

The  
Research Base  
of  
Avenues  
PreK

# The Research Base of *Avenues* PreK

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# Introduction: The Research Base of *Avenues* PreK

Early literacy instruction has been the focus of increasing interest and research within the past few years. To ensure that all children enter kindergarten with the necessary language, cognitive, and early literacy skills, it is imperative that educators use standards-based programs with a solid foundation in research. Well-known organizations and initiatives have explicitly defined literacy goals and expectations for these young children. Examples of such initiatives include:

- The **International Reading Association (IRA)** and the **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)** joined together to create *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*, a position statement regarding early literacy development, which contains a set of principles and recommendations for teaching practices and public policy (NAEYC, 1998).
- The **Early Reading First** initiative within the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* is a nationwide effort designed to provide high-quality, early education excellence to young children by promoting coherent, skill-based instruction in the years before kindergarten. “The mission of Early Reading First is to ensure that all children enter kindergarten with the necessary language, cognitive, and early reading skills for continued success in school” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).
- The **National Association for the Education of Young Children** *Accreditation Performance Criteria: Universal and Preschool Strands* were approved in April 2005 and will take effect in September 2006. These program standards represent essential, interlocking elements of high-quality programs for all children from birth through kindergarten. One of the ten program strands is devoted to curriculum, including language and early literacy development (NAEYC, April, 2005).

The purpose of this document is to define the research base of the *Avenues* PreK Program, drawing on the important concepts, skills, and effective instructional methods that foster young children's

learning and early literacy development. The core principles from Early Reading First, the IRA/NAEYC Position Statement, and the NAEYC Preschool Strands are included in this document.

# Overview of *Avenues* PreK: Program Goals and Organization

Hampton Brown's *Avenues* PreK Program develops language and literacy through scientific research-based and standards-based instruction for young children. Using carefully chosen literature selections in both fiction and nonfiction, instruction proceeds from building oral language and vocabulary, to developing phonological awareness, print and book awareness, alphabet knowledge, and comprehension.

In the *Avenues* PreK Program, unit concepts and vocabulary are explored through three types of lessons. Each unit includes ideas for daily routines and hands-on centers that offer children multiple opportunities to practice what they are learning in order to further strengthen their language and literacy development.

## **Types of Lessons in *Avenues* PreK:**

**(1) Time to Talk** lessons introduce and build language, concepts and vocabulary. Activities employ songs, games, and hands-on manipulatives to get children

actively involved in the learning process. The **Sing-Along Language Songs Big Book** provides a means for introducing new words and concepts with illustrations to provide maximum context.

**(2) Story Time** lessons reinforce vocabulary and help to build a love and appreciation for reading using a variety of reading resources. Fiction and nonfiction **Big Books** for Shared Reading develop unit themes and concepts, while allowing for instruction in print and book awareness, comprehension skills and strategies. The **My Little Word Books** provide opportunities to acquire the vocabulary and vocabulary concepts of English.

**(3) Activity Time** lessons allow children to put their new vocabulary to use in authentic interactions with teachers and peers using fun and engaging hands-on activities.

## **Phonological Awareness and Phonics**

Phonological awareness and phonics instruction at the PreK level is delivered through the *Alphachant*<sup>™</sup> PreK Phonics Kit which is designed to develop phonemic

awareness skills such as rhyming, blending of onset and rime, blending syllables and segmenting words into syllables, and to introduce all letters and sounds.

## Oral Language Development in *Avenues* PreK

Oral language development is key for all young learners' success in school, whether they are native speakers of English or come from other diverse language backgrounds. The research shows that "gaps in vocabulary size can imperil children's academic futures," making activities to encourage oral language development even more crucial to pre-school aged children (Adger, Snow and Christian, 2002, p.65). Instruction in *Avenues* PreK focuses on language and vocabulary development with explicit instruction of age-appropriate language functions, and will give young children the foundation to succeed with their oral language skills.

Given the importance of oral vocabulary, instruction needs to include rich oral language experiences, provide scaffolded opportunities for children to use and get feedback on language, and engage young children in exploration of words (Blachowicz and Fisher, 2004). The *Avenues* PreK program is designed to tap prior knowledge, build background and develop the language children need to succeed. Every day,

children receiving instruction in *Avenues* experience oral language development, including purposeful language use and vocabulary exploration.

Peer interaction and play, as well as interaction with more "accomplished speakers of the language," will all contribute to the vital area of oral language acquisition (Adger, Snow and Christian, 2002, p. 59). *Avenues* PreK was developed to provide just the kind of language rich experiences the research suggests. Children are encouraged to authentically use language in a low-risk, fun environment which incorporates songs, chants and plenty of peer interaction and play.

Each unit in *Avenues* begins with **Time to Talk**, an activity that presents a memorable chant, song, or fingerplay and develops oral language in a fun and physical way. In addition to **Time to Talk**, oral language development is infused throughout the program to teach language functions and language patterns through a variety of effective strategies.

- The puppet is often used in songs and conversations, to elicit and use language in a non-threatening way.
- Daily routines such as alphabet and number songs reinforce the alphabet and numbers 1-10.
- Song innovations revisit and extend vocabulary.
- Interactive games, role-plays, and dramatic play encourage children to use language to communicate with their peers.

The explicit instruction in *Avenues* PreK in concepts and vocabulary as well as language functions and patterns provides children with multiple authentic opportunities to use the new language they are acquiring.

Additionally, *Avenues* PreK offers other teaching strategies to help children construct meaning from the language they experience:

- **Restate, Repeat and Reduce Speed** These simple modifications in a teacher's presentation style make language more comprehensible and build children's vocabulary. Restating

involves using new vocabulary, then pausing and paraphrasing with more familiar words and phrases.

- **Use Visuals** A picture is worth a thousand words in any language! In addition to the photographs and illustrations in the Big Books, the Picture Perfect Word Book provides colorful pictures that convey the meaning of new words and concepts.

- **Use Body Language and Movement** Pantomime, dramatic play, dance, and creative movement are important methods for teaching young children. Ways to include movement in your lessons are built into many of the activities in *Avenues*.

- **Use Manipulatives** Real objects that children can hold and manipulate help anchor new vocabulary and concepts in memory. *Avenues* encourages use of real objects to present vocabulary and concepts when feasible.



## Vocabulary Development in *Avenues* PreK

Vocabulary is a key element in learning to read. The strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension is among the oldest and most clearly articulated findings in educational research (Blachowicz and Fisher, 1996; Stahl, 1999). Oral vocabulary is central to making the shift from oral to written forms. If a word is not in the learner's oral vocabulary, it will not be understood when encountered in print (National Reading Panel, 2000). In the *Avenues* PreK Program, vocabulary development is central to instruction. Children are introduced to key words and concepts in thirteen thematic units. *Avenues* PreK develops vocabulary using a broad range of instructional methods that incorporate numerous media such as the **Language Songs Big Book** and **Song CDs**, the **Big Picture Word Book**, and **Lizzie the Language Lizard** hand puppet.

The research also indicates the necessity of direct instruction of specific vocabulary connected to particular texts (Blachowicz and Fisher, 1996). The *Avenues* PreK Program provides direct

instruction of the key vocabulary within each unit. Direct instruction of key vocabulary begins in the Time to Talk lessons, which provide context for the Read Aloud Big Book, and provide more opportunities for the vocabulary extensions in the follow up activities in Activity Time. Additionally, *Avenues* PreK includes instruction to support the acquisition of academic vocabulary which is critical to children's understanding of content area topics connected to the unit themes. The *Avenues* PreK unit themes include face and body, clothes and colors, senses and food, home, family, neighborhood, animals, weather, seasons and plants.

Research shows that optimal learning occurs in the presence of a variety of methods, emphasizing multi-media aspects of learning, richness of context and number of exposures to words (National Reading Panel, 2000). In *Avenues* PreK, songs, finger plays, chants, role-plays and hand-on centers offer many, diverse and engaging opportunities to build language and vocabulary. Having children utilize

multiple modalities with repeated exposures to words further contributes to the overall effectiveness of vocabulary instruction in *Avenues*.

In addition to the instructional strategies in *Avenues* PreK, the program components facilitate the acquisition of new vocabulary as well:

- The **Sing-Along Language Songs Big Book** and **CD** introduce and reinforce additional vocabulary through songs and chants.
- Interactive, follow-up activities provide more opportunities to make vocabulary memorable and build vocabulary concepts.
- The thematic collections of fiction and nonfiction **Big Books** for read-alouds make new vocabulary accessible through engaging stories and rich illustrations, providing visual support.
- The student collection of **My Little Word Books** reinforces vocabulary and concepts using high visual support that is necessary at PreK.

# Building Knowledge and Comprehension in *Avenues* PreK

The goal of any reading experience is comprehension. Reading comprehension is defined as, “intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader” (Durkin, 1993). Comprehension is vital to the development of a child’s reading skills and has come to be recognized as the “essence of reading” (Durkin, 1993). *Avenues* PreK has been structured to develop young learners’ comprehension during the story time lessons.

Reading to children daily gives them an interest in learning to read and write that affects literacy success later on. Asking young children to predict and analyze, talk about pictures, retell or talk about their favorite parts of stories not only helps them make stories more meaningful and relevant, but these activities enhance the learners’ vocabulary development and comprehension of the story as well. It is the talk that surrounds the storybook reading that gives it power, helping children to bridge what is in the story

and their own lives (Karweit and Wasik 1996; Dickinson & Smith 1994; Snow et.al. 1995).

Research shows that explicit strategy instruction in a pre-, during- and post-reading framework is an effective method of improving comprehension because it enables children to generalize their learning across texts and settings (Guillaume, 1998). In the *Avenues* PreK **Big Book** instruction, children preview stories with picture walks prior to reading, are exposed to comprehension and critical thinking skills during the read alouds, and respond to the literature with special strategies to reinforce the story concept and retelling activities.

In *Avenues* PreK, each unit centers on a fiction or nonfiction **Big Book** that explores the unit theme. The book is presented as a read aloud in the Story Time section, and revisited in later activities. Story Time features an effective instructional sequence that supports the development of

comprehension, thereby encouraging early interest in literacy and literature:

- Preview Script and Picture Walk present the key elements and information in the selection, introducing vocabulary and resulting in successful understanding when the book is read aloud.
- Concepts of Print and Comprehension instruction are incorporated into the Read-Aloud.

- Revisiting and Retelling activities encourage reading the story again and again. Various activities are geared to a variety of language proficiencies.

These and other strategies found in *Avenues PreK* not only facilitate in comprehension and vocabulary development, they also provide authentic opportunities for practicing concepts and language functions and patterns as well.

# Phonological Awareness Instruction in *Avenues* PreK

“Being phonologically aware means becoming sensitive to the sounds of language” (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998, p. 76.). The phonological system refers to the sounds of our language. Our speech is basically a stream of sounds that the listener must isolate and construct meaning from. When learning language, children become aware of the sounds of language, attend to these sounds and construct meaning.

A child acquiring English must make sense of the oral messages he or she is receiving in English, and must focus attention on extracting meaning from what initially may be sensed as noise. In *Avenues* PreK and *Alphachant* PreK, songs and chants provide children with multiple opportunities to experience language and develop phonological awareness.

“There is a natural human tendency to enjoy the sounds of language. For example we delight in poetic alliteration and we enjoy rhythm and rhyme. Parents and teachers can use this natural enjoyment of poetry, song and rhyme to

help young children pay close attention to how language sounds” (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998, pp. 7-8.). Children will play with the sounds of English in a memorable and risk-free setting with *Avenues* PreK and *Alphachant* PreK. As they learn the songs and rhymes, children will begin to construct meaning and to assimilate the English phonological system.

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) *Accreditation Performance Criteria: Universal and Preschool Strands*, children should be regularly provided with multiple and varied opportunities to develop phonological awareness. This document states that children should experience the following in their PreK classroom:

- They are encouraged to play with the sounds of language including syllables, word families, and phonemes using rhymes poems and finger plays.

- They are helped to identify letters and the sounds they represent.
- They are helped to recognize and produce words that have the same beginning or ending sounds.
- They are supported in their self-initiated efforts to write letters that represent the sounds of words.

Additional phonological awareness and phonics activities can be folded into *Avenues* PreK lessons through the use of the *Alphachant*<sup>™</sup> PreK Phonics Kit. This companion program provides

chants and songs, instruction in letter and word formation, and the rhyming, alliteration, and language play so important to early childhood education. Phonological Awareness is developed through the use of the lessons in the *Alphachant*<sup>™</sup> Phonics Kit using fun and engaging chants, songs, and rhymes. Specific phonemic awareness tasks, such as rhyming, blending of onset and rime, blending syllables and segmenting words into syllables, etc., occur in each lesson to help children discriminate and identify sounds in spoken language. Children are actively engaged as they associate these sounds with written words.

# Print & Book Awareness Instruction in *Avenues* PreK

“A central goal during the preschool years is to enhance children’s exposure to and concepts about print” (Clay 1979, 1991; Holdaway 1979; Teale 1984; Stanovich & West 1989). Reinforcing concepts of print with preschool children can provide the background and build the foundation that will ensure success for these emerging readers, and these concepts are consistently developed with the instruction contained in the **Big Book** lessons in *Avenues* PreK.

The NAEYC *Accreditation Performance Criteria: Universal and Preschool Strands* require that children participate in activities that help them to become familiar with print and offer the following suggestions:

- Teachers help children recognize print and connect it to spoken words.
- Children have opportunities to make sense of environmental print in their classroom. Some materials are labeled, and print is used to describe some rules and

routines. Items belonging to a child are labeled with his or her name.

- Children are actively involved in making sense of print.
- Children have opportunities to become familiar with, recognize, and use print that is accessible throughout the classroom.

Children need a print-rich environment as they learn to read and write, and they need to start thinking of themselves right from the start as not only print *consumers*, but also *creators* of print.

The explicit instruction in *Avenues* not only reinforces concepts of print in reading experiences, but includes writing instruction and opportunities for practice woven throughout the program as well, such as making name and number cards, helping to create classroom signs and labels, and putting together simple books for sharing.

*Avenues* PreK supports young learners in the acquisition of the concepts of print in a multitude of ways. In addition to the teaching strategies contained in lessons

such as **Big Book** Read-Alouds, *Avenues* provides:

- Suggestions for additional read-aloud books for each unit (books may also be displayed in a reading corner or class library, to encourage exploratory independent reading).
- Take-home **My Little Word Books** for reinforcing vocabulary and concepts.

- Many activities that encourage young children to experiment with writing, such as making name and number cards, helping to create classroom signs and labels, and putting together simple books for sharing.

Print awareness is also addressed through the use of the PreK *Alphachant*<sup>TM</sup> Phonics Kit as children identify capital and lowercase letters and recognize the cover and title page in books.



# Alphabet Knowledge Instruction in *Avenues* PreK

Letter knowledge is basic to literacy. Most important for children is their recognition of the features of the letters and then their ability to make the connection between letters and sounds (Pinnell and Fountas, 1998). In *Avenues* PreK, letter knowledge is addressed through the use of daily routines such as Alphabet Time, and through the use of the PreK *Alphachant*<sup>™</sup> Phonics Kit.

Research shows that “Prereaders’ letter knowledge was found to be the single best predictor of first-year reading achievement, with the ability to discriminate phonemes auditorily ranking a close second” (Adams, 1999, p. 55). Learners can begin reading and writing at the same time they build their knowledge of letters and words.

Strategies and activities that focus on letters and words are very helpful in the beginning phases of literacy learning (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996).

*Alphachant*<sup>™</sup> builds alphabetic knowledge by associating the names of letters with their shapes and sounds through the use of the *Alphachant*<sup>™</sup>

**Lap Books** (one per letter of the alphabet), which help develop phonemic awareness and letter-sound association in an engaging and age-appropriate way.

As children learn letters and develop concepts about how print works, they usually begin to acquire a few words that they can recognize when they can encounter them in print (Pinnell and Fountas, 1998). Authentic writing activities support the acquisition of alphabet knowledge. “Children acquire a working knowledge of the alphabetic system not only through reading but also through writing” (Neuman et al., 2000, p. 9). Children are encouraged to experiment with writing in *Avenues* as they make name and number cards, create signs and labels, and assemble simple letter books for sharing.

## Writing Instruction in *Avenues* PreK

One of the primary goals of elementary schools is to enable children to read and write proficiently. This entails the ability to construct meaning from their own texts and the texts of others, and to use reading and writing to learn about and interpret the world around them (Hudelson, 1994). For young learners, the NAEYC *Accreditation Performance Criteria* state that PreK children should have multiple and varied opportunities to write:

- Writing should be embedded into art, dramatic play and various center activities.
- Children should have daily opportunities to write or dictate their ideas.
- Various types of writing are supported, including scribbling, letter-like marks, and developmental spelling.
- Children should be given the support they need to write on their own and provided needed assistance in writing the words and messages they are trying to communicate.

- Children should see teachers model functional use of writing and be helped to discuss the many ways writing is used in daily life (NAEYC, January, 2005).

Connecting reading and writing for young learners is vital, as it contributes to the factors that monitor writing ability. Additionally, informal classroom writing is beneficial for children as it provides stress-free writing experiences that promote curiosity and confidence (Guillaume, 1998). The daily routines in *Avenues* PreK which include Alphabet Time and Number Time allow children to play with letter and number formation.

Young children need to read and write continuous text so they can use and expand their knowledge about letters, sounds, words and language (Pinnell and Fountas, 1998). Teachers can set up their classrooms so children have plenty of opportunities to write without pressure to use correct spelling or handwriting skills. Initially teachers can serve as

scribes, later allowing children to transition from primarily using pictures to express ideas into labeling, telling and even writing stories (NAEYC, 1999). Activity Time lessons and **My Little Word Book** activities in each unit of *Avenues* PreK offer consistent, multiple opportunities for children to experiment with writing.

The PreK *Alphachant*<sup>™</sup> Phonics Kit provides instruction in letter and word formation, giving children multiple opportunities to gain experience with the relationship between letters and sounds, and exposure to and practice with writing.

## Assessment in *Avenues* PreK

Authentic assessments, monitored over time, are recommended as the primary tool for monitoring progress. Teacher ratings, observations and interviews are not only valuable for all English language learners, they are especially helpful when evaluating all young children. These assessments should incorporate both verbal and non-verbal items (NAEYC, January, 2005.). *Avenues* PreK and *Alphachant*<sup>TM</sup> PreK contain assessment tools, both verbal and non-verbal, to assess acquisition of vocabulary and also assess and monitor progress in phonological awareness and letter names and sounds.

Anecdotal records from different settings can be used to develop a complete picture of language proficiency. Teachers who observe children interacting with peers, adults, in the classroom, on the playground, etc. will gain a clear understanding of the English proficiency of their children, and can use this data to document growth over time (NAEYC, January, 2005). The Vocabulary Assessments in *Avenues* PreK provide opportunities to assess

acquisition of the unit vocabulary words in an interactive, authentic setting.

*Avenues* PreK is also designed to support English learners and move them through the stages of language acquisition. In order to more effectively facilitate children's learning, strategies for differentiated instruction are offered in each *Avenues* PreK lesson. These strategies are targeted toward children's levels of English language development. Each unit concludes with a Vocabulary Assessment that offers multi-level strategies to assess the acquisition of unit vocabulary.

Initially, teachers will determine student language proficiency. Standardized instruments such as the *Language Assessment Scales (LAS)*, *IDEA Proficiency Test (IPT)* or the *California English Language Development Test (CELDT)* will help identify a child's level of English proficiency. Individual children's proficiency information is then used to select the appropriate instructional strategies— Beginning, Intermediate, or Advanced—from the

Multi-Level Strategies that appear throughout the Teacher's Edition.

In *Avenues* PreK, teachers can use assessment strategies that are matched to the needs of learners in their class.

*Avenues* assessments will help them to monitor progress and diagnose reteaching opportunities.

- Differentiated Assessment: *Avenues* PreK offers differentiated assessment, so teachers can test the way they teach, and children have the opportunity to show what they know, regardless of their English proficiency
- Vocabulary Assessment: Each Unit contains a vocabulary assessment to help teachers monitor children's acquisition of the target vocabulary.

- Student and Class Profiles: *Avenues* PreK student and class profiles assist teachers in evaluating and recording progress, as well as reteaching support.
- *Alphachant*<sup>TM</sup> PreK phonological and Phonemic Awareness and Letter-Sound Assessments help monitor progress and mastery of these skills.

The assessment tools in *Avenues* PreK and *Alphachant*<sup>TM</sup> PreK prepare children for language and literacy success. The Vocabulary Assessments and *Alphachant* PreK progress monitoring tools will help teachers track children's performance and deliver effective, differentiated instruction throughout the year.

## Early Reading First and *Avenues* Pre-K Correlation

Early Reading First Goals	Hampton-Brown <i>Avenues</i> Pre-K Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ To support local efforts to enhance the early language, literacy, and early reading development of preschool age children, particularly those from low-income families, through strategies and professional development that are based on scientifically based reading research.</li>   <li>➤ To provide preschool age children with cognitive learning opportunities in high-quality language and literature-rich environments so that they can attain the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary for optimal reading development in kindergarten and beyond.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Hampton Brown’s <i>Avenues</i> PreK Program and <i>Alphachant</i><sup>™</sup> PreK Phonics Kit develop language and literacy through scientifically research-based instruction. The <i>Avenues</i> PreK Teacher’s Editions explicitly teach language and literacy skills to build the fundamentals that PreK children need for early literacy success.</li>   <li>➤ The motivating material in <i>Avenues</i> PreK supports children on the road to early language and literacy success. In each thematic unit, children acquire important concepts and vocabulary through the use of risk-free, hands-on experiences, visual vocabulary, and engaging chants and songs that make language memorable. Authentic and charming literature, both fiction and nonfiction, are used to provide an effective instructional sequence that supports comprehension thereby encouraging early interest in literacy and literature.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ To demonstrate language and literacy activities based on scientifically based reading research that supports the age-appropriate development of -               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Oral Language</i> (vocabulary development, expressive language, and listening comprehension);</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Oral Language</i> (vocabulary development, expressive language, and listening comprehension);               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Each unit in <i>Avenues</i> begins with Time to Talk, an activity that presents a memorable chant, song, or finger play and develops oral language in a fun and physical way.</li> <li>- Oral Language is supported throughout the lessons in a variety of ways, including daily routines for numbers and the alphabet, song innovations to revisit and extend vocabulary, interactive games, role plays, and dramatic play. All of these oral language activities encourage children to use language and communicate with peers.</li> <li>- The Story Time lessons feature an effective instructional sequence that supports listening comprehension.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



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