Effective Early Literacy Practice

Here’s How, Here’s Why

edited by

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Initially, young children tend to the entire context of EP rather than just the print (Masonheimer et al., 1984). As they grow older, children become able to recognize increasingly decontextualized forms of print. Research has revealed a general developmental progression of EP recognition: an actual three-dimensional object, a two-dimensional color picture of complete logo, a stylized “word art” text from logo, and text in generic font (Cloer, Aldridge, & Dean, 1981; Kuby, Aldridge, & Snyder, 1994). Our research (Christie et al., 2003a; Christie et al., 2003b; Gerard & Prior, 2004; Prior & Gerard, 2004) suggests that teachers can help this progression from full-color, logo-graphic to more decontextualized print by explicitly drawing children's attention to the letters within the word. The following vignette demonstrates how Ms. Jordan, a kindergarten teacher, guides the lesson.

Sitting around a horseshoe table, Ms. Jordan and five kindergarteners begin to match logos to decontextualized print. At the table, Ms. Jordan holds up a Trix logo. She asks the children to look at their five cards to see which of their print cards match. Each child had a set of logos in the final decontextualized form. Ms. Jordon facilitates this activity by asking the following questions:

1. “How do you know that one says ‘Trix’?”
2. “Do any of the others begin with the same letter?”
3. “Is the second letter r?”
4. “Are there any other letters in that word that you know?”
5. “What letter sounds do you hear?”

The activity lasts between 5 and 6 minutes, and then Ms. Jordon invites another group to play with her. She can simplify the difficulty level of the game by using logos that start with different initial letters. However, Ms. Jordon has found that the children really begin to pay close attention to the subsequent letters in the word if she has all the logos begin with the same initial letter. This activity is so successful that she has developed an entire alphabet deck of logos and print (see Figure 2.1 for an example).

Once a teacher has begun to use EP as an instructional approach, he or she can easily build on previous lessons. Introducing consonant blends and digraphs becomes a simple task of reviewing the EP alphabet chart. The following vignette provides an example.

Mr. Terry expands upon the use of the EP alphabet chart when he introduces digraphs and blends to his first-grade students. He begins by reviewing the alphabet charts in the classroom with his students. He focuses their attention on the letter C card and asks the students to see if all the items on the card make
the same /K/ sound. As the children read the logos, they quickly realize that
Chucky Cheese, Cheerios, Cheer, and Cheetos make a very unique sound:
/ch/. Mr. Terry then asks them to see if these words have some letters in com-
mon. The children immediately see the CH digraph. Mr. Terry tells the students
that the /ch/ is so special that it needs its own alphabet card. The following
day, the students ceremoniously remove the CH words from the C card and pin
them to the CH card. Two children, Charlie and Charlene, also ask if they can
put their name tags on the CH card. Another child has brought in an empty
cherry cough drop package. The students place the CH card directly below the
C card. Figure 2.2 provides an example of a C alphabet chart without the logos.
The teacher will be responsible for placing images of the logos on the chart for
the students to identify.
As the vignette with Mr. Terry illustrates, children, with the explicit and specific instruction from a knowledgeable teacher, are quickly able to build their skill in phonemic awareness and letter recognition. The easy accessibility of the EP enables the children to connect old information and expand to new concepts, in this case the CH digraph. Using these highly motivating and visually appealing materials creates a meaningful foundation for learning about the alphabetic principle. In addition, we have found that when teachers use EP as an instructional tool to teach letters and sounds, the print in the child’s community serves as a constant reinforcement of the reading skills they are learning in school.

Another way preschool and primary teachers can use EP is to build sight-word vocabulary and comprehension. The following vignette demonstrates how Mrs. Rhodes, a first-grade teacher, created a rebus story chart with a series of blanks. The intent of her lesson was to build fluency, sight-word recognition, and comprehension.

Mrs. Rhodes noticed her first-grade students were beginning to use context clues to help them read. To encourage this process, she created several simple stories (see Figure 2.3 for an example). She asked the children to listen to the story very carefully. Next, she asked them to read the story again with her. She asked them about the type of words that should go into each spot. The children considered the EP logos that Mrs. Rhodes provided. They tried different versions of the story until they finally agreed upon the best version.
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