



**ON TRACK FOR SUCCESS
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
READING INSTRUCTION**

The Research-Based Steps Behind
SRA/McGraw Hill's *Imagine It!*
Pre-Kindergarten Program



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How Young Children Learn

Building Strong Language Skills Early Determines Later Success

Time and again, research has verified the powerful correlation between young children's oral and written language skills and their success when they enter school (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Torgesen, 1998).


The ultimate goal of Pre-Kindergarten reading instruction is to help children learn about and use oral and written language in ways that prepare them to become successful and independent readers, writers, and learners.

Children who develop critical language and reading skills at an early age are more likely to be successful in school and life. Conversely, children who do not acquire proficient language skills in the early years often fall behind in their early school years and may never become proficient readers and writers.

What Research Tells Us

The National Research Council in *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) found that young children on the road to becoming successful readers exhibit these skills:

- Knowing alphabet letters are a special category of visual graphics that can be named individually
- Recognizing local environmental print
- Knowing that it is the print that is read in stories
- Understanding that different text forms are used for different functions of print (e.g., list for groceries)
- Paying attention to separate and repeating sounds in language (e.g., Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater)
- Using new vocabulary and grammatical constructions in own speech
- Understanding and following oral directions
- Recognizing sequences of events in stories
- Showing an interest in books and reading
- Connecting information and events to life experiences when listening to a story
- Asking questions and making comments that demonstrate an understanding of the literal meaning of a story being told
- Attempting to read stories and to write
- Identifying 10 alphabet letters, especially those from their own names
- "Writing" (scribbling) messages as part of playful activity
- Playing with words and rhymes



Children who do not acquire proficient language skills in the early years require intensive help later.

1

Opportunities to Develop Listening and Speaking Skills Broaden Children's Vocabularies

The importance of developing language and building vocabulary in the early years cannot be underestimated. Until children can read on their own, they learn new vocabulary, ideas, and facts by listening and speaking (New Standards, 2001). Studies show that children who do not hear a lot of oral language and who are not encouraged to use oral language usually have problems learning to read (Kuhl, 2000).

The ability to sound out words and to make sense of written text depends largely upon oral vocabulary. The more limited the oral language experiences children have directly correlates to limited vocabulary acquisition.

Effective Pre-Kindergarten literacy programs can play a key role by providing opportunities for children to close the language gap.

Some adults mistakenly think children's language development occurs naturally (Kuhl, 2000; Pinker, 1996). In reality, natural development depends largely on the quantity and quality of language-related experiences that children have at home (Hart & Risley (1995).

- Children in advantaged homes have oral vocabularies as much as five times larger than children from disadvantaged homes.
- Fewer words are spoken to disadvantaged children. By age 3, advantaged children have heard about 30 million words – three times as many words as disadvantaged children.
- Disadvantaged children often hear most words spoken to them in imperative sentences and few in descriptive or elaborative sentences

What Research Tells Us

Guidelines from Early Reading First and various state standards and guidelines (e.g. Florida Partnership for School Readiness, 2004; Ohio Department of Education, 2004; Texas Education Agency, 1999) indicate that effective oral language instruction should help children do the following by:

- Listening carefully for different purposes, such as for enjoyment or to get information
- Using spoken language for a variety of purposes
- Following and giving simple directions and instructions
- Asking and answering questions
- Using appropriate volume and rate when speaking
- Participating in discussions and follow the rules of polite conversation, such as staying on the topic and taking turns
- Experimenting with new words
- Retelling simple stories in the correct sequence
- Telling personal narratives

Imagine It! Pre-K puts Research in Action

In *Imagine It!* Pre-Kindergarten, oral language development is integrated throughout every lesson. Examples of opportunities to build oral language include:

Daily warm-up activities

- Rhyming activities, finger plays, word play, and language games
- Recognizing environmental sounds

Development of listening skills

- Listening comprehension from read alouds, poems, folktales, and songs
- Listening and responding to Big Books
- Following directions through games like Simon Says, where children are engaged and having fun

Vocabulary development

- Building language through activities using key words and phrases
- Exploring selected vocabulary

Verbal expression and discussion

- Sharing daily experiences with others
- Discussing and sharing writing
- Talking about stories and sharing reactions



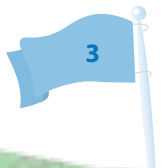
Closing the gap
can be achieved
with effective
Pre-Kindergarten
literacy programs.



On Track for Success

Listening Practice

Listening activities sharpen a child's ability to pay close attention to sounds and to distinguish one from another.



2

Students Learn to Recognize that Words are Composed of Individual Sounds and Understand Characteristics of Spoken Language

Phonological awareness refers to the ability to notice, think about, and manipulate spoken language. Young children who have phonological awareness understand:

- Sentences are made up of individual words
- Words are made up of parts or syllables
- Words can rhyme

The most complex level of phonological awareness - phonemic awareness - is the understanding that even word parts are made up of smaller units (phonemes). These phonemes can be put together blended to make words. Words can also be segmented into individual phonemes. Phonemic awareness reflects a child's ability to focus on the sounds of words, as opposed to the meanings (Adams, 1990).

Both phonological and phonemic awareness play a crucial role in learning to read. Children begin to develop this awareness at about age 3, and parents and teachers can help enhance it over several years (Snow, et al., 1998).

Children must begin to hear and identify the sounds of language and start to think of words as having sounds as well as meanings. They must recognize that words are made up of sounds in order to map these sounds into letters to develop their understanding of the alphabetic principle (the idea that written letters represent spoken sounds) and to read words. In fact, research shows the ease by which children learn to read often depends on how much phonological/phonemic awareness they possess (Shaywitz, 2003; Stanovich, 1986).

What Research Tells Us

The National Reading Panel reports that effective instruction for this age group should be kept playful and interesting to children and need not take up a great deal of class time. Researchers suggest that instruction reflect the simple to complex developmental pattern (Stanovich, 1993). For Pre-Kindergarten children, this might include:

- Identifying environmental sounds, like clocks ticking and horns honking
- Participating in rhyming games, songs, and poems
- Recognizing the same sound at the beginning of a series of words
- Beginning to hear and isolate words in spoken sentences
- Distinguishing between similar-sounding words, such as boat and coat
- Beginning to break (segment) spoken words into parts, often by clapping out the syllables

Imagine It! Pre-K Puts Research in Action

Comprehensive, systematic instruction in phonological and phonemic awareness is included daily in *Imagine It!* Pre-Kindergarten through a variety of fun and engaging activities. These include:

Word play

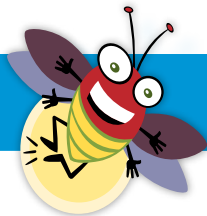
- Listening for sounds
- Rhyming words and games
- Counting words in sentences
- Extending sentence length
- Clapping each word in a sentence
- Recognizing words are missing

Oral blending

- Compound words (two-syllable and three-syllable)
- Onsets and rimes
- Final consonant sounds
- Long vowels
- Blending words with three sounds

Segmentation

- Clapping word parts
- Deleting parts of words
- Learning three-syllable words
- Restoring onsets and rimes



On Track for Success

Middle Sounds

To introduce the concept of middle sounds, have three children come forward. Have two children stand side by side. Move them apart, and have the third child stand in the middle of the other two.

3

Children Learn About the Forms and Uses of Print to Connect Knowledge of Oral Language to Written Language

Book awareness begins with the ability to differentiate between the front and back of a book. It eventually develops into an understanding that print is a form of communication used for many purposes, whether in a book or on a stop sign.

Once children understand that print conveys a message, they are ready to unite oral language with written language. Research indicates that young children's levels of print awareness predict their future reading achievement.

What Research Tells Us

Children gain print insight through the guidance of adults. As adults read to children or engage them in reading during other activities, such as calling their attention to a funny sign on the side of a bus, they help children become aware of how print functions. Effective Pre-Kindergarten instruction in print and book awareness should help children do the following by (Armbruster et al, 2001, Burns et al., 1999; Newman et al., 2000):

- Recognizing print in their surroundings
- Discovering that print carries meaning
- Knowing that print is used for many purposes (lists, books, notes, letters, etc.)
- Determining how to handle books appropriately
- Learning that text in a book begins at the top of the page, moves from left to right, and carries over to the next page
- Realizing that a book has a title, author, and illustrator
- Distinguishing the print clues that show the beginnings and endings of sentences (capital letters and end punctuation marks)
- Learning to distinguish words and the spaces that separate them
- Understanding that pictures have meanings but cannot be "read"



Imagine It! Pre-K puts Research in Action

Print and book awareness in *Imagine It!* Pre-Kindergarten occurs in each of the three sections of every daily lesson:

Book awareness


- Parts of books
- Title, author, illustrator
- Print directionality
- Page numbering

Print awareness

- Word boundaries
- Word length
- Capitalization and end punctuation
- Recognition of sight Words

Picture-text relationships

- Illustrations
- Dramatic play



Research indicates that young children's levels of print awareness predict their future reading achievement.



On Track for Success

Print and Book Awareness

Always have plenty of books available for children to explore. Throughout the day encourage them to look through and 'read' the books by themselves, to each other, or to you.



STEP 4 Alphabetic Knowledge

Children Recognize the Names and Shapes of Letters of the Alphabet to Help Them Understand How Print Works

Children with alphabetic knowledge can do more than say their ABCs. They can name and identify letters and form the shapes of the alphabet quickly and accurately. They can also recognize individual letters in various forms (capital, lowercase, printed, and cursive) and identify letters that are similar in shape, such as b/d, m/n/, K/X, p/q/g, and U/V (Honig, Diamond, & Gutlohn, 2000).

Research shows a strong relationship between alphabetic knowledge and early reading success (e.g., Adams, 1990; Bond & Dysktra, 1967; Chall, 1967; Hall & Moats, 1999; Share, Jorm, Maclean, & Matthews, 1984). That's because alphabetic knowledge helps children understand how print works. Once they can identify and name letters quickly and easily, children begin to understand that these individual letters make up printed words. This lays the foundation for rapid word recognition and prepares them to learn the alphabetic principle (Ehri, 1987; Ehri & Wilce, 1985).

What Research Tells Us

The alphabet should be taught explicitly and systematically (see, e.g., Adams, 1990). Effective instruction follows a sequence in which teachers introduce a letter and then provide children with many opportunities to practice saying its name and identifying and making its shape (e.g. Wasik, 2001). Effective instruction should specifically help children by (Armbruster et al., 2002; Newman et al., 2000; Snow et al., 1998):

- Quickly and accurately naming and identifying letters of the alphabet in various forms (capital, lowercase, printed, and cursive)
- Recognizing and distinguishing among letters with similar shapes
- Recognizing and forming some letters in the alphabet, particularly those in their names and in other words that are important to them
- Beginning to use letters to write or scribble messages

4



Imagine It! Pre-K puts Research in Action

The program's explicit, systematic teaching of alphabetic knowledge is accomplished through:

Name recognition

- Alphabet Sound Wall Cards
- From A to Z Big Book
- Over in the Meadow Big Book
- Songs and games

Recognizing high-frequency words

- High-Frequency Flash Cards
- Pre-Decodable Takehomes

Recognizing and making words

- Pocket Chart Word Cards
- Alphabet Letter Cards



On Track for Success

Handwriting

Remember that handwriting is an introduction and mastery should not be expected at this level. To help the children, always model how to write the letters using the board or chart paper. Then have the children put their fingers in the air to 'practice' writing the letter with you.



5

Children Learn that Sounds Can Be Connected to Letters in Order to Read Words

Children have learned the alphabetic principle when they understand there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds. If they can not apply this alphabetic principle, they will struggle with word recognition, which will impede reading development.

Understanding the alphabetic principle is critical to reading success.

Although Pre-Kindergarten children may not be able to fully grasp the alphabetic principle, effective instruction provides the groundwork for future understanding through activities in which children play with words and letters and write by dictation or through the use of invented spelling (Adams, 1990).

What Research Tells Us

Research has not yet revealed a single best sequence for teaching the relationships between sounds and letters. Some researchers suggest it is most productive to begin instruction with some consonants whose sounds children can pronounce in isolation and with the least distortion, such as s, m, t, h, and p (see, e.g., Adams, 1990; Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Stahl, 1998).

Instruction also should focus on those relationships children can use to read as many words as possible as soon as possible. For this purpose, some relationships are clearly more useful than others: s, m, a, n, and t appear in more words than x, v, and q.

Effective Pre-Kindergarten instruction in the alphabetic principle should help children by:

- Understanding that letters and combinations of letters represent spoken sounds
- Connecting sounds to letters
- Blending and sounding out a few simple words



Imagine It! Pre-K puts Research in Action

Letter-sound relationships are introduced in a logical, carefully developed sequence:

Connecting sounds to letters

- Alphabet Sound Wall Cards
- Alphabet Letter Cards

Writing and recognizing letters of the alphabet

- Teacher's Resource Book
- Alphabet Letter Cards, Pocket Chart
- Alphabet Sound Wall Cards

Systematic introduction of sound/letter correspondence

- Alphabet Sound Wall Cards
- Songs
- Alphabet Letter Cards, Pocket Chart Picture Cards
- From A to Z Big Book
- Alphabet Sound Card Song CDs
- Pre-Decodable Takehomes
- Listening Library CD
- Teacher's Resource Book



On Track for Success

How the Alphabet Works

Tell children anything that can be pronounced can be spelled with the letters of the alphabet. Ask children for a word. Tell them you know how to spell that word. Write the word on the board. Show them that the word contains the letters shown on alphabet cards.

Children Should Write Regularly to Increase Their Vocabularies and Improve Reading Comprehension Skills

Because all children do not acquire motor skills or grasp the alphabetic principle at the same pace, emergent writing includes drawing and scribbling. As with phonological awareness, emergent writing development tends to follow a progression.

First, young children learn to hold and use crayons, markers, and pencils as they draw and scribble. Gradually these scribbles begin to look like real writing. Letter-like forms are eventually replaced by recognizable letters, most often those letters in a child's name (Clay, 1975; Hiebert, 1988; Whitehurst, 2001).

Providing daily opportunities for children to write or pretend to write, even before they learn to read, is crucial. Instruction is most effective when it is incorporated into daily routines and activities, such as play in which children pretend to write down customers' orders when playing restaurant.

It is also helpful for children to write thank-you notes to classroom guests and messages in cards they create for friends and family. In addition, children benefit from labeling their drawings and keeping writing logs in which they draw pictures and label them as a reaction to what they have read or studied (see, e.g., Neuman et al., 2000).

What Research Tells Us

Effective emergent writing instruction helps children by:

- Understanding that writing represents spoken language and is another way to communicate
- Learning that writing can serve many different purposes
- Expressing themselves through developmentally appropriate means (drawing, scribbling, or attempting to write words and messages)
- Applying what they are learning regarding the relationship between sounds and letters and regarding written words and printed language
- Developing phonemic awareness

Imagine It! Pre-K puts Research in Action

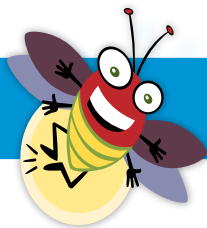
The program includes daily opportunities for children to write through:

Small group activities

- Convey thoughts and ideas through drawing or scribbling
- Dictate sentences and labels
- Create cards and pictures

Group writing

- Use class books, charts, and lists
- Discuss ideas and share stories



On Track for Success

Diverse Application

An alternative to writing books is creating a bulletin board display. This can help the children begin to understand that writing has multiple purposes and uses.



7

Teachers Should Model Reading and Engage Children in Interactive and Participatory Activities

Reading aloud to children has been called “the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for success in reading” (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Reading aloud is the best way to bring together everything that Pre-Kindergarteners are learning about spoken and written language.

However, simply reading to children is not enough. To be truly effective, reading aloud must be interactive. Therefore, how reading is conducted is as important as the reading itself (Morrow et al., 1990).

What Research Tells Us

In effective reading aloud activities, teachers “scaffold” the reading by:

- Guiding children through a book by making connections between story events and things the children already know
- Talking about characters and events
- Sequencing different events
- Asking questions to understand how well children comprehend the story
- Encouraging students to ask questions about things that interest or puzzle them

This leads to focused, book-related discussions that help children think, analyze, and interpret (e.g., Hiebert, 1988; Teale & Sulzby, 1987; van Kleeck, 1990).

To develop as readers and writers, children must be given many opportunities to practice what they are learning. For example, Pre-Kindergarteners can “read” rebus books. Rebus books tell a story through pictures and contain both simple words that children have not learned to read and a set of previously taught high-frequency words. These books give children hands-on practice with books and print and ease them into real reading (Biemiller & Siegel, 1997).



On Track for Success

Vocabulary

Give children an opportunities to tell what they already know about the meanings of selection vocabulary words.

Imagine It! Pre-K puts Research in Action

Preparing young children to read means laying a strong foundation for their future success by focusing on the specific skills they need to understand to use both oral and written language with accuracy and ease.

Imagine It! Pre-Kindergarten introduces young children to the basics of literacy, giving them the building blocks to develop a solid reading foundation and putting them on the path to becoming successful lifelong readers and learners.



Reading aloud is the best way to bring together everything that children are learning about spoken and written language.



For more information
about *Imagine It!*
Pre-Kindergarten,
please call
1-888-SRA-4543
and visit
ImagineItReading.com.

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