Working with Words

If you have ANY emergent students in your classroom who know less than 80% of the alphabet then….

1. You should be doing letter of the week. See this blog post for a suggested list of things to include in your letter of the week activities <http://www.janefarrall.com/blog/2012/08/26/letter-of-the-week-resources-for-older-students/>
2. You should have a name wall – this is the same format as a word wall but the only words on it are the student’s names. Get them to find their name and get them to put their name up on the wall under the right letter. (If you have more conventional students you can include the name wall as part of the word wall – but have your emergent students use their names in activities)
3. You can also be doing visual word sorts. A visual word sort is where you take a group of words starting with the letter of the week and a group of words starting with another letter – get the students to sort them into two piles e.g. a words and c words.
4. You can also do auditory word sorts. This is where you have pictures (no text) starting with two different letters and the students again have to put them in two piles by listening for the beginning sound.
5. You can also do assorted alphabet games. I loved the hopscotch game in Deb and Heather’s room as an example.
6. You can also be doing onset rime – to help a student to hear the initial sounds in words. Here’s some information on that <http://www.spectronicsinoz.com/article/onset-rime-word-families>

If you have ANY conventional students in your classroom or students who know more than 80% of the alphabet then you need to:

1. Have a word wall. Please see below for word wall structure.
2. Do frequent activities with the word wall to show the students how they can use it e.g. <http://web.archive.org/web/20031209123643/http://teams.lacoe.edu/village/ideas/idea3.html>
3. You also need to be teaching students how to decode and recode – not just learn words as chunks. Systematic Sequential Phonics is a way of doing this that is thorough and systematic. Find-a-word activities etc are great filler activities but are not systematic. If you don’t do systematic sequential phonics then you need to nominate another similar program that you are following.
4. You can also do other activities that encourage students to use their word skills. Guess the Covered Word is a great one for both comprehension and phonics- <http://www.scottsboro.org/~flewis/Working%20with%20Words.htm>. Basically – you give students the sentence and ask them to finish it. “He likes to eat” – and then students name food. Write all their suggestions down. Then expose the first letter e.g. f. Cross off all the suggestions that don’t start with f. Get students to make new suggestions. Now reveal the whole word.
5. Word sorts – both visual and auditory – are also great for this group. <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/word-sorts-beginning-struggling-795.html> or just use Google - there are hundreds.

Word Wall Contents.

Word walls should only contain three sorts of words:

* High frequency words (your Oxford word list)
* High utility words (words that will be used again and again through the year such as students’ names)
* Word family words – one for each word family.

Any words that are related to the book of the week or the theme of the term should go on a separate topic related word board or word list.

3 – 5 words per week should be introduced to the word wall – no more than 5. During the week these are practiced again and again. These can be one word from each category or all high frequency words.