Print Awareness: Guidelines for Instruction

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Print awareness is a child’s earliest understanding that written language carries meaning. The foundation of all other literacy learning builds upon this knowledge. The following are guidelines for teachers in how to promote print awareness and a sample activity for assessing print awareness in young children.

Guidelines for promoting print awareness

- The organization of books

  Make sure students know how books are organized. They should be taught the basics about books – that they are read from left to right and top to bottom, that print may be accompanied by pictures or graphics, that the pages are numbered, and that the purpose of reading is to gain meaning from the text and understand ideas that words convey.

- Read to students

  Read to children from books with easy-to-read large print. Use stories that have predictable words in the text.

- Use "big books" and draw attention to words and letters
Help children notice and learn to recognize words that occur frequently, such as *a, the, is, was,* and *you.* Draw attention to letters and punctuation marks within the story.

- **Label objects and centers in your classroom**

  Use an index card to label objects and centers within the classroom with words and pictures. Use an index card with the word "house" for the house center and draw a picture of a house. Draw students' attention to these words when showing them the different centers.

- **Encourage preschool children to play with print**

  They can pretend to write a shopping list, construct a stop sign, write a letter, make a birthday card, etc.

- **Help children understand the relationship between spoken and written language**

  Encourage students to find on a page letters that are in their names: "Look at this word, 'big.' It begins with the same letter as the name of someone in this room, 'Ben.'"

- **Play with letters of the alphabet**

  Read the book *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom.* Place several copies of each letter of the alphabet in a bowl and ask students to withdraw one letter. When everyone has a letter, ask each student to say the letter's name and, if the letter is in his or her own name, have the child keep the letter. Continue until the first child to spell his or her name wins.

- **Reinforce the forms and functions of print**
Point them out in classroom signs, labels, posters, calendars, and so forth.

- Teach and reinforce print conventions
  Discuss print directionality (print is written and read from left to right), word boundaries, capital letters, and end punctuation.

- Teach and reinforce book awareness and book handling

- Promote word awareness by helping children identify word boundaries and compare words

- Allow children to practice what they are learning
  Ask them to listen to and participate in the reading of predictable and patterned stories and books.

- Provide practice with predictable and patterned books
  Also try using a wordless picture book like *Pancakes*. Go through each page asking the children to tell the story from the pictures. Write their narration on a large piece of paper. Celebrate the story they authored by eating pancakes!

- Provide many opportunities for children to hear good books and to participate in read-aloud activities

**A sample activity for assessing print awareness**

Give a student a storybook and ask him or her to show you:

- The front of the book
- The title of the book
- Where you should begin reading
A letter

A word

The first word of a sentence

The last word of a sentence

The first and last word on a page

Punctuation marks

A capital letter

A lowercase letter

The back of the book

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