

Understanding Montessori

The Kids Talk Way



Why Teach Two Alphabets When One Will Do?

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"What's this word?" my students ask.

"Oh, you know it," I reply.

"No, I don't."

I give them a clue. "What if I told you it started with a capital letter?"

For the beginning reader, we add an unnecessary difficulty to learning the letters and their sounds by introducing 52 letters when 26 are all we need. Ninety percent of all printed matter is in lowercase print. It just makes sense to introduce the lowercase letters first. After the child learns all the lowercase letters and their unique sounds, it is usually not difficult for them to learn the capital letters. For most children, you can begin to introduce the capital letters after they are reading three-word phrases.

Reading success is built on a foundation of two skills:

1. Being aware that words are made of individual sounds.
2. Understanding the relationship between letters and sounds.

Reading without understanding these foundational concepts forces the young reader to adopt a coping strategy of symbolizing words, meaning they look at the word and just remember that a certain set of lines means "cat." The young reader does not then develop the decoding skills of knowing that the three letters in cat make three different sounds. Without this knowledge, reading becomes limited to the number of words you can manage to memorize, and this can be visually confusing when trying to memorize the difference between similar looking words such as cat, can, cap, cab, cad, car, etc.

Depending on visual memory for word recognition along with the inability to assign a sound to each letter are the main reasons that the reading level for many adults makes them "functionally illiterate." The National Center for Educational Statistics reported in 1997 in the National Adult Literacy Survey that 40 to 44 million adults in the United States were only able to perform the most routine literacy tasks. Adults at this level could usually locate one piece of information in a sports article or locate the expiration date on a driver's license. They could not locate two pieces of information in a sports article or locate an intersection on a street map. Forty million (40,000,000) adults are unable to read because neither their parents, their teachers nor anybody else made sure that they knew the reading basics. The report also showed that these adults were also in the bottom 20 percent for income.

Assure reading success for your child by introducing only the lowercase letters first. With only 26 symbols to learn, we double the rate of learning success since lowercase letters are used nine times more than capital letters.

Learning the letter/sound relationships is also critical for reading success. Make sure your child knows all the letter sounds for the lowercase letters before you introduce capital letters. It will be easier for your child to be a successful reader by introducing one alphabet at a time, the lowercase alphabet first.

Next week: Increase Your Child's Active Working Memory