

**KINDERGARTEN FROM A TO Z:  
A WHOLE LANGUAGE, MULTI-DISCIPLINARY  
APPROACH TO TEACHING THE ALPHABET**

**MASTER'S PROJECT**

**Submitted to the School of Education  
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**by**

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Approved by:

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## DEDICATION

To my father who loved education almost as much as his family

To my mother, Peggy, my husband Steve, and my daughter, Stephanie

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background**

Whole language is a child-centered, language and literature based method of teaching which places the emphasis on teaching language as a whole rather than in isolated segments. Whole language proponents believe children learn to read in a natural, holistic manner similar to the way young children learn to speak oral language. Infants and young children are exposed to oral language as a whole instead of in isolated segments. Children repeatedly hear parents, other adults and older children use language in meaningful ways. Individual sounds are not taught in isolation, and yet children learn and master these sounds and put them together to form words and sentences. Despite the lack of formal instruction, children learn oral language through exposure in a natural way. Just as children are immersed in oral language when they are learning to speak, so children learning to read and write should be immersed in a print rich environment.

In a whole language classroom, teachers provide numerous real, hands-on activities for children to experience. These activities are designed to teach children in a natural way and use materials and topics of interest to the children. The main emphasis is on children being responsible for their own education by making their own choices for their learning experiences. A whole language classroom is

child-centered. The teacher's role is of secondary importance to the student's role. The teacher acts as a facilitator to provide students with the materials they need to grow intellectually, socially, emotionally, creatively, and physically. The materials provided need to be of interest to the students and developmentally appropriate for their use.

A whole language program relies mostly on quality children's literature and all types of environmental print to give children reading experience. Basal readers are of secondary importance if used at all. The use of good quality literature can help ensure the children's interest in reading. Certainly the interests and abilities of the children should be a primary consideration. Since whole language teachers believe in a child-centered curriculum designed to meet the child's interests and needs, the literature chosen will naturally reflect the interests of the students in the class. Environmental print of all kinds are also an excellent way to expose children to letters and words. Whole language teachers believe in providing a print rich environment for children. Reading signs, recipes for cooking, and directions for activities are all examples of the way print can be used in context and in a meaningful way for children.

A whole language classroom gives children numerous opportunities to read and write. Children write to read and

read to write. Reading to children, giving children time to read themselves, and providing materials and encouragement in a writing center are important responsibilities for a whole language teacher in the early grades.

### **Purpose**

This handbook for kindergarten teachers and parents gives suggestions for quality children's literature, activities, and student made books which teach and reinforce letters of the alphabet. In addition to teaching letters of the alphabet and their sounds, students are offered meaningful experiences using written language. An appropriate book of children's literature was suggested as a starting point in the introduction of letters of the alphabet. Two follow-up activities, usually in math or science, were included as reinforcers and enrichment. A multi-disciplinary approach to teaching the alphabet and reading and writing will help provide activities of interest to all students in a class. The wide variety of activities will ensure there is appeal and educational benefit for all children regardless of their interest, learning style, or developmental level.

Each child is able to contribute at their own level to the learning by participating in the class books written by the whole class. This was accomplished by having each student in class dictate to the teacher or write his own completion of the same sentence or story starter for a class



book. These books were usually an extension of the literature or classroom activity. One of the main words in the story starter began with the particular letter being studied during that week. The student made books reinforced the literature and the particular letter of the alphabet introduced. The use of student books increased the knowledge and interest of the students in reading and writing as well as their knowledge of individual letters of the alphabet, whole words and sentences.

Using children's literature, hands-on activities and class books gave students opportunities to learn letters of the alphabet, words, and reading and writing in a meaningful way. The use of student made books in a whole language kindergarten classroom increased the self-confidence and self esteem of students and improved their ability to write and read. Student made books encouraged students to write their own stories and books which increased their confidence in their ability to read and write. The pride of ownership in the student made books increased the interest in reading these books. The simple and repetitious text gave students opportunities to "read" print on their own.

#### **Definition of Terms**

Whole Language - A teaching approach based on the belief that children learn to read and write in natural ways using meaningful print and in a holistic way, rather than by

learning isolated sounds. Children are active participants in the learning process.

Class Books - Books written by students using the same sentence with the same words as a beginning or end to the sentence. Each child in the class will complete his own page either by dictating to the teacher or writing the words themselves and then illustrating the page for the book.

"Kid-watching" - Informal observations of children and the way they read and write in the classroom.

Recurring Principle - The use of the same moves over and over in writing.

Flexibility Principle - Students vary letter forms to produce new letters, these may not always be acceptable letter forms.

Generative Principle - Students use a small set of letters and combine these in various ways to produce limitless writing.

Print Rich Environment - A classroom filled with all kinds of print, not just children's books. A classroom in which books and all kinds of print are read and used often.

Literature Extension Activities - Activities for children built around a text that has been read to the students or read by the students.

Story Starters - Several words used to stimulate the beginning of an idea for children to dictate or write about a common topic.

Experience Chart - A large chart or paper used by teachers to write down what several children dictate in a group situation.

Alphabetic Principle - The realization that print represents language by specific sounds for specific letters.

Cloze Principle - The natural desire or tendency to complete a sentence or thought.

### **Limitations**

This project included students in a whole language kindergarten class of ten children at Young Learner's World in Centerville, Ohio. The children attend a self-contained kindergarten class from 8:30 to 11:30 five days a week. This project was specifically designed to teach the alphabet to children in kindergarten. With slight modification, it could also be used with younger children to give them exposure to reading and writing, hands-on activities and the alphabet. There is also a real possibility of using these activities and similar activities for remedial work or in special education classes.

**CHAPTER II****REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

In a whole language classroom, authentic, natural, functional materials are used to build literacy. (Goodman, Goodman & Hood, 1989) It is particularly critical for young children to be provided with real hands-on materials and activities. Jean Piaget discovered through his research that young children, before six years of age, learn much more by touching, seeing, smelling, tasting, and experiencing than they do by simply listening. (Kantrowitz & Winger, 1989) More recently David Elkind pointed out that children under six or seven require real, physical action with real things. Active interest and involvement in the learning process by children is supported by good educators. (Schickedanz, York, Steward, & White 1977) Young children find learning by doing much more interesting. Teaching methods which meet the special needs of children are more successful. (Kantrowitz, 1989) Meeting the special needs of children is the motivation of a whole language program.

"Whole language instruction is a total immersion program." (Harp, 1991) Whole language programs help children become competent readers and writers by teaching skills when there is an obvious need for them. Skills are taught and learned through meaningful reading and writing activities. (Lamme & Lee, 1990) In a whole language classroom, children have many opportunities to read and write. The instruction-

al focus is on communication not on isolated forms of language. Reading and writing should be done for meaning rather than for mechanical reasons. (Harp, 1991)

Whole language teachers teach students from whole to part by integrating reading, writing, speaking, and listening with the main emphasis on meaning and purpose. (Educational Research Service, 1991) If written language is kept whole, functional, and meaningful, children will be able to use their current knowledge to understand it. Language development does not need to be broken down into isolated skills of reading, writing, and speaking in order to be mastered. Children learn to talk and reason first, but they are capable of expressing their thoughts and having them written down through dictation before they are physically or mentally ready to write themselves. In the early grades, experts agree content is more important than form. Children can eventually write down their own thoughts even though these attempts may not be letter perfect. Language, speaking, reading and writing should be presented to children in a way that actually makes sense and has a reason to it. (Kantrowitz, 1989) Children learn oral language by using it as a whole not learning it in isolated parts. Just as children learn oral language in a holistic way, children need to learn written language by using it as best they can in a holistic manner which includes any mistakes that may occur with beginning writing efforts. (Calkins, 1986)

The emphasis in a whole language classroom is on using a child's own natural language to instruct. This instruction is accomplished through the use of teacher written charts, and student writing. Lessons are child-centered and based on a child's need to communicate rather than teacher centered. Trade books are as important or more important than basal readers. Basal readers may still be used in a whole language classroom, but there is much less emphasis on them. Decoding lessons are taught as the need arises in the context of reading whole texts. Phonics are not taught in isolation. Phonics and other reading instruction are taught in connection with the context of real whole texts of stories. Teachers focus on the meaningfulness of language as a whole rather than on nonmeaningful segments of language. Segments are taught as needed to understand particular texts. (Stahl & Miller, 1989)

Reading is an important part of any whole language classroom. Research shows when parents read stories to their children, there is a positive effect on their later language and interest in books. Teachers can also have a very positive effect on students by reading to them. Students learn about reading by reading and by having books read to them. Professional literature supports the importance of reading aloud to children. If readings are repeated, it encourages children to explore those books for themselves. Repeated readings also promote independent, emer-

gent reading of those particular books. (Strickland & Morrow, 1989) Reading to children shows them that print has a desirable end, a good story. (Temple, Nathan, Burris & Temple, 1988) Reading aloud to children is recognized as a valuable and appropriate activity in the development of language and emergent literacy in young children. (Wolter, 1992) During story times, children begin to understand that print carries meaning that does not change and that pictures represent the objects and events in the story. Group story time is also a social experience. It helps teach children appropriate ways to respond to stories so they do not disturb others. A child's emotional, social, and cognitive development are all enhanced through the use of story time. (Conlon, 1992)

Reading to children helps to build a positive attitude toward reading and can develop a strong desire in young children to learn to read themselves. Some of the books chosen to be read to children might be predictable books which make it easier for children to anticipate and recall the words of the story. Predictable books contain much repetition and rhyme. (Strickland, 1989) Teachers can also use the cloze procedure when reading to children. When using this, the teacher omits one or more of the words at the end of a sentence or phrase. The children supply the missing word or words by using the context clues, picture clues, or knowledge of rhyming words if the story uses

rhyiming words. (Anderson, 1984)

Still another way to use reading with young children is to read recipes and follow the directions for cooking and then eating. This certainly gives a message that learning to read is valuable and has a pleasurable end result.

(Schickedanz, 1977) In addition to reading to children, teachers should also provide an appealing display of various books for children to read themselves. The books offered should be good quality literature and include easy to read, familiar and predictable books. (Schickedanz, 1986) Repetition in children's books helps to increase understanding and encourages children to explore print on their own.

(Wolter, 1992)

After beginning with lots of shared book experience and reading aloud to children, including calling attention to the way letters signal sounds in words, teachers should encourage children to make their own print with paper and pencil. (Temple, 1988) Dictation is often used in lower grades to teach the concept of words, spacing, sentences, and to encourage standard spelling. (Educational Research Service, 1991) When taking dictation for children, a teacher or older student models left to right progression, and top to bottom progression as well as standard spelling. Dictation can be a one on one activity between a writer and a child or it can be used as a group activity. (Schickedanz, 1977)



As a group activity, a teacher writes down what is said in a group situation on an experience chart. The teacher actually can involve the child or children in the process more by having children help determine the letters that should be used to spell words. Children are learning letter-sound association when this occurs. (Schickedanz, 1977)

The follow-up activity to any dictation is to have both the person taking dictation and the person giving dictation to read the words together and follow the printed words. (Educational Research Service, 1991) Most importantly, dictation of any kind helps children appreciate the relationship between spoken and written language. (Schickedanz, 1977)

As teachers take dictation from children and model the writing process, they are helping children learn to write on their own. In a positive environment that encourages children to take chances, children will begin to write their own stories. Trust, support, help, and encouragement stimulate learning to occur. With positive feedback and lots of experience, children will learn how writing works and master the techniques themselves. (Walton, 1989)

The first and most important thing a teacher can do to help emergent writers is to encourage and support children's early efforts to write. A well-supplied writing area with various writing tools is a must. (Schickedanz, 1986) A good writing center might include labeled shelves with

supplies, a plastic file holder with hanging folders for the children's work, a desk, and table and chairs. The supplies available on the shelves would be different kinds and sizes of paper, envelopes, rulers, crayons, pencils, markers, a stapler, a date stamp, and a stamp pad. An alphabet chart and laminated alphabet cards with upper and lower case letters should also be accessible to the children. (Fisher, 1991) Writing centers with picture dictionaries that illustrate and spell words and include writing tools of all kinds encourage young writers to create their own writing. (Silberman, 1989)

In the first year of formal schooling, usually kindergarten, children demonstrated their ability to print in the following ways. Students:

1. drew pictures and the teacher wrote captions.
2. traced over teacher's script
3. copied captions
4. copied words from around the room
5. remembered word forms and wrote them independently
6. invented (generated) word forms, often correctly
7. got a written copy of unknown words from the teacher

(Clay, 1975, p. 1)

Another teaching strategy in a whole language classroom is the use of literature extension activities. After the teacher or children have read a text, activities are designed to reinforce the story. These may include retelling, creating puppets, dramatizing, an art activity, or creating new books based on the story. These activities reinforce reading as fun and use art and writing with reading to teach

young children. (Educational Research Service, 1991)

Extension activities complement and enhance the effects of storybook readings. (Temple, 1988) All of these will help students to enjoy and get more meaning from the text.

During the kindergarten year, we expect children to progress from talking about print as they would a picture to the realization that print represents language. Young children need to develop an understanding of how writing represents ideas. There are three needs for a beginning writing group. Teachers need to establish an approximation of a literate community by drawing out children's language, leading children to compose orally, and helping children find a connection between written representation and spoken language. (Temple, 1988)

After students find a connection between written and spoken language, they acquire the alphabetic principle which is the realization that print represents language by sounds. Students begin with recognition of one or two letter sounds which are usually consonants. When this occurs, children will begin to use the letters they know to write on their own. Teachers can help beginning writers by supplying unknown letters and providing encouragement. As they are helping and observing students, teachers can also assess the students' skills in three areas. These areas are letter formation, phonics' skill, and the understanding of the mechanics of print. (Temple, 1988) This is known as "kid-

watching", a term coined by Yetta Goodman to describe the continual observation, interaction, and analysis of a student in order to assess growth. (Goodman, 1989)

Early childhood educators and whole language teachers know that young children learn by doing. In one whole language kindergarten classroom, children learn to read and write by doing since writing and making books are everyday occurrences. After a class trip, the children dictated highlights of the trip to the teacher and then each child illustrated one part of the class book. The book was laminated, bound, and then placed in the class library. This book and others created by students themselves were frequently the most popular in the classroom. (Fields & Hillstead, 1990)

**CHAPTER III****DEVELOPMENT OF THE HANDBOOK**

The ideas for this handbook occurred in various ways. Excellent classes, ideas from other respected teachers, books on early childhood education, and trial and error all played a part in the development of this handbook. There is no easy way to develop a curriculum and there are no quick answers to the challenges of teaching young children. Each program of study must reflect the needs of the particular students and the personality of the teacher. A curriculum should not be static, but rather change as the need occurs. The goals are often the same or similar each year, but the developmental level of the students may be very different and must be considered when designing the activities to be used.

There are several ways to select books for children. One of the most obvious ways, that may not be used often enough, is to ask the students themselves to recount their favorite books, stories, and authors. This is a sure fire way to succeed. When children make their own choices, they are choosing what they are interested in and what they will enjoy. The second way to choose books is to ask other teachers to give a list of the most successful and popular books they have used in their classrooms. This can be a general list or a request for a book or books on a specific topic or area of interest. These books should also have a

high chance of success in the classroom since they have been used with success by other teachers. Teacher's workshops on reading and literature and teacher's journals are a good source of literature for children. These can be especially helpful in learning about new books. Public libraries also offer workshops on using children literature in the classroom and on new recently published books. The list of Newbery and Caldecott Award winning children's books might be used to find high quality literature for children.

One of the very best resources for any list of good quality children's literature is the librarian at school or the public library. These qualified individuals provide a wealth of information to teachers, particularly whole language teachers who rely so heavily on trade books rather than basal readers to teach children to read. It is possible to request books on any subject and interest at the desired reading level. Children's books and suggested activities can also be found in commercial teacher's manuals designed for a whole language approach to teaching the alphabet. Two of the commercial books this author has used for ideas in this project and in her teaching are R Is For Rainbow Developing Young Children's Thinking Skills Through The Alphabet and Alphabet Theme-A-Saurus. Despite expert advice, there will still be some books which appeal to children more than others. There will also be a few books that are a disappointment regardless of the careful planning

that may have occurred before choosing these books. For this reason there should be a variety of books available to children at all times. Not all reading must be story books. Poetry, non-fiction, recipes and other types of reading should be included as well. Big books, predictable books, easy to read books, and rhyming books are all examples of the literature included in a kindergarten classroom.

The activities included in this handbook are a result of years of teaching, workshops, college courses, reading, suggestions from other teachers, inspiration, and most importantly the interests and desires of the students themselves. Many of these activities began in the way I planned and then developed in a different way due to the way the children reacted to the materials.

The activities are designed with a multi-disciplinary approach so all areas of the curriculum are addressed. There are math, science, social studies, and art lessons included in the other activities part of the handbook. Not all children have the same interest level in these different disciplines, so this approach will hopefully appeal to all children in some way. Many of the math activities suggested in the handbook were ideas from Mary Baratta-Lorton's book Mathematics Their Way. It is an excellent hands-on math program for young children. Since children learn in different ways and on different levels, a variety of materials and activities should be provided for students. In select-

ing the activities, there was an effort to choose open ended activities that could be used on different developmental levels. Many of them require very little guidance by the teacher once the activity is explained to the students. Cooking and eating are often included since these are almost always a big success with children. Obviously children will remember activities they enjoy better than those they do not enjoy.

The class books were designed to involve all students in a joint publishing effort that reinforces writing and letters of the alphabet. Not all students approached this endeavor with the same enthusiasm and ability, but all students were involved in their own way and at their own ability level.



**CHAPTER IV****ALPHABET HANDBOOK****Introduction**

The purpose of this handbook was to suggest good children's literature, appropriate hands-on activities, and an idea for a class book to teach and reinforce each letter of the alphabet. This handbook was divided into three sections, by the particular letters introduced in the fall, winter, and spring of a typical school year. Alpha-Time letter people, which are blow-up characters for each letter of the alphabet, are used in this district's kindergarten curriculum of study. Each letter of the alphabet is given a name such as Mr. M, Munching Mouth. This handbook follows the sequence of letters suggested by the Alpha-Time curriculum. Children are introduced to one of the blown-up alphabet characters each week.

In addition to the alphabet characters, quality children's literature is used to reinforce the letters of the alphabet being studied. Since research shows children learn well in a print rich environment, this handbook recommends teachers and parents read to children at least once every day. Using good literature the children will enjoy helps ensure that their interest in reading and writing are increased. Although only one book is suggested to introduce and reinforce each letter of the alphabet, teachers and parents should read as many books as possible and as often

as possible to stress a particular letter of the alphabet to the children. There are many other books which can be used in addition to the ones suggested in this handbook.

Whenever possible fun, hands-on learning experiences are provided for the children. These often seem like play to a casual observer, but are in reality a child's "work". Some of the activities planned for the children are an extension of the literature read to the children and the letter being studied. Two activities for each letter of the alphabet have been included in this handbook. These are merely suggestions and should act as a springboard for other ideas of learning experiences. Teachers, parents and especially the children themselves can often add new and better ideas. The learning belongs to the children themselves and should be an extension of their interests.

The class book suggested in this handbook provided children the opportunity to participate in a joint publishing endeavor. Each child contributed to the project and shares ownership of the completed book. Since each child does his or her own page in the book, they are able to contribute at their own individual level. I have found young children in kindergarten very interested in making books. Most do not have the attention span and ability to write a complete story book themselves. In this way, each child contributes to a complete book. The completed books are available in class for the children to choose to read

during quiet reading time or free choice time. If desired, the class books can be taken apart at the end of the year and assembled as a personal book for each child with each of their own pages. The pages will reflect the work done throughout the entire year by each child.

Children are also encouraged to read these class books to their own class and to younger children in the school. After several class books have been completed, the children are allowed to check these out to take home, similar to the way they would check out a book from a public library. They stamp the date on an index card with their name on it and put their card in a 3 X 5 filing box. They put their card behind a card with the name of the book they are checking out. The children enjoy reading these to their parents or siblings at home before they return them to school. The children have pride of ownership in the books, and most children are able to read them successfully since there is so much repetition. Students learn to use alphabet and picture clues to help them decipher individual pages of the books.

The literature, activities, and class books are merely suggestions. There are many more books, activities, and story starters that could be used for each letter of the alphabet. The important aspect is to involve children at an early age in as many reading and writing activities as possible.

## Section 1

## Fall Letters

Mm

Ff

Tt

Nn

Hh

Bb

Aa

Zz

Pp

**Letter Mm**

**I. Children's Literature:** If You Give a Mouse a Cookie? by  
Laura Joffe Numeroff

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Make chocolate chip cookies in class.

B. Children dictate the sequence of events in the story while the teacher writes these on sentence strips. The children can later arrange these in order and read the sequence of events themselves.

**III. Class Book:**

Children dictate or write their own ending to the sentence, "If you give a mouse a cookie, he will..... Children tell what the mouse will request or do.

**Letter Tt**

**I. Children's Literature:** Tikki Tikki Tembo retold by  
Arlene Mosel

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children write down their whole names and count the number of letters in their names. They will compare names to see who has the longest and the shortest name and who have names that are the same length.

B. Take a nature walk and observe different trees.

**III. Class Book:**

Children complete the sentence "The tree...." and draw a picture of their tree.

**Letter Ff****I. Children's Literature: Fish Is Fish by Leo Lionni****II. Other Activities:**

A. Children estimate the number of goldfish crackers in a jar. The answers are written from the smallest number to the largest number on the chalk board and then the actual number is counted and written on the board. The children decide which numbers were too small and which numbers were too large.

B. Play the "Whale Game" (figure 4.1 and 4.2) from Mathematics Their Way. Each child is given the same number of goldfish crackers to keep in the "ocean" in front of them. The children pretend to be a "whale" looking for fish to eat. Following the teachers directions, the children eat 1, 2, or 3 fish and then count how many are left in the ocean. You can use this to practice adding and subtracting concepts.

**III. Class Book:**

Children draw a picture of fish and finish the sentence "Fish...." The book and each page can be in the shape of a fish to help the children identify this book.

7

NUMBER  
AT THE  
CONCEPT  
LEVEL

## The Whale Game

**SKILLS** \_\_\_\_\_ Addition  
Subtraction  
Counting  
Discovering relationships among different quantities  
Visual imagery

**MATERIALS** \_\_\_\_\_ A paper cup with ten to fifteen Pepperidge Farm goldfish crackers for each child

**ACTIVITY** \_\_\_\_\_ The children act out the whale story as it is told by the teacher. Dramatic embellishments are invited from both teacher and students!




(Mathematics Their Way, 1976)

(figure 4.1)



STRATEGY

TEACHER	CHILDREN
"This is a story about a whale. He was a very special whale and he loved to eat little fish. In this story <i>you</i> are going to play the part of the whale! Who's the whale?"	"We are." "Me!" "You said we get to be."
"And <i>this</i> is your ocean." (Teacher extends his/her hands, palm up.) "Show me your ocean."	The children extend their hands, palm up.
"One bright day the whale was swimming around. All at once he saw two fish swimming near him. Show me what happened!"	Each child takes two fish out of his/her cup and places them in the "ocean." 
"'Boy, am I hungry', said the whale, and he gobbled up one of the fish." (Teacher looks expectantly at the children.)	Each child eats one of the fish from the "ocean."
"And that left how many fish?"	"One."
"Pretty soon two other fish came swimming along. How many fish are in the ocean now?"	Each child places two more fish in the ocean and says, "Three!"
"It didn't take the whale long to spy those three fish. He swam by and in a flash gobbled up one of the fish.	Each child eats one fish and says,
That left . . ."	"Two!"
"The whale was <i>still</i> hungry so he ate one more fish. That left. . ."	Each child eats one fish and says, "One!"
In a little while three more fish came by to join the one that was left. That made. . ."	Each child adds three additional fish and says, "Four."

7  
 NUMBER  
 AT THE  
 CONCEPT  
 LEVEL



Continue to add and subtract fish until all the crackers are eaten. This game should be played over and over again to reinforce number concepts at different levels. Let the children improvise on the theme and take turns telling the story to the group.

.....  
 You can vary this activity by using Fruit Loops or Cheerios, making up a similar donut story.  
 .....

(Mathematics Their Way, 1976)

(figure 4.2)

**Letter Hh**

**I. Children's Literature:** A House Is A House by Mary Ann Hoberman

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children are encouraged to build houses with various types of blocks, including unit blocks and other classroom materials. When they have completed their buildings, each child or group of children take turns describing their house.

B. Children build a house using craft sticks and/or other scrap materials on tagboard.

**III. Class Book:**

Children think of another type of house and what might live in it, similar to the ideas in the book A House Is A House, such as a pod is a house for peas, a cave is a house for a bear, a hive is a house for bees, etc.

**Letter Nn****I. Children's Literature: Noisy Nora by Rosemary Wells****II. Other Activities:**

A. Children tear up newspaper and glue the pieces on a piece of construction paper to make a newspaper nest for birds. They draw birds and eggs in the nest.

B. Children look through newspapers at school and at home to find words they can read. These are cut out and glued on a large sheet of paper titled, "Words We Can Read." These will most likely be advertisements for products they know.

**III. Class Book:**

The "class book" for this letter will actually be a class newspaper written by the students. The students will write or dictate sentences to the teacher about to tell about what is happening at their school and in their classroom. The students may also want to include cartoons, advertisements and other parts of a newspaper in their class newspaper. They will choose a name for the paper and help put the newspaper together. Copies will be sent home to parents and to other classes in the building.

**Letter Aa**

**I. Children's Literature:** Ten Apples Up On Top by Theo LeSieg

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children bring in apples and the apples are graphed according to the size, shape, color, with and without stems, etc.

B. Children cup up apples and prepare Apple Crisp for snack.

**Apple Crisp**

12 apples, peeled, cored, and cut into pieces

Topping:

1/2 cup sugar                      1 cup flour

1/4 cup brown sugar              1/4 cup oleo

Mix topping ingredients well and put on top of apples.

Bake at 350\* for 30 minutes.

**III. Class Book:**

Children cut out apple shapes for the pages in the book.

Each child illustrates their own page and finishes the sentence "Apples ...." by dictating to the teacher or writing the word or words themselves.

**Letter Bb**

**I. Children's Literature:** Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin Jr.

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children bring their favorite stuffed bear to show to the class. The bears are arranged from the smallest to the largest.

B. Awards are given by the teacher for the "Biggest Bear," "Best Dressed Bear," "Smallest Bear," "Softest Bear," "Best White Bear," etc. Each child will receive an award for the best bear in some category. The awards can be circles of poster board with blue ribbons stapled to them.

**III. Class Book:**

Children draw a picture of their bear and finish the sentence "My bear ....."

**Letter Zz**

**I. Children's Literature:** Animals in the Zoo illustrated by Feodor Rojankonsky

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children use small plastic animals to separate into categories of wild animals and tame animals.

B. Children may use the small plastic animals in the block area and construct a zoo with the blocks. The teacher might write the names of some of the animals on small label cards and encourage the children to add more names themselves.

**III. Class Book:**

Children complete the sentence "I saw a \_\_\_\_\_ at the zoo," and draw a picture of the animal they named.

**Letter Pp**

**I. Children's Literature:** The Popcorn Book by Tomie De Paola

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Pop popcorn in a hot air popper into a bowl.

Children try to count the kernels as they pop. Take some of the popcorn and estimate the amount of popcorn. Count the popcorn and determine how many estimations were less or more than the actual amount of popcorn.

B. Children pretend to be popcorn kernels as they get hot, start to move around and then pop.

**III. Class Book:**

Children complete the sentence "Popcorn ....." and draw pictures of popcorn or some fact they learned from the book about popcorn.

## Section 2

## Winter Letters

Ss

Vv

Ee

Ll

Dd

Gg

Cc

Ii

Oo



**Letter Ss**

**I. Children's Literature:** Stone Soup by Marcia Brown

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children bring in different types of vegetables. These are graphed in different ways according to size, shape, color, etc.

B. Children cup up vegetables and cook stone soup in class.

**III. Class Book:**

The children finish the sentence "Stone soup is....." and draw a picture of the soup or a scene from the story.

**Letter Vv**

**I. Children's Literature:** A Day in the Life of a Veterinarian by William Jaspersohn

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Visit a veterinarian office for a field trip or ask a veterinarian to visit your class and then set up the dramatic center of the classroom into a veterinarian office by using play doctor items and stuffed animals for patients. The children can make a price list on chart paper for services at the office.

B. Provide several types of vegetables for the children to taste. After they have tasted each type of vegetable, the children choose their favorite by placing a circle of paper with their name written on it on a graph with the name of each vegetable. Discuss which vegetable received the most votes, the fewest votes, etc.

**III. Class Book:**

Children complete the sentence "My favorite vegetable is..." and draw a picture of their favorite vegetable.

**Letter Ee**

**I. Children's Literature:** Green Eggs and Ham by Dr. Seuss

**II. Other Activities:**

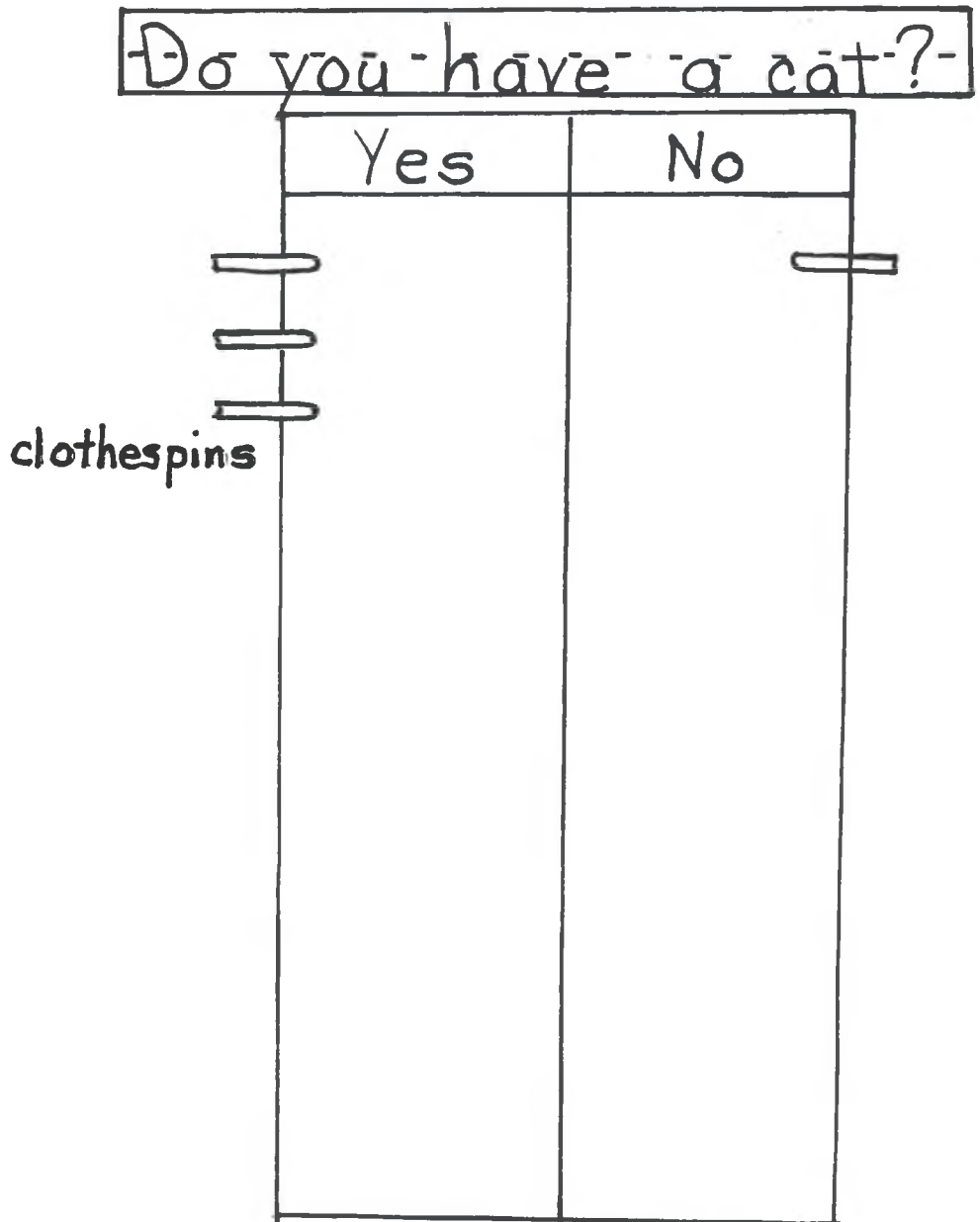
A. Graph the way children prefer their eggs cooked. The sections would be labeled scrambled, fried, soft boiled, or hard boiled.

B. Children answer the question "Do you like green eggs and ham?" using a Yes / No graph (figure 4.3) used in Mathematics Their Way. A poster board is divided in half with a marker down the length of the poster. "Yes" is written on one side and "no" is written on the other side of the line. Students put clothespins on the side that applies to their answer, either the "yes" or "no" side of the chart.

**III. Class Book:**

Children write or dictate their own recipe for or using eggs.

# Yes/No Graph



(figure 4.3)

**Letter Ll**

**I. Children's Literature:** The Grouchy Ladybug by Eric Carle

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children make a ladybug out of construction paper.

B. Children help to name each animal the ladybug met on his travels and these are written down on large chart paper next to the time of day they met each other.

**III. Class Book:**

Children complete the sentence "I love..." and draw a picture of who or what they love.

Letter Dd

I. Children's Literature: A Dozen Dinosaurs by Richard W. Armour

II. Other Activities:

A. Children classify plastic dinosaurs in various groups.

1. Meat eating dinosaurs, plant eating dinosaurs
2. Large dinosaurs, small dinosaurs
3. Dinosaurs with horns, dinosaurs without horns

B. Count a dozen donuts and then have donuts for snack.

III. Class Book:

Children help to write and illustrate a book based on Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See. This book is called Dinosaur, Dinosaur What Do You See. There is a different dinosaur on each page.

**Letter Gg**

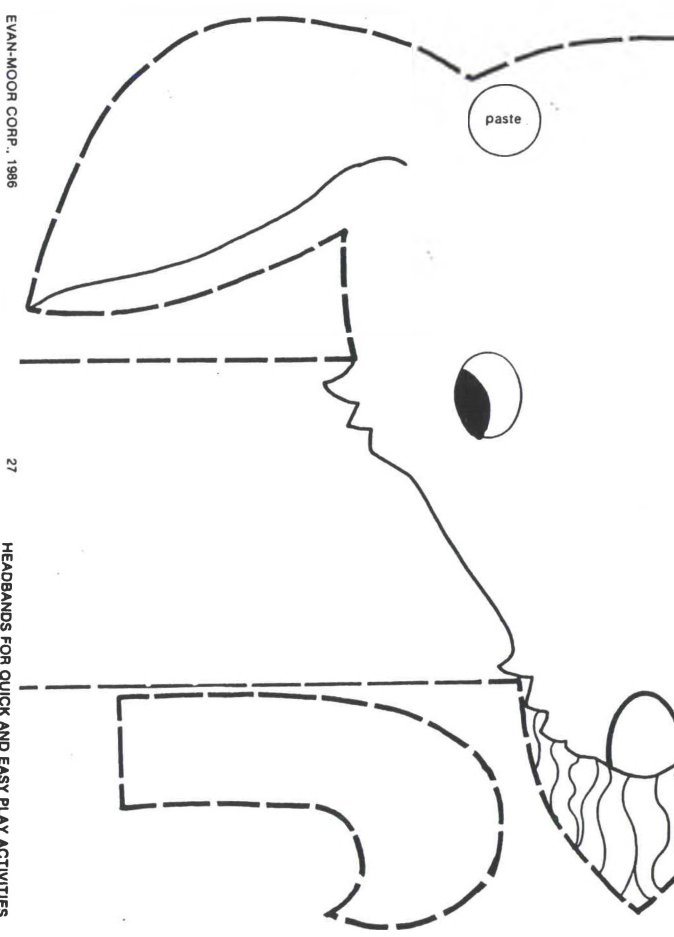
**I. Children's Literature:** The Three Billy Goats Gruff by Paul Galdone

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Estimate the number of green grapes on a bunch of grapes and then have them for snack.

B. Children take turns acting out the story of the three Billy Goats Gruff. Headbands (figure 4.4 and 4.5) can be made for the Troll and the goats.

**III. Class Book:** Children illustrate and begin the sentence, ".....is/are green."



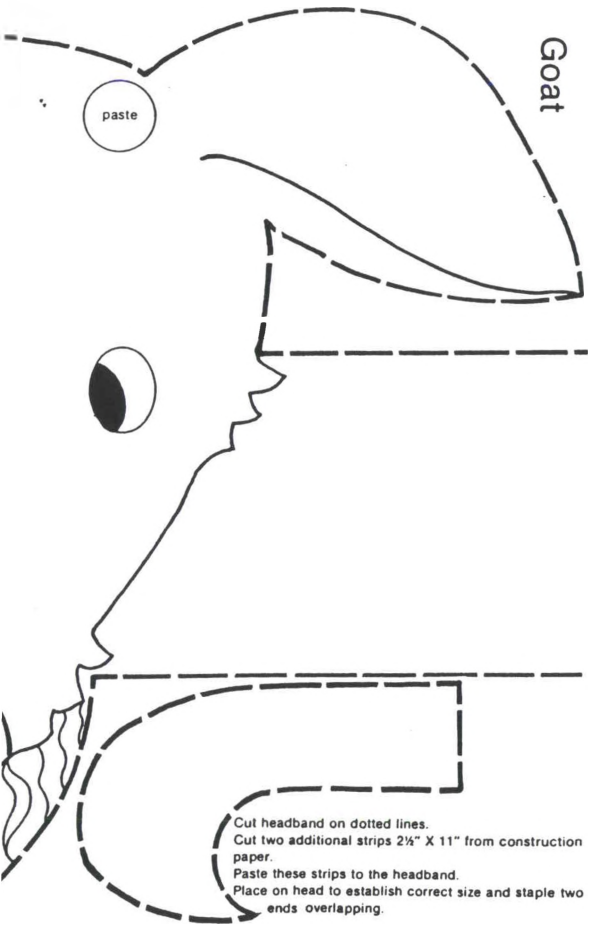
EVAN-MOOR CORP., 1986

27

HEADBANDS FOR QUICK AND EASY PLAY ACTIVITIES

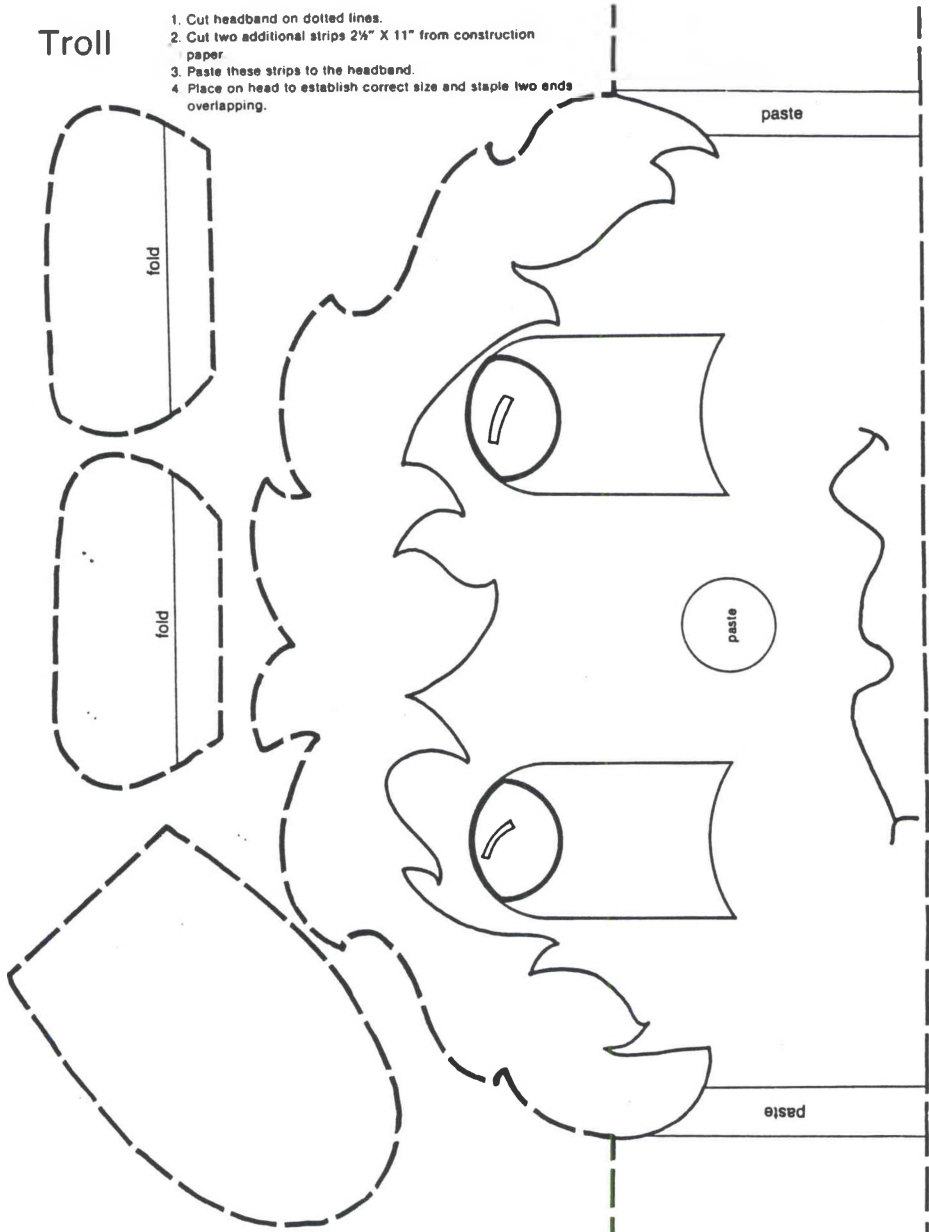
(figure 4.4)





# Troll

1. Cut headband on dotted lines.
2. Cut two additional strips  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " X 11" from construction paper.
3. Paste these strips to the headband.
4. Place on head to establish correct size and staple two ends overlapping.



(figure 4.5)

**Letter Cc**

**I. Children's Literature:** Have You Seen My Cat by Eric Carle

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children answer the question "Do you have a cat?" using a Yes / No (figure 4.3) graph used in Mathematics Their Way.

B. Children use small metal cars dipped in paint (car painting) to "drive" over a large sheet of construction paper.

**III. Class Books:**

Children draw a picture of a cat and finish the sentence "Cats like to....."

**Letter Ii**

**I. Children's Literature: The Important Book by Margaret Brown**

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children make an igloo by gluing styrofoam packing pieces on a piece of tagboard.

B. Children paint with ice by dipping an ice cube in powdered tempera paint and then moving it around on a piece of construction paper.

**III. Class Book:**

Children complete the sentence "Ice...." and illustrate their page for the class book.

**Letter Oo**

**I. Children's Literature:** Opposites by Ruth Thomson

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children play a matching game by matching cards with their opposite picture.

B. Children cut out an oval and glue eight strips of paper onto the oval to make it into an oval octopus.

**III. Class Book:**

Children choose a set of opposites and illustrate them on a page divided into two sections for a class book.

Section 3

Spring Letters

Kk

Yy

Rr

Uu

Xx

Ww

Vv

Oo

**Letter Kk**

**I. Children's Literature: What Do You Do with A Kangaroo?**

by Mercer Mayer

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children make a kite with paper and string.

B. Children make a kangaroo puppet with brown construction paper and small brown paper lunch sacks.

**III. Class Book:**

Children finish the sentence "My kite....." and draw a picture of a kite.

**Letter Ww**

**I. Children's Literature:** Willie Finds A Wallet by Mary Beth Markham

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children make their own wallet using a 6 x 9 inch piece of construction paper (half the size of a small piece of construction paper) which they fold in half lengthwise. They also make money, pictures, credit cards, etc. to go into their wallets.

B. Play a game with the wallets by hiding them around the classroom. The children are to find someone else's wallet. When all the wallets are found, the children take turns describing the wallets so the owner can claim his wallet.

**III. Class Book:**

Children complete the sentence "My wallet ....." and draw a picture of their wallet or something to go inside their wallet.



**Letter Yy**

**I. Children's Literature:** Little Blue and Little Yellow by Leo Lionni

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children paint with yellow and blue paint at the easel and write about their paintings.

B. Children graph different types of yarn according to color size, etc.

**III. Class Books:**

Children begin the sentence "\_\_\_\_\_is / are yellow, and illustrate their page in the class book.

**Letter Rr**

**I. Children's Literature:** Little Red Riding Hood by Paul Galdone

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Put different types of rocks into the science center and let the children examine the rocks and sort them into different types.

B. Act out the story of Little Red Riding Hood in class.

**III. Class Book:**

Children make a red book by drawing pictures of things that are red and complete the sentence ".....is/are red."

**Letter Jj**

**I. Children's Literature: The Giant Jam Sandwich by John Vernon Lord**

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children make their own peanut butter and jelly or jam sandwich for snack.

B. Children make their own jet airplanes out of paper. Have a contest to see whose jet flies the farthest and then measure the distance with string or a tape measure.

**III. Class Book:**

Make a class book with the story starter, " My jet is going to ....." The students draw pictures of the places their jet is flying.

**Letter Uu**

**I. Children's Literature:** Umbrella by Taro Yashima

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Children trace a pattern for an umbrella onto a book of wallpaper samples. They cut out their umbrellas and glue them onto a larger piece of paper and illustrate the rest of their pages.

B. Children help make a list of unusual things on a piece of large chart paper.

**III. Class Book:**

Children finish the sentence "There is a ..... under my umbrella." and illustrate their pages.

**Letter Xx**

**I. Children's Literature:** The Box Book by Cecilia Maloney

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Put out several size toys and several size boxes.

The children match the toys and the boxes together.

B. Children draw a pirate map and use "x" to mark the spot where the treasure is buried.

**III. Class Book:**

Children complete the sentence "There is a ..... inside the box." and draw a picture of the item named.

**Letter Qq**

**I. Children's Literature:** The Quicksand Book by Tomie de Paola

**II. Other Activities:**

A. Make quicksand in a bucket following the directions in Tomie de Paola's The Quicksand Book.

B. Make a class quilt. Each child decorates a square piece of paper. The papers are put together to form a quilt.

**III. Class Book:**

Children complete the sentence "Quicksand...." and illustrate their page for the class book.

## Evaluations

Part B. Instruments used: Checklists etc.

Journal Writing Evaluation

Developmental Stages Observed:

\_\_\_\_\_ Pictures - No evidence of any writing

\_\_\_\_\_ Recurring Principle - Writing consists of same moves applied over and over again.

\_\_\_\_\_ Generative Principle - A Limitless amount of writing can be generated by using a small set of letters - provided they are combined in different ways.

\_\_\_\_\_ Flexibility Principle - By varying letter forms, students produce letters they didn't know how to make - not all letters formed that way are acceptable as signs.

\_\_\_\_\_ Inventory Principle - Students make an ordered list of letters and words they can write.

\_\_\_\_\_ Language Level Observed

\_\_\_\_\_ Message Quality Observed

\_\_\_\_\_ Directional Principles Observed

Message Level:

1. Alphabetic letters only
2. Word (any recognizable word)
3. Word Group (any two word sentence)
4. Sentence (any simple sentence)
5. Punctuated Story (of any two or more sentence)
6. Paragraphed story (two themes)

Message Quality:

1. He has a concept of signs (uses letters, invents letters, uses punctuation).
2. He has a concept that a message is conveyed (i.e., He tells you a message but what he has written is not that message)
3. A message is copied, and he knows more or less what that message says.
4. Repetitive, independent use of sentence patterns like "here is a ..."
5. Attempts to record own ideas mostly independently.
6. successful composition.

Directional Principle:

1. No evidence of directional knowledge.
2. Part of the directional pattern is known; either start at top left or move left to right or return down left.
3. Reversal of the directional pattern (right to left and/or down right). A sample with one lapse should be rated at this level.
4. Correct directional pattern..
5. Correct directional pattern and spaces between words.
6. Extensive text without any difficulties of arrangement and spacing of text.

Reference: Clay, Marie. What Did I Write?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Alphabet Inventory

Point to each letter and say its name.

t	h	Q	H	O	B	K
w	C	i	D	u	M	y
f	X	j	P	A	q	S
m	e	v	P	Z	E	J
o	r	N	n	R	l	s
L	a	g	b	k	V	c
x	U	W	T	I	Y	d
G	z	F				

(figure 4.6)



**CHAPTER V****SUMMARY**

This project was developed to give kindergarten and early childhood teachers an understanding of a whole language approach to teaching the alphabet to young children. Specific suggestions for teaching each letter of the alphabet are incorporated in the handbook section. In Chapter I the author explained the whole language approach to teaching, stated the purpose of the paper, defined terms, and explained limitations of the project.

The introduction to Chapter I explained that whole language proponents believe young children need to learn to read and write in a natural, holistic manner similar to the way they learn to speak oral language. It is the responsibility of whole language teachers to provide young students with real, hands-on learning experiences that are appealing and interesting to the students themselves. Children learn best when they are interested in the subject or endeavor. The teacher's role therefore in a whole language classroom is to provide interesting materials which are developmentally appropriate to the students' academic, social, emotional, creative, and physical growth. The importance of using good quality literature and a print rich environment are also crucial to a good program. These help to stimulate interest in reading and writing which are the hallmark of whole language teaching and learning.

In Chapter II the review of the literature established the importance of the holistic approach to teaching reading and writing to children. Reading stories to children and providing a print-rich environment with fun, meaningful reading opportunities were key points in this chapter. The significance of using dictation to model writing was also evident in the literature reviewed. Writing centers and literature extension activities were discussed in relation to their use and influence on a child's reading and writing education.

Chapter III discussed the development of the handbook and included the major sources of information and ideas this author has used in the past. Ways to choose books and activities for children were discussed in an effort to help other teachers develop their own unique curriculum plans. The students themselves were suggested as a primary source of ideas since their interest in a book or activity would most likely ensure its success. Other teachers were also included as a good resource for new ideas. The helpfulness and expertise of a children's librarian either in a public school or public library were mentioned as an enormous aid to teachers when selecting books for children in a whole language classroom. College courses, workshops, and commercial books were also cited.

Chapter IV began with an introduction to the handbook explaining its purpose, formation, and use. The handbook

was designed to teach and reinforce letters of the alphabet by using good quality literature, active hands-on learning experiences, and a story starter to involve each child in a class book project concentrating on an individual letter of the alphabet. The handbook itself consisted of separate pages for each letter of the alphabet. A variety of books and activities were selected. This was to help ensure the interest of all students in some of the activities. This approach gave students a wide range of multi-disciplinary activities which included social studies, mathematics, art, and science. The books and activities were meant to be suggestions and not a complete curriculum. Hopefully other teachers would add their own ideas to the ones in the handbook. Two checklists, designed to evaluate a student's progress in recognizing and using alphabet letters, were included at the end of the handbook chapter.

### **Conclusions**

The whole language approach to teaching the alphabet with the ideas given in this handbook were exciting to use for me as a teacher. The children's literature was excellent and fun to read to the children. More enthusiasm is obviously projected when the reading is enjoyed, and the variety provided in this type of approach helps to keep both students and educators interested. The children gained knowledge and appreciation of various types of books and their authors. They showed a greater understanding and

awareness of literature and authors because of frequent use of literature in the classroom.

The multi-disciplinary hands-on activities were stimulating for the teacher as well as the students. This teacher was challenged to find an assortment of different projects to stimulate all areas of the curriculum while reinforcing a particular letter of the alphabet. The children were excited about coming to school since there were new and exciting things to do each day.

The use of the class books suggested by the handbook were particularly helpful in encouraging children to write their own words, sentences, and books. By the end of the school year, the children felt like writers themselves and very often wrote stories and books on their own. They also felt great mastery as readers since they were able to begin reading with such success by reading their own sentences in the class books. The repetitious nature of the pages in the class books helped them read whole books.

Overall the children felt success, enthusiasm for learning, and gained confidence in their ability to recognize and use letters of the alphabet in context. It is important to always provide a variety of good children's literature for students, read to children as often as possible, model writing in various ways especially dictation at the beginning of the school year, and give students many opportunities for various, active learning experiences.

Students were curious and fascinated in learning letters of the alphabet. They particularly enjoyed books about the alphabet. In the future, I hope to include more alphabet books in the books available for the students.

### **Recommendations**

There are several implications in this project which could involve further study. A study could be designed to determine the actual advantages of this type of whole language approach to teaching the alphabet compared to a more traditional workbook approach. Samples of the children's writing and art work throughout the school year in each type of classroom would be interesting to compare and contrast.

This type of handbook could easily be adapted to younger pre-school children. Some of the books and activities would need very little change and others might need to be changed almost completely or deleted altogether. It would also be interesting to use this with a group of special needs children and compare the effectiveness for them.

The handbook itself could be expanded to include as many books as possible and many more activities to teach and reinforce each letter of the alphabet. An effort could be made to maximize and optimize the math, science, or social studies related activities in the handbook.

Elements of this project have been an integral part of my teaching for many years. Putting it all together in thesis form has made me cognizant of the importance of what I can offer young children. I gained a special appreciation for the support, encouragement, and ideas I have received over the years of my education and teaching from professors, fellow teachers, parents, and most importantly the students themselves.

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