FL Quarterback Bernie Kosar told reporters recently: “the third day of kindergarten, I came home, threw down my lunch box and told my mother that I was never going back to Mrs. Sullivan’s class.” “Why?” asked his mother. Kosar’s response was, “because Mrs. Sullivan didn’t teach me how to read.” (Dallas Morning News, 1993, A17). Most children begin kindergarten with this same intense desire to learn how to read. Unfortunately, in today’s schools, many kindergarten children like Bernie Kosar are not developing a love of reading. Most struggle as they try to master the principles of “how to read.” Such difficulties exact a tremendous toll on children’s self-confidence, motivation, and subsequent reading achievement. When kindergarten children are taught the principles of Phonemic Awareness and Alphabet Recognition, however, their positive
attitudes towards school and reading improve significantly. To illustrate, a young five-year-old, Erica, who attends Martin Luther King Elementary School in Broward County, Florida, recently ran home from school after her third day of kindergarten. She jumped up and down and reported to her mother: “Mrs. Markum never forgets to have story time every day! She helps us by pointing to the words in the books that she reads. I love to read and she teaches us how to read every day.”

The NRP (National Reading Panel) charged to identify instructional methods that significantly increase students’ reading success in kindergarten through 3rd grade, completed a review of more than 100,000 research studies. While there are no quick solutions for developing optimal reading achievement, the extensive knowledge base compiled by the NRP demonstrated that Phonemic Awareness and Alphabet Recognition can and should be taught in a kindergarten curriculum.

Phonemic Awareness is defined as the ability to segment, analyze, and synthesize speech, and the understanding that the sounds of spoken language work together to make words. The Alphabetic Principle is defined as the phenomenon in English in which each speech sound, or phoneme, is represented by a distinct graphic symbol(s) that students can learn to read. At the kindergarten level, the Alphabetic Principle is usually assessed by determining children’s ability to name the letters of the alphabet.

Effective Phonemic Awareness instruction teaches children to recognize, understand, and manipulate sounds in their spoken language. An effective instructional program contains eight types of phonemic awareness instruction:

- **Phonemic Isolation** (children learn to recognize individual sounds in a word);
- **Phonemic Identity** (children recognize the same sounds in different words);
- **Phonemic Categorization** (children recognize a word, in a set of three, that has an odd sound);
Phonemic Blending (children listen to a sequence of separately spoken sounds and then combine the sounds to form a word); Phonemic Segmentation (children break a word into separate sounds and count how many sounds they hear); Phonemic Deletion (children recognize the word that remains when a phoneme is removed); Phonemic Addition (children make a new word by adding a phoneme to an existing word); and Phonemic Substitution (children substitute one phoneme for another to make a new word).

Alphabet Recognition can be taught as children develop the knowledge that writing has meaning (Block, 2003). To recognize alphabetic letters, most children must receive direct instruction relative to the recurring, directional, flexibility, contrastive, abbreviated, and sign principles. These five principles help children to understand that letters are not comprised of the same mark, but of various forms that can face different directions. As children realize that “adult writing” is ordered, they begin to place their letters horizontally (recurring, directional, and flexibility principles) and to reproduce different types of symbols to represent single letters (contrastive, abbreviated, and sign principles). In the process, young children notice that individual letters are the symbols that they read and which they watch others write. Because of the complexity of thought needed to understand these principles, it often takes children considerable time and many exposures to effective instruction before they can fully recognize, make, and say the names of all English letters (Clay, 1993; National Reading Panel, 2002; Stanovich, & Cunningham 1993). Once children fully realize that single features distinguish one letter from another, they begin to associate a distinct name with each letter. An effective kindergarten program teaches these Phonemic Awareness and Alphabet Recognition principles in a joyful, effective, and efficient manner.

What Is Taught Is Important

Before most kindergarteners can recognize individual sounds and the names of the letters, they must be taught all aspects of phonological awareness described above.
Research has also demonstrated that it is crucial for us to not only teach these skills, but to do so in such a way that we increase kindergarteners’ desire to read (Snow, Burns, Griffin, 1998; U.S. Dept. of Education, 1997). The most effective methods of doing so are to ensure that children’s instruction is enjoyable and that young readers are constantly reminded that print has meaning. At the same time, we must engage children in activities that emphasize the fact that sounds match letters and that letters have names. In addition, children should be supplied with writing materials, crayons, markers, papers, and clay so that they can experiment with print at the same time they are learning how to recognize traditional script (Block, 2003; De Bruin-Parecki, Perkinson, & Ferderer, 2002).

The Scholastic ReadingLine™ program includes such opportunities and provides numerous elaborated experiences with reading and writing so that all children can learn to love reading. To develop Phonemic Awareness, this program: (1) incorporates nursery rhymes; (2) ties instruction to children names; (3) teaches children to use the position of their mouths to recognize sounds and letter names; (4) encourages students to generate word segments; (5) instructs children to isolate, delete, combine, and manipulate sounds in the eight ways necessary to master phonemic awareness; (6) asks students to pick out words in sentences that begin with a specific letter being taught; (7) helps children develop letter sounds and letter names simultaneously; (8) helps children make connections between sounds in a sentence; (9) teaches rhyming sounds using picture cards and songs; and, (10) infuses instruction with charts, posters, small books, CDs, games and numerous writing experiences.

Similarly, the following ReadingLine activities and materials offer multiple methods by which children can develop alphabet recognition: charts, posters, pointing to letters, ABC books, letter cards, writing letters, teaching features of letters, molding letters with clay, using the first letter and context clues to determine a word’s meaning, reading with a teacher, following along as a teacher reads, singing and using many manipulative and writing experiences. There is also direct teacher instruction. Within such a rich environment, children have repeatedly demonstrated that
they have developed the necessary skills to become successful readers and experienced great pleasure in becoming stronger readers.

**How Phonemic Awareness and Alphabet Recognition Are Taught Is Important**

Many programs for Phonemic Awareness and Alphabet Recognition place too much importance on the power of drill and repetition to develop mastery. They also over rely on a single lesson format. The Scholastic ReadingLine™ program focuses on providing children with diverse learning opportunities each day so as to engage as many learning styles as possible. For example, children in a single week will learn a letter, alphabetic principle, and phonemic awareness concepts using many visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile experiences. This instruction is also enriched because it does not occur in isolation of other elements of the reading process. For instance, as children learn to track print, they are taught how to increase their listening, speaking, reading, and writing vocabulary as well as their comprehension skills.

To be more specific, let's look at the Sound and Letter Kit in the Scholastic ReadingLine™ program. In a single week, children will be taught in ten fun-filled ways to (a) articulate the differences between words and non-words; (b) recognize letters in many printed forms and within varied contexts; (c) know the meaning of words within a sentence; (d) say rhyming units, beginning and ending sounds, syllables, phonemes, and individual sounds within words; (e) comprehend instructions; (f) be introduced to many hundreds of words; (g) track print; (h) read alphabet books and nursery rhymes; (i) play oral blending games; (j) engage in fun-filled activities where they are asked questions that they can answer, for example: *can you say the first sound in fish, foot, and fan and name other words that begin with that sound*, so they begin to generate thousands of words.

Thus, it is important how Phonemic Awareness and Alphabet Recognition are taught.
In addition to providing many varied learning experiences, it is important that teachers become skilled at reteaching and reviewing the same concept in a variety of contexts and content areas.

With the varied instructional opportunities in the Scholastic ReadingLine™ program, children are never offered only one method or one lesson plan format for learning. They can develop an understanding of phonemic awareness and alphabet principles through the instructional methods that call upon their learning strengths.

*How Phonemic Awareness and Alphabet Recognition are Retaught, Reviewed and Related to Children’s Lives Is Important*

In addition to providing many varied learning experiences, it is important that teachers become skilled at reteaching and reviewing the same concept in a variety of contexts and content areas. Without a strong curriculum to provide this variety of experiences, most teachers will not have the time or resources to review, reteach, and relate Phonemic Awareness and Alphabet Recognition to children’s lives. Fortunately, the Scholastic ReadingLine™ program enables teachers to reteach the same concept in so many different ways in a single week (and to review the concepts taught in combination with stories, sentences, songs, and multiple sentence activities) that children learn how sounds and letters contribute to the entire reading process. Every concept is related to children’s lives. When single words are introduced, they are tied to children’s names, their home lives, their communities, and the experiences that are built at school through the Scholastic ReadingLine™ program. In this enriched environment, most children come to transfer the concepts of Phonemic Awareness and Alphabet Recognition instantly without remediation.

It is also important to note that the Scholastic ReadingLine™ program helps teachers to develop the abilities to reteach, review, and relate reading instruction to children’s lives. As teachers are shown a variety of ways to reteach, they have reported that they also enhanced their own abilities to become even more creative and more skilled at meeting individual student’s needs.

In summary, the purpose of this article was to demonstrate that (a) teaching Phonemic
Awareness and Alphabet Recognition is important; (b) how they are taught is important; and (c) how they are retaught, reviewed and related to children’s lives is important. If only one of the eight components of Phonemic Awareness is taught, children will not develop the ability to manipulate sounds and to create long, multi-syllable words when they move into more advanced books. If children are not taught Alphabetic Recognition through enriched and varied writing and reading activities, confusion over letter names will interfere with students’ adequate progress in learning how to read. If kindergarteners are not provided multiple input systems so that they can use their own learning strengths to approach the complexities of mastering reading and writing, many children will lose their desire to learn to read. As a result, reading may not become a pleasurable pursuit that they seek independently. Lastly, it is important that teachers learn how to reteach, review and relate Phonemic Awareness and Alphabet Recognition to children’s lives so that literacy skills become important in a personal way. Such instruction increases transfer of these abilities to new texts because students see the relevance that they hold for reading (Block, 2003).

It is with great pride that we present the Scholastic ReadingLine™ program. Our intent is to help you and your children to develop the most effective, enriching, and exciting reading program possible so that all kindergarteners can develop the literacy skills that they need to succeed at age five, to succeed in schools in subsequent years, and to succeed in their professions, personal lives, and communities when they become adults. We will measure our success through the pleasure and proficiency with which your children embrace and enjoy each reading experience throughout the rest of their lives.
REFERENCE LIST


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Cathy Collins Block is Professor of Education at Texas Christian University. She has served as the director of seven nationally funded research projects concerning comprehension development. In addition, she is author of many professional articles and books. Including:


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