ABCs by Design: The Role of Alphabet Book Design and Children’s Alphabetic Behaviours in Emergent Literacy Skill Acquisition

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Abstract: The current studies examined children’s preferences for ABC book formats and relations between alphabet books and early literacy learning and behaviours. Study 1: Using a pictorial scale, page ratings of 51 junior kindergarten students (4-5 years old) revealed no preference for the amount of text nor picture complexity in alphabet books. Study 2: 94 junior kindergarten students (3-4 years old) participated in a 16 sessions reading program whereby they were read and interacted with alphabet books with research-based features, alphabet books with conventional features, or storybooks in small groups. Children across all three conditions made gains in their letter-name knowledge, letter-sound knowledge, and phonological awareness over the course of the study; however, no significant differences were seen between groups. Observations of children’s behaviours while reading independently revealed that alphabet books elicited more alphabetic behaviours than storybooks, despite children in the three conditions spending the same proportion of time oriented to their books. Children’s pre-test knowledge was the greatest predictor of post-test knowledge across all literacy measures, and book behaviour was positively associated with gains in letter sounds and phonological awareness. No effect of behaviour was seen for uppercase letter names; however, behaviour moderated the relation with pre-test letter-name knowledge for lowercase letter names when standard alphabet books were presented. Findings highlight the utility of using alphabet books, in a variety of formats, as part of a child’s greater literacy experience.

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Children with strong alphabetic knowledge tend to go on to have strong literacy skills. Children’s oral language skill (including both receptive and expressive components) has also been identified as an important predictor of literacy development [17]. A further predictor of unique variance in literacy achievement is a child’s rapid automatized naming (RAN; usually operationally defined as how fast they can name highly-familiar items such as digits, letters, colours and objects) [18]. The Role of Families in Children’s Literacy Development - What can Parents Contribute? Parents, as children’s first teachers [20] play a crucially important role in building their offspring’s emergent literacy knowledge and skills [21]. Literacy-rich environment emphasizes the importance of speaking, reading, and writing in the learning of all students. This involves the selection of materials that will facilitate language and literacy opportunities. Evidence on the Role of the Teacher. The literacy-rich environment also provides students with opportunities to engage with, and see adults interact with, print, allowing students...