The RTI (Response to Intervention) series
Everything you need to know about

Learning the Alphabet

This program will help you understand how the alphabet is learned and how to effectively teach alphabet skills

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Alphabetic Writing System

• Spelling roughly associated with pronunciation of words

• At least a rough pronunciation of unknown words can be derived by applying alphabetic principles

• Children must discover the link between speech sounds and letters

• Includes learning letter names and letter sounds
Learning the alphabet

• Once thought of as a simple associative learning task
• Now recognized as a complex linguistic accomplishment
• Develops across multiple dimensions and skills
• Has an extended developmental course
• Many years to achieve adult competence
Early Development

• Roots in infancy
• Evolves systematically throughout early childhood
• Requires consistent exposure to literacy
Letter Names

• Letter names provide a means to learn the alphabet code
• Step toward learning how letters represent pronounceable words before they can use letter-sound strategies
• May also provide an initial step toward phonological awareness
Letter Sounds

• Advanced phonological awareness is needed to detect sounds within letter names
• Multiple sources of phonemic awareness each contribute (rhyme, developmental spelling, play with letters, alphabet books)
Alphabet Song

• Sung by mothers from infancy
• Sung to tune of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star
• Before 3 years children chime in with letter names
• Sing entire song independently between 4-5 yr
• Many letter names rhyme, ending in the phoneme /i/ [long e] (b, c, d, e, g, p, t, v, z)
• Rhyme helps children remember letter names before they recognize the letters
Age:

- 3-4;0 - recites the alphabet (rote memory)
- 4-4;6 - knows many letter names
- 4;6-5 - knows letters by name in own name
- 5-5;6 - uses letter names to spell words LFNT
In *Phonic Faces* (elementory.com) the first syllable of the character’s name is the letter name. Names for people are familiar to children and they understand that the character can both have a name and make a sound. The character name cues the letter name.
Letter Names

• Letter names are pronounced as a single syllable (except w) so they sound like other words (as opposed to letter sounds that are more difficult to pronounce and do not sound like words)
• Most of the letter names fit a sound pattern
  • Pattern 1 = consonant + /i/ (b, c, d, e, g, p, v, z)
  • Pattern 2 = /ɛ/ + consonant (f, l, m, n, s, x)
• Children know more Pattern one names
Pattern 1

• Pattern 1 = consonant + /i/ [long e] (b, c, d, e, g, p, v, z)

• Letter name is a bridge into letter-sound learning because the letter name can be heard in words (b = beat, beach, bees)

• Children can correctly give letter heard at the beginning ("b") if letter name is heard (beat, bees) but not for words with other vowels like "bone" or "bag"
Pattern 2

- \( \varepsilon = \) short e sound
- \( /\varepsilon l/ \ /\varepsilon m/ \ /\varepsilon n/ \ /\varepsilon s/ \ /\varepsilon ks/ \)
- Children must ignore onset, attend to rime
- More difficult than consonant + /i/ but easier than letters such as ‘h’ or ‘w’
- Letters recognized in words that contain the sound (deaf, hen, them) but not words with other vowels (loaf, gone, him)
Intervention for Discovering Letter Sound Principle

Phonic Faces have different faces for long and short e. The baby has his first tooth and makes the short e sound as he coos “eh eh.” The adult makes the long e sound as his lips pull back in a smile that shows all of his teeth as he says /i/ (long e sound). The faces used on the Phonic Faces Train (elementory.com) help the child listen for a sound using a letter name strategy.

“What sound do you hear at the beginning of the word, “bean?”

“What sound do you hear at the end of the word, “Ben?”
Intervention for Discovering Letter Sound Principle

*Phonic Faces Basic Books* (elementory.com) provide the sound production cue shown by the letter in the face and several pictures of words that begin with the sound. Toddlers who were read these books 3 times weekly for 6 weeks (5-7 minute book readings) made gains in letter identification, letter discrimination, sound production and other measures and maintained the skills when retested 6 weeks later. Terrell, Pamela A (2007).
The *Phonic Faces Alphabet-Dictionary* (elementory.com) provides the sound production cue shown by the letter in the face as the first letter-sound of each word. Toddlers who were presented these words weekly for 6 weeks (5-7 minute book readings) learned sight words and also identified beginning letters and learned letter sounds. McInnis, Alicia T. (2008).
Phonology vs Letter Sounds

• Learning to decode words is more than associating sounds with letters
• Speech is not produced as a series of sounds
• Rather, overlapping ballistic movements
• Saying sounds in sequence does not really sound like the word (/d/ /ɔ/ /g/)
• Child must recover underlying phonological representation
Alphabet and Spelling

- To spell, child must listen for sounds and choose a letter to represent each sound.
- Each time word is spelled, child must reinvent a spelling (see our free RTI Developmental Spelling program).
- Notices different features or sounds.
- Results in increasing awareness of sounds in specific word positions.
- Brings sound structure of words to conscious awareness.
- Spelling improves Phonemic Awareness, and Phonemic Awareness improves spelling.
Intervention for Alphabet and Spelling

• Programs like the *Lindamood Phonemic Sequencing (LiPS)®* use speech production cues to use the oral aspects of sounds to identify and order them within words.

• Research shows that children are very successful using this approach and do readily become aware of their own speech production.

• However, children still need to learn how arbitrary letter shapes represent these sounds.

• Phonic Faces® (elementory.com) makes this transition from sound to letters easy for children learning LIPS or other programs.
Phonic Faces: Speech Production Cues

Use Phonic Faces (elementory.com) to teach the alphabetic principle

The shape of the letter is drawn in the mouth to represent what sound the letter makes your mouth produce. The circular shape of letter “A” looks like the open mouth of a crying baby (ahhh!); the curve of letter “p” looks like the top lip popping the /p/ sound; the top of letter “m” looks like the cupid’s bow of the top lip, which says /mmmm/ as the boy eats candy; the straight like of the “t” looks like the tongue tapping behind the teeth (represented by the horizontal line). Kids just have to copy the faces to make the correct letter-sound association (no prior phonemic awareness required).
The *Phonic Faces Train* helps children focus sequentially on beginning, middle, and ending sounds. As they attempt letters, the adult provides feedback. “Look at the faces. They tell my mouth to say ‘fog.’ How could you change the first sound to make my mouth say /d//d/ “dog?”

The sound production cues shown by the faces enable children to manipulate sounds before they have phonemic awareness. By engaging in these activities, phonemic awareness develops along with letter sound knowledge and spelling patterns.
Letter Shapes

- Infants see letter shapes on blocks, toys, books
- Writing begins as soon as they can grasp and make marks (scribble by 18 months)
- The curves and lines of scribbling become the forms needed to write letters
- Begin to write letters between 4-5 years
Writing Own Name

- Name is usually first word attempted
- Assisted by adults who name the letter as it is printed
- Children learn letters in own name by 3 years
- Use these same letters, regardless of letter-sounds, to spell new words
- Actual letter-sounds are learned gradually, often beginning with visually distinct letters like “s”
Writing Letter Shapes

Children learn to write letters by associating the lines with speech production cues. “Draw a line straight down to stop the air in his mouth. Now draw a curve at the top of the line like his top lip to pop the sound out of his mouth.”

Practice writing the letter in isolation and in words. Stop the air with a line, pop the air with a curve.

Worksheets available at elementary.com
Putting It All Together

• Usually by kindergarten year, children begin to consolidate all of the components to master letter-sounds

- **Letter Names**
- **Phonemic Awareness**
- **Letter Shapes**
- **Literacy Experiences**
- **Letter Sounds**
Easily Learned

• Letter-sounds using Phonic Faces are easily learned by toddlers (Terrell, 2008; McInnis, 2008), nonverbal children (Banajee, 2007; Bourque, 2008), and Head Start children (Brazier-Carter, 2008)

• Letters-sounds are learned without the need for advanced phonemic awareness abilities

• Appears to be a more direct route
Writing System


Letter Names


Phonemic Awareness


Rhyme


Spelling


Alphabet Books

Developing phoneme awareness through alphabet books
Bruce A. Murray, Steven A. Stahl and M. Gay Ivey (1996). Reading and Writing
Volume 8, Number 4, 307-322,


Letter Shapes


Speech Production


Letter Sounds


Phonic Faces


Materials


