Letter-Sound Relationships

These resources provide educators with resources to introduce concepts related to the alphabet and the sounds associated with the letters of the alphabet.

The overall scaffold of the program has been written by Samantha Hornery. Many of the included board games and resources have been sourced from a variety of educational suppliers, and have been acknowledged throughout.

This booklet provides the foundation for introducing and practicing letter-sound relationships with children with learning difficulties.

Letter-Sound Relationships

It is essential that children can identify the name and sound of each of the letters of the alphabet before they can be expected to complete tasks such as writing their name, learning to read, and engaging with print.

Learning to say individual sounds and recognise their corresponding written letter is one of the first skills a child will learn in Kindergarten, possibly even pre-school, but is very complex and involves many skills including articulation (ability to pronounce sounds), visual perception and memory (recognizing letter shape), and auditory memory and processing (identify individual sound in isolation and context and recall sounds in word). All other literacy skills rest on the basis of children knowing the 26 letters of the alphabet and their associated sounds. It is one of the most important skills to be taught. For children with learning difficulties, there often exist some persistent confusions with letter-sound relationships which prevent success in reading and spelling. These need to be addressed prior to any additional work.

Single sounds can be taught in alphabetical order, but this sets the scene for e/i, b/d and p/q confusions as the letters are taught so close together in alphabetical order. Instead the Cascade Model is recommended, with the order:

amstif - droghl - ucnkvb - epj - yxqz

Please Note: It is important to remember that letter-sound correspondence (alphabetic principle) is a simplistic way of considering the letters in the English language and is in no way adequate for a child to become literate. There are flaws with the letter-sound correspondence basis of teaching mainly that despite there being 26 letters of the alphabet there are really 44 sounds in the English language, which in turn can be spelt in over 70 different ways.   When working with a child with a learning disability it is helpful to place this is perspective for the child immediately and consider using methods such as THRASS, Lindamood or Spalding (references found in bibliography) to address the sounds of the English language.

Important Definitions

It is helpful to use correct terminology from the beginning of working with children and young children in a remediation environment. These are the terms which will be used throughout this booklet:

Letters: Alphabetic names for 26 letters of the alphabet
Phonemes: Speech sounds (a, A)
Graphemes: Ways to spell sounds (ie - letter combinations)

Assessment

As with all skills, it is helpful to conduct a pre-test of the child's knowledge of alphabetical order, letters, and phonemes. This identifies the concepts which need to be addressed.

At the end of this package is a simple "Letter-Sound Relationships" assessment tool. Use letter cards in upper and lower case to complete this (pdf files on corresponding pages).

You simply ask the children to say the name of each letter (in upper case), one sound each letter makes (in lower case), and a word which begins with this sound.

Based on the results of this, you would identify what elements of letter-sound relationships are to be taught.

Teaching

Once you have identified what is to be taught, it is time to begin,

Alphabetical Order

We teach alphabetical order as a simple way to drill letter names with young children. However, we use alphabetical order often in our everyday lives (dictionary, phone book, street directory). Alphabetical order is best learnt by rote and drill practice using the alphabet song.

For children experiencing difficulty with this task, you may need to chunk the song up further and learn only 7 or so letters at a time, slowly building to the whole song. Written cues for the beginning of each section may also help (see below)
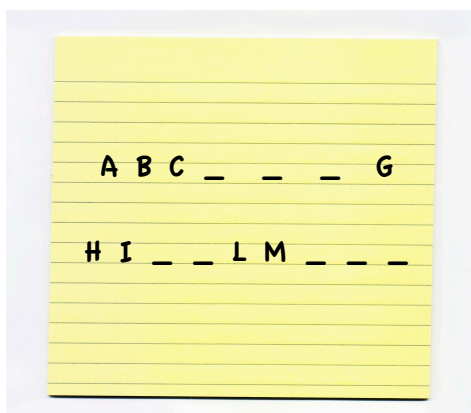
Simply searching "alphabet song" on your computer will display a number of versions of this song, many with fun video files to accompany them.

Online Practice

Here are some links to online modules to practice alphabetical order.

http://www.roythezebra.com/reading-games/alphabetical-order-1.html

http://www.primaryresources.co.uk/online/alphaorder1.swf

http://www.playkidsgames.com/alphabetGames.htm

http://www.learningplanet.com/act/abcorder.asp

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/ks1bitesize/literacy/alphabet/index.shtml

Worksheet Practice

Any Kindergarten English textbook will contain activities to revise alphabetical order. An internet search will yield additional worksheets you can print.

Games Practice

Simply taking the alphabet cards and placing them on the table & timing the child when placing them in alphabetical order can be presented as a game - children compete to be the first one to complete the alphabetical order.

These same alphabet cards can be placed in a pile and used in a board game. Upon landing on a square on the board, children must pick up a card from the pile and then continue the alphabet from the card they have selected.

Direct and Explicit Teaching of Sound

Then we move to introducing specific letters and phonemes. Below is a scaffold to introduce these concepts (note: this can be used to introduce numerals as well).

Introduce Sound

1. Adult formally introduces letter and phoneme, using a predictable and clear script "This is the letter A (show card), it can be written as A or a (show card examples and write on board), it often sounds like a, like in words ant, apple, axe …" Important point – when introducing single sounds it is helpful to have many letter cards in a variety of colours, fonts, materials and accompanying pictures to ensure transfer of knowledge occurs prepared prior to beginning teaching.

2. Single sounds are often introduced and consolidated using rhymes and songs. Ants in the Apple "ants in the apple a a a" and Letterland (Annie apple) are two such programs which use an alliterative phrase and tune to introduce single sounds. This is a successful way of introducing single sounds.   In this case the adult should show children the rhyme card, discuss the picture, read and teach the alliterative phrase at the bottom of the card to the appropriate tune. Extension activities for recalling rhyme include colouring the rhyme page for home use, writing letters while singing tune and ensuring parents are aware of tune for home rehearsal. Here's a sample of one: http://www.kiddyhouse.com/Songs/alpha/a.html

3. It is very important that articulation is correct from the very first time a child says a sound.   Moderate to severe articulation difficulties are managed by speech and language pathologists, but it is vital that professionals understand how the mouth makes the sounds we teach.   Children should be encouraged to use a mirror to see how their mouth makes sounds, paying attention to lips, tongue, teeth and nose.   It is a good idea to have children describe how their mouth feels when making a sound.   The chart on the next page describes how the mouth makes specific sounds and suggests ways to assist a child if they are experiencing difficulty in this area.

M	• Lips pressed tightly together • Long sound • Voiced • Nose sound	P	• Lips pressed together • Short explosive sound • Unvoiced • Blow a feather, tissue
F	• Teeth gently resting on bottom lip with space for air to flow • Blowing motion	D	• Same as t • Voiced • Drum noise
Th (quiet)	• Tongue pushed out between lips, only tip of tongue sticking out • Blow to make sound • Unvoiced, long continuous sound • Sound coming out of a tyre	Z	• Same as s • Voiced • Long continuous sound • Buzzing bee sound
S	• Tongue tip up behind top teeth, push tongue against teeth • Long continuous sound • Feel air • Teeth gently together, tongue not past teeth • Unvoiced • Snake noise	K/C	• Sound from back of mouth • Unvoiced • Short, sharp sound • Mouth open slightly • Tickle back of neck for a kinesthetic reminder • Coughing or cannon noise
G	• As k • Drinking noise	V	• Same as f • Vacuum noise
SH	• Tongue pushed against the roof of the mouth with a tunnel down the middle • Teeth together, lips round • Unvoiced, long continuous sound • Feel air escaping with hand	H	• Mouth open • Feel air escaping • Feathers, tissues … • Unvoiced • Panting sound
B	• Lips pressed together • Short, explosive sound • Voiced • Bouncing ball noise	R	• Tongue on roof of mouth, not using lips • Voiced • Lion noise
L	• Tongue tip behind top teeth then flop down to the bottom of mouth • Mouth open wide • Voiced • La la la noise	T	• Tongue tip behind top teeth • Short sharp sound • Unvoiced • Dripping tap noise • Clicking tongue
W	• Rounded lips • Lifesaver, straw or finger between lips to round • Voiced	Th (loud)	• Same as th quiet except voiced • Motor sound

Practice and Revision

- Regular recital of song (as child traces the letter with finger or pencil)
- Identification and discrimination activities using cards, otherwise known as "match to sample" (start with just two choices, then extend to 3, 4 and 5): "point to the letter which makes this sound", "show me [phoneme]" , "give me [phoneme]" , "[phoneme 1] [phoneme 2] – show me"
- Recall: "what sound does [letter] make?"
- Games – card games.   Use traditional card games (snap, bingo, memory, concentration, fish, snail ...) to rehearse these sounds
- Board Games.   Take a blank board game and fill it with letters (capital) or phonemes (lower case). Have children roll a die, move around the board, and say the letter or phoneme they land on.

Application

Once single sounds are well understood the position of those sounds needs to be considered.   Initial sounds are the first things introduced, then final and medial. Oral identification and manipulation activities need to be focused on here.   This is addressed more fully in the phonological awareness booklet.

- Auditory Discrimination – say "[word] – what is the first sound you hear?" (then extend to last sound)
- Auditory Discrimination – say "[word 1] [word 2] – do these words start with the same sound?" (extend to 3 words & final sounds)
- Pictures on a page – circle / colour all the words that start with a particular phoneme.
- Finding words that start with a particular phoneme.

Extension

- Manipulation (altering sounds in a word to create new words) – say "[word]", take [first phoneme] away, what word is left?" (can extend to last phoneme and then replacing phonemes)
- Creating alliterative word strings – "Betty's beach ball bounces by a blue bubbling brook"
- These tasks may need to be visual as well (physical manipulation of letter cards).

Time

Most importantly, you need to allow time. Time to learn these letters and phonemes. Time to practice these. Time to store them in long-term memory. You may be practising these for a long time, and that's perfectly OK - no other literacy instruction can occur before this.
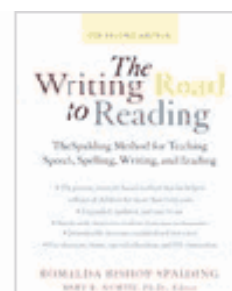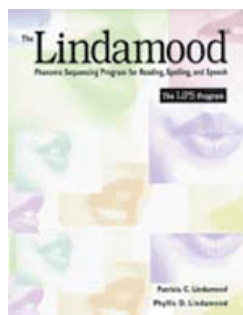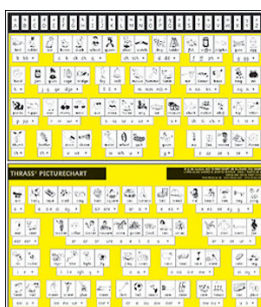
Resources

You can essentially teach letter-sound relationships with a set of flash cards and following the routine described on the previous pages.

A simple internet search will yield different formats of flash cards.

You can use a commercial program, such as Ants in the Apple or Letterland. These contain the cards, stories, auditory practice tasks, cds with the rhyme --> they are essentially a step-by-step package to follow and is completely sufficient.

You can also use commercial programs, such as Thrass, Spalding, or Lindamood to teach the 44 phonemes. Again, these are step-by-step packages, but require training to use the programs.

Online Practice

Here are some links to online modules to practice letter sound knowledge.

http://teacher.scholastic.com/clifford1/flash/phonics/index.htm

http://www.netrover.com/~kingskid/alphabet/sounds3.html

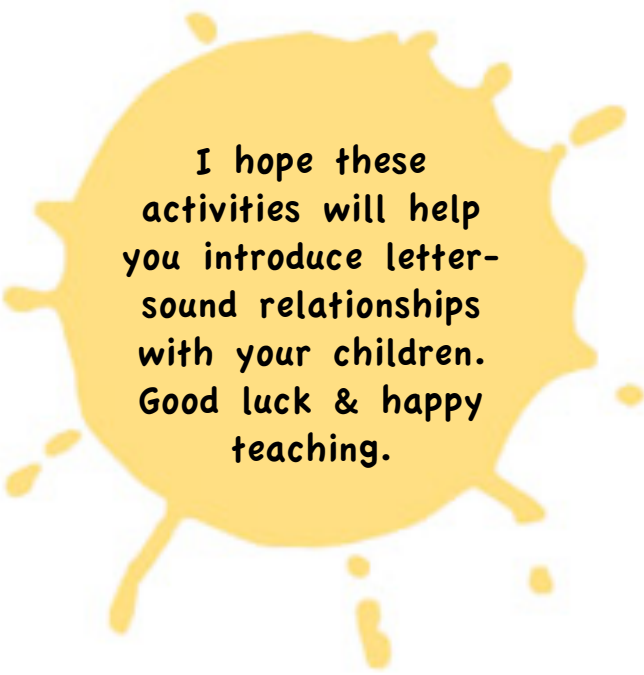http://www.kiddonet.com/gb/flash/phonics/Intro.html

Worksheet Practice

Any Kindergarten English textbook will contain activities to revise letter sound knowledge.
An internet search will yield additional worksheets you can print.

http://www.mes-english.com/phonics.php

http://www.k-3teacherresources.com/alphabet_printables.html

I hope these activities will help you introduce letter-sound relationships with your children. Good luck & happy teaching.