The goal of the tracing is for the student to learn the name of each letter, correct letter formation, and a picture link for the letter sound. The tracing occurs outside the pre-A small-group lesson and is usually done by a teaching assistant, a volunteer, or an upper-grade student. Be sure to train tutors in the following procedures:

Tracing procedures

The tutor and student sit next to each other with the tutor sitting on the student's dominant side so he or she can guide the student's hand when necessary.

The student uses his or her pointing finger to trace each uppercase and lowercase letter in the ABC book, saying the name of the letter each time. Then the student points to the picture and names it (e.g., *A, a, apple*). Do not allow students to trace with a pencil or marker. The tactile experience is essential for building a memory trace for the letter (Fernald, 1943). The tutor observes the student trace each letter and helps if the student struggles with remembering the name of the letter, using correct letter formation, or identifying the picture concept.

- If the student does not know the name of the letter, the tutor says the letter name. Then the student should repeat the name of the letter while tracing it with his or her finger.

- If the student does not know how to form a letter correctly, the tutor lightly holds the student's hand and helps trace the letter. Always have the student trace the letter from top to bottom.

- If the student does not know the concept in the picture, the tutor should explain the concept and have the student repeat the picture.

- If the student knows fewer than ten letters, have the student trace only the letters he or she knows and the letters in his or her first name for one month. For example, if Isaiah can only identify the letters *x* and *o* by name, he should trace

the letters *a*, *h*, *i*, and *s* (because they are in his name) and the letters *x* and *o*. If after four weeks the child still knows fewer than ten letters, have the student trace every letter in the book. Sometimes the letters in the child's name are not the easiest to learn. You can never predict which letters the student will learn first. (At age three, my son learned the letter *M* first because of McDonald's!)

Assess letter knowledge each week and track progress on the Letter/Sound Checklist. Discontinue the tracing when the student identifies at least 40 letters.

> ### Pre-A Video Link 1 ▶▶▶
>
> *Watch Jan guiding a student to trace an alphabet book.*

Research on tracing

For 20 years I have been collecting data on tracing the alphabet book. Tracing is by far the fastest and easiest way for children to learn their letters, even if they are learning English. Rates will vary, but most students learn about five to ten letters a week. Some who begin the year knowing less than ten letters progress at a slower rate and may take up to 12 weeks to learn all 52. It is extremely rare to take longer than 12 weeks if the tracing is done consistently.

For the past several years, I've worked with a rural North Carolina Title I school that has 91 percent qualifying for free or reduced lunch and 32 percent dual language learners (DLLs). In 2015 (a typical year) 40 out of 62 kindergartners (65 percent) entered school knowing fewer than 40 letters. After four weeks of tracing, only four (6 percent) were still pre-A, knowing fewer than 40 letters.

Progress of Pre-A Students Who Knew Fewer Than 40 Letters			
Total students entry to K	Total pre-A entry to K	Total pre-A after 4 weeks of tracing	Total pre-A after 8 weeks of tracing
62	40 (65%)	25 (40%)	4 (6%)

As I was writing this chapter, I asked the kindergarten teachers from this school to send me their midyear reading levels as measured by their state's (North Carolina) Reading 3D assessment. The 3D assessment uses PC to identify pre-A readers and RB for Level A. The chart below demonstrates what is possible for a high-poverty school after only one semester of instruction. I can't wait to see their data at the end of the year! These teachers have altered the future for the children in their classrooms. They're definitely on a pathway to success.