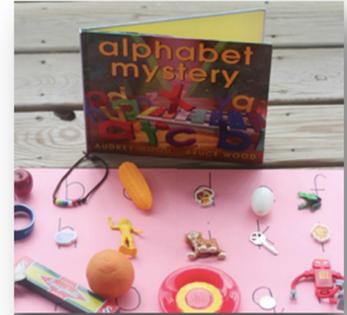


Alphabetic Principle

What is it?

The alphabetic principle refers to the understanding that there are predictable and consistent relations between written letters and spoken sounds – the combination of letter knowledge and awareness. The 26 letters are the “key” to the English language. They have names, shapes, sounds, and go together to make words.



Why is it important?

Children's knowledge of letter names, shapes and sounds is a strong predictor of their success in learning to read. Knowing letter names is strongly related to children's ability to remember the forms of written words and their ability to treat words as sequences of letters. As this becomes internalized we will see writing and reading skills grow.

Considerations: (what to think about?)

- Be **intentional** with the purpose and clear with the expectations. “We are going to be learning about the letters of the alphabet. There are 26 letters (use the abc line to count together slowly while you touch them). You all have some of them in your names (check that out with their name cards). Letters have sounds and go together to make words. Your name is a word....” How cool is that!!” Make it interesting and meaningful. Revisit the learning often ... “What letters do you know really well? Which ones are still tricky?” Kids can answer this!
- Have 2 alphabet strips - one high to teach from and one low for students to access (have a special abc pointer to reach the high one when you teach from it). Have them run in one long line.
- Be very **explicit** when talking about the alphabet and clear when enunciating. A common error is to add a vowel sound when saying the consonant sound (ex. “b” – “bu” rather than a quiet “b” – puff of air).
- Weave many opportunities for children to become familiar with the alphabet. Notice it often. Point it out. Bring it to their attention with wonder and curiosity.
- Embrace the whole alphabet rather than a letter of the week .
- Spend lots of time - go slow while working with the **abc** – you are ensuring success with later reading and spelling when kids can totally manipulate sounds with ease.



What to do?

- Start with students names - meaningful, purposeful and comfortable!
- Have a collection of alphabet books easily accessible. Select engaging alphabet books to read-aloud.
- Add letters in play areas, such as in sand or light tables, water play, blocks, dramatic play and art stations.
- “Build” the letters using craft sticks, twigs, WikkiStix, ribbons, bodies...
- Feel the letters by tracing in sand, on a friend's back, on carpet/fabric, use a crayon rub on tree bark, screen or sandpaper, try finger paint or baggie tracing...
- Collect alphabet letters in various sizes, forms (g/g), and uppercase and lowercase. This can be as simple as printing letters onto rocks.
- Offer white boards, clip boards, 5/10 frames, variety of paper, name cards, child sized alphabet strips... to encourage “writing, recording” the letters.
- Use letter wands, (letters glued on chop sticks or tongue depressors) magnifying glasses or “word catchers” (fly swatters with holes cut out) for letter searches.
- Ask questions to nudge their thinking (see ideas in package).



Whole group:

- Use “Rich Routines” (see RR document) to playfully weave letters, their sounds, and how they relate to words into daily whole group gatherings.
- Co-construct visual cues for your classroom alphabet (use students’ pictures, characters from favourite books, etc.) so the students form personal connections to the letters.
- Explicitly teach elements of the alphabet line, such as why each letter has two symbols (upper/lower case), talk about the “picture clue”, point out tricky letters (ex: “lmnop”). Challenge them to say/sing the alphabet backwards, or start part way though as you point to the letters. Go slow!
- Engage students in noticing the alphabet line as a whole. Have students look for letters in their name, compare friends’ names and notice similarities and differences.
- Explore letters in environmental print and book covers.
- Incorporate the students’ ideas in shared writing interactions to model how letters and their sounds form words and can create meaningful messages.



Small Group (10-minutes):

- Use students’ name cards and magnetic letters to match the letters in their names.

- Decompose the alphabet based on different features such as straight letters, curvy letters, with tails, etc.
- Use various materials to form letters both indoors and outdoors (playdough, shaving cream, sticks, rocks ...)
- Use collections of objects or pictures that students can sort by initial/final sound.
- ***What is the rest of the class doing?*** While working with small groups, the remaining students will be engaged in practicing the concepts with purposeful independent activities that they understand the intentions of.

For example, students can be finding specific letters in alphabet books or friends names, building letters out of materials, experimenting with writing, or finding items around the room to match letter sound.



Extra Scoop

Some children need multiple opportunities of exposure, or “extra scoops”, in order to grasp concepts. Be responsive by providing them opportunities to slow down, go deeper, or try other ways to explore letters and their sounds. Take time to work one-on-one with these students in meaningful ways, connecting to their interests, favourite songs and stories, and nudging them forward from what they can currently do.

What to look for? (Formative assessment entry points)

- What letters in their names and the alphabet can students recognize by name? By sound?
- Do students understand that there is a relationship between the sound and the symbol? Are students able recognize most letter-sound matches?
- Do students demonstrate curiosity and “ah-ha” moments around the alphabet?
- Are they able to notice commonalities between letters and/or words (common features, same number of letters, same beginning sound, etc.)?
- Do students recognize some familiar words?

What next?

1. If a student is having difficulty wonder: about possible hearing/speech issues, if concepts make sense, have multiple ways been explained, about developmental readiness after this thoughtful analysis and conversation with the child start from what they know and repeat above ideas.
2. If a student is fluent and confident in their understanding of the alphabet they can be encouraged to write and read using what they know. They can also be introduced to sight words, and common sound combinations if this has not already been done (ch, sh, th, wh, ph, ing, ...).

Connections to Real Reading & Writing (language from big ideas)

The goal is that every child become a confident, passionate reader and an empowered writer. Teaching the letters of the alphabet simultaneously, in context, allows children to make connections to meaningful reading and writing while developing an understanding of how the letters help us communicate for a variety of purposes. Isolating letters from their purpose or teaching letters individually one week at a time makes it difficult for learners to apply letter-sound knowledge (Wagstaff, 1998).

References

Wagstaff, J. M. (1997). Building practical knowledge of letter-sound correspondences: A beginner's word wall and beyond. *The Reading Teacher*, 51(4), 298-304.

Jamison Rog, L., (2017) *Reading, Writing, Playing, Learning: Find the Sweet Spots in Kindergarten Literacy*

Morrell, E., Allyn, P. (2016). *Every Child A Super Reader – 7 Strengths to Open a World of Possible*

Reid, J., Schultze, B., Petersen, U., (2012) *What's Next for this Beginning Writer?*

Children's Literature

LMNO Peas – by Keith Baker

Eating the Alphabet – by Lois Ehlert

Chicka Chicka Boom Boom – by Bill Martin Jr.

Alphabet City – by Stephen Johnson

an excessive ALPHABET – Avalanches of As to Zillions of Zs
– by Judi Barret

