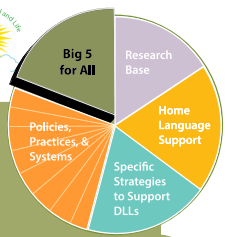


# The Big 5 *The Big Picture*



1. **Alphabet Knowledge and Early Writing**
2. Background Knowledge
3. Book Knowledge and Print Concepts
4. Oral Language and Vocabulary
5. Phonological Awareness

Kay, a home visitor, was visiting with Clara and her two young children, Ben and Carmen. One-year-old Ben reaches for his mother's pen. He makes marks on the envelope on the table and smiles up at his mother. Four-year-old Carmen takes the pen and says, "Carmen" and writes "CRM." The home visitor says, "Ah, you wrote Carmen!" Carmen and Ben like to write!"



# Alphabet Knowledge and Early Writing are separate but related skills

Alphabet knowledge and early writing are separate but related skills that together support later reading and writing. These skills include:

- ▶ Attempting to communicate through print (from first scribbles through first letters and words), such as:
  - ▶ Intentional attempts to create letters, words, and connected text (emergent writing) for a wide variety of authentic purposes, including lists, captions, labels, stories, or information
  - ▶ Letter formation by toddlers and preschoolers that begins to look more and more like conventional print
  - ▶ Name writing by toddlers and preschoolers that begins to look more and more like conventional print



Some languages are not alphabetic. This means they do not have an alphabet in which letters (and their sounds) form words.

In Chinese, for example, a word is written as a whole pictorial character rather than with individual letters. The individual sounds in a word are not related to parts of the pictorial character. Rather, the pictorial character represents a whole word or words.



- ▶ Understanding that letters are special symbols that we use to read and write in English
- ▶ Observing and experiencing written language in their environments, which enables young children to develop an understanding that writing has special purposes, such as:
  - ▶ Communicating with others
  - ▶ Writing to remember
  - ▶ Documenting
  - ▶ Writing for pleasure or entertainment
- ▶ Recognizing capital and lowercase letters in the English alphabet
- ▶ Knowing that English letters are associated with individual sounds
- ▶ Associating letters of the English alphabet with their specific sounds

## Similarities and differences between English and other languages\*

	Hindi and English	Chinese and English	Spanish and English	Twi and English
<b>Written form of the language</b>	<p>बालक (child)</p> <p>शिशु (baby-formal)</p> <p>बच्चा (small baby-colloquial)</p>	<p>小宝宝 (little treasure-boy)</p> <p>小孩子 (little kid)</p> <p>小囡囡 (little sweet girl)</p> <p>小朋友 (little friend)</p> <p>小贝贝 (little treasure-girl)</p> <p>小东西 (little "little thing")</p>	<p>chico, chica (small child-regional South America)</p> <p>chiquillo, chiquilla (small child-regional Central America)</p> <p>mocoso, mocosa (small child-regional Caribbean)</p> <p>chamaco, chamaca (small child-regional Mexico)</p>	<p>Abofra (child)</p> <p>Akola (same as child)</p> <p>Ketewa (small or little-meaning little child)</p>
<b>Written form of the language</b>	Letters represent sounds. However, the letters look quite different from English letters.	Chinese does not use letters to represent sounds. Words are symbolized by characters.	Letters represent sounds. Spanish uses many of the same letters as English, although the letters do not always make the same sounds as in English.	Letters represent sounds. The vowels are the same as in English but certain consonants in the alphabet are made up of more than one letter.

\* Please note that this chart provides general information on how languages are similar to and different from English. Speakers of these languages may or may not need additional support in written English, depending on their prior experiences.



## Why Alphabet Knowledge and Early Writing matter

Alphabet knowledge and early writing are separate but related skills that together support later reading and writing. Early writing supports later writing by developing children's understanding of the purposes and functions of written language. Early writing also supports children's later reading because children learn about the relationship between print and language. Alphabet knowledge also supports children's understanding of letter-sound relationships. This is key to both reading and writing in English and many other languages.

*"Moving toward being a good reader means that a child has gained a [working] knowledge of the principles of the culture's writing system. ... Prior to real reading, young children gain [working] knowledge of the parts, products, and uses of the writing system and the ways in which reading and oral language activities complement each other and diverge from each other" (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, pp. 42-43).*

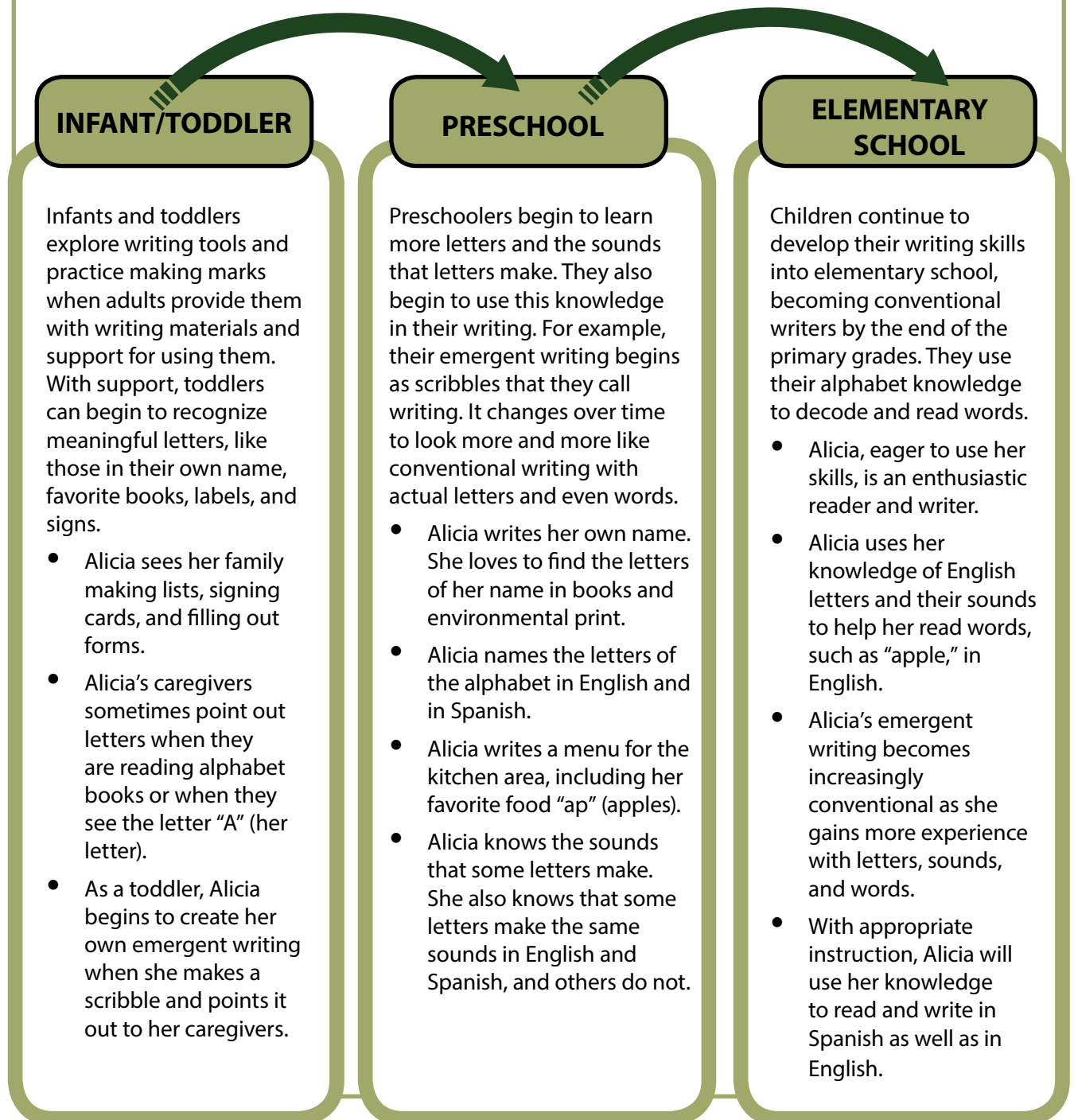
*"Children acquire a working knowledge of the alphabetic system not only through reading but also through writing" (IRA & NAEYC, 1998, p. 33).*

*"With instruction and practice in writing, they [children] become increasingly proficient at recognizing and forming letters and using these letters to represent the sounds that they hear" (Bardige, 2009, p. 176).*



# How do Alphabet Knowledge and Early Writing develop?

Alicia develops alphabet knowledge and early writing throughout her early childhood, and these skills directly support her school readiness. As a dual language learner (DLL), Alicia is learning Spanish and English at home and English at school. She will develop skills in each language based on how each language is used with her and how she uses each language. Here we see how the skills she develops from birth directly support her school readiness.



## Alphabet Knowledge, Early Writing, and dual language learners (DLLs)

Alicia (a Spanish and English speaker) and Xiao (a Chinese and English speaker) know different things about writing because of their experiences at home. They bring these differences to preschool.

### Alicia

My big sister taught me to write my name letter by letter. She made me copy it over and over, and now I can write it as good as she can!



### Xiao

I have been taking lessons in Chinese calligraphy from my grandmother. I can write my name and other characters myself!



DLLs are developing knowledge of two writing systems.

- ▶ The basic but important insight that print conveys meaning or is *speech written down* (Justice & Kadaravek, 2004) transfers across the writing systems of different languages. Once children understand this concept in one language, they may find it easier to make the same connection in another language.
- ▶ When the print systems of children's languages are different (e.g., English and Chinese for Xiao), children need many experiences with each print system in order to develop writing skills in each language.

English letters and sounds may be new to some DLLs.

- ▶ Some alphabetic languages, like English and Spanish, share many letters and sounds. Other alphabetic languages, like English and Arabic, do not share any letters and only some sounds.
- ▶ Depending on children's prior experiences in English and their home languages, DLLs may need additional experiences with new English sounds (see *Phonological Awareness*) and with English letters.
- ▶ Many writing activities, including dictation (in which adults or older children write down what children say), can use either of a child's languages. Dictation helps children make the connection between writing and speech and children can transfer this insight from one language to another. Children will, however, need to learn the specific relationship between writing and speech for each language.





## Language, culture, letters, and Early Writing

Children develop “funds of knowledge” about writing and the English alphabet based on their experiences with their families, cultures, and communities. Funds of knowledge is a way of thinking about the skills and attitudes that children have developed based on their experiences with their families (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).



When teachers are aware of the funds of knowledge that children have already developed, they can help children connect new, school-based knowledge to what they have already learned at home. For example:

- ▶ Some children may have practiced individual letter formation with their families and be proud of their ability to make conventional letter forms. Their families celebrate the ability to form conventional English print, even in young children.
- ▶ Other children may have developed a wide and varied understanding of the purposes of writing. They may have helped their families decide what should be included on a shopping list. They may have used emergent writing to sign cards and thank you notes or to create labels for their drawings.
- ▶ Some children may have little direct exposure to print in their families, but they may use rich oral language to tell detailed stories about themselves and their experiences. Although they possess extensive oral language skills in their home language, they may have little direct exposure to the English alphabet or writing.



When teachers and caregivers develop trusting relationships with families, the teachers and caregivers can ask family members about their children's experiences with letters and with writing. These discussions, paired with observations of each child, can help teachers and caregivers to plan experiences with print that build on and extend children's existing knowledge and experiences. For example:

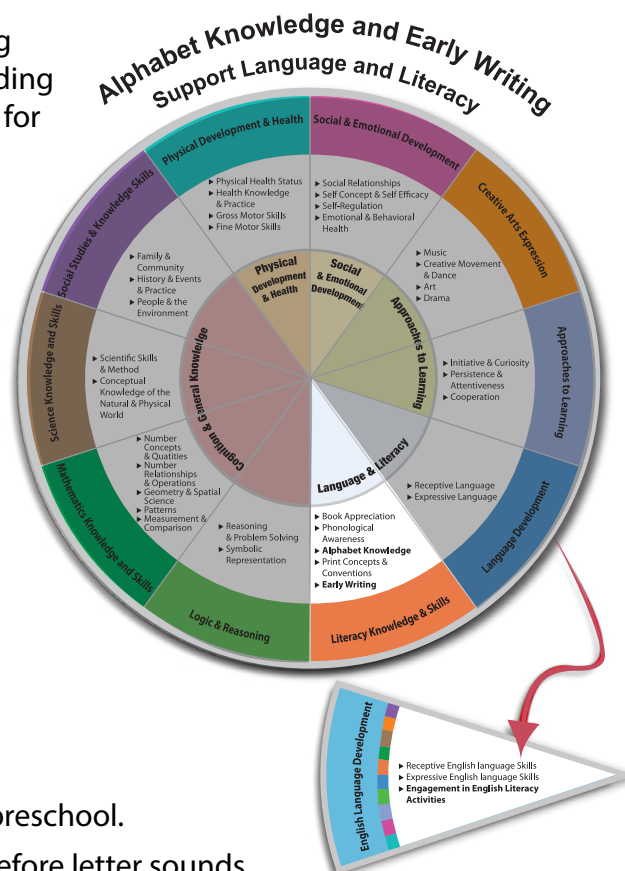


- ▶ Children who bring a strong knowledge of writing individual letters may use and build on this knowledge by writing individual letters during shared writing activities. Shared writing is when both the teacher and children write together. The teacher may extend children's experiences by connecting the letters children know to letters in picture books and by supporting children in writing their names or simple labels.
- ▶ Children who have extensive experience with the meaning and purposes of print can build on those experiences by making lists, signing cards, and writing labels in the classroom. The teacher can extend this knowledge by helping children connect their writing to letters and sounds.
- ▶ Children who have rich oral language but little experience with print can build on that language by participating in dictation activities in which teachers write down what children say. The teacher may also extend this knowledge by supporting children to understand the connection between the letters and sounds in their names.

It is important for teachers to learn about the ways language and literacy are used and valued within children's families. These experiences may differ from those that the teacher expects to see in the classroom. Teachers can learn about, honor, build on, and extend these experiences.

# Supporting Alphabet Knowledge and Early Writing

- ▶ Explore writing tools and practice making marks with infants and toddlers by providing them with writing materials and support for using them.
  - ▶ Very young children may “write” in a high chair, lap, or on the floor.
  - ▶ Toddlers may begin to point to their own writing and tell you what it says.
- ▶ Find and talk about the letters of the alphabet with toddlers and preschoolers, particularly the letters in their name (the first letter in their name will be a special favorite). The letters can be pointed out in places, such as:
  - ▶ Favorite books
  - ▶ Signs and other environmental print
  - ▶ Words they “write” or see others write
- ▶ Teach letter names and letter sounds in preschool.
  - ▶ Usually, children learn letter names before letter sounds. However, occasionally, some children learn letter sounds first.
- ▶ Keep letter and sound activities fun and enjoyable.
  - ▶ Naming and using letters can be part of reading a favorite book or seeing a new sign or pamphlet.
  - ▶ Letter experiences should be very short (1–2 minutes) and not be extended lessons.
- ▶ Remember early writing is both a literacy activity and a fine motor skill.
  - ▶ Some children may need additional support in developing fine motor skills, including gripping a ball or using scissors, beading, or putting small manipulatives together.
- ▶ Encourage children to explore, practice, and enjoy early writing activities.
  - ▶ Children may choose from a variety of writing tools, including markers, pencils, and crayons in different colors.
  - ▶ Children may draw pictures and then “write” a letter, word, or scribble describing the drawing.
  - ▶ Children may make cards, lists, or posters.



## Alphabet Knowledge and Early Writing in action for infants and toddlers

Mara is a toddler teacher who notices that the children in her room love to touch their food. She decides to provide print-based experiences with food to support their early writing. Mara knows that the children really enjoy the kitchen dramatic play area, and they often pretend to make food and serve it to each other and to adults. Mara places books about food in the kitchen and labels popular items, such as the stove, cabinets, and bread box. She also tapes a large piece of paper to the table and provides crayons for the children to use.



Mara sits in the kitchen with the children and helps them use the books and writing area. Bea picks up the book *My Food/Mi Comida* and points to the picture of bread, one of her favorite foods. Mara says, "Bread. You love bread! Where do we keep the bread?" Bea walks over to the bread box and takes out the plastic bread. "Bread," she says. Mara says, "I think the bread box needs a label so we know where the bread is." With Bea watching, she makes the label. Bea sees the label, recognizes the first letter of her name, and says, "B, B, B!"

On another day, Mara asks the children if they need any food for their kitchen. The children start to name their favorite foods. "Yes, crackers!" says Simon. "Juice!" says Amalka. "Pie!" says Tom. "Oh, these are great ideas," Mara says. "Let's make a list of what we need from the store. What did you say, Simon?" "Crackers! Cheese!" he replies. "Yes, let me see," Mara continues. "We need crackers and cheese." After she finishes the list, she says, "Hmm, let's use one of these foods today and another one tomorrow. The first food on my list is crackers. Here are some crackers." As she gives them a cracker box, Simon says, "Crackers!"

Mara rotates different books through the kitchen dramatic play area. She also includes boxes with labels and pictures of the children's favorite foods. Although she often makes the boxes, families also bring in empty containers from home.

## Alphabet Knowledge and Early Writing in action for preschoolers

Amanda, a preschool teacher, notices that all of the children in her class talk about eating bread at home. They also eat many different kinds of bread—sliced bread, *pan dulce*, *naan*, bagels, and croissants. Therefore, she decides to explore the topic—making bread—with the children.

Through the process of shared writing, Amanda and the children create a big cookbook. She involves the children in the process of writing the recipe titles by asking each child to participate in a way that would allow everyone to succeed. Amanda posts the alphabet above the chart paper. Depending on each child's knowledge and comfort level, she asks each preschooler to write either a single letter or multiple letters. For example, she asks Nancy to write the word *naan* (a type of Indian bread), since she can already form all of those letters. Boris writes the "B" in bread, since he is new to English and that is the only letter he knows. He looks up at the "B" in the alphabet posted on the wall and slowly and deliberately makes his "B."

To ensure each child's success in this shared writing activity, Amanda does the following:

- ▶ Places the paper on an easel in easy reach of the children
- ▶ Allows each child an opportunity to hold the pencil and write letters or words
- ▶ Supports the children in deciding which letter comes next
- ▶ Allows the children time to write their letter(s) and posts the alphabet for help
- ▶ Understands that errors are learning opportunities, and encourages the children to try again
- ▶ Does some of the writing herself
- ▶ Keeps the writing sessions short

Amanda also provides opportunities for children to produce longer connected text. She uses dictation to help them record their experiences eating the different types of bread. Amanda asks each child to describe his or her favorite bread. She writes down what each child says and asks the child to illustrate the words. Nancy says, "My favorite bread was *naan* because it was flat and chewy. I liked stretching it out and putting toppings on it. The butter was so delicious!" Boris, who is new to English, says, "Bread good." His aunt, who volunteers in the classroom every week, writes what he says in Russian. Есть хлеб было весело. Мне нравился хлеб с изюмом, потому что изюм - это здорово. (Translated: The bread was fun to eat. I liked the bread with raisins because raisins are good.)





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This document was prepared under Grant #90HC0001 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, by the National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic>

