



The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool
Letter Knowledge

In *The Creative Curriculum*[®] for Preschool classroom, children have daily opportunities to learn to recognize, name, and write the letters of the alphabet and to associate them with sounds. Teachers take an active role in promoting children’s knowledge of letters and words through meaningful reading and writing experiences. Guided by *Curriculum* resources, teachers offer planned, focused, individualized instruction, promoting letter knowledge as they simultaneously support development in other areas. They help children begin to

- recognize and name upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet,
- associate letter names and symbols with their sounds,
- understand that letter symbols are grouped together in a particular order to form words, and
- experiment with writing letters of the alphabet in the context of writing for a purpose.

These expectations are appropriate, especially given the kindergarten standards in *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts*. Those end-of-kindergarten expectations include recognizing and naming all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet, isolating and pronouncing sounds in simple words, and producing the primary sound for each consonant.

The Creative Curriculum[®] for Preschool provides guidance for promoting letter knowledge intentionally through meaningful activities. The *Curriculum* does not use a decontextualized “letter of the week” approach because that approach often confuses children about the purpose of letters in relation to written words. Rather than suggest that the features, names, and sounds of letters be taught in isolation, the *Curriculum* shows teachers how to talk about letters in the context of reading, writing, and conversation sparked by children’s interests, experiences, and investigations.

The scope and sequence of teaching letter knowledge in *The Creative Curriculum*[®] for Preschool follows the strengths and needs of the individual child, not the group. Rather than introduce letters by the week or in a prescribed order, the *Curriculum* provides a detailed teaching sequence on every *Intentional Teaching Card*[™]. The sequences explain how to individualize the experiences for each child, enabling teachers to scaffold every child’s learning during small-group activities. Instruction for a child who is just beginning to learn a few letters does not hinder the progress of a child who has more letter knowledge. Similarly, instruction for a child who already knows many upper- and lowercase letters does not pressure a child with less knowledge to try to move forward too quickly. Differentiated instruction improves outcomes for all children.

Furthermore, new letters are not always introduced through the same experiences. *Intentional Teaching Cards*[™] present a variety of activities that promote letter knowledge, and each activity can be adjusted easily whenever it is repeated. During new and familiar activities, each child is challenged in a different way to recognize more letters and make more letter–sound associations.

Strategies for Promoting Letter Knowledge

Here are a few of the strategies that teachers use to promote children's letter knowledge in *The Creative Curriculum*[®] classroom. These strategies are discussed in the *The Creative Curriculum*[®] for *Preschool: Foundation*, and their consistent, integrated use is guided by the *Daily Resources*.

Display the alphabet. Teachers post the alphabet at the children's eye level. They make the poster more meaningful by writing the names of the children in the class near the first letters of their names. Smaller alphabet strips or cards are available in interest areas so children can refer to them easily while writing.

Read alphabet books and add them to the library and other interest areas. Some alphabet books with story lines are used for group reading, and other alphabet books are shared one-with-one. Research indicates that use of alphabet books in the classroom "may increase children's letter knowledge and phonological processing skills."¹ As the teacher and child(ren) explore an alphabet book together, they talk about the letters, their shapes, and the names of pictured objects that begin with the letter. The *Teaching Strategies*[®] *Children's Book Collection* includes books that encourage children to explore the alphabet.

Sing the alphabet song and other songs with letter names. Teachers sing the alphabet song to help children become familiar with letter names and alphabetical order. They sing slowly, pronouncing the letter names separately and sometimes

pausing in different places so that children do not slur groups of letters (e.g., so that *l, m, n, o* are not pronounced as the single unit *elemeno*). They often have a large alphabet chart handy so they can point to the letters as they sing with the children.

The *Curriculum* includes short activities, called *Mighty Minutes*[™], which can be used during "in-between" times of day. *Mighty Minutes*[™] include songs, chants, rhymes, and games that emphasize letter knowledge in playful and purposeful ways.

Individualize alphabet instruction, especially during small-group time.

The Creative Curriculum[®] *Teaching Guides* offer daily plans that include frequent *Intentional Teaching Card*[™] activities that promote letter knowledge. The teaching sequence presented on each *Intentional Teaching Card*[™] explains how to adjust the activity according to each child's level of development and learning. This individualized approach enables teachers to challenge each child appropriately.

Encourage sensory exploration of the alphabet. Children often understand concepts more easily when learning experiences involve multiple senses. By feeling as well as seeing letters, they learn more about their shapes and formation. Teachers offer children a variety of ways to explore the alphabet: by using sandpaper, salt trays, clay, magnetic letters, and felt letters, and by forming letters with their bodies. *Intentional Teaching Cards*[™] such as "Textured Letters," "Walk a Letter," "Stick Letters," and "Shaving Cream

Letters” focus on sensory exploration of the alphabet during individualized small-group experiences.

Provide ample time, materials, and space for children to write throughout the day.

In addition to prompting children to write their names, teachers encourage children to write other words that are important to them as they create drawings, paintings, greeting cards, lists, signs, books, and dramatic play props such as menus and tickets. Teachers support children’s writing efforts by saying words slowly so children can write letters for the predominant sounds they hear.

Use children’s names to help them learn alphabet letters and sounds.

Teachers include activities that give children reasons to write their names. Research has shown that children most easily identify letters that are used frequently or that have some personal relevance for them, i.e., letters in environmental print and in their names.² For example, children write their names on drawings, letters, greeting cards, sign-up sheets for popular activities, and attendance sheets. Teachers make name cards available for children to use as resources as they write. To make the cards, teachers print clearly, using upper- and lowercase letters. “Question Basket,” “Writing With Wordless Books,” and “Sunshine Message Board” are examples of *Intentional Teaching Card*[™] activities that give children meaningful reasons to explore writing.

Model writing during daily shared writing experiences.

As teachers write, they say the words slowly, calling attention to each phoneme as they write the corresponding

letter(s). Sometimes they say letter names as they write the letters. They also talk about directionality and letter shapes as they form letters. Shared writing experiences always conclude with the teacher’s fluent reading of the composition so that children associate letters with spoken words and always expect to find meaning in printed texts. The *Curriculum* includes daily plans featuring shared writing as a fundamental component of every large-group experience. The *Intentional Teaching Card*[™] “Shared Writing” explains how to draw children’s attention to the characteristics of written letters and words effectively.

General Information About The Creative Curriculum[®] for Preschool

The Creative Curriculum[®] for Preschool is a comprehensive collection of research-based resources. It encourages exploration and discovery as a way of learning, helping children develop confidence, creativity, and lifelong critical thinking skills. It supports children’s development and learning in relation to 38 objectives that include predictors of school success and that are aligned to state early learning standards and the *Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework*. Several *Curriculum* resources are devoted to early language and literacy development.

The Creative Curriculum[®] for Preschool includes *The Creative Curriculum[®] for Preschool: Foundation*. The five volumes are the knowledge-building resources of the *Curriculum*. Four of those volumes are particularly helpful to teachers as they

develop a comprehensive understanding of how to integrate enjoyable, purposeful literacy experiences throughout the day. *Volume 1: The Foundation* addresses the central components of teaching preschool children effectively. *Volume 2: Interest Areas* offers detailed guidance for setting up the classroom and interacting with children. *Volume 3: Literacy* focuses on early language and literacy learning, including the development of letter knowledge.

Volume 5: Objectives for Development & Learning gives detailed information about the language and literacy objectives. Letter knowledge is addressed by Objective 16, *Demonstrates knowledge of the alphabet*, and by Objective 19, *Demonstrates emergent writing skills*. For those two objectives as well as most others, *Volume 5* presents research findings, progressions of development and learning for the related dimensions, and teaching strategies.

Detailed guidance for addressing letter knowledge is also provided by the *Daily Resources*, including the *Teaching Guides* and particular *Intentional Teaching Cards™*. Letter knowledge is also supported by selected *Mighty Minutes™* and the *Teaching Strategies® Children's Book Collection*.

References

- ¹ Baker, L., Fernandez-Fein, S., Scher, D., & Williams, H. (1998). Home experiences related to the development of word recognition. In J. L. Metsala & L. C. Ehri (Eds.), *Word recognition in beginning literacy* (pp. 263–287). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Murray, B. A., Stahl, S. A., & Ivey, M. G. (1996). Developing phonemic awareness through alphabet books. *Reading and Writing*, 8(4), 307–322.
- ² Honig, B., Diamond, L., & Gutlohn, L. (2000). *CORE teaching reading sourcebook*. Novato, CA: Arena Press.

