

Name Cards

Using Name Cards in the Early Childhood Classroom

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PURPOSE OF USING NAME CARDS IN THE CLASSROOM

Most early childhood teachers place children's names on lockers or personal belongings. Writing names on name cards can open the door to literacy learning by making it personal. Children become fascinated with letters and sounds as they learn to recognize their own names and those of their classmates. What is the best order for teaching letters? Researchers don't agree on this but do agree that there is an "own-name advantage." Children typically learn the first letter in their names before learning other letters. Their interest often includes learning the first letter of family and friend names after learning their own. Children usually start learning the concept of what a word is when they understand that their name is a word made up of letters that are always the same and in the same order. Once a child can recognize their entire name, it is possible to use the name as a "resource" for extended learning of letters and words (Pinnell & Fountas, 2011). They notice similarities in other words such as noticing that Grandma and Grandpa start with the same letter. *It is more meaningful to introduce letters as they become meaningful to the students. Removing letters from their meaningful context removes the meaning and purpose from the letter. Children who are taught letters in isolation have difficulty placing that information into literacy activities* (Wood & McLeMore, 2001).



UNDERSTANDING WHAT CHILDREN CAN DO

There are many ways to incorporate the names of students throughout the day in an early childhood classroom. Teachers may ask students to sign in with a laminated name card at the beginning of the school year. When students are ready to sign in by writing their names, they can use these name cards to help them with the formation of letters or to check their work after signing in. Name cards can be used for graphing, publishing a class name book, or for filling in a familiar name in a song or poem. Name cards can be placed in baskets around the room so that children have access to them when signing in for a turn or as a wait list at a preferred center, learning to write the names of classmates, or comparing the letters in their name to other words posted in the classroom.

INTEGRATIVE NATURE OF USING NAME CARDS

Science

- Labeling materials to use during investigations
- Signing up for a task or a turn

Mathematics

- Counting and comparing the number of letters in names
- Looking at written names to determine whose name is the shortest, whose name is the longest, or how many people are the same
- Counting names on the sign in chart to find out who is present or how many students want chocolate milk
- Using names to collect data
- Conducting surveys
- Voting

Social Studies

- Learning names of classmates
- Voting
- Assigning classroom tasks
- Deciding who goes first, next, last

Literacy

Phonological awareness is developed by:

- Thinking hard about the sounds in their name and the names of peers
- Noticing similarities or patterns in how sounds are represented as they read classmate's names and write their own

- Signing name to indicate a desire to play in a center or take a turn in a limited center
- Clapping syllables in the names of friends to determine who has the most claps

Purposeful reading

- Finding name card
- Figuring out what their job is for the day
- Finding letters from name in text
- Question of the Day
- Morning Message
- Class Books

Purposeful writing

- Signing in at the beginning of each day



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DAILY ROUTINES USING NAME CARDS

Attendance/lunch count

When teachers place children's name cards near the sign in center, they allow children the responsibility of taking their own attendance by moving their name card into a column marked "here" in a specified place. If taking lunch count is required, attendance and lunch count can be combined by having children move their name cards into the correct columns (for example, hot lunch, bag lunch, or milk only) and children can take turns being responsible for making sure the lunch count is recorded.

Classroom jobs

Most classrooms have a system of assigning classroom jobs (line leader, plant person, door holder, etc.) to children on a rotating basis. The name cards can be physically moved from one place to another (a hook, Velcro, magnets, a column on the board, a basket, post-it notes, etc.) so that children can keep track of the rotation of turns. Being able to keep track of turns allows children the opportunity to predict when they will have a turn and to construct an understanding that they have a democratic classroom.



Calling on children

Often during whole group instruction or discussion times, many children will want to talk at the same time, creating the necessity for the teacher to have a system for ensuring that all children have an opportunity to share their ideas. For example, when a new center is introduced the teacher may ask children how they will use the materials safely. When many hands go up at once, the teacher must decide whom to call on. Some teachers decide to call on quiet children. However, if more than one child is being quiet the teacher has a dilemma. Children who are sitting quietly and are not called on first may not understand that only one person can be first, and so become upset that the teacher has not been fair. Young children can be sensitive, and an event that seems inconsequential to an adult may be experienced by the child as upsetting. When children hold their hands up to get the teacher's attention, they often are wholly focused on getting a turn. Consequently, they may not focus on the discussion. This may explain why children repeat what was previously shared --they become so intent on their idea that they don't hear another child say it first.

Name cards can be very helpful for group discussions, transitions, or any time teachers must call on children. When student name cards are placed in the group gathering place, the teacher can be assured that each 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.



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.

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EXTENDING THE USE OF NAME CARDS

- Explore children's names at the beginning of the year to get to know each other (Cunningham, 2013).
- Create a class birthday book with pages organized by months and a birthday picture added after each child's birthday. You will bring lots of excitement as each child's picture is added to the birthday cake and printed name.
- Take pictures of each child in front of their house on the initial home visit and then create a class book with the pictures and the children's names.
- Place baskets of names around the classroom so that children have easy access when they need a model when they want to write their name or the names of classmates.
- Recite poems and sing songs with repeating lines that use children's names. (Willoughby, Wallaby, Woo; Ridin' on That New River Train)
- Include children's names in the morning message or when reviewing the day
- Create name puzzles by cutting up name cards for each child so they can place the letters in correct order
- Include each child's name on the classroom word wall
- Place magnetic or foam letters in a sensory tub and challenge students to find the letters in their name by searching in the tub.
- Letter Bead Names: Children use jewelry cord or pipe cleaners to string their name with alphabet letter beads.
- My Name/Not In My Name: Students sort letters that are found in their name or not in their name
- How Many Letters in My Name: Create a book with a different number on each page. Students write their names on the page that matches the number of letters in their name. Add their photos next to their names to provide cues.
- Name Chart: Place student names in pocket chart. Call attention to the first letter of each name and the length of the name. These cards can be used for many activities: helper chart, sorting activities, comparing and contrasting the number of letters in each name, models for children who need help to sign in or want to learn how to write the names of friends.
- Connecting Cube or Unifix Cube Names: Write letters on cubes with a permanent marker and ask students to spell their names by connecting the cubes.
- Predictable Charts: Make a predictable chart about something your students are interested in or a book you have shared in class. You can make them as simple or as complex as your students need. The sentences all follow the same pattern.
- Class Alphabet Book: Have a letter on the top of each page, including each letter of the alphabet. Underneath each letter, write the names that include that letter.
- Write simple sentences about children's lives
- Class name book: Take a picture of each child to include in the book. Use a simple sentence that is the same on each page. It could be "I see (child's name)", "(Child's name) has a new school", or "I want to play with (child's name)". Give each student a page and include him or her in creating the page with the name. Laminate the pages and create a book to keep in the reading center.
- Transitioning from group time to center time: Give clues about the child's name who will be dismissed next. Children identify their own name by listening to the clues.
- Name Chart: Write each students' name in alphabetical order. Post it so that students can use it when reading and writing.



RESOURCES

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