# **Alphabet Knowledge and Early Literacy Birth to Five – Virtual KIT**

**Kit QT**

**Introduction**:

Young children’s alphabet knowledge (AK) in preschool is a strong predictor of their later literacy achievement. The National Early Literacy Panel *NELP* (2008) synthesized the research in early literacy to identify the knowledge, skills and abilities that young children need to learn to ensure later literacy development. Four areas emerged as important for young children's early literacy experiences: oral language (which includes vocabulary knowledge), phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print knowledge (National Institute for Literacy, 2009). AK includes knowing letter names, letter shapes, and letter sounds. To become readers, young children must learn each letter has a name that is visually represented by two distinct symbols, an upper- and lower-case letter. They must also understand each letter is associated with one or more speech sounds that can be combined to form words.

Is it necessary and appropriate to teach young children the letters and sounds of the alphabet explicitly? Yes. AK is learned the same way other concepts are learned. Young children need to be intentionally taught about letters and letter sounds. However, they also need hands-on exploration of letters and the opportunity to use letters and sounds through meaningful experiences (e.g. environmental print, name labels, writing notes) in their play. Just surrounding children with letters, alphabet books and letter activities isn’t enough. To take advantage of a literacy-rich environment, children need instruction about letters and their sounds.

What does research tell us about the best ways to teach AK? There is evidence to suggest teaching young children letter names does support their ability to use sound cues contained in the letter names (e.g. /b/ in B, /f/ in F) to learn letter sounds (Phillips & Piasta, 2013). There may also be an advantage to teaching both upper and lower-case letters together rather than teaching first upper and then lower-case letters. (Phillips & Piasta, 2013). Research doesn’t provide much evidence about the best sequence for teaching the alphabet, however we do know that children tend to learn letters that have the most meaning to them first, so beginning with the letters in children’s names provides some advantage (Justice Pence, Bowles, & Wiggins, 2006).There is also evidence to suggest the “*One Letter A Week Method”* may not be the best approach to alphabet instruction (Invernizzi, 2003). When preschool programs go through the alphabet one letter each week, they are not able to get through the alphabet more than one time each school year. This method does not allow opportunities for children to compare and contrast several letters at a time. The article linked below, *Enhancing Alphabet Knoweldge Instruction: Research Implications and Practical Strategies for Early Childhood Educators* suggests a rationale and alternative method that can provide children with multiple rotations through the alphabet in a school year*.*

Families and professionals have an opportunity and responsibility to incorporate language and literacy enhancing experiences into children's daily lives. To do this, they must understand the most current research in early literacy and the evidence-based practices associated with supporting young children's language and literacy development. This Virtual Kit was designed to provide information about Alphabet Knowledge that will support early literacy, birth to five.

**Show me now! (I need this tomorrow.)**

These websites will help you find an evidence-based practice, or the evidence base for your practices.

* [The Alphabetic Principle](http://www.readingrockets.org/article/3408/)
* [NAEYC Position Statement on Learning to Read and Write](http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/learning_readwrite) (.pdf)
* [Using Alphabet Toys and Materials to Provide a Literacy-Rich Environment](http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/cellpract_pract/presch/p_group/alpha_know_grp.pdf) (.pdf)

**What does this look like in practice? (I have a little more time to read about this.)**

* [Print Referencing During Read-Alouds: A Technique for Increasing Emergent Readers’ Print Knowledge](http://earlyliteracyci5823.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/63484896/PrintReference.pdf) (.pdf)
* [N is for Nonsensical](http://www-personal.umich.edu/~sbneuman/pdf/nisfornonsense.pdf) (.pdf)
* [Classroom Strategies for Teaching the Alphabet](http://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/alphabet_matching/)

**What does the ECRC have on this topic?**

Below are selected resources from the Early Childhood Resource Center. For additional resources related to the alphabet knowledge and early literacy go to the KITS [Early Child Resource Center](http://opac.libraryworld.com/cgi-bin/opac.pl?command=signin&libraryname=KITS%20ECRC) and click on ECRC catalogue, or call (620) 421-6550 ext. 1638 for personal assistance.

* Invernizzi, M. (2003). Concepts, sounds, and the ABCs: a diet for a very young reader. In D. M. Barone & L. M. Morrow (Eds.), *Literacy and young children: research-based practices*. New York: Guilford Press.
* Justice, L. M. & Vukelich, C. (Eds.) (2008). *Achieving excellence in preschool literacy instruction.* New York: Guilford Press.
* Justice, L. M. & SOfka, A. E. (2010). *Engaging children with print: building early literacy skills through quality read-alouds.*  New York: Guildford Press.
* Justice, L. M., Pence, K., Bowles, R. B., & Wiggins, A. (2006). An investigation of four hypotheses concerning the order by which 4-year-old children learn the alphabet letters. *(Kansas educators can request a copy of this journal article by emailing your request to the* *ECRC**.)*
* Paulson, L. H., Noble, L. A., Jeson, S., van den Pol, R. (2001). *Building early literacy and language skills.* Longmont, Co.: Sopris West.
* Schickendanz, J. (2012). *Much more that the ABC’s: the early stages of reading and writing.* Washington D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
* Schickedanz, J. & Casbergue, R. M. (2009). *Writing in Preschool: Learning to Orchestrate Meaning and Marks.* Newark, Del.: International Reading Association
* Shanahan, T., & Lonigan, C. J. (Eds.). (2012). *Early childhood literacy: the National Early Literacy Panel and beyond*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
* Strickland, D. S. & Schickedanz, J. A. (2009). *Learning about print in preschool: working with letters, words, and beginning links with phonemic awareness*. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.

**How can I find training materials on this topic?**

* [Self-Guided Learning Module for Literacy-Rich Environments](http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/ta_pdf/SelfGuided_Module_LRE.pdf) (.pdf)
* [CONNECT Module: Dialogic Reading Practices](http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connect-modules/learners/module-6/introduction)

Visit the KITS online Collaborative Calendar located on the website to find out if there might be an upcoming training related to this topic.

**What if I still need help?**

Contact KITS by e-mail to request assistance.

**If you thought this kit was helpful, you might also like ….**

* [Kansas Kids Ready for Learning: Language and Literacy](http://readyforlearning.net/html/langdev.shtml)

**Evaluation**

Please take a minute to complete a brief survey located on the Virtual Kits page on the website to let us know what you think about this virtual kit, and what other topics you would like to see addressed in the future.

**References:**

Invernizzi, M. (2003). Concepts, sounds, and the ABCs: a diet for a very young reader. In D. M. Barone & L. M. Morrow (Eds.), *Literacy and young children: research-based practices*. New York: Guilford Press.

Justice, L. M., Pence, K., Bowles, R. B., & Wiggins, A. (2006). An investigation of four hypotheses concerning the order by which 4-year-old children learn the alphabet letters.

National Early Literacy Panel. (2008). Developing early literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel. Washington DC: National Institute for Literacy.

National Institute for Literacy. (2009). Early Beginnings: Early Literacy Knowledge and Instruction. Jessup, MD: U.S. Department of Education.

Phillips, B. M., & Piasta, S. B. (2013). Phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge: key precursors and instructional targets to promote reading success. In T. Shanahan & C. J. Lonigan (Eds.), *Early childhood literacy: the National Early Literacy Panel and beyond* (pp. 95-116). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.