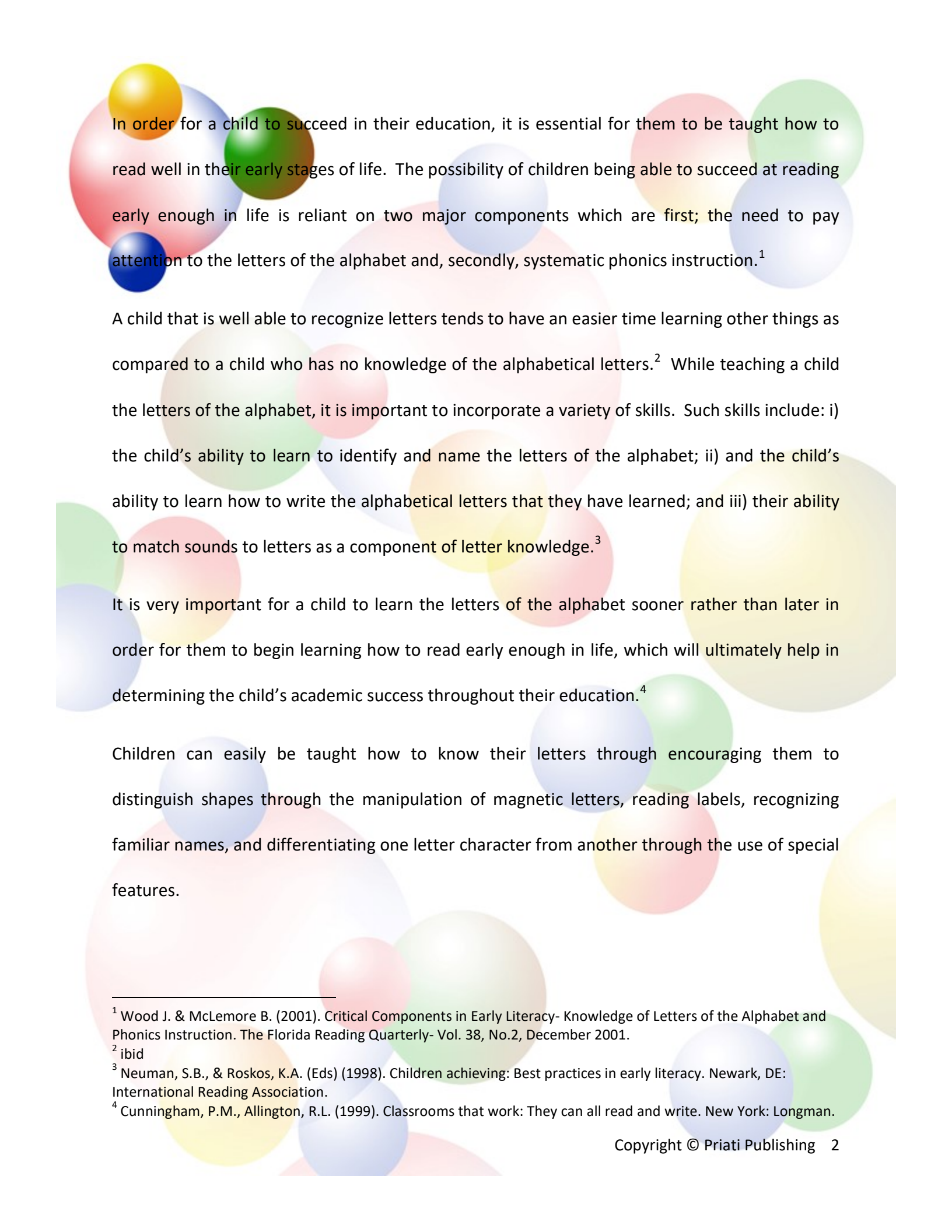




***CHILDREN  
AND THEIR  
FIRST LETTERS***



In order for a child to succeed in their education, it is essential for them to be taught how to read well in their early stages of life. The possibility of children being able to succeed at reading early enough in life is reliant on two major components which are first; the need to pay attention to the letters of the alphabet and, secondly, systematic phonics instruction.<sup>1</sup>

A child that is well able to recognize letters tends to have an easier time learning other things as compared to a child who has no knowledge of the alphabetical letters.<sup>2</sup> While teaching a child the letters of the alphabet, it is important to incorporate a variety of skills. Such skills include: i) the child's ability to learn to identify and name the letters of the alphabet; ii) and the child's ability to learn how to write the alphabetical letters that they have learned; and iii) their ability to match sounds to letters as a component of letter knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

It is very important for a child to learn the letters of the alphabet sooner rather than later in order for them to begin learning how to read early enough in life, which will ultimately help in determining the child's academic success throughout their education.<sup>4</sup>

Children can easily be taught how to know their letters through encouraging them to distinguish shapes through the manipulation of magnetic letters, reading labels, recognizing familiar names, and differentiating one letter character from another through the use of special features.

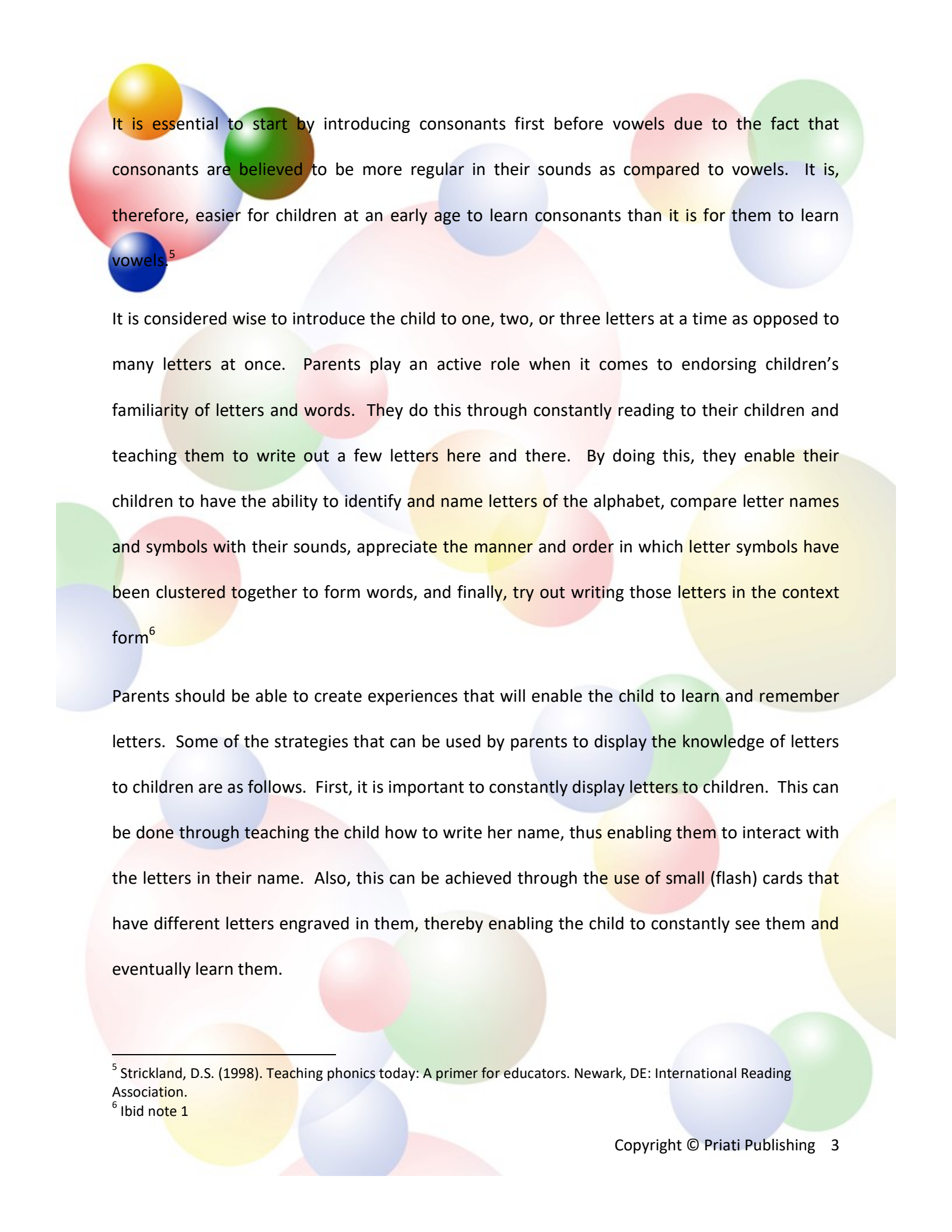
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<sup>1</sup> Wood J. & McLemore B. (2001). Critical Components in Early Literacy- Knowledge of Letters of the Alphabet and Phonics Instruction. The Florida Reading Quarterly- Vol. 38, No.2, December 2001.

<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> Neuman, S.B., & Roskos, K.A. (Eds) (1998). Children achieving: Best practices in early literacy. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

<sup>4</sup> Cunningham, P.M., Allington, R.L. (1999). Classrooms that work: They can all read and write. New York: Longman.



It is essential to start by introducing consonants first before vowels due to the fact that consonants are believed to be more regular in their sounds as compared to vowels. It is, therefore, easier for children at an early age to learn consonants than it is for them to learn vowels.<sup>5</sup>

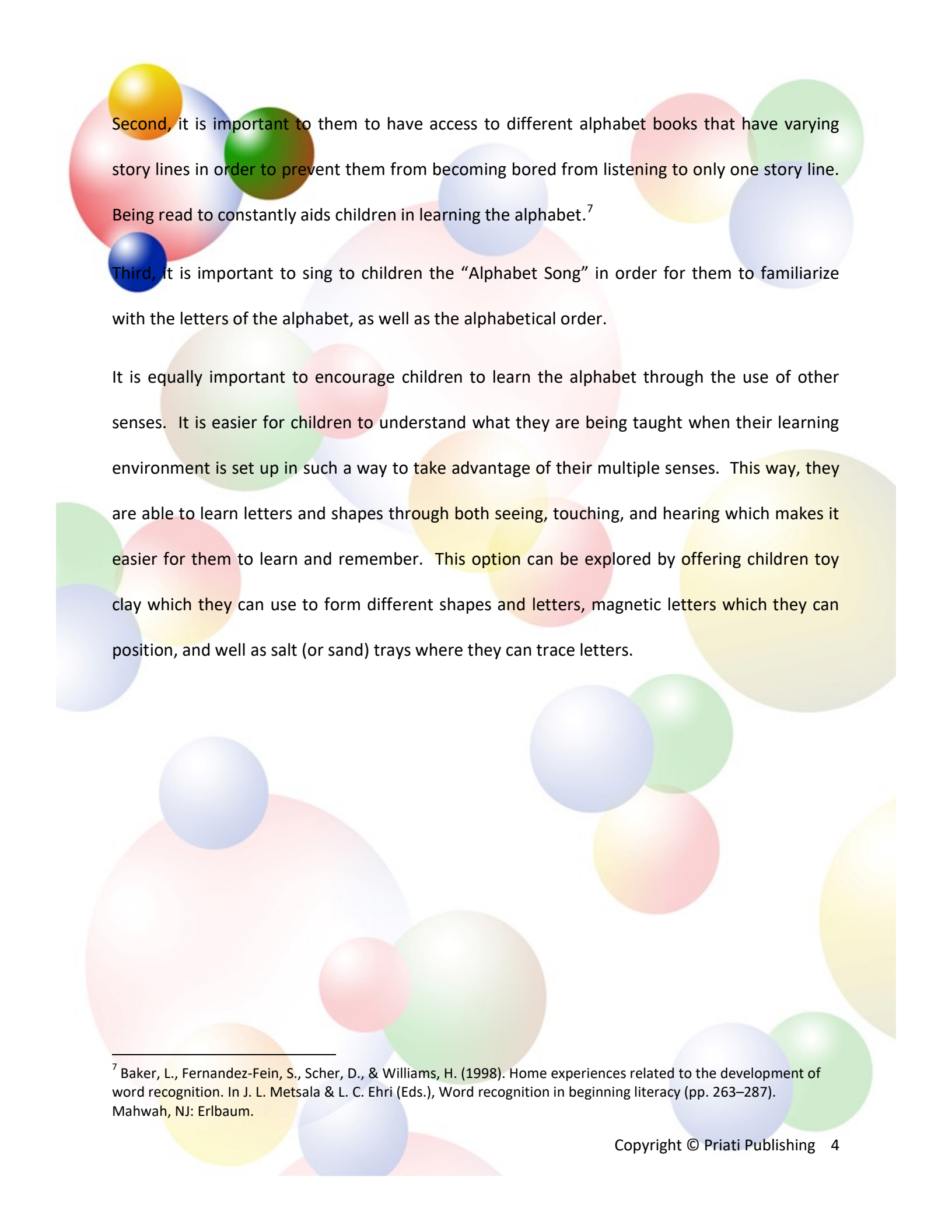
It is considered wise to introduce the child to one, two, or three letters at a time as opposed to many letters at once. Parents play an active role when it comes to endorsing children's familiarity of letters and words. They do this through constantly reading to their children and teaching them to write out a few letters here and there. By doing this, they enable their children to have the ability to identify and name letters of the alphabet, compare letter names and symbols with their sounds, appreciate the manner and order in which letter symbols have been clustered together to form words, and finally, try out writing those letters in the context form<sup>6</sup>

Parents should be able to create experiences that will enable the child to learn and remember letters. Some of the strategies that can be used by parents to display the knowledge of letters to children are as follows. First, it is important to constantly display letters to children. This can be done through teaching the child how to write her name, thus enabling them to interact with the letters in their name. Also, this can be achieved through the use of small (flash) cards that have different letters engraved in them, thereby enabling the child to constantly see them and eventually learn them.

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<sup>5</sup> Strickland, D.S. (1998). Teaching phonics today: A primer for educators. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid note 1



Second, it is important to them to have access to different alphabet books that have varying story lines in order to prevent them from becoming bored from listening to only one story line.

Being read to constantly aids children in learning the alphabet.<sup>7</sup>

Third, it is important to sing to children the “Alphabet Song” in order for them to familiarize with the letters of the alphabet, as well as the alphabetical order.

It is equally important to encourage children to learn the alphabet through the use of other senses. It is easier for children to understand what they are being taught when their learning environment is set up in such a way to take advantage of their multiple senses. This way, they are able to learn letters and shapes through both seeing, touching, and hearing which makes it easier for them to learn and remember. This option can be explored by offering children toy clay which they can use to form different shapes and letters, magnetic letters which they can position, and well as salt (or sand) trays where they can trace letters.

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<sup>7</sup> Baker, L., Fernandez-Fein, S., Scher, D., & Williams, H. (1998). Home experiences related to the development of word recognition. In J. L. Metsala & L. C. Ehri (Eds.), *Word recognition in beginning literacy* (pp. 263–287). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.





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