

Put 'PLAY' back into Word Play

Part 1



Our students need to instill an interest in and a love of language that will support literacy development for a long time.

Somewhere along the line, the word *play* was replaced with *work*. Teachers and children are being pressured to read at earlier ages. The focus on letter names and sounds, and words has changed the emphasis in the early years. It is far too common to see children sitting at desks completing worksheets than assembling puzzles or making words using play dough letters.

It is time to put the word play back into word play. There are so many possible ways to fill our young learner's literate lives with engaging, interactive and developmentally appropriate experiences with letters and words that are playful and purposeful.

Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell (2002) suggest a word study continuum that systematically introduces concepts of print, phonological awareness, and letter awareness, followed by letter-sound relationships, spelling pattern and high-frequency words in midyear and structural analysis later in the year.

Learning Language Through Names

"A child's name has singular importance as he embarks on learning about literacy, both for the child's management of his own learning about print and for the observant teacher trying to understand his pattern of progress." (Clay, 1991)

A child's name is the most important word in any child's vocabulary. It is usually the first word they connect orally to print and learn to write. Their names become a powerful tool for providing systematic instruction in alphabet letters and sounds, and how those sounds are combined to make words.

Suggested Routines for word play with 'NAMES':

- introduce a new name each day
- point to the letters in the name and cheer the letter names (i.e. "Give me a S! S!")
- repeat the letters in a chant, rhythm or a melody
- add snapping fingers, clapping or marching to the chant
- count the letters
- talk about the shapes and structures of the letters (tall, tail, round, curved, straight)

- cut apart name and put letters back together in a pocket chart
- talk about the sounds in a name – beginning and ending sounds, syllables and sounds in the middle
- compare names
- model and practice printing the first letter of the name
- post the names on a word wall
- adapt familiar songs to include students’ names (i.e. If your name begins with B, clap your hands...If you are happy and you know it..)
- use name cards for sorting (i.e. number of syllables, number of letters, names of boys and girls....)
- Bingo card with names (find a name that begins with ‘s’)
- name bags with picture of student on the front and name cut up to put back together
- mystery names – have student guess which letters might be in the name (displayed with a blank for each letter) and try to determine whose name it is
- tri-fold tracing – student’s name is written with permanent marker in the middle of a piece of paper folded into three parts. The student flips over the top section and traces the name, then flips up the bottom section
- memory game using pictures to match names
- name flip book – match names to pictures
- wikki stick names
- stamp names with letter stamps

“Why choose name routines over the letter of the week?”

- presents the language concepts in the context of meaningful words
- the alphabet can be covered in a couple of months vs 26 weeks
- Letter of the Week separates the letters from their purpose



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