formulate predictions about the story. Or observes teacher model the above.</td>
<td>To use clues from text and background knowledge to make inferences and formulate predictions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows pleasure and interest in anticipation of the reading.</td>
<td>Observes as teacher models personal interest and eagerness toward the reading.</td>
<td>To build positive attitudes toward books and reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>During Reading (Teacher Reads Aloud)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives lively reading. Displays interest and delight in language and story line.</td>
<td>Observes teacher evoke meaningful language from print.</td>
<td>To understand that print carries meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracks print with hand or pointer.</td>
<td>Follows movement of hand or pointer.</td>
<td>To match speech to print. To learn directionality: left to right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinks aloud about her or his understanding of certain aspects of the story (self-query, making predictions, drawing conclusions, etc.).</td>
<td>Observes as teacher monitors her or his own understandings.</td>
<td>To develop an understanding of the reading process as thinking with text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hesitates at predictable parts in the text. Allows children to fill in possible words or phrases.</td>
<td>Fills in likely words for a given slot.</td>
<td>To use semantic and syntactic clues to determine what makes sense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At appropriate parts in a story, queries children about what might happen next.</td>
<td>Makes predictions about what might happen next in the story.</td>
<td>To use story line to predict possible events and outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After Reading</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guides discussion about key ideas in the text. Helps children relate key concepts.</td>
<td>Participates in discussion of important ideas in the text.</td>
<td>To reflect on the reading: to apply and personalize key ideas in text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks children to recall important or favorite parts. Finds corresponding part of the text (perhaps with help of children) and rereads.</td>
<td>Recalls and describes specific events and parts of text.</td>
<td>To use print to support and confirm discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guides group rereading of all or specific parts of text for errorless repetition and reinforcement.</td>
<td>Joins in the reading in parts he or she feels confident about.</td>
<td>To develop fluency and confidence through group reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses cloze activities (flaps to cover words) to involve children in meaningful (contextually plausible) offerings. Discusses response with children.</td>
<td>Fills in possible words for a given slot.</td>
<td>To use semantic and syntactic clues to determine which words fit in a slot and why.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
New Zealand researchers, spearheaded by the pioneering work of Don Holdaway, observed and documented the influence of big-book teaching on children’s literacy development and their social interactions in the classroom (Holdaway, 1979). Children learn to read naturally in the company of other children and the teacher. Joy Cowley’s amazingly popular *Mrs. Wishy-Washy* is used today in classrooms for beginners throughout the world (see her Viewpoint featured in Box 5.4). Today’s big books not only capture the child’s view of the world but also range in content from traditional tales, to books of poems, to nonfiction books in various content areas.

**E-Books**

In Chapter 2, we mentioned that electronic books support children’s literacy development by providing activities such as interactive story writing, reading aloud text that is highlighted, and playing word identification and vocabulary games on virtually any subject. Another ideal choice for read-alouds is e-books. Teachers of young children can use Web-based books to support their traditional print-based literacy program in whole groups during shared reading time with touch-screen computers and independently by using the iPad and iPod, which bring e-books into the palms of young children. Teachers can have children listen to stories, read along with text, look for familiar words or letters, and do virtually anything with an e-book that they can do with a traditional book, and there are a lot of free e-books available online. Figure 5.2 provides...
Big Books

Joy Cowley is an author of children’s books from New Zealand.

Big book reading is a big plus for all children. It puts children in a no-risk situation where they can read with a group at their own skill level. Children who lack confidence in reading will especially benefit from big book reading. Their reading is reinforced by their peers, and they can enjoy the pleasure of stories within a group until they are ready to attempt the stories on their own.

Enthusiasm is the key emotion associated with big book reading. A confident, enthusiastic teacher will readily communicate those feelings to his or her students. Usually I introduce a big book by reading the story a couple of times to the class and inviting discussion. Then the students and I can read the book together. Big books invite student participation, not just in reading but in using a pointer for following along, turning pages, and so on. Children may extend the large group experience by reading to each other in smaller groups, reading individually, dramatizing the text, making recordings complete with sound effects, and writing their own books using a similar theme or pattern.

Whatever the follow-up or innovation, it is important to remember that reading and writing are activities we do to share ourselves with others. Big books are especially good tools for sharing. It’s for that reason, I think, that teachers around the world are having such success in using big books to bring literature into the lives of children.


a sampling of some websites that offer Web-based books. In Box 5.5, technology specialist Jeremy Brueck tells us about e-books and their use in the early childhood classroom.

Assessing Children’s Comprehension Through Book Reading

Reading to and with children provides opportunities for teachers to assess children’s comprehension, which is the ability to read or listen to and understand text—the goal
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When teachers read aloud, children have the opportunity to hear rich and diverse language as well as the rhythm and flow of words and teachers have the opportunity to observe children and evaluate them. Assessment of young children’s comprehension can be demonstrated through retellings, attempted readings of favorite and familiar stories, role-playing, and other reenactments. Enz and Morrow (2009) suggest using a tool similar to the one in Figure 5.3 to assess young children’s comprehension of text a few times a year.

Learning About Early Literacy and Language Through Shared Writing

Interactive writing provides many opportunities for explicit instruction in which teachers demonstrate early writing strategies (Clay, 1985). Taberski (2000) refers to this type of writing as “shared writing,” and says that through this activity she and her students work out the conventions of print, spelling, and grammar. Following steps associated with the language-experience approach, the teacher becomes a scribe for a text dictated...
by the children and shares the pen with them, creating text together. The focus, first
and foremost, is always on composing the text. The teacher, as well as the children who
volunteer, will often read, then reread, the text for emphasis and make additions and
changes to clarify meaning. Within this meaningful, collaborative context, opportunities
abound to demonstrate early writing strategies such as word-by-word matching, left-to-
right directionality, use of space to create boundaries between words, and other print
conventions. As children gain experience with the conventions of print, the teacher uses
shared writing activities to focus on spelling patterns and word analysis.

Source: Adapted from Assessing Preschool Literacy Development: Informal and Formal Measures to Guide Instruction, by B. J. Enz and L. M.
Morrow (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2009), 115–116. Copyright © 2009 by the International Reading Asso-
ciation (www.reading.org). Reproduced with permission of the International Reading Association via Copyright Clearance Center.
Let’s take a look at how interactive reading and writing play out in Stephanie Hawking’s first-grade class (Hawking, 1989). Stephanie and the children have been sharing Jack Kent’s story *The Fat Cat*. After the third rereading, she and the children decided to write an alternative text to the story, which they titled “The Fat Cat at Big Boy.” The inspiration for the alternative story was the Big Boy restaurant located near the school.

The children wondered what would happen if the Fat Cat ever prowled for food at the Big Boy. So their first interactive writing experience involved brainstorming a list of what the Fat Cat would eat at Big Boy. One student, Miranda, suggested that the Fat Cat could eat men. Stephanie invited her to write the word *men* on a list, saying, “You know how to write *ten* Can you use *ten* to help you write *men*?” (Hawking, 1989, p. 7). Miranda first practiced on the blackboard and then wrote *men* on a chart titled “Big Boy.” The class worked on the chart for several days, and when it was finished, the children taped it to the wall to use as a resource.

Stephanie and the children then began writing the alternative text together. Talk, as you might predict, was crucial to the success of the story. As Stephanie explains, “The talk surrounding shared writing is a rich source of information. . . . As the children discuss what to write and how it should be written, the teacher finds out more about their developing concepts of story and their understanding of the writing process” (Hawking, 1989, p. 7). The class began by talking about how to begin the story. Everyone agreed that it should begin with the words “once upon a time” because it was going to be a “fake” story. Stephanie used this “teachable moment” to underscore the connection the children made between their story and the fairy tale genre. She told them that another name for a particular kind of fake story is a folktale.

As the text began to develop, Stephanie wrote on the chart as children dictated, but she also invited the children to add to the story by volunteering to write parts. Stephanie observed what the children who volunteered knew about the mechanics and conventions of writing and listened to their comments and suggestions as other children added to the text. When she served as a scribe for the children, she was able to focus their attention on the use of quotation marks for portions of the text that contained dialogue. As the class finished each page of the chart, the children would tape it to the wall so that they could refer to it whenever necessary to check on continuity of story line. At other times, they would search for the spelling of a word they knew had already been written on a previous page.

“*The Fat Cat at Big Boy*” was eventually made into a class big book. The children illustrated the story with drawings, decided on the sequencing of pages, and assembled the entire big-book text, rereading each page several times. Stephanie served as proofreader for the final copy—the public copy—of the big book by changing children’s invented spellings to conventional forms.

Alternative texts such as “*The Fat Cat at Big Boy*” are popular forms of interactive writing in Stephanie’s class. Some of the children were so excited about the project that they wanted to write Fat Cat stories on their own. And they did. What began as interactive reading of a popular storybook for young children turned into independent reading and writing.

Podcasts are quickly becoming another way teachers and students record stories. Today *The Fat Cat* stories could be recorded as audio podcasts or enhanced podcasts that have images to go along with the audio. Creating podcasts is worthwhile because children use a wide range of skills to plan, prepare, record, and broadcast a podcast. They brainstorm ideas, rehearse, practice their lines, edit their work, and often receive
feedback from other students and listeners on the Web. Take a look at Box 5.6 and see what how one primary classroom has used podcasting as a way to encourage others to listen and read along.

Box 5.6

Podcasts in the Classroom

Today, everywhere you look people walk around with earphones coming out of their ears. Ask them “Who’s on your playlist?” and they instantly reel off a long list of musicians, some of whom you may even have heard of. The iPod has become such a staple of children and adults everywhere that, in just a few years, an entire cottage industry has developed around the iPod and other MP3 digital recorders and players, including cars with built-in “docking stations,” houses and businesses wired with MP3 connections, and numerous accessories. While many teachers and school administrators have had to restrict the use of MP3 players in school, more and more schools are also recognizing the teaching potential of the little gadgets.

One such school, Jamestown Elementary School in Arlington, Virginia, has received a great deal of publicity in recent years for their creative use of the technology. Teachers and children at Jamestown Elementary are taking LEA to the next level by producing podcasts of their experiences. Podcasts are brief radio shows that are simply audio files that can be downloaded and listened to on a portable MP3 player or on your personal computer.

At Jamestown Elementary, and a growing number of schools across the country, teachers work with the students to create podcasts of their poetry, reports, interviews, discussions on classroom topics, and more. The podcasts can be used to store information for later review, as an alternative platform for a classroom presentation, or to share with parents. Because podcasts involve various skills such as writing, editing, oral presentation, and technical work, they address different learning styles of students. One of the greatest benefits of podcasts in the schools is the level of excitement it creates among students (Long, 2007). The trendy technology and the potential to reach a wide audience serve as a great motivation for students (Shen, 2005).

As stated by Tim Tyson, principal at Mabry Middle School, Cobb County, Georgia, “If kids don’t learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn” (Klein, 2006).

To see how Jamestown Elementary and other schools are using podcasts, check out these web sites:

- [http://apsva.us/jamestown/site/default.asp](http://apsva.us/jamestown/site/default.asp)
- [www.lesliennettling.com/NettlingNewscasts.htm](http://www.lesliennettling.com/NettlingNewscasts.htm)
- [www.cbsd.org/millcreek/jaffe/podcast/index.html](http://www.cbsd.org/millcreek/jaffe/podcast/index.html)
- [www.ahisd.net/campuses/cambridge/radio/radio.htm](http://www.ahisd.net/campuses/cambridge/radio/radio.htm)

Learning About the Relationships Between Speech and Print

Children must be able to figure out what spoken language and written language have in common. Without learning the relationship between speech and print, the beginner will never make sense of reading or achieve independence in it. Earlier we suggested that reading often to children, repeating favorite bedtime stories, and providing opportunities to draw, scribble, and interact with print in their immediate environment are some of the ways that children naturally learn to make sense out of reading and its uses. Nevertheless, many 5-year-olds enter school with only vague notions of the purpose and nature of reading. They are not yet aware that what is said can be written, that written language is made up of words and sentences, or that reading involves directionality, attending to the spacing between words, punctuation cues, and other conventions of print. There are several ways of going about this important instructional task.

Understanding the Uses of Written Language

From the beginning of their school experience, children must learn that the value of reading or writing lies in its uses as a tool for communicating, understanding, and enjoying. A 3-year-old or a 75-year-old should engage in reading and writing for real reasons and in real situations. Effective teachers make their own opportunities and should consider teaching about the uses of written language when any interesting or natural occasion arises in the classroom.

The teacher and children are gathered around the guinea pig cage discussing their new pet. The teacher is explaining the food guinea pigs eat and is showing the children the food they will be feeding the pet. One of the children remembers that the class goldfish died because too much food was put in the bowl. The teacher suggests that the class make a sign to put on the package telling the right amount of food and a chart to put near the cage to be checked on the day he is fed. She discusses the reasons these written records will help. (Taylor & Vawter, 1978, p. 942)

Situations such as the guinea pig scenario evolve naturally in the classroom. Nevertheless, seizing the opportunity to help children recognize the value of reading and writing requires a certain amount of awareness and commitment. For example, Taylor and Vawter (1978) illustrate how two teachers approach an everyday event differently. As children prepare for a field trip to a farm, one kindergarten teacher passes out name tags routinely and without explanation. Another teacher, however, poses a problem to be solved by the children: “If the farmer wants to ask one of us a question, how can we help him know our names?” Through give-and-take discussion, the children offer solutions that range from “tell him” to “I don’t know” to “wear our names.” As the discussion progresses, the teacher passes out the name tags and suggests that names are written so that someone can read them and that writing a name helps identify someone.

In Chapter 1, we outlined the uses of oral language. These language functions can and should be adapted to print at the beginning of instruction in order to help children become aware of the purposes of written language. Many of the activities outlined here build word awareness. Therefore, beginners should be introduced to some of the more obvious uses of print.
In general, the classroom should reflect a living example of written language put to purposeful ends. The classroom environment should be filled with print to suit specific instructional goals. Print should be evident everywhere in the form of labels for classroom objects, simple messages, rules, directions, and locations where a specific activity takes place, such as a story-reading area or an art center. Specifically, consider these uses of written language.

**Perpetuating Uses**  Show children how to bridge the gap between time and space through print, or *perpetuate*. To do this, keep records and charts of a daily activity. For example, develop a weekly weather chart with the days of the week at the top and slots for inserting descriptive word cards under each day. The children can then use words to describe the day’s weather.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>awful</td>
<td>foggy</td>
<td>sunny</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rainy</td>
<td>cloudy</td>
<td>clear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sticky</td>
<td>dark</td>
<td>dry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Post the names of room helpers for each week. Each morning, make a point of going to the chart and having the children identify who will help the teacher for the day.

Vote or poll children on various classroom events or activities and tally the results. For example, Shelley Adams polls her class daily on a “Question of the Day” generated by a student, such as “What is your favorite ice cream?” She then allows children to take turns giving an oral response while she tallies the results for all to see. Often she creates a simple graph with the results for discussion of which response is most or least common or other analysis. For example, if the numbers are close, she asks them to predict whether the count will be the same or not.

| Chocolate |   |||| |
|---|---|
| Vanilla  |   || |
| Cookie dough |   |||| |
| Cake batter |   |||||

Use children as messengers to deliver notes to other teachers or to parents. Explain the purpose of the note and why it was written. Or display notes from the principal
congratulating children for work well done. Also post thank-you notes, letters, the school lunch menu for each day, and many other forms of communication.

Finally, keep a classroom scrapbook, beginning from the first day of school and including important events throughout the year. Use a digital camera and record the importance of each event.

**Regulatory, Authoritative-Contractual Uses**  Show children how print can be used to control and direct behavior and to establish rules and agreements. For example, list classroom rules and use print to give directions such as lining up for the bus or going to the library. Establish official written contracts with children for various classroom activities (e.g., cleaning up after art activities, taking milk count for the week).

![Classroom Rules](image)

1. We will follow directions.
2. We will keep hands, feet, and objects to ourselves.
3. We will listen when others are speaking.
4. We will raise our hand before speaking.
5. We will take turns.
6. We will help others.
7. We will always do our best.
8. We will cover our mouths when we sneeze or cough.

To use print to give directions, a teacher can make recipe charts for cooking projects that may include pictures and words explaining what to do. Pictures can depict ingredients such as flour, sugar, or eggs (cut from a magazine advertisement) or processes (e.g., a sketch of eggs being broken). In addition, children can follow directions with clue cards that use pictures and simple words, or they can play scavenger hunt using simple messages to direct the hunt.

**Instrumental Uses**  Children should learn that print can be used to express personal needs. Teachers and children can list materials needed to participate in various activities:
The teacher can write gift lists or birthday wishes dictated by the children. Signs can be used to invite children to participate in various activities:

**Diversion Uses**  Demonstrate the value of print as a tool for enjoyment, or diversion. Read aloud to children on a daily basis. Also consider storytelling. (We will explain a variety of reading-aloud and storytelling procedures and activities in Chapter 12.) In particular, introduce children to humorous and nonsensical literature. Consider such classics as Dr. Seuss’s *Cat in the Hat*, Mayer’s *Billygoofang*, Pincus’s *Tell Me a Mitzi*, and Krauss’s *Backward Day*. Read to children those that you especially enjoy.

Tell puns, jokes, riddles, brainteasers, and the like. For example, ask children, “What’s white and can be poured in a glass?” and record the responses. Or consider posting a tongue twister of the week or joke of the week.

Tongue Twister of the Week:

Double bubble gum, bubbles double.

Riddle of the Week:

What gets wet the more you dry? (Towel)
Use simple language patterns to introduce children to rhythms of language. Later in the year, use patterned stories and poems to model language patterns in writing. These patterned stories are highly predictable, enjoyable, and repetitious enough that children are naturally attracted to them. Bill Martin’s *Instant Readers* or Dr. Seuss’s materials develop children’s sensitivity to hearing language.

**Personal Uses** Children need to learn that written language can be used to express individuality, pride, and awareness of self—a *personal* use of language. Develop a “this is me” book for each child. The book might be bound or created on the computer, and contain the child’s drawings or photos and descriptions of self and family. The first page might begin “This is me” and include a self-portrait drawn by the child or a photo of the child. Other pages might include “This is my family.” “This is my pet.” “My favorite game is ________. “My favorite book is ________. “I like ________. “I want to be ________. “My best friend is ________.”

In a similar vein, have the students make “me” cards that tell the names of pets, favorite toys, books, colors, television programs, or movies. Names of places of interest, places recently visited, or exciting places to explore in the community can also be included.

**Assessing the Classroom Environment for Speech and Print Functions**

Teachers need to create environments that support children’s exploration in the various functions or purposes of print in authentic ways. To determine if your classroom environment has the needed resources for nurturing print’s many uses, ask yourself the questions in Figure 5.4.

**Learning About Features of Written Language**

Children’s understanding of the relationship between speech and print is a vital first step in learning to read. They become aware of what reading is all about by recognizing the functionality of reading—that the purpose of reading, in its broadest sense, is to communicate ideas. A second step, or stage, is to become aware of the technical features of reading (Downing, 1979). These technical features (printed letters, words, sentences, syllables, sounds, punctuation marks, etc.) make up children’s “technical vocabulary” for reading, or, according to Reid (1966), the language available to children “to talk and think about the activity of reading itself” (p. 57). To understand the technical features of reading, children must develop **linguistic awareness**.

Young children may not be aware that words are language units. Spoken language, after all, is a steady stream of sounds that flow one into the other. Words and other print conventions (e.g., punctuation marks) were created to better represent spoken language in print and thus facilitate the reading of written language. For the 4-year-old,
the six-word written message *Did you visit the fire station?* sounds like one big word—*Didjavisitthefirestation?* Even more difficult concepts for young children to learn are that spoken words are made up of smaller sounds (phonemes), that written words are made up of letters, and that in a written word, there is a close approximation between letters and sounds.

If children are to succeed in reading, they must acquire linguistic awareness and understand the language of reading instruction. They must learn the technical terms and labels that are needed to talk and think about reading and to carry out instructional tasks. What, for example, is the child’s concept of “reading”? Of a “word”? Of a “sound”? Does the child confuse “writing” with “drawing” and “letter” with “number” when given a set of directions? Without an awareness of these terms, cognitive confusion in the classroom mounts quickly for the child (Downing, 1979). The teacher’s job is to make explicit what each child knows implicitly about written language.

### Figure 5.4
Assessing the Classroom Environment for Speech and Print Functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES OR NO?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the design of the room helpful in teaching children about print?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the print at eye level for the children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is print displayed in meaningful ways around the classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the print that is displayed developmentally appropriate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there places for children to explore and use print in meaningful ways?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does all of the print in the room serve a purpose?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Does the environment contain the following materials that demonstrate functions of print? |
| Functional sign-up sheets (such as sign-in sheets, center sign-up sheets, etc.) |
| Classroom schedules posted |
| Labels on objects around the room |
| Children’s names displayed on lists, charts, cubbies |
| Collections of printed materials that supplement dramatic play (coupons, receipts, order pads, menus, tickets, maps, store ads, signs such as Manager on Duty or Hours of Operation, etc.) |
| Poem and song charts |
| Alphabet chart |
| Blank journals |
| Stationery and envelopes |
| Chart paper with shared writings recorded |
| Informational books |
| Storybooks |
The technical features of written language are learned gradually by children and are best taught through real reading and readinglike activities and through discussions designed to build concepts and to untangle the confusion that children may have. Within the context of shared-book experiences, language-experience stories, and writing activities, children will develop linguistic sophistication with the technical features of print. These vehicles for instruction not only provide teachers with diagnostic information about children’s print awareness but also form the basis for explicit instruction and discussion.

Assessing Linguistic Awareness

Agniew (1982) shows how to use language-experience stories to assess young children’s emerging print awareness. The various procedures and tasks she proposed can be easily adapted to big-book and language-experience stories.

**Procedures**

1. Obtain a short story dictated by the child.
2. Print three or four nouns or verbs from the story on index cards.
3. Print two sentences from the story on separate pieces of paper.
4. Have available a supply of separate letters made from wood, felt, cardboard, or other materials.
5. Ask the child to complete any or all of the tasks outlined below. Record responses and impressions on the evaluation form.
6. Results should be viewed as tentative hypotheses about the child’s print awareness. You’ll want to validate results through classroom observation.

**Tasks**

1. Ask the child to point to any word on the chart story, then to "cup" his or her hands around or circle the word. (The child does not have to say the word but only show that he or she knows where the word begins and ends.) Ask the child to repeat the task with three or four other words.
2. Ask the child to match an individual word card with the same word in the story. (The child does not have to say the word; he or she simply needs to make a visual match.) If the word occurs more than once in the story, ask the child to locate the word in another place in the story. Repeat the task with several other word cards.
3. Ask the child to match a sentence with its counterpart from the story. (The child does not have to read the sentence.) Repeat the task with the other sentence.
4. Show the child an individual word card and provide him or her with the individual letters necessary to spell the word. Ask the child to build the word he or she sees on the card, using the separate letters. Ask the child for the names of the letters he or she is using. Probe the child about his or her understanding of the difference between letters and words. Repeat the exercise with two or three other word cards.
5. Ask the child to point to any letters he or she can name in the story. (Note whether the child points to letters rather than words.)

Assessing Concepts About Print

As part of a research study to investigate young children’s acquisition of concepts about print, Marie Clay (1979) developed the Concepts About Print Test. She examined not only what knowledge of print children possessed but also how their understanding of print changed. The underlying question that guided the study asked, “To what degree
do young children possess reading-related concepts and linguistic abilities considered to be essential in learning to read?"

The Concepts About Print Test is individually administered to a child. The teacher usually engages the child in a conversation and asks the child if he or she will help in the reading of a story. The teacher then proceeds to assess the child's concepts of print as they read the book together. For example, the teacher might say, "I'm going to read a story to you. Can you show me the front of the book so that I can get started?" or, once the book is opened, "Where should I start reading?" The child's responses reveal the knowledge of print he or she possesses. Table 5.2 lists the types of reading-related and linguistics concepts teachers should follow as they assess print concepts. Full instructions for the administration of the Concept About Print Test may be found in many places online or in Clay's book *The Early Detection of Reading Difficulties* (1992).

### Table 5.2 Reading-Related and Linguistic Concepts Assessed in Marie Clay's Concepts About Print Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRINT CONCEPT</th>
<th>CHILD'S TASK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Front of book</td>
<td>Identifies the front of the book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference between a picture and a page of print</td>
<td>Identifies a page of text (and not the picture on the opposite page) as the place to begin reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-to-right directionality</td>
<td>Identifies the direction of reading as a left-to-right process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return sweep</td>
<td>Identifies the return sweep as the appropriate reading behavior at the end of a line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word pointing</td>
<td>Points out words as a teacher reads a line of print slowly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning and end</td>
<td>Identifies the first and last parts of a story, page, line, or word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom of a picture</td>
<td>Identifies the bottom of a picture that is inverted (upside down) on a page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inverted page of print</td>
<td>Identifies the appropriate place to begin, left-to-right direction, and return sweep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line order</td>
<td>Identifies line sequence as the correct answer when asked, &quot;What's wrong with this?&quot; (The teacher reads a printed sentence in which the line sequence is jumbled.) Example: and began to swim. I jumped into the water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left page begins a text</td>
<td>Identifies the left page as place to begin reading when two pages of text are side by side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word order</td>
<td>Identifies word order as the correct answer when asked, &quot;What's wrong with this?&quot; (The teacher reads a printed sentence in which the word order is distorted.) Example: I looked and looked I but could not find the cat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter order</td>
<td>Identifies that the letters in simple words are not sequenced properly when the teacher reads, as if correct, a text in which the letters of the words are out of order Example: The dog chased teh cat this way and ththa way. The cta ran pu a tree.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessing Children’s Emerging Literacy Accomplishments Through Observation

Teachers can use observation to assess children’s emerging literacy accomplishments. A wealth of information can be garnered from daily classroom interactions. Many of the instructional activities suggested in this book will reveal important information to help you make instructional decisions. For example, as you interact with children, ask yourself these questions (McDonnell & Osburn, 1978):

1. Do children attend to the visual aspects of print? If I am reading a story, can the children tell me where to start and where to go next? Are the children able to point to words as I read them, thereby demonstrating knowledge of directional patterns of print? Do the children understand the concepts of words and letters? Can they circle a word and letter in the book? To ensure that children are not just good guessers, this ability should be demonstrated several times.

2. Do children use their intuitive knowledge of language? Can the children look at a picture book and invent a story to go with the pictures? Does the invented story, when the teacher begins to write it down, indicate the children are using a more formalized language that approximates the language used in books (i.e., book-talk) rather than an informal conversational style? Do children recognize that the print and the pictures are related? Can children “read the words” of a memorized text such as a nursery rhyme, even though the spoken words are not completely accurate matches for the print? Is this recall stimulated or changed by the pictures?

3. Are children beginning to show signs of integrating visual and language cues? Are they beginning to read single sentences word by word, pointing to each word with a finger while reading? Can children use all the cues available to a reader: the predictability of language, word order, a beginning sound, and an appropriateness to context while reading? Do they stop and correct, without prompting, when a visual–vocal mismatch occurs?

4. Do children expect meaning from print? Do they demonstrate that a message is expected by relating a sensible story?

You can also adapt Clay’s Concepts About Print Test to observe young children’s emerging literacy concepts. Enz and Morrow (2009), for example, developed a set of questions based on Clay’s work to improve preservice teachers’ understanding of beginners’ emerging print-related concepts. The Concepts About Books and Conventions of Print Checklist (see the Research-Based Practices featured in Box 5.7) allows teachers to use books as an assessment tool to interview and observe a child’s concepts about print. The questions can be adapted to any small book that has both print and pictures. Use the questions to think about why a child responded to each question in the manner that he or she did.

Read-alouds are the perfect place to teach children about the features of written language. Teachers can do this as they read stories, poems, and other texts aloud to children. For example, by pointing to the words while reading a big book, children learn important print concepts such as left-to-right directionality, where reading begins, return sweep, and that print is what is read, not pictures. Teachers can also show children the functions of navigational sections of a book, such as an index or table of contents, by thinking aloud: “I want to see if this zoo book has anything about gorillas in it so I am going to look in the index. Here we go. It says gorillas are on page 18.” The assessments presented in this section can also be used as a guide for teaching features of written language.
Language-experience stories help children discover that the string of sounds in spoken language can be broken down into units of print made up of words and sentences. But children must also learn that a word can be separated into sounds and that the segmented or separated sounds can be represented by letters. Such learning involves the beginnings of phonics, a topic discussed in depth in Chapter 7. The smallest sound unit that is identifiable in spoken language is known as a phone. Although phones describe all the possible separate speech sounds in language, they are not necessarily represented by the letters of the alphabet. Phonemes are the minimal sound units that can be represented...
in written language. The *alphabetic principle* suggests that letters in the alphabet map to phonemes. Hence the term *phonics* is used to refer to the child’s identification of words by their sounds. This process involves the association of speech sounds with letters. In the beginning of reading instruction, key questions that need to be asked are “Is the child able to hear sounds in a word?” and “Is the child able to recognize letters as representing units of sound?”

One of the first indications that children can analyze speech sounds and use knowledge about letters is when they invent their own spellings during writing. As discussed in Chapter 4, invented spellings are a sure sign that children are beginning to be conscious of sounds in words.

Table 5.3 records invented spellings from several samples of writing from three kindergartners, Monica, Tesscha, and James. Their spellings reflect varying levels of sophistication in hearing sounds in words and in corresponding letters to those sounds. Gentry and Henderson (1980) contend that Monica demonstrates the most phonemic awareness and James the least. **Phonemic awareness** refers to an insight about oral language and the ability to segment and manipulate the sounds of speech and is one of the five essential components of reading according to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development’s National Reading Panel (2000). A perusal of Monica’s list of words indicates that she has learned to distinguish sounds in sequence and can correspond letters directly to the surface sounds that she hears. Tesscha has also developed an awareness of sounds and letters, though not to the same extent as Monica. James is the least ready of the three to benefit from letter–sound instruction. For James (and other children at a similar level of development), analyzing sounds in words and attaching letters to those sounds is beyond present conceptual reach. Making initial reading tasks too abstract or removed from what James already knows about print will not help him progress in reading.

Children can easily become confused when taught to identify sounds in words or correspond letters to sounds if they have not yet developed a concept of what a word is. Likewise, the level of abstraction in recognizing a word is too difficult for children if they have yet to make any global connection that speech is related to print. This doesn’t mean that program goals for learning about letters and sounds are not worthwhile. However, learning letter–sound relationships must be put into perspective and taught to beginners in meaningful contexts and as the need or opportunity arises.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORD</th>
<th>MONICA’S SPELLING</th>
<th>TESSCHA’S SPELLING</th>
<th>JAMES’S SPELLING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>monster</td>
<td>monstr</td>
<td>mtr</td>
<td>aml</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>united</td>
<td>unintid</td>
<td>nnt</td>
<td>em332 l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dressing</td>
<td>dressing</td>
<td>jrasm</td>
<td>8emaaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bottom</td>
<td>bodm</td>
<td>bodm</td>
<td>19nhm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hiked</td>
<td>hikt</td>
<td>hot</td>
<td>sanh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>human</td>
<td>humin</td>
<td>hmn</td>
<td>menena</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recognizing Letters

Today’s 5-year-old undoubtedly brings more letter knowledge to beginning reading instruction than the 5-year-old of a half-century ago. Television plays a big part in this phenomenon. Children’s programs such as Sesame Street are largely responsible for increasing children’s letter awareness, as are the computer and Web-based games available today.

Preschool, kindergarten, and first-grade teachers should capitalize on children’s knowledge of letters in a variety of ways. Plan instruction in letter recognition around daily classroom routines and activities. Also help children discriminate small but significant differences among letters, not necessarily in isolated activity, but in meaningful written language contexts. Traditionally, visual perception tasks have involved letter identification and discrimination. Although these tasks are more justifiable than discrimination activities involving geometric shapes, the teacher should move quickly to letter recognition and discrimination within words and sentences. Consider the following instructional activities:

- **Discuss letters in the context of a language-experience story or key words that children recognize instantly because they are personal and meaningful.** (See Chapter 7 for a discussion of key word instruction.) For example, ask children to find at least one other child in the room whose first name begins with the same letter. If a child can’t find a match, ask the class to brainstorm some names that begin with the same letter as the child’s name. Write the names on the board for discussion and analysis.

- **Use alphabet books.** Every early childhood classroom should have a collection of alphabet books. Ask children to find the page that a certain letter is on. Compare and contrast the illustrations of the letter in the different books. The children can illustrate their own rendition of the letter, and over time the class can develop its own alphabet book. Some good alphabet books that can be used in class include

  - *Alphabet City* by Stephen T. Johnson (1999, Reed Business Information)
  - *Alligator Arrived with Apples* by Crescent Dragonwagon (1992, Aladdin)

- **Target a letter for discussion.** Have children search for the letter on labels of cans and other commercial products (e.g., Special K), in magazines, newspapers, and other sources of print. Children can make a letter collage by cutting the letters they find and arranging and pasting them onto a big letter poster that the teacher has made from construction paper.

- **Tie letter recognition to writing.** Begin with each child’s name. Encourage children to write their names by tracing copies of the letters or writing independently. Ask children to count the number of letters in their names, to examine their names for repeating letters, and so on.

- **Create letters through art activities.** Art plays a very important part in the child’s school experience by giving children the opportunity to learn that there are many ways to express their thoughts, feelings, and points of view. Art also heightens children’s awareness of their physical environment, involving them through the manipulation of different materials and the development of visual and sensory capacities. For this reason, one small but significant form of expression might be to create letters through drawing, finger painting, sculpting, and making collages such as the letter poster previously described.
Learning single alphabet letters contributes greatly to learning to read, although it is not sufficient by itself. Often some teachers may be tempted to have children memorize single alphabet letters through the use of flash cards. Schickedanz (1998), however, recommends avoiding flash cards for teaching young children letter naming and recognition because the practice is devoid of a meaningful context. As she puts it:

In meaningful activities, children are able to see and appreciate a connection between what they are learning and some application of it—some reason for its importance or usefulness. If children are exposed to letters and their names through the use of flashcards . . . the purpose of alphabet letters is not obvious. But if children are exposed to letters and letter names in looking at their own names, classroom signs, or titles of storybooks, the purpose of letters is obvious. (p. 23)

To illustrate this point, Strickland and Schickedanz provide suggestions for teaching alphabet letter naming and recognition. Study the Research-Based Practices scenario featured in Box 5.8.

**Assessing What Children Know About Letters and Sounds**

Alphabet knowledge is important because it is a predictor of success in early reading. To assess alphabet knowledge you need a set of lowercase letters and a set of uppercase letters. Strickland and Schickedanz (2009) encourage using children’s names to teach them about print. Here are a few of their suggestions.

**MATCHING NAMES**

Make a pair of identical name cards for each child in the class. Strickland and Schickedanz suggest putting a visual clue like a photo of the child, a picture, or a drawing on one of the cards to help children get started. During large group time, pass out the cards to the children, and then from the other set, hold up one card at a time asking, “Whose name is this?” Have the children match their cards with the card you are holding. Each time a child matches cards, recite the letters in his or her name. Invite the children to join in and say the letters as you point to them.

**NAME PUZZLE**

Print each child’s name on a business-size envelope. Make a duplicate on a piece of heavy paper and then cut the child’s name into individual letters. Put the letters in the envelope. Have children match the cut letters on the inside with the name on the outside of the envelope. Say each of the letter names if the child needs assistance.

**LETTER DETECTIVES**

Display one, two, or three different name cards at a time. Show a letter card and ask the child to visually identify the letter in the names. You can also ask children to find letters without showing them the letter card.
letters as well as a checklist similar to the one in Figure 5.5.

1. Ask the child to identify the uppercase letters one at a time: “What letter is this?”
2. Do the same procedure for lowercase letters, one letter at a time.
3. Place an X next to the letters the child identifies correctly. You might use a dash if the child incorrectly identifies the letter.
4. Assess letter knowledge a few times a year.

### Phonological Awareness

Children who have well-developed skills in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness have an easier time learning to read (National Reading Panel, 2000). **Phonological awareness** is the ability to hear, recognize, and play with the sounds in our language. It’s the recognition that sounds in English can be broken down into smaller and smaller parts: sentences, words, rimes, and syllables. Phonological awareness is auditory; students can do most phonological awareness activities with their eyes closed. Phonological awareness can be taught and is important for all students. Phonological awareness includes knowing that:

- Sentences can be segmented into words.
- Words can be segmented into syllables.
- Words can be segmented into their individual sounds.
- Words can begin or end with the same sounds.
- The individual sounds of words can be blended together.
- The individual sounds of words can be manipulated (added, deleted, or substituted).

**Phonological awareness** is an encompassing term that involves working with the sounds of language at the word, syllable, and phoneme level; it is an umbrella term that includes rhyming, alliteration, sentence segmenting, syllable blending and segmenting, and phonemic awareness. These skills should be taught, so teachers should start with the larger units (rhymes) and move to smaller units of sounds like blends or individual sounds.

- Rhyming—Matching the ending sounds of words, called rimes, like *hat*, *cat*, *bat*, *rat*.
- Alliteration—Producing groups of words that begin with the same initial sound like *two tall trees*.

![Figure 5.5 Alphabet Knowledge Checklist](image-url)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s Name ___________________________ Date ___________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X if Correct — if Incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>W</td>
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<tr>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Sentence segmenting—Understanding sentences are composed of separate words.

  The pig is fat
  1 2 3 4

- Syllable blending and segmenting—Blending syllables to make words and segmenting words into syllables help students distinguish distinct units of sounds.

  /mag/ /net/; /kick/ /ball/

- Phonemic awareness—This is the most complex phonological skill. It is the ability to segment words into sounds, blend them back together, and manipulate the sounds to make new words.

  /c/ /a/ /t/; /sh/ /i/ /p/

Figure 5.6 shows the phonological skills along a continuum.
Phonemic awareness is a very important part of phonological awareness and requires narrower and more advanced skills than rhyming and clapping syllables. Phonemic awareness links more directly to phonics, which relates sounds to the letters that represent them.

**Developing Phonemic Awareness**

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate sounds in spoken words, the understanding that spoken words consist of a sequence of speech sounds, and an awareness of individual sounds (phonemes). Beginning readers must become aware that a word is made up of a series of sounds. Phonemic awareness is important because it plays a causal role in learning to read, primes the reader for print, and helps make sense of phonics instruction. Yopp (1992) explains that young children typically lack phonemic awareness, the understanding that speech is composed of a series of individual sounds: "Cat . . . is simply a cat, a furry animal that purrs. Young children are unaware that the spoken utterance cat is a word that is made up of a series of sounds, or phonemes, /k/, /a/, and /t/" (p. 696). The lack of phonemic awareness contributes to children's inability to identify unknown words. If beginners are to benefit from phonics instruction, they must first develop an ability to manipulate sounds in words.

Based on their research analysis, the authors of the International Reading Association's position statement, *Phonemic Awareness and the Teaching of Reading*, emphasize the importance of phonemic awareness in learning to read and spell (Cunningham, Cunningham, Hoffman, & Yopp, 1998). Research on early reading acquisition clearly demonstrates that phonemic awareness is a powerful predictor of young children's later reading development (Ehri, Nunes, Willows, Schuster, Yaghoub-Zadeh, & Shanahan, 2001; Juel, 1988).
Why is phonemic awareness such an important ability in learning to read and spell? The orthographic system of the English language is based on the alphabetic principle, so children must have an understanding of how spoken language maps to written language. Phonemic awareness helps a child grasp this understanding. Without phonemic awareness, a child might be able to learn letter–sound relationships by rote but will not understand how to use and coordinate letter–sound knowledge to read or spell new words. As a result, phonemic awareness plays a critical role in the development of skills required in the manipulation of phonemes—namely, phonics and spelling skills (Griffith & Olson, 1992).

Several kinds of tasks are involved in phonemic awareness. Children should be able to perform these tasks as a precursor to phonics and spelling instruction.

- **Phoneme isolation.** Children recognize individual sounds in a word. For example, the first sound in dog is /d/. This is a simple task of phonemic awareness.
- **Phoneme identity.** This is the recognition of the same sounds in different words, such as six, sun, and sat. The first sound /s/ is the same.
- **Phoneme categorization.** This task requires children to recognize a word in a set that doesn’t fit or has an odd sound. A teacher might ask, “What word doesn’t sound like the others—dot, big, doll?”
- **Blending.** A more difficult task involving phonemic awareness requires children to blend a series of orally presented sounds to form a word; for example, given the separate sounds /k/, /a/, /t/, the child says cat.
- **Segmenting beginning and ending sounds in words.** Children who have developed the capacity to hear sounds in words are able to perform phonemic awareness tasks that require them to isolate and identify the sound at the beginning or end of a word. A teacher might ask, “What sound do you hear at the beginning of the word pig?” or “What sound do you hear at the end of the word hit?”
- **Segmenting separate sounds in a word.** This is the most difficult of the phonemic awareness tasks. Children who can segment separate sounds in a word are considered to be phonemically aware.
- **Phoneme deletion, addition, and substitution.** These phoneme manipulation tasks require children to take away or add something to make new words. For example, stack without the /s/ is tack. If you have rain and add a /t/ to it you have train. These types of activities all require children to manipulate sounds in spoken words.

Findings from the National Reading Panel (2000) advise us that blending and segmenting are probably the most useful phonemic awareness activities and that children only need a few minutes of phonemic awareness instruction daily.

When children develop phonemic awareness, they recognize that words can rhyme, can begin or end with the same sound or different sounds, and are composed of phonemes that can be separated or blended in different ways to form words. Most children develop phonemic awareness by the middle of the first grade. Because phonemic awareness appears to develop naturally in young children, some people might question whether it needs to be taught or emphasized in early reading. Today, we know it does.

How can phonemic awareness be taught? The Viewpoint featured in Box 5.9 from IRA’s position statement on phonemic awareness responds to that question.

**Developing Phonemic Awareness in Children** Instruction has its greatest impact on phonemic awareness when teachers balance a high level of interaction with print and explicit instruction in various tasks related to manipulating sounds in words. Consider the following practices in the development of a child’s phonemic awareness.
Play with Language Through Read-Alouds

Use read-aloud books, nursery rhymes, riddles, songs, and poems that play with language and manipulate sounds in natural and spontaneous ways. Choose language-rich literature that is appropriate for young children and deals playfully with speech sounds through the use of rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and other forms of phoneme manipulation. In doing so, draw children’s attention to the sounds of spoken language and examine language use.

Playing with sounds through interactive reading experiences integrates phonemic awareness instruction within the context of enjoying stories, nursery rhymes, songs, poems, or riddles. You can create numerous opportunities for children to develop phonemic awareness through the questions you pose to draw children’s attention to the sounds in words. For example, ask questions such as “Did you notice how those words rhymed?” “Which words start alike?” and “What sound do you hear at the beginning of all these words?” In addition, extend interactive read-alouds by creating alternative versions of the story or additional verses while maintaining the same language patterns. Some books appropriate for read-alouds in the classroom to develop phonemic awareness might include Silly Sally by Audrey Wood (1992, Harcourt Children’s Books), Is Your Mama a Llama? by Deborah Guarino (1991, Perfection Learning Prebound), Down by the Bay by Nadine Bernard Westcott (1998, Crown Books for Young Readers), and Four Fur Feet by Margaret Wise Brown (1996, Hyperion). Appendix C also contains an

How Should Phonemic Awareness Be Taught?

The answer to this question has both theoretical and practical implications. Theorists interested in determining the causal contribution of phonemic awareness to learning to read have conducted experimental studies in which some students are explicitly taught phonemic awareness and some are not. Many of the early studies in this genre focused on treatments that emphasize oral language work only. The findings from these studies suggest phonemic awareness can be taught successfully.

More recently, there have been studies of phonemic awareness training that combine and contrast purely oral language approaches to the nurturing of phonemic awareness abilities, with approaches that include interaction with print during the training. These studies suggest that programs that encourage high levels of student engagement and interaction with print (for example, through read-alouds, shared reading, and invented spelling) yield as much growth in phonemic awareness abilities as programs that offer only a focus on oral language teaching. These studies also suggest that the greatest impact on phonemic awareness is achieved when there is both interaction with print and explicit attention to phonemic awareness abilities. In other words, interaction with print combined with explicit attention to sound structure in spoken words is the best vehicle toward growth.

Some research suggests that student engagement in writing activities that encourage invented spelling of words can promote the development of phonemic awareness. These findings also are consistent with continuing research into the sources of influence on phonemic awareness abilities before students enter school. It is clear that high levels of phonemic awareness among very young children are related to home experiences that are filled with interactions with print (such as being read to at home, playing letter games and language play, and having early writing experiences).

annotated list of read-aloud books that can be used to develop children’s phonemic awareness.

Create Games and Gamelike Activities to Reinforce and Extend Children’s Awareness of Sounds in Words

As children develop a familiarity with the concept of rhyme, make or purchase games that use rhyming words. For example, make a bingo-style board on which children cover pictures that rhyme with those drawn from a bag or a box. Other phonemic awareness activities might include these:

- Clapping the number of syllables heard in a name or a word. To begin, say the name or word and then repeat it in unison with the children as they clap with you.
- Play guessing games or use riddles to help children become sensitive to the sounds in words. For example, “What am I thinking of?” is a guessing game that helps children blend spoken sounds to form a word (Yopp, 1995). Here’s how it works: First, choose a category from which you will select words. Then, in a deliberate, segmented fashion, say each sound of the word and ask children, “What am I thinking of?” For example, given the category “sea animals,” a teacher might say the following sounds: /k/, /r/, /a/, /b/.
- Play with tongue twisters to build awareness of the sounds in beginning letters. Have children say tongue twisters as quickly, and as slowly, as they can. Once children can recite tongue twisters from memory, write them on poster boards. Direct children’s attention to the beginning sounds.
- Have children line up for lunchtime or recess by the beginning sound in their names. For example, say, “Anyone whose name begins with /b/, please line up.” This activity involves sound matching. Sound-matching activities can be adapted in numerous ways. For example, ask children to decide which of several words begins with a given sound, or to generate a word beginning with a particular sound. Yopp (1992) recommends giving children a series of pictures of familiar animals or objects (e.g., snake, dog, cat, bird) and asking them to select the one that begins with the /s/ sound. Also, to the tune of “Jimmy Crack Corn and I Don’t Care,” have children generate words that begin with a particular sound by singing:

Who has a /d/ word to share with us?
Who has a /d/ word to share with us?
Who has a /d/ word to share with us?
It must start with the /d/ sound.

As the class sings together, call on individual children to volunteer words that begin with the /d/ sound. Then incorporate the words that have been contributed by the children into the song (e.g.: “Dog is a word that starts with /d/. Dog is a word that starts with /d/. Dog is a word that starts with /d/. Dog starts with the /d/ sound.”). Make sure throughout the activity that the children sing the phoneme sound, not the letter name.
- In addition to sound matching, Yopp (1992) presents several other useful phonemic awareness activities that involve sound isolation, blending, segmentation, sound addition, and sound substitution.

Engage Children in Numerous Occasions to Write

Provide children with many opportunities to experiment with language through writing. Daily writing experiences may be beneficial for children who lack phonemic awareness (Klesius & Griffith, 1998). The more children write, the better they become at hearing sounds in words as they attempt to invent spelling. As they become more adept at segmenting sounds in words,
encourage children to approximate spelling based on the way words sound. Teacher–
child interactions should provide as much instructional support as the child needs to
approximate the spelling of a word.

Notice how Mrs. Nicholas scaffolds instruction for a first grader who asks for help
as she attempts to spell hospital in the story that she is writing (Cramer, 1978, p. 132).

**Jenny:** Mrs. Nicholas, how do you spell hospital?

**Mrs. Nicholas:** Spell it as best you can, Jenny.

**Jenny:** I don’t know how to spell it.

**Mrs. Nicholas:** I know you don’t know how to spell it, honey. I just want you
to write as much of the word as you can.

**Jenny:** I don’t know any of it.

**Mrs. Nicholas:** Yes, you do, Jenny. How do you think hospital starts? (Mrs. Nicho-
las pronounced hospital distinctly with a slight emphasis on the first sound, but she
deliberately avoided grossly distorting the pronunciation.)

**Jenny:** (very tentatively) h-s.

**Mrs. Nicholas:** Good! Write the hs. What do you hear next in hospital? (Again
Mrs. Nicholas pronounced hospital distinctly, this time with a slight emphasis on the
second part.)

**Jenny:** (still tentatively) p-t.

**Mrs. Nicholas:** Yes! Write the pt. Now, what’s the last sound you hear in hospital? (While
pronouncing hospital for the last time, Mrs. Nicholas emphasized the last part
without exaggerating it unduly.)

**Jenny:** (with some assurance) l.

**Mrs. Nicholas:** Excellent, Jenny, h-s-p-t-l is a fine way to spell hospital. There is
another way to spell hospital, but for now I want you to spell words you don’t
know just as we did this one.

Because Mrs. Nicholas was willing to accept invented spellings in a beginning situa-
tion, Jenny benefitted. Not only did she have an opportunity to map spoken language
onto written language, but Jenny also had the opportunity to test the rules that govern
English spelling in an accepting environment.

**Teach Children to Segment Sounds in Words Through Explicit Instruction**

Individual children who may be having trouble segmenting sounds in words may ben-
efit most from explicit instruction. Clay (1992) recommends the use of Elkonin boxes
(named after a Russian psychologist) as a **phonemic segmentation** strategy. Elkonin
boxes are widely used today and are often called “sound boxes.” Because they help
fix phoneme–grapheme correspondences in children’s minds, Elkonin boxes support
children’s spelling, reading, and writing development (Moats, 2006). The following
procedures can be incorporated into individual or small group instruction once the
children are identified as ready for training in phonemic segmentation. To benefit from
such instruction, children must have developed strong concepts of print as “talk written
down” as well as a concept of “word.” Because the initial stages of training in segment-
ing a word into sounds is totally aural, children need not be aware of letters to profit
from this type of instruction. Eventually, children learn to attach letters to sounds that
are separated.

1. **Give the child a picture of a familiar object.** A rectangle is divided into squares accord-
ing to the number of sounds in the name of the object. Remember that a square is
required for every sound in a word, not necessarily every letter. For example, if the
picture were of a boat, there would be three squares for three sounds:
2. Next say the word slowly and deliberately, allowing the child to hear the sounds that can be naturally segmented. Research has shown that it is easier to hear syllables than individual phonemes in a word (Liberman, Shankweiler, Fisher, & Carter, 1974).
3. Now ask the child to repeat the word, modeling the way you have said it.
4. Continue to model. As you segment the word into sounds, show the child how to place counters in each square according to the sounds heard sequentially in the word. For example, with the word boat, as the teacher articulates each sound, a counter is placed in a square:

5. Walk the child through the procedure by attempting it together several times.
6. Show another picture and then the word. Ask the child to pronounce the word and separate the sounds by placing the counters in the squares. The teacher may have to continue modeling until the child catches on to the task.
7. Phase out the picture stimulus and the use of counters and squares. Eventually, the child is asked to analyze words aurally without teacher assistance.

In time, the teacher should combine phonemic segmentation with letter association. As the child pronounces a word, letters and letter patterns can be used instead of counters in the squares. The child can be asked, “What letters do you think go in each of the squares?” At first, the letters can be written in for the child. Clay (1985) suggests that the teacher accept any correct letter–sound relationship the child gives and write it in the correct position as the child watches. She also recommends that the teacher
prompt the child with questions such as “What do you hear in the beginning?” “In the middle?” “At the end?” and “What else do you hear?”

Hearing sounds in words is no easy reading task for young children. As we suggested earlier, helping children sound out words may be premature if they are not yet phonemically aware. That is why it is important to assess children’s ability to manipulate sounds in words.

Assessing Phonemic Awareness Teachers can assess children’s phonemic awareness through ongoing instruction as they engage in various activities. Observing children perform phonemic awareness tasks is an informal means of assessment that will help you plan and adapt instruction according to children’s needs. Formal measures of phonemic awareness create a testlike environment but provide useful indicators of children’s capacity to manipulate sounds in words. For example, the Yopp–Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation in Figure 5.7 measures a child’s ability to separately articulate the sounds of a spoken word in order. Validation studies of the Yopp–Singer test show not only that it is a valid and reliable measure of phonemic awareness ability but also

**Figure 5.7**
A Test for Assessing Phonemic Awareness in Young Children

Name: ___________________________________________ Date: _________________
Score (number correct): ______________________________________________________________

Directions: Today we’re going to play a word game. I’m going to say a word and I want you to break the word apart. You are going to tell me each sound in the word in order. For example, if I say “old,” you should say “/o/-/l/-/d/.” (Administrator: Be sure to say the sounds, not the letters, in the word.) Let’s try a few together.

Practice items: (Assist the child in segmenting these items as necessary.)
ride, go, man

Test items: (Circle those items that the student correctly segments; incorrect responses may be recorded on the blank line following the item.)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. dog</td>
<td>12. lay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. keep</td>
<td>13. race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. fine</td>
<td>14. zoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. no</td>
<td>15. three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. she</td>
<td>16. job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. wave</td>
<td>17. in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. grew</td>
<td>18. ice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. that</td>
<td>19. at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. red</td>
<td>20. top</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. me</td>
<td>21. by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. sat</td>
<td>22. do</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

that it can be used to identify children who are likely to experience difficulty in reading and spelling (Yopp, 1995).

To administer the Yopp–Singer Test, orally present the set of target words one at a time, and ask a child to respond by segmenting each target word into its separate sounds. For example, you say the word *red* and the child responds /r/, /e/, /d/; say the word *fish* and the child says /f/, /i/, /sh/. As the child progresses through the 22-item test, it is appropriate to provide feedback. If the child responds correctly, nod approval or say, “Good job; that’s right.” If a child gives an incorrect answer, provide the correct response and then continue down the list. To see an online video demonstration of the Yopp–Singer Test, go to http://teams.lacoe.edu/reading/assessments/assessments.html.

You can determine a child’s score on the Yopp–Singer Test by counting the number of items correctly segmented into all constituent phonemes. Although no partial credit is given, a child’s incorrect responses should be noted on the blank line following the item. These incorrect responses provide much insight into the child’s developing awareness of sounds in words. As you score each test item, note that consonant and vowel digraphs are counted as a single phoneme (e.g., /sh/ in *she*; /th/ in *three*; /oo/ in *zoo*; /oi/ in *boy*; a more detailed explanation of digraphs and other phonics elements is given in Chapter 7).

Expect wide variation in young children’s performance on the Yopp–Singer Test. Yopp (1995) reports that second-semester kindergarten students drawn from the public schools in a West Coast city in the United States obtained scores ranging from 0 to 22 correct responses on the test items. Guidelines for evaluating a child’s performance include the following:

- Correct responses for *all* or *nearly all* of the items indicate that a child is phonemically aware.
- Correct responses for *some* of the items (about 12 correct responses, with a standard deviation of 7.66) indicate that a child displays emerging phonemic awareness.
- Correct responses for *few* items or *none at all* indicate that a child lacks phonemic awareness.

The Yopp–Singer Test allows teachers to identify children who are likely to experience difficulty learning to read and spell and give them instructional support using practices described earlier. In Chapter 7 examine how children use their knowledge of sounds in words to engage in code instruction as they develop word identification skills and strategies.
home environments in which English is not the primary language; some may come from homes in which interactions with print are not evident; and some may not come from environments in which they are exposed to the joys of reading. A variety of factors such as these can place children at high risk for struggling with reading because they do not bring a schema for literacy learning that recognizes reading as an emergent, developing process.

The involvement of parents in decisions about the education of their child is critical. RTI requires parents to be part of the decision-making process. Schools implementing RTI are supposed to provide parents with information about

- Their child’s progress
- The instruction and the interventions used
- The staff who are delivering the instruction
- The academic or behavioral goals for their child

We encourage educators to help parents understand the RTI process within their school, and to involve them in the process. You might even invite parents to participate on building-level leadership teams that are charged with exploring and developing RTI activities. A parent might also work with someone from the school to do a presentation for all parents, or be a liaison or train other parents.

What About Standards, Assessment, and Beginning Readers and Writers?

Ample opportunities to practice reading help children become effective readers. Adequate access to reading materials is critical for accomplishing this goal. When young children are provided with both the time to engage in self-selected reading and the necessary resources, such as children’s literature, their reading achievement and attitude toward reading improve (Fielding, Wilson, & Anderson, 1986; McQuillan, 1998).

Key professional organizations—such as the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children—which make recommendations on standards and policies, emphasize the need to provide young readers with access to books and print materials. The International Reading Association (2000b, para. 11) suggests that teachers, librarians, and school administrators

- Request an appropriate number of books for classrooms, school libraries, and public libraries
- Inform parents and policymakers of the importance of access to books
- Remind state and local policymakers of the need to allot funding for books

In the NAEYC report Promoting Early Childhood Literacy: Highlights of State Efforts, Kinch and Azer (2002) note that, although one-third of all states provides reading resources to early literacy programs, additional funding is needed to make effective programs accessible to a wider range of children and families. Examples of the materials and services provided by some states to early childhood centers and family child care settings include

- Children’s literature books
- Comprehensive reading kits
• Resource centers that provide children’s books, reading kits, and teachers’ guides to educators
• Mobile vans that travel to rural areas to supply literacy resources to teachers and families
• Literacy-oriented educational software
• Professional development opportunities that suggest instructional strategies to teachers of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers
• Hotlines for teachers and families that offer ideas for enhancing the literacy development of young children

These resources are just some of the ways in which young readers can be encouraged to read and write.

Summary

In this chapter, we explored the difference between reading readiness and emergent literacy as platforms on which to begin instruction. If reading is viewed developmentally, teachers will make use of children’s preschool experiences with and knowledge of print to get beginners started in reading and writing. The principle behind instruction is to teach for literate behavior. In other words, beginning reading and writing should center on readinglike situations rather than on activities that are unrelated to having children interact with printed language.

Three strands of instruction characterize beginning reading. First, children should participate in storybook literacy experiences as well as learn what reading is all about. We showed how to use stories and incorporate language functions into instructional practices. Through these activities, children learn that the string of sounds in spoken language can be broken down into units of print made up of words and sentences. Moreover, they should be getting instruction in which they learn that a word can be separated into sounds and that these separated sounds can be represented by letters. Finally, a third phase should center on the language of instruction. Children must learn the terms and labels that are needed to talk about reading and carry out reading tasks.

We emphasized informal assessment because it provides daily judgments of children’s preparedness and progress in beginning reading situations. Assessment through teaching and observation yields valuable information about a child’s abilities, as well as about the teaching methods that seem to be easiest and of greatest interest to individual children.

Teacher Action Research

1. Suppose you were planning to conduct an interview with a young child to determine the child’s concepts about print. What questions would you develop to tap the
child’s knowledge about books and print? Develop a set of questions to use both before and during reading. Compare your questions with those of several of your classmates.

2. Roberto is an active kindergartner who loves to be on the move, playing with games, building blocks, and Lego blocks. He will sit to hear a good book, but when asked to follow along, he doesn’t know where to begin. Sometimes he points to the top right side of the page and sometimes to the middle of the page. In collaboration with a fellow class member, design several classroom experiences with print from which Roberto may benefit.

3. An editorial in your local newspaper advocates a strong phonics program beginning in kindergarten. Write a letter to the editor in which you explain the importance of developing children’s concepts about print and phonemic awareness before teaching phonics. Use language that parents in the community will understand.

4. Coaching has become popular in schools to provide professional development and support to improve the instructional skills of teachers. Imagine you are a literacy coach working in a kindergarten classroom. Based on what you’ve learned in Chapters 4 and 5, create a checklist of things to look for in a kindergarten classroom. Compare your list with your classmates or colleagues.

**Related Web Sites**

*Apple Creek Elementary Webquest*
www.tccsa.net/webquest/blanchard_smith/
This WebQuest, developed by two teachers, is a wonderful resource for lovers of Mrs. Wishy-Washy. Students read the book via PowerPoint, retell the story using puppets, and put key pictures in sequence. A great center activity!

*Blank Elkonin Boxes*
http://bogglesworldesl.com/elkonin_boxes.htm
The Elkonin boxes on this site are downloadable so teachers can print them off individually and laminate them for classroom use.

*North Central Regional Educational Laboratory*
www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/ntareas/reading/li1lk69.htm
Video of six 5-year-olds in the same classroom with narration describing the wide range of development in their writing skills.

*Reading Rockets*
www.readingrockets.org/firstyear/fyt.php?CAT=6#print
Reading Rockets First-Year Teacher Program is a self-paced professional development course for novice teachers. The videos on phonemic awareness as well as the Concepts of Print assessment administration are well done.
Resources, Lesson Plans, and Activities for Kindergartens
www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/fil/pages/listkindersu.html#cat1
This site has a wealth of Web resources, lesson plans, and listservs created especially for the kindergarten teacher.

Now go to the Vacca et al. Reading and Learning to Read, Eighth Edition, MyEducationLab course at www.myeducationlab.com to

- Take a pretest to assess your initial comprehension of the chapter content
- Study chapter content with your individualized study plan
- Take a posttest to assess your understanding of chapter content
- Engage in multimedia exercises to help you build a deeper and more applied understanding of chapter content