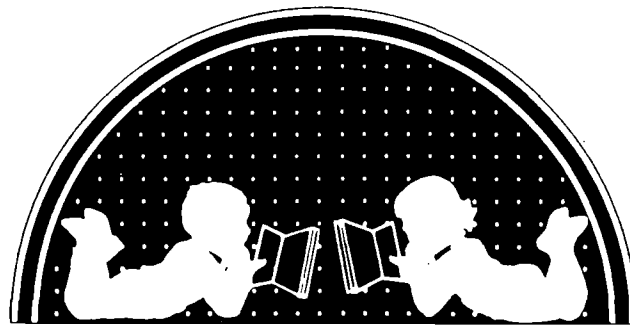


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Literacy Starts Early



CHILDREN'S
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Children's Literacy Initiative
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Philadelphia, Pa. 19103
561-4676
561-4677 (Fax)



CHILDREN'S EXPO • 2314 MARKET STREET, 4TH FLOOR, PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103
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March 4, 1997

Mr. Richard W. Riley
Secretary of Education
United States Dept. of Education
600 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Riley,

It was a great honor to meet you at Philadelphia's Education Summit last week. We are grateful for your invitation to write to you about the issue of teaching the alphabet and Head Start. Our goal is to have a meeting with Secretary Shalala, and perhaps you would assist us in this endeavor.

Children's Literacy Initiative, a non-profit organization, has done emergent literacy professional development work all over the country. Mary Jean LeTendre is familiar with our work, and will attest to the validation studies that show the success of children in kindergarten on a variety of reading and writing measures after their teachers have participated in our training. We have worked with great success and with the enthusiastic approval of teachers under both Head Start and Title One contracts in urban schools and neighborhoods.

We have an enormous concern about the education component of Head Start, and the firmly held beliefs shared by many (perhaps even most) Head Start lead teachers and educational consultants that the alphabet should not be displayed in the classroom.

Furthermore, reading aloud to children is not enough of a priority to receive even a mention in the new proposed Head Start Performance Standards, which guide all local agencies. Perhaps Head Start is not sufficiently aware of the research that has led you to state unequivocally that reading aloud to children is of critical importance.

This is what we have observed:

- In Philadelphia, the biggest Head Start grantee, the School District of Philadelphia, has not allowed teachers to post alphabets. In our trainings, teachers have referred to the "A" word.
- In Baltimore, we are just now getting Head Start centers to post the alphabet in writing areas. We have some influence after having obtained a grant to give the agency over 35,000 books.

March 4, 1997

- Head Start teachers from Connecticut, North Carolina, and New York State have told us that they are not allowed to post the alphabet.

The typical full-day activity schedule we have seen posted in Head Start classrooms from Hempstead, Long Island, to Palm Springs, California, typically allots ten minutes out of a full day for reading aloud (see enclosed photo). We have seldom, if ever, seen an adequate library corner and book collection in the hundreds of classrooms we have visited.

We think Head Start is important and valuable, and has a tremendous infrastructure of classrooms and teachers. Our goal is to help enhance the program so that teachers read aloud more, role-model reading aloud for parents, provide the best books, and help children become familiar with the alphabet and rich vocabulary words. We want to help prevent the need for expensive remediation later.

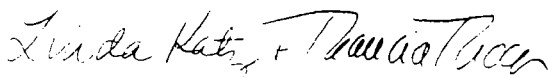
There is a great amount of research from the fields of reading instruction and brain study that would help Head Start educators make better teaching decisions. We feel strongly, and we are not alone, that many Head Start leaders are making decisions based on inadequate ideas of what is "developmentally appropriate" for poor children (See enclosed Anne McGill-Franzen article).

Head Start agencies all over the are not providing enough emergent literacy experiences for over 600,000 children each year, who then enter kindergarten as much as 8 years behind in language (see Professor Frederick Morrison of Loyola University's longitudinal study that shows starting kindergarten children testing from age 2 to age 10 on vocabulary measures). Public school seldom closes that gap. Experts agree that sophisticated vocabulary is chiefly developed through reading aloud good books to children.

We trust that you will find this matter of sufficient concern to help us present our information and solutions to Secretary Shalala; we will call your office to follow up. With President Clinton's America Reads Initiative, the opportunity could not be more timely or appropriate to help the early childhood community learn about the reading expectations and demands made in elementary school, and how they can help children prepare and keep on track to succeed.

Thank you for giving our concerns your time and attention.

Sincerely,



Linda Katz and Marcia Moon, Co-Directors, CLI

Enclosures



CHILDREN'S EXPO • 2314 MARKET STREET, 4TH FLOOR, PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103
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HISTORY AND MISSION

Children's Literacy Initiative (CLI), a non-profit organization recognized by the IRS with a 501(c)(3) classification, was founded in June 1988 by Marcia Moon and Linda Katz, as an outgrowth of Children's Expo, a Philadelphia children's book event which attracted over 25,000 teachers, parents, children, and authors/illustrators. Our mission is to enhance the opportunity for children from low income families to enter school ready to learn and to be successful in learning to read. CLI trains teachers, parents, and caregivers; informs the general public; educates policy makers in "emergent literacy" (literature-based) teaching and read-aloud practices, and provides information on how to create literacy-promoting environments in the classroom and at home.

CURRENT AGENCY SERVICES

Children's Literacy Initiative serves children from economically disadvantaged families in Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, North Carolina, Connecticut, California, and other states across the country. CLI conducts Emergent Literacy Training Institutes for education coordinators, teachers and staff from Head Start and other subsidized child care centers, kindergarten and early elementary school teachers. One of the most recent projects completed by CLI was the Philadelphia Kindergarten Training and Research Project, supported in part by grants from the William Penn Foundation and the Pennsylvania Department of Education. This study demonstrated the tremendous benefits of CLI training coupled with collections of quality books. Children from kindergarten classrooms receiving both books and training scored far higher on Concepts About Print, reading and vocabulary tests than did children from classrooms receiving only books, or neither books nor training.

DESCRIPTION OF TARGET POPULATION AND NEED

Current research shows that as many as 50% of American children from urban areas are assessed as educationally at risk by their teachers upon entering kindergarten. A significant number of these children will be candidates for early school failure (at a cost of approximately \$6,000-10,000 per child for one repeated grade), or will be placed in Chapter One special education and pre-first classes. However, many of these children could be **prevented** from entering the remedial stream by being exposed to a comprehensive early intervention program in preschool and kindergarten, centered on the acquisition of literacy skills and designed to prepare them for learning to read in the first grade.

Why are so many children from low income families failing to succeed in school?

The low achievement levels of children from low income families cannot be explained by socioeconomic status alone. These children's primary impedance to achieving school success is a **lack of experience with print and language**. Major discrepancies in vocabulary development between children from low income and middle income families have inspired researchers to study language experience in the home:

- After two years of observation, Drs. Betty Hart and Todd Risley discovered that “by age 4, the average child in a welfare family might have **13 million fewer words** of cumulative experience [number of words heard] than the average child in a working-class family” and **32 million fewer words** than a child in a professional family.
- These statistics are supported by the differences in the amount of read-aloud time of quality literature that occurs both at school and in the home. Parents from low income homes may read aloud as little as **25 hours total** to their children before they reach first grade, compared to **over 1,250 hours** for mainstream children.
- Middle class children will have acquired other important emergent literacy skills, such as **alphabet/phonemic relationships, knowledge of print directionality and other reading conventions, called Concepts About Print**, from storybook reading, message writing and letter identification provided by parents, preschool teachers and educational toys. Lower class and welfare children may have had few such experiences.

How do these differences in early childhood experience affect school performance?

These disparities in language skills and print knowledge become exacerbated once economically disadvantaged children enter school. Reforms in education lose effectiveness when elementary school teachers try to teach an enriched curriculum to students who have limited vocabularies, poor decoding skills and a lack of familiarity with print.

Without fully developed emergent literacy skills, these children will often be labeled “learning disabled” or placed in the bottom reading group upon entering elementary school. Once the children are so placed, it is difficult for them to break the cycle. Drs. Anne McGill-Franzen and Richard Allington, two of the nation’s foremost reading experts, found that **9 out of 10 children who start first grade in the bottom reading group stay in the bottom group throughout all of elementary school. These children will also be more likely candidates for expensive remediation later in life.**

How CLI CAN HELP

CLI educates parents, caregivers and teachers about how to best prepare children to be school-ready and to learn to read. Topics covered during training sessions include:

- the importance of reading aloud to children for at least 20 minutes a day
- choosing quality children’s literature
- involving parents in their children’s literacy development
- helping children to develop vocabulary, Concepts About Print and critical thinking skills through books
- developing children’s writing skills
- rearranging the classroom to promote literacy by establishing effective library corners and writing centers, and through the use of environmental print

Research conducted over the past ten years by Dr. William Teale, Dr. Marie Clay and others has redefined reading readiness as a series of **learned literacy behaviors and instructions rather than a developmental (age-related) stage**. Through CLI training, teachers learn how to provide appropriate instruction through quality literature so that children can build the **learning base** necessary to succeed in learning to read. **The most effective way to encourage children’s interest in reading, with attendant increases in vocabulary and Concepts About Print, is to read aloud to them from their earliest days.**

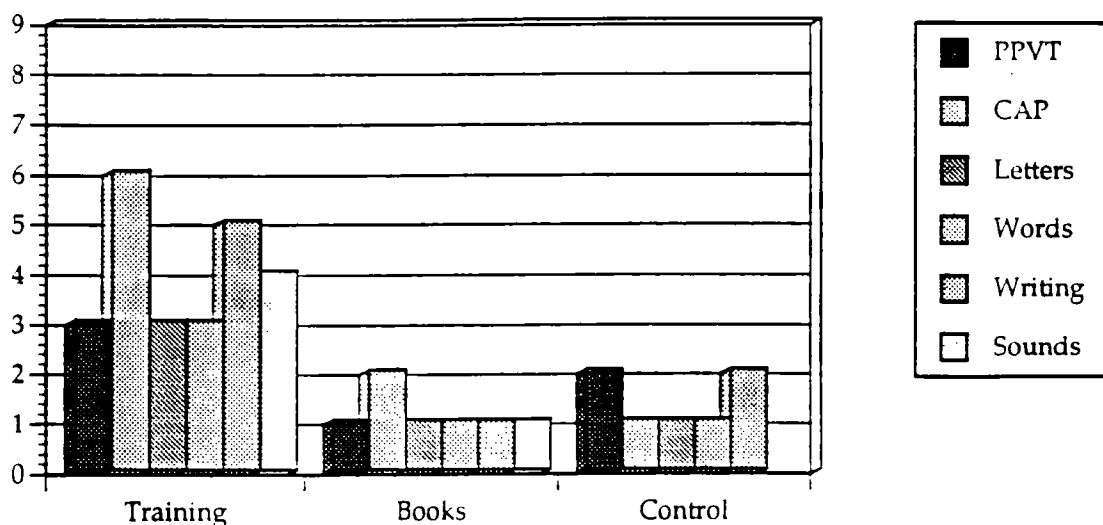
Print-rich kindergarten classrooms dramatically enhance learning.

Anne McGill-Franzen, Ph.D. & Richard Allington, Ph.D.
The University at Albany - SUNY

The Children's Literacy Initiative has effectively demonstrated that the literacy development of urban kindergarten children can be substantially accelerated by enhancing the quality of classroom literacy environments. The CLI Philadelphia Kindergarten Project provided kindergarten teachers in two city schools with approximately 250 children's books for classroom libraries, 130 books for parent lending libraries, over 300 books for children and parents to keep, and classroom literacy supplies. Each teacher received 30 hours of training on reorganizing the school day so that reading to and with children and writing occurred daily — something often missing in too many kindergartens. In two other city schools the kindergarten teachers received the book collections but no training. Two other city schools served as control sites. Kindergarten teachers in these schools received comparable book collections only after the study was completed.

This CLI kindergarten intervention produced statistically significant achievement effects — children enrolled in the CLI Training schools outperformed the children enrolled in both the Books Only and Control schools on every measure. Children's vocabulary achievement was measured on the nationally standardized Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT). Other literacy achievement measures were drawn from the Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (OSELA) — usually used in first grade assessment. The OSELA includes five separate subtests including CAP (concepts about print including directionality, print awareness, book features, and so on), letter names, word reading, writing from dictation, and hearing sounds in words (phonemic awareness).

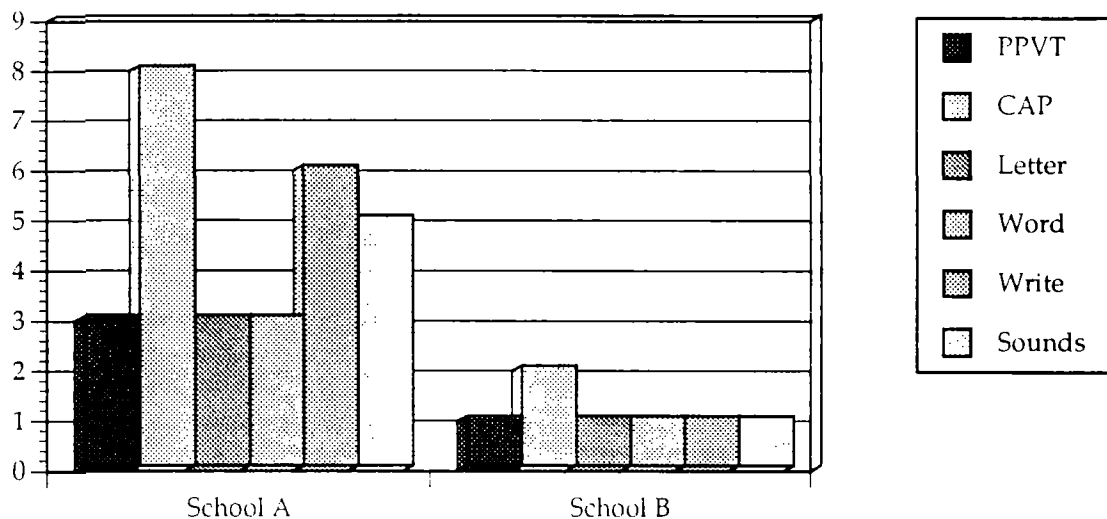
The end-of-year achievement for each set of schools is displayed below. Note that all OSELA norms are for American first grade students, the group for whom this assessment was primarily designed. Thus, a 6th stanine score, for instance, achieved by the Training classroom children on the CAP, represents a performance comparable to that of an average first grader or slightly better (stanine ranks of 4, 5, and 6 are considered within the normal achievement band).



There were large achievement differences at the end of the school year (and achievement did not differ between schools when the children were pretested in September/October). The CLI training intervention consistently and cost-effectively produced superior literacy learning (across every achievement measure). In fact, on every assessment the kindergartners from the Training schools approached or achieved scores comparable to normally achieving beginning American first graders!

Early literacy development is critical to later school success. Unfortunately, kindergarten has been largely omitted from discussions of accelerating the literacy development of city school children. When kindergarten programs are restructured so that children experience rich demonstrations of literacy and opportunities to engage in literacy activity, their achievement soars. Every kindergartner in the city deserves such demonstrations and opportunities.

Two Schools, Same Neighborhood, Very Different Outcomes. Another view of the effects of the CLI intervention is through comparison of the outcomes achieved in kindergarten classrooms in schools just eight blocks apart. In both schools better than 2 of 3 children are from low-income families. Neither school has student achievement that ranks among the 75 higher achieving elementary schools in the city. School A was a books and training site and School B was a books only site. Compare the average end-of-year achievement of kindergartner children in these two schools as illustrated below.



At School A, average kindergarten performance is near, at, or above the normal range of achievement for beginning first graders (though these children are just completing kindergarten). At School B, average achievement on every measure except letter name knowledge ranks at the very lowest level possible. Further, average letter name knowledge achievement is in the next to lowest ranking compared to the very high ranking of School A). Remember that these schools are located in the same neighborhood and that the achievement of the kindergarten children enrolled in the two schools did not differ in the fall. The classrooms at School B were supplied with the same children's books as the classrooms at School A. However, School B teachers were not offered the training that the School A teachers received.

These comparisons illustrate two key findings of our study of this program. First, providing a literacy-rich kindergarten experience is an effective early intervention — children's achievement can be dramatically enhanced when kindergarten classrooms are designed to provide consistently rich language and literacy activities. Second, the problem is not simply a materials problem. Supplying classrooms with a large number of children's books had virtually no effect on language and literacy achievement at School B (and no effect in the larger study). In other words, in the kindergarten classrooms we studied both children's access to books and teacher expertise in early literacy development needed enhancement.

It was the kindergarten teachers who received the CLI books and training whose children showed dramatic improvements in every area tested. These outcomes demonstrate the potential of investments in classroom book collections while also developing kindergarten teachers' effective use of books in rich literacy demonstrations within a re-organized daily schedule that provides time for literacy activities. Kindergarten programs can make a difference. The CLI intervention shows the enormous potential benefits of investing to enhance the quality of Philadelphia kindergarten literacy programs.

(November, 1996)

For additional information contact Marcia Moon or Linda Katz at:
CLI, 2314 Market St., Philadelphia PA 19103

Creating a Classroom Literacy Environment



A guide for teachers of
pre-school through second grade



A kindergarten literacy program passes test

Gloria Reid and May Berger knew that something was happening in their kindergarten classrooms at Blankenburg School.

The two were part of the Kindergarten Literacy Intervention Project, research into what effect good books, teacher training and an emphasis on literacy would have on kindergartners. Blankenburg, in West Philadelphia, was one of 50 schools that received 11 three elements, provided by the Children's Literacy Initiative. Two other schools received only books, and another 50 schools got nothing. The results are in. On tests that measure vocabulary, reading and writing skills, the Blankenburg kindergartners outperformed the children in the four other schools by a wide margin.

Reid is elated. A kindergarten teacher for 22 years, she had been to countless workshops. "But this was the first time I found I could use everything they taught us."

Reid had her students increase their writing; she read to them from good books. She and Berger made it a team effort (a key factor to the children's success, Reid believes). They would brainstorm about how

they could increase opportunities for reading.

"Sometimes Berger and I would look at each other with tears in our eyes. Our kids were eating it up. And we were thrilled."

For those of you who like things broken down in dollars and cents, here are a few things to consider:

The school district in Philadelphia spends \$6,000 a year on each child. Each time a child is held back, the school district faces spending an extra \$6,000 to give the child the same instruction.

Think about it: Say that five children who would likely be held back show so much mastery that they continue to first grade on schedule. Result: You don't have to spend

\$30,000 for them to repeat the grade. Here's something else to consider: If those five kindergartners continue to first grade, the incoming kindergarten class automatically is five children smaller. A smaller class gives the teacher a better opportunity to really work with students. Maybe all those children will be promoted on time, too, saving thousands more dollars.

Then the thousands of dollars budgeted for repeating students

could be invested in more books and teacher training in all 257 kindergarten classes in the district, so that success can be duplicated over and over again.

In fact, according to Marcia Moon, codirector of the Children's Literacy Initiative, training, books and supplies cost \$7,000 per classroom — only \$1,000 more than the district spends on each child each year. The program would pay for itself in no time, if you consider that it keeps students from being held back.

The school district is aware of the effects of the program. Patricia D. Harris, executive director of early childhood education for the district, sent a memo to cluster leaders pointing out the results. She recommended that teachers consider the program as they plan their budgets. But it was only a recommendation.

That leaves the decision up to individual schools within the cluster. It is possible that some schools might include it. It's also possible that other schools will pass up the opportunity and use the teacher-training money to attend other seminars and classes that will lead to salary increases. Without a direct mandate from the central office, the Kindergarten Literacy Intervention Project is scattershot at best.

But money is only one standard to measure success. Here's another: If you give this opportunity to kinder-

gartners, you offer them an early taste of success. They'll know the feel of it, and they'll like it and want to repeat it. They'll go into first grade well equipped for the task of learning to read — the key to future academic success. They'll approach it without fear and without hesitation.

My guess is that children who experience success early and often are less likely to become frustrated and angry. I bet if you look into the first grade class of students who were kindergartners in Gloria Reid's class last year, you'll find children who are more self-assured and less disruptive. I bet the first grade teachers also wish kindergarten teachers could have the training.

President Clinton told the nation that he wants every 8-year-old to be able to read. That doesn't mean to start in second grade. Learning begins early — preferably at home with parents reading aloud to their children. (Parental tip: When should you start reading aloud to children? When you start talking to them.)

The results are here for all to see. Immersing kindergartners in a classroom filled with print, books and pencils and instructing teachers in how to begin and build a literacy-rich environment results in children achieving.

It makes sense.



Lucia Herndon
The Family

Children's Literacy Initiative

Grants Received for Head Start Projects

Name of Funder	Amount Received	Date Grant Awarded	Project	Date Project Completed
Abell Foundation	\$5,613	4/18/95	Baltimore Head Start (Cold Spring Family Development Center)	August-November 1995
Advanta Foundation	\$5,000	7/21/95	Montgomery County Initiative (Abington Head Start)	1995-96 school year
Ahmanson Foundation	\$20,000	1996	A second Los Angeles Head Start Training Institute for staff from 3 Delegate Agencies: Los Angeles Urban League, Kedren Community Health Center and Frederick Douglass Child Development Center	1996-97 school year
Annenberg Foundation	\$198,000	1992	Pennsylvania Literacy Training Workshop	February-April 1993
Annenberg Foundation	\$100,000	9/21/94	Los Angeles Head Start Institute	March 1995
Baltimore Gas & Electric	\$15,000 over three years	1/11/95	Book collections for Baltimore Head Start classrooms	ongoing
Casey, Annie E. Foundation	\$19,879	11/6/96	Training and books for 4 Baltimore Head Start Centers (Emily Price Jones and St. Bernadine's Delegate Agencies)	to be completed during the 1996/97 school year
Chase Manhattan Foundation	\$210,000	1/31/92	<i>Gifts of the Season</i> program to purchase books for 300 Head Start centers nationwide	Fall 1992
Chase Manhattan Foundation	\$2,500	11/10/93	Books for New York City Head Start centers	Spring 1994

Name of Funder	Amount Received	Date Grant Awarded	Project	Date Project Completed
Chase Manhattan Foundation	\$5,000	1/13/95	Medgar Evers Head Start, Brooklyn	1995/1996
Chase Manhattan Foundation	\$10,000	11/27/95	Medgar Evers Head Start and Parent Institute, Brooklyn	1995/1996
Colgate Palmolive	\$1,500	3/13/96	New York Head Start (books and training for one center)	1996
Cotsen Family Fund	\$5,000	7/11/95	Program development for Los Angeles Head Start centers following the Training Institute	Fall 1995
Hayden, Charles Foundation	\$6,000	11/13/95	La Peninsula Head Start, NY (books and training for one center)	Spring 1996
Intelligent Electronics	\$15,000	1992	Books and training for 5 Chester County Head Start centers and other subsidized child care programs	1993-94 school year
Intelligent Electronics	\$10,000	7/1/1993	Books for parent lending libraries and writing boxes for 7 Chester County Head Start centers; training and books for Devon, PA Head Start	Fall 1994
Merck and Company	\$26,000	9/1/94	Montgomery County Initiative	1994-95 school year
Merck and Company	\$26,000	8/1/95	Montgomery County Initiative	1995-96 school year
Meridian Bank	\$1,000	8/4/94	Montgomery County Initiative	1994-95 school year

Name of Funder	Amount Received	Date Grant Awarded	Project	Date Project Completed
Montgomery County Foundation	\$1,000	6/20/94	Montgomery County Initiative	1994-95 school year
Montgomery County Foundation	\$1,000	1995	Montgomery County Initiative	1995-96 school year
Pennsylvania Department of Education	\$200,000	1993-94 state budget	Books for Pennsylvania Head Start centers	Summer 1994
Rauch Foundation	\$37,610	2/27/96	Baltimore Head Start Metro Delta Delegate Agency (7 centers)	April-June 1996
Rauch Foundation	\$34,660	7/23/96	Nassau County, NY Head Start	ongoing
Ronald McDonald Children's Charities of Southern California	\$4,500	1/9/96	Book collections for Los Angeles Head Start Delegate Agencies Frederick Douglass Child Development Center and Delta Sigma Theta following the Los Angeles Training Institute	Spring 1996
Sanford Foundation	\$71,000	1991	Books and training for 19 Chester County Head Start centers and other subsidized child care programs	1992-94
Weinberg Foundation, Inc.	\$304,000	7/30/96	Book collections, literacy materials and writing boxes for classrooms and families at Baltimore Head Start centers	ongoing

Name of Funder	Amount Received	Date Grant Awarded	Project	Date Project Completed
Weingart Foundation	\$30,000	6/9/95	Book collections for Los Angeles Head Start Delegate Agencies Frederick Douglass Child Development Center, Delta Sigma Theta and Training Research Foundation (which manage 57 Head Start centers) following the Training Institute	October 1995
Weingart Foundation	\$25,000	9/20/96	A second Los Angeles Head Start Training Institute for staff from 3 Delegate Agencies: Los Angeles Urban League, Kedren Community Health Center and Frederick Douglass Child Development Center	1996-97 school year

In Kind Grants

Name of Funder	Amount Received	Date Grant Awarded	Project	Date Project Completed
Book Publishers and Children's Literacy Initiative	\$15,707	1995-96	Books for Head Start agencies	1995-96

Contracting Agencies

Name of Funder	Amount Received	Date Grant Awarded	Project	Date Project Completed
Baltimore Head Start	\$45,000	3/21/95	Baltimore Head Start Training Institute for Education Coordinators	May 1995
Baltimore Head Start	\$8,379	11/20/96	Books for classrooms and parents	ongoing
Delta Sigma Theta Head Start, Los Angeles, CA	\$3,750	July 1995	Matching funds as part of the Weingart grant to purchase books for classrooms	October 1995
Frederick Douglass Child Development Center, Los Angeles, CA	\$4,000	July 1995	Matching funds as part of the Weingart grant to purchase books for classrooms	October 1995
Thames Valley Council for Community Action Head Start, Norwich, CT	\$2,621	10/10/96	On-site training session for parents and staff; books for classroom collections and families	December 1996
Training Research Foundation, Los Angeles, CA	\$2,375	July 1995	Matching funds as part of the Weingart grant to purchase books for classrooms	October 1995
New York City Head Start	\$274,000	1994-96	Training and book collections for Head Start centers	1994-96
New York City Head Start	\$110,000	1997	Training and book collections for Head Start centers	ongoing

LITERACY FOR ALL CHILDREN

Early literacy: What does "developmentally appropriate" mean?

Anne McGill-Franzen, State University of New York at Albany

This department will focus on children who find learning to read difficult. These children have been tagged with a variety of diagnostic and categorical labels. We are quite certain that these labels are not very useful—too often obscuring children's potential. We will attempt to explore the conventional wisdom that has enveloped our responses to these children and suggest alternative ways for thinking about the challenges these children face in our schools. We believe that all children can become literate with their peers but that attaining this will require us to reformulate literacy instruction. We hope this department will prove useful in this regard and move us closer to meeting the challenge of achieving literacy for all children.

Anne McGill-Franzen
Richard Allington
Department Editors

A year or so ago I attended a reunion of women who, like me, had been legislative fellows sponsored by the Center for Women in Government at the State University of New York at Albany. All of these women are deeply committed to supporting policies that will improve the lives of women and children. I was engaged in a lively debate about the benefits of Federal legislation (U.S. PL 99-457) to increase the participation of "at-risk" 3- to 5-year-old children in early intervention programs for the handicapped. Such children are said to be developmentally

"behind" their peers because of social, emotional, language, or cognitive factors, although their "handicap" may not be precisely identified at this early age. When I said that I didn't believe in identifying children as disabled before they had even experienced whatever it was they were supposed to learn, I was asked: "Aren't you a developmentalist?" The question gave me pause.

Would a developmentalist isolate children who already know a lot about written language and literacy from those who do not? Does a developmentalist believe that early school programs can be powerful equalizers of children's literacy experiences so that all children achieve with their peers? Or does a developmentalist believe that there has to be a "bottom" group and children who fail because they're "not ready"?

As it turns out, *developmental learning* or *developmentally appropriate instruction* are the new buzz words for educating young (and not so young) children. Like all buzz words, "developmentally appropriate instruction" can have multiple interpretations.

There are few who would quibble with the argument that children differ from each other in important ways. As research studies have demonstrated again and again, children differ in language use and social competence, children differ in their memory for what we as teachers view as important, and children differ in the attention they are willing to invest in the tasks we present

as our literacy curriculum. Most important, I would argue that children differ in the personal literacy histories they bring to school and families differ in the resources they have to promote the educational well-being of their children.

In her book, *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*, psychologist Marilyn Adams (1990) tells us that middle-class children typically come to school with thousands of hours of guidance about print—story-book reading, message writing, letter identification, and so on—from parents, preschool teachers, educational toys, and television, whereas less advantaged children may have no such experiences. Nonetheless, all parents—regardless of social class—value education for their children. The sociologist Annette Lareau (1989), for example, suggests in her book that the "home advantage" enjoyed by children of the middle and upper classes is not money per se, but rather parents' knowledge of how schools work. Like middle-class parents, working-class parents expect their young children to learn to read in first grade. However, working-class parents usually are not able to compensate at home when the first-grade curriculum turns out to be weak or their children have trouble keeping up.

In short, there are real differences in the development and histories of children. If we want to personalize our instruction, engage children, and make

them feel valued, these differences *must* inform what we do and say in our interactions with children. Yet these differences should not become the rationale for not teaching all children whatever it is they need to know to participate fully in the literate culture of our schools.

A trap for poor children?

I believe there is a trap in the concept of *developmental appropriateness*. Not long ago, the National Association for the Education of Young Children broadly defined *developmental appropriateness* as a concept related to both "predictable sequences of growth and change that occur in [most] children during the first 9 years of life" and to the "individual pattern and timing of growth, as well as individual personality, learning style, and family background" (1986, p. 5). In practice, however, developmental appropriateness has been interpreted to mean that reading and writing are "academic skills" that do not belong in child-centered early childhood programs and that there is no role for adult modeling or teaching in so-called "active" learning environments. Artificial dichotomies that pit academic learning against social learning, direct-instruction versus activity-based models, and academics versus child development have been set up. As the early childhood researcher Susan Robinson (1990) found, preschool teachers are reluctant to display print, read extended stories, or allow children to write because they are not sure these trappings of our literate culture are appropriate for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds. Unfortunately for poor children, the restrictions of such developmentally appropriate practices are most burdensome for them. Private nursery schools and other early childhood programs can and do teach whatever they please, often providing instruction in not only written English but also, say, some Spanish or French, and perhaps the Hebrew alphabet or a few Chinese words as well. By contrast, in many publicly funded early childhood programs for poor children it is considered developmentally inappropriate to display the letters of the English alpha-

bet or even to sing the alphabet song. One African-American teacher told me that Head Start doesn't believe in teaching kids to write:

The goal is self-esteem. Maybe 25 years ago when they started the program children were so delayed they needed a whole year of social skills. That's not the case now. The program assumes the children are stupid.... There's no money for books and paper...circle time is not supposed to last longer than 10 minutes...and they are not supposed to do whole group activities.

Yet this same teacher noted that children were screened both in preschool and in kindergarten for developmental benchmarks such as being able to retell stories and print some letters of the alphabet. When children perform poorly, it is attributed to their delayed development or disability, rather than to the paucity of experiences and opportunities to explore written language and literary understandings.

Developmental metaphors: Flowers or scaffolds?

For some Piagetian psychologists or Gesell developmentalists, children's development is biologically fixed and the timetable cannot be influenced by instruction. Teachers may be admonished not to tamper with the unfolding maturation of the child. For those who hold this view, to say that development may be accelerated is to propose the unthinkable.

In fact, the contemporary "hot-house" metaphors of the late 1980s and early 1990s not only espouse this position, but they are indeed reminiscent of much earlier times. Amariah Brigham, an influential 19th-century physician, and many of his turn-of-the-century peers believed that "cultivating intellectual faculties of children before they

are six or seven" would harm body and soul:

Early mental excitement will serve only to bring forth beautiful but premature flowers, which are destined soon to wither away, without producing fruit. (cited in Kaestle & Vinovskis, 1980, p. 59)

According to these doctors, more than an hour of school for children under 8 years old would induce the "morbid condition of precocity," which could lead to "imbecility or premature old age." Arnold Gesell, an influential physician of the next century, related human development to "neural ripening," and a prominent progressive educator of the same time period, Carleton Washburne, identified the mental age of 6½ years as the optimal time to begin to teach reading. Over the years, these theories have persisted within certain school communities even though no credible evidence supports them. As late as 1988, David Elkind, early childhood educator and author of several books on the "hurried child" and "miseducation" of children, cited Washburne's 1930s work as testimony to the wisdom of teaching children to read at 7 or 8 years old, rather than at younger ages.

Unfortunately, in our culture, a child who is 8 years old and not a reader is a child in deep trouble at school. The irony of it all is that no child needs to be in that kind of trouble. We are so much smarter now than we were in the 1800s and the early 1900s about how children come to literacy. We know now that reading instruction does not start in preschool, or kindergarten, or first grade. We learn to read, as Frank Smith says, from "the company we keep," and children are in the company of adults from the moment they are born.

Literacy for All Children is a column focusing on children who find learning to read difficult. Send questions, comments, or suggestions about the column to Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen, Department of Reading, State University of New York at Albany, Education 333, 1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12222, USA.

Vygotskian psychologists, also developmentalists, would agree with Smith. They believe that instruction should move ahead of development and pull it along. By talking with grownups and capable peers as they go about doing the kinds of things literate people do, children are able to construct meanings for tasks that they could not understand on their own. This modeling or scaffolding enables children to perform tasks that they could not otherwise do. But such instruction actually *transforms* the child's development so that tomorrow the child is able to independently do what he could do *only with assistance* today.

Believing in ourselves as teachers

The interaction between *instruction* and *development* is complex, and an uncontested definition of the relationship does not exist. Nonetheless, our own beliefs about the relationship are extremely important. As researchers Mary Lee Smith and Lorne Shepard (1988) discovered, teachers who hold a nativist view (the flower metaphor) do not believe that they can accelerate development of children who arrive unready for kindergarten. Such teachers urge parents to give children the "gift of time" by holding them out of school for an extra year or by placing them in developmental kindergartens

or other transitional-grade classrooms. These teachers retain children deemed unready to go on and classify them as developmentally delayed and in need of special education services. The nativist perspective might preclude reading to children who prefer to spend all of their time at the sandbox. Children who claim that they cannot write a story or their names might not be invited to explore with paper and pens if we believe that children's thinking passes through invariant stages regardless of how we support their learning.

On the other hand, teachers who hold remedial or interactionist views of development (the scaffold metaphor) revise their instruction, not their expectations for learning, when children are not progressing. These teachers believe in themselves as able to "bring children along." The noted New Zealand educator, Marie Clay, spoke recently in Columbus, Ohio, about the results of early intervention in reading instruction in her country. Clay expressed amazement that between 98 and 99% of all children were able to achieve at the expected level for first grade, and in New Zealand children with learning disabilities and other mild handicaps were not separated from their peers. Trained as a developmental psychologist in the Piagetian tradition, Clay said that she was unprepared for the dramatic way that ap-

propriate *instruction* in reading *accelerated development*.

We should not look at development as something that *limits* what children can accomplish as learners and what we can accomplish as teachers. Rather, the individual and variable development of children is an opportunity to personalize our instruction. As teachers we must celebrate and affirm, but also *extend and elaborate* each child's developing knowledge of written language.

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hramis Chism awaits a response from fellow kindergarten teacher after a day's teaching. May Berger, a word he recognized from the chart. The children at Blair Elementary School in the Center City area are learning to read.

West Phila. kindergartners excel in innovative reading program.

Plot and action spell happy ending

By Richard Jones

PHILADELPHIA

There are no Power Rangers here. Barbie is only so much hollow, robbled plastic. And good ol' Barney right as well be extinct.

But when it comes to books, sucher May Berger's class at Blair Elementary School in West Philadelphia has high standards. No hick and Jans stuff for them. Keep those cartoons, too.

For these kids, it's all about plot and action and vocabulary. The

more complicated the better.

Such are the literary habits of Berger's class. Mind you, these are kindergartners we're talking about.

But this is not just any kindergarten. These kids scored well above the national average as high as the top 10 percent, in fact, in tests measuring early childhood vocabulary, reading and writing skills.

And all this in one of the city's most impoverished neighborhoods, where the odds are so

that some experts give children little chance of excelling, no matter what.

What's going on in May Berger's classroom?

For the last year and half, they've been involved in an experiment conducted by the Children's Literacy Initiative, a Center City-based nonprofit group aimed at improving youngsters' reading skills. The idea was to see if books or intensive teacher training or both would best help kids learn.

So in the fall of 1995, two elementary schools were given high-quality books and additional teacher training, two were given just books, and two maintained business as usual. All were in neighborhoods with similar demographics.

In June, children in all six schools were tested. The results: The schools with no additional resources saw virtually no change; those with just books measured slight improvements; and the scores

See **READING** on E2



Christopher Ford looks for a response from teacher May Berger after recognizing a word. The Blankenburg Elementary Kindergarten, participating in an experiment conducted by the Children's Literacy Initiative, drastically improved word recognition test scores.

Youngsters excel in reading program

READING program for kids at Blankenburg was off the charts. The other school with the same program saw results at most as impressive.

At Blankenburg, the scores had gone from well below the 50 percent mark to the top 10 percent on the Concepts About Print tests, which measure word recognition, aptitude.

"We were blown away," said Linda Katz, a codirector of the Literacy Initiative, who, with research partner Marcia Moon, supervised the study. "In our wildest dreams we didn't expect results like this."

"It's incredible," added Berger, who saw the results firsthand. "All of the children are making progress. They're not all at the same level, of course, but they're all trying. They're looking at words and saying, 'Wow.'"

"The difference in the kids has been amazing. Now, instead of playing with their doll babies, they're reading to their doll babies."

Indeed, the Literacy Initiative's program test results are so striking that the school district has encouraged principals to reorganize their budgets to begin using the program. The plan costs about \$250 per child for books and teacher training.

The program's potential seems particularly relevant as momentum for school reform builds.

This is year three of Superintendent David Bombyek's Children Achieving agenda, which stressed early childhood learning by opening full-day kindergarten in each of the district's 28 schools in September.

And last week, President Clinton in his State of the Union address, called for one million volunteer reading tutors and pledged to hold a conference on early learning this spring.

But don't bother telling about all that with May Berger's students. They just know what books they like and don't like. And that makes this reading stuff isn't as tough as it's cracked up to be.

The meteoric progress did not seem without considerable effort. After more than seven years of research, Katz and her fellow Literacy Initiative researchers developed a program to immerse children in language and foster reading — or, as Katz called it, a "print-rich environment."

So that end, labels were put around Berger's classroom and that of her colleague Gloria Reid, who also took part in the study. So the word **CLOCK** is printed on the big round thing on the wall that tells time, **DOOR** over a that space where students enter the classroom, and **CLOSED** next to the place where they hang their coats.

Bad for with the school district's own Chapter 1 money and funding from the William Penn, Houston and Ford Foundations, the Blankenburg study sought to make literacy an omnipresent part of the kids' lives.

Books were put in just about every space in the room — there are no less than a half dozen shelves or racks in Berger's class — with kids encouraged to not only use them in class but also to take home for reading with parents.

Throw in a variety of other techniques including writing exercises where kids take dictation from teachers, listen to story telling and a computer program to teach letter names, as well as teachers, and you've got the Literacy Initiative program.

"We've always read a book," Berger said. "We've always taught about the three ways to laugh. But this is different. We've learned the concept."

And excited some young literary snobs. Said Berger, "Before the kids were all interested in reading about

the Power Rangers. Now, they say we only read good books."

An intense focus is essential to the program. The emphasis is on high expectations.

"It's all in the expectations," Berger said. "They are little people, but we don't usually talk to them like little people. We say, 'Oh, they're children, they can't do it.' Or 'Let's not stress the little dears.' But if this is expected of them, they will do it."

To be sure, these kids are still more comfortable dealing with the material in *Green Eggs and Ham* rather than *Hamlet*. And they won't be winning any essay contests anytime soon. But the Literacy Initiative folks have the kids aiming high.

And to a large extent, Berger said, it's worked. While most kindergartners may have mastered about 5 or 10 new words at this point in the school year, Berger said her kids are up to at least 30. And, researchers say, that measured proficiency can be traced to something as mundane as the decorations in Berger's class.

The walls inside Room 14 are festooned with labels written in neat print letters, colorful book covers lined up neatly every space, and a selection of children's written assignments hang from a clothesline strung across the room. "On a snowy day, I would play outside for

a long time," wrote Duvell Hill in an out-sized kindergarten script.

The children sit at half-sized chairs around a half-dozen tables in the classroom. And there's a medium shag rug that kids can plop down on for story telling or an assignment called "message time" where Berger fills a chalkboard with words and her students pick out as many as they can.

On a recent morning, the board read, "Message Time. Good morning to all of you. The meteorologist said, 'It will be cold and cloudy this morning.'"

The kids not only picked out words like *good* and *morning*, and even *meteorologist*, they also found words inside words like the "me" in message, the "go" in good, the "in" in morning. In all, they would find 59 words this day. (The record is 117, held by Reid's class.)

"We went from weatherman to weather forecaster to meteorologist," Berger said. These are words you wouldn't expect these kids to understand. But if given them something to talk about, you might not expect kids to know as many words, but they're going to run into it sooner or later in life. Why not now? Now, they can see it and say, 'Oh yeah, we learned that word from Mrs. Berger.'"

Focus, high expectations. High performance. All are necessary elements of the program. Katz said because of what the kids had in skills before they walk into the classroom on the first day of school.

Katz said research has shown that middle-class kids have been read aloud to for about 1,500 hours before they start kindergarten and have as much as 1,300 hours of other literacy activity.

That figure drops to only about 25 hours for poor children — and a recent study showed that 45 percent of Blankenburg's students come from families on welfare.

"These kids already come in with so much to make up, we can't wash time," said Katz, a former librarian who's been with the Literacy Initiative for more than a decade.

And, she said, it's time to reevaluate a tenet held by some educators that such kids just can't do it.

"It's not like this [program] is beyond these kids," she said. "It goes to the premise that all children are intelligent, it's just a matter of what are you going to do with it."



Nadiah Evans studies material in teacher Gloria Reid's class. Items in the kindergarten room are labeled to aid word recognition.