How to KRA-L

A Manual for Teachers and Other Education Professionals

Ohio's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy (KRA-L)

Center for
Students, Families, and Communities

Ohio Department of Education

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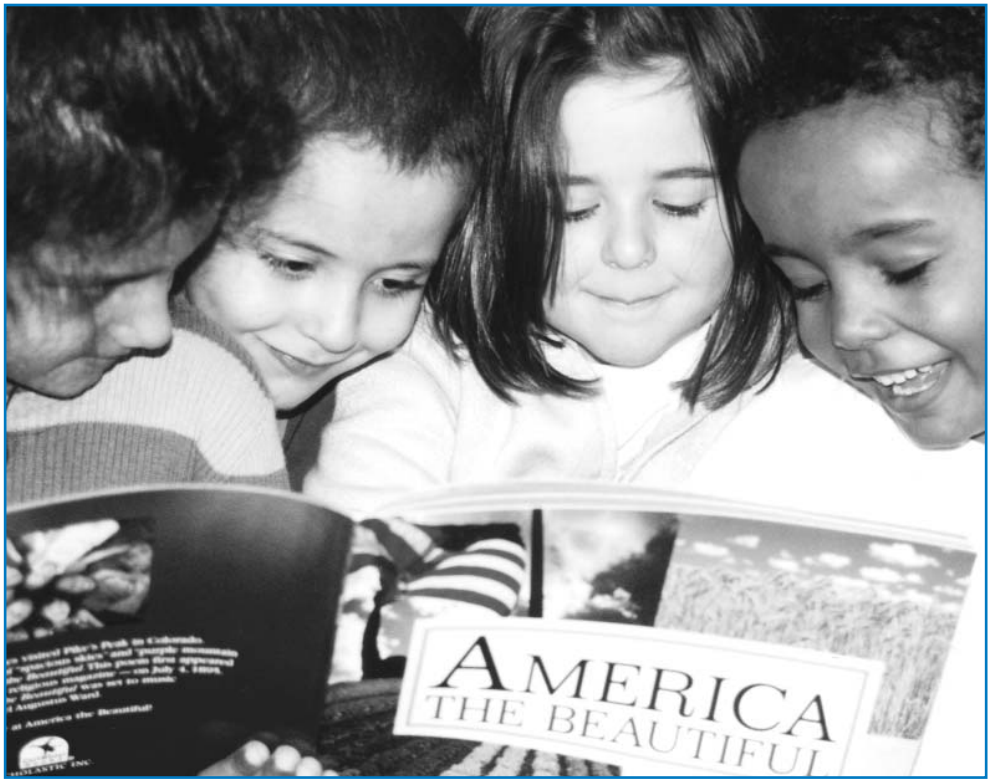
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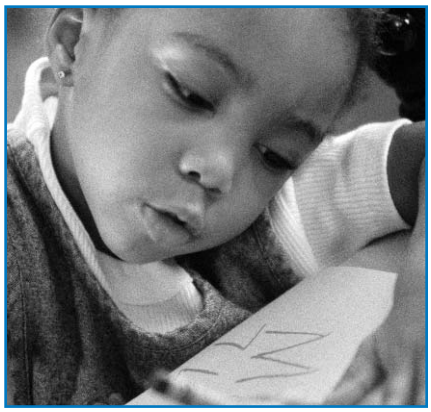
How to KRA-L: A Manual for Teachers and other Education Professionals



The purpose of the *How to KRA-L* manual is to provide support for teachers and other professionals who will be administering, scoring and using the results of Ohio's statewide Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy (KRA-L). The KRA-L is the required screening assessment that all school districts in Ohio must administer to all entering kindergarten students by the sixth week of school. School districts and teachers may also select, design and use other literacy screening tools in addition to the KRA-L, but not in place of it.

Teachers and other education professionals are likely to have many questions about the KRA-L, how to administer the KRA-L, how to interpret it and, perhaps most importantly, how to use the information the KRA-L provides to support all children in their success with learning to read. This manual can be used to answer many of these questions. The manual also provides resources for teachers and others to use in further developing their skills and improving their professional teaching practice related to early literacy learning.

By working through *How to KRA-L*, the reader will find answers to many "why, what and how" questions: Why assess the oral language and literacy skills of children when they first enter kindergarten? What components make up a complete KRA-L screening assessment? What preparations need to be made to ensure accurate administration and interpretation? How can KRA-L total scores be interpreted? How can KRA-L sub-scores, along with other assessment data, be used to communicate with families? No doubt, readers will think of many "what if…" questions, too, as they consider the variety of circumstances that might emerge with kindergarten children. Therefore, the manual addresses answers to questions such as: What if a parent does not want the results of his or her child's KRA-L reported to the Ohio Department of Education? What if an entering kindergarten student does not speak English? What if a child enters kindergarten in the middle of the school year?

Ohio's KRA-L is the first required, standardized, literacy screening assessment to be administered statewide to all children entering kindergarten. The KRA-L is relatively quick to administer and score. It accurately assesses early language and literacy skills that are strong predictors of success in learning to read. The KRA-L has significant implications for teaching, learning and professional development.

In this spirit of continuous improvement, the reader is invited to learn *How to KRA-L*.

A Special Note to Ohio's Kindergarten Teachers

How to KRA-L: A Manual for Teachers and Other Education Professionals is written for a variety of school staff, but you are the person who holds the key to the KRA-L's potential to improve literacy achievement for your students. You may be the one to administer the KRA-L. You will be the first professional to see, interpret and use the results. You will talk with family members about KRA-L results and what next steps are appropriate for their child. You will be the professional to whom parents and other caregivers come to first with questions, concerns, successes and issues related to learning to read.

Your well informed and skillful use of the KRA-L gives the assessment real potential to help you improve your teaching practice during the early weeks of school. Without your knowledge and skill, the KRA-L could be "just one more thing" to be done during the already demanding first weeks of kindergarten.

The effective early literacy learning experiences you provide during kindergarten, both by attending to what kindergarten children are expected to know and be able to do and by using a continuous cycle of assessing, revising and teaching, have potential to increase student achievement. A good beginning leads to a good ending.

This manual provides information and suggested resources that you can use in a manner consistent with your needs and circumstances. This manual is a professional development tool. Please put it to use, in conjunction both with resources your district provides and with the other KRA-L resources such as the KRA-L Administration Manual, the KRA-L Resource Manual and the KRA-L Assessment Video. By using these tools, you can develop and refine the skills needed to administer the KRA-L, to accurately report and interpret scores and, most importantly, to use results to design and implement instructional experiences that support all students' success in learning to read.

The Ohio Department of Education's Office of Early Learning and School Readiness values what you and your school district do to make entry into kindergarten a smooth and supportive process.

Before and After

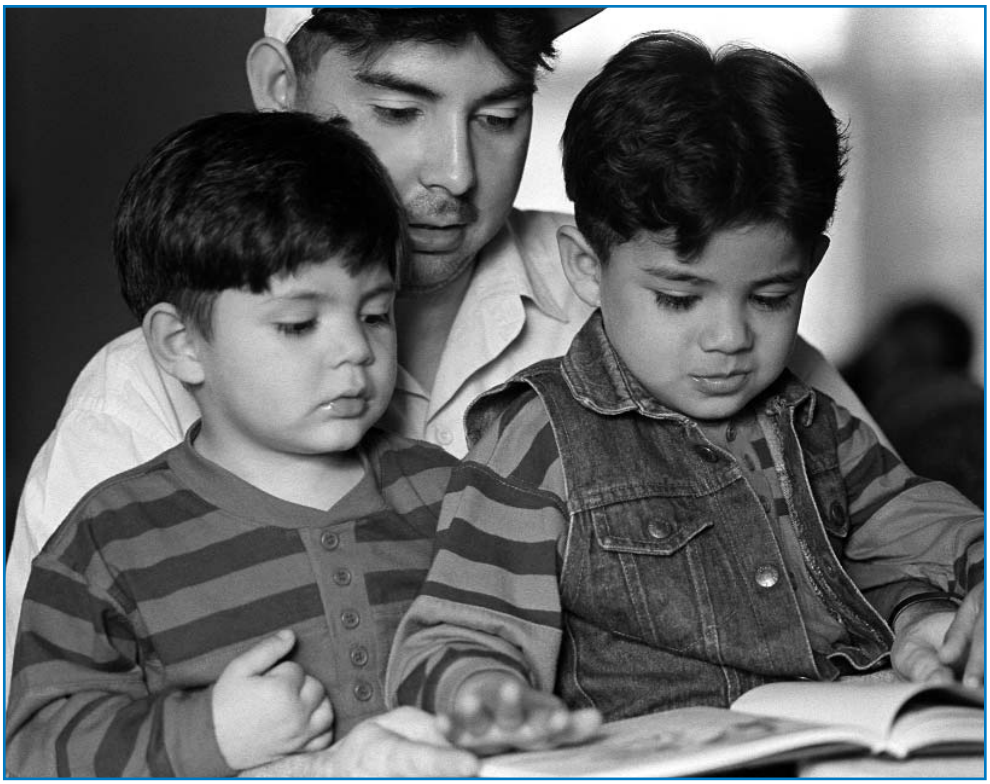
As you begin working through the *How to KRA-L* manual, please respond to the following scenarios. After you have worked through the manual and perhaps administered the screening, you may chose to visit the scenarios again in light of your growing understanding.

It's the start of a new school year. In addition to meeting parents, helping children adjust to a new school setting, preparing the learning environment, attending to content standards and planning for instruction, you are now required to administer Ohio's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy (KRA-L). How do you think you may be affected by the requirement to administer, score, interpret, report and reflect on the KRA-L?

You are committed to developmentally appropriate practice and concerned about academic pressure on young children. Sometimes you think that if a child's oral language, letter knowledge and phonological awareness are limited, the child should wait a year before starting kindergarten. You know one teacher who advises parents, "If in doubt, keep him out (of kindergarten)." What problems do you see with that advice?

Either you or a volunteer has administered and scored the KRA-L during the first few weeks of school. You have been observing your students, have begun to make anecdotal records, and may have even started an assessment portfolio for each child. Now you have KRA-L results in hand. Begin to generate some thoughts about how you might put the KRA-L results to work to serve student achievement in your classroom.

The KRA-L is a quick literacy screening assessment, and as such it will not provide a full picture of a child's set of literacy readiness skills. Knowing that the KRA-L won't provide all the information you need, how else will you acquire the data you need to make effective plans to begin teaching each child to read?



What does it mean to be ready, and why should readiness be assessed?

On the morning of April 18th, Dana's fifth birthday, she arrived in the kitchen, dressed and obviously ready for something important. She had several of her favorite books under her arm. "Well, she said, "Let's go. I'm ready to start kindergarten."

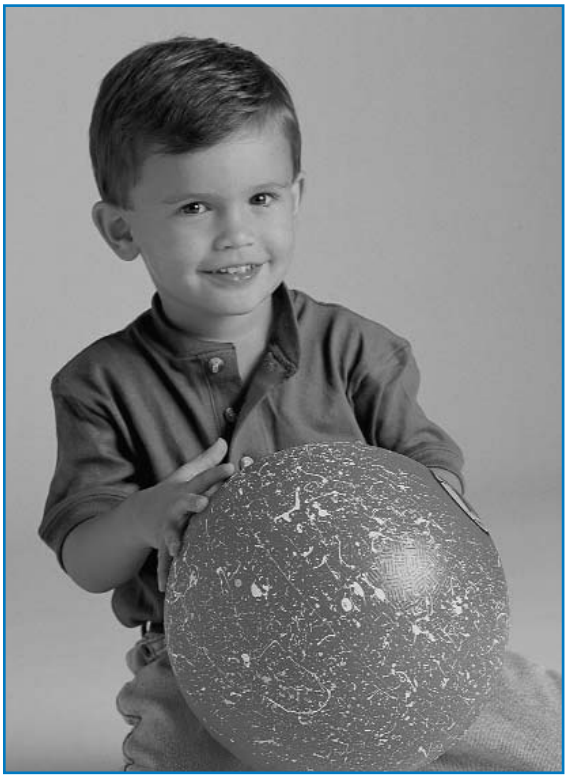
Dana knew that she would begin kindergarten when she turned 5. Her play-based preschool experiences with projects, children's literature, conversations about books and print in the environment, enjoyment of rhymes, and experimentation with writing, among other experiences, helped prepare her for kindergarten. So did her experiences at home with her brother and parents. When she was 4 years old, she talked with her older brother about finishing preschool and going to the "big school," where she would learn how to read like he did. She asked her mother when she would go to kindergarten and the answer was always, "When you are 5, you'll be ready for kindergarten." It was her fifth birthday, and not only did Dana know that she was ready, she had every confidence that her kindergarten teacher would quickly find out what Dana already could do with books, words, sounds and letters. Her kindergarten teacher would be ready and waiting to teach Dana to read like her brother.

Dana has grasped several of the most basic themes of this manual:

- *Reading instruction in kindergarten is extremely important. It provides the foundation for becoming a reader and writer.*
- *Each child enters kindergarten with a unique set of language and literacy readiness skills that have developed over time through his or her language and literacy experiences and other learning opportunities.*
- *Teachers have an obligation to be ready to teach every child and ready to build upon each child's skills, no matter how advanced or limited those skills are.*

Children who are entering kindergarten vary widely in terms of both the early language and literacy skills they have had an opportunity to learn and their fluency in using those skills. Some children enter kindergarten with an extensive spoken vocabulary and a collection of words they immediately recognize in print. Some know how to say or sing the alphabet, but may or may not recognize and be able to name the letters. Some children enjoy playing with language and will generate rhymes and alliterative phrases. Other children may enter kindergarten with only a vague sense of what a letter is or with a limited vocabulary that makes it difficult for them to understand and act on classroom conversation and instruction. Nonetheless, all children enter kindergarten ready to learn.

As a kindergarten teacher, you are obligated to be ready to teach every child. As early in the school year as possible, you need to develop a clear picture of the set of early literacy skills each child brings into the kindergarten experience. In order to teach effectively, you build on the solid ground of what each child knows and can do on his or her own. In order to move forward, you must also know and plan for what each child is able to do with assistance. This information, along with a deep understanding of language and literacy development, enables you to design and implement meaningful reading instruction for every child.



The KRA-L is a tool to quickly screen for specific early literacy skills that are essential indicators of success in learning to read. Of course, the information gained from the KRA-L in and of itself cannot provide you with a complete picture of a child's literacy learning readiness. Data collected in a short time, and typically collected only once, provides important but limited information. As a skillful teacher, you will also gather information from the child's parents or guardians; observe the child in meaningful literacy encounters, such as interactive reading and book sharing; and engage the child in conversations and opportunities to play with words, rhymes, sounds and letters, while taking note of the child's level of engagement and demonstrated skills. The KRA-L results can indicate that more detailed assessment may be needed in order to determine next steps in literacy instruction. The KRA-L can also be used as the first step in monitoring progress, so a child who is not learning the important skills needed for reading can benefit from early additional assistance and opportunities to learn.

KRA-L: What it Measures

What Reading Readiness Skills Does the KRA-L Assess?

The KRA-L is a screening assessment. Screening assessments are designed both to be an efficient way to identify children needing additional literacy assessment and as a tool to design focused, explicit instruction. As a screening instrument, the KRA-L does not assess all areas of reading readiness. Rather, it attends to the literacy skills correlated to learning to read. If a child has difficulty with items on the KRA-L, assessment of a broader range of literacy skills may be required.

Specifically, the KRA-L utilizes six activities that relate to essential indicators of success in learning to read. These activities include:

- Answering when and why questions
- Repeating sentences
- Identifying rhyming words
- Producing rhyming words
- Recognizing capital and lower case letters
- Recognizing beginning sounds

The activities are timed and move along quickly. The pacing is an indication of ease in accessing the information needed for success in accomplishing each of the activities.

Activities One and Two:
Answering Questions and Repeating Sentences

The child is asked three simple questions about when or why something happens. The responses indicate whether or not a child is familiar with answering questions and also provide information about a child's vocabulary and the complexity of a child's sentence structures. Many of the storybooks a child will hear and be asked to think and talk about in kindergarten are organized chronologically or in a cause and effect manner. Thinking about and talking about why and when events happen will help the child comprehend texts during the primary years.

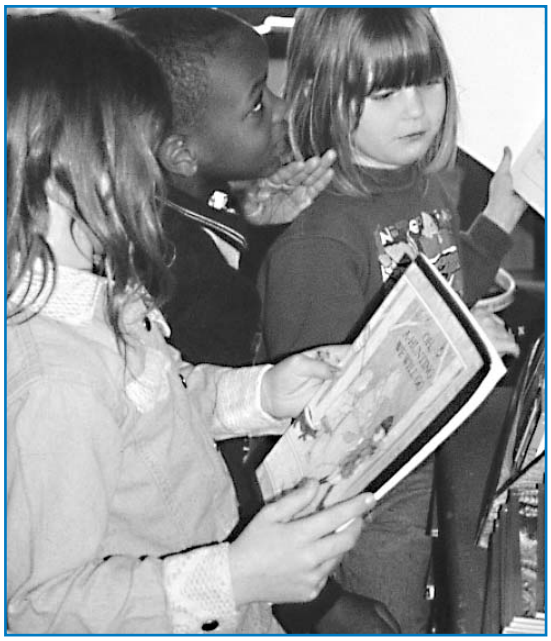
The ability to repeat a spoken sentence measures a child's short-term auditory memory. The ability to repeat spoken sentences predicts later success in reading. Difficulty remembering information presented verbally correlates with difficulty in learning to read (Scarborough, 1998; Velluntinio, 1996).

Activities Three and Four:
Recognizing and Producing Rhyming Words

Rhyming is an oral language skill that can develop without exposure to print or letters. The ability to rhyme is an essential indicator of success in learning to read. A child who recognizes rhyming words is alert to the phonological aspects of words. That child is able to perceive similarities and differences among spoken sounds and think about words in a decontextualized way. When a child is able to decontextualize words, he or she is able to take words out of a meaningful context (e.g., conversation) and think about words as "things" apart from the meanings that the words may have. Decontextualization is necessary for playing with words, and playing with language is a powerful process for learning.

Activity Five:
Letter Recognition and Naming

The ability to recognize letters has been found to be a consistent predictor of success in reading (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The letter recognition activity provides information about the child's ability to recognize both lower case and capital letters.



Activity Six:
Initial Sound Identification

Identifying the first sound, or phoneme, in a word is a measure of a child's phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness and processing are the cornerstones of early reading. Along with rhyme, perceiving the initial sounds of words is an important skill that predicts later reading success (Abouzeid, 1986; Good et al, 2002).

KRA-L: How it was Developed

The Ohio English language arts content standards and early learning content standards are the foundation of the KRA-L. The KRA-L was developed in accord with and is characterized by the indicators of effective assessment as defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education Position Statement (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, November 2003). They are as follows:

- Ethical principles guide the assessment process. Children are not denied kindergarten entrance regardless of their performance on the assessment;
- Assessment instruments are used for their intended purposes. The KRA-L is intended to serve as an entry level screening in order to better help teachers understand the literacy development of the children in their classes;
- Assessments are appropriate for the ages and other characteristics of the children being assessed. The KRA-L was designed and field-tested with the Ohio early learning content standards as a basis;
- Assessment instruments comply with professional criteria for quality. The reliability and the validity of the KRA-L conform to the measurement standards set forth in 1999 by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Center for Measurement in Education (NCME);
- What is assessed is developmentally and educationally significant. The KRA-L is focused on measuring the most essential indicators of literacy skills necessary for future school success;
- Assessment evidence is used to understand and improve learning. The KRA-L is designed to enable teachers to translate assessment information into improved curriculum implementation and teaching practices;
- Screening is always linked to follow-up. Since the KRA-L is an initial assessment and is intended to lead to appropriate follow-up or other intervention, its use does not result in diagnostic labeling; and
- Staff and family are knowledgeable about assessment. Documents that provide administrators, teachers and parents with information about the proper use and interpretation of the KRA-L are available. Regional training sessions for district personnel have been conducted. Information about the KRA-L, including answers to frequently asked questions, is posted online. See www.ode.state.oh.us/ece/ and www.frogfirst.net for additional information.

Doing the KRA-L

The KRA-L is a standardized instrument with specific, scripted procedures for administration and scoring. In order for scores to be reliable, it is crucial that individuals who administer the KRA-L adhere exactly to the procedures as presented in the KRA-L Administration Manual. Sometimes adhering exactly to the procedures may be difficult for you to do, in part because you naturally want each child to perform well. There may be a desire to provide clues, or extra time, or even to assume that a child knows more than is demonstrated. Giving into such urges may negate the value of the assessment. There are no high stakes associated with KRA-L performance for either a teacher or a child; rather there is only valuable information about a child who is entering kindergarten that can be put to use in a way that increases student achievement.

Remember that the KRA-L is a quick screening assessment, and you will use many other types of assessments to better understand the full range of early literacy skills that each child brings to the kindergarten experience. Every school district in Ohio will administer the KRA-L and report KRA-L results in a consistent manner. The resulting data can then be analyzed across your district for the purpose of continuous improvement planning.

Prepare Yourself

- Take time to read the Administration Manual. Become familiar with all the activities, the materials, the script and the time allowed for the activities.
- It may be helpful to practice administering the KRA-L with an older child or even an adult before beginning the assessment with an entering kindergarten student.
- The more at ease you are with the procedure for administering the KRA-L, the more at ease the child is likely to be.
- The classroom teacher may be the best person to administer the assessment, because he or she will have direct knowledge of the child's performance.
- If this is not possible, it would be helpful for the child to get to know the assessor in an environment other than the assessment environment.

Prepare the Environment

- Choose a location that is comfortable for you and the child.
- Choose a location that is free from distractions.
- Have everything you need close at hand.
- Keep in mind that most of this assessment is auditory.
- Seat yourself and the child so that you are sitting either diagonally at the corner of a table or side-by-side.
- If you are right-handed, the child could be seated to your left so he or she is less likely to attend to what you are writing on the score sheet. If you are left-handed, try seating the child to your right.
- The Administration Manual should be in front of you, between the child and the scoring sheet.
- Prepare assessment materials.
- Have the assessment materials organized and available before the actual assessment begins. This will help ensure a smooth, efficient assessment. Having to locate materials during the course of the assessment will create moments of down time, during which children could lose focus.
- A child who may be hesitant to participate may become even more reserved if encountering long delays, and a child who appears restless may become more so as a result of delays.

Communicate During the Assessment

- Let the child know that that you will be writing down the child's answers so that you will not forget what he or she says.
- Provide neutral praise to support the child.
- Use the child's name in a natural way.
- Be aware of the child's body language and other nonverbal cues, because a child may not verbalize or express his or her needs. For example, a child may need a break to stretch, may need more physical space from the examiner, or may simply need to relax.

Interpreting and Using Results of the KRA-L

The KRA-L is only one source of information you will gather about your incoming kindergarten students. You should consider it in relation to other developmental screening information as well as classroom-based assessment; information available about the child's speech, language and hearing; and information provided by parents.

The results of the KRA-L should be used both to identify children who may need additional assessment and as a way to begin planning for initial instruction. The KRA-L should not be used to assign children to classrooms or permanent groups, to label children in any way or to deny any child's access to kindergarten. Development occurs through a child's experiences and opportunities to learn. Early literacy skills related to phonemic awareness and knowledge of the alphabet are taught. Meaningful instruction that engages a child in print and in literacy-rich experiences is crucial to learning to read. A readiness test such as the KRA-L identifies which children have already benefited from literacy experiences that fostered their development.

Difficulty with any section of the KRA-L signals a need to look further to determine whether a child has the skill, can easily and quickly acquire the skill, or needs additional intervention. You should review other data available about the child's development, tailor instruction to the areas of difficulty, monitor progress and consult with the literacy specialist in the school for additional suggestions as needed. If the child does not progress after two to three weeks of classroom instruction targeted to the areas of difficulty, the child may be at risk and should be evaluated further for interventions that are more intensive. Additional assessments, such as the use of the kindergarten and grade one diagnostic assessments, may also help in identifying the child's instructional levels.

You should examine the student score sheet to analyze the child's responses. In order to do this, you need to write the child's responses to the questions, and to the sentence repetition and rhyme generation exercises, on the score sheet during administration. For example, when considering letter recognition, it is informative to note which letters a child recognizes. Are they letters that appear frequently in words that the child is likely to learn to read in kindergarten and first grade, or are they less frequently used letters like "z" and "q"? Does the child recognize the letters in his or her name and the names of family members? If a child recognizes just one letter, is it a random letter or a letter that has special meaning for the child, like the first letter in his or her name or the name of a favorite media character? Apply the same kind of qualitative analysis to each section of the KRA-L assessment. For example, what might it mean if a child is easily able to produce rhymes but is not able to recognize them? The "ART" of teaching comes into play when you analyze the results of the KRA-L, along with other assessment data, and then use this data to develop and implement supportive next steps for achieving success in learning to read. The ART of teaching requires that you engage in a continuous cycle of A: Assessment, R: Reflection and T: Teaching.

Using Assessment Results to Plan Instruction

Literacy growth is an emerging process that begins at birth and is fostered through a variety of reading and writing experiences. Each child entering kindergarten will have developed different levels of proficiency in using specific literacy skills. You must be aware of the different levels of student progress on the developmental continuum of skills related to the literacy processes of reading, writing, oral language and spelling. Also, it is important to understand how students will be proceeding through the stages of development as they grow in each of these interrelated literacy areas. Language and literacy development continuums are included as resources at the end of this manual. The continuums can be used as guides for planning instruction and for monitoring progress.

Strategies for Collecting and Organizing Assessment Data

Use of assessment data will require summarizing results through a record-keeping system. Checklists and portfolios can be effectively used to collect and organize data, so you can summarize and put the data to use.

Checklists help teachers assess students' work and record their attainment of early learning competencies. However, checklists may not indicate the exact levels of proficiency a particular student has attained. For example, a checklist can be designed with a yes or no format, indicating only that a child does or does not demonstrate a skill. An alternative format records whether a student is at one of several stages in mastering a skill; for example, Beginning (B), Developing (D) or Secure (S). Neither format makes examples or full descriptions of student work available.

Portfolios, another format for data collection, are organized collections of individual students' demonstrations of student growth and progress. Student work, including rubrics used to assess the work, can be collected over a period of time and used to demonstrate the course of learning that led to attainment of a particular skill or ability. The materials in the portfolio should be linked to instructional goals.

A compilation of grade-level indicators can also be kept in the portfolio. Items in the portfolio may be aligned with indicators from Ohio's early learning standards. New examples of student work can be added periodically, and new instructional goals can be set as literacy proficiency develops. A portfolio can also include photographic documentation of a child's work in process, along with notations of the child's reflections on what he or she was doing, thinking about and learning. Student reflection on the collection of his or her work is one way to self-evaluate progress and learning. Inclusion of current and complete information ensures that progress is being monitored and that appropriate instruction is being designed and delivered.

Sharing Information with Parents

As the teacher, you are the primary person responsible for developing relationships with parents. Early in the relationship building process, you will be called on to share assessment information, including KRA-L results, with parents.

When results of any assessment such as the KRA-L are shared with parents, it should be in the context of sharing information about the child from a variety of sources. Parents need to know that the KRA-L is not a "high stakes" assessment, and that the results provide a starting point for learning about their child's skills in early reading and writing development. Information that parents can add about the child's interests, including experience with books, letters, writing and reading, may also help the teacher understand what the child knows and can do. The information parents provide can be clues that indicate how to motivate and present information to the child in meaningful ways.

It is important to discuss the child's strengths as well the areas that should be addressed next in instruction. Do not place emphasis on the KRA-L score. By itself, the score does not hold meaning. Talk with parents about the elements of the KRA-L; for example, recognizing rhymes, matching initial sounds, naming letters and the next steps for the child. Offer parents the *Standards Guide for Families – Kindergarten* and the *Family Guide to Understanding Early Reading Skills*. Both of these documents are published and distributed to school districts by the Ohio Department of Education. Discuss support services available through the district, and assure parents that you will work with them to support the child's achievement of success in learning to read.

Using the KRA-L Results to Inform Instruction in the Classroom

Once you have reviewed and interpreted the results of the KRA-L, the input you received from parents, and the classroom assessment data for each child, you will be using the results to plan and implement appropriate next steps in literacy instruction.

Context-rich activities in classroom centers lend themselves to small group or individual interventions, and both should be included regularly. Remember that literacy skills need to be taught both in contextualized everyday activities (e.g., shared reading, dramatic play, interactive conversations) as well as in targeted, explicit small group and individualized instructional opportunities.

Strategies for Developing Oral Language

Read-alouds

Read-alouds are a perfect time to enhance oral language skills. Before reading, show the cover of the book to the children and ask them to make predictions about what the book is about. This will encourage them to verbalize their thoughts and communicate their ideas in an organized fashion. Read-alouds are also a good time for teachers to model appropriate oral language strategies. Children benefit from having the same book read repeatedly, as well as from being exposed to a wide variety of books representing different book genres (e.g., ABC, rhyming, narrative, expository).

Shared Reading

Shared reading activities are a good time to help children develop their abilities to recall appropriate oral language patterns. For example, after reading repetitive text with children several times, encourage them to complete sentences for you or to provide missing words from phrases. These strategies help children determine which words make sense in a passage, or which words sound right. During shared readings, you can encourage the children to make comments, respond and engage in conversational turn-taking as well as in elaborated and abstract language. This kind of interaction is referred to as dialogic reading. You can use “literate language features,” such as asking the children, “What did the storybook character think, know and/or say?” These abstract concepts frequently appear in books, and are difficult for some children.

Role Playing

Having children role-play provides them with multiple opportunities to utilize their oral language skills. Taking on the role of others allows children to learn about appropriate and inappropriate speaking and listening behaviors. Practicing these skills through role-playing offers children opportunities to experiment with oral language skills, such as speaking, listening, modulating volume and tone. Children can role-play by acting out stories, taking on the roles of the familiar characters. Once children have had multiple opportunities to hear a story, encourage them to recreate the story, providing their own language to support the story. Children not participating can take the role of “director,” using pictures or other story prompts; they can tell the “actors” what to say and think (i.e., literate language features).

Sharing

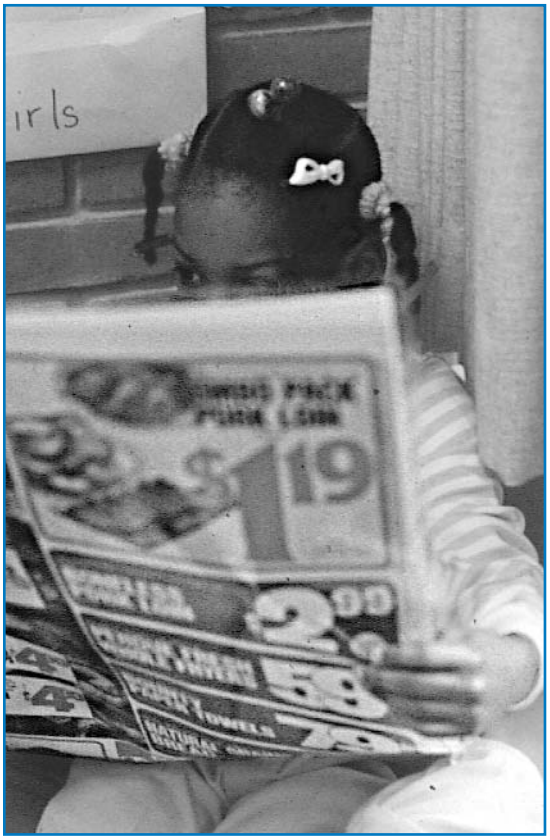
Sharing time provides kindergarten children with opportunities to practice listening and speaking skills. Opportunities to share experiences and stories can take many forms, including informal sharing, show and tell, class presentations, and one-on-one sharing between children. Whether the children are delivering or receiving the message, sharing time is a natural way for them to develop listening and speaking skills.

Concept Pictures

Concept pictures have multiple uses in the kindergarten classroom. For example, concept pictures can be used to initiate conversations. Asking children to label a concept picture is one way to develop vocabulary skills. Additionally, having children sort concept pictures gives them a different opportunity to verbalize their thinking processes. You may want to have children sort pictures into predetermined categories or have them create their own categories. Either way, you should ask the children to explain their thinking and their reasons for placing pictures into particular categories. This will enhance their speaking skills as well as encourage them to listen to directions and explanations.

Independent Reading

Kindergarten children should be provided with daily opportunities to engage in independent reading. Whether with books, poems, charts or other texts, children need time to revisit familiar texts on their own in order to develop their confidence as beginning readers. Independent reading gives them a chance to explore print materials and focus on the print concepts that make sense to them. When children engage in independent reading, they see themselves as "real" readers.



The following texts may be useful resources for enriching oral language instruction and experiences:

Evans, J., & Allen, L. (1994). First steps oral language resource book. Columbus, OH: Irwin Publishing.

Hansen, J. (2004). Tell me a story: Developmentally appropriate retelling strategies. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Morrow, L. M., & Gambrell, L. B. (2004) Using children's literature in preschool: Comprehending and enjoying books. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Roskos, K. A., Tabors, P. O, & Lenhart, L. A. (2004) Oral language and early literacy in preschool: Talking, reading and writing. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Trehearne, M. P. (2003). The creative curriculum for preschool. Washington, D.C.: Teaching Strategies.

Strategies for Developing Print Awareness

Read-alouds

Again, read-alouds provide teachers with many opportunities to enhance print awareness skills. When children listen to a teacher reading aloud, they witness how a teacher uses the words to convey meaning. They also come to understand that although the pictures support the text, the text is what is telling the story. This is a crucial component of print awareness, because understanding the purpose that print serves is a first step in the reading process. During read-alouds, teachers can also begin to expose children to important print concepts such as modeling left to right directionality, the top to bottom process of reading, and identifying some key features of books, such as the title and author(s).

Shared Reading

Teachers typically use "big books" or charts for shared reading experiences. The large print format of "big books" and charts provides teachers the opportunity to model some of the same strategies as do read-alouds, but to do so more explicitly. For example, during shared reading, teachers can point out print concepts like punctuation, letters (upper and lower case), sight words, the sound-letter connection and relating pictures to print. Children also have a chance to view the directionality of reading and are able to track print as they watch the teacher point to words while they are read.

Shared Writing

Much like shared reading, shared writing gives teachers an opportunity to model important print concepts. Teachers can demonstrate the process of writing, including how thoughts can be translated into written words, sound-symbol relationships, letters, punctuation and directionality of print. It is important to remember during shared writing that teachers must continually talk to the students, so they are able to fully understand what is happening during the writing process. Some common formats for shared writing include morning message and language experience charts.

Interactive Writing

Interactive writing allows a group of children to become actively involved in a shared writing experience. The teacher acts as a model as the children attend to letters, sounds, words and punctuation while the writing occurs. The teacher draws attention, for example, to the particular sounds as they are being formed, saying aloud what she or he is thinking about the sounds. At the teacher's request, children take control of the pen, contribute to the writing and help the teacher determine how and what to write. Interactive writing can be done with a whole class or a small group.

Independent Writing

Every child benefits from writing every day. As children learn new print concepts, it is important that they have a chance to practice those concepts through writing on a regular basis. Independent writing can take place on paper, journals, white boards, chalkboards or easels. When children engage in independent writing, they are working on letter-sound correspondence, print concepts and invented spelling skills.

Environmental Print

Kindergarten children come to school with a variety of literacy experience. However, one common experience they all are likely to have is exposure to environmental print. The environment is full of print examples, such as restaurant signs, grocery store signs and traffic signs. Additionally, children are exposed daily to print in the classroom environment, including labels, signs and charts. It is important for teachers to visit examples of environmental print regularly, so children will begin recognizing the letters included in the print. In addition, the teacher should intentionally point out signs and labels, drawing children's attention to specific letters, words and meanings.

Word Wall

A word wall is a place in the classroom where teachers and children can post familiar words for reference. Teachers introduce words in the context of stories or charts, and then place them on the word wall. Children will be able to see previously introduced words regularly and will have opportunities to add words on a regular basis. Seeing these words will help develop print awareness and aid in word recognition. Typically, word walls are organized alphabetically.

Tactile letters

Tactile letters are useful in helping children identify letter names and shapes. Tactile letters can be created from a variety of materials, such as sandpaper, sponges, different fabrics, foam or wood. When children have tactile letters available to them, they are able to feel the shapes of the letters, see their visual representations and learn about the orientation of the letters in space (e.g., b, d, p and q). Children can trace these letters with their fingers or hands while they say the letters' names.

Print on the Move

Children can make alphabet letters by moving their bodies. By working in groups or partners, children can create letter shapes by lying on the floor and moving their bodies so that the shape of the letter is made. Teachers can take photographs of these alphabetical body shapes and post them in the room for children to view and reference during writing activities.

Letter Memory Games (Concentration)

Children can match letters on cards that have been placed face down on a table. This game can be adapted to the needs of children in the classroom. Several options include 1) match a few cards that have letters that are quite different in formation from one another (e.g., B, N, O); 2) match cards that have letters similar in formation to one another (e.g., O, C, G); or 3) match upper and lower case letters (e.g., N,n; M,m; P,p; Q,q).

Name Activities

Names are a powerful form of print. In fact, it has been said that a child's name is "on the door to literacy." For that reason, using names is a good place to start when identifying letters and sounds. Teachers can use names in a variety of ways to enhance print awareness. Some simple but effective strategies include:

Matching Names to Pictures

Obtain a picture of each child. Place each picture on a separate card. Write each child's name on a sentence strip or index card. Children will be able to match each classmate's picture with his or her written name.

Name Cards

Make a card for each child that includes his or her picture along with his or her first and last name written clearly on it. Leave these cards at the writing center. Children will be able to identify classmates' names and attempt to write each others' names as well.

Name Sort

Create opportunities for children to sort their names. You can help them to sort alphabetically using the initial letter (all names beginning with 'A' together, etc.), or by the names' length.

Name Puzzles

Write each child's name on a sentence strip or index card. Then, cut the children's names apart into individual letters. Each child will be able to recreate his or her name by putting the letters together in

the correct order.

These may be useful to generate additional strategies for teaching print awareness.

Adams, M. J. (1990). Thinking and learning about print. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Cunningham, P. M. (1999). Phonics they use. Boston: Addison-Wesley.

Fountas, I., & Pinnel, G. S. (1996). Guided reading. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fountas, I., & Pinnel, G. S. (1998). Word matters: Teaching phonics and spelling in the reading/writing classroom. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Strickland, D. S., & Schickedanz, J. A. (2004). Learning about print in preschool: Working with letters, words, and beginning links with phonemic awareness. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Trehearne, M. P. (2003). Comprehensive literacy resource for kindergarten teachers. Vernon Hills, IL: ETA Cusienaire.

Strategies for Developing Phonological Awareness

Songs and Finger Plays

Songs and finger plays incorporate rhythm and include many rhyming words for children to recognize. Some songs, such as "Down by the Bay" and "Willoby, Walloby, Woo," allow children to generate new rhymes ("Have you ever seen ants wearing striped pants down by the bay?"). Allow time to share songs daily, and revisit them often. Post the words to the songs and familiar rhymes on chart paper. When you do this, be sure to point out the rhyming words, and identify the way they sound as well as how they look when written.

Read-alouds

Read-alouds give teachers a chance to model the rhythm of spoken language. When children repeatedly hear familiar stories, they are able to identify patterns in the language and predict words and sounds. Teachers can also use read-alouds to develop syllable awareness by pointing out long words with multiple syllables and short words with single syllables. Books and poems with many rhyming words offer children the opportunity to generate a rhyming word that would make sense at the end of a phrase or sentence.

Shared Reading

As teachers read with children using big books or charts, they are able to call attention to words while they track print. They are also able to help children understand that long words and short words have different rhythms and contain different numbers of syllables. Tapping or clapping the syllables in selected words or passages helps children to identify the segments of words or sentences that can be heard when reading. If the shared reading text contains rhyming words, the teacher can help children identify which words rhyme and talk about how the words sound and look.

Shared Writing

During shared writing experiences, teachers have the opportunity to model using phonemic awareness skills to identify letters based on their sounds. For example, when writing the word 'mouse,' the teacher can emphasize the 'm' sound, asking the children to help identify what letter can be used to begin the word 'mouse.' Teachers also model chunking words into workable units when attempting to spell them.

Independent Writing

Kindergarten children benefit from daily opportunities to experiment with phonological awareness through independent writing. Teachers can encourage children to record the letters they hear as they enunciate words and to identify which sounds they hear. It is important to acknowledge all attempts at recording sounds while providing just-in-time instruction to help refine students' skills. Creating materials that are meaningful to the children, such as "Me" books, helps to engage children.

In addition to the above general strategies for developing phonological awareness, there are also some more specific strategies for developing phonological awareness at the word, syllable, rhyme and sound levels.

Sentence Cut-ups

After sharing a text with children several times, choose one sentence or passage from the text. Write that passage on sentence strips and cut the words apart. The children can recreate the passage by sequencing the cut-up words appropriately. You can modify this activity by having each child take one word from the sentence and then having them stand in a line with their words. The children can order themselves so that the sentence is put together properly. Read the reconstructed sentence together aloud.

Syllable Clapping

This game can be used to help children identify the number of syllables in a word. The children can clap their hands together for each syllable in any word. For example, 'television' would be clapped with four claps: tel-e-vi-sion.

Rhyme Sorting

Pass out pictures of objects with labels from two or three different word families. Have each child identify and name the picture he or she has. Once all cards are identified, the teacher calls out a word and asks for the person with the picture that rhymes with that word to come forward. This activity can also take place in small groups, or it can be made into a game for pairs of students.

Sound Matching

Sound matching activities help students listen for specific sounds and identify other words with the same sound. Begin with something familiar, such as student names. Choose two or three students whose names begin with the same letter. Then, say the students' names aloud, and have the other children try to identify what their names have in common. It is important in this game that the teacher emphasize the sound of the letter, not the name of the letter.

Shapes or Colors Word Hop

Place shape or color mats on the floor to serve as word mats. The teacher speaks a sentence slowly for the children to hear. Children will hop on one mat for each word in the sentence. Start with simple, single-syllable-word sentences such as 'I like milk,' and gradually add words with multiple syllables. Note that each word gets it own mat/hop, not each syllable.

The following are useful resources for strategies that help develop phonological awareness.

Adams, M. J., Foorman, B. R., Lundberg, I., & Beeler, T. (1998). Phonemic awareness in young children: A classroom curriculum. Baltimore: Paul Brookes Publishing.

Bear, D., Invernizzi, M., Templeton, S., & Johnson, F. (2003). Words their way. Columbus, OH: Prentice-Hall.

Fountas, I., & Pinnel, G. S. (1996). Guided reading. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Juliebo, M. F., & Ericson, L. (1998). The phonological awareness handbook for kindergarten and primary teachers. Washington, DC: International Reading Association.

Strickland, D., & Morrow, L. (Eds). (2000). Beginning reading and writing. New York: Teachers College Press.

Quick Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

The KRA-L is an assessment that provides teachers with an initial look at specific literacy skills of children. The KRA-L, however, is just a starting place in a continuous cycle of assessing, reflecting on teaching practices and adjusting teaching strategies. Recording observations on an ongoing basis is essential to determining where each child is in respect to literacy development. Teachers can also use work samples throughout the school year to help them, their students and parents visualize the progress made. These assessment activities invite reflection and may be used to determine whether a child is moving toward successful literacy development. It is essential to provide enriched instruction early to a child who is not progressing as expected, so difficulties can be resolved early, and before a cycle of failure is established. Early intervention leads to success in learning to read and write.

The KRA-L can also help teachers with end-of-year assessment. They can look back and see where each child started the year and the progress made during the kindergarten year. Future teachers can then use this information to help plan instructional strategies for educational continuity.

Does the kindergarten teacher have to be the person to administer the KRA-L?

Individuals other than teachers could give the assessment. An important consideration, however, is that if the person administering the assessment is, for example, a volunteer who has little background in education or assessment, additional training may be beneficial. It is preferable that the teacher administer the KRA-L, because the teacher will learn more about the child in the process of administering the assessment.

How long does the KRA-L take to administer?

It takes approximately 10 to 15 minutes to administer the KRA-L to a single child. The assessment must be administered to each child individually.

What does the KRA-L measure?

The KRA-L measures elements of reading development known to be essential indicators with later reading success. Components include letter identification, rhyme identification and production, answering questions, repetition of spoken sentences and initial sound identification.

Can the results of the KRA-L be used for kindergarten entrance or placement criteria?

No, the ONLY criterion for kindergarten entrance is age. If a child is 5 years old by the district entrance date, then he or she is legally eligible to attend kindergarten.

Other than the KRA-L, are there any other screening requirements for kindergarten?

Yes. According to ORC 3313.673, kindergarten children must be screened for vision, hearing, speech and communication, medical problems and any developmental disorders by November 1 of the school year. If the screening reveals the possibility of potential learning needs, the district must provide further assessment. These screenings are conducted not to diagnose educational disability or to be used for placement procedures but to ensure that all children entering kindergarten come to school “ready” to participate in instruction and that their vision, hearing, speech and communication abilities are not hampering them from doing their best.

If my school district meets Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), am I still required to administer the KRA-L?

Yes. All public school districts are required to administer the KRA-L.

Are school districts required to use the KRA-L, or may they choose another assessment?

For the purposes of the legislation, school districts are required to use the state-developed instrument, the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy (KRA-L).

Are school districts required to report the results of the KRA-L?

Yes. School districts will report the total KRA-L score and the date on which the assessment was administered for each child.

What will the state do with the district results?

The Ohio Department of Education will use the results to determine the impact of children's experiences before kindergarten, to understand how better to provide information and offer support to parents and teachers, and to provide the necessary data for early education policy decision making.

Are districts required to administer the KRA-L to students with limited English proficiency?

Districts are not required to administer the KRA-L to children who have limited English proficiency, if they have been enrolled in schools in the United States for fewer than 10 months.

Are districts required to administer the KRA-L to children with disabilities?

All children shall have the opportunity to be assessed using the KRA-L. The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process will determine what accomodations are appropriate for children with disabilities.

Can a parent refuse to have his or her child take the KRA-L?

A parent has the right to refuse to allow his or her child's score to be reported to the Ohio Department of Education.

As a teacher, what are the implications for administering the KRA-L?

It is important for teachers to understand a child's literacy skills as early as possible. Research has made it evident that certain skills and abilities are precursors for later reading and ultimately school success. Knowing a child's strengths and needs related to language, reading and writing is a good first step for instructional planning. A teacher may also use the results to help parents understand how they can help their children at home.

After and Before

Remember the scenarios at the beginning of *How to KRA-L*? Now that you may be more familiar with the assessment, how it was developed and what it measures, please consider the scenarios again in light of your growing understanding of how to put the KRA-L to use.

It's the start of a new school year. In addition to meeting parents, helping children adjust to a new school setting, preparing the learning environment, attending to content standards and planning for instruction, you are now be required to administer Ohio's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy (KRA-L). How do you think you may be affected by the requirement to administer, score, interpret, report and reflect on the KRA-L?

You are committed to developmentally appropriate practice and concerned about academic pressure on young children. Sometimes you think that if a child's oral language, letter knowledge and phonological awareness are limited, the child should wait a year before starting kindergarten. You know one teacher who advises parents, "If in doubt, keep him out (of kindergarten)." What problems do you see with that advice?

Either you or a volunteer has administered and scored the KRA-L during the first few weeks of school. You have been observing your students, have begun to make anecdotal records, and may have even started an assessment portfolio for each child. Now you have KRA-L results in hand. Begin to generate some thoughts about how you might put the KRA-L results to work to serve student achievement in your classroom.

The KRA-L is a quick literacy screening assessment, and as such it will not provide a full picture of a child's set of literacy readiness skills. Knowing that the KRA-L won't provide all the information you need, how else will you acquire the data you need to make effective plans to begin teaching each child to read?

Glossary

Alliteration – Repetition of initial sounds in neighboring words or stress syllables.

Alphabetic principle – An understanding that the letters in written words represent the phonemes in spoken words.

Analysis – Examination of data collected from observation and assessment to perceive patterns of behavior.

Assessment cycle – A continuous process that involves a systematic use of assessment techniques to collect, interpret and use data to develop instruction relevant to student needs.

Blending – Combining separate sounds represented by letters to pronounce a word.

Concepts of print – Understanding the mechanics of reading text, including concepts like print has meaning, one reads from left to right and from top to bottom, written words correspond to spoken words, and language has a structure.

Continuum – An overall pattern of development, including descriptions of behaviors of various stages during development.

Decoding – An ability to pronounce familiar and unfamiliar words accurately.

Diagnostic assessment – A comprehensive assessment that provides information about students' skills and instructional needs.

Documentation – Systematic recording of assessment data.

Emergent literacy – Early literacy development that occurs through interaction with others.

Explicit – Information that is directly stated or taught.

Grapheme – A written representation of a phoneme.

Interpretation – Conclusions drawn from analyzing data regarding a student's progress toward achieving learning goals.

Implicit – Information that depends on inferences to form a complete understanding.

Letter knowledge – Knowledge that graphemes are used to represent sounds.

Morphology – Understanding the structure of words and how morphemes (the smallest units of meaning) in a word relate to each other and form meaning.

Observation – attending to a student's behavior to obtain information for informing instruction.

Onset – Consonants preceding the vowel of a syllable ("c" at).

Orthography – A system of written symbols representing the sounds, syllables and morphemes of a spoken language.

Phoneme – The smallest unit of a spoken language.

Phonemic awareness – Understanding that words are composed of individual units of sound and that phonemes can be manipulated to create different words.

Phonics – A method of teaching reading and spelling that stresses sound-symbol relationships.

Phonological awareness – Awareness of the sounds in words (syllables, onset rimes and phonemes).

Pragmatics – A description of the language choices individuals make in social interactions.

Progress monitoring – Assessment that is an ongoing review of a student's progress in achieving learning goals.

Reflection – A thoughtful review of the effects of instruction on meeting a student's needs.

Rime – A vowel and any following consonants in a syllable ("at" in cat).

Screening assessment – Assessment used to inform instruction and identify children may need additional assessment.

Segmenting – The ability to break words into separate sounds.

Summative assessment – Assessment providing a comprehensive view of how students are progressing toward meeting instructional goals.

Syllable – A unit of sequential speech sounds comprised of a vowel sound or a vowel-consonant combination ("bab" in babble).

Syntax – Understanding how words can be combined to form meaningful sentences.

Translation – use of assessment results for instructional planning and for informing others of a student's progress.

Suggested Readings

Ball, E. W., & Blachman, B. A. (1991). Does phoneme awareness training in kindergarten make a difference in early word recognition and developmental spelling? *Reading Research Quarterly*, 26, 29-66.

One of the seminal studies of the impact of phonological awareness on reading ability. Research results demonstrate that supporting the development of preschool, kindergarten and first grade students' awareness of the phonological structure of speech facilitates reading and spelling acquisition.

Borko, H. (1997). New forms of classroom assessment: Implications for staff development. Theory Into Practice, 26, 231-238.

The article reviews the important roll of staff development in changing school assessment and instructional practices in classrooms. In addition, the author discusses the supports and impediments to change.

Ervin, R. (1998). Assessing early reading achievement: The road to results. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80, 226-228.

The author discusses a teacher-led process of changing school assessment. Teachers developed assessment tools and protocols based on state standards and identified instructional goals. As a result of the assessments, teachers developed literacy profiles for each student to share data and literacy growth with students, parents and administrators.

International Reading Association. (2000). Excellent reading teachers: A position statement of the International Reading Association. *The Reading Teacher*, 54(2), 235-250.

The position statement provides a summary of the qualities of knowledge and practice that excellent reading teachers possess, including an understanding of reading and writing development, knowledge of a variety of ways to teach reading, and the ability to tailor instruction to student needs. The article highlights the importance of parents, community members and administrators working in partnership as a factor in providing effective instruction.

International Reading Association and National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1998). Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children. *The Reading Teacher*, 52, 193-216.

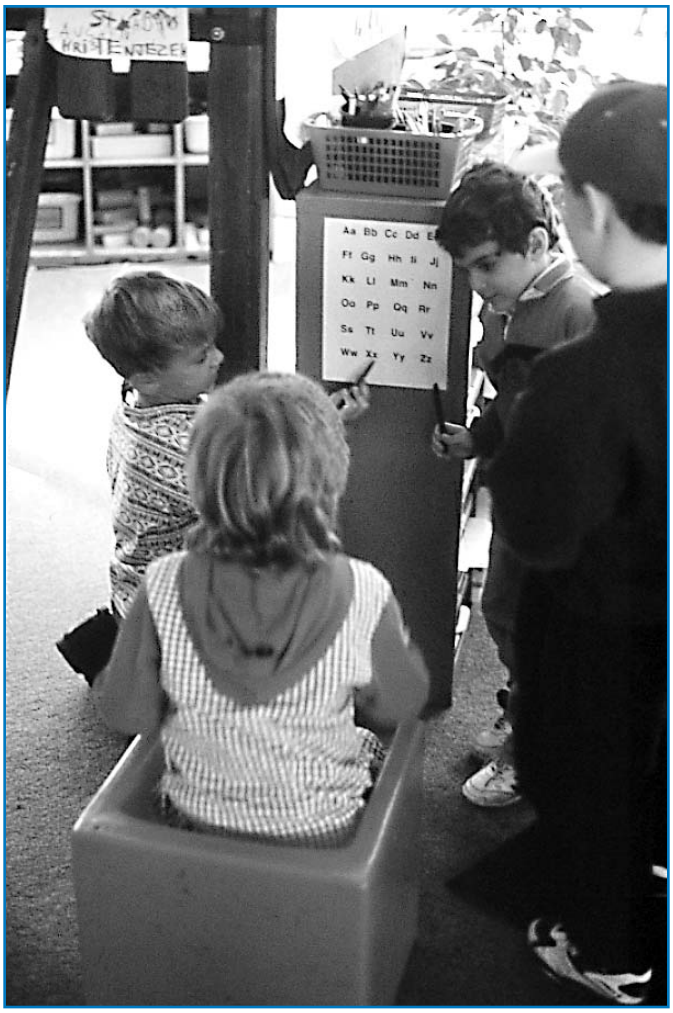
The International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) joint statement underscores the value of an array of early literacy accomplishments as a foundation of literacy. It also emphasizes the importance of assessment as a basis for instruction. Assessment should be systematic, authentic and multifaceted. The report stresses the importance for teachers both to understand a developmental continuum of reading and writing and to be able to use a variety of strategies to guide student development across the continuum.

Johnson, F. (2000). Spelling exceptions: Problems or possibilities? *The Reading Teacher*, 54, 372-378.

The author demonstrates how an understanding of the structure of printed English can shape teacher and student attitudes about language. Explanations about the development of English orthography can stimulate curiosity rather than provoke confusion.

National Research Council. (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

The National Research Council (NRC), based on a comprehensive review of research, made a series of recommendations about early literacy practices that must be addressed to insure that all children become successful readers. These practices include the development of phonemic awareness, understanding the alphabetic principle, developing sight vocabulary, decoding, fluency and comprehension. The report has implications for classroom assessment and instruction.



Resources

Oral Language Developmental Continuum

Infancy (precursor language)

- Responds to voices
- Makes cooing sounds
- Intentional and purposeful use of crying
- Babbles with intonation patterns
- Increasing use of eye contact during vocalizing
- Produces occasional words in isolation, e.g. no
- Evidence of syntactic awareness exhibited by unusual words in second position

Early Preschool Years (Ages 1 to 3)

- Increase in average number of morphemes produced (mean length of utterance or MLU)
- Limited inventory of sounds and syllable types that grows to include additional consonant and vowel sounds
- Growing list of semantically acceptable single words used intentionally
- Syntax awareness demonstrated with use of two-word utterances, growing to three- to four-word sentences
- Use of nouns, verbs, adjectives and noun phrases with modifiers
- Use of ordinals (other, first), cardinals (one, two), demonstratives (this, that) and articles (a, the)
- Beginning use of grammatical morphemes, e.g. –ing and possessive inflections

Later Pre-school/K Years (Ages 4 to 6)

- More sophisticated and resourceful use of language for a variety of purposes (pragmatics)
- Use of grammatically sophisticated sentences with more than one clause linked with conjunction
- Syntax includes questions and negative expressions
- Vocabulary increases by approximately two words a day
- Phonological development mostly complete with few vocalization problems
- Over-generalizations occur as syntax becomes more complex
- Full range of sounds can be reproduced

School Years (Ages 7 to 9)

- Adept use of language as "school" vocabulary is learned
- Increase in awareness of rules for initiating and maintaining conversation
- Syntax includes wide range of clause patterns with adverbs playing a larger role
- Sentence structure expands to include complex subject-noun phrases and articles
- Increasing use of auxiliary verbs such as can, would, might and may
- Rapid morphophonemic growth which includes vowel alternation and stress rules, e.g., different pronunciation of compose and composition
- Vocabulary size ranges from 2,500 to 8,000 words

Core curriculum (2003) Adapted from Piper, T. (1998) *Language and learning: the home and school years* (2nd ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill

Reading Developmental Continuum

Emergent Reading

- Mimics a reader
- Uses a story voice
- Listens to a story
- Retells the gist of the story

Early/Beginning Reading

- Prefers oral reading
- Reads with monotonic voice
- Reads word by word
- Reads dialogue with some expression
- Reads at a rate of 40 to 80 words per minute (wpm)
- Retells text sequentially

Transitional Reading

- Approaches fluency
- Reads silently occasionally
- Often reads in phrases
- Reads at a rate of 70 to 140 wpm
- Analyzes and generalizes information from text

Intermediate/Advanced Reading

- Reads fluently
- Reads silently most of the time
- Uses phrased reading
- Skims for specific purpose
- Develops a repertoire of reading styles
- Uses problem-solving strategies to read
- Personally and critically reflects on reading
- Reads at an intermediate rate of 120 to 250 wpm
- Adjusts rate to purpose

Core Curriculum (2003) Adapted from Bear, D. R. & Barone, D., 1998. *Developing literacy: An integrated approach to assessment and instruction*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Writing Developmental Continuum

Emergent Writing

- Draws and colors with ease
- Talks expressively while drawing
- Uses symbols to express words as distinct from pictures
- Uses transitional phrases

Early/Beginning Writing

- Writes at least three sentences with ease
- Uses occasional punctuation
- Represents talk with writing

Transitional Writing

- Writes a paragraph with ease
- Uses common forms of punctuation
- Focuses on making sense

Intermediate/Advanced Writing

- Writes three paragraphs about any familiar topic
- Develops different styles for different purposes, changing voice as needed
- Uses connectives

Orthographic (Spelling) Developmental Continuum

Prephonemic/ Semiphonemic Spelling

- Scribbles randomly
- Uses distinct sounds in speech to represent words

Letter-Name Spelling

- Uses consonants
- Experiments with short vowels
- Represents initial and final consonants consistently

Within Word Spelling

- Uses short vowel patterns correctly
- Experiments with long vowel patterns

Syllable Junction

- Experiments with two-syllable word patterns
- Uses but confuses prefix/suffix rules
- Understands spelling and meaning connections

Derivational Consistency Spelling

- Examines derivations
- Analyzes words
- Understands bases and roots

Core Curriculum (2003) Adapted from Bear, D. R. & Barone, D. (1998). Developing literacy: an integrated approach to assessment and instruction. Boston, MA; Houghton Mifflin Company.

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all children are born ready to learn

environments matter

communication is critical

relationships are influential