Nine Categories of Learning

Early Literacy Concepts

Most early literacy concepts are developed through early reading and writing experiences. These concepts include distinguishing between print and pictures, understanding the concept of letters and words, and learning that print has directionality (in other words, in English we read from top to bottom, left to right). Basic lessons help children use their own names as resources in learning about letters, sounds, and words. Even if your first graders are very knowledgeable, you may still want to use name charts and some name exercises in the first weeks of school to help students feel welcome.

Phonological Awareness (and Phonemic Awareness)

We recommend extensive work in reading aloud and shared reading to develop phonemic awareness. Songs, rhymes, and poetry provide students with the background and examples to participate fully in your minilessons in this area. In first grade, children are learning to control onsets and rimes; identify initial, final, and medial consonants, and identify, separate, and blend sounds to make words.

Letter Knowledge

Children need many different experiences with letters in order to learn "what to look for" when distinguishing one letter from another. They learn that there are many different letters in the set called the "alphabet," and that each letter is just a little different from the others. First graders are learning to recognize, name, and use the letters of the alphabet in many contexts. They can also write letters legibly with efficient motor movements.

Letter/Sound Relationships

Understanding the relationships between letters and letter clusters and sounds is basic to understanding the way words are structured. First graders can connect letters and letter clusters to sounds, recognize several sounds that may be connected to the same letter, and use several letters that may be connected to the same sound.

Spelling Patterns

First graders are able to spell some familiar words and word endings (*in* and *s* for example) quickly and automatically. And for those words they write often, they may know conventional spelling. They can also check their spelling for accuracy.

High Frequency Words

High frequency words are also learned in many other components of the language and literacy framework, especially shared/interactive writing and guided reading. Lessons on high frequency words are connected to the word wall. First graders can quickly recognize 100 to 150 high frequency words they know while reading continuous text.

Word Meaning

Children need to know the meaning of the words they are learning to read and write. It is important for them constantly to expand their vocabulary as well as develop a more complex understanding of words they already know. This section of the Continuum describes understandings related to the development of vocabulary—labels and concept words, such as colors, numbers, and days of the week.

Word Structure

Beyond simple word patterns, children in first grade begin to understand how words are related to each other and how they can change words by adding parts. First graders may recognize and use syllables, simple contractions, compound words, plurals, affixes, and possessives.

Word-Solving Actions

Word solving refers to the strategic actions that readers take when they use their phonics knowledge while reading or writing continuous text. These strategies are "in-the-head" actions that are invisible, although we can infer them from some overt behavior; for example, children will sometimes make several attempts at words, revealing their hypotheses. Or, children may work left to right on a word (sometimes called "sounding out"); they may also make connections with other words. Good readers tend to use these in-the-head word-solving actions in connection with meaning and knowledge of language so that the reading is smoother, makes sense, and is accurate. They are fitting all systems together. First graders learn to solve words "on the run" while reading with fluency and understanding.