

The Transdisciplinary
Play-Based Curriculum
from Toni Linder



*Storybook
Activities*
for Young Children



Toni W. Linder, Ed.D.

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Overview

Read,

Play,

and

Learn!®

AN OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH BASE FOR *READ, PLAY, AND LEARN!*[®]

Several studies are underway to look at the outcomes of *Read, Play, and Learn!*

RESEARCH ON *READ, PLAY, AND LEARN!*[®]

In one on-going study, Coleman, Linder, and Linas (2005) and Coleman, Linder, Linas, and Meyer (2005) have found significantly higher developmental skills as measured by standard scores on the Mullen Scales of Early Learning for 50 preschool children who have been immersed in *Read, Play, and Learn!* for 1 year compared to children entered in the program for 3 months or less. Analysis using a linear regression indicated that immersion in *Read, Play, and Learn!* predicted both significantly higher overall developmental scores and receptive language sub-scales scores ($p = .01$).

Another study, done with developmentally younger children from Early Head Start (Child Development Resources, 2005), used *1-2-3 Read!*, an adapted version of *Read, Play, and Learn!* for younger children. This study looked at developmental growth in 24 children from low income and diverse backgrounds whose mean pre-test developmental quotient (DQ) on the Early Learning Accomplishment Profile prior to using the curriculum was 83. At post assessment, the mean DQ was 102. All children, including the 6 with identified disabilities, showed substantial developmental gains. Overall, children showed a 12-month gain in 9 months. This study demonstrates the effect of the *Read, Play, and Learn!* model on children who are developmentally younger, from high risk environments, and culturally diverse backgrounds. In addition, 100% of families reported, post-test, reading daily to their children. This is in sharp contrast to a study (Halfon, McLearn, & Schuster, 2002) showing less than half of parents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds reading daily to their children under age 3.

Similar results were found with middle income families whose children used the *Read, Play, and Learn!* model. A survey of 87 families of children using *Read, Play, and Learn!* in five preschool classrooms found that as a result of using the curriculum, families read to their children more frequently, used the vocabulary being taught in the classroom, and followed through with activities done at school more frequently than they had before having their children enrolled in the program with the *Read, Play, and Learn!* curriculum (Coleman & Stokka, 2003, unpublished paper).

In a qualitative study conducted with teachers who had children with disabilities in their classes where they were using *Read, Play, and Learn!*, Coleman (submitted for publication, 2005) found that teachers were able to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of a wide range of children. Children remained engaged and participated in the curriculum using creative modifications. The cur-

riculum was found to assist teachers in making environmental, lesson planning, and other daily adaptations.

Read, Play, and Learn! integrates the findings from literature on development, learning, play, and literacy. With the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, schools are under increasing pressure to find and use evidence-based curricula to align with the scientifically based research criteria outlined in NCLB. Unfortunately, in the aftermath of NCLB, the value of play as a foundation for learning has been diminished (Zigler, May 27, 2002, childcareexchange.com). If play is to continue to serve an important role in the education of young children, empirical research is needed to document potential developmental and academic outcomes, in addition to other developmental benefits, of play. The above studies and a growing body of research, as described in part below, are finding that a play and literature-based curriculum can have significant impact on children, families, and teachers.

COMPONENTS OF LITERACY

The *Read, Play, and Learn!* curriculum is founded on important research findings about how children learn early literacy skills. With the active support of adults, these skills should develop in an integrated manner (Ollila & Mayfield, 1992). Components of literacy (Depree & Iversen, 1994) include: 1) oral language, with the subcomponents of listening (accessing information from speech) and speaking (expressing information orally); 2) written language, with the subcomponents of reading (accessing information from print) and writing (expressing information in print); and 3) visual language, with the subcomponents of viewing (accessing information from sources other than print, e.g., pictures, maps) and presenting (expressing information in visual form other than print, e.g., art, charts).

A brief description of research support for these aspects within *Read, Play, and Learn!* follows.

RESEARCH ON ORAL LANGUAGE: Listening and Speaking

In order to have facility with oral language, children need to be exposed to an environment rich in language and interact with adults using language in a social context (Bruner, 1975; Cazden, 1992; Chomsky, 1965; Halliday, 1975; McNeill, 1970; Menyuk, 1977; Morrow, 1991). *Read, Play, and Learn!* explores new literature themes every 2 weeks, ensuring that language is constantly changing. Adults help children use new language concepts throughout the day. Language concepts are learned in meaningful contexts and generalized. Children demonstrate dramatic gains in vocabulary and language usage (Linder, in progress).

Research demonstrates that storytelling strongly attracts children to books (Morrow & Weinstein, 1986) and that children who frequently listen to stories develop more sophisticated language structures and a larger vocabulary (Lenz, 1992). Listening to stories establishes favorite storybooks and encourages children to want to read and actively pursue the necessary skills to read by themselves (Sulzby, 1985). Research shows that listening to stories 1) enhances comprehension and knowledge about books and print (Mason, 1980), 2) develops a sense of story structure (Morrow, 1985), 3) develops positive attitudes toward reading and writing, and 4) helps children develop their own stories (Morrow, 1985).

With *Read, Play, and Learn!*, children are read to at the beginning of each day and numerous times throughout the day. Repetition gives the child mastery over story sequence and vocabulary. The stories soon become favorites. As the stories are sought out by children for rereading throughout the year (Linder, in progress), children learn the conventions of reading and print.

When telling stories, children tend to mimic the intonation of adults reading stories. This “book language” takes children beyond talking into understanding the language of reading (Cazden, 1992; Snow, 1991). Children’s ability to question also develops, with questions relating to the pictures and meanings of the story. With additional maturation and practice, the questions children ask relate to the letters, words, and sounds of letters in print on the storybook page (Morrow, 1985; Roser & Martinez, 1985). Parents report dramatic gains in vocabulary and discussion about books when a storybook curriculum is used (Linder, in progress). In addition, with increasing exposure to the books and interaction with the teacher, either individually or in small or large groups, the children develop an increasing repertoire of literacy-related questions, vocabulary, and concepts related to a broad range of topics.

RESEARCH ON WRITTEN LANGUAGE: *Reading and Writing*

When children use functional forms of literacy in their play, they begin to understand the forms’ purposes. Children use a variety of functional literacy forms throughout all of the centers in the *Read, Play, and Learn!* classroom. Each child is encouraged to work at his or her own level of learning, with teachers facilitating the child’s acquisition of the next stage of learning. McCormick and Mason (1981) established three developmental levels of word recognition in learning to read: 1) identifying words through context, 2) using sound–letter cues, and 3) sounding out words. Parents and teachers report gains in children’s book knowledge and understanding of basic reading skills, such as letter recognition, phonological awareness, and basic sight vocabulary. Children begin to understand the meaning of print by using syntactic cues, semantic cues, and graphophonic rules (Morrow, 1991).

As a first step in reading and writing, children learn that print has functions (Mason, 1980). Children next express interest in the forms of print—including names, sounds, and configurations of letters and words—and then learn the conventions of print—including reading from left to right and the purpose of punctuation and spacing. Sulzby (1985) identified six steps in the development of children’s writing behavior: 1) use of drawings for writing, 2) scribble writing, 3) use of letter-like forms, 4) use of well-learned units or letter strings, 5) use of invented spelling, and 6) writing conventionally. All forms of literacy are incorporated into *Read, Play, and Learn!*. For example, children illustrate story concepts, construct charts and maps, follow recipes, create books, make signs for dramatic play, and write notes or messages for peers and parents. Each child’s attempts are accepted at his or her developmental level and scaffolded to the next level. Children show an increase in representational abilities in symbolic expression, dramatic play, art, and print.

RESEARCH ON VISUAL LANGUAGE: *Viewing and Presenting*

Pictures and symbols introduce children to literacy (Schickedanz, 1999). Children need opportunities to gain information through pictures, maps, charts, and symbols. In addition, dramatic representations of story concepts assist in memory

development (Rowe, 1998), syntactic skills (Vedelar, 1997), book comprehension (Rowe, 1998), and phonological awareness (Sonnenschein, Baker, Serpell, & Schmidt, 2000) and build connections between oral and written modes of expression (Roskos & Christie, 2001). The *Read, Play, and Learn!* classroom uses a variety of visual representations of emerging literacy and print. Charts of daily routines, recipes and instructions, symbols for print in books, and maps of the classroom are integrated into each module. Children also learn signs and visual symbols associated with each of the stories. Dramatizations of each story are central to the curriculum, with the teacher facilitating by introducing story props and materials; modeling and encouraging functional use of literacy tools; and mediating the social interactions among children as they integrate story, props, and dramatic interactions.

Emerging literacy requires presentation of the following language and literacy components at a developmentally appropriate level for each child: phonological awareness, vocabulary, syntax, semantics, and story sequence. These concepts are introduced through multidimensional means, including pictures, dramatization, songs and fingerplays, gestures, signs, charts, symbols, and other visual methods. Opportunities for children to express their conceptual understanding through a variety of visual means, including gestural, dramatic, and artistic, enable them to connect oral and written modes of expression (Neuman & Roskos, 1990; Rowe, 1998; Schickedanz, 1999).

Presenting visual information is integral to *Read, Play, and Learn!*. A group art mural depicting story elements, sequences, and concepts is developed for each story. In addition, children create individual art projects, drawings with dictations, charts in science projects, and two- and three-dimensional representations related to the stories. Children also render dramatic representation of story characters, concepts, actions, and sequence. Children's ability to represent ideas pictorially increases.

RESEARCH ON LITERACY, PLAY, AND SCAFFOLDING

Research shows that play can support the application of literacy skills. Play provides a meaningful setting, supportive peer interactions, and functional opportunities for using skills (Morrow, 1990; Neuman & Roskos, 1990, 1992, 1997). Play can provide settings that promote literacy activities, skills, and strategies, offer language experiences that build associations between oral and written modes of expression, provide opportunities for teachers to instruct children in functional literacy skills (Neuman & Roskos, 1990), and help incorporate literacy concepts, skills, and processes (Neuman & Roskos, 1992, 1997). When appropriately facilitated by an adult, play and literacy can be integrated to increase book comprehension and memory for stories (Rowe, 1998), assist children in learning to read environmental print (Neuman & Roskos, 1993; Vukelich, 1994), and develop phonological awareness and motivation to read print (Sonnenschein et al., 2000). *Read, Play, and Learn!* integrates play and literacy throughout the day.

Adult involvement in the early childhood environment is critical to children's learning. Adult involvement and intervention infuse literacy ideas, processes, and skills into play (Neuman, 2000; Vukelich, 1994). Scaffolding for emerging literacy skills should incorporate a sequence of developmental strategies, including shared language experiences, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading. Concurrently, scaffolding of writing needs to incorporate a corresponding sequence of developmental strategies that include language experience, writing for children,

shared writing, guided writing, and independent writing (Depree & Iversen, 1994). The *Read, Play, and Learn!* modules incorporate all of these strategies. Specific strategies for literacy are addressed in Chapter 7 of the *Teacher's Guide* for the *Read, Play, and Learn!* curriculum.

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