Classrooms That Work

They Can All Read and Write

SIXTH EDITION

6

Patricia Cunningham **Richard Allington**

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They Can All Read and Write

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Full-Service Project Management: Cenveo® Publisher Services
Composition: Cenveo Publisher Services
Printer/Binder: Edwards Brothers Malloy/Jackson Rd.
Cover Printer: Edwards Brothers Malloy/Jackson Rd.
Text Font: Times LT Std

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

PEARSON

www.pearsonhighered.com

ISBN-10: 0-13-408959-6
ISBN-13: 978-0-13-408959-1

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Preface

IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE we are revising *Classrooms That Work* for the sixth time! Much has changed since we first wrote this book in the early nineties. Systematic phonics programs have replaced whole language as the dominant organizing theme for literacy instruction. Struggling readers are found in the bottom reading group in primary grades and in the low track in intermediate grades. Reading First mandated that all children read at grade level and that their reading progress be regularly monitored. Response to Intervention mandated that schools demonstrate that struggling readers were receiving appropriate classroom instruction and targeted Tier 2 instruction if they were not making adequate progress in their classroom Tier 1 instruction. Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts, which intend for all students to graduate from high school ready for college or career, were adopted by the majority of states. To date, there is no evidence that these changes have made things better for children who struggle with reading and writing.

In the first edition of *Classrooms That Work*, we applauded the authentic reading and writing experiences provided in whole-language classrooms but expressed our fears that children were not being given enough instruction in decoding and spelling. We made the case for balanced, comprehensive literacy instruction that included authentic reading and writing, along with explicit instruction in the skills that would enable children to successfully engage in reading and writing. Of course, the pendulum has once again swung too far. In many classrooms with a lot of at-risk readers, skills instruction, worksheets, and test prep absorb a huge amount of time and energy, leaving little place for actually engaging in reading and writing.

The most effective classrooms described in Chapter 1 are classrooms that do it all! Authentic reading and writing are combined with explicit skills instruction. Daily instruction includes some whole-class teaching, some one-to-one conferences, and both teacher-led and collaborative groupings. Literacy instruction takes place during the reading/language arts time and throughout the day as the students learn math, science, and social studies. The teachers in these classrooms believe all their students can learn to read and write well and don't believe in an "either–or" approach to their teaching.

The original *Classrooms That Work* argued that all children—particularly children who struggle with reading and writing—need balanced, comprehensive literacy instruction. Our schools today have more children from racial and ethnic minority groups, more children who are learning English, more children from single-parent homes, and more children living in poverty. The need for balanced, comprehensive literacy instruction that pervades the school day and curriculum is greater now than ever. We have revised this book to help you better meet the needs of our increasingly diverse classrooms.

Like many of you, we worry about how Common Core is going to affect the literacy instruction received by struggling readers. Our greatest fear is that because Common Core raises the level of material students are expected to read at each grade level, struggling readers will not be engaging in the on-their-level and easy reading that all readers need to become confident, fluent readers. On the other hand, we are encouraged by the focus of the Common Core on higher-level thinking and comprehension and on including more informational text in our reading instruction at all grade levels. Children who struggle with reading can, and should, be expected to engage in higher-level, and critical, thinking about what they read. Many struggling readers are boys and boys generally prefer informational text over story text. Once they learn how to use the visuals and other special features informational texts provide, they are often more successful at reading informational text.

The other features of the Common Core that we like are its inclusion of the forgotten language arts—listening, speaking, and writing. Children are expected to talk with one another about what they are learning, to write informational and persuasive pieces about what they are learning, and to conduct research and make presentations to extend their learning.

Common Core raises the bar for all children. We have revised *Classrooms That Work* to provide more support for you as you work to help all your children rise to the challenge. Here are the major changes we have made:

New to This Edition

We have added a new chapter on reading informational text. In Chapter 8, you will find many lesson frameworks you can adapt to teach your students how to read informational text. Each lesson framework is illustrated with a sample lesson and each lesson incorporates the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model. At the beginning of the lesson, you model and show your students how they need to think and what they are to do. We call this phase, "I Do and You Watch." "I Do and You Watch" is followed by the "I Do and You Help" phase in which the class helps you to think and do something. Next, students meet in their trios to work together to complete the task. In this "You Do It Together and I Help" phase, students talk to and teach each other how to do the kind of thinking required by the task. As you continue to teach lessons with different text using the same lesson framework, you fade out some of the modeling and help. When your formative assessments indicate that all your students have learned to do the kind of thinking the lesson is focused on, you have them complete the task independently. This is the final phase in the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, "You Do and I Watch." We believe that using these lesson frameworks specifically designed for informational text and providing lots of scaffolding in the early lessons and gradually fading out that scaffolding will greatly increase the success and confidence of your struggling readers with informational text.

Recognizing the importance of meaning vocabulary to comprehension, the Common Core includes a reading standard and two language standards that pertain specifically to meaning vocabulary. These standards require that students learn how to figure out appropriate meanings for words they encounter. This is particularly important for struggling readers who, when encountering a new word while reading on their own, are very apt to just skip over that word without thinking about what it means. This "Skip it!" habit is probably one of the major reasons most struggling readers have meaning vocabulary deficits, and meaning vocabulary is highly correlated with comprehension. To teach students how to use all the clues in the text—context, pictures, and morphology—to figure out word meanings, we have added a *Word Detectives* lesson framework to Chapter 6. This lesson, like the comprehension lessons, follows the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model. Across the year, you fade the scaffolding provided by you and the small group, and you expect all your students to be able to independently figure out word meanings for new words they encounter in reading.

As in previous editions, the writing chapter, Chapter 9, includes suggestions for making Writer's Workshop the centerpiece of your writing instruction. In addition, this chapter provides lesson frameworks and guidelines for teaching students to write the informational, opinion, and narrative pieces required in the Common Core. Chapter 10 gives you practical suggestions for integrating writing with math, science, and social studies and for teaching lessons that connect reading and writing.

The final big change in this edition can be found in Chapter 12. The first 11 chapters of this book detail for you what we think is the best, most comprehensive Tier 1 classroom instruction. In Chapter 12, you will find diagnostic procedures you can use to truly target your Tier 2 interventions for struggling readers who are not making adequate progress with this "state-of-the-art" classroom instruction. You will learn how to quickly determine whether comprehension, word identification, or fluency is the greatest roadblock for each of your struggling readers and which interventions are apt to be the most effective.

It is hard for us to believe that we are writing the sixth edition of this book and even harder to believe that it was over 20 years ago when we wrote it originally. Back then, we thought we knew all there was to know about teaching all children to read and write. Twenty plus years later, we are smart enough to know we will never know it all!

Thank you to the following reviewers: Christie L. Brown, Clear Spring Elementary School, Hagerstown, MD; Leslie Hopping, Granville Intermediate School, Granville, Ohio; Cerissa Stevenson, Colorado State University; and Victoria A. Tabeek, MacMurray College.

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Creating Classrooms **That Work**

HOW WELL DOES YOUR CLASSROOM WORK? If you are like most teachers, you might respond, "Some days better than others" or "Most days, things work pretty well." Or you might answer the question with a question, "What do you mean by 'work'?"

In 1994, when the first edition of this book was published, it had a bold and optimistic title: *Classrooms That Work: They Can* All *Read and Write*. The claim that *all* children could learn to read and write was, at the time, not widely accepted. In January of 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law by President George W. Bush. Reading First specified how NCLB was to be implemented. Reading First required states to assess student progress in reading and schools were penalized if they failed to make AYP—Adequate Yearly Progress. Reading First specified that by 2014, all children were expected to read on grade-level. Unfortunately, this important goal of teaching all children to read well was not achieved by the costly and widely implemented Reading First initiative.

Although Reading First did not require the implementation of specific commercial reading programs, it did require that curricula had to be based on "scientific" research. The effect of this requirement and the way it was implemented was that almost all schools that received federal funds adopted one of a few commercial reading programs. These programs in the early grades focused almost exclusively on phonics instruction and what students read consisted of "highly decodable" texts in which the words were controlled according to which phonics principles had been taught. The programs were also scripted, specifying in the teacher's guide exactly what the teacher should say and how much time should be spent on each part of the lesson. Many school systems, fearful that teachers would deviate from the script, hired monitoring services to ensure fidelity of implementation.

Several large-scale evaluation studies have demonstrated that Reading First was not effective in raising reading achievement scores and that many children were left behind. In the executive summary of the federal government's official final report on the impact of Reading First, the evaluators (Gamse, Jacob, Horst, Boulay, & Unlu, 2008) concluded that there was no consistent pattern of effects over time in the impact estimates for reading instruction in grade one or in reading comprehension in any grade and that there appeared to be a systematic decline in reading instruction impacts in grade two.

In addition to this large evaluation study, results from the National Assessment of Education Progress in Reading (NAEP-Reading) demonstrate the lack of effectiveness of Reading First. In the 2009 NAEP-Reading, seven years into the implementation of Reading First and more than halfway to 2014, 33 percent of America's fourth-graders scored below the Basic level and 67 percent scored below the Proficient level. Only 8 percent performed at the Advanced level (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Moreover, Reading First failed to reduce achievement gaps in reading. The gap between Hispanic and Caucasian fourth- and eighth-graders on the NAEP-Reading Test remained the same size in 2009 as it had been in 1992 (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2010).

The failure of Reading First is a fact. We are left to infer why it failed. The argument that it failed because it wasn't implemented correctly does not hold water because of the scripted reading programs, the extreme pressure on schools to achieve AYP, and the fidelity monitoring many schools put into place. The failure of Reading First can probably be attributed to two factors—the narrow scope of the instruction and the scripted nature of that instruction.

Instruction in the programs adopted by Reading First schools was focused almost exclusively on phonics and fluency. Vocabulary and comprehension instruction were largely left until the later elementary years when students should have mastered phonics skills and be reading fluently. Lesaux and Kieffer (2010) gave a standardized reading comprehension test to 581 urban sixth-graders and found that 45 percent of them scored at or below the 35th percentile. The 262 struggling readers were then given a battery of tests to determine their relative strengths and weaknesses on the major components of

reading. Decoding, as measured by nonsense words, was above average for 78.6 percent of the struggling readers and a relative strength for the majority of the rest. Fluency was at least average or a relative strength for the majority of struggling readers. What the struggling readers had most in common was low meaning vocabulary knowledge. This study and others similar to it demonstrate that the near exclusive focus under Reading First on phonics and fluency did not prevent us from having struggling readers or teach them what they would need to know to be able to comprehend satisfactorily when they reach the upper elementary grades and middle school.

One of the most basic principles of effective instruction is that teachers must tailor their instruction to the needs of their students. In a scripted program, you can't do that and if you do deviate from the script and one of the watchers happens to be sitting at the back of your classroom, you will be "called down" for your lack of fidelity.

Teachers we have worked with have cited many instances of this kind of monitoring. The one that is most egregious and hard to believe unless you heard it firsthand was from the African-American first-year teacher who told us he was marked down on the evaluation for not following the script. Following the script from the manual, he introduced the word *Caribbean* before students had read it. A student raised his hand and asked, "Where is that Caribbean?" This fledgling teacher pulled down the map, located the Caribbean, and then continued the lesson as scripted. He received an unsatisfactory evaluation. Locating the Caribbean on the map was not in the script!

In hindsight, we should not be surprised by the failure of Reading First. In fact, if focusing instruction primarily on phonics and fluency and doing that instruction in a scripted way had worked, it would have contradicted much that decades of research, experience, and common sense have taught us.

Observing in the Classrooms of Unusually Effective Teachers

Reading First didn't work but we know what does work. All over the country—in rural, suburban, and urban areas—there are classrooms where, year after year, *all* the children succeed in learning to read and write. We know what happens in these overachieving classrooms. We know what kinds of environment, instruction, and activities the teachers provide that result in all children becoming readers and writers. In this chapter we will invite you into the classrooms of unusually effective teachers by sharing the observations of some very clever researchers. We will then summarize some of the characteristics you would see if you could be a "fly on the wall" in one of these "odds-beating" classrooms.

One of the first research studies that actually observed what was happening in classrooms to try to determine effective classroom practice was conducted by Michael Knapp in 140 classrooms in moderate- to high-poverty areas of California, Ohio, and Maryland (Knapp, 1995). After two years of observations, Knapp concluded that classrooms with the highest achievement gains were classrooms in which teachers:

- Emphasized higher-order meaning construction more than lower-order skills
- Maximized opportunities to read
- Integrated reading and writing with other subject areas
- Provided opportunities to discuss what was read

A team of researchers headed by Ruth Wharton-McDonald (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998) carried out the first extensive observational study to determine what actually happens in the classrooms of outstanding first-grade teachers. Administrators in school districts in upstate New York nominated "exemplary" first-grade teachers as well as "more-typical—solid but not outstanding"—first-grade teachers. In choosing the exemplary teachers, administrators were asked to consider their own observations of the teacher; teacher, parent, and student enthusiasm; the reading and writing achievement of children in that classroom; and the ability of the teacher to teach children with a wide range of abilities.

Five outstanding teachers and five more-typical teachers were identified, and the researchers made multiple visits to their classrooms across one school year. In addition to being observed, the teachers were interviewed across the year about their teaching and how they made decisions. Throughout the year, the observers also looked for indicators of how well the children in these 10 classrooms were reading and writing.

At the end of the year, the researchers reclassified the teachers according to the achievement of the children. Three classes had unusually high achievement. Most of the students in these three classrooms were reading books at or above first-grade level. They wrote pieces longer than a page in length, and their writing showed reasonably good coherence, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. These three classes with the highest reading and writing achievement also had the highest levels of engagement. Most of the students were working productively on reading and writing most of the time.

The researchers then looked at the observation and interview data from these three classrooms with the highest levels of reading, writing, and engagement and compared them with the data from other classrooms. Although there were many similarities across all classrooms, the three outstanding first-grade classes differed from the others in significant ways:

- All of the teachers provided both skills instruction and reading and writing, but the teachers in the highest-achieving classrooms integrated skills teaching with reading and writing.
- Every minute of time in the highest-achieving classrooms was used well. Teachers in these classrooms turned even mundane routines into instructional events.
- Teachers in the highest-achieving classrooms used lots of scaffolding and coaching—providing support but always trying to get the most out of every child.
- Teachers in the highest-achieving classrooms constantly emphasized self-regulation and self-monitoring.
- In the high-achieving classrooms, reading and writing instruction was often integrated. Reading and writing were also integrated with content areas, and teachers made many cross-curricular connections.
- Teachers in the high-achieving classes had high expectations for their children—both for their learning to read and write and for their behavior. Students knew how they were expected to act and behaved accordingly most of the time.
- Teachers in the high-achieving classrooms were excellent classroom managers.

Encouraged by the results of the Wharton-McDonald study and supported by a large grant, faculty at the University of Albany and other researchers planned and carried out an observational study of first-grade classrooms in five states (Pressley, Allington,

Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001). Thirty exemplary or typical teachers were identified in New York, New Jersey, Texas, Wisconsin, and California, and year-long observations and interviews were conducted in their classrooms. At the end of the year, each teacher identified six students—two low achieving, two middle achieving, and two high achieving—and these children were administered a standardized reading test. Based on the results of this test, a most effective and a least effective teacher were identified for each of the five locations. Comparing observations in the classrooms of the most and least effective teachers revealed the following characteristics of the most effective classrooms:

- Skills were explicitly taught and related to reading and writing.
- Books were everywhere and used in a variety of ways—read aloud by the teacher and read and listened to on tape by the children.
- Children did a lot of reading and writing throughout the day and for homework.
- Teachers had high but realistic expectations of children and monitored progress regularly.
- Self-regulation was modeled and expected. Children were taught to check and reflect on their work and to make wise choices.
- Cross-curricular connections were made as children read and wrote while studying science and social studies themes.
- Classrooms were caring, positive, cooperative environments, in which discipline issues were handled quickly and quietly.
- Classroom management was excellent and teachers used a variety of grouping structures, including whole class, one-to-one teaching, and a variety of small groups.
- Classrooms showed high student engagement. Ninety percent of the students were engaged in their reading and writing work 90 percent of the time.

The researchers followed up their first-grade observational study by looking at exemplary teachers in fourth grade (Allington & Johnson, 2002). Thirty fourth-grade teachers from five states were identified. Classroom observations took place for 10 days in each classroom. Teachers and children were interviewed. Samples of student writing, reading logs, and end-of-year achievement tests provided information about the reading and writing abilities of the children. From their observations, interviews, and data, the researchers concluded that the following variables distinguished the most effective fourth-grade classrooms from the less effective fourth-grade classrooms:

- All kinds of real conversations took place regularly in the most effective classrooms. Children had conversations with each other and teachers had conversations with children.
- Through their conversations and in their instruction, teachers constantly modeled thinking strategies. More emphasis was put on How could we find out? than on right and wrong answers.
- All kinds of materials were used for reading and writing. Teachers "dipped" into reading, science, and social studies textbooks but rarely followed the lesson plans for these materials. Students read historical novels, biographies, and informational books. Magazines and the Internet were used to gather information.

- Word study focused on building interest in words and on looking for patterns in words.
- Learner interest and engagement were important variables in the teachers' planning. Teachers taught the standard curriculum but tailored it to their students' interests, needs, strengths, and weaknesses.
- *Managed choice* was a common feature in these classrooms. Students were often presented with a topic or problem and allowed to choose which part of it they would pursue and what resources they would use.
- Instruction took place in a variety of formats. Whole-class, various types of small groups, and side-by-side teaching were seen throughout the day.
- Students were expected to work collaboratively and take responsibility for their learning. Working together was valued. When problems occurred, teachers helped students figure out how to solve these problems so the group could successfully complete its task.
- Reading and writing were integrated with science and social studies. Many of the books chosen for the class to read tied into science and social studies topics.
- Teachers evaluated student work with consideration for improvement, progress, and effort. Self-evaluation was also encouraged and modeled.

In the late 1990s, Barbara Taylor, David Pearson, and other researchers at the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) began investigating school and classroom practices in schools with unexpectedly high achievement and compared them to what was happening in similar schools in which the children were not "beating the odds" (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000). They identified 70 first-, second-, and third-grade teachers from 14 schools in Virginia, Minnesota, Colorado, and California. Teachers were observed monthly and kept weekly logs of instructional activities. They also completed a questionnaire on their reading/language arts instructional practices. Some of the teachers and principals also participated in interviews. In each classroom, data were gathered for two low and two average readers in the fall and in the spring. When comparing the classroom practices of the most effective teachers with those of the less effective teachers, researchers concluded that the most effective teachers shared these qualities:

- Had higher pupil engagement
- Provided more small-group instruction
- Provided more coaching to help children improve in word recognition
- Asked more higher-level comprehension questions
- Communicated more with parents
- Had children engage in more independent reading

For a peek into preschool and kindergarten classrooms that work, we invite you into classrooms observed by Connie Juel and associates (Juel, Biancarosa, Coker, & Deffes, 2003), who followed 200 low-income urban children from preschool to first grade. Juel and her associates tracked the development of these young children in two important areas—decoding and oral vocabulary. While it is generally accepted that young children need to develop phonemic awareness and phonics skills to become successful readers, meaning vocabulary—that is, the number of words students have meanings for in their speaking and listening vocabularies—is often ignored. Meaning vocabulary, however, is

essential to comprehension, and deficits in the oral vocabularies of young children are apt to show up as comprehension deficits in future years.

When the 200 children were evaluated on their decoding and meaning vocabulary skills as they entered preschool, most showed deficits in both areas. The children improved in their decoding skills each year. By the middle of first grade, their average decoding scores were slightly above national norms. Although the children did make gains in oral vocabulary between preschool and first grade, they never caught up to national norms. In their vocabulary development, these low-income children were as far behind (nearly one standard deviation) in first grade as they had been in preschool.

Juel and her associates then looked at their classroom observations and coded all the instruction observed into five categories: letter-sound, oral language, anchored word, reading, and writing. The only category of activities that had a positive effect on oral vocabulary was anchored word instruction. Anchored word instruction was defined using an example from Pat Hutchins's *Rosie's Walk*:

> The teacher had printed the words *pond, mill* and *haystack* on large cards which she places on the floor in front of her students. As she rereads the story, she points to the word cards and asks the students to walk around them the way Rosie walks around each of the locations in the book. The class discusses the meaning of the words *pond, mill* and *haystack.* (p. 13)

The article goes on to explain that the teacher then helps children with the sounds in the words *pond, mill,* and *haystack* but only after having the children actively involved in adding these words to their oral vocabularies. Choosing important words from reading, printing them on cards, and focusing specifically on their meanings is what Juel defines as *anchored word instruction*.

First-graders who had experienced more anchored word instruction had higher oral vocabulary scores. This increase occurred for children who entered preschool with low, average, and high levels of oral vocabulary. Conversely, the oral vocabulary scores of children in classrooms that spent the largest amount of time in letter-sound instruction decreased. This decrease in scores occurred for children who entered preschool with low, average, and high levels of oral vocabulary. Juel concluded her research with one of the best arguments for the need for balanced instruction at all grade levels:

> Ultimately, effective early reading instruction must help students learn to identify words and know their meanings. With so much research emphasizing the importance of early development in both word reading and language skills, we must consider how to provide instruction that fosters students' vocabulary development without losing the promising results of effective instruction in decoding. It does little good, after all, to be able to sound out the words *pond, mill* and *haystack* if you have no idea what they mean. (p. 18)

Observing in the Most Successful Schools

In 2005, Pat Cunningham conducted a study of effective schools (Cunningham, 2006; 2007). She identified six schools with high levels of poverty and large numbers of children who passed their states' literacy tests. The six schools were located in five different states. All but one school were located in medium-sized cities in the midwest, northeast, and

southeast. The non-urban school was on an army base. The percentage of children in these schools who qualified for free/reduced-price lunch ranged from 68 to 98 percent. Students in two of the schools were predominately Hispanic and most of these students were English language learners. One school was almost exclusively African American. Two of the schools had mixed populations of children, with approximately half Caucasian and half African-American students. In the army base school, 70 percent of the students were Caucasian. The tests taken by the students varied according to the states in which they were located. Scores on the 2005 state literacy tests indicated that between 68 and 87 percent of students met or exceeded the state's standards for proficiency. All six schools scored better on their literacy tests than other schools in their districts that had lower levels of poverty.

The third factor all six schools shared was that they used the Four Blocks framework to organize their literacy instruction. Four Blocks, a framework for balanced literacy in the primary grades, began in the 1989 school year in one first-grade classroom (Cunningham, Hall, & Defee, 1991). Since then, it has expanded to include a Building Blocks framework in kindergarten and a Big Blocks framework in upper grades. At all grade levels, instructional time and emphasis is divided between a Words Block, which includes sight words, fluency, phonics, and spelling; a Guided Reading Block, which focuses on comprehension strategies for story and informational text and building prior knowledge and meaning vocabulary; a Writing Block, which includes both process writing and focused writing; and a Self-Selected Reading Block, which includes teacher read-alouds and independent reading.

The six schools had three things in common: They had large numbers of poor children, they had done better than expected on their states' literacy tests, and they all used the Four Blocks framework. What did they do that allowed them to achieve their success? To attempt to answer this question, 12 factors were identified that research suggests are important to high literacy achievement: assessment, community involvement, comprehensive curriculum, engagement, instruction, leadership, materials, parent participation, perseverance, professional development, specialist support, and time spent reading and writing. Through interviews and school visits, it was determined that all 12 factors were valued by all six schools and played important roles in school decision making. To determine which of the 12 factors was most important to the schools' success, teachers and administrators completed a survey in which they ranked these 12 factors according to their perceived importance.

None of these factors is unimportant, but when the teachers and administrators in these schools were forced to decide what contributed most to their success, *time spent reading and writing*, the *engagement* of their students in the literacy activities, and their *perseverance* in sticking with the Four Blocks framework were ranked as the most important factors.

The final evidence of what works in raising reading achievement comes from Chula Vista, California (Fisher, Frey, & Nelson, 2012). Chula Vista is a large school district with more than 27,000 K–6 students. The high level of poverty in Chula Vista is evidenced by the fact that 45 percent of their students qualify for free/reduced-price lunch and only 13 percent of the students are Caucasian. In 2002, only two of Chula Vista's 44 elementary schools performed satisfactorily according to the California Academic Performance Index (API). Chula Vista implemented Reading First by purchasing a commercial reading program, providing teachers with 120 hours of professional development on how to use the reading program, and observing teachers daily to ensure the fidelity of implementation. By 2004, after two years of using the scripted reading program, nine of 44 schools performed satisfactorily on the API.

In 2005, Chula Vista abandoned the idea that scripted instruction could achieve their goals of teaching all children to read and adapted a model based on developing teacher expertise in reading instruction and supporting teachers in teaching reading lessons based on the needs and interests of students. They adopted the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model of instruction (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) in which teachers first modeled and scaffolded the comprehension strategies they were teaching, then had the students practice the strategies in small groups, and, finally, asked students to perform the strategies independently. Across the next several years, leadership teams conducted regular classroom walk-throughs and provided professional development to teachers based on the instruction they observed. Scores on the 2011 tests indicated that 41 of Chula Vista's 44 schools now performed satisfactory on the California API.

What We Know About Effective Classrooms

Based on the research studies of effective classrooms and schools, we can draw some firm conclusions about what it takes to create classrooms in which all the children learn to read and write.

The Most Effective Classrooms Provide Huge Amounts of Balanced, Comprehensive Instruction

Balance is an overused word these days, but it is still an important concept in classroom instruction. Balance can be thought of as a multiple vitamin. We know that many vitamins are required for good health, and we try to eat a balanced diet. Many of us take a multiple vitamin each day as extra insurance that we are getting all the most important nutrients. The most effective teachers provide all the important ingredients that go into creating thoughtful, avid readers and writers. Exceptional teachers teach skills and strategies and also provide lots of time each day for children to read and write. The Juel study, in particular, points out the importance of balance (Juel et al., 2003). When teachers spend too much time on one component—teaching decoding—the development of another important component—meaning vocabulary—suffers.

Children in the Most Effective Classrooms Do a Lot of Reading and Writing

We have long known that the amount of reading and writing children do is directly related to how well they read and write. Classrooms in which all the students learned to read and write are classrooms in which the teachers gave more than "lip service" to the importance of actually engaging in reading and writing. They planned their time so that children did a lot of reading and writing throughout the day—not just in the 100 minutes set aside for reading and language arts.

Science and Social Studies Are Taught and Integrated with Reading and Writing

In a misguided effort to raise test scores, some schools have eliminated science and social studies in the primary grades and asked teachers just to focus on "the basics." Unfortunately,

children who have not had regular science and social studies instruction usually enter the intermediate grades with huge vocabulary deficits. Science and social studies are the "knowledge" part of the curriculum. Young children need to be increasing the size and depth of their meaning vocabularies so that they can comprehend the more sophisticated and less familiar text they will be reading as they get older. Exemplary teachers don't choose reading and writing over science and social studies. Rather, they integrate reading and writing with the content areas. As children engage in science and social studies units, they have daily opportunities to increase the size of their meaning and knowledge stores and real reasons for reading and writing.

Meaning Is Central and Teachers Emphasize Higher-Level Thinking Skills

In today's society, where almost every job requires a high level of literacy, employers demand that the people they hire be able to communicate well and thoughtfully as they read and write. Low levels of literal comprehension and basic writing are no longer acceptable in the workplace. The most effective teachers emphasize higher-level thinking skills from the beginning. They ask questions that do not have just one answer. They engage students in conversations and encourage them to have conversations with one another. They teach students to problem solve, self-regulate, and monitor their own comprehension. Classrooms in which all the children learn to read and write are classrooms in which meaning is central to all instruction and activities.

Skills and Strategies Are Explicitly Taught, and Children Are Coached to Use Them While Reading and Writing

Excellent teachers know what strategies children need to be taught, and they teach these explicitly—often through modeling and demonstration. More importantly, these excellent teachers never lose sight of the goals of their instruction. When working with children in a small group or in a one-on-one reading or writing setting, these teachers remind children to use what they have been taught. Because the children are doing a lot of reading and writing, they have numerous opportunities to apply what they are learning and to do so independently.

Teachers Use a Variety of Formats to Provide Instruction

The argument about whether instruction is best presented in a whole-class, a small-group, or an individual setting is settled when you observe excellent teachers. Teachers who get the best results from their children use a variety of formats, depending on what they want to accomplish. In addition to providing whole-class, small-group, and individual instruction themselves, excellent teachers use a variety of collaborative grouping arrangements to allow children to learn from one another. Excellent teachers group children in a variety of ways and change these groupings from day to day, depending on what format they determine will best achieve their goals.

A Wide Variety of Materials Are Used

In some schools today, there is a constant search for the "magic bullet" to increase reading achievement. "What program should we buy?" is the question these schools ask. Not a single one of the exemplary teachers found in the various observational studies was using

only one program or set of materials. All the teachers gathered and used the widest range of materials available to them. Administrators who restrict teachers to any one set of materials will find no support for this decision in the research on outstanding teachers.

Classrooms Are Well Managed and Have High Levels of Engagement

In order to learn, children must be in a safe and orderly environment. If there are many disruptions and behavior management issues in a classroom, they will take the teacher's time away from teaching and the children's focus away from learning. All the teachers in the most effective classrooms had excellent classroom management. They expected children to behave in a kind and courteous manner and made these expectations known. These classrooms all had high levels of engagement. Almost all the children were doing what they were supposed to be doing almost all the time. If this seems a bit unreal to you, think about all the factors underlying these well-managed, highly engaging classrooms. Instead of doing a lot of worksheets and repetitive drills, the children were engaged in a lot of reading and writing. Because the teachers took into account the interests and needs of the children, the students were interested in what they were reading and writing. The fourth-grade classrooms, in particular, featured a great amount of managed choice and collaborative learning. Children spent time investigating topics they cared about with friends with whom they were encouraged to have conversations. Teachers focused their evaluations on improvement and progress, and they guided the children in becoming self-reliant and responsible for their own learning. Classrooms in which the activities seem real and important to the children are classrooms in which children are more engaged with learning and less apt to find reasons to be disruptive.

Common Core Raises the Bar

While schools across the nation were working to implement Reading First and becoming increasingly frustrated with the results they were getting, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers were working to develop high-quality education standards. These Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (CCSS-ELA) specify what K–12 students should be able to do at each grade level in the areas of reading, writing, language, speaking, and listening (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010). In developing these standards, the governors and chief state school officers worked backward from their previously developed College and Career Readiness (CCR) standards. The standards are very rigorous and require elementary students to engage in higher-level thinking, synthesis, and analysis, as they read or listen, to write well-formulated, mechanically correct opinion, informational and narrative pieces, and to conduct and summarize research. By the end of fifth grade, students are expected to be able to integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the topic knowledgeably—a task that would be challenging for many college graduates!

The majority of states have adopted the CCSS-ELA standards and teachers are working to provide instruction that will help students meet the very high standards and pass the tests that will evaluate how well the students—and teachers—are doing in the quest to be college and career ready!

Creating Your Classroom That Works

From the first edition to the current edition, we have been writing this book for you—the classroom teacher. It has been clear to everyone for decades that the teacher is the most important variable in how well children learn to read and write. In 1967, the results of the first-grade studies were reported. Teams of investigators examined the effectiveness of programs and approaches for teaching beginning reading. The principal finding of this seminal and national study was summarized by Bond and Dykstra (1967):

> "to improve reading instruction, it is necessary to train better teachers of reading rather than to expect a panacea in the form of methods and materials" (p. 416).

The critical role of the teacher in determining reading achievement was confirmed by Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges (2004) in a large study that showed that teacher effects were more powerful than any other variable, including class size and socioeconomic status. Although there are many restrictions on what elementary classroom teachers can do, most teachers are still given a great deal of freedom in deciding exactly how their classrooms will be run, how the various materials will be used, what the daily schedule will be like, what kinds of instructional formats they will use, how they will monitor and assess the progress of their students, and how they will create a well-managed, engaging environment. By learning from the most exemplary teachers—teachers who "beat the odds" in helping all their children achieve thoughtful literacy—you can create classrooms that work *even better* than they have in the past. You can teach all your students to read and write at the high levels required for them to be college and career ready.

2

Creating **Independent Readers**

IN CHAPTER 1, we described the characteristics of classrooms that work—classrooms in which all the children become the very best readers and writers they can be. These classrooms share many important features. Teachers in these classrooms provide a comprehensive curriculum and devote time and energy to all the important components of literacy. They model, demonstrate, and encourage. They emphasize meaning and integrate reading and writing with each other and with the content areas. They use a variety of groupings and side-by-side teaching. They use a wide assortment of materials and are not tied to any one published program. They have excellent classroom management, based primarily on engaging their students in meaningful and worthwhile endeavors. Children spend a lot of their time actually engaged in reading and writing.

In this chapter, we will focus on the essential component that must be in place in any classroom where all the children learn to read and write. In order to become literate, children must become readers. Readers are not just children who *can* read—they are children who *do* read. The amount of reading children do is highly correlated with how well they read. The number of words in your meaning vocabulary store is directly related to how much you read, and your reading comprehension is heavily dependent on having meanings for the words you read. *Fluency*—the ability to read quickly and with expression—is also related to how much you read.

Reading is complex, and teaching children to read is equally complex. The fact that children must do a lot of reading to become good readers, however, is simple and straightforward. Because creating enthusiastic and independent readers is the essential foundation on which all good instruction can be built, we begin this book by describing how to create classrooms in which all children become readers. We hope that as you think about how to make your classroom one in which all children become readers, you will begin by considering how much and how willingly they read and what steps you can take to increase both those levels.

Assess and Document Your Students' Independent Reading

One of the characteristics of the most effective teachers is that they regularly assess how children are progressing toward meeting important goals and then adjust their instruction based on these assessments. Suppose that having all your children read more enthusiastically is one of your most important goals. You will be more apt to achieve this goal if you have some way of knowing where your children are early in the year and how they are progressing toward that goal.

Many teachers do a status assessment early in the year to determine how the children feel about themselves as readers. They file these assessments away and then have the children respond to the same questions halfway through the year and at the end of the year. After the children assess themselves halfway through the year, the teachers give them the reports they completed early in the year and have them compare how they are "growing up" as readers. Both the early-in-the-year reports and the midyear reports are then filed away. At the end of the year, the teachers have children self-report their reading habits one last time. After the students complete the final report, the teachers give them the first and second reports and have them write paragraphs summarizing their change and growth as readers. Many children are amazed (and proud!) to see how much more they like to read. The "Reading and Me" form is one example of the type of report you might use to help you and your students assess their growth as readers.

Make a Teacher Read-Aloud an Everyday Event

Do you read aloud to your students at least once every day? Teacher read-alouds have been shown to be one of the major motivators for children's desire to read. In 1975, Sterl Artley asked successful college students what they remembered their teachers doing that motivated them to read. The majority of students responded that teachers reading aloud

Reading and Me

My name is _____.

Here is how I feel about reading as of _____ (today's date).

The best book I ever read was _____.

I like it because _____.

The best book I read in the last 4 months was _____.

I like it because _____.

My favorite author is _____.

My favorite kind of book is _____.

When I am home, I read: (Circle one)

Almost Never Sometimes Almost Every Day Every Day

This is how I feel about reading right now: (Circle one)

I love reading. I like reading. I don't like reading. I hate reading.

to the class was what got them interested in reading. More recently, elementary students were asked what motivated them to read particular books. The most frequent response was "My teacher read it to the class" (Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell, 1994). Ivey and Broaddus (2001) surveyed 1,765 sixth-graders to determine what motivates them to read. The responses of this large group of diverse preteens indicated that their major motivation for reading came from having time for independent reading of books of their own choosing and teachers reading aloud to them.

Reading aloud to children is a simple and research-proven way to motivate children of all ages to become readers. When thinking about your struggling readers, however,

Common Core Connections: Teacher Read-Aloud and Independent Reading

Speaking and Listening is one of the four major strands of the CCSS-ELA and Standard 2 relates directly to text read-aloud. Children in kindergarten and first and second grade are expected to describe and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud. Third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders are expected to determine main ideas and details and summarize text read aloud to them. Including daily read-alouds of a variety of texts through the elementary grades will help your students meet Listening and Speaking Standard 2.

Reading Standard 10 requires children to read grade-level stories, plays, poems, and informational and technical texts independently and proficiently. Your instruction, as described in the next chapters, will teach students how to read and comprehend a variety of texts. Independent reading time is their opportunity to independently apply what you are teaching them to materials of their own choosing.

My Epiphany

I (Pat) first heard this report on female/male preferences for fiction versus informational texts on *All Things Considered* while driving home from a workshop I had just done on motivation to read. I was instantly transported back to a fourth-grade class I taught many years ago. I had five "resistant" readers—all boys—who I tried all kinds of things with to motivate them to read. I can clearly hear their voices telling me that they didn't want to read because "Reading is dumb and silly." At the time, I thought this was just their way of rationalizing the fact that they weren't good readers.

I read to my fourth-graders every day, but I am embarrassed to admit I can't think of a single nonfiction title I read aloud. I read *Charlotte's Web* but never a book about real spiders. What if their "reading is dumb and silly" attitude was engendered by the fanciful text I so enjoyed reading to them?

Reading to children motivates many of them to want to read—and particularly to want to read the book the teacher reads aloud. I wonder if my struggling boys' attitude toward reading was an unintended consequence of years of being read to by female teachers who were reading their favorite books—which just happened to be mostly fiction! If I could go back in time, I would resolve to read equal amounts of fiction and informational text. Yes, I would still read *Charlotte's Web,* but I would also read Gail Gibbon's wonderful book *Spiders.*

you also need to consider *what* you are reading aloud. Did you know that most of the fiction sold in bookstores is sold to women and most of the informational texts are sold to men? Now, this doesn't mean that women never read informational texts or that men never read fiction; it just means that males seem to have a preference for information and females for fiction.

Include Both Fact and Fiction

Reading aloud matters to motivation, and what you read aloud may really matter to your struggling readers. In *True Stories from Four Blocks Classrooms* (Cunningham & Hall, 2001), Deb Smith describes her daily teacher read-aloud session. Each day, Deb reads one chapter from a fiction book, a part of an information book, and an "everyone" book. She chooses the "everyone" book by looking for a short, simple book that "everyone in her class will enjoy and can read." (She *never* calls these books "easy" books!) By reading from these three types of books daily, Deb demonstrates to her students that all kinds of books are cherished and acceptable in her classroom. Deb follows her teacher read-aloud with independent reading time. The informational books and "everyone" books are popular choices, especially with her boys who struggle with reading.

Reading aloud to students is more common in primary grades than in upper grades, even though it might be even more important for teachers of older children to read aloud. Most children develop the reading habit between the ages of 8 and 11. Reading aloud to older children provides the motivation for them to read at the critical point when they have the literacy skills to take advantage of that motivation. Intermediate teachers need to make a special effort to read books from all the different sections of the bookstore. Most of us who are readers established our reading preferences in these preteen years. If you read *Cam Jansen* mysteries then, you probably still enjoy reading mysteries today. If you read *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* books then, you probably still enjoy science fiction today. If you packed biographies of famous people and informational books about sports to take to camp, the books you pack in your vacation travel bags today are probably still more information than fiction.

One way you can motivate more of your students to become readers is to read some books in a series and some books by authors who have written many other books. Remember that your students often want to read the book you read aloud. Read aloud one of David Adler's *Cam Jansen* mysteries, and then show students several more of these mysteries that you wish you had time to read aloud to them. Read aloud one of Gail Gibbon's informational books on animals—perhaps *Sharks* or *Whales* or *Dogs*—and then show students the other 40 Gibbon animal books you wish you had time to read to them. Your students who like mysteries may have "choice anxiety" trying to decide which *Cam Jansen* mystery they want to read first, and your animal lover informational readers will not know where to begin with all of Gail Gibbon's wonderful animal books. Unlike most anxiety, this kind of choice anxiety is a good thing!

Male Reading Models

Most elementary teachers are women, and most struggling readers are boys. A lot of boys believe that "Real men don't read books!" Many schools have reported an increase in students' motivation to read after some "real men" came in to read books to their classes.

Finding these real men and getting them to come to school regularly is not easy, but if you are on the lookout for them, they can often be found. Service organizations such as the Jaycees and the Big Brothers are a place to begin your search. City workers, including policemen and firemen, may also be willing to help. Would the person who delivers something to your school each week be flattered to be asked to come and read to your class? If some construction is being done in your neighborhood, the construction company may feel that it is good public relations to allow its workers to volunteer to come into your classroom for a half hour each week and read to your class.

Cindy Visser (1991), a reading specialist in Washington, reported how her school formed a partnership with the local high school football team. Football players came once a month and read to elementary classes. Appropriate read-aloud books were chosen by the elementary teachers and sent to the high school ahead of time. Interested athletes chose books and took them home to "polish their delivery." On the last Friday of the month, the athletes donned their football jerseys and rode the team bus to the elementary school. The arrival of the bus was greeted by cheering elementary students, who escorted the players to their classes. There, they read to the children and answered questions about reading, life, and, of course, football. This partnership, which was initiated by an elementary school in search of male reading models, turned out to be as profitable for the athletes as it was for the elementary students. The coach reported a waiting list of athletes who wanted to participate and a boost in the self-esteem of the ones who did.

You may want to make a list of different genres, titles, and authors, on which you can record the books you have read aloud. By keeping a Teacher Record Sheet, you can be sure you are opening the doors to all the different kinds of wonderful books there are.

If you teach older children, you can show your students the whole range of items that adults read by bringing real-world reading materials, such as newspapers and magazines, into the classroom and reading tidbits from these with an "I was reading this last night and

It's Never Too Late! Become a Book Whisperer!

If you need inspiration and lots of practical tips for turning older children on to books, read Donalyn Miller's *The Book Whisperer*. Donalyn is a teacher who requires her sixth-graders to read 40 books during the year they spend in her classroom! Most of her students, including her English learners, reach or exceed this goal. She begins the books by describing the dilemma many teachers of teens and tweens face:

> So many children don't read. They don't read well enough; they don't read often enough; and if you talk to children, they will tell you that they don't see reading as meaningful to their life. (p. 2)

If you can hear yourself saying these very words, read Donalyn's book and you will be empowered to change this in your classroom and change the future for many of your struggling readers.

Teacher Record Sheet: Books and Magazines Read Aloud This Year

Type	Title	Author
Mystery		
Science Fiction		
Fantasy		
Contemporary Fiction		
Historical Fiction		
Multicultural Fiction		
Sports Fiction		
Other Fiction		
Sports Informational		
Animal Informational		
Multicultural Informational		
Science Informational		
Other Informational		
Biography		
Easy Chapter-Series		
Authors with Other Books		
Magazines		

just couldn't wait to get here and share it with you" attitude. You may also want to keep a book of poetry handy and read one or two poems whenever appropriate. No intermediate-aged student can resist the appeal of Jack Prelutsky's or Judith Viorst's poems. In addition to poetry, your students will look forward to your reading to them if you often read snippets from *The Guinness Book of World Records* and from your favorite joke and riddle books. Be sure to include some of the wonderful new multicultural books in your read-aloud, so that all your students will feel affirmed by what you read aloud to them.

Talking Partners

Many teachers use a "Turn and Talk" routine to increase student talk and engagement. Before introducing Turn and Talk to your students, think carefully about who you will pair with whom. If you have children learning English, do you have other children who speak their language and whose English is more advanced so they could do some translating? Do you have a "budding teacher" who, although not able to speak the language of the child learning English, would

enjoy teaching that child? If you have a child with attention or behavior problems, could you pair that child with someone he or she is friends with and thus more likely to want to talk with and listen to? Thinking about what kind of support you want the partners to provide for the various activities and assigning partners purposefully are the secrets to the success of this collaborative grouping.

After you have decided on the talking partners, think about when you want to have the partners turn and talk, and seat your talking partners together for this activity. Many teachers use Turn and Talk regularly during their teacher read-aloud so they assign places on the carpet to the talking partners. Periodically, they stop during their reading and pose a question and give students 30 seconds to turn and talk.

> "Turn and talk to your partner about what you see in the pictures. How many things can you name?"
> "Turn and tell your partner what you think is going to happen next."
> "Turn and tell your partner if you think the boy has a plan that will work."
> "Would you like to take a trip to the moon? Tell your partner why or why not."
> "Do you think the things in this story could really happen? Explain to your partner what you think and why."

The possibilities for Turn and Talk during teacher read-aloud are endless. When you incorporate Turn and Talk into your read-aloud, you can raise both the level of thinking your students do and their active engagement with the text. After students talk with one another, resist the temptation to let everyone share with the whole group. This will slow your read-aloud down considerably and you have accomplished what you wanted to accomplish by letting them share their thinking with each other. After the 30 seconds, return to your read-aloud and acknowledge their thinking with a general response.

> "You named a lot of the things in the picture. Listen and see if you called them what the author called them."
> "I heard lots of good predictions. Let's see what did happen."
> "Some of you think yes and some of you think no. Let's read on and see."
> "Thumbs up if you told your partner you would like to go to the moon."
> "Most of you thought the story was imaginary. Here are some of the good reasons I heard you use to explain your thinking."

English Language Learners

Approximately 25 percent of the children in U.S. elementary schools speak a language other than English as their home language. That means that one out of every four children in our classrooms must learn to *speak* English as they learn how to read and write English. Use your teacher read-aloud time as one vehicle for developing English vocabulary. Be sensitive to vocabulary that might not be understood and ask your students to explain what unfamiliar words mean. Be sure to include "everyone" books and informational books with lots of pictures as part of your teacher read-aloud. When reading an easy book, record that reading and let your English language learners listen to that book several times. If possible, include some books that reflect the culture of your English language learners.

Schedule Time Every Day for Independent Reading

The goal of every elementary teacher should be to have all children read for at least 20 minutes each day from materials they have chosen to read. Use an analogy to help your students understand that becoming good at reading is just like becoming good at anything else. Compare learning to read with learning to play the piano or tennis or baseball. Explain that in order to become good at anything, you need three things: (1) instruction, (2) practice on the skills, and (3) practice on the whole thing. To become a good tennis player, you need to (1) take tennis lessons, (2) practice the skills (backhand, serve, etc.), and (3) play tennis. To become a good reader, you also need instruction, practice on the important skills, and practice reading! Point out that sometimes we get so busy that we forget to take the important time each day to read. Therefore, we must schedule it, just like anything else we do.

At least 20 minutes daily for independent reading is the goal, but you may want to start with a shorter period of time and increase it gradually as your children establish the reading habit and learn to look forward to this daily "read what you want to" time. Consider using a timer to signal the beginning and end of the independent reading time. When engaging in activities regularly, some natural time rhythms are established. Using a timer to monitor independent reading will help children establish these rhythms. When the timer sounds at the end of the session, say something like "Take another minute if you need to get to a stopping point."

When the time for independent reading has begun, do not allow your students to move around the room, looking for books. You may want to suggest to the children that they choose several pieces of reading material before the time begins. Alternately, place a crate of books on each table, and let children choose from that crate. Every few days rotate the crates from table to table so that all the children have access to many different books "within arm's reach." Depending on the arrangement of your classroom, you might want some of your students to read in various spots around the room. Make sure that they all get to their spots before the reading time begins and they stay in that spot until the time is up. Help your students understand that reading requires quiet and concentration and that people wandering around are distracting to everyone.

Establishing and enforcing the "No wandering" rule is particularly important for struggling readers. If your students have not been successful with reading in the past and they are allowed to move around the room to look for books during the independent reading time, then they will be apt to spend more time wandering than reading. Remember

English Language Learners

Support your English language learners in choosing books they can read during independent reading time. Provide them with alphabet and simple picture dictionaries. If they can read in their home language, help them find books in that language. When they demonstrate that they can read some materials, encourage them to take those items home and share them with their families, who will be delighted with the progress their children are making in learning English.

that one of your major reasons for committing yourself to this daily independent reading time is that you know how much children read plays a critical role in how well they read. If your good readers read for almost all the allotted time and your struggling readers read for only half the time, the gap between your good and poor readers will further widen as the year goes on. Having a large variety of materials within arm's reach is crucial if your struggling readers are going to profit from this precious time you are setting aside each day for independent reading.

If you begin with just five or six minutes, kindergarteners and early first-graders can engage in independent reading even before they can read. Think about your own children or other young children you have known. Those who have been read to regularly often look at their books and pretend they are reading. Encourage your kindergarteners and early first-graders to get in the habit of reading even before they can do it. Many teachers of young children encourage them to "Pretend that you are the teacher and you are reading the book." Kindergarten children are also very motivated to read when they are allowed to pick a stuffed animal or a doll to read to!

Big Buddy Readers

Having easy-to-read books available for older struggling readers will not get you anywhere if those readers refuse to be seen reading "baby books"! One way to get older children to read easy books is to give them a real-life reason to do so. In some schools, older children (big buddies) go to the kindergarten and read aloud to their little buddies books that they have practiced ahead of time. Arranging such partnerships allows older poor readers to become reading models. The buddy system also serves another critical function in that it legitimizes the reading and rereading of very easy books.

Once you have a buddy system set up, you can have the kindergarten teacher send up a basket of books from which each of your big buddies can choose. Tell them that professional readers always practice reading a book aloud several times before reading it to an audience. Then, let them practice reading the book—first to themselves, then to a partner in the classroom, and finally to a tape recorder.

Accumulate the Widest Possible Variety of Reading Materials

To have successful independent reading, it is crucial that students choose their own reading materials and have plenty of materials to choose from. Collecting a lot of appealing books requires determination, cleverness, and an eye for bargains. In addition to obvious sources—such as getting free books from book clubs when your students order books, asking parents to donate, begging for books from your friends and relatives whose children have outgrown them, and haunting yard sales and thrift shops—there are some less obvious sources. Libraries often sell or donate used books and magazines on a regular basis. Some bookstores will give you a good deal on closeouts and may even set up a "donation basket," where they will collect used books for you. (Take some pictures of your eager readers and have them write letters that tell what kind of books they like to read for the store to display above the donation basket.)

Many classrooms subscribe to some of the popular children's magazines. You will have far fewer resistant readers if the latest issue and back copies of *Your Big Backyard, Children's Digest, Cricket, Soccer Junior, Ranger Rick, 3-2-1 Contact, Sports Illustrated for Kids, National Geographic for Kids,* and *Zoobooks* are available for your students to read during independent reading.

Another inexpensive source of motivating reading materials is the variety of news magazines for children, including *Scholastic News, Weekly Reader,* and *Time for Kids.* They generally cost about $4.00 per year, and you get a "desk copy" with an order of 10 to 12. Teachers across a grade level often share the magazines, with each classroom receiving two or three copies. These news magazines deal with topics of real interest to kids, and reading interest is always heightened on the day that a new issue arrives.

The Rotating Book Crates Solution

The goal of every teacher of struggling readers should be to have a variety of appealing reading materials constantly and readily available to the children. In one school, four intermediate teachers became convinced of the futility of trying to teach resistant children to read with almost no appealing materials in the classroom. The teachers appealed to the administration and the parent group for money and were told that it would be put in the budget "for next year." Not willing to "write off" the children they were teaching this year, each teacher cleaned out her or his closets (school and home), rummaged through the bookroom, and used other means to round up all the easy and appealing books they could find. Then they put these materials into four big crates, making sure that each crate had as much variety as possible. Mysteries, sports, biographies, science fiction, informational books, cartoon books, and the like were divided up equally.

Since the teachers did this over the Christmas holiday, they decided that each classroom would keep a crate for five weeks. At the end of each five-week period, a couple of students carried the crate of books that had been in their room to another room. In this way, the four teachers provided many more appealing books than they could have if each had kept the books in his or her own classroom.

The four-crate solution was one of those "necessity is the mother of invention" solutions that the teachers came up with to get through the year without many books; fortunately, it had serendipitous results. When the first crate left each classroom at the end of the initial five-week period, several children complained that they had not been able to read certain books or that they wanted to read some again. The teacher sympathized but explained that there were not enough great books to go around and that their crate had to go to the next room. The teacher then made a "countdown" calendar and attached it to the second crate. Each day, someone tore off a number so the children would realize that they had only 10, 9, 8, 7, and so on days to read or reread anything they wanted to from this second crate. Reading enthusiasm picked up when the students knew that they had limited time with these books.

When the third crate arrived, students dug in immediately. A race-like atmosphere developed as children tried to read as many books as possible before the crate moved on. When the fourth (and final) crate arrived, children already knew about some of the books that were in it. Comments such as "My friend read a great mystery in that crate, and I am going to read it, too" let the teachers know that the children were talking to their friends in other classes about the books in the crates!

While the enthusiasm generated by the moving crates of books had not been anticipated by the teachers, they realized in retrospect that it could have been. We all like something new and different, and "limited time only" offers are a common selling device. The following year, even with many more books available, the teachers divided their books up into seven crates and moved them every five weeks so that the children would always have new, fresh material.

Schedule Conferences So You Can Talk with Your Students About Their Reading

Early in the year, when you are getting your students in the habit of reading every day and gradually increasing the time for independent reading, circulate around and have whispered conversations with individual children about their books. Once the self-selected reading time has been well established, set up a schedule so that you can conference with one-fifth of your students each day. Use this time to monitor your children's reading, to encourage them in their individual reading interests, and to help them with book selection if they need that help.

If your reading conferences are going to be something your students look forward to (instead of dreading!), you need to think of them as conversations rather than interrogations. Here are some "conference starters" you can use to set a positive and encouraging tone for your conferences:

> "Let's see. What have you got for me today?"
>
> "Oh good, another book about ocean animals. I had no idea there were so many books about ocean animals!"

"I see you have bookmarked two pages to share with me. Read these pages to me, and tell me why you chose them."

"I never knew there was so much to learn about animals in the ocean. I am so glad you bring such interesting books to share with me each week. You are turning me into an ocean animal expert!"

"I can't wait to see what you bring to share with me next week!"

One way to make sure your conferences are kid-centered conversations, rather than interrogations, is to put the job of preparing for the conference on your students. Before you begin conferences, use modeling and role-playing to help children learn what their job is in the conference. Your children are to choose the book (or magazine) they want to share and bookmark the part they want to discuss with you. Make sure your students know they must prepare and be ready for the conference, since you will only have three or four minutes with each student. After role-playing and modeling, many teachers post a chart to remind children what they are to do on the day of their conference.

Rather than arbitrarily assigning one fifth of the class to the different conference days, consider dividing your struggling and avid readers across the days. Spend an extra minute or two with the struggling reader scheduled for the day. Many of these readers need help selecting books they can read. After your struggling reader shares the book chosen for that day, take a minute to help that student select some books or magazines to read across the next week. Advanced readers also often need an extra minute for help with book selection. These excellent readers are sometimes reading books that are very easy for them. Although reading easy books is good for all of us, it is nice to take a minute to nudge them forward in their book selection. Clever teachers do this in a "seductive" rather than a heavy-handed way.

"Carla, I know you love mysteries. The other day when I was in the library, I found two mysteries that made me think of you. Listen to this." (Teacher reads "blurb" on the back of each mystery to Carla.) "Now, I have to warn you: These mysteries are a little longer and harder than the ones you usually read. But you are such a good reader. I know you could handle them if you wanted to read them."

Getting Ready for Your Reading Conference

1. Choose the book or magazine you want to share.
2. Pick a part to read to me and practice this part.
3. Write the title and page number on a bookmark and put the bookmark in the right place.
4. Think about what you want to talk to me about. Some possibilities are:
   - What you like about this book
   - Why you chose this part to read to me
   - Other good parts of the book
   - What you think will happen (if you haven't finished the book)
   - What you are thinking about sharing with me next week
   - Who you think would also like this book

English Language Learners

Spread your English language learners out across the days and take a few extra minutes to develop language and confidence as you talk with them about the book they have chosen.

Carla will probably be delighted that you thought of her and believed she could read harder mysteries. She will very likely "take the bait" and go off with some mysteries closer to her advanced reading level.

Reading books you want to read motivates you to read more. Sharing those books once a week with someone who "oohs and aahs" about your reading choices is also a surefire motivator.

Make Time for Sharing and Responding

Children who read also enjoy talking to their classmates about what they have read. In fact, Manning and Manning (1984) found that providing time for children to interact with one another about reading material enhanced the effects of sustained silent reading on both reading achievement and attitudes.

One device sure to spark conversation about books is to create a classroom bookboard. Cover a bulletin board with white paper, and use yarn to divide it into 40 or 50 spaces. Select 40 to 50 titles from the classroom library, and write each title in one of the spaces. Next, make some small construction paper rectangles in three colors or use three colors of small sticky notes. Designate a color to stand for various reactions to the books.

- Red stands for "Super—one of the all-time best books I've ever read."
- Blue indicates that a book was "OK—not the best I've ever read but still enjoyable."
- Yellow stands for "Yucky, boring—a waste of time!"

Encourage your students to read as many of the bookboard books as possible and to put their "autographs" on red, blue, and yellow rectangles and attach them to the appropriate titles. Every week or two, lead your class in a lively discussion of the reasons for their book evaluations. If some books are universally declared "reds," "blues," or "yellows," ask your students to explain why the books were so wonderful or so lame. The most interesting discussions, however, can be centered on those books that are evaluated differently by your students. When most of your students have read some of the books on your bookboard, begin a new bookboard. This time, you may want to let each student select a book and label/decorate the spot for that book.

Another way to have your students share books with each other is to end the independent reading time with a *Reader's Chair,* in which one or two children do a book

English Language Learners

Sharing books in small groups motivates all your students to read but it is especially important for your students who are learning English. Often, these children are not comfortable speaking in front of the whole class. The small group is much less threatening. Sharing a book, including the pictures, gives them something concrete to use their burgeoning language skills to talk about.

talk each day. Each child shows a favorite book and reads or tells a little about it and then tries to "sell" this book to the rest of the class. The students' selling techniques are quite effective, since these books are usually quickly seen in the hands of many of their classmates.

Another popular sharing option is to hold "reading parties" one afternoon every two or three weeks. Your students' names are pulled from a jar and they form groups of three or four, in which everyone gets to share his or her favorite book. Reading parties, like other parties, often include refreshments such as popcorn or cookies. Your students will develop all kinds of tasty associations with books and sharing books!

Finding time for children to talk about books is not easy in today's crowded curriculum. There is, however, a part of each day that is not well used in most elementary classrooms—the last 15 minutes of the day. Many teachers have found that they can successfully schedule weekly reading sharing time if they utilize those last 15 minutes one day each week. Here is how this sharing time works in one classroom.

Every Thursday afternoon, the teacher gets the children completely ready to be dismissed 15 minutes before the final bell rings. Notes to go home are distributed. Book bags are packed. Chairs are placed on top of the desks. The teacher has previously written down each child's name on an index card. The index cards are now shuffled and the first five names—which will form the first group—are called. These children go to a corner of the room that will always be the meeting place for the first group. The next five names that are called will form the second group and will go to whichever place has been designated for the second group. The process continues until all five or six groups have been formed and all the children are in their places. Now, each child has two minutes to read, tell, show, act out, or otherwise share something from what he or she has been reading this week. The children share in the order that their names were called. The first person called for each group is the leader. Each person has exactly two minutes and is timed by a timer. When the timer sounds, the next person gets two minutes. If a few minutes remain after all the children have had their allotted two minutes, the leader of each group selects something to share with the whole class. If you establish a regular sharing time, you will find that your students are more enthusiastic about reading. Comments such as "I'm going to stump them with these riddles when I get my two minutes" and "Wait 'til I read the scary part to everyone" are proof that your students are looking forward to sharing and that this anticipation is increasing their motivation to read. The popularity next week of books shared this week is further proof of the motivation power of book sharing.

Do Incentive Programs and Book Reports Demotivate Reading?

Many schools set up reading incentive programs in an attempt to get children to read real books. These programs can take many different forms. In some, children are given T-shirts that proclaim "I have read 100 books!" and in others, whole classes are rewarded with pizza parties if they have read "the most" books.

These reward systems are set up with the best intentions and may even motivate some children to begin reading. Unfortunately, another message can get communicated to children who are exposed to such incentive programs. The message goes something like "Reading is one of those things I must do in order to get something that I want." Reading thus becomes a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. Many teachers (and parents) report that children only read "short, dumb books" so that they can achieve the "longest list."

Doing book reports is another device used to motivate reading that can often have the opposite effect to what was intended. When adults are asked what they remember about elementary school that made them like reading, they mention having their teachers read books aloud to the class, being allowed to select their own books, and having time to read them. When asked what things teachers did that made them dislike reading, doing book reports is most commonly mentioned. Likewise today, few children enjoy doing book reports, and their dislike is often transferred to the act of reading. Some children report on the same books year after year, and others even admit lying about reading books and copying their book report from the summary on the Internet!

Children who are going to become readers must begin to view reading as its own reward. This intrinsic motivation can only be nurtured as children find books that they "just can't put down" and subsequently seek out other books. Incentive programs and book reports must be evaluated on the basis of how well they develop this intrinsic motivation.

Summary

The more you read, the better you read! Nagy and Anderson (1984) showed that good readers often read 10 times as many words as poor readers during the school day. Guthrie and Humenick (2004) analyzed 22 studies of reading achievement and found that access to interesting books and choice about what to read were strongly correlated with reading achievement scores. Stanovich (1986) labeled the tendency of poor readers to remain poor readers as "the Matthew effect" and attributed the increasing gap between good readers and poor readers in part to the difference in time spent reading.

Summer reading loss by low-income children is a well-documented fact. Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, and Greathouse (1996) reviewed 13 studies representing approximately 40,000 students and found that, on average, the reading proficiency levels of students from lower income families declined over the summer months, while the reading proficiency levels of students from middle-income families increased. In one year, this decline resulted in an estimated three-month achievement gap between more advantaged and less advantaged students. Allington (2013) summarizes the results of an attempt to stem this summer reading loss by providing low-income children with 12 free self-selected books to read in the summer. The poor children who were provided with these books actually showed gains in reading achievement over the summer months while the control children who were not provided books lost ground.

Wide reading is highly correlated with meaning vocabulary, which, in turn, is highly correlated with reading comprehension. Students who read more encounter the same words more frequently, and repeated exposure to the same words has been shown to lead to improvements in fluency (Topping & Paul, 1999). A. E. Cunningham and Stanovich (1998) found that struggling readers with limited reading and comprehension skills increased vocabulary and comprehension skills when time spent reading was increased.

Wide reading is also associated with the development of automatic word recognition (Stanovich & West, 1989). Share (1999) reviewed the research and concluded that self-teaching of word recognition occurs while readers are decoding words during independent reading. Good decoders teach themselves to recognize many words as they read for enjoyment.

This chapter has described classroom-tested ways to create a classroom in which your students read enthusiastically and independently. Reading aloud to your students from all the different types of books and magazines is your best tool for motivating independent reading. Scheduling time every day for independent reading demonstrates to your students the importance of reading and ensures that all your students spend some time every day developing the reading habit. Having a wide variety of books and magazines available is critical to the success of independent reading—particularly with your struggling readers, who may not yet have discovered the perfect books for them. Sharing what they are reading in a weekly conference with you and periodically with their peers further motivates students to read and is consistent with a sociocultural view of literacy.

How Well Does Your Classroom Support the Creation of Independent Readers?

1. Do I set aside time to read aloud to my students?
2. Do I read aloud from a wide variety of fiction and informational books and magazines?
3. Do I seize opportunities to build meaning vocabulary when I read aloud to my students?
4. Do I set aside time for my students to engage in independent reading?
5. Do I let my students choose what they want to read from a wide variety of materials?
6. Do I conference with my students about their independent reading?
7. Do I set aside time for students to share what they are reading?
8. Have I considered how I might provide self-selected books to my needy children to read over the summer?

3

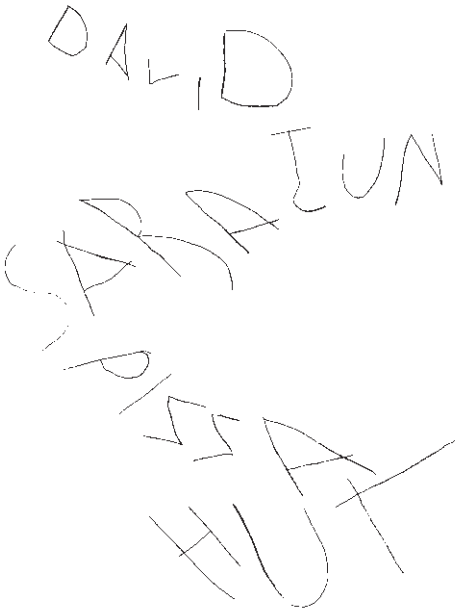
Building the Literacy Foundation

ASK MOST ADULTS when they learned to read, and most will tell you about their experiences in kindergarten or first grade. In reality, learning to read begins much earlier for many children. Think back to your own preschool years. You probably couldn't read in the way we usually think of it. You probably couldn't pick up a brand-new book and read it by yourself. But you probably did have some literacy skills in place before you were ever given any reading instruction in school.

Did you have a favorite book that someone read to you over and over? Did you ever sit down with a younger child or a stuffed animal and pretend you could read that book? Perhaps it was a predictable book, such as *Are You My Mother?* or *Pat the Bunny* or *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* You probably didn't know all the individual words in the book, but you could sound like you were reading by telling in book language what was happening on the different pages.

Pretend reading is a stage that many 3- and 4-year-olds go through and is probably crucial to the ease with which they learn to read once they start school. Children who pretend to read a book know what reading is—that it has to "sound right" and "make sense." They also know that reading is enjoyable and something all the "big people" can do and thus something they are very eager to be able to do, too. Pretend reading is a way of experiencing what reading feels like even before you can do it and is an indicator of future success in reading.

Did you write before you came to school? Could you write your name and the names of your siblings, cousins, pets, or favorite restaurants?



Did you ever write a note like this?

Did you ever make a sign for your room that looked like this?

Many 4-year-olds love to write. Sometimes they write in scribbles.

Young children want to do everything that grown-ups can do. For the things they can't do yet, they just pretend they can! They pretend to drive, to take care of babies, to cook—and if they grow up in homes where the grown-ups read and write, they pretend they can read and write. As they engage in these early literacy behaviors, they learn important concepts.

Concepts That Form the Foundation for Literacy

Why We Read and Write

Ask 5-year-olds from strong literacy backgrounds why people read and write, and they reel off a string of answers:

> "Well, you have to able to read. You read books and signs and cereal boxes and birthday cards that come in the mail and recipes and … You write notes and stories and signs and lists and you write on the computer and you send postcards when you are on a trip and you write to your aunt and …"

You can tell from these answers that children who come to school with clear ideas about the functions of reading and writing have had many real-world experiences with reading and writing. Reading and writing are things all the bigger people they know do, and they intend to do them, too!

Background Knowledge and Vocabulary

A lot of what we know about the world, we have learned from reading. This is also true of young children. When parents or other people read to young children, they don't just read; they also talk with the children about what they are reading:

> "Do you know what that animal is called?"
>
> "Yes, it's a bear. The bears in this story are not real bears. We can tell because we know that real bears don't wear clothes or live in houses. Where could we go to see a real bear?"
>
> "Maybe we can find a book about real bears the next time we go to the library."

Comprehension is very highly correlated with prior knowledge and vocabulary. The more you know about any topic, the greater will be your understanding of what you read related to that topic. Your store of background knowledge and vocabulary directly affects how well you read. Young children who have had many books read to them simply know more than children who haven't.

Print Concepts

Print is what you read and write. Print includes all the funny little marks—letters, punctuation, spaces between words and paragraphs—that translate into familiar spoken language. In English, we read across the page in a left-to-right fashion. Because our eyes can see only a few words during each stop (called a *fixation*), we must actually move our eyes several times to read one line of print. When we finish that line, we make a return sweep and start all over again, left to right. If there are sentences at the top of a page, a picture in the middle, and more sentences at the bottom, we read the top first and then the bottom. We start at the front of a book and go toward the back. These arbitrary rules about how we proceed through print are called *conventions.*

Jargon refers to all the words we use to talk about reading and writing. Jargon includes such terms as *word, letter, sentence,* and *sound.* We use this jargon constantly as we try to teach children how to read:

> "Look at the **first word** in the **second sentence**."
> "How does that **word begin**?"
> "What **letter** has that **sound**?"

Children who have been read to and whose early attempts at writing have been encouraged often walk in the door of kindergarten knowing these critical print conventions and jargon. From being read to in the "lap position," they have noticed how the eyes "jump" across the lines of print as someone is reading. They have watched people write grocery lists and thank-you letters to Grandma, and they have observed the top-to-bottom, left-to-right movement. Often, they have typed on the computer and observed these print conventions. Because they have had people to talk with them about reading and writing, they have learned much of the jargon. While writing down a dictated thank-you note to Grandma, Dad may say,

> "Say your **sentence** one **word** at a time if you want me to write it. I can't write as fast as you can talk."

When the child asks how to spell *birthday,* he may be told,

> "It **starts with** the **letter *b***, just like your dog, Buddy's, name. *Birthday* and *Buddy* **start with the same sound and the same letter**."

Knowing these print concepts is an essential part of the foundation for becoming literate. Young children who have had lots of informal early experiences with reading and writing have already begun to develop understandings about print conventions and jargon.

Phonemic Awareness

The ability to recognize that words are made up of a discrete set of sounds and to manipulate those sounds is called *phonemic awareness,* and children's level of phonemic awareness is very highly correlated with their success in beginning reading. Phonemic awareness develops through a series of stages, during which children first become aware that language is made up of individual words, that words are made up of syllables, and that syllables are made up of phonemes. It is important to note here that it is not the jargon children learn. Five-year-olds cannot tell you there are three syllables in *dinosaur* and one syllable in *Rex.* What they can do is clap out the three beats in *dinosaur* and the

one beat in *Rex.* Likewise, they cannot tell you that the first phoneme in *mice* is *m,* but they can tell you what you would have if you took the "mmm" off *mice—ice.* Children develop this phonemic awareness as a result of the oral and written language they are exposed to. Nursery rhymes, chants, and Dr. Seuss books usually play a large role in this development.

Phonemic awareness is an oral ability. You hear the words that rhyme. You hear that *baby* and *book* begin the same. You hear the three sounds in *bat* and can say these sounds separately. Only when children realize that words can be changed and how changing a sound changes the word are they able to profit from instruction in phonics.

Children also develop a sense of sounds and words as they try to write. In the beginning, many children let a single letter stand for an entire word. Later, they put in more letters and often say the word they want to write, dragging out its sounds to hear what letters they might use. Children who are allowed and encouraged to "invent-spell" develop an early and strong sense of phonemic awareness.

Some Concrete Words

In addition to print concepts and phonemic awareness, children who have been exposed to lots of reading and writing activities know some words. If you were to sit down with children in their first week of school and try to determine if they can read by giving them a simple book to read or testing them on some common words, such as *the, and, of,* and *with,* you would probably conclude that most of them can't read yet. But many young children do know some words. The words they know are usually "important-to-them" concrete words—*David, tiger, Pizza Hut, Cheerios.* Knowing a few words is important, not because you can read much with a few words but because in learning these first words, you have accomplished a critical task. You have learned how to learn words, and the few words you can read give you confidence that you can learn lots of words.

Some Letter Names and Sounds

Many children know some letter names and sounds when they come to school. They can't always recognize all 26 letters in both upper- and lowercase, and they often don't know the sound of *w* or *c,* but they have learned the names and sounds for the most common letters. Usually, the letter names and sounds children know have come from those concrete words they can read and write. Many children have also learned some letter names and sounds through repeated readings of alphabet books and through making words with magnetic letters on the refrigerator. In addition, children have learned some letter names and sounds as adults have spelled out words they were trying to write. This immersion in print has allowed children to make connections between the most common letters and sounds.

Desire to Learn to Read and Write

Children who have had lots of early literacy encounters can't wait to learn to read! All the big people can do it, and they want to, too! We all know of children who have come home disappointed after the first day of school because "We were there all day and didn't learn to read!" This "can't wait" attitude motivates and sustains them through the work and effort required to learn to read.

The Foundation

From early reading and writing experiences, children develop these critical concepts:

- Why we read and write
- Background knowledge and vocabulary
- Print concepts
- Phonemic awareness
- Some concrete words
- Some letter names and sounds
- Desire to learn to read

These concepts are not, however, all or nothing. Some children come to school with all the concepts quite well developed. Some children come with some developed but not all. Some children come with few of these concepts. Successful classrooms for young children are filled with lots of activities to help all children move along in their development of these crucial concepts.

Common Core Connections Reading: Foundational Skills

The concepts that form the foundation for success in reading can be found in the Foundational Reading Standards. Foundational Standard 1 states that kindergarteners demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print. Specifically, kindergarteners are expected to follow words from left to right, top to bottom, and page by page; recognize that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters; understand that words are separated by spaces in print; and recognize and name all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet.

Phonological and phonemic awareness are the focus of Foundation Standard 2. Kindergarteners are expected to demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds. Specifically, they must learn to recognize and produce rhyming words, blend and segment syllables and onsets and rimes, isolate and pronounce sounds, and substitute sounds in simple one syllable words to make new words.

Reading: Foundational Standard 3 requires kindergarteners to know the common sound for consonants and vowels.

Activities for Building the Foundation

Reading to Children and Independent Reading Time

The previous chapter outlined the importance of doing activities to promote enthusiastic and independent readers. If you have committed yourself to reading aloud to children and including a time for independent reading each day, you are well on your way to helping children build a firm foundation for learning to read. Many children are read to at home and are encouraged as they "pretend read" favorite books and attempt to read signs, labels, and other environmental print. For these children, your teacher read-alouds and independent reading encouragement will just move them further along in their literacy development. For children who have not had these experiences before coming to school, daily teacher read-alouds and independent reading time will give them a successful start in building the foundation for literacy.

Reading to children and providing time for them to read independently will also help children build their oral vocabularies. You may want to capitalize on an anchored vocabulary activity found to be effective in helping low-income young children build their oral vocabularies by picking important words from the books you read aloud to them and focusing their attention on those words. Find or copy a picture to go with each word. Put these words together in a book, with each page having one picture and the word that goes with it. Label the book according to the category the word belongs in. Make these books available for self-selected reading, and you will have lots of simple books that even your most struggling readers can find success with and enjoy.

Supporting and Encouraging Writing

Some people believe that if children are allowed to write before they can spell and form the letters correctly, they will get into bad habits that will be hard to break later. There is a

certain logic in this argument, but the logic does not hold up to scrutiny when you actually look at what children do before they come to school. Just as many children "read" before they can read by pretend reading a memorized book, they "write" before they can write. Their writing is not initially decipherable by anyone besides themselves, and sometimes they read the same scribbling different ways! They write with pens, markers, crayons, paint, chalk, and normal-sized pencils with erasers on the ends. They write on chalkboards, magic slates, paper, and, alas, walls! You can encourage and support fledgling attempts at writing in numerous ways.

Model Writing for the Children As children watch you write, they observe that you always start in a certain place, go in certain directions, and leave spaces between words. In addition to these print conventions, they observe that writing is "talk written down." There are numerous opportunities in every classroom for the teacher to write as the children watch—and sometimes help with what to write.

In many classrooms, the teacher begins the day by writing a morning message on the board. The teacher writes this short message as the children watch. The teacher then reads the message, pointing to each word and inviting the children to join in on any words they know.

> Dear Class,
>
> Today is Thursday, October 24. It is a very windy day! We will need our jackets when we go outside. Did you wear your jacket to school today?
>
> Love,
>
> Miss Williams

Sometimes, the teacher takes a few minutes to point out some things students might notice from the morning message:

"How many sentences did I write today?"
"How can we tell how many there are?"
"What do we call this mark I put at the end of this sentence?"
"Who can come and circle some words that begin with the same letters?"
"Who can come and underline some words you can read?"

These and similar questions help children learn the conventions and jargon of print and focus their attention on words and letters.

Provide a Variety of Things to Write With and On Young children view writing as a creation and are often motivated to write by various media. Many teachers grab free postcards, scratch pads, counter checks, pens, and pencils and haunt yard sales—always on the lookout for an extra chalkboard or an old but still working typewriter. A letter home to parents at the beginning of the year, asking them to clean out desks and drawers and

donate writing utensils and various kinds of paper, often brings unexpected treasures. In addition to the usual writing media, young children like to write with sticks in sand, with paintbrushes or sponges on chalkboards, and with chocolate pudding and shaving cream on tables.

Help Children Find Writing Purposes through Center Activities Children need to develop the basic understanding that writing is a message across time and space. Once they have that understanding, they are able to identify a purpose for a piece of writing. For most young children, the purpose of writing is to get something told or done. Children will find some real purposes for writing if you incorporate writing in all your classroom centers. Encourage children to make grocery lists while they are playing in the housekeeping center. Menus, ordering pads, and receipts are a natural part of a restaurant center. An office center would include various writing implements, a typewriter or computer, along with index cards, phone books, and appointment books.

Children can make birthday cards for friends or relatives or write notes to you or their classmates and then mail them in the post office center. They can make signs (Keep Out! Girls Only!) and post them as part of their dramatic play. When children put a lot of time into building a particularly wonderful creation from the blocks, they often do not want to have it taken apart so that something else can be built. Many teachers keep a large pad of tablet paper in the construction center. Children can draw and label records of their constructions before disassembling them.

Once you start looking for them, there are numerous opportunities for children to write for real purposes as they carry out their creative and dramatic play in various centers.

Provide a Print-Rich Classroom Classrooms in which children are encouraged to write have lots of print in them. In addition to books, there are magazines and newspapers. There are also charts of recipes made and directions for building things. Children's names are on their desks and on many different objects. There are class books, bulletin boards with labeled pictures of animals under study, and labels on almost everything. Children's drawings and all kinds of writing are displayed. In these classrooms, children see that all kinds of writing are valued. Equally important, children who want to write "the grown-up way" can find lots of words to make their own.

Accept the Writing They Do Accepting a variety of writing—from scribbling to one-letter representations to invented spellings to copied words—is the key to having young children "write" before they can write. Talk to your students on the very first day of school about the forms they can use for writing. Show them examples of other children's scribbles, pictures, single letters, vowel-less words, and other kinds of writing. Tell them they all started out at the scribble stage, and they will all get to conventional writing. For now, they should write in the way that is most comfortable to share the message they have.

Teach Concrete Words

All children need to be successful in their first attempts at word learning. If the words you focus on with your beginners are the most common words—*the, have, with, to*—then those children who have not had many literacy experiences are going to have a hard time learning and remembering these words. The problem with the most common words is that

they do not mean anything. *The, have, with,* and *to* are abstract connecting words. Children do need to learn these words (lots more about that in Chapter 4), but doing so will be much easier if they have already learned some concrete important-to-them words. Most kindergarten and first-grade teachers begin their year with some get-acquainted activities. As part of these activities, they often have a "special child" each day. In addition to learning about each child, you can focus attention on the special child's name and use that name to develop some important understandings about words and letters.

To prepare for this activity, write all the children's first names (with initials for last names, if two first names are the same) in permanent marker on sentence strips. Cut the strips so that long names have long strips and short names have short strips. Each day, reach into the box and draw out a name. This child becomes the "King or Queen for a Day," and his or her name becomes the focus of many activities. Reserve a bulletin board and add each child's name to the board. (Some teachers like to have children bring in snapshots of themselves or take pictures of the children to add to the board as the names are added.) The following sections describe some day-by-day examples of what you might do with the names.

Day 1 Close your eyes. Reach into the box, shuffle the names around, and draw one out. Crown that child "King (or Queen) for a Day!" Lead the other children in interviewing this child to find out what he or she likes to eat, play, or do after school. Does she or he have brothers? Sisters? Cats? Dogs? Mice? Many teachers record this information on a chart or compile a class book, with one page of information about each child.

David Cunningham

David likes to play basketball. Carolina is his favorite team. His dad teaches at Carolina and they go to the games. David's favorite food is spaghetti. His favorite color is blue. David does not have any brothers or sisters. He doesn't have any pets because his mom is allergic! David's birthday is September 20.

Now focus the children's attention on the child's name—*David.* Point to the word *David* on the sentence strip and develop children's understanding of jargon by pointing out that this *word* is David's name. Tell them that it takes many *letters* to write the word *David,* and let them help you count the letters. Say the letters in *David*—D-a-v-i-d—and have the children chant them with you. Point out that the word *David* begins and ends with the same letter. Explain that the first and the last *d* look different because one is a capital *D* and the other is a small *d* (or uppercase/lowercase—whatever jargon you use).

Take another sentence strip and have the children watch as you write *David.* Have them chant the spelling of the letters with you. Cut the letters apart and mix them up. Let several children come up and arrange the letters in just the right order so that they spell *David,* using the original sentence strip on which *David* is written as a model. Have the other children chant to check that the order is correct.

Give each child a large sheet of drawing paper, and have all of them write *David* in large letters on one side of their papers using crayons. Model at the board how to write each letter as the children write it. Do not worry if what they write is not perfect (or even if it does not bear much resemblance to the letter you wrote). Also resist the temptation to correct what they write. Remember that children who write at home before coming to

school often reverse letters or write them in funny ways. The important understanding is that names are words, that words can be written, and that it takes lots of letters to write them. Finally, have everyone draw a picture of David on the other side of the drawing paper. Let David take all the pictures home!

Day 2 Draw another name—*Caroline.* Crown "Queen Caroline" and do the same interviewing and chart making that you did for David. (Decide carefully what you will do for the first child because every child will expect equal treatment!) Focus the children's attention on Caroline's name. Say the letters in *Caroline,* and have the children chant them with you. Help the children count the letters and decide which letter is first and last. Write *Caroline* on another sentence strip and cut it into letters. Have children arrange the letters to spell *Caroline,* using the first sentence strip name as their model. Put *Caroline* on the bulletin board under *David,* and compare the two. Which has the most letters? How many more letters are in the word *Caroline* than in the word *David?* Does *Caroline* have any of the same letters as *David?* Finish the lesson by having everyone write *Caroline* as you model the writing and draw a picture of *Caroline* on the back of their paper. Let Caroline take all the pictures home.

Day 3 Draw the third name—*Dorinda.* Do the crowning, interviewing, and chart making. Chant the letters in Dorinda's name. Write it, cut it up, and do the letter arranging. Be sure to note the two *d*'s and to talk about first and last letters. As you put *Dorinda* on the bulletin board, compare it to both *David* and *Caroline.* This is a perfect time to notice that both *David* and *Dorinda* begin with the same letter and the same sound. Finish the lesson by having the children write *Dorinda* and draw pictures for Dorinda to take home.

Day 4 *Mike* is the next name. Do all the usual activities. When you put *Mike* on the bulletin board, help the children realize that *David* has lost the dubious distinction of having the shortest name. (Bo may now look down at the name card on his desk and call out that his name is even shorter. You will point out that he is right but that Mike's name is the shortest one on the bulletin board right now. What is really fascinating about this activity is how the children compare their own names to the ones on the board, even before their names get there. That is exactly the kind of word/letter awareness you are trying to develop!)

When you have a one-syllable name with which there are many rhymes (*Pat, Jack, Bo, Sue,* etc.), seize the opportunity to develop phonemic awareness by having children listen for words that rhyme with that name. Say pairs of words, some of which rhyme with Mike—*Mike/ball, Mike/bike, Mike/hike, Mike/cook, Mike/like.* If the pairs rhyme, everyone should point at Mike and shout "Mike." If not, they should shake their heads and frown.

Day 5 Next, the name *Cynthia* is drawn from the box. Do the various activities, and then take advantage of the fact that the names *Caroline* and *Cynthia* both begin with the letter *c* but with different sounds. Have Caroline and Cynthia stand on opposite sides of you. Write their names above them on the chalkboard. Have the children say *Caroline* and *Cynthia* several times, drawing out the first sound. Help them understand that some letters can have more than one sound and that the names *Caroline* and *Cynthia* demonstrate this fact. Tell the class that you are going to say some words, all of which begin with the letter *c.* Some of these words will sound like *Caroline* at the beginning, and some of them will sound like *Cynthia.* Say some words and have the children say them with you—*cat, celery, candy, cookies, city,*

cereal, cut. For each word, have the children point to Caroline or Cynthia to show which sound they hear. Once they have decided, write each word under *Caroline* or *Cynthia.*

Day 6/Last Day Continue to have a special child each day. For each child, do the standard interviewing, charting, chanting, letter arranging, writing, and drawing activities. Then take advantage of the names you have to help children develop an understanding about how letters and sounds work. Here are some extra activities many teachers do with the names:

- Write the letters of the alphabet across the board. Count to see how many names contain each letter. Make tally marks or a bar graph, and then decide which letters are included in the most names and which letters are included in the fewest names. Are there any letters that no one in the whole class has in his or her name?
- Pass out laminated letter cards—one letter to a card, lowercase on one side, uppercase on the other. Call out a name from the bulletin board, and lead the children to chant the letters in the name. Then let the children who have those letters come up and display the letters and lead the class in a chant, cheerleader style: "David—D-a-v-i-d—David—Yay, David!"

Learning Other Concrete Words The activities just described for names can be used to teach many concrete words. Many teachers bring in cereal boxes as part of a nutrition unit. In addition to talking about the cereals, children learn the names of the cereals by chanting, writing, and comparing. Places to shop is another engaging topic. Ads for local stores—Walmart, Kmart, Sears—are brought in. Children talk about the stores and, of course, learn the names by chanting, writing, and comparing. Food is a topic of universal interest. Menus from popular restaurants—Burger King, McDonald's, Pizza Hut—spark lots of lively discussion from children, and, of course, children love learning to read and spell these very important words. You can teach the color words through chanting, writing, and drawing. When studying animals, add an animal name to an animal board each day. Children love chanting, writing, and drawing the animals.

These activities with the children's names and other concrete words can be done even when many children in the class do not know their letter names yet. Young children enjoy chanting, writing, and comparing words. They learn letter names by associating them with the important-to-them words they are learning.

Develop Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the ability to take words apart, put them back together again, and change them. Phonemic awareness activities are done orally, calling attention to the sounds—not the letters or which letters make which sounds. Here are some activities to include in your classroom to ensure that all your children continue to develop in their ability to hear and manipulate sounds in words.

Use Names to Build Phonemic Awareness Capitalize on your children's interest in names by using their names to develop a variety of phonemic awareness skills. The first way that children learn to pull apart words is into syllables. Say each child's name, and have all the children clap the beats in that name as they say it with you. Help children to discover that *Dick* and *Pat* are one-beat names, that *Manuel* and *Patrick* are two beats, and so on. Once children begin to understand, clap the beats and have all the children whose

names have that number of beats stand up and say their names as they clap the beats with you.

Another phonemic awareness skill is the ability to hear when sounds are the same or different. Say a sound, not a letter name, and have all the children whose names begin with that sound come forward. Stretch out the sound as you make it: "s-s-s." For the "s-s-s" sound, Samantha, Susie, Steve, and Cynthia should all come forward. Have everyone stretch out the "s-s-s" as they say each name. If anyone points out that *Cynthia* starts with a *c* or that *Sharon* starts with an *s,* explain that they are correct about the letters but that now you are listening for sounds.

You can use the names of some of your children to help them understand the concept of *rhyme.* Choose the children whose names have lots of rhyming words to come forward—*Bill, Jack, Brent, Kate, Clark.* Say a word that rhymes with one of the names (*hill, pack, spent, late, park*), and have the children say the word along with the name of the rhyming child. Not all your children's names will have rhymes, but the children who do will feel special and appreciated because they are helping everyone learn about rhyming words.

All your children will feel special if you call them to line up by stretching out their names, emphasizing each letter of each name. As each child lines up, have the class stretch out his or her name with you. The ability to segment words into sounds and blend them back together is an important phonemic awareness ability.

Encourage Phonics Spelling Think about what you have to do to "put down the letters you hear" while writing. You have to stretch out the sounds in the word. Children who stretch out words develop the phonemic awareness skill of *segmenting.* When children are just beginning, it doesn't really matter if they represent all the sounds with the right letters. What matters is the stretching out they are doing to try to hear the sounds. As phonics instruction continues, their phonics spelling will more closely match the actual spelling of the word.

Count Words This activity lets you build math skills as you develop the basic phonological awareness concept of separating words. For this activity, each child should have 10 counters in a paper cup. (Anything that is manipulative is fine. Some teachers use edibles, such as raisins, grapes, or small crackers, and let the children eat their counters at the end of the lesson. This makes clean-up quick and easy!) Begin by counting some familiar objects in the room, such as windows, doors, trash cans, and the like, having each child place one of the counters on the desk for each object.

Tell the children that you can also count words by putting down a counter for each word you say. Explain that you will say a sentence in the normal way and then repeat the sentence, pausing after each word. The children should put down counters as you say the words in the sentence slowly and then count the counters and decide how many words you said. As usual, children's attention is better if you make sentences about them:

> "Carol has a big smile."
> "Paul is back at school today."
> "Last night I saw Jawan at the grocery store."

Once the children catch on to the activity, let them make up the sentences. Have them say the sentence—first in the normal way, then one word at a time. Listen carefully as they say their sentences, because they usually need help saying them one word at a time. Not only

do children enjoy this activity and learn to separate words in speech but they are also practicing basic counting skills!

Clap Syllables In addition to using your students' names to develop syllable awareness, you can use any of the environmental print words that you are helping children learn. *Cheerios* is a three-beat word. *Kix* takes only one clap and has one beat. When children can clap syllables and decide how many beats a given word has, help them see that one-beat words are usually shorter than three-beat words—that is, they take fewer letters to write. To do this, use your sentence strips and write some words that children cannot read. Cut the strips into words so that short words have short strips and long words have long strips. Have some of the words begin with the same letters but be of different lengths. This will require the children to think about word length in order to decide which word is which.

For the category of animals, choose animal names that begin the same but are quite different in length. Create picture cards with the name on one side and a picture of the animal on the other side. This lesson uses the words *horse* and *hippopotamus, dog* and *donkey, ant* and *alligator,* and *rat, rabbit,* and *rhinoceros.* Show the children the pictures of the animals whose names begin with the same letter and have the children pronounce the names. Have children say the names of animals and clap to show how many beats each word has. (Do not show them the words yet!) Help children to decide that *horse* is a one-beat word and that *hippopotamus* takes a lot more claps and is a five-beat word. Now, show children the two words and say, "One of these words is *horse,* and the other is *hippopotamus.* Who thinks they can figure out which one is which?" The children will probably quickly guess that *horse* in the short word and *hippopotamus* is the really long word. Turn the card to the picture side to show them that they correctly figured out which word was which. Continue with the other sets of words that begin alike and help children notice that short words have just a few letters but long words have many letters!

Play Blending and Segmenting Games In addition to using the names of your children to help them learn to blend and segment, you can use a variety of other words that help build their meaning vocabularies while simultaneously practicing blending and segmenting. Use pictures related to your unit or from simple concept and alphabet books. Let each child take a turn saying the name of the picture (one sound at a time), and call on another child to identify the picture. In the beginning, limit the pictures to five or six items whose names are very different and short—*truck, frog, cat, pony, tiger,* for example. After children understand what they are trying to do, they love playing a variation of "I Spy," in which they see something in the room, stretch out its name, and then call on someone to figure out what was seen and to give the next clue.

Read Rhyming Books and Chant Rhymes One of the best indicators of how well children will learn to read is their ability to recite rhymes when they walk into kindergarten. Since this is such a reliable indicator and since rhymes are so naturally appealing to children at this age, kindergarten and first-grade classrooms should be filled with rhymes. Children should learn to recite these rhymes, sing the rhymes, clap to the rhymes, act out the rhymes, and pantomime the rhymes. In some primary classrooms, they develop "raps" for the rhymes.

As part of your read-aloud, include lots of rhyming books, including such old favorites as *Hop on Pop; One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish;* and *There's a Wocket in My Pocket.* As you read the book for the second time—once is never near enough for a

favorite book of young children—pause just before you get to the rhyme and let the children chime in with the rhyming word.

Read and Invent Tongue Twisters Children love tongue twisters, which are wonderful reminders of the sounds of beginning letters. Use children's names and let them help you create the tongue twisters. Have students say them as fast as they can and as slowly as they can. When students have said them enough times to have them memorized, write them on posters or in a class book.

Teach Letter Names and Sounds

Through all the activities just described, children will begin to learn some letter names and sounds. You can accelerate this learning with some of the following activities.

Use Children's Names to Teach Letter Names and Sounds When you focus on a special child each day, chanting and writing that child's name and then comparing the names of all the children, many children will begin to learn some letter names and sounds. Once all the names are displayed, however, and most of the children can read most of the names, you can use these names to solidify knowledge of letter names and sounds.

Imagine that these children's names are displayed on the word wall or name board:

David	Rasheed	Robert	Catherine	Cindy
Mike	Sheila	Larry	Joseph	Julio
Amber T.	Matt	Erin	Shawonda	Bianca
Erica	Kevin	Adam	Delano	Brittany
Bill	Tara	Amber M.	Octavius	Kelsie

Begin with a letter that many children have in their names and that usually has its expected sound. With this class, you might begin with the letter *r.* Have all children whose names have an *r* in them come to the front of the class, holding cards with their names on them. First count all the *r*'s. There are 12 *r*'s in all. Next, have the children whose names contain an *r* divide themselves into those whose names begin with an *r*—*Robert* and *Rasheed;* those whose names end with an *r*—*Amber T.* and *Amber M.*; and those with an *r* that is not the first or the last letter—*Brittany, Erica, Tara, Erin, Catherine,* and *Larry.* Finally, say each name slowly, stretching out the letters, and decide if you can hear the usual sound of that letter. For *r,* you can hear them all.

Now choose another letter, and let all those children come down and display their name cards. Count the number of times that letter occurs, and then have the children divide themselves into groups according to whether the letter is first, last, or in between. Finally, say the names, stretching them out, and decide if you can hear the usual sound that letter makes. The letter *D* would be a good second choice. You would have *David* and *Delano* beginning with *d; David* and *Rasheed* ending with *d; Cindy, Shawonda,* and *Adam* having a *d* that is not first or last. Again, you can hear the usual sound of *d* in all these names.

Continue picking letters and having children come up with their name cards until you have sorted for some of the letters represented by your names. When doing the letters *s, c, t,* and *j,* be sure to point out that they can have two sounds and that the *th* in *Catherine* and the *sh* in *Sheila, Shawonda,* and *Rasheed* have their own special sounds. You probably should not sort out the names with an *h* because although *Shawonda, Sheila, Rasheed, Catherine,* and *Joseph* all have *h's,* the *h* sound is not represented by any of these. The same would

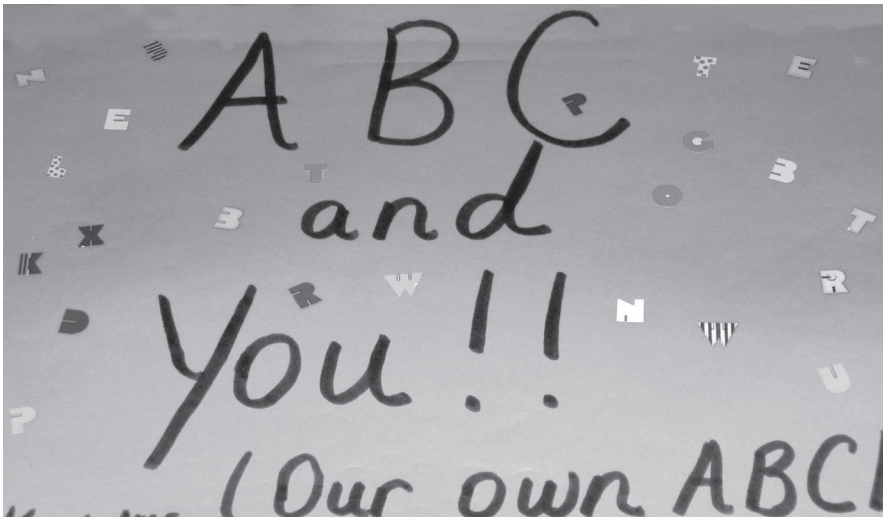
go for *p,* which only occurs in *Joseph.* When you have the children come down for the vowels—*a, e, i, o,* and *u*—count and then sort the children according to first, last, and in between but do not try to listen for the sounds. Explain that vowels have many different sounds and that the children will learn more about the vowels and their sounds all year.

Use Favorite Words with Pure Initial Sounds as Key Words Capitalize on the concrete words you have been teaching your children by choosing one or two of these words to represent each of the important sounds. Use your children's names when they have the appropriate sounds and then use other concrete words you have been learning.

When teaching the first letter–sound relationships, begin with two letters that are very different in look and sound and that are made in different places of the mouth—*b* and *l,* for example. Also choose two letters for which your children's names can be the examples. Show the children the two words, *Bill* and *Larry,* which will serve as key words for these letters. Have the children pronounce the two key words and notice the positions of their tongues and teeth as they do. Have Bill stand in the front of the room and hold the word *Bill.* Also have Larry hold a card with his name on it. Say several concrete words that begin like *Bill* or *Larry—bike, lemon, box, book, ladder, lady, boy*—and have the children say them after you. Have them notice where their tongues and teeth are as they say the words. Let the children point to the child holding the sign *Bill* or *Larry* to indicate how each word begins.

The Alphabet Song and Alphabet Books "The Alphabet Song" has been sung by generations of children. Not only do children enjoy it, but it seems to give them a sense of all the letters and a framework in which to put new letters as they learn them. Many children come to school already able to sing "The Alphabet Song." Let them sing it and teach it to everyone else. Once the children can sing the song, you may want to point to alphabet cards (usually found above the chalkboard) as they sing. Children also enjoy "being the alphabet" as they line up to go somewhere. Simply pass out your laminated alphabet cards—one to each child, leftovers to the teacher—and let the children sing the song slowly as they line up. Be sure to hand out the cards randomly, so that no one always gets to be the *A* and lead the line or has to be the *Z* and bring up the rear every day!

Wonderful alphabet books are also available. You can read these books aloud over and over. Your children can select these books to "read" during their independent reading. Teacher aides, as well as parent and grandparent volunteers, can "lap read" these in



the reading corner and so on. Your class can create its own alphabet book modeled after the children's favorite alphabet books. Be sure to focus on the meanings of the words in all alphabet books you use, so that children will add words to their oral vocabularies.

Source: Patricia Cunningham

Letter Actions Young children love movement! Teach children actions for the letters, and they will remember those letters. Write a letter on one side of a large index card and an action on the other. The first time you teach each letter, make a big deal of it. Get out the rhythm sticks and the marching music when you *march* for *M*. Go out on the playground and do *jumping jacks* for *J*. Play *hopscotch* and *hop* like bunnies for *H*.

When the children have learned actions for several letters, you can do many activities in the classroom without any props. Have all the children stand by their desks and wait until you show them a letter. Then, they should do that action until you hide the letter behind your back. When they have all stopped and you have their attention again, show them another letter and have them do that action. Continue this with as many letters as you have time to fill. Be sure to make comments such as "Yes, I see everyone marching because *M* is our marching letter."

In another activity, pass out the letters for which children have learned the actions to individual children. Each child then gets up and does the action required and calls on someone to guess which letter he or she was given. In "Follow the Letter Leader," the leader picks a letter card and does that action. Everyone else follows the leader, doing the same action. The leader then chooses another card and the game continues.

Teachers have different favorites for letter actions, and you will have your own favorites. Try to select actions with which everyone is familiar and that are only called by single names. Following is a list of actions we like:

bounce	hop	nod	vacuum
catch	jump	paint	walk
dance	kick	run	yawn
fall	laugh	sit	zip
gallop	march	talk	

The action for *s* is our particular favorite. You can use it to end the game. Children say, "It is not an action at all," but remember that "*s* is the sitting letter." You may want to take pictures of various members of your class doing the different actions and make a book of actions they can all read and enjoy.

English Language Learners

Using concrete words, alphabet picture books, and actions will help all your students learn letter names and sounds. Your English language learners will reap the extra benefit of adding these words to their oral vocabularies.

Summary

Emergent literacy research began with the work of Charles Read (1975) and his mentor, Carol Chomsky (1971). Read's work described for many of us at the time what we were seeing in the writing of young children. Read taught us that young children's spellings are developmental and could be predicted by analyzing the consonant and vowel substitutions students consistently made. Chomsky's article, "Write First, Read Later," was seminal in helping to shift instruction toward the field that came to be known as *emergent literacy.*

Much of the emergent literacy research has been done in the homes of young children, tracing their literacy development from birth until the time they read and write in conventional ways (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). From this observational research, it became apparent that children in literate home environments engage in reading and writing long before they begin formal reading instruction. These children use reading and writing in a variety of ways and pass through a series of predictable stages on their voyage from pretending and scribbling to conventional reading and writing. When parents read to children, interact with them about the print they see in the world (signs, cereal boxes, advertisements), and encourage and support their early writing efforts, children establish a firm foundation for learning to read.

This chapter has summarized the crucial understandings essential to building the foundation for success. Through early reading and writing experiences, children learn why we read and write. They develop background knowledge and vocabulary, print concepts, and phonemic awareness. They learn some concrete important-to-them words and some letter names and sounds. Most important, they develop the desire to learn to read and gain self-confidence in their own ability to become literate. Classrooms in which all children develop a firm foundation of emergent literacy provide a variety of reading, writing, and word activities to help all children get off to a successful start in literacy.

How Well Does Your Classroom Help Children Build the Literacy Foundation?

1. Do I read aloud to children and provide a print-rich classroom so that my children will all know why we read and write?
2. Do I build meaning vocabulary when I read aloud to my students and during other activities throughout the day?
3. Do I model writing and do other activities from which all children can learn the conventions and jargon of print?
4. Do I use a variety of activities to teach all the phonemic awareness skills?
5. Do I include activities from which all children can learn to read and write some concrete words?
6. Do I use concrete words and other activities to teach letter names and sounds?
7. Do I establish a climate in my classroom so that all children develop the desire to learn to read and write and the confidence that they can?

4

Fluency

SOMETIMES TO UNDERSTAND what something is, you have to understand what it is not. To experience what it feels like to read without fluency, read this paragraph **aloud** WITHOUT first reading it to yourself. When you have finished reading it, cover it and summarize what you read.

FLUENCYISTHEABILITYTOREADMOSTWORDSINCONTEXTQUICKLYAND
ACCURATELYANDWITHAPPROPRIATEEXPRESSIONFLUENCYISCRITICAL
TOREADINGCOMPREHENSIONBECAUSEOFTHEATTENTIONFACTOR
OURBRAINSCANATTENDTOALIMITEDNUMBEROFTHINGSATATIMEIF
MOSTOFOURATTENTIONISFOCUSEDONDECODINGTHEWORDSTHERE
ISLITTLEATTENTIONLEFTFORTHECOMPREHENSIONPARTOFREADING
PUTTINGTHEWORDSTOGETHERANDTHINKINGABOUTWHATTHEYMEAN

If you paused to figure out some of the words and if your phrasing and expression was not very smooth, you have experienced what it feels like when you cannot read something fluently. If your summary lacked some important information, you have experienced the detrimental effects of the lack of comprehension. If you are developing a headache, you have experienced what a painful task reading can be to readers who lack fluency.

Fluency is the ability to read most words in context quickly and accurately and with appropriate expression. It is critical to reading comprehension because of the attention factor. Our brains can attend to a limited number of things at a time. If most of our attention is focused on decoding the words, there is little attention left for the comprehension part of reading—putting the words together and thinking about what they mean.

The paragraph you just read is exactly the same as the one written in caps with no punctuation and no spaces between words. If, this time, you read it quickly and effortlessly and with good comprehension, you read it the way you normally read everything—fluently.

In order to become avid and enthusiastic readers who get pleasure and information from reading, children must develop fluency. Children who have to labor over everything they read, as you did with the paragraph with no spacing or punctuation opening paragraph, will only read when forced to read and will never understand how anyone can actually enjoy reading!

Fluency is not something you have or don't have. In fact, how fluent a reader you are is directly related to the complexity of the text you are reading. If you are reading a text on a familiar topic with lots of words you have read accurately many times before, you probably recognize those familiar words immediately and automatically. All your attention is then available to think about the meaning of what you are reading. If you are reading a text on an unfamiliar topic with lots of new words, you will have to stop and decode these words in some way—using the letter–sound and morphemic patterns you know to turn the printed letters into sounds and words. In order to comprehend what you have read, you may have to reread the text once or even twice so that your attention is freed from decoding and available for comprehending.

The National Reading Panel (2000) explains this relationship between reading comprehension and fluency:

> If text is read in a laborious and inefficient manner, it will be difficult for the child to remember what has been read and to relate the ideas expressed in the text to his or her background knowledge. (p. 11)

Fluency is fast, expressive reading. Close your eyes and try to imagine the voices of your good and struggling readers as they read aloud. The good readers probably sound "normal." They identify almost all the words quickly and accurately and their voices rise and fall and pause at appropriate points.

Some of your struggling readers, however, read one word at a time hes—si—ta—ting and and and re—peat—ing words. Every teacher has had the experience of working with students who can read many words but for whom reading is a tortured, labored, word-by-word, sometimes syllable-by-syllable, process. Dysfluent reading is slow, labored, and lacking in expression and phrasing. Fluency is the ability to quickly and automatically

Common Core Connections: Fluency

Reading: Foundational Standard 4 recognizes the importance of fluency to young readers. First- and second-graders are expected to read grade-level text orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings and to use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding. Foundational Standard 3 recognizes that, in English, many of the most common words (*they*, *want*, *of*) cannot be decoded and requires that first-, second-, and third-graders read grade-appropriate irregularly spelled words.