Whatever happened to phonics, spelling and grammar?
How schools teach reading and writing

For parents of students in primary and junior grades

PLAY – TALK – THINK
Play all the time! Spending time with your child is crucial for the development of a good literacy base. The more experiences your child has, the more he or she will have to connect to when reading, writing and talking. Don’t forget to make things FUN!

Talk is the beginning of all language. It is how children experience sounds together with meaning.

Think about everything! Be curious, wonder, imagine, and ask questions that allow the mind to explore new things.

It all starts with talk
- During reading time, talk with your child about interesting patterns or words and rhymes. Pick these out of a story you are reading, and have your child point out another instance of the letter combination as you read from the book.
- Read simple poetry aloud to your children. Ask children questions about the poem—not what the poem is about, but questions about the sounds in the poem and the letters that make those sounds.
- Pick a sound and use a graph to chart how many times it’s heard. As you come across the particular sound in your reading, have your child make a graph. You can use stick-on letters for a chart on a white board, or tape on a large poster board.
- If your child is struggling with a certain letter combination, write that letter combination on a white board or on a piece of paper and point to it every time you come to that combination while you're reading. After you've done this a few times, ask your child to point to the letter combination each time she hears it.
- In addition to reading and listening to sounds, have your child write out the letters that make up sounds. This provides practice for writing and formation of letters. It also helps younger children or children who may be a bit behind catch up.

7 Simple ways to teach phonics at home
1. **Converse** - Talking to children will develop their ability to listen and imitate. Conversations will help children listen to the sounds as you say them correctly.

2. **Act it Out** - As actions speak louder than words, teaching sound to your child using funny and enjoyable facial expressions and hand and body movements is very effective. Movements will break the monotony in learning and you children will always look forward to fun activities of interaction. Moreover, the actions will enhance the transfer of the sounds to your children.

3. **Flashcards** - Pictures captivate the interest and curiosity of the child. Flash some picture cards while you say the sound of the letters and you make association easier for the child. Choose pictures that are especially designed for children - simple and colourful.

4. **Nursery Rhymes** - Rhyming will let the children have a view of what the letters of the alphabets can do when sounded or blended together. Nursery rhymes help children to enjoy learning.

5. **DVDs** – Use phonics DVDs and games at home to help children imitate the sounds easily. Most phonics programs can be viewed on the
computer where teaching is done through games. Educational games are fun activities that you and your child can play together.

6. **Education cartoons** - For children, seeing their favourite cartoon character talk and act out will become an inspiration and challenge for them to learn phonics. There are vast arrays of cartoon shows that teach phonics for kids. Let the television and the internet be your partner in helping your child learn.

7. **Computer games and programs** - Studies have shown that through using computer games about phonics help children learn.

**Bring in the alphabet…**
As their experience grows, children begin to understand that letters represent the sounds in speech.

- alphabet song – variations (e.g. to other nursery rhyme tunes)
- say the letter 'names'
- say the letter 'sounds'
- say beginning sounds of words – the ending sounds, the middle sounds
- letter-finding – make it a game
- play games using the letter names and sounds (e.g. 'I Spy')
- notice letter combinations (e.g. endings – 'ing', 'ed', 's'; word families - *at, *ed, *ate, etc.)

**Making words**
From their growing awareness of speech sounds and letter forms, children begin to spell by sounding out parts of words.

- have lots of magnetic letters around – on cookie trays, burner covers, your fridge, freezer or file cabinet
- informally, and as they occur, notice patterns and groups of letters and sounds
- play with endings like ed, ing, and s
- find little words in big words
- begin a 'high frequency' word collection (e.g. and, but, where, when, because, the…) 
- find the words from your lists in your reading
- keep a list of 'words to chew on' – really good, big, meaty words!
- find out how many words you can find that mean...
- play with opposites

**Writing for a purpose**
Writing skills develop when children write in real-life situations, for reasons they clearly understand.

- Write notes and read the notes your child leaves for you. Don't forget to write back!
- write invitations
- label pictures
- write shopping lists
- notice different forms of writing – advertisements, letters, signs, instructions
- encourage your child to write down ideas, opinion, wonderings, questions
- keep a trip diary
- keep a daily diary
- respect your child's private writings
- show your child that you write too

**Resources:**
Sharon, Lois, and Brahm (cd)
Raffi (cd)
Eric Nagler (cd)
Nursery rhymes
Newspaper games
Cooking, recipes, instructions
Cleaning and sharing jobs
Going for walks
Discovering nature, planting flowers, gardening
Planning parties, lists,
Grocery shopping, food packaging
Playing board games
Talking about your day and asking questions
Q-Chart, Literacy grid
Science Centre, Royal Ontario Museum, Zoo

**Teaching phonics to children with special needs**
The following accommodations and tips may be helpful to teach children and help them develop beginning reading skills:

1. Practice common sound combinations by saying the sounds aloud repetitively. Give many examples of how the sounds are used in words.
2. Read entertaining and rhyming stories to children that use the new sounds over
and over. Many books (such as those offered by Scholastic, Inc.) are available that focus on one or two various phonics sounds.

3. Have kids come up with words they already know that use the sounds being taught.

4. Divide longer words into syllables, prefixes, stems, and suffixes using a chart, and demonstrate how to read each part.

5. Have students create a word bank containing sounds of letters and blends that they have mastered.

6. Associate new words with pictures.

7. Use multimedia, such as phonics computer software, to help your child learn.

Websites

http://www.crayola.com/
http://canada.funschool.com/
http://www.cbcbooks.org/
http://www.ala.org/parents/
http://www.goodnightstories.com/
http://www.howstuffworks.com/
http://www.storyplace.org/
http://billybear4kids.com/
www.starfall.com
www.readingonline.org/electronic/webwatch/phonics
www.sachem.edu/dept/sd/Phonics%20Websites.htm
www.sitesforteachers.com
www.surfnetkids.com/phonics.htm

Sites containing specific information about teaching using phonics

http://teams.lacoe.edu/documentation/classrooms/patti/teacher/levels.html
This site is a list of what to expect from children at various stages of phonemic awareness.

http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/Phonics.html
This site contains an article titled Phonics in Whole Language Classrooms, by Contance Weaver.
http://www.parenthoodweb.com/parent_efmfile
http://ed.info.apple.com/education/techlearn/elementary/pros.cfm/341
This site contains an article titled The Great Debate: Whole Language vs. Phonics. Note: the site is geared towards parents.

http://teams.lacoe.edu/documentation/classrooms/patti/teacher/spell.html
This site provides suggestions for teaching using phonics, decodeable books, spelling, high frequency words, and literature.

Note: This parent tip sheet is a revised version of the original which was prepared by Elizabeth Maitland, teacher, and Miranda Murphy, vice-principal(2009).