

THE ABC PRINCIPLE AND THE SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNER

by **Emilio G. Cortez**

In a current edition of the *TESL REPORTER*, Dr. Kenneth Croft asserted that:

A unit of study based on dictionary usage at the beginning of a reading and/or composition course is well worth the time and effort.¹

In keeping with this position, various dictionary-related activities are here described. These activities are intended to afford the non-English speaker a familiarity and/or practice with the alphabetic principle.

To instill in the student a more focused awareness of the alphabetic principle, the teacher may select students' surnames and place them on the blackboard, first scrambled, and then in alphabetical order. Names from class lists or attendance sheets might also be used in the same fashion.

Another approach might be to pose the hypothetical case of a late registrant, "Now where shall we place Mr. A-Z on our class list?"

Old telephone directories are excellent for class use. The students' curiosity might be stimulated by asking them to find the first name listed after "Alice Pack" in the telephone directory. Students' names might also be used. The same technique lends itself to dictionary entries as well, e.g., "Which word comes after *orange*?"

Locating local business addresses also offers possibilities, e.g., "Where is Rayfield's pharmacy?"

The telephone directory not only utilizes the alphabetic principle, but it contains some very practical information concerning

stores, services, and various places of interest to our students. In a sense, the business section of the telephone directory reflects some aspects of our culture.

For those students who enjoy game-like activities, a dictionary race might ensue.

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The teacher calls out a word and the first student to find it raises his hand. The student then announces to the class the page on which he found the word. A different word is called out, and so on.

An added dimension to an English vocabulary review might be to have the students place these previously-taught words into alphabetical order. English words posing pronunciation difficulties for the non-English speaker may be written on flash cards and placed along the chalkledge in random order. A student is then called upon to place these words into the proper alphabetical order within a certain time limit. By utilizing words posing pronunciation difficulties, a twofold teaching purpose can be realized: pronunciation and/or auditory discrimination practice, and practice in alphabetizing. This activity may also be played competitively—teams formed and points awarded for correct responses.

A "framing" technique might also be used: Two flash cards are held up by the teacher, e.g., *field*, *hill*. A student is chosen to call out a word which would fall alphabetically between the two exposed words. The difficulty of such a task varies depending upon

¹Kenneth Croft, "Dictionary Use in ESL Courses," *TESL Reporter*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Fall, 1973), p. 1.

