

Name Cards

Cards with children's names written on them have many uses and can make a valuable contribution to an early childhood literacy program. Over the years teachers have suggested many uses for name cards, some of which we have reproduced here.

1. Attendance/Lunch Count

Many teachers have reported that by using children's name cards with magnets, they no longer have to take time to count attendance. Children take on the responsibility to do it themselves by moving their name card into a column marked "Here" on the chalkboard. If a lunch count is needed, attendance and lunch count can be combined by having children move their name cards into the correct columns (for example, "Buy Lunch" or "Buy Milk") and children can take turns being responsible for making sure the lunch count is recorded.

Goals:

1. Reading (recognition of classmates' names)
2. Responsibility (for classroom tasks)
3. Counting
4. Graphing

2. Special Helpers

Most classrooms have a system of assigning special tasks or privileges (line leader, paper person, door holder, etc.) to children on a rotating basis. The name cards can be physically moved from one place to another (a hook, a column on the board, a basket, etc.) so that children can keep track of the rotation of turns. Being able to keep track of turns helps children to be able to predict when they will have a turn and to believe that their classroom is a fair place.

Goals:

1. Reading (classmates' names, descriptions of tasks/privileges)
2. Responsibility (for taking care of the class needs)
3. Prediction (yesterday, today, tomorrow)
4. Pattern recognition

3. Calling on Children

Often during whole group instruction or discussion times, many children will want to talk at the same time, creating a situation in which name cards can be extremely useful. For example, in preparing for a field trip to a farm, the teacher may ask children what sorts of things they might see on a farm. When many hands shoot into the air at once, the teacher has a dilemma--whom to call on first. Sometimes the teacher states that he or she will call on quiet children first. However, if more than one child is being quiet the teacher has a problem. Children who are sitting quietly and are not called on first may not understand that only one person can be first, and may become hurt or angry. Young children's emotions are often unstable, and an event that seems (to an adult) small and insignificant can be experienced by the child as highly distressing.

When children hold their hands up, trying to get the teacher's attention, they often are totally focused on getting a chance to say what they want to say, and do not pay attention to the discussion. This is one

reason why children often repeat something that was already stated--they were so intent on what they wanted to say that they did not hear another child say it first. Holding one's hand up for a long time can be tiring. In situations such as this the name cards can be very helpful. Taking the stack of name cards, the teacher can call on children, beginning with the first card in the stack. The teacher can assure children that every child will get a turn, so they can put their hands down. Each child can be given the opportunity to pass if he or she does not have anything to say, with the assurance that they can have a turn later if they think of something. This is a fair way to regulate turns, assures that no child will be missed (often shy children never raise their hands and so are rarely called upon), and increases the likelihood that all children will participate in the discussion.

Goals:

1. Participation in discussion
2. Reading (name recognition)
3. Classroom management

4. Decision Making

Sometimes situations will arise in the classroom in which children need to make group decisions. One way to make a group decision is to take a vote. However, often voting with young children is very difficult. When asked to raise their hands, children may raise them halfway, or wave them around, or fail to keep them up long enough for the teacher to count them. Often children do not understand what it means to vote, and so will raise their hand for all options. Using the name cards to vote can circumvent many problems and help to make the vote more meaningful to the children. The teacher can go through the name cards, ask each child which option he or she votes for, and then place the name card in the appropriate stack. After everyone has voted (including the teacher), the teacher can place the cards in columns in one-to-one correspondence and invite the children to count the cards. For children whose understanding of number is unstable, the length of the columns can be a strong visual cue for more and less.

Goals:

1. Name recognition
2. Counting
3. One-to-one correspondence
4. Graphing
5. Responsibility (for group decisions)

5. Cloze Technique

Anytime the name cards are used, the teacher can draw attention to beginning letters using the cloze technique. This works best when most of the children are able to recognize their classmates' names. All of the name except the first letter is covered up, and children are asked to guess, "Whose name do you think this might be?" Children rapidly learn to recognize their own and others' first initial. If more than one child's name begins with the same letter, this is a perfect opportunity to move on to the next letter, asking, for example, "How can we tell if it is Travis or Terence?"

Goals:

1. Name recognition
2. Beginning letters
3. Letter-sound correspondence