

PEARL™

Providing for Early At-Risk Learners



A PROGRAM DESIGNED TO BRING AT-RISK LEARNERS
"OUT OF THEIR SHELLS"

P. E. A. R. L.

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Learners

A PROGRAM
DESIGNED TO BRING
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“OUT OF THEIR
SHELLS”

BY SUSAN W. OWENS

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DEDICATION

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
TO ALL CHILDREN WHO
HAVE EVER BEEN CALLED
“LAZY, STUPID OR DUMB”
BECAUSE THEY LEARNED
DIFFERENTLY THAN THEIR
PEERS.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Philosophy	vii
Comments about P. E. A. R. L. workshops	viii
Introductory Notes	xiii
Biography	1
Foreword	4
Prologue	7
Chapter I: Causative factors/Program overview	9
Chapter II: Assessment testing for placement in program	21
Chapter III: Prescriptive teaching groups description/ Gross motor prescriptive group	31
Chapter IV: Fine motor prescriptive group	52
Chapter V: Receptive/Expressive language, visual memory, visual perception and auditory processing prescriptive groups	56
Chapter VI: Dominance testing and the role of dominance in learning	65
Chapter VII: Modality testing and the role of modalities in learning (including strategies for A.D.D. and A.D.H.D. students)	83
Chapter VIII: Kindergarten alternative program description	98
Chapter IX: First grade alternative program description	111

Chapter X:	What next? A middle/high school model for at-risk students	140
Chapter XI:	Establishing classroom discipline	146
Chapter XII:	Pearls of wisdom	150
Bibliography		153
Appendix		

PHILOSOPHY

With the increasing numbers of at-risk students (often living in poverty) entering the public education system today, this P. E. A. R. L. program is more necessary than ever. With lower socioeconomic levels, children tend to come from homes with poor prenatal care, inadequate postnatal care and insufficient nutrition. They tend to have lower vocabulary levels due to lack of exposure to many experiences. Now, with the increased use of drugs, tobacco and alcohol, these children have more neurological and learning problems than ever before. It is imperative that we have programs in place to teach them intervention methods and strategies.

It is my belief that if at-risk children are to reach their full potential, we must pinpoint processing (visual, auditory and motor) deficits, strengths and learning styles as early as possible. We must then use this information to write prescriptive strategies for each child.

In simple terms, we must teach at-risk children the “HOW” of learning before they can engage successfully in actual learning.

That means that we must take the time at the beginning of their school careers to teach them critical gross motor, fine motor, language, visual and auditory processing skills before we ask them to begin formal academic learning. If we fail to do so, they will suffer long-term effects later on in their school years. The “window of opportunity” for these preacademic skills is between the ages of three and seven. Therefore, early programs for our youngest at-risk students must strive to include activities for these critical areas.

COMMENTS ABOUT P. E. A. R. L. WORKSHOPS

This past fall, I conducted a series of workshops on my program for teachers and aides. I attempted to explain the philosophy of the program as well as display the diagnostic and evaluative procedures we use in the program. I also gave many practical, easy-to-understand methods and strategies to use with at-risk early learners. I am including comments from the participants in these workshops at North Port Glenallen Elementary School in North Port, Florida.

“You gave staff many effective strategies/activities/beliefs/ideas to ponder and then put into practice. That is the key-putting them into practice.”

Steve Dragon
Elementary school principal

“What a relief to finally have some usable strategies to use with my at-risk students. In college, I learned that I would have to make accommodations for these students but was not taught any strategies. Your P. E. A. R. L. program not only explained many causative factors, but also gave me usable, common sense strategies to help my students.”

Kim Weber
Kindergarten teacher

“Sue, you gave me a new outlook to teaching, just when I was beginning to feel jaded and lacking in spirit. I am now excited and looking forward to a new beginning. I hope the P. E. A. R. L. workshop will one day be part of all teacher-training courses, and that your program will be established for all students, who have special needs, continuing into middle and higher education. Your charismatic presentation covered the full gamut of emotions. I found myself laughing one minute and crying the next. Most importantly, I gained a lot of knowledge and insight into the problems experienced by the at-risk learner.”

Barbara Kessler
Primary E. S. E. teacher

“Easy and effective are the words I would use to describe Sue Owens’ methods. Sue is one of the most knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers I have ever met. She is definitely a Master Teacher.”

Sharon Reisen
Kindergarten teacher

“I found that I not only learned many new strategies to use in my classroom but also gained insight into my own learning style. I have already started to implement some of the strategies I have learned from your workshop. As a recent college graduate, I can tell you they are not teaching this valuable information at the universities.”

Traci Jopke
Kindergarten teacher

“I gained new knowledge that I was able to put into practice almost immediately. Many workshops focus on statistics and facts. Although you provided valuable statistical information, you backed it up with functional ways to help our students. You taught me new and exciting ways to reach my students.”

Robyn O’Toole
Speech-language pathologist

“Sue Owens communicates her passion for teaching children with special needs and reaches into the hearts of her colleagues to also impassion them. These sessions emphasized the importance of meeting a child’s emotional needs as well.”

Kim Morningstar
Speech-language pathologist

“What a huge difference we would see if the teachers would incorporate just a few of your ideas and beliefs into their daily routine. I was moved by your knowledge and compassion for children.”

Stephanie Schaub
Teacher’s aide, First grade

“You reminded me of things I am doing right and ways that I can help improve the program for our children. I also learned about risk factors to look out for that cause learning problems and what to do to overcome these problems.”

Arlene Ramsey
Teacher’s aide, Preschool V.E.

“I think all teachers and aides should take this course. It should be mandatory. Teachers are so concerned with papers, papers, instead of the individual child. I had a fantastic learning experience.”

Tereses Potier
Teacher’s aide, Primary E.S.E.

“I was hired this school year not to serve as a regular classroom teacher but rather to provide extra help to kindergarten students who were at-risk of failure. I was invited to attend Mrs. Owens’ workshop series on the teaching of at-risk students and realized at once that this was exactly the information and ideas that I needed. I feel that this workshop series has been quite beneficial, especially considering the nature of my current assignment. I feel privileged and fortunate to have been able to participate in it.”

Sally Lehman
At-risk kindergarten teacher

“I use the 3M’s of Music, Motor, and Make-believe and your class has fired up my resolve to do even more especially in musical rhyme and exercises in cross-dominance.”

Rita Freeman
Preschool teacher

“I learned more about spotting children’s specific problems and how to help them cope in this class than all of the other classes I have taken.”

Pat Staab
Preschool teacher

“Your understanding of your students and your willingness to go the extra mile for them and with them is truly heartwarming. Speaking of heart,

it is obvious that your teaching comes from your heart which is something toward which our profession should strive.”

Pam VanTilburg
Second grade teacher

“I have learned so much about how to help kids become the best they can be. I have also become a better student myself by realizing my own dominance and learning modality strengths.”

Carolee Meinzer
Teacher’s aide, Kindergarten

“I have implemented more movement activities into my lessons and have been having my students cross the midline whenever possible. I feel I am better able to meet my students’ needs because of the information you have shared with us.”

Sandy Kouba
Kindergarten teacher

“Your workshop opened my heart to the ways children learn and the many obstacles that we as educators can put on them. Your enthusiasm toward the various strategies that involve the modalities of learning is contagious.”

Diane Schroedter
Title I second grade teacher

“This was one of the best classes I have taken in my 20 years of teaching. I learned how important the role of dominance and modalities come into play for providing the optimum teaching conditions for each child. I also learned how vital it is to teach children the “how” of learning before they can engage in actual learning.”

Christa Richmond
First grade teacher

“Your program is the perfect formula for Pre-K through middle school, and your suggestions for work programs in high school are winners for students, parents and the community.”

Anna Derrick
Preschool V.E. teacher

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

It is not my purpose to write a sophisticated educational journal. However, I can share the ideas, feelings, strategies and methods I have experienced in the classroom for thirty-four years. It has been in the past six years of developing and implementing this P. E. A. R. L. program, that I have truly felt that I am seeing dramatic gains in the academic and emotional growth of my early at-risk learners. Therefore, I feel a responsibility to share this program with other teachers and parents who struggle daily to raise test scores as well as self-esteem in our youngest at-risk learners.

I was also motivated to write this book by teachers from other schools who came to observe my program. After observing our kindergarten and first grade classes, they would always say they were fascinated by the methods and strategies we utilized. They would say our techniques were unique and quite interesting. They would also say, "This is too much to absorb in one visit. You need to write a book for teachers explaining these creative and innovative approaches you use." This is a "how-to" book for teachers, aides, parents and those who volunteer in our schools or outside of them helping all students learn.

The reader may find some of the terms and concepts used unfamiliar and uncomfortable initially. The reader will find repetition of ideas and practices in the text. In some instances, this repetition exists because exercises used in a different context can help a student develop varied skills. Other times, the repetition exists to reinforce and remind the reader of ideas and procedures making it easier for the teachers to incorporate them into their everyday routine.

My wish for teachers and students is to have an enjoyable learning experience, one they look forward to engaging in and naturally apply in all of their educational experiences. My main purpose in writing this book is to truly endeavor to "make school fun for everyone!"

For ease of reading, I have used the feminine gender (she, her, etc.) when referring to the teacher and the masculine (he, his, etc.) when referring to the student. I have also underlined various materials and tests for emphasis and to draw reader's attention to them.

BIOGRAPHY

I have never wanted to do anything but teach school. There were many teachers in my family including my mother. Spending a lot of time in her classroom, before and after school, led me at an early age to decide that I would teach.

I was also motivated by the fact that my good friend, Bertha, was an epileptic. When I saw the teasing and torment that she endured during her school years, I resolved that I would be a champion for those children who were different. Therefore, I decided that I would go into Special Education and make a difference for those children whose lives were so difficult.

I graduated from Slippery Rock State Teacher's College in Pennsylvania in 1966. I had a degree in Elementary Education with a minor in Special Education. I first taught Educable Mentally Handicapped students for seven years. This was a wonderful place to begin my career. I was constantly searching and experimenting with new strategies and methods to help me teach these special children. During this time I developed great compassion for those children who were different. It happened one day when I took my children into the hall for a drink. While standing in line at the drinking fountain, another class passed by. I was horrified and shocked when all my children turned their heads toward the wall and tried to cover their faces. They realized that everyone in the school viewed our class as the "retarded" class. I do believe that after 34 years in education, I have been able to make my classroom so enjoyable that children have been happy and proud to be a member of my class. I've always tried to make school fun. As one parent wrote to me and said, "Your class is so much fun that before the children know it, it's too late. They've already learned it." I have never lost the compassion that I established as a 21-year-old idealist who was going to save the world. Now, as I face retirement, I realize that I must leave a small legacy for those who come after me and perhaps inspire them to develop that same compassion.

After returning from a maternity leave in 1973, I was assigned to develop the first Specific Learning Disabilities class in our tri-county area of western Pennsylvania. Since there were no college resources available for me, again I had to experiment and research to find methods and strategies to help these children. They were quite different from my Educable Mentally Handicapped students. Their learning styles and problems presented a new challenge for me. They seemed so bright and capable but yet had such problems acquiring and retaining academic skills. They were so much more

frustrated than my former students were. That frustration came from the fact that they fully realized their shortcomings but had no idea of the reasons why they could not succeed like their peers. These children were hard working and determined to succeed, but for them, academic success was a constant struggle. Their frustrations and fears over learning problems often became the source of emotional problems. It was then that I realized that if these children were to succeed, their environment had to be as supportive and non-threatening as possible.

My family relocated to Florida in 1981. I taught middle school Specific Learning Disabilities. During this time I developed empathy and understanding of the older at-risk student. Many of them were on a second or third grade reading level. They had few writing skills and severe language and comprehension problems. By this age level, their problems had become so severe that they were unable to succeed in any of their classes. Many of them had extreme family problems which only increased their inability to cope. The combination of learning problems as well as personal problems caused them to be in trouble quite often at school. They were often suspended for fighting or misconduct in class. Most of them had begun a downward spiral which could not be stopped. For them, school was just one disappointment after another. Many of them had developed a tough outer shell which insulated them against all the hurt and frustration that they experienced daily.

I then returned to elementary school. I taught Title I classes for fourth graders for six years. I was then asked by my principal to teach regular second and third grades. What a thrill to be able to work with children who could learn so easily. This was the first time in my career that I had an opportunity to work with above-average students. I found it truly unbelievable that I could teach without many interruptions and that the children could master the curriculum so easily. I was able to do so many creative activities because I did not have to spend every moment on teaching basic skills.

After teaching regular classes, I was requested to make another change. My principal asked that I teach an E. S. O. L. (English Speakers of Other Languages) class for students with limited English proficiency. I was thrilled by the eagerness and thirst for knowledge that these young immigrants showed. They were so motivated and success-oriented that they made fantastic gains. The one thing that struck me the most about these students was their ability to pay attention and comprehend what was being taught. When I moved around the room, every eye stayed focused on me. It was the first time in my career that this was true. They also could

concentrate for long periods of time and focus completely on the task before them. This will remain as one of my most rewarding teaching assignments.

Six years ago, I was asked to change course again. My principal asked that I develop a program for our at-risk early learners using many of the strategies that I had learned in my years of teaching special children. She wanted a program that would truly impact their learning and yet maintain their self-esteem. I agreed and wrote the P. E. A. R. L. program. I am currently utilizing the program to teach the kindergarten and first graders.

As I look back over my 34 years in education, I realize most of my enthusiasm and zeal for my job came from the fact that I have changed grade levels, assignments, methods and strategies so frequently. I have never taught the same class the same way for more than one year. Every year has been a new and exciting challenge. Having taught every grade level from kindergarten through eighth grade, I perhaps have a broader perspective than most teachers do. I have moved my classroom 22 times in 34 years. Therefore, I've never become rigid or inflexible.

When I think of my first class so many years ago at the drinking fountain, covering their heads out of shame and frustration, I realize that I have never lost the desire to make every student in my class not only proud of who they were, but also where they were.

It's been a long exciting journey, but I would not have changed it for anything. I know when I leave this earth as a teacher and I stand before the Eternal Superintendent of Schools, He will be more interested in how I treated each and every student than how I raised test scores.

FOREWORD

With the recent school violence and our public schools under siege, everyone is asking, “How can this be happening?” and, “What can cause a child to be so desperate and disillusioned with life that he would take such drastic measures?” Many are having conferences and services to find answers. Talk shows, T.V. news magazines and other forms of media are filled with experts trying to help us find solutions. Recently, President Clinton held a conference at the White House to discuss the problem and find solutions. Every time I see these children’s faces on the evening news, I too, feel I must do something to help this horrific situation plaguing our schools and our society itself.

I have decided to write this book with the hope that some of my ideas will make things better for children who are at-risk in classrooms across America. Although this book is for dealing with the at-risk child, the ideas and strategies will make school better for all children. When the most needy in a school have programs that work for them, all children in that school benefit. The tone of the entire school changes when the at-risk students are engaged actively in programs that meet their needs and do not defame their self-concepts.

For too long in America, we have tried to make kids fit programs rather than having programs that fit kids. This system must change if we are going to move into the twenty-first century with a public school system that is not just existing, but flourishing and prospering. Compulsory education for all in America has been a cornerstone of our great democracy. It has enabled us to become the greatest nation in the history of mankind. With assailants at our doors, public education needs to better meet the needs of “today’s child.” If we fail to do so, our very system of government and way of life may disappear. What makes America special will certainly be gone forever.

We can no longer “stay the course” and continue to do the same thing. Throwing more money at educational programs is not always the answer. Title I, which is run by the federal government, has been the foundation of compensatory education in the country since 1965. Once a school reaches 50% of its students on free or reduced lunch, it becomes a school-wide Title I school. Other Title I funds reach almost every school system in the nation.

However, in 1984, the project director of the first longitudinal study of Title I students released very sobering news. “The federal program which spent \$40 billion in the first two decades to close the achievement gap

between low income students and their more affluent peers has little long-term impact. Elementary students who received Title I assistance performed slightly better on standardized tests than disadvantaged youngsters who went without the services, but the benefits didn't last. By the time students reached junior high school, there was no sustained delayed effect of Title I," Launor Carter, director of the study, wrote in August/September 1984 issue of *Education Researcher*. Thirteen years and some \$78 billion later, another longitudinal study of Title I (known through most of the 1980's and early 1990's as Chapter I) has reached the same discouraging conclusion. "We cannot discern any 'compensatory' effect over time associated with Chapter I participation," declared the final report of the four-year study conducted by Abet Association, a Maryland-based research firm. (1997)

Thus many scholars, teachers and parents have come to the same disappointing conclusion: "The federal government's largest K-12 program was failing to help children overcome the impact of poverty on school achievement." (1997)

Carter and his fellow researchers suggested that Title I fell short of expectations because money went to whatever interventions local officials wanted – not necessarily to what worked. "Because the instruction was often remedial and given in pull-out programs, the average Title I student did not receive any extra attention from the teacher. And what special help disadvantaged students did get was often from less experienced teachers than those in the classrooms they had been pulled from."

"Title I did not represent a unified or coherent treatment program. It is an amalgam of many different programs, practices and services. Title I is a hodgepodge of whatever local officials wanted to do," Carter wrote.

Most recent data released in 1999 showed again that the program failed to close the gap between high-achieving students and Title I students, even though over 11 million students were served by the Title I program.

The choice is therefore clear. We can either perpetuate programs, which may not work, or we can begin to plan programs that work by using common sense, reality and research. The future of the public school system is at stake. We can no longer wait for these programs to cure themselves. It will take a force of dedicated teachers and committed administrators if we are to succeed. Perhaps, most importantly, it will take federal and state legislatures encouraging the individual schools (based on knowledge of their at-risk students) to plan and execute unified programs that truly work for their early at-risk students. From the White House to the State House to the schoolhouse, changes must be made! Currently kindergarten teachers are under tremendous pressure to begin prereading, reading, and writing skills

with their students. Although this might make sense for the average or above-average student, it makes no sense to start the at-risk students (perhaps with a mental age of three or four) into pure academics without attempting to develop prerequisite skills first. They have not learned the “how” of learning so they will have extreme difficulty in actual learning. In the past when kindergarten dealt more with the six critical areas of gross motor skills, fine motor skills, auditory processing, visual processing, receptive and expressive language, the students learned the basics of the “how” of learning before being expected to actually learn. However, these areas are now often excluded from the kindergarten curriculum. These areas form the foundation of all learning which will come later. If these skills are not built as the foundation, the house will surely collapse later under the burden of academics for which it is so poorly prepared. Who would ever think of putting on the roof of a house before pouring a solid foundation and putting up sturdy walls? Yet this is exactly what we are doing with many of our at-risk students in America today.

Another important aspect of this dilemma is the child’s self-concept. These students who are not ready for academics will suffer tremendously when they are expected to do tasks which are impossible for them. Their peers begin to ridicule them and view them as “dumb, lazy or stupid.” Their own parents, after many conferences at school, may also begin to feel that way about them. Thus, the downward spiral has begun. Lessons and perceptions learned early in life tend to stay with us forever. The child then truly begins to feel that he must be “lazy, stupid or dumb.” Everybody else can’t be wrong.

Many illiterate adults will openly state that their problems began with being labeled at an early age with one of these three adjectives. Only many years later do they realize that they are smart, capable and able to accomplish great things with their lives. The years of humiliation and fear can never be erased. We must prevent these problems early so that the next generation does not suffer the same fate.

When I came up with the concept of the P. E. A. R. L. program, these were the exact students I had in mind. These are the students who come to school poorly prepared (through no fault of their own) and are viewed as ugly, rough oyster shells. With appropriate programs, supportive teachers and parents, these oyster shells can be opened to expose the beautiful pearl inside each one. It is the responsibility of everyone in education to see that this happens. The time is short, the need is great!

PROLOGUE

I would like you to go on a journey with me. For a moment, close your eyes and transpose yourself to M. I. T. enrolled in a class of nuclear physics. The professor, Dr. Owens, is on loan from Stanford for the semester. She has thirty years of experience in the field and is also known as, “the mother of modern nuclear physics.”

She wastes no time and quickly begins with a transparency of the atom and its basic components. Since she is assured in her mind that everyone in the class has prior knowledge of these rudimentary principles, she moves quickly to the next transparency, which deals with fusion and fission. She then quickly asks the class to list their attributes, similarities and differences. Everyone in the class begins to write feverishly to complete the assignment because they have the prerequisite skills necessary to complete it. You realize that you don’t have a clue as to what she is asking you to do. You are as they say - “clueless!”

After weeks and weeks of this scenario being played out, you will probably react in one of three ways. First, you just sit there, being passive, acting sweetly and trying not to call any attention to yourself. Second, you start sneaking in magazines to copy recipes. This is something you can do that is relevant to your life. Third, you may (out of complete frustration and feelings of inadequacy) start wandering to the restroom and perhaps even muttering to yourself. You may also begin to wisecrack, call out and interrupt instruction. So, to survive, you learn a way of coping to make it through the entire semester of frustration, self-concept destruction and feeling completely out of control of your learning.

Now transpose yourself to the first day of school, assuming the role of an at-risk kindergarten student. Your teacher, Mrs. Owens, has thirty years of experience in teaching. The first task she asks you to complete is, “Go beside the calendar and point to today’s date with your right hand.” However, being an at-risk learner, you are not prepared to complete this task which seems so easy for Mrs. Owens and the rest of the class. You simply stand there, “clueless!”

Why can’t you follow and complete this assignment? First, because of an inadequate vocabulary level, you may not know what a calendar is. Second, because of poor receptive language skills, you are not sure where beside is. Third, because of poor laterality skills, you are not sure which is your right hand. Fourth, because of poor gross motor skills, you trip on your way to the front of the room. Last, because of poor auditory memory skills,

you can't remember the entire command. You only heard the first part. So you stand there frozen, unable to complete this task. It's not that you won't do it, you can't do it!

However, you're in an even worse spot than you were at M. I. T. Mrs. Owens gives you a disapproving look, the other kids snicker at you, and when you sit down in your seat, they move their desks away from you. Perhaps someone even calls you, "dummy." Added to your misery as a young student, you are faced with another element. You must go home and face your parents.

When you get home from school, your mother says those dreaded words. "Your teacher called today and said you are refusing to follow classroom procedures. Now go to your room and no dinner or T.V. tonight." And those other dreaded words, "Just wait till your father gets home!" When your dad gets home after working a double shift, (and just finding out that he might be laid off next week) he explodes and lets out all his frustration on you. He screams at you and says, "You are lazy and dumb! If you don't shape up, you will never amount to anything!" He may even take off his belt and give you three or four lashes just to assure that you try harder and do better tomorrow.

After weeks and weeks of the same misery, you most likely will react in one of the three ways described earlier in the M. I. T. scenario: First, you sit there, act sweetly and try to be inconspicuous. Second, you stick that Matchbox car or Power Ranger figure in your pocket so you have something relevant to your life which you can do. Third, out of pure fear and frustration, you become disruptive by making frequent trips to the restroom, wandering around the room, calling and acting out. Now you not only have a learning problem, but a behavior problem.

Many of these at-risk children who enter school will find themselves in this predicament. To them, kindergarten is M. I. T. and the activities planned for them might as well be nuclear physics. Without recognizing, evaluating, and at least attempting to remediate these deficit areas, and also teaching these kids coping and compensatory skills, we shall continue to fill up our E. S. E. (Exceptional Student Education) programs. Our dropout rates will remain high, and many discipline problems will continue to move from the school system to the prison system. We must do something different to intervene early and plan diagnostic, prescriptive programs that work.

CHAPTER ONE

CAUSATIVE FACTORS

As I mentioned in my Foreword, we can no longer “stay the course” with remedial programs in this country. Today’s child, as never before, begins school with a plethora of problems that would have been unimaginable 30 or 40 years ago. At that time, kindergarten students entering school tended to have mental age gaps of two to three years between the most ready and the least ready. Today at our school we are seeing mental age gaps of five years between the highest and lowest performing kindergarten students. My colleagues often ask why so many students come to school so poorly prepared for academic learning.

The child of today has more emotional, social, physical and neurological problems than the child of yesteryear. In an attempt to help teachers and parents understand the underlying reasons for all these problems, I have compiled a list of causative factors that may help to explain some of the reasons why many children are so poorly prepared for kindergarten and continue to do poorly in school. Everyone must be aware of these factors if we are to understand these early learners and provide worthwhile educational programs for them.

Causative factors: (Prenatal)

1. **Drug use:** Alcohol, smoking and drug use among parents have risen dramatically. Many fetuses today are exposed to these damaging substances which were not so prevalent years ago. F. A. S. (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome) children suffer from their mother’s overuse of alcohol during pregnancy. “Crack babies” are the result of mothers using drugs during pregnancy. Some research has shown that women who are heavy smokers during pregnancy tend to have children with lower IQs. Research is now showing that use of these substances by the father may also affect the fetus. The majority of these children will demonstrate poor language development, impulsivity, short attention span, delayed gross motor skills, speech problems and decreased self-control. These children are challenging the public school system which must provide a worthwhile education for them.

2. **Higher teenage pregnancy rate:** Teen pregnancies tend to result in lower birth weights. Also, due to fear and shame, many of these young mothers do not receive adequate prenatal care. They may suffer extreme emotional and psychological stress which may affect their unborn child. They may also lack the maturity and skills to adequately care for their baby.
3. **Trauma during pregnancy:** With the increase of domestic violence, pregnant women, more than ever, are often the victims of physical punishment and abuse which can harm the fetus. Along with the physical punishment, the emotional and psychological stress suffered by these women can be overwhelming. I do not believe that anyone can truly and fully evaluate the full extent of these problems on the unborn child.
4. **Oxygen depravation:** Due to complications at birth, fetuses suffer from oxygen deprivation at the time of delivery. Years ago, many of these babies would not have survived. Medical advances are saving more of them today. This may also result in developmental and learning problems.
5. **Premature babies:** Due to advancements in neonatal care, many more premature babies survive today. Of approximately 450,000 premature babies born annually in this country, an estimated 50 percent will have lingering problems. Most premature babies will have some developmental lags up until the age of eight. This group of children also requires a different approach in their early years as they are often delayed in many areas.
6. **Depression:** With so many children born to teenage and single mothers, depression and resultant stress factors must also be considered. These young mothers, many of whom must work during their entire pregnancy, may suffer from clinical depression. Again, the full ramification of these problems is unknown.

Causative factors: (Postnatal)

1. **Lack of nurturing and bonding:** Mothers who must return to work almost immediately after birth of the child often fail to truly bond with the newborn. This may also lead to a lack of nurturing on the part of the mother. The long-term results of this situation may lead to future problems.
2. **Under stimulation of the newborn:** Many newborns are placed almost immediately in daycare centers. Even the best cannot replace the constant stimulation and nurturing required for optimal brain development. Without adequate stimulation, the brain does not fully develop. Newborn babies must be caressed, touched, talked to, played with and sung to. Otherwise, their dendrites, the branched parts of the nerve cell which transmit impulses, fail to develop. Research done on orphaned Bosnian babies showed underdevelopment of their brains attributed to this lack of stimulation.
3. **Poor gross motor development:** Gross motor skills do not develop properly when children are put right from the crib, to a walker, to a car seat to a swing. Overstressed busy parents follow hectic schedules which prevent them from letting their toddlers investigate and explore their environments. These toddlers are not given ample opportunities to investigate, crawl and explore. They are often put where they are safe and require the least amount of attention. Crawling is a major building block of coordination. When children skip this important step, the long-term effects may be harmful. In many unsafe neighborhoods, outdoor play for children is almost nonexistent. Even in the safest neighborhoods, busy schedules prevent extensive outdoor exercise. This lack of activity and exercise for American children may prove to be extremely costly in the future. It has been estimated that 40 percent of American children between the ages of five and eight already have one heart-risk factor.
4. **Poor nutrition:** Many children today have diets which tend to be high in sugars, processed food, carbohydrates and low in fresh fruits and vegetables as well as proteins, calcium and whole grain foods. Undernourished bodies may well lead to underdeveloped minds.

5. **Lack of experiences:** Without family trips to airports, farms, zoos and museums, children often lack the experiential background necessary for prereading skills. Also, without creative play, many children do not develop the imagination and creativity to do well in school. All of these early experiences help the child to develop adequate vocabulary as well as an experiential background necessary for proper language and reading skills development.
6. **Poor fine motor skills:** Fine motor skills lag in many of these children because they are not given ample opportunity to color, cut, trace, do puzzles or play with blocks. Fine motor activities have been replaced with television watching or video games.
7. **Underdeveloped language and prereading skills:** Nursery rhymes and children's songs are often not taught to preschoolers. Children who have not been read to frequently may also have lags in their ability to acquire language and reading skills.
8. **Television watching:** Some estimates have shown that by the time a child enters kindergarten, he may have watched as much as five thousand hours of television. He may have engaged in this activity more than any other, except sleeping. Long hours of watching television may cause two conditions. The first is when the eyes stay locked into a fixed position and do not respond adequately to visual stimuli other than the television. The second condition is when the child associates no true meaning to the auditory stimuli presented. Both of these conditions will adversely affect classroom performance and academic achievement later.
9. **Lack of meaningful conversation with adults:** Truly meaningful discussions with parents are critical to the child's language development as well as auditory skills. Recent studies reveal that, on average, parents may spend only two minutes a day in worthwhile conversation with their children. Children need to be questioned and then expected to give answers that are relevant and worthwhile. This lack of discussion and conversation will hamper the child in school. Oral language skills must be developed at all stages. Without this development, the child will suffer greatly in the classroom environment. Adequate sentence structure and oral language skills are prerequisites for all language acquisition.

10. **Lags in auditory analysis skills:** Children who watch too much television will tend to have very poor listening skills. After years of blocking out the background noise of a television, they attach very little meaning to auditory stimuli. Therefore, when they enter school, they find it very difficult to follow directions given by the teacher. They may also have great difficulty paying attention to oral activities. They may not be able to sit and listen for long periods of time to a story or class discussion. It has been estimated that one-third of specific learning disabled students have some type of auditory problem. Another problem is the fact that busy parents tend to repeat directions many times. Thus, the child does not respond immediately to that direction. When the child does not respond immediately, the parent may often scream or holler the direction. This will also foster poor listening skills in young children. For optimal following direction development, the direction needs to be given once in a clear and calm voice.
11. **Lags in visual analysis skills:** Children who watch too much television will also tend to have poor visual analysis skills. Because of the constant staring at a television screen, their eyes may not track properly. Many have developed a “glazed-over” look. They may be unable to discriminate, sequence or remember visual stimuli. All of these inabilities will hamper their learning. Children with poor visual memory will experience great difficulty in remembering words in reading and spelling. This may be due to the lack of time spent looking at pages in a book and then answering questions by studying the pictures. This type of visual analysis development is critical to reading and language skills.
12. **Stress due to family problems:** Arguments and fighting between parents often leave the child with guilt and insecurity. He feels that in some way it is his fault that his parents fight. Verbal, physical and psychological abuse lead to mental instability and a lack of a sense of well-being in the child. This can lead to depression and a complete sense of hopelessness. Violence witnessed at home can often lead to aggressive behavior in school. A burgeoning divorce rate in this country also adds to the problem. When one parent moves out, the child may constantly worry about that parent. Feelings of abandonment and betrayal follow the child from home to school. Many children in school spend their day worrying about occurrences at home. A child who is constantly worried and distracted about home problems cannot fully

engage in the classroom activities. When either parent has some alcohol or drug problem, the child's fear and worry are even greater.

13. **Inadequate medical care:** With an estimated ten million children in America living in poverty, medical care is often unavailable for these children. Lack of medical attention to ear infections, bronchitis, allergies and other recurring illnesses leads to problems in academic performance. Long-term ear infections are one of the leading causes of learning disabilities. There also appears to be a direct link between asthma or allergies and learning disabilities. High fevers (incurred during illness) that are left untreated can cause brain damage. For the child living in poverty, these untreated medical problems can have long-term effects.
14. **Lack of loving attentive care:** A child not lovingly cared for will exhibit low self-esteem and low self-confidence. The child will realize that others in his classroom look neater and cleaner. The child may begin to believe that his parents do not value him as much as other children's parents. These feelings of inadequacy will only worsen as he moves into the upper elementary and middle school years.
15. **Cuts in mental health treatment:** Many mentally ill patients in America today go untreated. It is estimated that we incarcerate more mentally ill people in our prisons than we treat in our mental hospitals. Bipolar disorder, chronic depression and other forms of mental illness go undiagnosed but most importantly untreated. Medications to control these mental illnesses are not available for millions of Americans. It has been estimated that nearly eighteen million Americans suffer from chronic depression. It is also believed that 80 percent of them could be treated with medicine or other forms of help. The children of these parents suffer greatly. Recent studies have shown that mothers who suffer from chronic depression stunt their child's eagerness to learn. All of these factors impact heavily on America's schools.
16. **Sexual abuse:** Sexual predators stalk our children at church, at the ballparks, at school, on the playgrounds and even in their homes. Fear of physical harm to themselves or their parents keeps the abuse secret but leads to long-term hopelessness and clinical depression. Sexually abused children will have a very difficult time devoting all their time and attention to school when they must keep such horrific secrets.

17. **No extended family or support system:** We live in a very mobile society where aunts, uncles and grandparents may live thousands of miles away. The support and nurturing that children used to receive from this extended family are no longer available. Grandparents may only see their grandchildren once or twice a year. Therefore, the family does not benefit from the support, attention and teaching that grandparents were once able to provide for the children. Grandparents used to be the purveyors of moral standards and beliefs. However, that is not the case in many American families today.
18. **Video games:** Long hours of playing video games may have left many children confused and unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Too many video games may instill a sense of pleasure from committing violent acts on the video screen. In some video games, the more wounds inflicted and the more blood that flows, the higher the points. This establishes a stimulus/response on the part of the player as he gets a high from racking up points as he kills, kills, kills! This may lead some children to be unable to distinguish reality from make-believe. I am truly amazed at the number of kindergarten and first grade students who spend long hours playing video games. The violence that these children experience on the video screen may often carry over to playtime and other school activities. They learn that the best way to deal with problems is through violent behavior. Also, while they are engaged in video games, they are not spending time developing critical skills such as gross motor, language, auditory, creativity and thinking skills. I've had parents of some kindergarten students tell me that their child may spend three to four hours playing video games daily.
19. **Daycare:** Lack of excellent affordable daycare is a problem in almost every community across this country, especially in poor neighborhoods. High turnover of caregivers in daycare centers has been linked to antisocial behavior. Due to low wages and poor benefits, turnover of employees is high in many daycare centers. Therefore, many children fail to truly bond with their primary caregiver. This failure may have long-term effects.
20. **Absent fathers:** Lack of a father in a child's life (especially for boys) leaves them feeling bitter and very belligerent. Often when I talk to the boys in my classes, the one desire that they ardently express is to have their fathers as a part of their lives. Many of these boys see their fathers

only once a year or perhaps not at all. This instills an anger and a “short fuse” in them that they may struggle with the rest of their lives.

21. **Abandonment by mothers:** In the past few years, I have seen a dramatic increase in the number of children who have been abandoned by their mothers. Many of these children are being raised by their grandparents. All human beings desire the love and approval of their mothers. Many times these children will strive to be perfectionists. In their minds, if they are more perfect, perhaps their mothers will love them. Many of these children will spend their entire lives trying to attain love and acceptance from their mothers. Children concerned with this issue will really struggle to perform in the classroom.
22. **Head trauma:** Another trend that I have noticed in recent years is an increase in the number of head traumas. These are large swellings or bumps on the head. These traumas result from young children either being dropped or thrown and landing on their heads. Most years, I have found at least one or two of my children having a major head trauma. However, some years I have as many as four or five children suffering from head trauma. This is a topic that no one wants to discuss, but believe me, it does exist. Whether the traumas are incurred by accident or abuse, the effects are long lasting.
23. **Dehydration:** The most recent brain research points to the fact that 90 percent of the brain is composed of water (more than any other organ in the body). I believe that many children today are suffering from dehydration. Adequate hydration of the brain is critical for proper brain functioning. Many American children today have high intakes of diuretics (coffee, tea, soda and chocolate). These diuretics tend to actually dehydrate the body. Teachers and parents need to stress the importance of drinking plenty of water daily as well as limiting diuretics for small children. I actually keep water bottles on my children’s desks to encourage them to drink plenty of water.
24. **Familial factors:** In my years of teaching children with learning problems, I have come to the realization that the majority of these children (especially boys) have the same learning problems that their fathers had. Many may have inherited kinesthetic (hands-on) modalities strengths and cross-dominant (faulty wiring) patterns. Both of these factors may lead to academic problems. When I interview fathers at

parent conferences, I have actually had them cry as I discuss their son's learning profiles. They realize that their sons have inherited the same problems as they have had to battle throughout their academic careers.

25. **True heroes:** We send dangerous and mixed messages to our children about some of our so-called "heroes." Our children watch as these "heroes" display violence in the sports arenas across this country. They assault their coaches, referees, umpires and other players. They are often arrested on drug and assault charges in their private lives. After witnessing these violent acts, we still call them "heroes" and pay them huge salaries in spite of these acts. Who could imagine Stan Musial or Hank Aaron displaying such misbehavior on the field? Perhaps we have lost our perspective of sportsmanship, moral character and nonviolent problem solving. When we continue to raise so many of these sports figures to mythical status among our youth, how can we expect our children to be good sports and use nonviolent problem solving? When they see their "heroes" do such violent deeds, is it any wonder some children behave violently?
26. **Gender role confusion:** Pressure about gender roles has left children confused. Should all little girls be strong and aggressive or sweet and dainty? Should little boys cry and show their emotions openly or be strong, brave and act "like a man?" Although the sexual revolution has provided many unprecedented opportunities, it has led to a sense of confusion in our children as to their roles as boys or girls. This is just one more example of the plethora of problems facing the child of the twenty-first century.
27. **Stress, stress, stress:** All of the factors listed in this section have increased the stress levels of American children. From morning till night their lives are stress-filled. From the most affluent to the very poorest, American children are having to deal with more problems than their predecessors. Recent brain research has shown that when a child is under stress, the brain emits a chemical that inhibits learning as well as coping skills. Based on this newest research, it is imperative that parents, teachers and all Americans become involved to find solutions for the many problems faced by our children today. I am not only talking about raising test scores of our children, but raising the quality of life for them.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Due to the causative factors just discussed, classrooms today must change to accommodate these children. This P. E. A. R. L. program is designed to meet the needs of kindergarten and first grade at-risk students, but could be applied in all preschool and Head Start programs. At-risk students are those who simply are at-risk of not being able to meet the expectations and standards set for them at each grade level.

By ignoring the causes that make these at-risk children what they are, we cannot remediate the areas where they display deficiencies. Diagnostic and remedial techniques are included at each of the two grade levels. These are simply guidelines and must be adapted to each teacher's circumstances. Awareness and knowledge of these principles are only a beginning step for the teacher. With her own creativity, she must make them work for her.

The program is much better suited to a team approach where kindergarten and first grade teachers team together to meet individual needs. The morning academic classes can be taught separately or combined. The remedial (prescriptive) areas will be conducted in the afternoon when early learners tend to be less able to attend to academic instruction. These prescriptive groups will be taught by forming multi-age groups of both grade levels based on diagnostic procedures and teacher observation.

It is critical to remember that if a child displays problems in a certain area or skill, you must look at the prerequisite skills that the child needs for that skill. For example, if a child has great difficulty in handwriting, you must look at the prerequisite skills of fine motor and visual skills that must be in place before the child can succeed at that skill. If a child has great difficulty remembering spelling words and sight words, you must look at the child's visual and auditory skills for memory. The "window of opportunity" for remediation of these underlying skills is small from the ages of three to about seven. These skills must be remediated early so that the child has the prerequisite skills in place before higher level academic skills are attempted.

Today, we are hearing more and more about the "fade-out effect." That means children appear to do fairly well, in the early grades, but something happens (usually about fourth grade) that causes them to begin a downward spiral. This is especially true in Title I programs where students may achieve fairly well in the early years. However, by middle school, they seem to have no discernible evidence of remedial help. May I humbly suggest this decline may be caused by the lack of attention to these critical areas in the early years? I truly believe that may be the case with many of

these children. We are putting on the roof before building a firm foundation and sturdy walls. The house will surely fall!

There are six basic critical skills that each child must have before formal academic instruction will be successful. I have listed and defined these critical areas below.

1. Gross motor skills – the ability to use the large muscles of the body (legs, hands, trunk) in a balanced and coordinated manner
2. Fine motor skills – the ability to use small muscles (hand, fingers) in an efficient manner
3. Receptive language skills – the ability to “take in” language (words and concepts)
4. Expressive language skills – the ability to “put out” language with correct structure, syntax and vocabulary choice
5. Visual processing – the ability to use both eyes in a coordinated efficient manner
6. Auditory processing – the ability to use both ears in a coordinated efficient manner

When any of these six critical areas go unremediated, that child will suffer from the inability to learn efficiently. Today’s at-risk child may have significant problems in one area or, in extreme cases, may have deficits in almost all areas. It is very important to note that remediation cannot be done in all areas at the same time. The most severe deficiencies should be addressed first. In our program, gross motor skills are a top priority because the child will suffer dramatically from problems in this area. Also, these important skills are more easily remediated early. The confidence that the child gains when the gross motor skills improve will carry over to all other areas.

Along with diagnosis and remediation of these six areas, there is another important component of the program. For integration of skills, neurological input and motor output are essential if the at-risk child is to progress. These at-risk children learn very little incidentally. Because of problems with the aforementioned six critical areas, they do not just “pick things up” as their normal peers do. We therefore neurologically input (put in) critical skills and allow for motor output (moving, feeling, involving the body) so the skills become part of the child. The at-risk child does not benefit greatly from brief exposure to or glossing over of basic skills. For

him, the process is much more complicated. Alternative methods and strategies are imperative if the child is to learn and also be able to retain what he learns.

CHAPTER TWO

ASSESSMENT TESTING FOR PLACEMENT IN PROGRAM

Six years ago our school became a school-wide Title I school. My principal asked me to develop a program that would be the Title I component for the school. I developed the P. E. A. R. L. program for kindergarten and first grades based on my 28 years of teaching experience. I used many of the same techniques and methods I had used back in the 1970's when I started the first Specific Learning Disabilities program in our tri-county area of Pennsylvania. The principal wanted a program that would truly impact our at-risk children. Billions of dollars have been spent in Title I programs across this country. However, research has shown that when these children reach middle school, there is little indication of sustained benefits from the program in the elementary grades.

I feel that this is because most Title I programs have used the same curriculum and methods as regular education classes. Although these classes are usually smaller, lecture, rote memory, textbooks and worksheets are still utilized and administered using the same methods as in a regular class. Assessment and instruction often do not address the neurological, language and motor problems which are often the underlying causes of the academic failures of these children. We continue to try to put on the roof before laying the foundation. Therefore, without a solid foundation, the house crumbles later.

At our school we are now seeing children entering kindergarten with a five-year mental age gap between the most ready and the least ready. (Mental age is the level at which the child actually functions mentally versus his chronological age.) For instance, a child who is chronologically six years old may have the mental age of a three-year-old. Thirty or forty years ago, this mental age gap was much narrower. There are an estimated 10 million children living in poverty in this country, and the mental age gap has increased dramatically in recent years. Considering the causative factors previously discussed in Chapter One, many children come to school ill prepared for academic learning. Many of these children now enter school with the mental age of a three-year-old. In the last six years at our school, 27-32 percent of the children entering kindergarten have lower than expected readiness levels.

However, many children with active family involvement reared in language-rich homes come to school already reading. These children will have mental ages much higher than the expected level. Thus, the mental age gap between the two groups continues to increase.

It is impossible for one kindergarten teacher (no matter how hard-working and dedicated) to truly impact on all the children considering the mental age gap of five years. She will find it extremely difficult to enrich the above-level children, keep the average children moving along sufficiently and also remediate all the weaknesses in the at-risk children.

The P. E. A. R. L. program has grouped the at-risk students together in kindergarten and first grade. Each class is modeled as a prescriptive teaching classroom. Prescriptive teaching means we evaluate each child thoroughly to find his strengths and weaknesses in six critical areas as well as establish learning styles and then provide prescriptive remediation for each child.

I equate this to a visit to the doctor. Most of us would be truly alarmed if we went to the doctor for a specific complaint and found that he was recommending the same prescription for every patient in the office. We would feel much more assured if the doctor performed an examination on us and then “prescribed” a medicine to fit our specific ailment. However, we in education often continue to “prescribe” one prescription for all. Based on the mental age gap of kindergarten students, this practice must be addressed and perhaps changed to meet the needs of the child of today.

The process of establishing an Early Intervention Program begins in the spring at Kindergarten Round-Up. This is a meeting held at school where all the parents bring their children who will be starting kindergarten the next fall. At this meeting we screen all children on a two-fold skill assessment. The first area tested is visual-motor. This will establish a child’s ability to replicate shapes. This tests the child’s visual-motor level, which is an indicator of readiness for school. For example, if a child cannot make an X, he may be displaying delayed visual skills. This test is given to the whole group at one time. Each child is given a sheet with the shapes and then asked to make one just like it. An example of this test follows, and another reproducible copy is shown in the Appendix.

Kindergarten Round-Up Visual Motor Test

The second screening is a brief skills assessment of the child's proficiency in the areas of color, number and letter recognition. The child is asked to say his full name (first and last), age and to count to ten. He is then asked to identify the selected colors, numbers and letters. The sentence in quotation marks is read to the child, and he is asked to repeat it exactly as stated. The adult giving the test should then note whether or not the child holds his pencil correctly by asking him to write his first name on the bottom of the test paper. This assessment gives us a clue as to the child's skill readiness for learning. The teacher and volunteers give this assessment individually to each child.

Kindergarten Round-Up Skills Test

Name _____

	Yes	No
Name (first & last)		
Age		
Count to 10		
Colors Yellow		
Red		
Blue		
Orange		
Black		
Numbers 3		
5		
7		
Letters A		
S		
T		
M		
O		
"The cat is behind the chair."		
Holds pencil correctly		

After all screenings have been completed, we list all the scores from 22 (perfect score) to the lowest score. Every "yes" box checked is worth one point. Any child who falls below 80 percent on the screening may be viewed as needing some remediation before starting in the fall. We then send a letter to the parents with practical, easy to understand activities to do at home to help the child before school starts in the fall. An example of this letter is shown below, and a reproducible copy can also be found in the Appendix. All parents want their children to succeed in school but may lack the knowledge of how to help them.

To the parents of _____,

Your child was recently tested at Kindergarten Round-Up. This was done to determine his/her strengths and weaknesses. Your child displayed some difficulty in the area(s) of

_____.

Please use some of the following activities over the summer before school starts. This will be very useful to your child as he/she enters kindergarten.

NUMBERS

1. When cooking meals, give your child lots of practice counting cups, spoons, napkins and other items in your kitchen.
2. Make numbers from paper (or small paper plates) and have your child practice putting them in order from 1-10. Use beans, dry cereal, M&M's, etc. to show each number.
3. Sing number songs.
4. When traveling in the car, have your child count cars, big trucks, stop lights, etc.
5. Write the numbers 1-10 on sidewalk with sidewalk chalk. He/she can hop on each number and say the numbers.

ALPHABET

1. Pick out letters in their name from signs, magazines, books, etc.
2. Squirt a small pile of shaving cream on table or counter; smooth it out to make a white writing surface. Practice writing letters (upper & lower case) and numbers using finger.
3. Pick a different letter every day. Write it, color the letter, and cut out the letter from magazines. While driving, have your child count out how many times he/she sees the letter.
4. Make a snack, dessert, dinner, etc. that starts with the letter of the day. Ex: lemonade for L l, muffins for M m, pizza for P p.
5. Use sidewalk chalk to make a giant letter. Have your child "walk the letter."

COLORS

1. Gather several small items from around the house. Have your child sort them by color.
2. Have a "color of the day." Your child can pick out clothes in the color of the day. Cut out pictures of things in that day's color from magazines. Name things seen around town that are the color of the day.
3. Sort M&M's, Skittles, Fruit Loops, gumdrops, etc. by color.
4. Have your child sort household items by color.
5. Your child can go on a treasure hunt. Ex: Find seven blue things.

Sincerely,

We also distribute flyers (with the same activities described in the parent letter) to businesses in the community. We choose businesses that are frequented by families of small children such as fast-food restaurants, gas stations and grocery stores. There is a reproducible copy of this flyer in the Appendix. It is our hope to impact children in our target group that will be entering kindergarten in the fall but did not attend the Kindergarten Round-Up.

By distributing these flyers to parents before their children enter school, we are sending a clear message. We, the school are “reaching out” to you so you can help us enable your child to be more successful. This is a first step to improving the home-school connection which is vital to all children’s school careers. Many parents of at-risk children may have had difficulty in school themselves and therefore view the school negatively and with distrust. We must make them feel welcome and part of the school community. By doing this, we stand a much better chance of being successful with their children. A friendly “open door” policy is a must for all parents. All staff at school must be polite, friendly and helpful to all parents if we are ever going to change the negative perception many people have of schools.

It is important to note here that the children, who did not attend the Kindergarten Round-Up, will be assessed on the same screening when they register in the fall at school. Once they have been tested, their scores will be added to the list and those children may be placed in the program if they qualify.

Once we have tabulated the Kindergarten Round-Up screenings, we will then pull out the lowest eighteen to twenty scores and place these children in our program for remedial help for kindergarten. This class will be comprised of children with similar deficits and mental ages. We can directly impact the child’s weakest areas while building on the child’s strengths.

When I tour through regular kindergarten classes, I can quickly identify the at-risk children. They may be found in one of the following three places: playing in the sink, in the bathroom or playing on the floor. The curriculum goals are unreachable for these children, and they know it. They lose interest and soon become discipline problems because they are unable to keep up the pace. Their first experiences with school are negative. This scenario establishes a mindset that will follow them for the rest of their school careers.

The perfect scenario of an at-risk kindergartner placed in an inappropriate regular kindergarten classroom was mentioned earlier in the M. I. T. scenario. The first day of school, the teacher asks him to go to the calendar and point to today’s date with his right hand. Because of a low vocabulary level, he does not know what a calendar is. He does not know his right hand from his left hand because of laterality problems. Due to poor auditory skills, he cannot remember all of the directions. His lack of gross motor skills causes him to trip on his way to the front of the room. He stands there humiliated and embarrassed. As he returns to his seat, other

children move their chairs away from him. They may snicker or make cruel comments. The teacher gives him a look that says, "What a loser! I'm sure to have problems with this kid!" His first school experience will be a humiliating, horrifying memory. His self-concept has been demeaned, and others in his environment will think badly of him.

If we can place this child in a kindergarten classroom with a teacher who has knowledge of these problems, the scenario can be quite different: The teacher will take the child by the hand to the calendar, help him locate the date, talk him through the directions and lend assistance when needed. He completes the assigned task and sits down with a feeling of confidence and pride. Confidence builds confidence, and the child is able to maintain his pride and self-esteem. This type of supportive, non-threatening environment needs to be established and maintained if this child is to succeed. His first contacts with school and learning must be positive if we are to nurture a well-adjusted, confident, caring, cooperative learner. It must start his very first day of school and continue throughout his school career.

In the fall, once we have determined the children who will comprise the remedial kindergarten class, we will administer a comprehensive battery of tests to each child. This is absolutely necessary if we are going to raise mental ages and also pinpoint deficit areas as well as strengths. We use Walter J. Lesiak's Developmental Tasks for Kindergarten Readiness. Each kindergarten student in our program will be given the test. It takes 45-50 minutes to administer and will be the basis for the prescriptive groups which will be formed. The groups will be held during the last hour of the school day. With the at-risk child who enters our schools today, remediation without evaluation is useless. Pinpointing the deficit and then "prescribing" remediation is the best way to truly impact the at-risk student.

We then fill out a profile sheet for each child using two different colored highlighters. A copy of this profile sheet can be located in the Appendix. We consider 80 percent or above to be mastery. Then any score of 80 percent or higher will be marked with one color. Scores below 80 percent are considered deficit areas and marked with another color. These score sheets are used to schedule prescriptive (remedial) groups. It is important to note here that the child will be placed in groups based on his lowest two scores.

Also, it takes the first full month of school to complete all testing and profile sheets, so our groups will run from October until May first. That allows us the last month for reevaluation and completion of the spring scores on the profile sheets. Any areas below 80 percent remaining on the child's

profile sheet will be continued to be addressed in the prescriptive groups the next year in first grade.

We schedule the remedial groups in the afternoon for the last hour of the school day when the children are tired and the least likely to be actively engaged in purely academic learning. Each group focuses on a different deficit area. However, when the need is there, we will have two groups dealing with the same area. The one area where most of our children are deficient is visual memory. Most years, more than 70 percent of our students score below 80 percent in this critical area. I blame long hours of playing video games and watching television for the huge increases we are seeing in visual memory deficits.

The following areas are the critical areas that we address in our groups:

- Gross motor skills
- Fine motor skills
- Receptive language skills
- Expressive language skills
- Visual processing skills
- Auditory processing skills

These six areas form the foundation of learning for all children to succeed in school. After completing the testing and accompanying profile sheet, we find our at-risk children often display deficiencies in these areas. Some score low in only one or two areas but unfortunately, we find some have problems in all six areas. Without sequential, consistent intervention in these crucial areas, these at-risk children will not succeed. Our regular kindergarten classes may not address these problems and these children will not succeed without the interventions. The “window of opportunity” to impact these areas is small from the ages three to seven years. Failure to impact early will lead to failure for these children.

Schedule for Afternoon Remedial Groups

- 1:45 – 2:15 Gross motor (kindergarten)
- Fine motor
- Auditory processing
- Language skills

2:15-2:45 Gross motor (first grade)
 Visual memory – shapes/patterns (kindergarten)
 Visual perception
 Visual memory – letters/words (first grade)

Since we have a K-1 model in our program, we mix kindergarten and first grade students according to deficit areas rather than grade level. We have kindergarten and first grade students together in some groups. We also have two teacher's aides, which allows for four small groups.

At the end of kindergarten, all the students are retested on the same screening. Each child's score sheet is remarked below the fall score. This will show growth areas and also show us areas where the child still needs remediation in first grade. Also, at the end of kindergarten, all the children in the Kindergarten class are tested on a normed Test of Kindergarten/First Grade Readiness Skills (Gooding). We also test all children in other regular kindergarten classes whose teachers judge them to be unready for first grade in the fall. This test will give a mental age for each child. Research has shown children must attain a mental age of six years, six months before formal reading instruction will be successful. Therefore, those with the eighteen to twenty lowest scores are placed in the P. E. A. R. L. first grade classroom. These children will require more readiness instruction before formal reading instruction is started.

The remaining children with mental ages less than six years, six months are placed in two regular first grades where teachers form prescriptive teaching groups to better meet the needs of these children. This makes more sense than spreading them out in all first grade classes. Last year we use this model and found we were able to meet individual needs better. At the beginning of the school year, the Merrill Reading Test was given to all first grade students. There were 32 students classified as at-risk, but the results of the same test, given in the spring, showed us that only eleven were still at-risk.

This is our sixth year for the P. E. A. R. L. program at our school, and to my knowledge, we have only had one discipline referral from any of our classrooms. Our philosophy is when children are actively engaged in age-appropriate activities, time on-task is increased, self-esteem is enhanced and a supportive non-threatening environment is maintained for each child.

Many people will criticize this program philosophy and say that children should not be "labeled" before they even begin academics. However, based on the latest statistics, it is clear that these at-risk children

cannot achieve their fullest potential when they are placed in programs that are years above their mental ages as well as their performance levels. It is much more sensible to address these problems in the very early years than to wait until the child has reached the intermediate grades. By then it may be too late to truly impact all the areas that need remediation. Early intervention based on assessment is a must if they are going to progress in the first foundational years of schooling.

The program is only successful if the parents understand the many complex aspects of it. Throughout the year, Open House meetings, parent conferences, and classroom visits are a must if the parents are to truly understand what we are endeavoring to do with their children. I invite all parents in to visit and spend time to observe my classroom. During parent conferences, I strive to explain their children's learning profile and also justify the methods and strategies we're employing. I encourage them to use some of these same strategies and methods at home with their child. My job includes educating the parent about the child's learning strengths and weaknesses. When the school and family work together, this greatly increases the child's success. Empowering the parents, by enlisting their help, will encourage "open lines of communication" in which they are free to express their concerns and observations. I have included my Open House Letter in the Appendix.

We have kindergarten parents every year who request that their children remain in our program for first grade even though they may have progressed enough to go into a regular first grade. They often say that they are thoroughly pleased with the progress of their child. However, they most commonly state that their child is happy and loves to come to school. Many of them also state that this is the first time they did not have to fight with the child to come to school. This alone improves the situation for everyone. School should be fun for everyone, not just those that excel at it. Through careful assessment, prescriptive teaching and a "fun" supportive environment, this can be true for all children. That is the major goal of the entire P. E. A. R. L. program.

CHAPTER THREE

PRESCRIPTIVE TEACHING GROUPS DESCRIPTION

The next three chapters will deal with the six critical areas which are the basis of the prescriptive (remedial) teaching groups formed in the afternoon. Again, the six critical areas in which proficiency is required to have adequate learning are:

- Gross motor skills
- Fine motor skills
- Receptive language skills
- Expressive language skills
- Visual processing skills
- Auditory processing skills

These groups can be formed by the information gained by using Lesiak's Developmental Kindergarten Readiness Test. Once the profile sheet described on page 27 is completed, the students can be put into two groups according to deficits on this profile. This will be done by noting the lowest scores on the child's profile. Remember: when starting to remediate deficit areas, you cannot work on them all at the same time. Choose two areas in which the student lags the most, and do those first. Gross motor takes precedence over all others.

It is important that all Kindergarten Screening Profiles done in kindergarten be sent to the first grade teacher the next year. The teacher can use those profiles to place her first graders in groups with kindergarten students.

If the first grade students have few deficit areas left on the screening, further testing and teacher input are used for placing these children in the prescriptive groups. These testing procedures will be described in Chapter Five.

Note: Failure to impact in these six critical areas, which are needed for academic success, will foster poor academic progress in these children. Again, the "window of opportunity" is very small, between the ages of three to seven. Early diagnosis and remediation in these six areas is mandatory for closing the gap in these at-risk students.

These prescriptive teaching groups are conducted in the afternoon when these children benefit less from formal academic learning. Both the kindergarten teacher and I have teacher's aides, so we can conduct two sessions of four groups each.

The following is the schedule we follow:

1:45-2:15	Gross motor (K)	2:15-2:45	Gross motor (1)
	Fine motor (K, 1)		Visual perception (K, 1)
	Auditory processing (K, 1)		Visual memory (K)
	Language skills (K, 1)		Visual memory (1)

GROSS MOTOR PRESCRIPTIVE GROUPS

On the final day of school last year, six of us first grade teachers took about 125 first graders outside for a field day. Each teacher had designed a relay game or race where the children were divided into two teams and required to perform gross motor tasks to see which team could complete the task first. One relay involved throwing a beanbag into a Hula Hoop. Another required filling a cup of water from one bucket, running to another bucket, emptying it into the second bucket and returning the cup to the next child in line.

As I observed the children in these competitive activities, I was truly amazed by one glaring fact. The children who had the most difficulty completing the tasks were the same students who had struggled academically all year in first grade. For the most part, they were the children who had been referred for testing for learning disabilities or had been recommended for first grade retention. However, I wondered if they would be any more successful next year if some of their obvious gross motor problems were not identified and remediated. The saddest thing about watching these kids, who could not complete these activities successfully, was watching and listening to the reactions of their peers as they "messed up" time and time again. The other children began to moan and groan every time the child failed on the gross motor task. Soon, every time it was their turn, you could see their stress as they listened to their peers' negative reactions. This "fun day" was anything but fun for this group of children.

Six years earlier, when I developed a program for our at-risk students at our school, I had included a gross motor component for all our students

who needed help in developing their gross motor skills. Although I am currently the only teacher in the county conducting a specific class to develop these skills, I truly believe it is crucial for our early learners. Children who display gross motor problems may also often show academic problems as well as resultant emotional and social problems. Remediating these problems completely can only be accomplished between the ages of three and seven.

Years ago, preschool and kindergarten teachers would have worked on these developmental motor lags as part of a curriculum that strived to teach “the whole child.” Almost all kindergarten classrooms had balance beams, beanbags, assorted balls and Hula Hoops which were used to help children overcome some of these problems. Today, we are in such a hurry to start all early learners into academics that this important area is too often completely overlooked. I am reminded of the old saying, “Strong bodies make strong minds.” Ten to twenty percent of kindergarten and first grade students I test have discernable gross motor skills problems. I use a series of balance, crossing midline and coordination tasks to find the children who will participate in my gross motor remedial class in first grade and also kindergarten. I then schedule thirty minutes daily to work on these skills. The improvement in these children is quite dramatic, and I have included comments about this program from the Occupational Therapist and parents at the end of this chapter.

Six years ago when I started this program, I taught the kindergarten class the first year. This was my first experience working with kindergarten students.

I was truly astonished by the gross motor delays and problems exhibited by these kindergarten students. Gross motor involves development and adequate use of large muscles such as arms, legs and trunk. I then traveled through the kindergarten classes to find those children who were so impaired and delayed that they would benefit from a gross motor skills class. All of the kindergarten teachers were amazed by my ability to select children who needed this kind of service. But once you know what to look for, children with poor gross motor skills are very easy to identify. What also amazed them was the fact that the very children I selected were the ones who also displayed language, learning, social and emotional problems. I have listed the characteristics of such children:

- a) Appears awkward and uncomfortable with activities requiring physical movement
- b) Clumsy; often trips or falls

- c) Poor posture control
- d) Improper foot alignment; feet turning either in or out
- e) Unable to follow moving objects with eyes
- f) Changes hand in motor activities; Children who establish dominance late tend to be most at-risk.
- g) Cannot hold paper in place with one hand while writing with the other hand
- h) Confuses right and left
- i) Walks on tiptoes or on the side of feet
- j) Has difficulty using arms without overflow movement from other body parts
- k) Looks different from peers when walking or running
- l) Poor upper body strength; often puts head on desk
- m) Poor balance; cannot walk on a straight line or a balance beam smoothly
- n) Does not like physical activities
- o) Difficulty with eye/hand coordination
- p) Has trouble throwing or catching a ball
- q) Appears to be “spaced out”
- r) Often the last one chosen for a team
- s) Appears to tire easily during physical activities
- t) Cannot clap out a rhythm with both hands or stomp rhythm with feet
- u) Has trouble crossing midline in ball handling or chalkboard activities

When I taught Specific Learning Disabilities earlier in my career, I always had a gross motor skills class. Consequently, I had a basic knowledge of the methods and techniques needed to dramatically improve these children’s gross motor skills. We have an Occupational Therapist assigned to our school, but she only works with the children in the E. S. E. (Exceptional Student Education) program. That means a child must be enrolled in either Speech and Language Therapy, Specific Learning Disabilities or another E. S. E. program in order to receive her services. Of the 24 kindergartners in my class, only one student qualified and therefore could have received O. T. services from her. Without the gross motor skills class that I provided, the other 23 students would not receive such badly needed services.

Because our school has an Occupational Therapist, we have an O. T. Room, which is well stocked with all kinds of equipment needed for such a

program. The first year I worked closely with the Occupational Therapist to gain further insight and knowledge of the sequential order and scope of the skills I needed in order to significantly impact the students' gross motor problems. She was invaluable in helping me organize and refine my program.

Although the Occupational Therapist can only work with her E. S. E. students once a week, I was able to schedule my gross motor skills class every day for 30 minutes. With this kind of sequential, daily, intensive training, improvements in gross motor skills are more easily gained.

Following is a list of materials needed to start a program if an O. T. room and equipment are not available:

- Balance beam
- Kickboard
- Tire swing
- Scooter boards
- Exercise mats
- Hula Hoops
- Milk crates
- Beanbags
- Crawl tunnels
- One-legged stools
- Balls of various sizes
- Large 40 gallon cardboard drum (lined inside with carpet)
- Ten cardboard footprints (five right and five left, numbered 1-10)

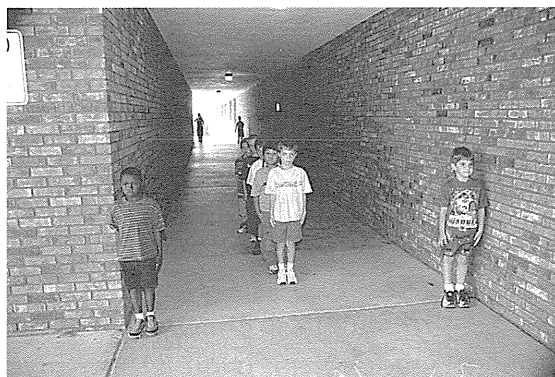
I must stress that this is a full year program for kindergarten. Very few students will master all the skills before the end of the year. Some severely impaired students may require additional remediation in a second year program in first grade. That's why I schedule two groups of O. T.: one for kindergarten and one for first grade. Also, many first graders are new to the program and need a full year program of gross motor skills training. I usually have eight to ten students at each grade level to include in this prescriptive teaching program.

It is important to recognize children of varying intelligences can suffer from gross motor problems. This component of gross motor skills can be used by preschool, E. S. E. classes and even gifted classes. P. E. teachers could use this model to set up an adaptive P. E. class, where kindergarten

and first grade students with gross motor problems could be pulled out, to work on gross motor skills. Early intervention by diagnosing and remediating these problems can improve success for children in many classifications.

As I describe my routine with the children, I cannot overemphasize the importance of pattern and repetition. Consequently, I will frequently say, “I always do...” because “always” describes the consistent use of a pattern, phrase or activity until the skill being developed becomes routine to the child. Every day as I line my students up to go to the O. T. room for class, I say, “Put your right hand on your hip and your finger (left index) to your lip.” Since their right hands had been stamped with a red star in the morning, they use the red star as a point of reference in establishing the first steps in directionality. This type of constant practice in directionality is crucial for children learning to automatically distinguish between left and right.

I then stop in the hall and line them up in the middle of the hall. I tell each child individually, “Go to the right.” It is important at the beginning to only teach right. Do not introduce left until the child has complete proficiency in right. I repeat this several times before moving to the O. T. room. Later on, I add other directional words such as point to the top (ceiling), bottom (floor), point forward, point backward, etc. Eventually I add left and tell individuals to go to the right side or left side of the hall. I call this “The Hall Game.” The kids love playing the game, and if I move past that point in the hall without stopping, they would all say, “Aren’t we going to play The Hall Game today?”



Hall Game

As we walk down the sidewalk toward the O. T. room, we sing the ABC Echoes song from the Sing, Spell, Read & Write program. Many days we stop to study the sky, and I ask questions like, “Is it sunny or cloudy

today? What color are the clouds? What do those kinds of clouds mean? etc.” On very bright days, we play a shadow game using our shadows. “Make your shadow big and tall. Now, make it very small.” They stretch up and squat down to follow the commands. This is a good exercise for muscle tone.

When we reach the end of the sidewalk, I allow them to run in the grass and play “Freeze Tag” for a few minutes. By holding their muscles taut and flexed, when I blow the whistle for “Freeze,” they are building muscle tone. The kids run and “Freeze” several times. This simple game helps to begin building whole body muscle tone, motor speed and auditory attention.

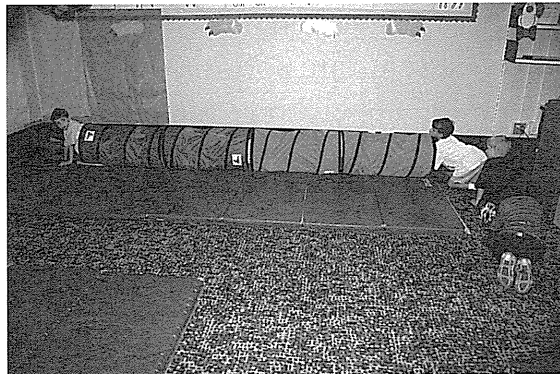
As we move back onto the sidewalk, I line them up against the wall and have them press their hands against the wall. I always say, “Let’s see who can move this wall today!” I call this “The Wall Game.” They continue to press till the count of ten. As time passes, I feel their shoulders and necks to check for improvements. I always make a positive comment about how big their muscles are getting. I am always amazed to see the improvement in the upper body strength as the year progresses. At the beginning of the year the muscles are soft like marshmallows. By May, you can feel much tighter, firmer upper body muscles. When you walk into a kindergarten or first grade class and notice several children with their heads laying on their desktops, let me assure you they are not all bored or lazy. The simple truth of the matter is that many early learners do not have the upper body strength to hold their heads up for long periods of time. Only through practice and exercise of the upper body will strength in this area adequately develop.



Wall Game

Then I have every student skip down a short sidewalk nearby. We all sing, “Skip to my Lou” as individuals skip down and back. At the beginning of the year, most gallop, but by midyear many are truly skipping. This skipping is an important step in body coordination. Based on my experience, show me a child who can’t skip, and the child may be either at-risk or gifted. That means gross motor delays may be displayed by children of all intelligence levels.

When we enter the O. T. classroom, all children sit in a row on the mats. The first thing I have the children do is crawl. They crawl through the cloth crawling tunnels and also through obstacle courses I have made using the milk crates or Hula Hoops. I check to see if they are crawling bilaterally using left arm/right leg, etc. Due to restricted environments and lack of outdoor play, many children, as I stated earlier, skip the crawling needed for bilateral coordination. You can make a yarn or ribbon track for them to crawl.

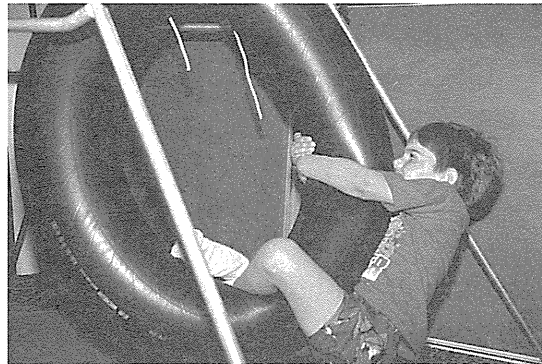


Crawling Tunnels

At the same time while working on crawling, I begin to enhance and promote good balance in the child. Without proper balance, all the successive skills will not develop properly. Good balance is a must for all students. I simply ask the child to walk on a masking tape line that is down the center of the O. T. room. I take notes on foot position and general ability to walk the line smoothly, make a smooth turn at the end of the line and walk the line back again. I then put a beanbag on the child’s head as he walks the line forward and back.

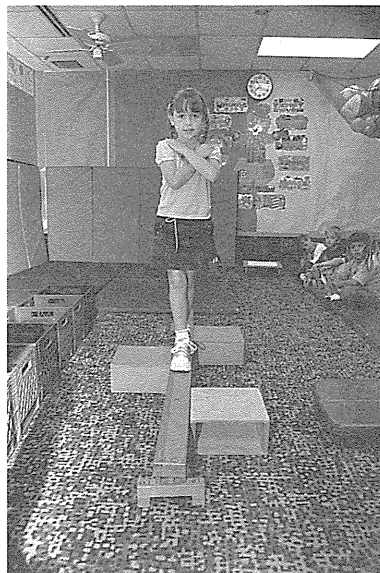
Concurrently with the crawling and balance, I start to work on more activities to improve upper body strength. I put the child on the tire swing, tell the child to hold his head as close as possible to the tire itself and swing to the count of ten. Although they want to let their heads hang down and

back, make sure they hold them up close to the tire. We end each session with jumping jacks, running in place and knee lifts all to the count of ten.



Tire Swing

After several weeks of this basic routine, and based on the children's balance improvement, I move some of them to the balance beam. This work on the beam may be done in their socks. I will again ask them to walk on the beam, turn and walk back. For some children, progress will come quickly. Others will take much longer to gain confidence and balance. Make sure to stress each time to the child to keep his feet straight. Also, encourage the children to keep their heads up and their eyes straight ahead.



Balance Beam

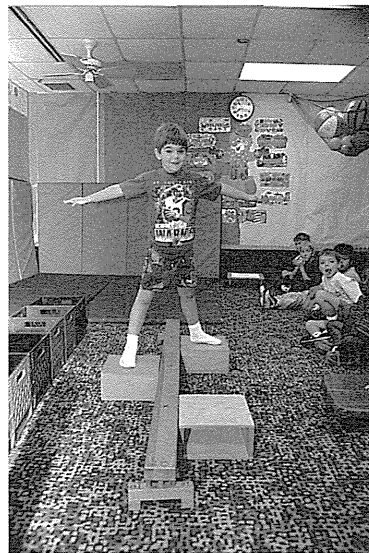
As each child improves his performance on the balance beam, increase the difficulty of each task to keep him motivated and interested. For the child who has the most difficulty, you may hold his hand and walk

next to the beam as he gains confidence. Later on, place a beanbag on each child's head and encourage him to keep his feet straight and his head up to keep the beanbag on his head. I always put a clown smile on the wall, at the child's eye level, for him to focus on.

Eventually, I ask the child to bounce a ball beside the beam or I direct him to step over beanbags I have placed on the beam a foot or so apart. I also ask the child to walk sideways on the beam or cross one foot in front of the other while walking sideways. I may also have him carry light weights as he crosses the beam.

Another good practice is to have the child walk to the middle of the beam, turn sideways, lift one foot to the count of ten, turn around and repeat with the other foot. I have even placed milk crates beside the beam and given the child beanbags to drop into the crates. By keeping his head straight, this activity will strengthen peripheral vision.

Eventually, children may be able to tiptoe across the beam. You can add music or drum beats to the balance beam activities. The children can walk the beam with hands on hips or hands on head. The possibilities are endless and will lead to a much more confident child as muscular strength and balance improve.

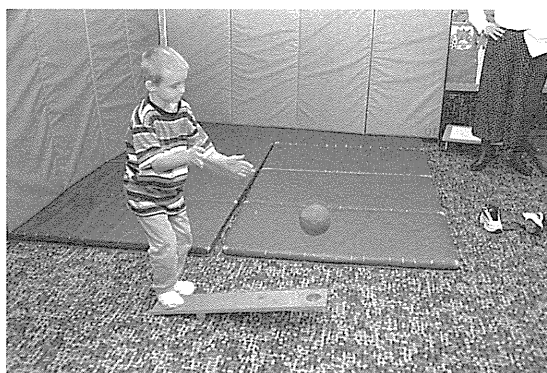


Balance Beam

I soon begin to work on eye/hand coordination concurrently with muscular strength and balance. I usually start with a kickboard. The board is eight inches wide, one-half inch thick, and about 28 inches long. There are two main types of kickboards. The one I use has a hole where the ball is placed. The other type is one that uses beanbags instead of a ball. It can be

ordered from *Learning Through Movement* by U.S. Games. In their catalog it is called Rocket Launch Set.

Place a four-inch ball on the hole. The child steps on the board, and the ball flies into the air. He then catches the ball before it hits the floor. The child gets three chances to catch the ball. This is difficult for some children, but it gets easier as they practice. Later on, the child can clap his hands before catching the ball. The children get so good at this activity that they are able to kick the board, clap twice and catch the ball. Some may be able to kick the board, turn around and catch the ball. Increase the difficulty of all tasks to keep motivation high.



Kickboard

Another way to enhance eye/hand coordination is to give the child five beanbags to toss into an empty milk crate, box or basket. You can have the child use a plastic bat to hit a ball. Later, have partners throw and catch balls of different sizes.

I soon increase work on the mats to build upper body strength. After crawling, balance beam activity and kickboard have all been completed, each child attempts to do five sit-ups with knees bent. The teacher may have to hold his feet and instruct him to pull up his body. In the fall, most of them can't do one, but by spring most can do 20 to 25.

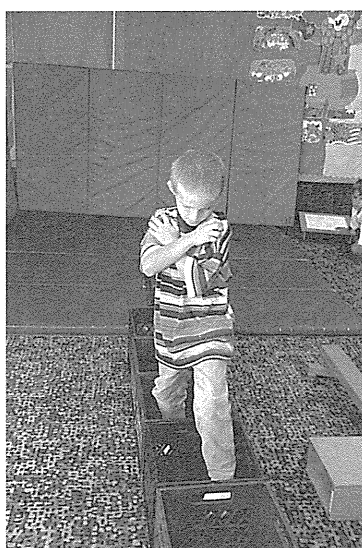
The next activity is to “build a bridge” by lying down on the mats, putting their hands on the mats and arching as high as possible, supporting their bodies with their hands and feet. I then roll a small ball under the bodies reminding them to hold up the bridge so the ball can roll under it. I then have them roll over on their stomachs, arch their bodies high and “build a bridge” for the ball to roll under again. While arching in this position, I have them do ten “donkey kicks.” This is done by supporting their bodies with their hands and kicking backward with both feet.

We also do “rocking horse” on the mat. The child locks his fingers together around his knees and rocks back and forth on the buttocks while locking his hands around his knees. This activity will strengthen fingers, hands, upper arms and upper body.

For variety, on some days, I ask the child to ride the scooter board around the obstacle course of milk crates. I pretend the milk crates are buildings in a town, and the child is driving his car around town. We sing, “East side, west side, all around the town, (child’s name) drove his yellow car up and down.” He is instructed not to touch any of the buildings with the car. Activities such as this will improve the child’s visual motor integration. This is the ability to integrate total visual motor skills allowing the child to move more smoothly and efficiently through his environment.

Unless otherwise stated, the child may start each activity with his dominant hand or foot. You can now begin agility activities. An agile child will be better at sports activities and playtime games. Agility is moving with quickness and ease. This training will improve the child’s classroom performance as movement around the classroom becomes easier.

I begin agility training by lining up six or seven milk crates in a row (right side up). The child is instructed to walk the crates by making sure he puts both feet in each crate. I stand beside the child and count, “One, two one, two, etc.” As the children improve in the ability to do the activity, I turn every other crate upside down. The child steps down into one and on top of the next, repeating the process until he has stepped into and onto each. At the end of the row of the milk crates, he steps onto the floor and repeats the same pattern. You can also do this exercise using old tires.



Milk Crates

To increase agility, I place Hula Hoops on the floor, and ask the child to hop into each hoop. I vary the pattern of the Hula Hoops. Sometimes, I have the child hop forward and back. Other times I ask the child to hop sideways, backwards or twice in each hoop. The child is told to try and not step outside the hoop. Later on, move the hoops further apart so the child really stretches his body. I also use cardboard boxes, set up in an obstacle course, for the child to hop over. The possibilities are endless, but always make sure to move from simple to more complex skill. Try not to skip necessary steps.

Another activity for building agility and bilateral coordination uses the footprints. Make ten footprint patterns from heavy cardboard or foam rubber. Make five left and five right feet. Put the numbers 1 – 10 on each (begin with a 1 on a left foot). Put the left and right footprints on the floor. Then, as he steps on each footprint with the correct foot, have him count one to ten aloud. Later, place the number ten footprint first and have him count backwards.



Feet on Floor

The teacher may also wish to purchase a Crossing Midline Rug. It can be ordered from the *Learning Through Movement* catalog by U.S. Games. The Crossing Midline Rug is a carpet with patterned feet on it. It has three different cross-over patterns, which may be used as you attempt to have the child cross midline (center of the body). Research is showing that the ability to cross midline is a key to successful learning. I usually play music as the children cross over the rug.



Crossing Midline Rug

By midyear you will have established a routine. The children come in and sit cross-legged on the mats while each child completes the activities one by one. I have tried having many children perform at the same time, but it can be chaotic and unsafe. The teacher needs to be close by each child to give assistance or prevent accidents. Therefore, have each child do the activities one by one. This gives each student a moment in the spotlight in which to feel special.

I found the best way to keep discipline during the O. T. class is simply tell the children that I will count “1” for misbehavior. If a child gets to “2” in the same day, he will be removed from participating in O. T. that day. The child has to sit away from the group and watch. The children like O. T. very much. It usually only takes one time of being removed from the group for the child to realize his behavior must be acceptable.

The children then complete the obstacle course for that day. An example of an obstacle course would be: crawl through the tunnel, do two somersaults on the mat, walk the balance beam forward and back, walk the 1-10 feet and finish by swinging on the tire swing for a count of ten. The child takes his seat back on the mat, and the next child goes.

It is important here to note that when a child has improved on a certain task, the children and I clap and cheer to show our pride in his accomplishments. The first time a child catches all three balls on the kickboard or crosses the balance beam is a cause for celebration. This does a great deal to improve the child’s self image as well as the skills he is mastering. It is also very important that the child is never ridiculed or criticized during this class. It should be a nurturing, caring, non-threatening

environment. This is especially important in the beginning because you are asking children to take risks and attempt skills that may be very difficult. Success breeds success. Make sure it's built into every step for each child. Another important benefit is if you have space available you can include kindergarten or first grade students from regular classes that need gross motor activities. I often check these students and have their teacher send them to me during one of the O. T. times.

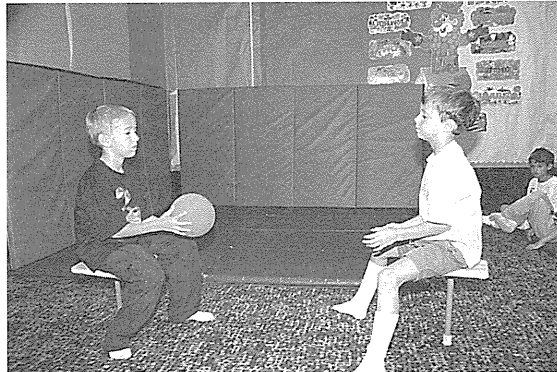
On Fridays, near the middle of the year, I let the children ride in the barrel. This is a 40-gallon, sturdy cardboard drum lined inside with carpeting. I place the barrel on its side and instruct the child to use his body to roll the barrel from one wall to the other and back again. The kids love this activity and by Wednesday or Thursday one of them will ask, "Are we going to ride in the barrel on Friday?" This is an excellent activity for building total body strength, muscle tone and endurance.



Barrel

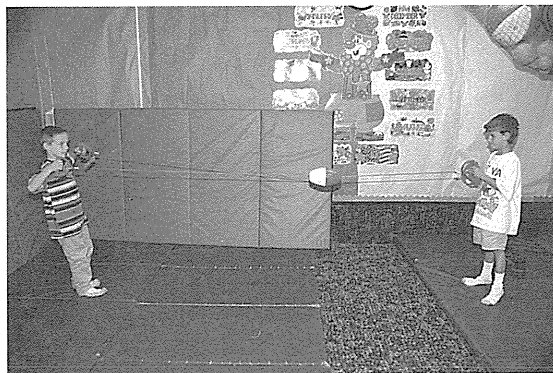
By spring, I am usually able to do some fairly high-level activities in my gross motor skills class. For instance, I'll have two children sit facing each other on a one-legged stool. They will throw a ball back and forth. Then I have them bounce the ball once in between them. I may also have two pairs of partners facing each other. I allow the partners to throw the ball back and forth to the count of ten. Once they get good at this, I have them toss the ball across to the other person's partner. I will say, "Ready, throw!" They will soon be able to judge how to do it with two balls crossing over. I can also have them bounce the balls across the floor to the other person's partner. By doing these types of activities, I am asking the child to visually

track objects, maintain balance and use eyes and hands to accomplish this task.



One-legged Stools

A great activity for building bilateral coordination of hands, visual tracking and upper body strength is Forward Pass. Two children hold the handle at both ends. The plastic disc is placed at one child's end. That child pulls his hands apart and sends the disc across the rope to the other child. The other child forces his hands apart to send the disc back to his partner. This will also increase motor speed as the child reacts to the stimulus.



Forward Pass

Before leaving the O. T. room, I choose a leader to lead the children in a closing exercise such as jumping jacks, run in place, high knee lifts, etc. On the way back to the classroom, we usually play the "Walk the Pole Game." We have a row of structural poles along our sidewalk. I lead the children in a close rank line as we snake in and out around the poles. I sometimes turn around, go back to a pole and go around it again. The kids have to stay close together and watch to follow the path I make. This is another excellent source of practice for visual motor integration.

Example Schedule for O. T.

- Hall game
- Freeze tag
- Wall game
- Skipping on sidewalk
- Crawling tunnels
- Obstacle course
- Kickboard
- Tire swing
- Mat exercises
- Closing exercise
- Pole game (on the way back to class)

In years past, most kindergarten classes had balance beams, jump ropes, balls, Hula Hoops, etc. for children to practice developing gross motor skills. However, in today's purely academic-driven kindergartens, teachers are feeling the pressure of getting their students through the alphabet, sounds, prereading and reading activities.

Thirty years ago, many kindergarten curriculums included these activities through a "whole child" curriculum. Today, our children are coming to school with more and more neurological and developmental problems, and we are neglecting these areas of need. Due to causative factors I have listed earlier in the book, these children have not developed many of these skills. It makes sense to address them in that "window of opportunity" from ages three to seven.

From birth until the time they enter school, many children live in very restricted environments. Babies are moved from the crib, to a high chair, to a car seat, to a swing to a playpen where they are left to languish for long periods of time. They are put where they are safe and require the least amount of care. Even the most affluent children often follow the busy schedule of busy parents. With this type of environment, they do not develop the necessary building blocks of gross motor skills. Many of them do not crawl for extended periods of time. As they grow older, they do not play outside as much. Living in Florida, I realize there are months when it's too hot for a lot of extensive outdoor play. Many children of today live in unsafe neighborhoods, and mothers tend to fret about letting their children outside for long periods of time unsupervised. Mom feels better if they are watching T. V. or playing in their rooms.

Children with these gross motor problems left undiagnosed and untreated will suffer teasing and humiliation at recess or playtime. They will be called names, teased, taunted and suffer self-esteem problems. They will be the last one in class to be chosen on a team, and others may not want to include them at all.

Once the child realizes his inability to keep up with his peers, he will withdraw more and more from activities requiring physical skills. The more the child withdraws, the less likely he will ever improve in any of these skills. The child's confidence and eagerness for school are affected. We can all remember how much it hurts to be teased and taunted at school. Today, with all the problems in our schools, related to lack of motivation and self-discipline, we need to find solutions for these types of learning problems before they are allowed to destroy these children. In our society, which is extremely sports-oriented, and in which a person's worth is readily linked to his physical prowess, these problems become even worse. Our school system also raises our star athletes to a place of high esteem based on their ability to field a ball, make a basket or score a touchdown. We may lead youngsters to believe the inability to do such physical skills makes them somehow less important. Thus, the cycle continues.

By the time these children have reached upper elementary and middle school, they may have withdrawn completely from team sports and other group activities. They are no longer willing to take the risk of physical activity knowing they simply cannot compete. When the other kids in the neighborhood are playing basketball or baseball, they withdraw more and more into their rooms. There they feel unthreatened and can engage in activities where they feel more confident: playing video games, watching the T. V. or listening to their favorite music groups. Some of these do not send the best moral and behavioral messages. They may become obsessed, particularly with video games.

They often gain weight, become lethargic and disinterested in much else. They have fewer and fewer friends because others may prefer a more active lifestyle. Some of them become known as "loners," and they may begin to wear far-out clothes, weird haircuts and other forms of rebellious symbols in an attempt to establish some identity other than the one given by classmates. This leads to more teasing and isolation.

They may become rude and insolent to their peers and teachers. This may be to demonstrate they are impervious to their rejection by peers. They may quit studying or doing homework because they are unable to keep up. They may begin to fail academically in school. Suddenly parents (both busy with jobs or careers) receive a call from the school telling them their child

has been cutting school and failing most or all of his classes. He may begin to associate with a group of others with similar problems. These children cling to each other in a desperate need to fit in or be accepted. This group may turn into a gang or the group that others think are “weird,” but in the group, the child has found acceptance and a sense of belonging.

Even for children for whom gross motor skill problems don’t lead to such dire consequences, problems with confidence, social awkwardness and lack of enjoyment of school could be improved greatly by early gross motor intervention.

GROSS MOTOR SKILLS CHECKLIST

In the Appendix at the end of this book, I am including a sample of the basic skills checklist that I use for my gross motor prescriptive group. This can be modified for each teacher’s individual needs. This is key to maintaining a running record of the child’s progress throughout the year. I will evaluate each child three times during the year to note progress and also the areas that still need work. Although this is a brief listing of skills, it includes all areas that I will be addressing in the program.

Each time I evaluate the child in these areas, I will mark the appropriate column with an M for “mastered,” P for “progressing” or a / for “not introduced yet.” This enables me to pinpoint each child’s individual progress as well as to plan future activities for that individual child.

I also give a copy to the parents of the child who are willing to work on these same skills at home. A school program coupled with a home program will greatly enhance the child’s progress. Just making the parents aware of the problems is certainly going to aid the child. Once the parents are aware of these areas of concern, many will spend time at home to aid the child acquire these vital skills. I have even had parents build a balance beam to use at home. This type of home-school connection is a win/win situation for the child.

COMMENTS CONCERNING THE GROSS MOTOR (O. T.) PROGRAM

“My observations from the beginning of the school year to the present are nothing but positive. In the beginning, these students had poor postural control, balance and bilateral skills. They could not complete sit-ups, walk on the balance beam without falling off, catch balls or skip, just to name a few. All of these are indicators of what the classroom teacher may see in the classroom or out at P. E. and on the playground. These students could not sit in their chairs for any length of time much less listen to what the classroom teacher was saying. They were unable to walk in a line (one behind the other) down the sidewalk. They were holding their crayons, pencils and scissors with an awkward grasp, and their control of these tools was very poor. They could not keep up with their classmates out at P. E.

The O. T. program has worked on the basic motor skills (postural control, balance, bilateral coordination,) on a daily basis, and the results are remarkable. Now, if you walk into the classroom, these students are sitting upright at their desks and not laying on them or wandering around the room. They are holding their pencils, crayons and scissors with functional grips, and they are able to complete assignments adequately. When you see these students walk down the sidewalk, they are in a straight line and not bumping into each other or wandering around. Out at P. E. and on the playground, they feel more confident with their bodies and are better able to keep up with their peers.”

Peg Robson
Occupational Therapist

“Before this program, my son was tested by our physician. His motor skills were significantly behind others at his age level. On May 4, 1998 during his annual checkup, he was retested. His motor skills have improved dramatically. He is now at his age level in motor skill development. The physician was both surprised and delighted at his improvement. This could not have been possible without Mrs. Owens and the O. T. program.”

Sandra Bray
Parent

“I was very impressed with the progress my son has made since he’s been in your program. At the beginning of the year, he was unable to do a sit-up or catch a ball. Now he comes home everyday, and he can’t wait to

tell me how many times he caught the ball when he does the kickboard. He is so proud of his accomplishments, and he really tries his best. Not only has he developed physical strength, but also an emotional strength that we've never seen before. I wish they had a program like this when I started school."

Patricia Pelowski
Parent

"My son was struggling in many ways at the beginning of the school year. Mrs. Owens took him in her class, worked with him in many different ways, and she even worked on his walking and body movements. Six months later he was a different kid. He's on the Honor Roll, he understands what he's learning and even walks and talks better. I owe it all to Mrs. Owens and her class. She took the time and put self-esteem in my son."

Michelle Nelson
Parent

"At the beginning of the school year, my son was recommended for the O. T. program. He walked with a shuffling gait, often walking on one side of the foot. He kept his head down, he held his crayons in a fisted grip, he did not work with scissors or a pencil, and he had gross motor problems like hopping and skipping. His fine motor skills were not well developed. He also lacked upper body strength.

At this time he has done a lot of work in the O. T. program and shown much improvement. He now walks with his feet properly aligned and positioned. His posture is now normal: head up, back straight. He now holds crayons and pencils in a useable, workable grip. He can hop, skip and balance himself better now. Mrs. Owens has given me a lot of assistance at home: a linoleum strip for him to walk on, pushing a pin around a drawn figure for fine motor skills and practical advice.

But he has benefited the most. He looks more normal, and he has more confidence in himself and relationships with peers."

Cheryl Smith
Parent

CHAPTER FOUR

FINE MOTOR PRESCRIPTIVE GROUP

Just as gross motor skills involve the large muscles of the body used in walking, hopping, running and jumping, fine motor skills involve the small muscles in the fingers and hands used for cutting, tracing, coloring, writing and grasping.

At the kindergarten level, we are finding more and more children entering with a deficit in fine motor skills. We use the Daily Finger Play and Developmental Hand Exercises musical tape, sold by Kimbo Educational, daily with our kindergarten students. Finger control, hand stretch, wrist rotation and grip strength needed for fine motor skills will improve by daily use of these exercises.

Children who display fine motor deficits in kindergarten and first grade must be given an opportunity to develop these skills before they can be successful in activities requiring these skills.

The children in this group will be selected by teacher's observation and knowledge of each child's fine motor skills. For the children who have a primitive grip, (when holding a pencil, the wrist is turned to the side and the pencil is held very tightly in a fisted position) writing activities will be very difficult and inappropriate.

CHARACTERISTICS

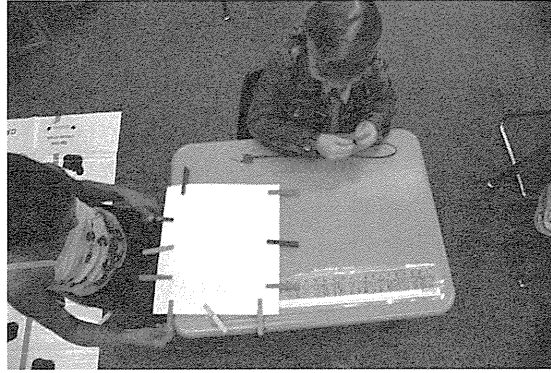
A child with fine motor problems:

- Holds pencil with primitive grip (wrist to the side and too firm of a grip which appears fisted).
- Has problems tracing because he cannot stay on the lines.
- Has trouble staying in the lines when coloring.
- Cannot use scissors effectively.
- When asked to complete a Cut and Paste sheet, he has great difficulty because cutting skills have not developed, and he cannot paste efficiently.

- Tends to scribble rather than to make strokes.
- When asked to do fine motor activities, complains that his fingers or hands are tired.
- Frustrated easily when working on fine motor activity.

ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE PENCIL GRIP

- Lacing cards – Look for sturdy cardboard or foam board, with easy path of holes to lace.
- Use small tongs or tweezers to pick up tiny objects such as pom-poms, mini-marshmallows, Cheerios, etc. Use for counting tasks, or “races” with parent. “Who can move all the cereal into the cup first?”
- Push pin pictures – Staple or tape a simple coloring book page to a sheet of construction paper. Place on a carpet square and use a pushpin to poke holes along the black lines of the picture.
- Put screws into Styrofoam with a small screwdriver.
- Crayon rubbings – Tape flat objects (leaves, shapes, etc.) to the table. Cover with paper and secure to table. Rub over paper using broken, fat crayon (on its side).
- Use rubber stamps with washable inkpads to make pictures.
- Keep a collection of wind-up toys (from kid’s meals) for playtime.
- Drawing with small pieces of chalk, crayons or markers on a vertical surface.
- Finger puppets – Encourage puppets on index finger and long fingers.
- Spinning tops – Small class collection for practice.
- Clothespins (with springs) – Clip pins onto a cardboard square and then remove. Repeat several times.
- Tiddly Winks – Move the Tiddly Winks across the floor.
- Pick-Up Sticks



Fine Motor

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR PENCIL GRIPS

- Be sure the table or desk is just a few inches above the waist. Feet touching the floor is optimal. If feet don't touch the floor, put a wooden box under them for support.
- Writing or coloring on a small incline, such as loose-leaf binder (thin side toward the child) is often helpful.
- Short pencils are sometimes helpful to encourage a better grip.
- Offer special pencil grips to adapt to the pencil while the student is learning the correct grasp pattern.

TEACHING SCISSOR SKILLS

We are finding more and more of our children are coming to school unable to cut and use scissors effectively. We begin teaching cutting skills by using scissors with tiny oval handles. These are much easier for young children to manipulate. Short blades make cutting less frustrating.

It is also important to begin cutting with heavier items such as straws, old playing cards, manila folders, travel brochures and light cardboard sheets. We also begin by making many cuts around the edges of these items. We then start line cutting with straight lines within the length of the blades. Once the child has mastered single cuts, the cuts can be lengthened. We will then move to wavy lines before expecting the child to cut circles or shapes.

A small object such as a penny, sponge or cotton ball can then be placed in the palm of the hand to assist the child in correct finger position.

It is important to note here that the child must be given a lot of practice in developing finger strength, wrist rotation, finger dexterity and coordination. These skills are absolutely necessary for both pencil control and success with scissors. They should be practiced daily and may need to be part of the curriculum for the entire kindergarten year. However, if these important skills are overlooked, the child will become frustrated and discouraged when required to do cutting and writing activities. I always say, "If we are to make all children winners, we must take away the things that make them losers." Fine motor deficits will hamper the child's ability to perform in classroom activities.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECEPTIVE/EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE PRESCRIPTIVE GROUP

Since I have a teacher's aide for this group, I had to find a program that had an easy to use format and was all-inclusive. That meant that the program had to have everything needed to implement the activities contained in one kit.

After researching the available material, I chose the Peabody Early Experience Kit (P. E. E. K.) This program contains one thousand activities. It provides for oral expression and vocabulary development. The vocabulary level of our kindergarten students has dropped significantly over the past few years. The story cards in the kit contain 80 pictures to develop listening, comprehension, recall, sequencing and rhyming words. The program contains all the materials needed for the lessons and provides a script of what to say. Therefore, I felt that this program was quite easy for an aide to use with the students in developing both receptive and expressive language.

It is important to note here the difference between the two: expressive and receptive language. Expressive language involves the child's ability to express his thoughts orally. It includes vocabulary, sentence structure, syntax, grammar patterns and expression. Receptive language, however, is what the child "takes in" and understands about the language. I feel receptive language is much more difficult to measure, but it plays an important role in the child's reading and language skills.

There are concept words that are critical for receptive language development. Words such as "middle, more, both and between" are critical for a child's true understanding of the language. Many early education teachers take it for granted that children understand these words. However, if the child does not master these concept words in the early years, he will suffer later. One of the most common areas of weakness that I noted, with my older S. L. D. (Specific Learning Disabilities) students, was the lack of knowledge of these concept words. Without knowledge of these words that are so commonly used in our language, the child cannot understand what is read or spoken. I am including a list of the most commonly used concept words that must be taught in the early grades. I keep a list of these concept

words in my plan book and include activities in my plans to make sure I have taught them. I often use my Circle Time in the morning to reinforce these words. I will choose one or two a week to include in my lesson plans. I will often use manipulatives to teach these words. Plastic geometric shapes and pattern blocks can be employed. I feel the child will remember the word if he is actively engaged in activities. For instance, if I am teaching the word “middle,” I will direct the children to put the red circle in the middle of the two blue ones. I will also have the children use motor output to integrate these words. For example I might say, “Jimmy, come and stand in the middle of the circle.” By manipulating objects and using their bodies, I hope to make these words more concrete and meaningful to each child. Although this sounds so simple, it is often overlooked in the programs for early at-risk students. Parents need to be aware of these basic concept words and provide lots of practice at home with them. If the child does not acquire proficiency in them, they will come back to haunt him later.

Basic Concept Words

- top/bottom
- above/below
- more/less
- first/last
- before/after
- longest/shortest
- over/under
- highest/lowest
- inside/outside
- all/none
- smallest/largest
- many/few
- forward/backward
- tallest/shortest
- up/down
- full/empty
- between
- together
- both
- middle
- around
- missing
- across
- another
- beside

In placing kindergarten students in this language prescriptive teaching group, I use the Relational Concepts (#11) score from the Developmental Tasks for Kindergarten Readiness test. Those children who fall below 80 percent on this subtest will be placed in this group in an attempt to remediate

this weak area which is so critical for language acquisition. First grade students with poor language skills may also be included in this group.

VISUAL MEMORY PRESCRIPTIVE GROUP FOR KINDERGARTEN

I have included two visual memory groups in our prescriptive teaching groups. That is because of all the areas tested, this is the one where the most students fall below 80 percent. We find more than 70 percent of our kindergarten students do not have an adequate visual memory. This critical area must be addressed early in the child's academic career.

Visual memory is the ability to look at visual stimuli and remember what is seen (in other words, to recall accurately a visual stimulus.) As a result of long hours of watching television, many children get used to just half-looking. Therefore, visual memory does not develop sufficiently.

The kindergarten students in this group will be those who scored below 80 percent on the visual memory subtest (#8) on the Developmental Tasks for Kindergarten Readiness test. These children will need much sequenced practice in this skill in order to ensure success in reading, spelling and other related tasks later on. Children with an inadequate visual memory will have extreme difficulty remembering spelling words no matter how much they study. Therefore, it only makes sense to provide extensive training to improve this critical skill.

I also use a teacher's aide for this group. The aide will seat the students directly in front of the center of the chalkboard. She will begin by displaying patterns using flat pattern shape blocks which have magnetic tape on the back of each one. She will start with just two blocks displayed on the board. She will say, "Look, see." She will then say, "Look, copy," and cover the blocks. The children will then make the same pattern on their desktops using the same shapes and colors. Then she will remove her hand and say, "Look, check." She will then check each child's desktop to see if they have replicated the pattern. After the aide has checked for accuracy, the children can all say the pattern together. As time goes on, and the children have mastered these patterns, she will increase the difficulty using three, four or five blocks. At first the patterns will go straight in a row across the board. Later on the blocks can be placed vertically or in different configurations. After much practice in this skill, a student can take the place of the teacher and make the pattern. Once the children have mastered four

or five shape patterns, we will move to using numbers and then finally letters which have magnetic tape on the back.

This procedure is done daily for about ten minutes depending on the attention span of the students. When they become restless, the teacher will play a fun game called, “Watch Me.” She does two or three actions and then has the children do the same things in order: Touch the nose, smile and raise hand. Oral directions are not given. The children are to use only their eyes in replicating the actions. This type of fun activity will enhance the child’s visual attention and memory.

For variety the teacher can use picture cards for another visual memory activity. She will flash the card for five seconds, then ask specific questions about the picture. What color was the bird? How many children did you see? Again, this sounds so easy, but these are critical skill areas that will serve the children later.

Shape, Number and Letter Bingo games may be introduced later on to further reinforce these skills. Be sure to use the Bingo games that correspond with the visual memory skill that is being taught. For example: Use Shape Bingo with shapes, Number Bingo with numbers, etc.

Attention given to visual memory at the early stages will pay dividends later on as the child is more capable of remembering spelling and reading words. This critical skill must be addressed early and often if remediation is to occur. I feel this is a causative factor in many early learners failing to learn to read well in kindergarten or first grade.

VISUAL MEMORY PRESCRIPTIVE GROUP FOR FIRST GRADE

Visual memory is critical for first graders if they are to acquire reading and spelling skills. Therefore, in the first grade visual memory prescriptive group, words will be used as the visual stimuli for increasing visual memory.

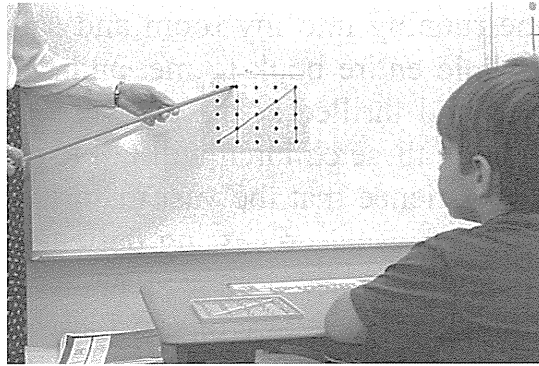
The teacher will separate basic sight word flash cards into groups of two letter words, three letter words, four letter words and five letter words. The children must be sitting at desks facing the teacher. The teacher will start with two-letter words on flash cards. She will hold the card up and say, “Look, read, spell.” The children will look at the word, read the word and then spell the word aloud. The teacher will then say, “Look, spell, write.” Then she will put the card face down as the children write the words on small whiteboards. After the children have written, the teacher will hold the

card up and say, "Look, spell, check." After they have mastered all two-letter words, the procedure is repeated for three, four and five letter word cards. The child must master each before moving onto the next. A great follow-up to this activity is Word Bingo.

VISUAL PERCEPTION PRESCRIPTIVE TEACHING GROUP

Visual perception skills involve the pupil's ability to see and reproduce designs and symbols accurately. This is a critical skill needed for reading, spelling and handwriting success. The child who often reverses letters and numbers, makes upside down letters or misshapes letters is in this group. I use subtest #9 on the Developmental Tasks for Kindergarten Readiness test to place kindergarten students. I pinpoint these problems with my first graders by using Jerome Rosner's Test of Visual Analysis Skills. This is a quick evaluation where the child is required to copy simple, as well as complex geometric patterns. If the child shows a year or more delay on this test, he should be included in the visual perception group. I use this test to place first graders in the prescriptive group.

Once the children have been identified, I use Jerome Rosner's geoboard pattern program as detailed in his book, Helping Children Overcome Learning Difficulties on pages 176-188. I have used this quite successfully and found it invaluable in helping at-risk students improve in visual perception. Again, the teacher seats the students directly in front of the board. She makes the designs (using a dry erase marker) on an acetate 25 dot grid mounted on the board. The dots on the acetate grid must be made with permanent marker. The teacher makes a design on the acetate grid, and the child is asked to replicate the same design with rubber bands on his geoboard. The teacher circulates to check and help with corrections. She erases her design and repeats the activity with a new design. Always use position words: right, left, top and bottom as you work through the patterns. The children will begin to integrate these important directional words. Just manipulating the rubber bands is excellent fine motor practice for the children.



Visual Perception

Parents rely on the visual screenings done at school. When they read the notice that says their child has passed the vision screening, they feel assured that their child's vision must be adequate. However, based on my experience with these at-risk learners, all children who fail to read well must be given an extensive visual examination by an eye doctor. This evaluation must involve more than just testing to see if the child has 20/20 vision. The child needs to be checked for accommodation (ability of the two eyes to focus together). When I am checking to see if his eyes are focusing together, I hold a pencil about six inches from the child's face and ask him to follow the pencil with just his eyes (holding head straight without moving it). I will then move the pencil to the left, right, up and down to see if the child can track the pencil. I will then move the pencil directly to the child's nose to see if both eyes converge at the nose. If one eye turns in and the other stays in a fixed position, I will do further testing to check the child's visual processing. I use Jerome Rosner's Test of Visual Analysis Skills to evaluate the child's visual perceptual skills. I also will be very careful to seat that child in the middle of my room so he can look straight at the board.

At this visual screening, the child also needs to be checked to make sure the eyes are correctly tracking (the ability of the eyes to move smoothly across a page, in a coordinated manner). This again will be a great detriment to reading skill acquisition. Improper tracking will surely impede this child's ability to read. The dominance of the eye also needs to be checked to see if the child is cross dominant (right-eyed, but left-handed). Again, this may affect the child's ability to read. Vision for these children is much more than just visual acuity. Parents must be aware of these conditions so they will know what to ask of the doctor. This fall, I requested the parent of one of my students to take her child in for an eye exam. I told her specifically to ask for her child's accommodation to be checked. The child did have a problem in this area, and glasses were prescribed for him. About three

months later, she came running into my room and said, “Mrs. Owens, last night my son read a whole entire book to me, and I could not believe it!” She was totally amazed and thrilled at his progress. Without this type of intervention early in school, these children will fail to progress to the fullest.

It has been my experience that the vast majority of reading problems are caused by some type of visual processing deficits. These may include: visual discrimination, attention, memory, sequencing, figure-ground, motor and imagery. If a child has a lag in any one of these areas, reading will be very difficult. Without early attempts to remediate the problem, reading instruction will be futile. In our program, by providing training in visual perception and memory with our children, we have made a lasting improvement in our children’s ability to make gains in reading. This improvement will carry over to all learning.

The last week of school this past year, I gave a final spelling test consisting of twenty words that were review words from the entire year. I can honestly state that I did not have one reversal on any of my students’ tests. This could not have been possible without visual perception training. Early attention to problem areas in processing will pay huge dividends. It is a must as we strive to reach and teach our at-risk students.

Also, speaking of visual processing and the important role it plays in learning to read, lighting in a classroom is an important aspect to consider. I believe, based on my experience working with these children for years, fluorescent lighting may cause difficulties for children who have visual problems associated with reading. After my children begin to read extensively, I will often give them sun visors to wear during reading. These help to cut down the glare, making it easier for them to read accurately for longer periods of time without fatigue. I may also provide colored overlays to put over the pages in an attempt to facilitate more efficient vision. Adequate and proper vision is a vital part of reading. Its role is critical to reading success.

AUDITORY PROCESSING PRESCRIPTIVE TEACHING GROUP

Auditory analysis deals with the child’s ability to listen and process auditory stimuli. This ability is another vital skill critical for efficient learning. There are many auditory training programs on the market that can be used. To place the kindergarten students in this group, I use low scores

on subtests #5 and #6 on the Developmental Tasks for Kindergarten Readiness profile sheet. For placing first graders, I use Jerome Rosner's Test of Auditory Analysis Skills. This very brief assessment will disclose those children who will benefit from training of auditory skills.

I use the combination of programs in the prescriptive group. I use Rosner's auditory perceptive skills techniques included in his book, Helping Children Overcome Learning Difficulties, pages 189-210. Rosner's books and tests can be found in *Academic Therapy Publication* catalog. I use this for approximately ten minutes. I also use Auditory Perception training tapes. These are a series of tapes with corresponding worksheets. They include all areas of auditory training. I use one tape and one worksheet daily. Both of these programs are very well explained in the teacher manuals. The program you decide to use is not nearly as important as the fact that you use something to remediate at-risk children's auditory skills. It is important to do it daily and in a sequential manner. Auditory skills can be improved with consistent, daily practice.

I am also including many simple activities that can be used by all teachers at different times of the day. With all the auditory problems displayed by early at-risk learners, it only makes sense to strive to remediate them.

Auditory Skills Training

- 1) Auditory training tapes/listening skills tapes
- 2) "Simon Says" game
- 3) Echoing – The teacher reads a sentence from a big book, and the child repeats the sentence verbatim. Increase length as mastered. This can be done daily at story time to increase auditory attention and memory with the whole class or individual students.
- 4) Provide quiet time for listening and practice the following sequence:
 - a. Say unrelated numbers, and have the child repeat verbatim, for example: 3, 5, 6, 7.
 - b. Say unrelated letters, and have the child repeat verbatim, for example: a, m, r, t.
 - c. Say unrelated words, and have the child repeat verbatim, for example: boy, girl, bird.

- d. Say related words in sentences, and have the child repeat verbatim, for example: The man is a policeman. The bird is in the tree.

Each of these activities is started with a three or four word or number memory span and then increased as the children increase mastery.

- 5) Draw a picture – The child is given a blank sheet of paper and is asked to draw each item. Example: Draw a house in the middle of the bottom of your paper, draw a sun at the top of your paper and draw a tree to the right of the house. Then ask the child to color each a certain color. Increase number and difficulty as mastered.
- 6) Oral direction practice: Give the child directions that require motor activity to complete. Go to the door, clap once, walk back to your seat and sit. Increase the number and level of difficulty as mastered.

A simple technique that I use for increasing auditory attention is to reward “good listeners.” When I am giving oral directions or lengthy explanations, I will say, “If you are listening to me right now, you may go and get a treat from the treat box.” I only do this occasionally, but it truly does motivate good listening. The children never know when to expect it. The first time I do this, there may be only two or three children who get up. However, as time goes on, more and more children will be receiving treats as their auditory attention improves because I have given them a reason to listen.

When auditory problems are not remediated, the child will be unable to cope with the classroom activities. Inability to follow oral directions will cause him to be unable to keep up with peers. Lack of auditory memory will cause him to feel lost and confused. Auditory sequencing (order) and auditory discrimination (comparing and contrasting) will really hamper his ability to learn phonetic sounds that may ultimately hamper his ability to read well. Again, I will state, “If we are to make all children winners, we must take away the things that make them losers.” Auditory processing problems will certainly hamper the child.

CHAPTER SIX

DOMINANCE AND THE ROLE OF DOMINANCE IN LEARNING

Before I begin this chapter on dominance, I must clearly state that the information and ideas presented are based on my observations and experiences in the classroom. I feel dominance is vital to understanding why learning is so difficult for some students who appear to have adequate intelligence. Dominance refers to the preferred hand, eye, ear or foot used. Exceptions will be found to every theory that I explain in this chapter. Every child is different, and no general statement will apply to each and every one. However, I feel all teachers and parents must be aware of how dominance does impact on learning. At the beginning of the school year, I will test all kindergarten and first grade students in our program to establish (as much as possible) their dominance profile. This will give us great insight into those children who are one-sided (right-handed, right-eyed, right-eared, and right-footed). Research has shown that these children with this profile tend to be more successful in school since they are accessing the left (logic) hemisphere of the brain. In general, the left hemisphere of the brain controls functions of the right side of the body. The right hemisphere generally controls all functions of the left side of the body. However, the hemispheres of the brain may be transposed in a small percentage of children.

Most right-handed, right-eyed students have the ability to draw from the left hemisphere which is more conducive to traditional classrooms. The left hemisphere deals with details, linear patterns, language, numbers and analysis. All of these are essential for success in a traditional classroom. However, the most important fact for teachers and parents to remember is that this hemisphere does not fully develop until between the ages of seven and nine. Therefore, in a traditional setting, the current push for academic skills in preschool, kindergarten and first grade makes little sense for the at-risk child. Many children, who are not able to easily access this hemisphere, will suffer frustration and defeat if they are asked to complete tasks before they are capable of doing so. I shall now list the attributes usually associated with each hemisphere.

The Brain's Two Hemispheres

Left (Logic)	Right (Gestalt)
• Can control emotions • Sentences, letters • Semantics, syntax • Numbers • Planned • Technique-oriented (in dance, for example) • Looks ahead (future) • Notes differences • Linear • Structured • Thinks sequentially • Sees the pieces first	• Very free with emotions • Rhythm, flow • Emotion • Image • Spontaneous • Movement, flow (in dance, for example) • Spontaneous (now) • Notes similarities • Estimates • Spontaneous • Thinks simultaneously • Sees the whole picture first
• Music (notes, tempo) • Sports (proper stance, placement) • Art (technique-oriented) • Analytical • Oriented to language	• Music (rhythm, passion) • Sports (rhythm, flow) • Art (emotion, image) • Intuitive • Oriented to feelings

The children who seem to suffer the most in our traditional schools are those right-brained (Gestalt) learners who may be left-handed or left-eyed. They tend to draw more from the right hemisphere of the brain. This hemisphere deals with whole (global) processing, rhythm, emotions and intuition. Thus these Gestalt or “right-brained” students may have great difficulty in the primary grades with such an emphasis on linear and language activities. The right hemisphere tends to have a growth spurt of development between the ages of four and seven. Therefore, children in preschool, kindergarten and first grade are more easily able to access this hemisphere. It only makes sense then to design programs in the early years that include more methods and strategies involving these attributes.

Neglecting to use right-brained strategies may lead to frustration and failure with these children.

Early programs should emphasize emotion, flow, rhythm and movement. When we put too much emphasis on writing, letters, numbers and linear activities, we harm those students who are not yet ready for so many “left-brained” activities. The left hemisphere doesn’t fully develop (in many children) until the ages of seven to nine. Therefore, by the time these at-risk students can access the left hemisphere, we have already turned them off and made them feel inferior by using inappropriate methods, strategies and curriculum.

For example, when teaching alphabet recognition to early learners, music and movement should be used instead of worksheets. By having the children sing the letters, hop on them on a mat and build them with their bodies, we stand a much better chance of true integration because we are using “right-brained” activities.

Another example is language and writing skills. Although it might be appropriate to expect an average or above-average kindergarten student to write a paragraph, it would be totally inappropriate to ask an at-risk or “right-brained” kindergartner to do so. The “right-brained” kindergartner would be much better served by acquiring language through puppet plays, drama or oral presentations. He will have much more success in these types of activities with an emphasis on feeling, movement and intuition, rather than linear and technique emphasis required to write a paragraph.

When learning math, the “right-brained” student would be much more successful singing number songs and using manipulatives to show number concepts than being expected to complete a worksheet of math facts.

For children with linear, visual and fine motor lags, the use of shaving cream, dry-erase marker boards or sand trays might be more advisable the first semester rather than paper/pencil activities.

Using appropriate methods and strategies in early education programs is a must, if we are to foster true learning as well as maintain egos and motivation for children, who are not ready for “left-brained” activities. We must give them time to develop access to both hemispheres before requiring them to do so.

From my years of testing students to determine dominance profiles, I have found the most at-risk students tend to be those who are right-handed and left-eyed, or left-handed and right-eyed. I refer to these students as “cross-dominant.” The child with a dominant left eye may want to naturally look at the right side of the page first when reading and then move across to the left. When that eye wants to track from right to left, it will also guide the

hand from right to left. This fact often causes letter reversals and writing problems which are so often associated with learning disabilities. When children are recommended for psychological testing to determine a learning disability, reversals are one of the most common sighted problems. Without many interventions through use of alternative strategies, these children continue to fill our Title I and Special Education classes. From the very beginning of their academic careers, they are asked and expected to do things which are truly impossible for them. They develop emotional and discipline problems, not because they will not do, but simply because they cannot do.

When explaining dominance in my workshops, I use the analogy of driving to work. That right-handed, right-eyed child has driven the same route to work for quite awhile. The trip has become routine as his car (neural pathways) has followed the same path and it has become quite easy for him. He can relax and enjoy the ride because he is so assured of where he is going and how to get there. He arrives at work relaxed and ready to take on the world.

For the cross-dominant child, the trip is much more frustrating. Every day, he takes a different route to work. Some days he gets turned around, drives around in circles, makes wrong turns and nearly wrecks his car. He becomes more and more confused and bewildered as he becomes more and more “turned around.” His car (neural pathways) has no set route. He struggles to find the right turn, street or sign, but he is completely and utterly lost. Then he stops to ask directions from someone (teacher). If she ignores his cry for help or acts disgusted with him, he is even more defeated. This adds greatly to his feelings of despair. Finally, he gives up and doesn’t even make it to work.

As he sits by the side of the road, he watches his friend (right-handed, right-eyed) flying by, tooting his horn, waving happily and ponders why he can’t be more like him.

I must stress here that all of these conditions and limits of transcending hemispheres have nothing to do with IQ. The child’s IQ may be extremely high, but because of dominance factors, the child has an inability to show his intelligence in traditional classroom settings. Everyone knows children who are so verbal and appear so bright, but as soon as they are asked to complete written assignments to prove that brightness, they shut down and appear quite the opposite. Based on this fact, our program uses methods and strategies to allow the child to show his ability in other ways that are more appropriate.

Perhaps the most important concept to remember, when speaking of brain hemispheres and the role that they play in all learning, is one important fact. The more all humans access both hemispheres, the more efficiently we are able to function. It is truly necessary to use both hemispheres to be the most successful in any task. When I conduct my workshops, I use the example of sports to make this point because it is so easy for everyone to relate to. The left-brained baseball player will go to the batter's box and place his feet correctly, his stance will be superb and his eye-hand coordination will allow him to knock the ball over the fence. However, if he is unable to transcend the right hemisphere to access the emotion and excitement, he will run around the bases and return to the dugout feeling little joy or fulfillment.

However, the right-brained batter cannot perfectly place his feet, his stance may be all wrong, but if he manages to get a single, he will jump for joy, hug all his teammates, slap the ump on the back and show uncontrollable joy and excitement. Although he lacked all the technique and optimal placement, which are left-brained qualities, he showed all the emotion, freedom of feelings, flow and rhythm which are linked to the right hemisphere.

In conclusion, the perfect batter would be the one who could access both hemispheres and be the "star." He would have the perfect foot placement, stance, eye-hand coordination and technique to hit the ball over the wall. He also would display his passion and emotion as he ran the bases. Raising and clasping his hands in triumph, slapping his teammates' hands and showing boundless joy and pride would make him the perfect example of the person who succeeds greatly because of the ability to transcend hemispheres efficiently for optimal performance.

TESTING DOMINANCE

Testing dominance gives insight into those students whose "one-sidedness" should lead to successful learning. One-sidedness means the child is right-handed, right-eyed, right-eared and right-footed. In most children, this dominance profile will enable the child to easily access the left (logic) hemisphere of the brain. These children tend to have more success in school which is heavily dependent on left-brained qualities.

Testing dominance will also lead to a better understanding of those children who may be right-handed but left-eyed, or left-handed and right-

eyed. These children may display learning problems due to confusion in processing information.

Finding the dominance preference of children will not be a “cure-all,” but it will give great insight into the child’s learning patterns.

I am including here the method that I use to test for dominance with my students:

Dominant Eye

First, have the child sit across from you at a table. Ask the child to fold his hands on the desktop. Use an index card that has a small hole cut in the center. Ask the child to bring the card to one eye and “zero in” on a particular object in the room. Repeat three times noting the eye that is used in each try. Each time use a different object in the room for them to focus on. If the child switches eyes, note that dominance may not have been established yet.



Dominant Eye

Dominant Hand

First, have the child sit across from you at a table. Ask him to fold his hands on the desktop. Then, have him pick up a pencil, a marker and a crayon individually. These should be placed in the center of the child’s body on the desktop. If the child switches hands, note that hand dominance may not have been established yet.

Dominant Ear

First, have the child sit across from you at a table. Ask the child to fold his hands on the desktop. Using a play telephone, ask the child to pretend to answer it three times. I will say, “This is Mom calling, please pick up and say, ‘Hi, Mom.’” Then Dad, Grandma, etc. Note the ear to

which the child places the phone. Repeat three times. If the child switches ears, note that the child may not have established a dominant ear yet.



Dominant Ear

Dominant Foot

Have the child stand against the wall with feet together. Ask the child to step away from the wall three times. Note the foot which he uses to lead with. If the child switches the lead foot, note that a dominant foot may have not been established yet.

We should be aware that cross-dominance might result in learning difficulties. Also, those children who establish dominance last may tend to have learning problems especially in the primary grades.

I cannot overstate the importance of activities that stress rhythm, rhyme, and repetition. These make learning much more meaningful for these cross-dominant children who do not learn efficiently through traditional paper/pencil worksheets. The need for sensory input with motor output activities also is paramount with these students to enable them to transcend hemispheres.

This group of cross-dominant children will need occupational therapy, visual perception and lots of practice in crossing midlines before they can succeed. I also find many of these children never crawled as infants or crawled for a very short time. Crawling activates both hemispheres in a very balanced way. Children who miss this crawling stage may exhibit learning problems later. Crawling fosters development of the nerve pathways between the two hemispheres of the brain. Skipping this important step in development, they have also missed an essential building block of bilateral coordination.

It is also true all early learners will not demonstrate a true dominance for ears, eyes, hands and feet. When a child keeps switching from one eye

to another, he has not yet established dominance. This group of children also tends to have severe learning problems and tends to be severely hampered in learning success.

This past May at Kindergarten Round-Up, I tested 20 four and five year-olds on dominance. I walked around the rooms and looked for those children who seemed to be really struggling with the visual sheet where they were required to draw a circle, square, triangle and an X.

I asked every one of them to pick up a pencil, then a crayon and then a marker. In absolutely every case of the child who could not complete the visual sheet, the child either used his left hand to pick up at least one object, or he used a different hand for each (switching from right hand to left hand). I then realized that either he had not established a true dominant hand, or he was indeed going to be left-handed.

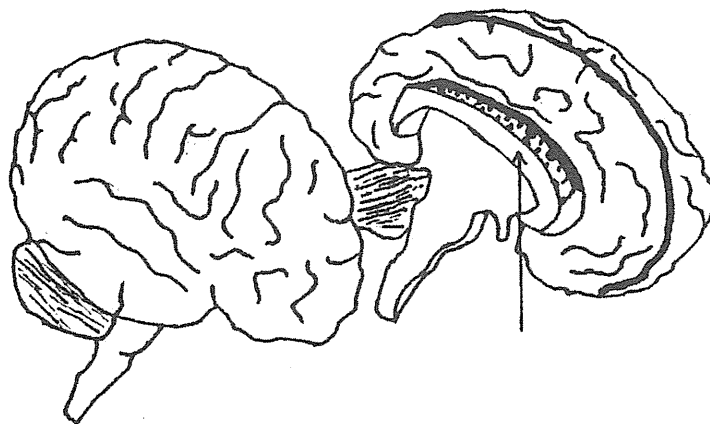
I then asked ten children who were able to do the visual sheet easily to complete the same task of picking up the objects, and all of them picked up the objects consistently with the right hand.

There will be many critics who say that dominance has nothing to do with children being able to attain and retain information, concepts and skills. However, that evening reaffirmed what I have said for years. Left-handed dominance, cross-dominance or no real dominance impedes early at-risk learners in ways that must be explored and modified if the child is to truly reach his full potential. No matter their IQ, they have greater difficulty processing information as well as integrating skills.

Once you have recorded dominance profiles, it is very important that you use this information in placing the children in your classroom. Right-eared children should be placed in the left side of the classroom so they easily access auditory stimuli. Right-eared students will be more frustrated if their dominant ear faces the wall. Left-eared children will be placed in the right side of the classroom. Also, all cross-dominant children need to be placed facing the chalkboard in the center of the classroom to optimize their learning. Avoid placing them at an angle or on the extreme left or right side. I also truly believe all students in kindergarten, first grade and second grade should be seated in desks facing the board. When we seat the children with their dominant eye toward the wall, I fear we are inhibiting the child's ability to use the preferred eye. When the children sit with their backs to the chalkboard, we are asking them to turn their heads and may be forcing them to use their non-dominant eye. This can really impede visual-motor and perception. For the cross-dominant child, it may really have dire consequences. All young children need a straight view of material presented to them. By placing them in clusters or at angles, I truly feel we are

Right Hemisphere

Left Hemisphere



The arrow is pointing to the corpus callosum which is the “superhighway” that must be developed in the early stages of childhood.

impeding proper visual processing and development. In our program, all kindergarten and first graders sit in desks in straight rows facing the board.

Recent brain research clearly points to the fact that no matter our age, we must all be able to transcend hemispheres efficiently in order to learn. In order to learn and succeed in a classroom and complete learning activities, children must be able to travel the corpus callosum (highway) that connects the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Due to causative factors cited earlier, many of our at-risk children come to school with a narrow path full of brambles, vines and boulders. They suffer from the inability to make the trip along their arduous obstacle course.

Other children, perhaps with no higher IQ, have an eight-lane “superhighway” already built. They are able to travel easily and quickly from hemisphere to hemisphere. They suffer little stress and thoroughly enjoy learning from the very first day until well into their retirement years. They enjoy academic pursuits and fill our college classrooms and libraries for the duration of their lives. They have been blessed with the right “wiring” and often come from stimulating, active, language-rich homes. This early environment has fostered their ability to travel the superhighway to learning. However, for the less fortunate child, the journey is much more difficult and frustrating. Because of faulty “wiring” (often inherited from one parent) or other causative factors, many of them “shut down” or sit down on the path and give up. The journey is just too overwhelming for them to continue. They may even pick up some rocks to throw at their teachers and peers who make fun of them for not being able to compete in the journey effectively.

We, as educators, must have the knowledge and methods to help these at-risk students to build their “superhighway” one pebble at a time, if necessary. By using crossing midline activities, singing, rhythm, rhyme, repetition and an intermodality (using ears, eyes, hands and bodies) approach based on brain research, we can attempt to change these children’s arduous path and allow them to travel the superhighway to academic success.

A second benefit of placing a child in an age-appropriate classroom is the fact that it takes a lot of pressure off the teacher. I speak from the voice of experience on this. Every fall when I study the list of mental ages of my at-risk students, I am overwhelmed by the fact that I must make two or three years progress with some of them in order for them to show enough growth to be ready for second grade the next year. I sometimes feel truly hopeless when I look at this prospect. By spring, I must have them ready to take the Stanford Achievement Test. I must give them the skills to pass the reading unit tests, chapter math tests, quarterly math tests, writing assessment and all the standardized tests that are required.

If I have taught special needs children for so many years and feel this extreme pressure, I cannot even imagine how young teachers with little experience feel. No wonder we lose so many gifted, exuberant, young teachers when we expect miracles from them. So along with frustrating the students with an inappropriate curriculum, I feel we are unduly frustrating the teachers as well.

This fact will drastically affect the teacher’s relationship with her pupils as well. It becomes much more difficult to relax and enjoy the at-risk child when you are always worried about the lack of progress he is making. You don’t have time to appreciate his bright smile or wonderful sense of humor when you’re constantly worried about the fact that he cannot add or does not have all his phonetic sounds mastered. When the teacher feels and acts so tensely, it has to affect the child. Many of these at-risk students are the most intuitive children in the world, so they are keenly aware of the fact that their teacher always seems tense and somehow disappointed in them (even though the teacher tries her best to hide it). It makes it much more difficult for teachers to be patient and understanding when we’re always under so much pressure to raise those test scores.

The month before spring achievement testing is the worst of the year. You have given 110 percent effort, and so has the at-risk child, but you know there are three or four students every year who will not reach that all-important 40 percent ranking on the achievement test. You know they have made vast improvements since the beginning of the year, but they still fall

short. I can say that this has been the most defeating part of my job for the past several years with the emphasis on raising test scores. I'm afraid we may be so worried about raising test scores that we are forgetting about raising children.

When we continue to use lecture, worksheets and rote memory as our only techniques for instruction, we have turned education into a race where they cannot possibly compete with their more capable peers. They are turned off before they ever get turned onto education and the opportunities it affords. Many of these children will remain functionally illiterate throughout their lives. Many men I have interviewed as adults have never read an entire book. They also refer to a sick feeling they get when they enter a classroom. Those feelings of inadequacy and terror, suffered in childhood, remain into adulthood.

Recently the media reported that all of the industrialized nations, Americans' financial success is more directly linked to their educational level than any of the other nations. Therefore, these results point to the fact that if we fail to level the playing field, we not only deny the at-risk students academic success but also future financial success.

Perhaps most unfortunate is the fact that since many learning difficulties related to cross-dominance appear to be inherited, generation after generation in the same family may suffer discrimination at the hands of a public school system which fails to make programs that accommodate a child's learning style. Instead, schools futilely attempt to make kids fit the program.

In American education today we are pushing academic skills earlier and earlier upon a group of children who are totally unprepared and unable to achieve them. At our school, between 29 and 32 percent of our kindergarten students are below expected developmental ages when they enter school. This is the pattern I have found over the last six years. We cannot continue to put on the roof before pouring the foundation for these children and then wonder why the house falls in during the upper elementary and middle school years.

I often tell of a fellow teacher who came running into my room one morning to show me her three year-old's homework from preschool. It was a worksheet full of capital and lowercase letters which he was to complete. Her son had taken a red crayon and scribbled all over it. He had reacted very appropriately for his developmental age. Should she have punished him for not being able to complete his homework? Of course not.

If free public education is indeed the bulldozer that levels the playing field of American society, we are not giving many of our at-risk students a

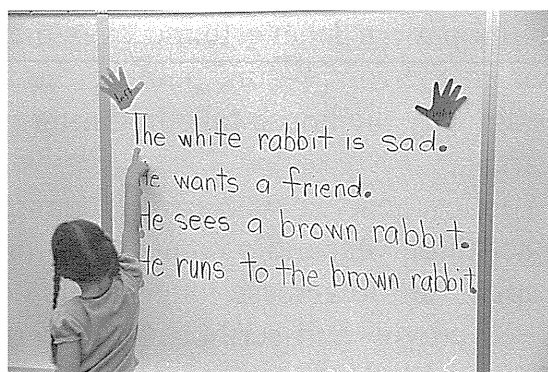
chance to play on a level field. In fact, we are piling up barriers for them to cross. We must change our philosophy and also our methods of early at-risk education.

In some European countries, where formal reading instruction is postponed until the age of eight, all children are allowed to build the “super-highway” before they are asked to travel on it. Some of these countries have a literacy rate of nearly one hundred percent. We must restructure our system and do it quickly if we are to maintain our leadership role in the world. When tested on language and mathematics, American students are falling behind most of the world’s industrialized nations. The need is great, the time is short.

GREEN MEANS GO

Once I have completed my dominance testing on every child, I will study the results to help me carefully plan my initial reading instruction. This year I have found that I have four cross-dominant children who may need extra attention in mastering left to right progression across a page, based on the fact that they may naturally want to read from right to left.

Therefore, I will use green dots under every first word of each line on both chart paper and the board. I will have the child touch each dot as he begins to read. I always say, “Green means go.” If you find the children have serious problems tracking, you may want to put a green dot under the first letter of every word. These dots can be put on using markers, green paper dots or even Velcro.



Green Means Go

I will also use red dots to show the ending punctuation mark. Thus, the child has the concept of green meaning go, and red meaning stop. When the children begin reading, I will use the first preprimer of the Heath Reading Series, Yellow Fish, Blue Fish, which has a green lizard at the beginning of each line. When my children point and read in this book, I always say, "Pointer finger on green. Go!" Thus, I have attempted as much as possible to train those left-eyed students to track from left to right. The beauty of this strategy is that although it is critical for those left-eyed students, it is also greatly beneficial to all my early readers. This type of intervention must be done in the very first stages of instruction if we are to reduce the number of cross-dominant children becoming disabled readers.

After months of using the finger as a pointer across the page, I will introduce the EZC Reader, which is sold by Really Good Stuff. This is a marker that has a highlighted strip which is placed on the line of print in the book. This is the next step that I use to enable the child to track smoothly from left to right. I will continue to use this method until I am assured that the child can read fluently without any tracking aid.

Thus I have a progression of strategies to aid my cross-dominant children (as well as others, perhaps) to be as successful as possible. Again, I will state, "If we are to make all children winners, we must take away the things that make them losers." Inadequate tracking skills will certainly help to make any child a "loser."

I will restate the progression of tracking strategies:

- 1) Green dots under the first word of every line of every story done on the chalkboard or chart.
- 2) Reading books with a green visual clue at the beginning of each line.
- 3) EZC Markers

Some statistics have shown that as many as one out of every three boys in our country needs some type of remedial reading help by third grade. Having taught disabled readers for years, I believe strongly that inadequate left-to-right progression is one causative factor.

CROSSING MIDLINE

I have just emphasized the importance of transcending hemispheres for optimal learning. Many American children lead such sedentary lifestyles

and crawl very little, or perhaps not at all. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers of early at-risk children to provide many opportunities to cross midline which may have been skipped by the child not crawling. Midline means the center of the body. Crossing the midline is taking arms or legs and going across the center of the body from one side to the other.

During these types of activities, both sides of the body are being used in a coordinated manner. When children use both ears, eyes, hands and feet together in a coordinated balanced way, the corpus callosum (super-highway) is developed and enhanced. This increases cognition and integration of skills.

At the beginning of the school year, I ask my first graders, "Can you put your right hand on your left hip? Put your left hand on your right ear." I then continue a series of these crossing midline directions to assess their knowledge of right and left as well as their ability to cross midline easily and automatically.

I will then star the right hand with a red star stamp daily when they enter the classroom. Throughout the day, I will often refer to "red/right" to instill that automatic sense of right. This is a critical skill that the teacher must never take for granted. Even with the brightest early learners, it must be addressed. Only after I am assured that the child has an automatic sense of right, will I introduce left. This may take the full year of first grade. If I need to use left, I will refer to it as the "other" until the child has complete mastery of right. This inability to distinguish right and left will haunt the child throughout his entire life. I know from my experience of teaching these children in the upper grades that it will also be a great impediment to classroom success.

There are many activities to have children practice crossing midline. I shall list a few samples, but teachers must use their own creativity to design other ways to foster this critical skill.

- 1) When singing, rapping or chanting, (such as number patterns, months of the year, math facts, spelling words etc.) have the children practice crossing midline by extending the right hand across the center of their bodies to the left in front of them. Then extend the left hand across their bodies to the right in front of them. Start slowly to ensure they are truly crossing midline.
- 2) Have the children play crawling games. Remove the chairs from the desks and tables, and allow the children to crawl under the desks or tables. Later on, you can play music. Stop the music occasionally, and tell them to stop with the music and begin again when the music

starts. Now you are teaching crossing midline, auditory attention, gross motor skills and rhythm all at the same time.

- 3) Purchase crawling tunnels (if money is available) and allow the children to crawl through them to music.
- 4) Do a Cross Midline March every morning to accompany the alphabet song that you use. Children line up and march around the room. As they march, they are to put their right elbow on the raised left knee, then left elbow on the raised right knee. You can only start this activity after the children can all do a simple march. Start slowly because this is very difficult for early learners. If they cannot do it, allow them to march while the other children do this cross midline march. Wait until they can do it easily without any stress. Never add to the stress level of these children.



Cross Midline March

- 5) When seated at their desks, tell the children to fold their hands in the center of their desktops. Then say, “Put your right hand on the top left corner of your desk. Now put your left hand on the top right corner.” If left has not been introduced yet, say the “other” corner. Use this same procedure on worksheets. Say, “Put your right hand on the top left (or other) corner. Put your left hand (or other) hand on the top right corner of your paper. I always put a red star on the right side of any worksheets before they are distributed. This connects with the red star on the right hand. This will allow the child to move smoothly and efficiently from one side of the worksheet to the other. This is critical for success in the child’s entire academic career.

- 6) Place cardboard feet that are numbered from one to ten in a cross-over pattern along a tile or carpet strip in the classroom. Tape these feet to the tile to keep them in place. The number one foot (a left foot) will be placed first on the right side of the strip. The number two foot (a right foot) will be placed on the left side of the strip. The children will stand at the end of the numbers with both feet together. They will then lead off with the left foot and then cross over with the right to the next foot, etc.
- 7) Use the Crossing Midline Rug, described in Chapter Three, daily to enhance this critical skill. After morning story time, I will have all my students cross the rug on their way back to their seats.



Crossing Midline Rug

Continue to create your own activities to foster and perfect this critical skill with your students. These activities will help the children to transcend hemispheres of the brain, improve their balance, gross motor skills and coordination skills which are all important as we attempt to teach the “whole child.”

TEACHING READIN`, WRITIN` AND `RITHMETIC THROUGH RHYTHM, RHYME AND REPETITION

The most improvement I have noted since starting my intermodality program for early at-risk students is how rhythm, music and motor activities

do truly foster and enhance the integration of basic skills for these children. They enable the child to transcend hemispheres of the brain.

In class we sing all our basic skills: colors, shapes, days of the week, months of the year, counting patterns, letters of the alphabet, phonics, math facts and even contractions. As we are singing these songs, we are also involved with some kind of motor output. When singing long vowels, we may be marching around the room. When singing the days of the week, we will join hands in a circle and move together to the beat of the music. When singing numbers, we will be flicking our fingers in and out. For example, when singing by fives, we will flick five fingers on the left hand, then five fingers on the right hand. This movement using both sides of the body also helps them transcend hemispheres. For counting by tens, we would flick all ten fingers at the same time. The beauty of this kind of instruction is that you are also improving fine motor skills, gross motor skills and socialization skills at the same time.

A secondary benefit to this type of instruction is that the child will constantly be reviewing these basic skills at other times throughout the day at playtime, bathing or sitting in the car or bus. After a month or so in my classroom, parents will tell me again and again how often they hear their children singing the songs and also moving their bodies as they sing. It's neurological input with motor output at its finest, and it truly works.

I therefore suggest that all teachers of at-risk students go through their curriculum guide and try to purchase a wide variety of audiotapes or cd's to use in teaching basic skills. Whether it is multiplication tables or capital cities of the states, there are many tapes that would foster an intermodality type of learning.

Recent brain research is showing more and more how these types of activities help the brain transcend hemispheres and lead to true integration of learning. As I have stated, worksheets leave the skill "out there" without making it part of the learner.

"Sing it, and they will learn it!"

LEFT/RIGHT DISCRIMINATION

It is crucial that early at-risk programs endeavor to establish left/right discrimination (ability to know right from left) in early learners. Preschool,

kindergarten and first grade teachers can aid students in acquiring this vital skill by using several techniques daily.

Stamp the right hand with a red star every morning when the children enter the classroom. Then throughout the day give lots of practice by saying, “Red, right,” when appropriate. Do not introduce left until right has been mastered. As children do activities, say, “Put your red right hand on the word, line, picture, etc.” I also put a red star on the right side of every worksheet.

Use songs such as the “Hokey-Pokey” and tapes where the children must use their right or left hands.

Use hall games where the students line up in the middle of the hall and are told individually, “Go to the right side.” I stick with right until all are able to move automatically to the right. I have noted such progress in this vital skill since implementing the red star and hall games. At the beginning of the year, the child will look at the star to aid him moving to the right side. After lots of practice, he will move automatically without looking at the star.

When moving in lines through the halls, I always say, “Put your right hand on your hip, and your finger (left index) to your lip.” Again, this constant visual, auditory and kinesthetic movement will lead to integration of left/right discrimination.

By the time these children move onto second and third grades, the lack of this important skill will hamper their performance in the classroom and in daily life activities. When taking a spelling test, they are told to put the date on the right side, their name on the left side, and number their paper from one to ten on the left side. This lack of discrimination causes such stress that they may shut down and be unable to correctly spell the words they knew earlier that morning. Teachers who are aware of these problems will give those students extra time or even exempt them from completing the heading. These children might be better assessed by oral testing.

I have watched documentary films on summer programs for learning disabled students, and the counselors in charge say that one of the greatest impediments they face is the fact that the children don’t know right from left. So many of us take this simple task for granted, but to the child with such a problem, it is a major problem. By doing some simple activities early in their academic career, in a non-threatening environment, these children stand a much better chance of success.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MODALITY TESTING AND THE ROLE OF MODALITIES IN LEARNING

Before I begin discussing modalities and the role that they play in a child's learning, I need to clarify the term. Modalities include the three ways that all humans use to learn. They include visual, auditory and kinesthetic. I have used the term modalities for many years. Thirty years ago in our Specific Learning Disabilities program, we tested children to pinpoint their learning strengths and weaknesses. We then taught these children using their modality strength, but we also tried to remediate the weak area. This is where I was first exposed to this kind of instruction which I call intermodality or modality-based instruction.

However, thirty years later, I am amazed that so little is done today in using this type of approach. Research has been conducted that points to the fact that when students are taught in this manner, improvement may be shown. Nonetheless, very few teachers use this type of strategy to reach and teach those children who tend to be less successful in school. It has been my experience that modality-based instruction is very successful in remediating all students. This is especially true for the very youngest children. These children tend to be more kinesthetic. This may change later on, but it is often the case with many early at-risk learners. When we bombard these kinesthetic learners with too many auditory and visual activities, especially worksheets, they tend to be left behind their more visual and auditory peers.

The term "modalities" has now been replaced with the term learning styles. It is basically the same concept. The Swassing-Barbe Modality Index, published by Zaner-Bloser, Inc., has been around for years, but I continue to use it because I am quite familiar with it, and it has served me well over the years. However, schools may opt to use one of the newer screenings available today. What screening is used is not nearly as important as the fact that something is used to pinpoint this information. This information is not a "cure-all," but it must be included in any evaluation of at-risk learners. From this point on, please remember when I use the term "modalities," I am referring to learning styles.

All children learn through one of three modalities, (visual, auditory and kinesthetic). Visual and auditory learners tend to be much more

successful in school because they are given many experiences using their modality strengths. It is my opinion that the most at-risk learners in our schools today are those children who tend to be highly kinesthetic. These are the children who are “hands-on” learners. These children must be given the opportunity to use their hands, small muscles and large muscles of the body in order to learn and truly integrate skills. They must move, feel and repeat in order to learn. Neurological input and motor output procedures to integrate knowledge with these children are critical.

It has been estimated that about 15 percent of children have a kinesthetic dominant modality. These children tend to fare the worst in a traditional classroom where instruction is mainly done through visual and auditory methods. The use of lectures and a constant diet of worksheets absolutely destroy these children’s learning as well as their motivation. If you put a strong kinesthetic learner with a strong visual teacher for three years straight, that child will be very at-risk because he has not been provided learning experiences using his modality strength. I often say that if a child is truly kinesthetic, but receives very little kinesthetic instruction, has the child failed the school or has the school failed the child?

These children often appear quite bright and capable, however, they never reach their full potential because they are not given enough experiences in their kinesthetic modality strength. They also are very often the children who become discipline problems because of their inability to sit still and pay attention to visual and auditory activities. This is not because they are rude or thoughtless. It is just not the way they learn. Teachers would never dream of putting a blindfold on their visual learners to take away their modality strength. Nor would they put earplugs in their auditory learners’ ears. However, when they don’t give their kinesthetic learners opportunities to move, feel and manipulate objects, they have taken away their opportunity to learn through their modality strength.

It is no wonder that these children tend to be the most at-risk students in our traditional classrooms across America today. I also truly believe that many high school dropouts today are kinesthetic learners. They often become quite successful once they find an occupation where they can use their modality strength. It has been my experience that when something in my classroom like a tape recorder or projector will not work, it is not always the straight A student who can fix it. Often, it is the at-risk kinesthetic student who is able to easily correct some mechanical problem.

Based on my knowledge of how modalities affect classroom performance, I have all first graders in my program tested on a modalities test at the beginning of the year. If we do not know how children learn, how

can we possibly teach them? To provide the optimal environment for every at-risk learner, modalities testing should be conducted. I use the Swassing-Barbe Modality Index. On this test, the child is tested using a group of plastic shapes. The student is asked to distinguish and remember the shapes using their visual, kinesthetic or auditory modalities. A score sheet is made for each child. This score sheet will then show the teacher that child's modality strengths as well as weaknesses. Many children will have a mixed modality score meaning that they can learn equally well in all three modalities. Some children show an extreme preference for one modality. When I notice a child with a very high score in the kinesthetic modality strength, I know immediately that I will need to use a different approach with that child. It is important to note here that modality strengths and weaknesses do change from one age level to another.



Modality Testing

Also, it must be stated that modality strengths and weaknesses affect all children's learning from the very lowest-performing students to gifted students. I was amazed, when I watched the National Spelling Bee this year on television, how the modality strengths of many of the participants were so apparent. The visual learners would close their eyes or squint as if they were trying to picture or see the word. The auditory learners would repeat the word over and over separating it into syllables so as to hear the sounds. To me, the most amazing were the few kinesthetic learners. They would turn the tags around their necks over and actually write the words on them, using their fingers. That way, they could feel the letters. Observing these very capable students employ their modality strengths only reaffirmed my belief that modalities play a crucial role in all children's learning.

Once the modalities testing is completed, I will put an A for auditory, V for visual, K for kinesthetic or M for mixed on each child's name tag on the top of his desk. This will serve as a constant reminder that when that

child needs help, I should try to use his modality strength. For instance, when the auditory child needs help in reading a word, I might have the child say the phonemic segments or sounds of each letter in the word. When the visual child asks for help with a word, I might have him look carefully at each letter or syllable. When the kinesthetic child needs help with a word, I might have him write the word with his finger on the desk. Also, when I make lesson plans, I strive to include directions, strategies and activities that address each of these three modalities. I call this an intermodality approach to teaching, and I have seen tremendous improvements in my students' test scores since implementing it as part of my entire program. Years ago when I taught my Title I classes using traditional methods, my children would average first stanine in reading and second stanine in math on the spring national achievement tests. However, since implementing an intermodality approach to all my lessons, my students traditionally average fifth stanine in reading and sixth stanine in math on the spring national achievement tests.

According to a *Newsweek* article, both children and adults retain ten percent of what they see, 50 percent of what they see and hear, but 80 percent of what they see, hear and do. Based on this knowledge, it only makes sense to have lessons that involve all three modalities as much as possible.

I also use this vital information in seating my students in the optimal area of the classroom. I will place my visual learners in the front of the classroom because they require and benefit the most from the visual stimuli that I provide. I will also place my auditory learners in the middle rows because they need to hear clearly but are not as dependent on the visual stimuli. But most importantly, for the teacher's sanity as well as the child's, I will place those highly kinesthetic learners in the back of the classroom. These students tend to be constantly in motion. They are often fidgety and unable to sit still or in one place for a long period of time. I do truly feel if they could sit still, they would sit still. When kinesthetic learners are placed in the front of the room or beside the teacher's desk, all their energy and concentration are spent on just trying to sit still. Therefore, they will learn very little, and neither will those visual learners who are stretching their necks to see over the distraction or the auditory learners striving to hear the teacher (and attempting to block out the teacher's constant hollering and verbal threats). I will also give that kinesthetic learner a ball of clay to keep on his desk to use for release and relaxation. I may allow him to stand, kneel, lie on the floor or move around the desk during class. I may even put masking tape in a square on the floor around the child's desk to remind him of his space. That is why I always place these children in the back of the

room so they too can use their modality strength just as the rest of my class. This allows that child to maintain his self-esteem and reduces the stress level tremendously. There is not much a teacher can truly do to engage this kinesthetic learner in purely visual or auditory activities, so I provide them with opportunities to learn in their own “comfort zone.” Be compassionate and remember they are only using their modality strength the same way as the visual learner in the front row. It’s just that the visual learner’s strength is so much more conducive to the classroom. One of my former students whom I met recently said to me, “Someday, Mrs. Owens, when I earn an Academy Award, I’m going to dedicate it to you because you’re the only teacher who ever let me stand up and move around to do my work in school.”

After the first several months of school, having placed my students in the correct place in my classroom and establishing an intermodality approach that makes learning “fun,” I can teach straight through the entire day with very few disruptions and discipline problems. My colleagues are always amazed when they walk into my room at the end of the day, and my students are still actively engaged in learning. They are not exhausted or frustrated from spending the day out of their “comfort zone.” They have received instruction in their modality strengths, and they are seated in the optimal area of the classroom for that modality strength to best serve them. It’s a win/win situation.

If it is impossible for the modalities testing to be administered, I am including a list of characteristics for each modality strength. By carefully studying individual students, the teacher can gain insight into the student’s modality strengths and weaknesses. I recommend taking one student at a time, and using this list of characteristics, study the child very carefully for a few days to see which characteristics are displayed. For instance, at story time when the children are seated on the floor, watch and study the children. The visual learners will stretch and move in order to see the pictures in the book. If they can’t see, they will often complain that they can’t because they need that visual stimulus. The auditory learners will listen intently, (perhaps not even looking at the book) but they may verbalize and repeat orally parts of the book. The truly kinesthetic learners may play with their shoestrings, rub the carpet, move around on the floor and have great difficulty staying in their own space. Once the teacher does enough of this observation, she will become more adept at differentiating among the three modalities. It will make a huge difference in teaching styles and methods as the teacher becomes more proficient at planning lessons to meet the modalities of each child.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MODALITY STRENGTHS

Auditory

- At circle time or shared reading time, often seems to be daydreaming and not paying attention, but when asked a question, knows the right answer
- Tends to verbalize and repeat what the teacher reads or says; when asked a question, often repeats the question before giving an answer; may often just move the lips
- Tends to learn to read by sounding out words (phonetic reader)
- Frequently does not pay attention to visual stimuli
- Very noisy; may be unable to be silent during testing or silent reading time
- May turn head so dominant ear is toward the auditory stimuli; when announcement is made on intercom, may actually turn the dominant ear to hear
- Often distracted by extraneous sounds (pencil sharpener, air conditioner)
- When facing a problem, may verbalize steps to solve it
- When asked to spell a word, may sound it out repeatedly to hear sounds or phonemic segments
- When writing, may say letters or strokes

Visual

- Appears to visualize; when asked to spell a word, may close eyes as if to picture the way it looks
- Neat and meticulous work
- Neat handwriting
- Sight word reader rather than phonetic
- When listening to a story, often notices and points out details about the pictures
- Becomes very frustrated when visual stimulus is obstructed; may often complain, "Sit down, I can't see!"
- Keeps personal belongings organized and neat (desk, materials, papers.)
- During a lecture, may tend to draw or doodle
- Often has a vivid imagination; often seems to be "painting a picture in his mind"
- Tends to follow teacher or fellow students with eyes

- Neat artwork with many colors and details

Kinesthetic

- Constantly moving, touching and feeling things in the environment
 - Fidgety; cannot sit still during a lecture or story time
 - Difficulty staying in own space; often annoys others by getting too close which results in other children not liking him
 - Has extreme difficulty listening or paying attention to teacher-directed activities
 - Never appears to be really paying attention completely
 - Poor handwriting
 - Puts things in his mouth
 - Appears to enjoy and learn by doing
 - Poor language skills
 - Does not appear to enjoy being read to
 - Often writes words on desk or hand to see how they feel
 - Shows emotions freely by moving; may jump for joy when happy, but also stomp feet or throw body to the floor when upset or unhappy
 - Described by parents and teachers as “distractible”
 - Enjoys projects as opposed to worksheets
- * These characteristics are from Swassing-Barbe.

This modality testing will also give me further insight into placement for the prescriptive groups taught in the afternoon. A child who scores very low on the visual portion of the modalities test may need to be included in the visual memory or visual perception prescriptive teaching group. Likewise a child with a very low auditory score may require remediation in auditory processing. All of this information is used in establishing the child’s learning profile which is the key to optimal learning. The modalities test will give insight into the child’s modality strength to be used in instruction, but it also provides vital information in what areas also need remediation. The more a teacher understands the child’s learning profile, the better she can plan for that individual child. Just having the knowledge and awareness of the three modalities will increase the teacher’s ability to teach individual children. This will increase the likelihood that long-term learning will take place for all students, regardless of their modality strengths and weaknesses.

I have observed that a teacher’s lack of knowledge of a child’s modality strength contributes greatly to the sense of hopelessness and

frustration that an at-risk child displays. When a child does not receive instruction in his modality strength, he spends a large part of the day unable to “take in” or “give back” information. This adds greatly to his stress levels. Recent brain research points to the fact that when the brain is under stress, it emits a chemical that impedes all learning capacity as well as coping ability. It only makes sense to teach using modality strengths to help the child stay in his “comfort zone.” Keeping a child in his “comfort zone” means that he is receiving some instruction in his modality strength and is correctly placed in the classroom.

Implementation of strategies and ideas, as they relate to modality strengths and weaknesses, may seem overwhelming at first, but the more the teacher explores and implements these ideas and methods, the easier classroom control and instruction will become. If, as some estimates show that as many as 78 percent of children with learning problems and normal IQs may have visual perceptual problems, it makes little sense to overuse worksheets and workbooks. Also, with the increase of A. D. D. and A. D. H. D. students, it makes little sense to overuse lectures where as many as 50 percent of the students may not be learning with the purely auditory stimuli. When our school can produce 80,000 copies on the copy machine a month, I must ask if worksheets aren’t the major instructional technique used in many classrooms. Based on all the most recent brain research, they certainly should not be.

If I could create the perfect school for at-risk learners, I would have visual learners taught by visual teachers and auditory learners taught by auditory teachers. But, most importantly, I would have kinesthetic learners taught by kinesthetic teachers who understand, respect and honor their unique learning modality style. As this is improbable, it is important for all teachers to remember: If you do one thing alone, keep each child in his “comfort zone.”

Once I have completed the dominance and modalities testing on each child, I shall then fill out a Modality/Dominance Learning Profile Sheet on each child. This will be a great asset to me as I begin to plan for each child’s learning.

MODALITY/DOMINANCE LEARNING PROFILE SHEET

Modalities

Visual _____
Auditory _____
Kinesthetic _____

Dominance

Eyes _____
Hands _____
Ears _____
Feet _____

Notes:

Methods/Strategies:

Classroom Seating:

It is important to note here that the same person gives all tests each year. I do all the dominance testing, my aide does all the modality testing and the kindergarten aide does all the Developmental Tasks for Kindergarten Readiness testing. This adds greatly to the validity of the test. Test reliability and validity are greatly affected by the ability of the test giver to efficiently give the test. Therefore, it is imperative that each of us develops expertise on the particular test we administer.

I shall first list the score for each of the modalities from the Swassing-Barbe Modality Index. I shall highlight the dominant modality that will serve as a reminder of the most beneficial strategies to use with the child. I also will write in the results of the dominance testing which I have completed on each child. If the child is cross-dominant, I shall note that under "Notes." This again will serve as a reminder that this child will need specific adaptations made to assure me that this cross-dominance is being considered in my plans for the child.

Using the test information, I shall then place that child in the optimal place in my classroom. Using the modalities test data, I shall make sure my visual learners are seated near the front of the room. My auditory learners will be in the middle rows. Most importantly, my highly kinesthetic learners

will be placed in the back of the room. This is key to classroom control and fosters learning for all my students.

I shall then very carefully study the results of my dominance testing to make sure that my right-eared students are seated on the left side of the classroom so that the dominant ear is toward the teacher to easily access the auditory stimuli. Left-eared students will be placed in the right side of the classroom so that the dominant ear is toward the teacher also to easily access the auditory stimuli. I also will make sure that my cross-dominant children are seated in the middle of the room. This will give them the best chance of looking at the visual stimuli straight without being at an extreme right or left angle which may only compound the cross-dominance factor. Mixed modality children can be placed anywhere in the classroom because they require the fewest modifications.

When I conduct parent conferences, the profile sheet is invaluable as I explain the student's learning style. Parents are always amazed that I have done so much assessment on their child. They also sincerely appreciate all the information that I give them on the best ways to help the child at home, based on both their dominance and modality strength.

For instance, with the kinesthetic child, I will suggest that parents use letter cards and scrambled sentences to teach reading and spelling. I might suggest using shaving cream or a sand tray to practice sight words and spelling words. When reading a story, I tell the parents to let the child act out the story so that he truly understands what is happening in the story. This adds to the child's comprehension and sequencing skills. I emphasize to the parents that for this child to learn, he must use the small and large muscles of the body not only the eyes, ears and brain. I may suggest manipulatives to teach math facts. Pennies and counters will assist this child in learning math facts rather than purely flashcards and worksheets. I may even suggest that they use a number line on the floor to allow the child to hop forward or backward to learn addition and subtraction facts. I also suggest that the child will be allowed to get up often and move around when doing the homework assignment. I also try to explain why the child acts the way he does. Once parents understand their kinesthetic learner, they tend to have more patience and compassion for the child's unique learning style. This understanding on the part of the parents is a great benefit to the child's self-esteem and academic success. Once they gain true insight into the child's learning modality, they will not view the constant moving and feeling as misbehavior, but as the way that child truly learns.

For the visual learner, I might suggest flashcards for learning spelling, reading and math. I tell the parents to make sure their visual learner gets lots

of practice using the visual modality. These children tend to have an easier time completing homework because it is often a worksheet which matches their learning style. I might also suggest using lots of visual aids in helping this child learn basic skills. I encourage them to allow their child to draw pictures and illustrate books at home to bring to school to share with the rest of the class.

For the auditory learner, I might suggest that the parents read quite frequently to the child and emphasize sounds when helping the child with reading and spelling homework. I might also suggest that they use the tape recorder frequently. The child can read a story into the tape recorder and then play it back to correct any mistakes. There are also many commercial taped books on the market which these parents might want to use to aid their child in becoming an excellent reader. Singing and learning chants for math facts can also be useful to the auditory learner. If this child has difficulty learning math facts, I may suggest buying tapes or cd's that teach math facts using music.

By completing the Modality/Dominance Learning Profile Sheet, I gain great insight into the child's learning profile which helps me plan for the child at school, but I also use the sheet to help parents help the child at home. The home-school connection is critical if these children are to succeed, and this is just one way that I foster and encourage that connection with my parents. Hopefully, this will help this parent avoid "burnout." Parents who do not understand their child's unique learning modality often give up helping him with homework. Homework sessions turn into screaming matches between the child and parent. They become so horrible that by the end of first grade, parents simply give up. Armed with true understanding and knowledge of the child's learning profile, the parents are much better equipped to deal with this situation.

THE RITALIN CONNECTION

It has been my experience when the P. E. A. R. L. methods and strategies are employed in the early grades, the need for Ritalin can be reduced. In the past six years, I have had the most at-risk first graders in my classroom. This would total approximately one hundred students. These children have all been tested on nationally-normed tests and found to be the most at-risk students entering first grade at our Title I school. This would be the group of children who might require Ritalin based on their learning and emotional problems. Many of these children had been in trouble both

behaviorally and academically in kindergarten. These children often had daily behavior reports sent home to parents. They also were the group of children who often missed recess because of their poor behavior, even though they were probably the group who needed recess the most.

However, I can say that I have never even suggested to one of my parents that they administer medication to their child to calm them or make it easier for me to cope with them in my classroom.

First of all, by testing each child at the beginning of the year to find his modality strengths and weaknesses as well as his dominance profile, I know where I will place that child in my classroom. I always place the active, inattentive child in the back of my room and give the child the chance to work standing up, lying on the floor or kneeling. If I need to, I will give that child a ball of clay to manipulate for relaxation. I may even put a masking tape box on the floor to show the child "his space."

Many teachers will put that type of learner right up in front of the teacher's desk and then spend the day trying to get him to sit still and be quiet. The child spends all his energy just trying to do that and learns very little. Also, every other child in the class loses valuable teaching time while the teacher hollers at the "bad" child.

Secondly, because I have an intermodality classroom, I allow and encourage my children to move, manipulate, touch, and feel their learning. I constantly use motor, music and movement activities to make sure that the hyperactive, A.D.D. children in my classroom have an outlet for all that energy. I begin every morning with lots of physical movement and activity so that when it's time to work at our desks, a lot of that stored-up energy has been expended. This gives that child a better chance of coping with the writing, reading and math activities that follow.

During the academic part of the day, I strive to meet the needs of all learners in my classroom (not just the visual learners). I make sure that every lesson addresses the needs of my kinesthetic learners. They always have something to occupy their hands. Letter cards, math manipulatives and props are used to keep them busy and involved. Many lessons throughout the day will involve physical movement also. When we are studying spelling, we will stand up and do spelling cheerleading. When practicing long vowels, we march around the room as we sing the long vowel song. We will act out many of our reading stories using masks or puppets in the puppet theatre. This type of "active classroom" involves every learner to the maximum. As one parent wrote, "Mrs. Owens' class is so much fun that before they know it, it's too late. They've already learned it!"

When teachers truly understand children's learning profiles and provide an active intermodality environment to accommodate those learning profiles, the need for medication may be reduced. There are no longitudinal studies clearly stating the long-term effects of Ritalin on children. Classrooms can and should be designed to reduce the need for such widespread use of a medication whose long-term effects on young bodies and minds remain unknown. When I watch the long line of children in our clinic every day at lunchtime waiting for their "meds," my resolve is stronger than ever to spread my word about helping every at-risk learner succeed.

In summary, may I state that the most at-risk students in our classrooms across America today are the cross-dominant and kinesthetic learners? Both of these groups of children have unique and challenging learning profiles. Traditional strategies and methods are not always the most beneficial for them.

When I conducted workshops at my school, I was shocked to learn that these early education teachers had no understanding of what I was talking about when I discussed the role that each of these conditions plays in a child's academic career. They were absolutely fascinated when I showed them how they could test and locate these problem areas. Most importantly, I gave them many strategies and methods to use in teaching these children. An understanding of and compassion for these students is a must if we are to really reach all early learners.

For the kinesthetic learner, it is imperative that the teacher gives that child many opportunities to learn through his modality strength. Remember that means using the hands, small muscles and large muscles of the body to learn. These are the fidgety "hands on" children who can be so challenging to both parents and teachers. In an "active" classroom based on music, motor, movement and make-believe, these children can flourish. However, in a passive classroom where lecture, rote memory and worksheets are the methods utilized for learning, they may also suffer greatly.

Likewise, for that cross dominant child who may be right-handed and left-eyed, it is equally important that the teacher be aware of this condition as well as have specific methods to aid the child in his skill acquisition. These children have quite enough stress in their lives. They think they are smart, but just can't understand why they cannot succeed in learning. They do not need to be more frustrated by methods and strategies that do not meet their unique needs. Certainly they do not need to be ridiculed or demeaned by teachers and peers for their uniqueness.

The third group of students who need special activities and methods are the A.D.D. (Attention Deficit Disorder) children. These students must

be given auditory attention, memory, motor and figure-ground training in the early years to learn to compensate for their problems. In the early years, the emphasis must be placed on teaching them “how” to learn before they are asked to learn. I have had much success with these students by placing them beside a calm, very capable student. This “study buddy” will repeat directions and assist this A.D.D. student throughout the day. This is a win/win situation which can prove helpful for both students. The “study buddy” gains confidence and pride as he is viewed as a valuable person. The A.D.D. student gains because he has immediate feedback and support. He will eventually interrupt class instruction less and less. Thus, his image in the group is improved.

I have strived to improve the environment for these unique students during reading groups. This is the part of the day when the teacher works with individual ability groups. While the teacher is working with these groups, the rest of the class may be seated at their desks working on workbook pages or worksheets. This is a very difficult time for many of these students. First of all, they have a hard time sitting in their desks and being quiet for a long period of time. Secondly, these students may not be visual learners who can handle a stream of visual tasks.

I have improved this situation by allowing them to move around the room to different centers during reading group time. All of these students who require alternative strategies have a schedule card on their desks. This schedule card has three or four clocks with a picture beside them showing the activity that they are to do at that specified time. For example, the first clock might show 9:30 with a picture of a tape recorder beside it. The child will soon learn that at 9:30, he can move to the table and listen to a book on the tape recorder. The next clock might show 9:45 with a picture of letter cards beside it. Then the child goes to a desk located in the room with letter cards on it. The desk also has a list of the week’s spelling words which the child can build using the letter cards. The desk may also have a whiteboard where the child can practice the words using a dry erase marker. The child can also use paper on this desk to write one sentence using a spelling word and then draw a picture to go with it. The third clock might show 10:15 with a picture of pattern blocks which the child might use on design cards. The possibilities are endless. The teacher must make this schedule based on her knowledge of the individual student and his modality strengths as well as interests. There may be only one or two students in each class who will need this adaption to their schedule. The teacher must explain to the other children in the class that the individual students with schedule cards learn in a different way, and therefore they need a different approach.

I also give each of them a card with a stop sign on it. I tell them if they need to tell me something important while I am working with the other groups, they are to come to me quietly and show me the stop sign. I will then give them a chance to tell me what they need to say. They are only allowed to use one or two stop sign privileges during the reading time. This alone will foster self-control in these children as they learn to save their stop signs for the most important messages. This may be a much better technique than having them constantly interrupting the reading groups.

This system will take time to work, but once the routine is established, everyone will benefit. The teacher can truly devote time to each of the reading groups without constant interruptions to discipline off-task behavior. All students benefit with more on-task time, but the kinesthetic, cross-dominant and A.D.D. greatly benefit by the opportunity of movement and appropriate activities.

Many of our at-risk learners in the early grades would be better served in this kind of environment which respects their uniqueness. They should not constantly be frustrated by an environment in which they cannot possibly succeed. We must all strive to understand their needs and stop telling these children that if they just tried harder or worked more, they could succeed like everybody else. We do a real injustice to them when we display that attitude toward them.

I truly feel that we may be compounding A. D. D. and A. D. H. D. problems when we overuse worksheets and lectures. These children, who may be very bright, soon become bored or frustrated with the constant bombardment of these methods. They may begin to shut down or withdraw into their own little worlds because their needs are not being met. This will only add to their attention and hyperactivity problems. To avoid increasing these problems, instruction must, first of all, be developmentally appropriate. It must also be presented using an intermodality approach to keep students involved and to prevent boredom and disinterest.

CHAPTER EIGHT

KINDERGARTEN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Before beginning the model descriptions of our kindergarten and first grade programs, I shall discuss general principles of early at-risk education for preschool, kindergarten and first grade at-risk students.

MUSIC, MOTOR AND MAKE-BELIEVE THE THREE M'S OF EARLY AT-RISK LEARNERS

I cannot overemphasize the importance of using the Three M's with early at-risk students: music, motor and make-believe. There are many cd's and tapes available to teach all basic skills to students. It is important to note that these must contain motor activities to accompany the music. As I stated earlier, if we are to help these students develop access to the left hemisphere, they must move, cross-midline and have many motor activities daily.

Early at-risk programs must include these areas:

- a. Listening skills
- b. Visual skills
- c. Auditory skills
- d. Gross motor activities
- e. Fine motor activities
- f. Rhythm instruments
- g. Make-believe, drama, puppets

Listening skills –

The teacher must provide daily practice in worthwhile listening. Echo reading provides a good place to start. The teacher, when reading a story to the class, asks the children to repeat exactly what she has said. She should start with short phrases or sentences and when the children have mastered that, move on to longer, more complicated sentences.

Visual skills –

To teach visual skills in the early at-risk programs, begin with visual attention. When sharing a big book with the class, close the book and ask questions about the pictures. How many children were in the picture? What color was the dog? By doing this, you are making it important for the children to really look and respond to visual stimuli. Our television-addicted students must be taught to develop visual attention.

Also, it is important to do visual discrimination activities. If children cannot visually discriminate between two different shapes or designs, they will have difficulty in discriminating between different words when they begin reading.

Visual discrimination sheets should be used to enhance visual skills. These skills are prerequisite skills for reading but are often completely eliminated from our curriculum in our constant push to begin reading and writing.

Auditory skills –

A simple technique to improve auditory skills is to do a listening activity that requires the students to follow directions given by the teacher. Example:

“Draw a house at the bottom of your paper. Put the sun above the house. Draw a tree beside the house. Color the house red. Color the sun yellow. Color the tree green.”

Start with the simple directions, and add more complicated directions as their skill level improves. I find the children love these activities. I use these types of activities after lunch or recess to settle them down and get them back to concentrating. They are usually quiet because I stress that I will not repeat the directions. Therefore, they will be quiet so they can complete the activity successfully.

As phonemic awareness is introduced, it is important to stress auditory discrimination. Children are asked to discriminate between two similar words. For example, say, “man, tan.” Ask the children if the words are the same. If not, ask them to tell you why. This kind of training will improve their ability to learn and retain phonics skills.

For auditory attention and memory, there are many cd’s and tapes available to teach these areas. It is important to note here, that they must be used consistently until they are mastered. Then they are truly fun for the students.

Another simple technique I use to increase auditory memory is to say three numbers or words and have the children repeat them correctly. This is

a great activity to use during those few minutes right before lunch or dismissal time when you may have a few minutes to fill. I simply go around the classroom and say, "Repeat after me." After they can do three numbers, move on to four or five numbers, then you can go to words and then finally sentences. This ability to repeat auditory stimuli in correct order will enhance their classroom performance and academic skills.

You may also work on following directions in the same way. Children who cannot follow simple two or three step directions will have difficulty in the classroom. Again, ask individual children to follow simple directions. Stand up, put your hand on your head, and then sit. Increase the number and complexity of the directions as the children improve. For example, stand up, walk to the door and then crawl back to your seat. Make it a game and never embarrass those children who have difficulty completing the tasks.

The most recent statistics show about one third of those children labeled with Specific Learning Disabilities have hearing or auditory problems. This important area must be addressed often in the early years.

Gross motor skills –

Hopping, jumping and crawling should be included daily in the curriculum. Also, relays using balls and beanbags should be included. Playing daily on playground equipment helps, but the teacher may want to organize activities to enhance gross motor skills at other times of the day. Activities for specific problems are included in Chapter Three.

Fine motor skills –

Practice in fine motor skills must be included daily. Activities to use for this area are discussed in Chapter Four.

Rhythm instruments –

Rhythm instruments should be utilized in combination with other activities. When marching or doing a listening tape, allow the children to use instruments. This will add another aspect to their learning. It will also give the child a sense of rhythm which may improve gross motor movement.

Another technique is to have the children sit in a circle. Each child has an instrument. Play a tape with a specific beat, and have them copy the beat. I usually start a three or four-beat rhythm. As they improve on this basic rhythm, I will increase the complexity of the rhythm. Practice on specific beats (presented sequentially) will enhance reading skills as the children transfer the sense of rhythm to reading.

Make-believe, drama, puppet theater –

An ideal way to make books come alive for children is to have them act out the stories. For instance, after reading the story, The Little Red Hen, have the children dramatize it. I have animal masks that I use for this activity. You can begin by reading the story again and letting the children act it out for the class. After practicing this technique several times, let the children say the parts of each animal. I am always amazed the first time I do this activity with my class. I realize they have never done anything like this before. It is very difficult for many of them to say even one simple sentence. They have great difficulty moving like the animal. However, after doing this with many books, the children will begin to come out of their shells and become more and more verbal and become much more able to move and “get into the story.” This is true language development at its finest. They will learn to add more and more of their own words. They are also learning sequencing as they act out each story in the correct sequence of events.

I also use puppets in the puppet theater the same way. Puppets can be made of paper plates, paper bags, socks or Styrofoam balls decorated to look like the characters. If you don’t have a puppet theater available, just cover the front of a desk or table with cardboard or cloth. Again, the story is read by the teacher or played on a tape or cd as the children act it out. Later on, children can make up their own stories and act them out for the class. By using puppets, the children feel safe to act and speak more creatively. Invite other classes to see your shows. This will enhance the children’s confidence and eliminate their fear of performing in front of others. After doing these activities all year, I will have the class perform a program for parents and other classes in the spring. Last year we enacted a fifteen-minute performance on the Solar System. As I watched the language skills, confidence and motor activities that the children performed in front of 40 or 50 peers and parents, I realized the hours spent on these activities had paid big dividends. As I watched the planets say their parts perfectly, meteorites soar around the room, rockets ships zoom to the beat of the music with confidence and pride, I realized it was the most enjoyable, profitable area I had covered in my curriculum.

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS USED IN KINDERGARTEN MODEL

Reading/Language

Sing, Spell, Read & Write
Basal Kindergarten Reading Program

Math

Addison-Wesley Math Series (Our district uses this series
because of the high correlation with the F.C.A.T)
Manipulatives with workmats
Audiotapes and cd's

Fine Motor/Manipulative Activities

Finger Play and Developmental Hand Exercises (audio tape)
Shaving cream, sand trays, Play-Doh, etc.
Pencil grips

KINDERGARTEN SCHEDULE

- 8:45-9:00 Teacher greets each child with a smile and a friendly hello. This sets the tone for the rest of the day. Morning work (Play-Doh, puzzles or color sheets) is on each child's desktop so that on task behavior is initiated immediately. The teacher takes attendance, lunch money, etc. while students work on their morning work.
- 9:00-9:20 Pledge, Promise – "I promise to work hard and pay attention because this is very important."
Sing, Spell, Read & Write ABC song, Finger Play and Developmental Hand Exercises tape.
- 9:20-9:50 Calendar/Circle Time
- 9:50-10:50 Language Arts (centers and direct instruction)
- 10:50-11:10 Playtime

11:10-12:00 Math

12:00-12:30 Lunch

12:30-1:00 Recess/Rest period

1:00-1:40 Specials (Art, Music, etc.)

1:45-2:15 Prescriptive Teaching Groups #1

2:15-2:45 Prescriptive Teaching Groups #2

2:45-3:10 Talk Time (Character Building/Social Skills)

MODEL DESCRIPTION

When setting up the kindergarten classroom, all children have their own individual desks. All desks are in rows facing forward to the board. I feel we have increased learning disabilities by placing children with weak visual skills in clusters where they view the board from different angles instead of straight ahead. One week, the “b” is going one way, then the child is moved and perhaps the “b” is going another way, according to the angle he is viewing it. The cross-dominant students in these classes should be seated in the middle of the classrooms. The most detrimental seats would be the extreme left or right seats in the front rows because of the angles.

At the top of the desk, the “ABC” stick-on nametag will be placed. A cut-out red right hand with the word “right” written on it is placed on the top right corner of each child’s desk. After each child is proficient in distinguishing his right hand, you can add a cut-out green left hand to the top left corner of his desk. Also, every morning during morning work, each child’s right hand will be stamped with a red star. This is a critical step in teaching left/right discrimination to our at-risk early learners.

Sometime in October, the teacher begins an activity to establish what I call a sense of “paperiness.” Use four pattern blocks to reinforce a sense of right, left, top and bottom on a paper. Although it sounds simple, many of our kindergarten at-risk students need lots of practice establishing these positions on their paper. You will have one red, one blue, one yellow and one green pattern block for each child. Direct the student to place the red

pattern block on the right side of the paper, the yellow block on the top of the paper for the sun, the green pattern block on the left side of the paper and the blue block on the bottom of the paper for the water. Each color is practiced individually. For instance, start with just red on the right, then add yellow at the top, then blue at the bottom. The last color introduced should be green on the left. Worksheets used later on should have a red star stamped on the right to carry through this critical skill.

With the low mental and developmental levels of our children, we find that worksheets used in the first semester do not lead to integration of skills. First of all, with fine motor lags, worksheets are totally inappropriate until the child has the skills needed to correctly hold a pencil without frustration.

We found by using the Finger Play and Developmental Hand Exercises tape daily, the children's ability to do fine motor work for longer periods of time increases. They are more able to hold pencils and scissors for longer periods of time without tiring. By practicing the songs and exercises, the children will increase finger grip and strength, wrist rotation and dexterity which are all critical skills for fine motor activity. At first, the children may complain about their fingers and wrists hurting. This is because they are using muscles that they have not used extensively. As time goes on, they will become more proficient.

If children show little progress in these skills, pencil grips should be used to aid them in manipulating a pencil. Also, you may use primary pencils and crayons if needed.

I feel at-risk kindergarten students benefit most from activities which are input neurologically, while output in a manner that requires movement of the body. That means that critical skills should be repeated using music, rhythm, movement and some other form of input. These activities are so much more developmentally appropriate for our at-risk kindergarten students with lower mental ages.

There are excellent musical tapes and cd's on the market to teach most basic skills. Days of the week, color, numbers, money and telling time can be enhanced by learning chants and songs for each skill area. It is important that movement activities be used along with each song. Look for cd's or audio tapes with movement and other activities that correlate with the songs.

When teaching letter formation, use shaving cream on the child's desktop. Then have the child repeat the prompt for each letter as it is formed. I am providing a prompt for each letter in the Appendix. By repeating the prompt as the letter is made in the shaving cream, the child is using all three modalities. This leads to true integration of the skill and also

makes learning fun. Following are some examples of intermodality activities which can be used in place of workbooks and worksheets in at-risk kindergarten classrooms.

LANGUAGE ARTS

Use short poems based on the letter or theme of the week. These poems should have movements to accompany them. At the beginning of the school year, the teacher can use the poem,

I Like School

I like school,
Yes I do.
School is cool,
For me and you!

The child can point to himself for the first line, show a big smile and point to himself again for the second line. He can put his hands on his hips for the third line, then point to himself and then a friend for the last line. Another poem the teacher can use is,

Me

Ten little fingers,
Ten little toes,
Two little eyes
And one little nose.
Put them all together,
And what have you got?
You've got me and that's
A lot!

In this poem, the child wiggles his fingers and then points to his toes for the first two lines. He points to his eyes, then nose for the next two lines. Make a big circle inward with arms (to show coming together) for the fifth line. The child puts his hands on his hips for the sixth line and points to the

audience, then himself for the seventh line. His arms are spread open for the last line.

Art activities using materials beginning with a specific letter are fun and relevant for the student. For example, glue macaroni on the letter M m, (written on construction paper with marker) glue cotton on C c, beans on B b, etc.

Children can color, cut and glue animal puppets on craft sticks or paper bags. The teacher can use stories that correspond to the beginning letter of each animal. Practice the story several times. Then use the puppets in puppet shows in the puppet theater.

The teacher can provide cooking activities that go along with a particular letter or theme. Make applesauce in the crock-pot for A a, pancakes for P p, muffins for Mother's Day, etc.

Reproducible books (for each letter of the alphabet) can be another great activity. Short (four to six pages) books can be copied for each child. There are many materials available to use for this activity, or the teacher can create her own books. The children color the picture and then "echo read" each page with the teacher. "Echo read" a few times each day, making sure the child points to the words with his index finger. At the end of the week, send the book home for him to "read" to his family.

Cut and paste activities are important for fine motor acquisition. Many different skills can be reviewed using cut and paste activity sheets. Be sure to start with cut and paste sheets on heavy (vellum) paper, and then move to lighter weight paper.

Children love to play Bingo. Start the year using Color/Shape Bingo, then move to Alphabet Bingo. "I Spy" is another game that children like to play. The teacher says, "I spy something that begins with the /f/ sound," etc.

We use the Sing, Spell, Read & Write sing-along and point song to teach letter sounds. There are several other cd or tape programs that the teacher can use to teach and reinforce letter/sound recognition. Using a musical approach is vital to teaching integrated phonetic skills.

The teacher can use big books for echo reading activities. Big books can also be used to reinforce kindergarten skills. For example: beginning letters, color words, numbers, etc.

MATH

The teacher should use manipulatives on work mats in math for the first several weeks of school. Sorting and classifying activities can all be done using manipulatives. Positional concept words can be taught, practiced and reinforced with manipulatives. For example, “Put one bear on the top of the mat. Put one bear on the bottom of the mat. Put two bears in the middle of the mat.” Another activity the teacher can use for teaching left, right, middle, above, on and below is, “Apples and Worms.” The child cuts out one red, one green and one yellow apple. He also cuts out three brown worms. The teacher gives the child a piece of large white construction paper (divided into thirds with two vertical lines). The teacher says, “Glue the red apple on the right side. Glue the green apple on the left side. Glue the yellow apple in the middle. Glue a worm above the green apple. Glue a worm on the yellow apple. Glue the last worm below the red apple.”

Songs, poems and chants can be used for counting. Again, there are several programs available and many come with manipulatives, work mats and related activities.

Patterning activities can be introduced using manipulatives. The child can use pattern blocks to make an “A B” pattern on his desk. Make the “A B” pattern many times (over several days) using different manipulatives, body movements and materials before moving onto more difficult patterns. For example, you can make Fruit Loops on yarn necklaces in an “A B” pattern (to make a “needle” at the end of the yarn, dip about one inch of the yarn into glue and let dry overnight). Glue two kinds of pasta on a strip of construction paper in the same pattern, then line the students in boy/girl order, etc.

Snack time is a wonderful activity to teach graphing. The child can taste-test different kinds of popcorn, (caramel, cheese, butter, etc.) and the class can graph the results on a Class Graph. Skittles and M&M’s can be sorted, counted and then graphed.

The teacher can use number prompts (listed in the next chapter) to teach and practice number writing. First, have the child write the numbers in the air. Then, have him write the numbers in shaving cream on his desk. Last, practice writing numbers with paper/pencil activities. For variety, the child can roll Play Doh into long snakes and shape them into numbers, tracing the numbers with the index finger several times. Be sure to use prompts at each level of number-writing activity.

Introduce counting, addition and subtraction using manipulatives and stories. For example, when teaching addition, the teacher says, "Three bears are in the river. Two more join them. How many bears altogether?" For subtraction, "Four apples are in the tree. One falls down. How many apples are left in the tree?"

Much of the assessment for mastery of the math skills and concepts should be done by observation rather than a paper/pencil test. When adding, have children use counters on desktops rather than a worksheet.

The more the teacher uses these types of activities listed above, the more the children will have a positive experience with learning. These types of activities are viewed as "fun." The children begin school with a positive attitude which may continue into the upper grades. When there is too much paper/pencil activity, at-risk children tend to enjoy school less because they are not successful at tasks that are inappropriate for their mental ages.

I have observed kindergarten teachers taking away recess time from their students because they were unable or unwilling to complete a math worksheet containing twenty addition or subtraction facts. Although the teacher feels she is just teaching responsibility, in reality the teacher may be instilling a fear and hatred of math that will follow the child for the rest of his school years. In kindergarten and first grade, math instruction should be fun and exploratory in nature, rather than a series of workbook pages and worksheets.

CENTERS

Centers are a vital part of any curriculum for at-risk kindergartners. I have included a few examples of some centers and materials that are used in our kindergarten model. Please remember that these centers are for reinforcement, not to introduce a skill. Activities in centers should have already been introduced to the entire class.

Office Center

Non-working telephone

Note pads

Pens/pencils

Desk

Miniature filing baskets

Fine Motor Center

(These activities are described in Chapter Four)

Play-Doh
Clothespin activity
Sand trays
Lacing cards
Beads with string
Cutting activities
Pushpin pictures

Math Center

Memory card game (numbers, time, money, etc.)
Number plates with manipulatives (Sequencing and counting)
Number puzzles
Number writing activities

Puppet Center

Puppets (commercial and student-made)
Puppet theater
Nursery rhymes (Little Miss Muffet, Three Little Pigs, etc.)

Writing Center

Alphabet magnets
Alphabet stamps
Small chalkboards
Small Wipe and Swipe boards
Markers, crayons, pencils, etc.
Paper

These centers are critical to raising the mental ages of our at-risk kindergartners. They are actively “doing” something when at the centers. This involvement in their learning will foster true integration of skills.

Also, these centers take the place of workbooks and worksheets in our kindergarten model, especially in the first semester. Cut and Paste and coloring sheets may be used, but we do not use worksheets for skill acquisition.

Because of severe visual perception and fine motor lags, it makes no sense for us to use paper/pencil activities. For instance, before teaching letter and number prompts in shaving cream, it makes little sense for us to have the child practice numbers and letters wrong on a worksheet. This only reinforces a mistake. It is much better to teach correct formation using number and letter prompts in shaving cream, and then have the child practice them correctly using paper/pencil activity. The second benefit is that the child receives positive reinforcement (by doing it correctly) throughout the entire process. In shaving cream, he can merely erase his mistakes. This makes more sense than sending home hundreds of worksheets with big, red corrections, made by the teacher, written all over them.

When we start a child's school career out this way, we may be completely destroying his ego and motivation. When he has mistakes corrected all over his paper, it only leads him to believe that he can't do anything right. When he looks at his peers' papers with stars and stickers on them, it only reinforces his feelings of inferiority and hopelessness. We should make sure children have the prerequisite skills before asking them to do paper/pencil activities. We must begin to assess different children in different ways if we are to succeed with all children. Success breeds success, and it must be built in the entire way through school.

Also, he may start to hide or destroy papers that are "bad" in an effort to keep them from his parents. This is especially true if the parents are punishing him for the "bad" papers. Therefore, we may be beginning to destroy his relationship with his parents as we make him sneaky and dishonest. This will have long-term effects on the parent-child relationship that is so critical.

CHAPTER NINE

FIRST GRADE ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

I believe first grade holds the key to success (or failure) for students. Research now shows that if a child does not read well by the end of first grade, he more than likely will not read well by the end of fourth grade.

With the great emphasis and stress now being placed on teachers to raise test scores, the pressure on first grade teachers is greater than ever before.

In this chapter I will explain the basic methods, strategies and philosophy that I have developed using the P. E. A. R. L. Program with the most at-risk first graders at my school.

In the spring, all kindergarten students who are viewed as not ready for first grade will be tested using Coddling's Test of Kindergarten/First Grade Readiness Skills. When these tests have scored, I will select the lowest eighteen to twenty scores on the reading subtest to comprise my first grade class in the fall. Often, many of these children will have been in our program for kindergarten. Therefore, these children will benefit from having the same approach used for both kindergarten and first grade. A consistent, unified approach is a must for these children. Since I have had many of them in gross motor class and other prescriptive groups, I already am keenly aware of their levels and needs. Therefore, no time is wasted in the fall. We can start right in because I am very familiar with these students. It also helps these children because they already know me, too. This type of multi-age program avoids a lot of apprehension.

The test is vital to me because it gives me a mental age equivalent for each child. I will know how much time I must spend on readiness and pre-reading activities before I start formal reading instruction. Since I believe a mental age of six years, six months is necessary for reading success, I will devote much of the first semester to raising mental ages, improving phonics skills as well as visual and auditory processing before I begin formal reading instruction.

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS USED IN FIRST GRADE MODEL

Reading/Language

Sing, Spell, Read & Write Program
Point and Read (Heath Program with tapes or Trade books with
tapes)
Neurological Impress Method
Rhyme Time
Scrambled Sentences
Highlighting for Comprehension Method

Writing

Two Pen Writing (Beat the Teacher)
Build a Paragraph

Math

Saxon Math Meeting
Touch Point math
Math Series (District's choice)
Musical tapes and cd's

Handwriting

Letter Prompts
"Wipe and Swipe" Boards

FIRST GRADE SCHEDULE

8:45-9:00 Teacher greets each child at the door with a smile and friendly hello. This sets the tone for the day. Morning work is on each child's desk so on task behavior is initiated immediately. Teacher takes attendance, lunch money, etc. while students actively work on morning work. Promise is said by all. "I promise to work hard and pay attention because this is very important."

- 9:00-9:20 Saxon Math Meeting and the Saxon Math Bulletin Board. The bulletin board is the center of the meeting. Calendar, weather and counting activities are completed according to the Saxon manual. Next, a big book is shared by the teacher. The big book is chosen to correlate with the day's reading concept. Later on in the school year, two pen writing will be done after story time.
- 9:20-9:50 Sing, Spell, Read & Write activity (songs, etc); Phonics sheet that accompanies the Sing, Spell, Read & Write song. Music/motor activity.
- 9:50-10:15 Rhyme time or scrambled sentences.
- 10:15-10:30 Point and Read time. A tape is used as children point to each word. The tape can be played several times. Use description procedure as described later in this chapter.
- 10:30-10:40 Shaving cream handwriting. Adhere very closely to letter prompts for handwriting.
- 10:40-11:40 Math (District approved Addison Wesley text and supplement with Touch Point).
- 11:40-12:10 Lunch
- 12:10-12:25 Recess
- 12:25-12:35 Silent Reading (which in my class is reading aloud because "inner speech" doesn't develop until about the age of seven).
- 12:35-1:15 Specials (Art, Music, etc.)
- 1:15-1:45 Science/Social Studies taught in units and tied in with Language Arts.
- 1:45-2:15 Prescriptive Groups #1 (with kindergarten)
- 2:15-2:45 Prescriptive Groups #2 (with kindergarten)

2:45-3:10 Talk Time – Character Building/Social Skills. This is a great way to end each day. It is a nonacademic activity that allows each child to leave the room on a positive note.

There are several character building series from which to choose. The teacher reads a short lesson, children discuss the content of the lesson, and then puppets are used to role-play the lesson. I feel by using puppets with early learners, they are better able to relate to the lesson's message and display their true feelings.

It is best that each child has his own puppet that he makes to look like himself. Puppets can be made with Styrofoam balls and yarn, socks or paper bags. With each child having his own puppet, he will feel very free to express feelings through the puppet. Role-playing is a great way to have children internalize and remember the lessons and concepts introduced.

All at-risk children must be exposed to some early character building/social skills learning if we are going to be successful in preventing social and behavioral problems later. Lessons learned early are more likely to stay with that child than lessons introduced when the child is older. Much of a child's character and behavior is set by the time they hit adolescence. Early intervention in this important area is critical.

MODEL DESCRIPTION

Before school starts, the teacher must set up her classroom using the same model as the kindergarten class. All desks are in rows facing the chalkboard. Again, I state that I feel we have increased learning disabilities by placing children with weak visual-motor skills in clusters where they view the board from different angles rather than straight ahead. One week the "b" is going one way. The next week, the child is moved, and now the "b" looks as if it is going the other way because of the angle from which he is viewing it. All primary at-risk students should be placed in desks in individual rows facing the chalkboard. The cross-dominant should be near the center. The extreme right and left seats in the front row are the worst because of the angle.

I will begin the year by implementing Sing, Spell, Read & Write. This program has storybooks, games, curriculum books and lots of catchy tunes to provide a complete language arts program for my first graders. I have seen great improvement in my students' reading and writing skills since using Sing, Spell, Read & Write. The most recent brain research is pointing to the fact that music helps transcend hemispheres most efficiently. This program is also an intermodality approach to reading. The children use their ears, eyes, hands and bodies to learn. Also, the children tend to repeat the songs at home, in the car and at playtime. They are constantly reviewing what they've learned. The lack of stress and the absolute merriment of the program make it a winner.

Music is a great way to teach and makes learning to read more enjoyable and less threatening. Several years ago, the need for a music based phonics program occurred to me. I had taken my at-risk first grade class to our annual spring talent show. Many of the participants lip-synched pop and rap songs. As I watched my first graders sing along with every word to the latest tunes, I was astounded by the fact that these kids remembered every word, the rhythm and the tune of each song. I made up my mind that I would find a music based program that would impact the same way on their reading skills. After finding and reviewing the Sing, Spell, Read & Write program, I knew I had found what I wanted. However, the cost of this program may be prohibitive. Any phonics program that uses music to teach can be utilized. I truly believe music is the best way to teach phonics to our young students today.

The Sing, Spell, Read & Write program has a video that comes with it in which the teacher is shown exactly how to move through the program. This program is all encompassing. It provides the songs, wall charts, workbooks, handwriting slates, student phonetic readers, teachers' editions, games and motivational class progress charts. The pace is set by the teacher, based on the knowledge of her individual students. The lessons are presented in an orderly sequence of multisensory instruction designed to reach every avenue to the brain. This is another reason I chose it as the cornerstone of my program. It is the best program I have seen combining the auditory, visual and kinesthetic modalities. I use it daily throughout the year.

Once I feel my students have a thorough knowledge of all letters, sounds and have much experience in language development through plays, puppet shows and phonics activities, I will begin the first preprimer of the Heath Reading Program, Yellow Fish, Blue Fish. At this time I will start the second cornerstone of my reading instruction, Point and Read.

I use the Heath reading series because it has an audiotope to accompany each reading book. This is an absolute must for my Point and Read component. The Houghton Mifflin reading series has audio tapes available for their reading books. There are many books with tapes, or the teacher can record an audiotope for each book she uses.

POINT AND READ METHOD DESCRIPTION
MOTTO – “POINT IT, AND YOU CAN READ IT!”

Point and Read is a relatively simple intermodality approach to teaching the reading process to beginning at-risk learners. It combines the visual, auditory and kinesthetic modalities. This program is especially beneficial to those students who may have adequate vocabulary and comprehension skills but simply cannot do the “mechanics” of reading. They are the children who have difficulty tracking left to right, staying focused on the words and are often losing their place when they read. They may demonstrate visual perceptual problems and often miscall similar words such as “saw” and “was.” For them the reading process is next to impossible without some type of intervention in the beginning stages of reading instruction.

Point and Read is only one part of my multi-faceted reading program. I use it for about ten minutes daily. I will introduce it when my children begin the first preprimer of the Heath series. This series has an audio tape that accompanies each reader. The first preprimer, Yellow Fish, Blue Fish has a green lizard at the beginning of each line which helps to enforce left to right tracking. I will play the tape and instruct the children to point with the index finger along with the words on the tape. I often find that some children will do better by using two fingers, the index and middle together.

The first few weeks of this technique may be very frustrating for some of the students. The speed of the tape may upset some of them. At first they may have difficulty keeping up with the pace of the reading. It is important to continue with the same process and to encourage them to stick with it. Slowly, but surely, the students will begin to pick out more and more words, and their eyes will begin to track more smoothly left to right across the page. These are the major two goals of the method: tracking smoothly and visual discrimination.

Discipline must be established during the first session and maintained throughout the sessions. I will walk around the room, patting children on the

shoulder to encourage their participation. If a child is not pointing, I may put my hand over his and help guide the finger across the page. This type of encouragement will aid the child in the process.

After weeks of this technique, the children will begin to realize that they are reading. This will build a sense of security and pride so that they are quite willing to read aloud. When I ask my children who wants to read, usually every hand is raised enthusiastically. This certainly was not the case in many of my classrooms before initiating the Point and Read. Confidence builds confidence and Point and Read, when done correctly and consistently, will lead to a greater sense of confidence in most beginning readers.

Point and Read Procedure

Materials: Tape recorder, student reading books with accompanying audio tape.

Procedure:

1. Start the tape. At the first auditory cue, the pupils place the index finger on the first word and continue through the pages.
2. The teacher circulates around the room, checking and encouraging individual students.
3. As time goes on, point and read two or three previous stories daily.

Sequence:

Use the same story daily for one week.

- A. Day one – Point and read silently with tape, repeat several times.
- B. Day two – Point and read silently with tape, repeat several times.
- C. Day three – Point and read orally with tape, repeat several times.
- D. Day four – Point and read orally with tape, repeat several times.
- E. Day five – Point and read orally first, then ask individual students (who volunteer) to read a page to the entire class. When they have completed the page, we cheer and applaud for their accomplishment. This does much to encourage even the most reluctant reader. It is important to note that no child is ever called upon to read until he is ready to volunteer. If you need to evaluate that child's progress, have the child read privately to you.

It is important to note that this technique should not be employed with fluent readers who handle the mechanics of the reading process very well. It may well slow down their reading and is not necessary.

I developed Point and Read several years ago when I was teaching second grade. Because of the huge range of abilities that year, we decided to group children according to reading levels. My group was comprised of the 26 lowest readers. The majority of these students were primer readers. I knew that I had to come up with a way of increasing their reading levels in an organized, non-threatening approach. This class was comprised of emotionally handicapped, learning disabled and slow learners. These kids had already become disillusioned with learning to read, and most of them had the feeling that reading was a goal they could not attain.

I devised Point and Read to be used daily as a component of my reading program. It is a highly organized approach demanding full participation by every student. At first, the children were frustrated by the speed of the tape. As time went on, they realized that they were recognizing more and more words. This built the motivation that I needed to teach them. It was a key factor in building confidence and raising their reading levels dramatically. We tested the students in the fall and spring using the Merrill reading test. Those results are listed here:

<u>Student</u>	<u>Fall</u>	<u>Spring</u>
Girl 1	6-AR	21-O
Girl 2	6-AR	15-O
Girl 3	7-AR	10-B
Girl 4	8-B	23-O
Girl 5	9-B	22-O
Boy 1	10-B	26-A
Boy 2	10-B	25-A
Girl 6	10-B	20-A
Girl 7	11-B	17-O
Girl 8	12-O	23-O
Boy 3	12-O	11-B
Boy 4	15-O	24-O
Boy 5	16-O	27-A
Boy 6	19-O	27-A
Boy 7	15-O	25-A

Girl 9	14-O	19-O
Girl 10	-----	24-O
Girl 11	17-O	25-A
Girl 12	11-B	21-O
Boy 8	-----	20-O
Boy 9	11-B	14-O
Boy 10	13-O	22-O
Girl 13	-----	10-B
Boy 11	12-O	19-O
Boy 12	11-B	19-O
Girl 14	10-B	22-O

AR – At-risk B – Below level O – On level A – Above level

Point and Read facilitates many skills in early readers. It neurologically impresses those tricky sight words such as: saw, was, here, there. These are always difficult for at-risk students to discriminate. Point and Read also improves visual discrimination between other similar words. Substitutions, omissions, miscalls and reversals are minimized as the child becomes a smoother, more fluent reader.

The child also learns excellent expression as he listens to the tape. Excitement, fear and surprise are shown by the inflection of the voice of the reader on tape. The monotone reader, so common in at-risk students, does not exist with Point and Read because the child has had so much practice in reading with expression. The child becomes much more proficient in phrase reading which also fosters fluency in reading.

However, the greatest benefit of Point and Read is that it teaches the emergent readers, from the very beginning, left to right directionality across the page. When older at-risk students read, they constantly lose their place and must keep going back to correct themselves. Reversals, omissions, substitutions and miscalls are frequent because that child has not learned left to right directionality across the page. The child's comprehension suffers because of his confusion.

If you sit across from an older at-risk reader, you will notice that the child's eyes may not move smoothly across the page. The eyes are constantly moving back to correct mistakes and appear to float rather than move smoothly.

When working with children in the upper grades who have already formed these patterns, I use Letter Tracking (manuscript) sheets published by Ann Arbor Publishers a Division of Academic Therapy Publications.

These are pages of random letters where the child finds and circles the alphabet letters in correct sequence. By completing a tracking sheet either before or after the Point and Read session, I saw dramatic improvement in the child's fluency as his left to right directionality improved. It is very simple: A child who cannot track smoothly across the printed page cannot read efficiently. Again, this is a prerequisite to reading and must be neurologically remediated before reading can improve.

If the child still exhibits problems after several months of Point and Read instruction, that child may be a candidate for the Neurological Impress Method developed by R. G. Heckelman. This technique can be done by classroom teachers, aides or parents. I have included the technique as another method for neurologically impacting on the at-risk reader.

I have had tremendous success using this approach. However, I have found it must be done at home with parents assuming the role of teacher also. If parents are willing to learn how to use Neurological Impress Method technique at home, the child will benefit in two ways. First, the child's reading improves. Secondly, the closeness and bonding with the parent may help the child emotionally. You can find Neurological Impress Method just by typing "Neurological Impress Method" into any search engine to locate it on the Internet.

SHORT VOWELS

Once I have completed the preprimer activities, and the children have mastered all consonant letters and sounds, I will move into the short vowel component of Sing, Spell, Read & Write. Also, the three preprimers in the Heath reading series mainly contain short vowel words. I will spend two weeks on each vowel, supplementing the Sing, Spell, Read & Write with phonics pages that correspond with each short vowel.

At this time, I begin using small alphabet letters to build word families. I call this activity "Rhyme Time." Each child has a zippered plastic bag containing all 26 lower case alphabet letters. Our phonics book has the letters at the back of the book, which are separated and put in the bags. The children will put the letters in correct order across the top of their desk. This is an excellent activity for teaching sequence of the letters of the alphabet. I will then check for correct letter order. This activity is time consuming at first and rather frustrating for the child. But stick to it, it will get easier.

I will say the short vowel words for the students to build with their letters. I always start with short vowel “a.” I tell the students to build the word, “cat.” Each child physically takes the letters from their alphabet and builds the word in the middle of their desk. I check each desktop for correct spelling. Next, they use their finger to trace the word as they spell it. Then, I instruct the children to close their eyes, picture the word and use their index finger to write the word in the air. After that, I instruct the students to change one letter and build the word, “fat.” The above procedure is followed and continued to build words from the –at family. A list of the words on the board can be reread and practiced later. It is vital, at this stage, that all the words rhyme and follow the same pattern.

Each week as I teach short vowels, I allow fifteen to twenty minutes daily for this word-building technique. The children view it as a game, and it is a positive non-threatening method of introducing spelling concepts to the children. By moving the letters to make words, children truly grasp the basic concept of putting sounds together to make words. Again, you are employing all three modalities (visual, auditory and kinesthetic) in attaining skills. The child is hearing, seeing, sequencing and moving the letters as he builds a word. Many teachers rely solely upon worksheets at this level to build these important steps. When worksheets are all that is used to teach this critical skill area, without total modality involvement, the child does not completely integrate his learning. By totally involving the child through all three modalities, true integration of skills is achieved.

SPELLING

At this time, I begin spelling tests. I send home a list of five to eight words for the child to practice. Again, these words all rhyme and follow the same pattern. The day before the test, I number the spelling test papers for each child. It is important that they not be bogged down with numbering the papers. You want each child to begin spelling with 100 percent accuracy. As you give these tests, emphasize the sound of each letter to ensure success. When you say the sound “b,” walk under the “b” on the board and point to the letter. Say “/b/, b, little tummy to the door,” while pointing to the door. Note: The prompts used may be changed according to the teacher’s classroom layout. This keeps all students from learning reversals and then having to unlearn them. Remember, all the desks are facing the board.

Based on the knowledge of the individual student levels, the teacher may begin scrambled sentences. I use sentences that I have made and cut apart into individual words. Each sentence is in a zippered plastic bag. The teacher gives each child one sentence. The child then moves the words around on his desk until he has the words in the correct order, making a sentence. Capital letters at the beginning of a sentence and punctuation at the end are provided on the words and are other important skills that are reinforced using this activity. The sentence always contains “Rhyme Time” words from the week. During short “a” week for example, the sentences may be, “The cat is fat. I have a bat. I sat on the mat.” By moving the words around on their desk, the children are using the three modalities, motor output and total involvement in learning another critical language area: sentence structure. They also get practice with their “Rhyme Time” words in context. I must emphasize that motor output enhances integration of true skill learning.

TWO PEN WRITING “BEAT THE TEACHER”

The next activity can be done daily at the morning math meeting after story time. Children are on the floor, and the teacher is seated next to a chart paper tablet on an easel. Shortly after the Rhyme Time activities have been introduced, and the students show some proficiency in building words and sentences, the teacher begins “Two Pen Writing,” also called, “Beat the Teacher.” Children love this activity because they view it as a contest with the teacher. For Two Pen Writing, the teacher uses two different colored markers. One color is for the children, and the other is for the teacher. Using the chart paper on an easel, the teacher dictates a sentence. Example: “The fat cat is on the mat.” The teacher will tell the children to listen carefully to the sentence and then ask them to raise their hands if they can spell the first word. It is important that you set the tone for this activity by picking students who are quietly raising their hands. If not, the activity will become chaotic. If the child spells the word correctly, the teacher writes the word using the students’ color marker. Letters or words that the child misses are written with the teacher’s color. Continue until the sentence is completed. In the beginning, you will use one to three sentences. At the end of “Beat the Teacher,” list the score on a poster (like baseball – Teacher 3, Class 10). By keeping the score displayed, the children are motivated to

beat the teacher. The next day, read the previous day's writing to reinforce the words. I use this activity for the entire first grade year, going from short vowels, long vowels, consonant clusters, etc. Students stay involved because they are highly motivated. On Fridays, we often read all of the previous Two Pen Writings together. The children are amazed to look back and see how much they have improved as each two pen writing has more and more of the story written in their color. Keep the same color for the teacher and students for the entire year so they can be acutely aware of the difference.

Although this seems like a lengthy, laborious method devoted only to short vowels, I cannot overstress the importance of short vowel skill mastery. It is estimated that 62 percent of our English language is made up of short vowel syllables and words. We cannot just gloss over this skill. It is critical to reading success.

I follow these basic procedures and techniques as I move the children through the Sing, Spell, Read & Write program as well as the Heath basal reading series. With the combination of Sing, Spell, Read & Write, and the Point and Read method, children will gain reading skills in a sequential, modality-based, neurologically imputed manner. I use the skillpack that accompanies each basal reader for extra practice with the skills.

HIGHLIGHTING METHOD

After completing the three primer basals, I begin the highlighting method. I use this method to train students to locate information in paragraphs and answer questions. I use a worksheet with a paragraph at the top, and three or four questions below the paragraph. The skillpacks have several pages like this. I also photocopy some reproducible reading comprehension booklets found at any teacher store. These also contain a short paragraph at the top with three or four comprehension questions below the paragraph.

I pass a highlighter to each child along with the comprehension sheet. We read the paragraph together several times. I then choose a child to read the first question. I direct the student to go up to the paragraph and reread until he locates the correct answer. When the child finds the answer, he reads it to me. If he is correct, I instruct the class to find the answer and highlight it. The children go back to the question and circle or bubble in the

correct answer. For example, if the paragraph is about pets and the question is, “What color is the pet?” I instruct the students to go back to the paragraph and look for the sentence containing the word “color,” then highlight that sentence. This is a valuable skill for increasing a child’s ability to locate information in a passage. This activity is critical for at-risk students’ performance on reading achievement tests.

HANDWRITING

After teaching for years in the intermediate grades, I was shocked when I went to first grade and realized that formal handwriting was not always being taught. For children with poor motor skills, each letter must be taught correctly. Without knowing the correct way to form each letter, these children write backwards, retrace and have very cumbersome writing styles. Formal teaching of handwriting for early at-risk learners is a must. I am providing a prompt for each letter in the Appendix. These should be used daily at the beginning of the year in either shaving cream or Wipe and Swipe (dry-erase) boards. Using this highly structured method reduces reversals and the child’s inability to tell the difference between similar letters. It is a very practical, sensible approach to handwriting. The child learns this prompt thoroughly so that he can say it automatically when needed. It is neurological impress, and it does work. We say each prompt rhythmically (more like a rap) and this also helps transcend hemispheres which will foster true integration for the child. I make the letter on the board while saying the prompt. The children then copy the letter saying the prompt as they write it. Thus all three modalities are being used at the same time. This will also enhance true learning for all students.

Bad habits learned in handwriting in first grade will come back to haunt the child later. Poor letter formation will cause the student to be a messy writer and unable to keep the pace in the upper grades. Each child must learn the most efficient way to make the letters. If not, they will retrace and make many extra strokes, thus taking longer to form each letter. Provide lots of practice at the beginning of the year using shaving cream. The children view this as fun, and it removes the stress that might be present using the traditional paper and pencil. Again, if we are to make all children winners, we must take away the things that make them losers.

I will take 26 days, one day for each new letter, and every day we write all the letters we have learned after practicing the new letter of the day.

Do not expect that every child will be able to make each letter perfectly. However, once they learn the formations of each letter, improvement will occur with lots of practice.

The key to success in this handwriting program is to have teachers willing to move away from worksheets and traditional methods to activities that require more neurological input with motor output. Combining the rhythm with the touching of each letter will help integrate the skill for early at-risk students. By using eyes, hands and ears at the same time, we stand a better chance of putting the skill into the child's brain where it truly becomes part of him. Worksheets tend to have the skills "out there," and we want to put the skill "in there," where it truly becomes part of the child.

WIPE AND SWIPE

One of the most frustrating activities that an early at-risk student faces is learning how to manipulate a pencil and produce a neat spelling or handwriting paper. When his paper is never displayed on the bulletin board for "Super Speller," or "Neat Writer," it is just another failure for that at-risk child who tries so hard.

I use Wipe and Swipe boards for my first grade students who have such difficulty in mastering handwriting and spelling papers. They would constantly write, erase, write, erase. Many times they would become so frustrated that they would end up with a hole in the paper. They would then crumple it up and toss it in the garbage. Often, they refused to try again. When frustration sets in, the brain emits a chemical which impedes their coping skills.

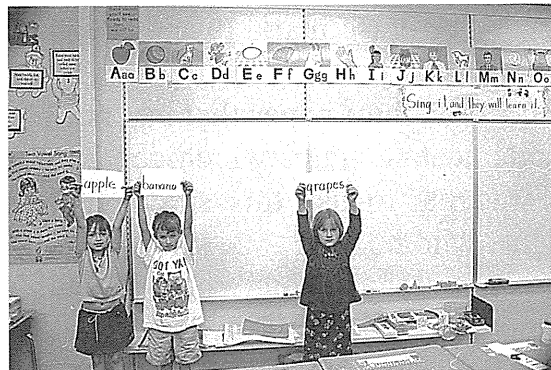
My Wipe and Swipe boards are simply acetate white boards that have a laminated finish. I use dry erase markers and special erasers made for dry erase markers. These boards have a ceiling line, floor line, and a dotted midline. You can even use vellum paper that has been laminated. There are also commercially made acetate slates which can be purchased. It may not be necessary for all students to use this strategy, but it certainly will be critical for those students who need it.

The beauty of this strategy is that when the children make a mistake, they simply "Wipe and Swipe." You then have taken a very threatening activity and turned it into a fun activity. This is the key to reaching at-risk learners.

I will now describe ways to teach some specific first grade skills using an intermodality approach where children can move around the room, manipulate objects and more truly integrate the skills. These types of activities will be much more conducive to those children with different learning profiles than worksheets and teacher lectures. The activities should lead to true integration of skills for these children, as they are participatory in nature.

ALPHABETICAL ORDER

To involve the children and allow for motor output, give four or five children an index card with one word on it. Use the same category, such as animals, foods, names, etc for each group of index cards. One at a time, have these children go to the front of the room and stand under the letter of the alphabet that matches the first letter in the word. For example, the child with the word banana would stand under the “b,” the child with orange would stand under the “o,” etc. Then have the class check the words to see if they are in correct order. Assign a secretary (at a side board) to write the words in correct order. The secretary will use a different color for the first letter in each word. Have the entire class read the list together to check for accuracy. After several days of this type of activity, worksheets can be used for review and reinforcement of the skill. Worksheets should not be used to introduce a skill but can be used for review and practice after initial “active” instruction. I especially like cut and paste worksheets because they involve lots of fine motor activity.



Alphabetical Order

PARTS OF SPEECH

When teaching early learners parts of speech, I have had great success by teaching them raps to go with each one. We stand and move our bodies to these raps to integrate the skills. Again, using neurological input with motor output increases learning. Although I only teach noun and verb in first grade, I am including adjective and adverb for your information.

Noun: A noun is anything that you see,
Like a bird, or a cat, or a dog or a tree!

Verb: A verb is anything that you do,
Like run, or dance, or sing or chew!

Adjective: An adjective tells more about a noun,
Like little, or big, or pretty or brown!

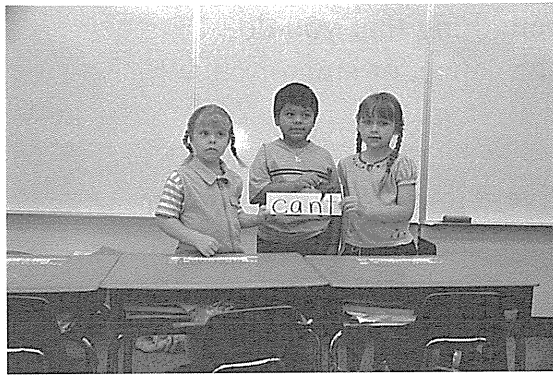
Adverb: An adverb tells when, where or how,
Like here, today, lately or now!

CONTRACTIONS

Let's now look at teaching contractions. Give two children an index card, each containing one word, that will be used to form the contraction. For example, for can't, one child's card will have the word "can," and the other child's card will have the word "not." The two children will go to the front of the room and put the cards together to form one word. Then ask the class to tell which letters must be removed to make the contraction "can't." Once it has been agreed that "n" and "o" need to be left out, the children will then slide the cards together to hide those two letters. This will give them the word "cant." At this time, ask the class what is needed to make a contraction. Once the class has agreed that the word needs an apostrophe, then ask a child to come up to the front of the classroom to be the apostrophe. Give that child a large paper apostrophe and ask the class where the apostrophe should be placed. When the right answer is given, he will then hold the apostrophe where the letters have been left out. That child will

then say, “Look at me, I’m the apostrophe!” This type of instruction, requiring full class participation along with motor output and rhyming, will truly lead to long-term integration of the skill. The children will always remember the process, in which they were involved, as well as the catchy rhyme. This type of “active” instruction is viewed as fun.

Assign a secretary (at a side board) to list the contractions as they are completed. Use a different color for the apostrophe. At the end, have the children read the contractions for review and practice. After several days of this type of instruction, worksheets can be used for reinforcement. I recommend that the same type of contractions be used for each lesson. Do the “not” contractions one day, and the “will” contractions another day etc.



Contractions

COMPOUND WORDS

Another skill where this motor output intermodality approach can be used is teaching compound words. For a class of twenty, I make ten compound words, using one card for each word in the compound word. Distribute the cards and have the children (one at a time) find the child with the other part of the compound word. They will go to the other child’s desk and put the words together and read the new compound word to the class. Both children will then read and spell the compound word to the secretary at the board who will record it. Continue this process until all ten compound words have been made and recorded. The class will then read the list on the board together and check for accuracy.

Once the teacher has used these types of intermodality techniques, she will become more aware of how involvement in the process along with motor output truly does help children integrate skills. Too many skills are

“glossed over” in the early years, and this leads to so many problems later on because the child has not truly integrated each skill. They will remember the involvement much better if they are required to move, feel and touch their learning. I feel countless worksheets requiring little student involvement, especially in the earlier years, have left many children bored, disillusioned, and totally uninvolved in their learning. Millions of Americans received solid educations before the advent of the worksheet. I believe that overuse of worksheets, which children often view as “busy work,” is the greatest detriment to at-risk children today. Through singing, motor activities, rhythm, rhyme and repetition, the skills tend to be integrated and become part of the child. That is the key to success for these children. Through use of neurological input techniques with resultant motor output, those children with different learning styles have a better chance of succeeding. We are allowing them to use their strength areas rather than always keeping them in their weak area.

Believing strongly in these two key concepts, I shall say that I feel the two cornerstones of reading instruction for at-risk learners in the early years should be a musically-based phonics program for phonics instruction (intensive phonics instruction is a must for most at-risk learners) and a neurological input technique for the actual teaching of the reading process such as Point and Read. Without this type of approach, many at-risk children will fail to learn to read by the end of first grade. Reading success in first grade is the foundation of all later school success.

STANFORD

I am including here the National Achievement Scores for my first graders for the last two years. Judging from the behavioral problems, learning problems and mental ages of my students at the beginning of the year, I felt that if I could have half of them score above the 40th percentile on the spring achievement test, I would feel successful. I was amazed and delighted when the Stanford scores for my class arrived. My class average was fifth stanine in reading and the sixth stanine in math. The overall scores far exceeded what might have been expected.

It is important to note that the students, who were still below 40th percentile, were either retained in first grade or recommended for psychological testing to find out why they had lagged so far behind the other students in my class. I will also state that those who scored low were the

ones who had serious personal problems (sexual abuse, domestic violence or other causative factors) that kept them from succeeding in school or were “developmentally delayed” and might profit from another year in first grade.

A great detriment to my children’s ability to continue this tremendous growth is the fact that many of them will go all summer and never read a single book. Our summer school programs have been cut so drastically that because many of them scored above the 40 percent, they will not qualify for summer school. Therefore, when they return to second grade the next fall, much of the tremendous growth of first grade will be lost because they have not read for three months. This is an issue that I would like to be addressed by legislatures and administrators.

Stanford Test Results

(1998-1999)

Student	Reading %	Math %
# 1	62	78
# 2	69	74
# 3	69	59
# 4	81	68
# 5	36	82
# 6	55	29
# 7	44	64
# 8	52	50
# 9	66	59
# 10	10	20
# 11	52	74
# 12	44	64
# 13	26	45
# 14	36	29
# 15	52	64
# 16	44	59
Class Average	50	57

Stanford Test Results

(1999-2000)

Student	Reading %	Math %
# 1	58	79
# 2	64	71
# 3	47	83
# 4	67	61
# 5	55	93
# 6	74	86
# 7	71	57
# 8	35	44
# 9	35	28
# 10	49	61
# 11	25	32
# 12	55	44
# 13	35	26
# 14	17	28
# 15	31	79
Class Average	48	60

MENTAL AGES OF FIRST GRADERS

At the end of the year, I retest my first graders using the same measure, Test of Kindergarten/First Grade Readiness Skills by Karen Gardner Coddling, as I used with them at the end of kindergarten. I have included the results here to show that this program using alternative methods and techniques can greatly impact on those children who have a great deficit in mental age levels. Although I expected at least a year's growth in each child, I was thrilled to see the dramatic improvement. I have listed just the mental ages for reading of the very lowest students in my classroom for the last two school years.

MENTAL AGE (READING SUBTEST) OF FIRST GRADERS

(1998-1999)

Student	Spring-Kindergarten	Spring-First Grade
# 1	4-8	7-0+
# 2	4-8	6-11
# 3	4-10	6-9
# 4	5-3	7-0+
# 5	5-1	7-0+
# 6	5-8	7-0+
# 7	6-0	7-0+
# 8	6-0	7-0+
# 9	6-2	7-0+

(1999-2000)

Student	Spring-Kindergarten	Spring-First Grade
# 1	3-7	6-10
# 2	4-0	7-0+
# 3	4-3	7-0+
# 4	4-3	7-0+
# 5	4-3	7-0+
# 6	4-6	7-0+
# 7	4-7	7-0+
# 8	4-11	7-0+
# 9	4-11	6-11
# 10	5-1	7-0+
# 11	5-3	6-9
# 12	5-6	7-0+
# 13	5-6	7-0+
# 14	5-10	7-0+
# 15	5-10	7-0+

Teaching first graders to write creatively is a challenging job. I do very little creative writing in the first semester of my first grade model. I am

so busy building the basic skills needed in reading, handwriting and math, that there is no time for formal instruction in paragraph writing or creative writing. Also, some research shows that writing skills are about a year behind reading skills. Therefore, I cannot afford time to teach a skill for which children are not ready.

We write many experience stories together as a class early in the year. This is done by the children dictating a story to the teacher. The teacher writes the story on the board or chart paper. Then the children read the story with the teacher. Each child copies the story on experience paper and illustrates above the story.

Note: I always put a green dot where I want the children to start writing (indent for paragraphs and a red dot at the end of each line before I pass out the experience paper).

BUILD A PARAGRAPH

I also use another method of helping these children begin to construct paragraphs using a “hands-on” approach. I give each child two or three strips of paper (about one inch wide and six or seven inches long.) The size of the strips will depend on the child. The teacher will need to decide this based on her knowledge of each child’s maturity level. I will ask each child to write one sentence about a given topic on each strip. I will cue the children to begin each sentence with a capital letter. Move around the room helping the children complete the strips. Then pass out a large sheet of color-coded paper. It will have a green dot at the beginning point (indenting the first word). Then direct the children to lay their strips in the correct order on their desktops, one by one. They will take each strip and glue it onto the lined paper. When they find that a whole sentence will not fit at the end of the line, they will need to cut it and put the remainder of it on the next line. When all sentence strips have been glued, then instruct the children to pick a red crayon (to show stops) and put a period at the end of each strip. This is the time to stress again and again that for every strip, they must have a period. Allow them time to count the strips, and then check to make sure they have that same number of periods.

As the children become more proficient at two or three sentences, you may add more sentences. The children enjoy this activity and do not fear writing paragraphs because they view it as a fun project. When the children have become comfortable with this, you may begin to ask them to write

paragraphs. They will remember the basic techniques used from this experience.

MATH

When teaching math to first graders, I use the same strategy of neurological input combined with motor output for integration of skills just as I do for language acquisition.

Our county has adopted the Addison-Wesley math series. This series was chosen because it ties in so well to F. C. A. T. (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test). I find a huge correlation between what is taught in this series and the skills tested on the Stanford as well. The Stanford is the achievement test used by our district.

The series provides many strategies compatible with my theory of neurological input combined with motor output. When teaching graphing, make sure the children not only do the activity in the book, but also give them several experiences in making their own graphs. Use M&M's, Skittles, etc. to sort, count and graph on blank graphs to foster real understanding of graphing.

At the beginning of the year, before requiring the children to write numbers, provide ample experience practicing writing in shaving cream. Once the child makes the number easily and correctly, he can then concentrate on the math rather than struggling with the formation of the number.

I have provided a prompt for each numeral. When practicing the numerals, with shaving cream, the children repeat the prompt with the teacher as she practices the number on the board. The prompts are as follows:

- 0 – Around we go.
- 1 – One is fun.
- 2 – Around and back on a railroad track.
- 3 – Around the tree, around the tree. That's the way we make a three!
- 4 – Down and over, and down some more. That's the way we make a four!
- 5 – Fat old five goes down. Give him a belly and a hat.
- 6 – Make a hoop, and a loop.
- 7 – Across the sky and down from heaven. That's the way we make a seven!

8 – Make an S, but don't wait. Go back up and close the gate.

9 – Make a nose and a line. That's a nine that's really fine.

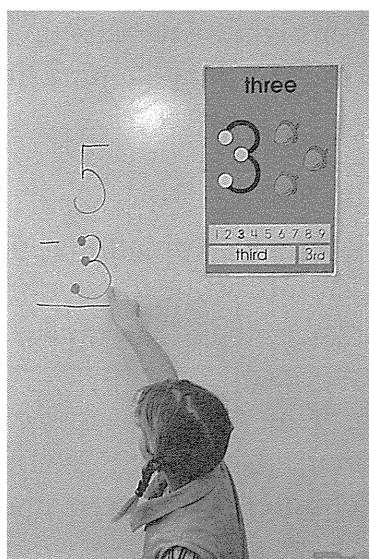
Source Unknown

Children must master the formations of numbers before being expected to use them. We do not want to have them practice reversals and misshapes in numbers. Once they can make the numbers easily and efficiently, math will become easier.

When teaching place value, provide lots of experience moving ones and tens strips on a workmat. By using a combined visual, auditory and kinesthetic approach, the children will learn and understand place value. Don't do the workbook pages first. Always introduce the skill by manipulating the ones and tens on a workmat first.

Plenty of practice with putting number cards in order should be used to teach numeration. Picking up and putting number cards in the correct order leads to a better understanding of number sequencing. A hundred-chart, cut up and stored in a zippered bag, is a great hands-on activity. (#1-30)

One area that I find needs more practice than current math books provide is learning basic addition and subtraction facts. I use Touchmath to teach and reinforce the basic skills. Touchmath is produced by Innovative Learning Concepts, Inc. The child is taught that each numeral has a touchpoint (dot). The number one has one touchpoint, number two has two touchpoints, etc. The student learns to add and subtract by touching points on each number. For instance, adding $4+2$: the child says the larger number (4), looks at the smaller number (2), touches the two dots on the two and counts up, "Five, six." Worksheets are provided with the touchpoints on the correct number (the smaller number). This is a great way of combining visual, auditory and kinesthetic modalities for learning. The child looks at the problem, verbalizes it, then touches the points and counts up for addition. The kinesthetic learner is provided a way of learning through his strength modality.



Touchmath

I also use musical tapes of basic addition and subtraction facts. The children enjoy the catchy tunes. I usually seat the students on the floor so I can hold up the number fact cards as they sing the tunes. I also teach addition and subtraction facts by playing the Leap Frog game. I lay the numbers one through ten in a straight line on the floor. The children form a straight line beside the numbers. Each child is given a flashcard with a basic addition fact on it. The student will go and stand on the higher number. He will say, “Four plus two,” (hops the numbers,) “is six.” Again, motor output is used for optimum learning and integration of skills. Use the same game for subtraction by having the child hop backwards. Great reinforcements of these skills are games like “Around the World,” or “Add-O,” a Bingo game.

When teaching problem solving, it is important to use counters and other manipulatives. Moving counters on and off a workmat helps the child internalize the skills needed for problem solving.

To teach problem solving, I often use the “School Bus” game. I put ten chairs at the front of the room (in two rows of five). I then direct the children to follow the directions as the problem is read. Example: Two children were on the bus (two children sit on the bus). Two more get on. How many are on the bus now? I often use the teacher’s chair for the bus driver and have the bus driver read the problem. Use the same activity for subtraction facts as well. The children love this game and view it as playtime, rather than math.

If math is introduced, in the early years, using games that involve all three modalities rather than worksheets, children will view math as fun, rather than as something to fear. By using these techniques early, we

remove the fear that leads to math failure later. A constant diet of worksheets in early years is threatening to some and boring for others.

STUDY OF TWINS

Last year in first grade, we had a set of twin boys. Twins provide an excellent source of comparison, since they are the exact same age, share the same genetics and the same home environment.

The first twin (child A) was placed in a traditional first grade class. This classroom used a basal reading series, worksheets and teacher-based instruction. The mother viewed this child as the more intelligent of the two and stated that he gave her fewer problems at home and had been more successful as school.

Child B was placed in my classroom several months into the school year because of his inability to keep up with his peers in his traditional first grade classroom and his severe learning problems. When he entered my classroom, he did know all the letters of the alphabet and their sounds. His previous teacher stated he displayed severe learning problems. She felt a move to my class would be a better placement for him.

At the end of the school year, both boys were tested on the same achievement test (Stanford). Child A scored 17th percentile on reading comprehension. Child B, who had been in my program, scored a 69th percentile on the same reading comprehension.

Again, this year we had twin boys in first grade. The one in my room tested much lower in kindergarten. At the end of first grade, the one in my room scored 73rd percentile on the reading achievement test. His brother, in a traditional first grade, scored 44th percentile. Although two cases do not provide conclusive evidence, it does point to the fact that instruction based on neurological input with motor output leads to true, long lasting integration of skills.

READATHON

During the last week of the year, I will invite all parents into my class for a Readathon. I do this for two reasons. First, it instills such pride and confidence in my students as they stand and read their favorite selection in

front of thirty-five or forty people. As a child, I would have never been able to do that at the age of six or seven. Each child is given a moment in the “limelight.” Parents beam with joy as their children read. Second, I am hoping to really encourage parents to work with their children over the summer. When they feel that pride in their children, they are more likely to continue reading over vacation. This is an absolute must for all my students.

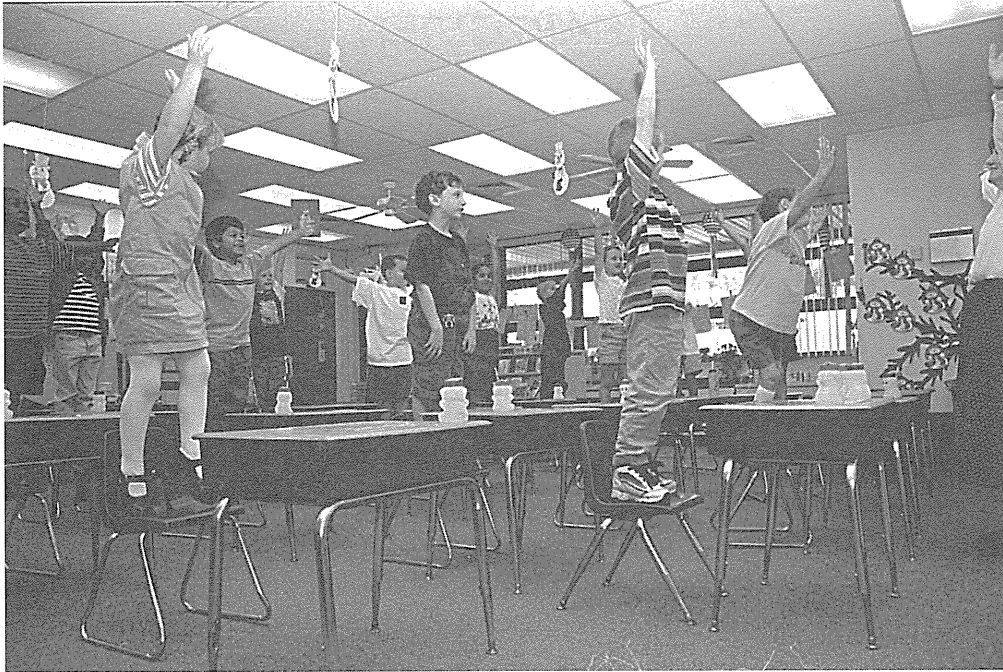
When the readings are finished, I will pass out packets of information for each parent. Along with the child’s name, I shall write their modality strength. Inside I will include suggestions for each modality strength. This way I hope to empower the parents on the most useful methods to use with their child.

I shall include reading, spelling and math games and materials that parents can use at home. I strive to make the learning “fun.” Then, I conclude by saying, “I’ve done my job. All of my children can now read. Now parents, it’s your job to see that they continue to read over the summer.”

From the parent feedback at this event, I knew my efforts were greatly appreciated. Every parent in attendance vowed to me that they would continue to work at home. I have included the invitation for this Readathon in the Appendix.

At the end of every school year, I am always keenly aware of the many “miracles” we have performed in our program. The four of us (two teachers, two aides) have worked diligently and calmly, day after day, all year to make a lasting impact on these dear children entrusted to us. Many of them can now walk more gracefully because of the hours spent in gross motor classes. Many can listen and understand more because of auditory processing sessions. All are now speaking correctly in complete sentences due to much work in the Peabody Language classes. They are better able to do all their class work because of the fine motor practice. Most of all, they are happier, more confident and more capable of dealing with the problems that lie ahead because they have had a nurturing, fun-filled and supportive beginning to their school careers.

Many will go on to be very successful in school. This year, six of our 30 former students from last year made the Honor Roll or A-Team in regular classes. I truly believe that would have been impossible without our program being there to give them a “jump start.”



*Working closely together as a team, we indeed have opened many ugly,
rough oyster shells to expose the beautiful pearls inside!*

CHAPTER TEN

WHAT NEXT? A MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL MODEL FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

This program description I have developed for early at-risk learners could be used at any elementary school grade level. Its emphasis on intermodality instruction along with neurological input/motor output strategies and methods could be modified for at-risk learners in all grades, kindergarten through fifth grade.

However, the critical years for most at-risk learners are the middle school years. During these years, school for at-risk children becomes even more difficult. The pressure from peers, hormonal changes and all other problems associated with puberty are often greatly maximized with at-risk students.

Careful planning, realistic goals and dedicated, caring teachers are all necessary when developing an at-risk program for these middle school students. Alternative teaching strategies, as well as alternative assessment tools, must be employed with these students to keep them “turned on” and “tuned in.” Curriculum adaptations must be made in all areas.

For instance: reading computer programs, trade books, individualized reading programs, etc. can be used to replace textbooks. All at-risk learners should have a dictionary and a calculator with them at all times. If they have not learned certain basic skills after five or six years, we must stop “beating a dead horse” and give them crutches to use instead of insisting that a little more practice will make it alright. We must teach them skills to learn to compensate for the things they can’t do while they explore finding things they can do.

In math, these children should be taught basic skills needed in life. No child, who has a history of extreme problems in math for six or seven years, should be required to take and pass Algebra. I have seen many children drop out of high school because they could not pass Algebra. The stress, depression and ego defamation can never be undone. The small amount of skills that they will truly learn in Algebra is far outweighed by the destruction done to the child’s motivation and ego. We, as educators, can no longer put impossible hurdles in front of these children and then act surprised when they give up (or worse) blow up. In our technical society,

companies are forced to import workers from other countries because American kids cannot use or read a simple ruler or measuring tape. As I often say, why should all children be forced to take Algebra when, on my Saturday shopping trip, I can find very few people under the age of 30 who can make change without the cash register? It is ludicrous and must stop.

All content areas of Social Studies or Science should have taped series for the student to use. If not, they should be allowed to tape lectures, rather than taking notes, to ease learning of the material. When taking tests in these content areas, the students should have the option of taking the tests orally. When you give an at-risk student a Social Studies test, you are testing his ability to read and comprehend rather than his knowledge of Social Studies. We must allow them to experience success rather than to continue to allow them to fail. Success breeds success, but we tend to ignore this basic premise when planning for these children.

I shall now describe a typical day for this child: Imagine yourself for a moment going through this child's usual day. You get dressed in the morning, putting on discount department store clothes. Even though your mom and dad both work, they cannot afford designer clothes from the fancy department stores. Uniforms would relieve this stress. While getting dressed, you notice a few more pimples on your face. You also notice that because of weight gain, your jeans no longer fit. Just these physical setbacks have you feeling depressed before you walk to the bus stop. You begin your day in a middle/high school with 1,600 other children, whom you already view as superior to you just based on your physical appearance alone.

First period, the Language Arts teacher assigns a chapter to be read and a study guide to be done during the period. Due to severe reading problems and knowing very well your own limitations, you don't even attempt to read the chapter. You sit and doodle on the study guide until the period ends.

Second period, you go to Algebra class which is mandated as a compulsory course by the state. The teacher gives several examples of today's work and then allows time to work on the next two pages which are to be completed as homework and handed in tomorrow. You really pay attention to the explanation, but you truly don't have a clue what she's talking about. You are too embarrassed to ask a question because you don't even know how to form a question that would sound intelligent.

This scenario is played out in each class where you are not unwilling, but unable to function. Because of learning problems, you simply cannot cope with the material presented. You may be teased or taunted as you move to your next class.

By lunchtime, you are having stomach pains or a headache, and you ask to go to the clinic (you can't bear two more hours of this). This is true all too often for our middle school and high school at-risk students. Without adaptations to curriculum and methods, they become so desperate by the age of sixteen, they can't wait to drop out of school.

When middle and high schools were smaller, most students could participate in something they viewed as valuable or pleasurable. But now with 1,500-2,000 students on campus, the possibilities of being involved in their area of expertise are greatly diminished. There are only 90 spots on the football team and 40 members in the chorus or theater group. Unless they are outstanding, they cannot engage in extra-curricular activities. These activities can be a source for pleasure and motivation, but only if they are available and attainable.

I feel if we are going to make our middle and high schools more rewarding for these at-risk students, and encourage them to stay in school, we must revolutionize education at this level. By using adaptations I mentioned earlier, we can make these years more bearable for them.

If we are going to save these children, we must start administering aptitude tests at the end of seventh grade. We can place these children in vocational and technical schools where most of their abilities and interests may lie. Many kinesthetic and cross-dominant children will benefit from this approach. Every child deserves either a solid academic education or a vocational/technical skill before he graduates from high school.

A second benefit for our educational system is that when those at-risk students are placed in vocational or technical schools, the college-bound students will be much more likely to learn in a highly stimulating environment free of discipline problems and interruptions caused by the students that cannot cope with the academic challenges. Teachers can spend more of their time planning and executing valuable, worthwhile lessons and less time on discipline. They can truly spend time teaching. This alone will make them better teachers. Not having to spend so much time remediating the at-risk student, the teacher can dedicate more time to the students for whom the program was originally designed. Therefore, teachers, college-bound and at-risk students benefit from this common sense approach.

These vocational areas will have to be selected according to the geographical area where the school is located. Hotel, restaurant and other service skills would be very applicable in Florida. Other skill areas would be needed in other areas of the country. Businesses need to be polled for their input in providing information concerning what kinds of jobs they will have in this century, and what skills the students will need to fill those

positions. A collaboration between the school and business partners will be the key for this to work. Businesses are screaming for more highly trained workers in many areas, and schools are crying out in search of programs that will work for their teenage population. It's a win/win situation. Why not have the two work together to build an environment based on hope and success for a brighter future for these kids? If we fail to do this for the next generation, then shame on us as adults!

The key to success, however, is the fact that we must value and honor this vocational/technical training. It must be shown as worthwhile, and a diploma from this kind of training must be greeted with respect and honor.

Today with the thrust on every child going to college, many children feel they aren't worth anything because they are not able to go to college. Thus, again we have reinforced those feelings of inferiority and worthlessness.

This country was not built by or defended by college graduates alone. Traditionally, up until the last 50 years, many people dropped out of high school or never pursued education beyond a secondary level. These people went on to do worthwhile things for America, building its industries, fighting its wars and making America into the greatest country in the world. I feel from working for 34 years with at-risk student (from kindergarten through eighth grade) that once these types of programs are offered, the at-risk children can be reached. The child's whole attitude will change as he begins to feel successful and worthwhile because for perhaps the first time, he is working toward an attainable goal! He will be mastering a skill and feeling pride and accomplishment in that mastery. For the first time in his academic career, he is working in a strength area rather than a deficit area. This fact alone will foster success. Years of depression and frustration will begin to disappear as he discovers that he can do something worthwhile that will provide income and a way of life that he enjoys. He can dare to dream! Discipline problems and disruptive behavior should decrease as the children are involved in activities in which they can become accomplished and succeed in mastering.

Math and reading skills can be taught in connection with vocational/technical training. Interest and motivation alone will increase competency in the academic skills. The child who would never have read Shakespeare or Greek mythology may read an electrician's manual because it is truly important to him.

Many years ago, when I developed the first Specific Learning Disabilities program in our school system in Pennsylvania, this model worked very well. Our graduation rate was high, and only one of my former

students was ever arrested or sent to prison (to my knowledge). These students are now in their thirties, and many of them are now quite successful in the building trades, cosmetology, fire departments, small businesses and mechanical technicians. Vocational education has afforded them a rewarding and successful way of life.

In my own residential neighborhood, there are currently five houses under construction. These projects have been slowed dramatically by the lack of skilled workers in the building trades. Yet take a drive downtown, and you will see many teenagers and young adults loitering on the corner with nothing to do. We continue to import workers from other countries to fill these positions. This should be stopped if we are going to improve the quality of life for many young Americans.

In this country today, we are in need of 60,000 skilled automotive technicians. Yet very few high school students have automotive mechanical training available to them. Currently, we do very little to keep these children in school. Therefore, our dropout rates remain high. Now in some areas of Florida, they are considering taking away the driver's licenses of these children who drop out of school before graduation.

There has been little done to provide alternative rewarding curriculums and programs for these children who cannot succeed in purely academic pursuits. One size education fits all, and if you don't like it, adios! When they can stand it no longer and drop out of school, we will not even allow them to drive to fast food restaurants to flip hamburgers. This may be all they are qualified to do because they have not been provided with a marketable vocational or technical skill. What alternatives have we really given these children who have so few choices available to them? They may turn to a life of crime on the street as the only means of making a living. Again, many have not failed the school, but the school has failed them!

Some are in and out of the juvenile justice system, and after many brushes with the law may be sent to a state or federal prison. Here it will cost more to keep them for a year than it would have to provide them with a solid education earlier. The cost to society in human and economic loss is tremendous. We all suffer because of this inability of a school system to change for the benefit of all students. With America incarcerating more prisoners than any other industrialized nation in the world, and private prisons being one of the fastest growing businesses in our present economy, isn't it time for us to find the causes as well as solutions to this plague that is sweeping our nation?

When the child becomes thirty years old, having spent fourteen or fifteen years in prison, with resultant emotional, social, drug and alcohol

problems, only then will the federal government step in and say, “We have a federal program to train you so that you, too, can compete and be successful in the job market.” What a farce!

If we had done that when the child was thirteen or fourteen, before he had become a hardened criminal, we could have saved fifteen years of prison and the accompanying human suffering. Many prisoners state that their problems began in the kindergarten classroom and playground when others started calling them names. Remember the scenario at the beginning of this book of the little kid in kindergarten who had so many problems with the calendar activity. Without early diagnosis, remediation and careful intervention all the way along, we are now looking at that same child 25 years later.

Shame on us as a society, and particularly upon those in the fields of education, because we have failed this child. To continue to stay the present course is unforgivable. We must change, and change quickly, if America is to survive as a world leader!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ESTABLISHING CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE

I have left this important topic until the end of the book for a reason. I want it to be the last thing read by and remembered by the reader. None of the methods, strategies and ideas stated in this book will have full impact and value unless the teacher is able to establish classroom discipline. It is truly impossible for at-risk children to perform well unless their classroom is orderly, fair and has defined limitations and boundaries which are clearly established, but more importantly, fairly administered to all.

It has been said that all teachers must be fair, friendly and firm. I must most of all stress the importance of fairness. When a teacher allows an A student to do certain misdeeds without punishment and yet severely punishes the at-risk child for the same exact behavior, she is undermining the discipline standards and giving the at-risk child a mindset that will only exasperate his problems. Fairness is the key to any discipline plan!

The first week of the school year is the most essential in establishing discipline. After the first week of school, it may often be too late to truly enact a discipline plan. Classroom rules should be made the very first day of the year by the entire class for the benefit of all. When children are involved in the process of making the rules, they are much more likely to be able to “live with” those rules. The rules in the early years should be clear and simple. I am listing the rules that my first graders and I might make as an example:

1. Follow directions given by the teacher.
2. Raise your hand to speak.
3. Respect yourself as well as others.
4. Ask permission before taking the belongings of others.
5. Keep your hands to yourself.
6. Listen.

These rules should then be clearly posted at the front of the classroom. I will then help the children learn each rule. We may role-play each one so that every child clearly understands the rules. Then I ask if each child fully understands each rule and what it means. That way, later on there is no excuse for the child to say that he did not understand the rule. This may sound so simple, but it is a key ingredient in making the discipline work.

The teacher should not expect children to follow rules that they do not fully comprehend.

I then use this method to remind the children of the rules. When I see a child breaking a rule, I will snap my fingers, make eye contact with the child and then hold up the number of fingers corresponding to the rule that he is breaking. For example, if a child is speaking out without raising his hand, I will hold up two fingers to correspond with the rule that states: Raise your hand to speak. By using this technique rather than constant reprimands and threats, I allow the child to maintain his self-respect as well as the respect of his classmates. Every time the teacher calls out a child's name in a negative way, self-esteem is diminished.

In our program, right after the Pledge of Allegiance, every child in our program will raise his right hand and repeat this Promise:

"I promise to work hard and pay attention because this is very important."

We do this every single day for the entire school year because it lays the ownership of responsibility right where it belongs: with the individual child. It is a simple strategy, but we have had great success with using it with our earliest at-risk learners.

A simple technique that I use for increasing effort and attention is to reward "good listeners." When I am giving oral directions or lengthy explanations, I will stop and say, "If you are listening to me right now, you may go and get a treat from the treat box." I only do this occasionally, but it truly does motivate good habits. The children never know when to expect it. The first time I do this there may be only two or three children who get up. However, as time goes on, more and more children will be receiving treats as effort and attention improve because I have given them a reason to listen. This will impact greatly on keeping children involved. When children are involved in classroom activities, they are more likely to have acceptable behavior.

I have always had better success with rewarding good behavior than punishing poor behavior. I seldom take away recess privileges from my children, because often these are the children who need recess the most for an outlet of excess energy as well as release and relaxation.

I try to provide many incentives for children to behave well. We have "Lunch Bunch" every Friday. This is when I allow the children to eat their lunches in the room instead of the cafeteria. We will also watch a video as we eat. They really look forward to this, and I feel it does improve behavior. I also have "Fun Friday" which is fifteen or twenty minutes on Friday afternoon for an extra indoor playtime. Both of these are rewarded to the

children who have had acceptable behavior. If not, they will be excluded. Therefore, they are motivated to behave in order to be able to participate.

Another technique that I have used for years in winning over the most severe discipline problems is to establish a personal relationship with those children first. I always strive to engage them in personal conversations, pat them often on the shoulder and make reassuring comments to them the very first day. I immediately find an important job for them to do that very first day. Passing out papers, being line leader and teacher's helper are ways of helping that child feel important. Especially when I let that child be the teacher's helper from the very beginning, I am raising his self-esteem and improving his position in the group. He begins to view himself as a worthwhile contributing member of that group. When these children are isolated from the group or ignored from the very beginning of the year, it is much more difficult to maintain acceptable behavior with them. The teacher is much better off to try to draw them into the group and make them a valued part of it, rather than shutting them out of the group. Isolation and feelings of inferiority will only cause that child to be even more determined to make that teacher's life miserable every single day. If they feel the teacher doesn't like them or accept them for who they are, they will become more and more rebellious and less likely to buy into anything the teacher suggests.

I also never place too much importance on the discipline reports from the previous year. I try not to prejudge that child based on last year's problems. When the teacher reads the previous year's discipline reports and places a child's desk right beside her desk or in the front row before the child ever enters the classroom, she has already told that child that he has had problems in the past, and she feels he is sure to have problems in the future. Guess what? He will do everything in his power to live up to that reputation that has already been established for this year. Also, I have discussed in Chapters Six and Seven the importance of placing these children properly in the classroom, of keeping each child in his "comfort zone." A desk right beside the teacher is perhaps the worst place to put that child.

It is the responsibility of the teacher to find out why the child acts the way he does. Have his parents recently divorced? Has he witnessed a lot of domestic violence? Has he been the recipient of the violence, abuse or neglect? Once the reason for his misbehavior has been established, it's much easier for the teacher to have compassion for and patience with the child. No child starts his school career wanting to be the troublemaker or the one who is always bullied by peers. However, when the teacher lacks knowledge of his problems and how to help him handle them, this is often

what happens. From the very beginning of his school career, if the child feels the teacher is on his side, he is much more likely to work with her instead of against her.

I feel that when teachers use an “active,” involved intermodality approach rather than lectures and worksheets, discipline will improve. When children are kept in their “comfort zone,” involved in their learning and taught using music, motor and make-believe, they are much more likely to view school as “fun” and less likely to cause problems.

When I taught in the intermediate grades and middle school, I always held a personal conference the first day of school with the children who had the worst reputations for discipline problems. By this age level, everyone on campus knows these children. At this conference, I would explain that I was fully aware of the problems he had in the past, but that I was anxious to give him a “clean slate,” a new beginning. I would emphasize to him that he would only get one chance to completely change and “turn over a new leaf.” If he chose to “mess up” the first day, he would not be able to take full advantage of this opportunity. I would stress that I was willing to work tirelessly with him to make this change. I would promise to be fair and equitable in all my dealings with him. I would also give him the options of oral testing, a “study buddy,” using a tape recorder or another student’s notes from lectures and the opportunity to give oral presentations instead of written reports. By removing the stress of academic pressure, the child would most often be able to improve his attitude and classroom performance. This has worked for me for years, and I feel it should be a part of every teacher’s strategy in attempting to reach and teach older children. I attribute the success of this strategy to the fact that I was perhaps the first teacher who ever gave this child options and alternatives before expecting compliance to my rules and classroom management. He knew from the very beginning that I would work with him, not against him. This alone built in the respect that I needed from him.

I truly believe this will be the most common attribute of successful teachers of this century. They will be the teachers who will take the time and put forth the effort it takes to implement these strategies and methods when working with all children, regardless of their academic level. If teachers feel that there are no bad kids, just bad things that happen to good kids, they will always be more successful in their dealings with their students. They will have the love and respect of students, their parents and the community. These will be the same teachers who will lead the public school system into the 21st Century as a viable, strong, flourishing system which truly strives to “leave no child behind.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

PEARLS OF WISDOM

Included in this chapter are my “Pearls of Wisdom.” These are sayings, ideas, beliefs and theories that I often use in my workshops for discussion and reflection.

- “Kids don’t really care what you know till they know that you really care.”
- “There are no bad kids, just good kids that bad things happen to.”
- “For many at-risk students today, it’s a case of the school failing them rather than them failing the school.”
- “If a child is a kinesthetic learner, but receives little kinesthetic learning experience, has he failed school, or has the school failed him?”
- “Without knowing what an early at-risk child’s problems are, how can we solve them?”
- “Without knowing how children learn, how can we teach them?”
- “Neurological input with motor output fosters true integration of skills for early at-risk learners.”
- “An intermodality approach should be used to reach and teach early at-risk learners.”
- “Rhythm, rhyme and repetition should form the foundation of early at-risk education.”

- “Music, motor and make-believe in the early years can make school fun for everyone!”
- “Sing it, and they will learn it!”
- “If you do one thing alone, keep each child in his ‘comfort zone.’”
- “If we are to make all children winners, we must take away the things that make them losers.”
- “Creative interactive play and motor activities should be increased, and television and video games should be decreased, if we are to better prepare children for school.”
- “Be careful who your heroes are.”
- “We must make all children a top priority in America.”
- “If we are to leave ‘no child behind,’ we must give those that need it a ‘jump start.’”
- “We are so busy raising test scores that we may be forgetting about raising children.”
- “The big question as we move into the 21st Century is, ‘Will we build better schools or bigger prisons?’”
- “Another important question is, ‘Will we continue to try to make kids fit programs, or will we make programs that fit kids?’”
- “If we don’t dramatically change our approaches and methods, more and more children will continue to move right from the school system to the prison system.”
- “Every child who leaves our public school system without a sound academic education or marketable vocational/technical skills is not only a potential burden to society, but also a potential threat to society.”

- “‘One size fits all’ education must stop if we are to truly prepare all students for a worthwhile future.”
- “The most important part of a teacher is her heart.”
- “When I leave this earth as a teacher and stand before the Eternal Superintendent of Schools, I feel He will be more interested in how I treated each and every student than how I raised test scores.”

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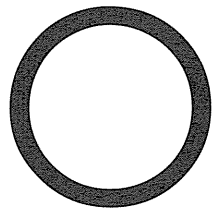
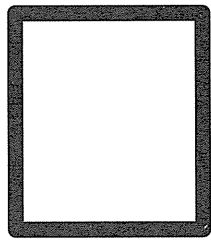
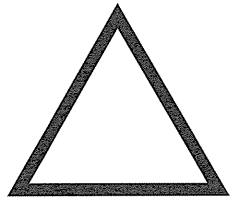
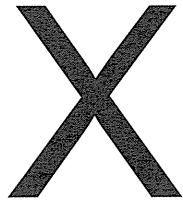
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APPENDIX

KINDERGARTEN ROUND-UP VISUAL MOTOR TEST



KINDERGARTEN ROUND-UP SKILLS TEST

Name_____

	Yes	No
Name (first & last)		
Age		
Count to 10		
Colors Yellow		
Red		
Blue		
Orange		
Black		
Numbers 3		
5		
7		
Letters A		
S		
T		
M		
O		
“The cat is behind the chair.”		
Holds pencil correctly.		

KINDERGARTEN ROUND-UP LETTER

To the parents of _____,

Your child was recently tested at Kindergarten Round-Up. This was done to determine his/her strengths and weaknesses. Your child displayed some difficulty in the area(s) of _____.

Please use some of the following activities over the summer before school starts. This will be very useful to your child as he/she enters kindergarten.

NUMBERS

1. When cooking meals, give your child lots of practice counting cups, spoons, napkins and other items in your kitchen.
2. Make numbers from paper (or small paper plates) and have your child practice putting them in order from 1-10. Use beans, dry cereal, M&M's, etc. to show each number.
3. Sing number songs.
4. When traveling in the car, have your child count cars, big trucks, stop lights, etc.
5. Write the numbers 1-10 on sidewalk with sidewalk chalk. He/she can hop on each number and say the numbers.

ALPHABET

1. Pick out letters in their name from signs, magazines, books, etc.
2. Squirt a small pile of shaving cream on table or counter; smooth it out to make a white writing surface. Practice writing letters (upper & lower case) and numbers using finger.
3. Pick a different letter every day. Write it, color the letter, cut out the letter from magazines. While driving, have your child count out how many times he/she sees the letter.
4. Make a snack, dessert, dinner, etc. that starts with the letter of the day. Ex: Lemonade for L l, muffins for M m, pizza for P p.
5. Use sidewalk chalk to make a giant letter. Have your child "walk the letter."

COLORS

1. Gather several small items from around the house. Have your child sort them by color.
2. Have a "color of the day." Your child can pick out clothes in the color of the day. Cut out pictures of things in that day's color from magazines. Name things seen around town that are the color of the day.
3. Sort M&M's, Skittles, Fruit Loops, gumdrops, etc. by color.
4. Have your child sort household items by color.
5. Your child can go on a treasure hunt. Ex: Find seven blue things.

Sincerely, _____

ATTENTION: KINDERGARTEN PARENTS

Is your child entering kindergarten in August? Using the following activities this summer will be very helpful toward a successful start in Kindergarten.

NUMBERS

1. When cooking meals, give your child lots of practice counting cups, spoons, napkins and other items in your kitchen.
2. Make numbers from paper (or small paper plates) and have your child practice putting them in order from 1-10. Use beans, dry cereal, M&M's, etc. to show each number.
3. Sing number songs.
4. When traveling in the car, have your child count cars, big trucks, stop lights, etc.
5. Write the numbers 1-10 on sidewalk with sidewalk chalk. He/she can hop on each number and say the numbers.

ALPHABET

1. Pick out letters in their name from signs, magazines, books, etc.
2. Squirt a small pile of shaving cream on table or counter; smooth it out to make a white writing surface. Practice writing letters (upper & lower case) and numbers using finger.
3. Pick a different letter every day. Write it, color the letter, cut out the letter from magazines. While driving, have your child count out how many times he/she sees the letter.
4. Make a snack, dessert, dinner, etc. that starts with the letter of the day. Ex: Lemonade for L l, muffins for M m, pizza for P p.
5. Use sidewalk chalk to make a giant letter. Have your child "walk the letter."

COLORS

1. Gather several small items from around the house. Have your child sort them by color.
2. Have a "color of the day." Your child can pick out clothes in the color of the day. Cut out pictures of things in that day's color from magazines. Name things seen around town that are the color of the day.
3. Sort M&M's, Skittles, Fruit Loops, gumdrops, etc. by color.
4. Have your child sort household items by color.
5. Your child can go on a treasure hunt. Ex: Find seven blue things.

NAME		FALL										SPRING									
		5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100
1. SOCIAL INTERACTION	%										FALL										
											SPRING										
2. NAME PRINTING											FALL										
											SPRING										
3. BODY CONCEPTS / AWARENESS											FALL										
											SPRING										
4. BODY CONCEPTS / USE											FALL										
											SPRING										
5. AUDITORY SEQUENCING											FALL										
											SPRING										
6. AUDITORY ASSOCIATION											FALL										
											SPRING										
7. VISUAL DISCRIMINATION											FALL										
											SPRING										
8. VISUAL MEMORY											FALL										
											SPRING										
9. VISUAL MOTOR											FALL										
											SPRING										
10. COLOR NAMING											FALL										
											SPRING										
11. RELATIONAL CONCEPTS											FALL										
											SPRING										
12. NUMBER COUNTING											FALL										
											SPRING										
13. NUMBER USE											FALL										
											SPRING										
14. NUMBER NAMING											FALL										
											SPRING										
15. ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE											FALL										
											SPRING										
	%	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100
* Used with permission of PRO ED : Lesiak's Developmental Tasks For Kindergarten Readiness - II																					

OPEN HOUSE LETTER FOR PARENTS

Dear Family,

In an effort to help your child have a successful school year, may I suggest some ideas to use at home?

1. Start the day as calmly and positively as possible. Your child's day is greatly affected by the way it starts.
2. Make sure your child drinks plenty of water. Recent brain research has shown that many children perform poorly in school because of brain dehydration.
3. Please limit the time your child watches TV or plays video games. Try to use other activities. Worthwhile suggestions include: family games (Checkers, Sorry, memory card games, etc.) Retail stores have several games for children five to seven years of age. Also, check out garage sales for affordable games.
4. Read to your child daily, and ask questions about the book.
5. Take your child to the Public Library weekly. Check out books for yourself and your child. When you set the example of the importance of reading, your child will benefit greatly.
6. Give your child plenty of opportunities to play outside. Throwing and catching a ball, hopscotch, playing on a tire swing, etc. all help children develop gross motor skills.
7. Help develop fine motor skills by encouraging your child to do lots of drawing, tracing, cutting, pasting and gluing. Fine motor skills development is crucial to school success.
8. Spend time talking to your child daily. Ask specific questions about your child's day at school. Encourage your child to answer in complete sentences rather than just one word. While riding in the car, have your child watch for certain things: letters, numbers, shapes, etc.
9. When giving directions to your child, use a calm voice and say the direction only **once**. When you repeat the same direction over and over or in a loud voice, your child does not develop "following directions skills," which are essential for classroom success.

Remember – You are your child's first teacher.

If you have any questions, please do not be afraid to ask. The only dumb question is the one that wasn't asked.

Thank you for your support,

GROSS MOTOR SKILLS CHECKLIST

<u>BALANCE</u>	August	January	May
1. Can walk on line			
2. Can walk on line (beanbag on head)			
3. Can stand on left foot (eyes closed to count of 10)			
4. Can stand on right foot (eyes closed to count of 10)			
5. Can walk balance beam forward			
6. Can walk balance beam backward			
7. Can walk balance beam forward (beanbag on head)			
8. Can walk balance beam backward (beanbag on head)			
9. Can walk sideways on beam			
<u>UPPER BODY STRENGTH</u>	August	January	May
1. Can press on wall to count of 10			
2. Can swing on tire swing to count of 10			
3. Can do 10 sit-ups (knees bent)			
4. Can cross monkey bars			
<u>JUMPING</u>	August	January	May
1. Can jump over string 2" high, no tripping			
2. Can jump over string 10" high, no tripping			
3. Can jump forward 24"			
<u>HOPPING</u>	August	January	May
1. Can hop 3x in place on one foot			
2. Can hop forward 8ft on one foot			
3. Can hop forward 20ft in 6 sec. (on both feet)			
<u>TIPTOE BALANCE</u>	August	January	May
1. Can tiptoe 8ft forward			
2. Can stand on tiptoe for 2 sec. without moving feet			
3. Can tiptoe 15 ft with hands on hip			
<u>SKIPPING</u>	August	January	May
1. Can skip 5 steps			
2. Can skip 8-10ft smoothly, leading with same foot			
3. Can skip 10ft alternating feet, bilateral arms and legs			
<u>BALL</u>	August	January	May
1. Can kick ball 6ft			
2. Can catch ball from 5ft			
3. Can throw overhand to wall, catching after 1 bounce			
<u>EYE/HAND COORDINATION</u>	August	January	May
1. Can catch ball or beanbag 3x using kickboard			
2. Can catch various sized balls 3x			
3. Can hit suspended ball with plastic bat 3x			
4. Can throw 3 beanbags into milk crate			
M=Mastered P=Progressing /=Not introduced			

MODALITY/DOMINANCE LEARNING PROFILE SHEET

Name_____

Modalities

Dominance

Visual_____

Eyes_____

Auditory_____

Hands_____

Kinesthetic_____

Ears_____

Feet_____

Notes:

Methods/Strategies:

Classroom Seating:

Letter Prompts

These are the letter prompts that I use. They make reference to the configuration of my classroom. Feel free to create your own or alter these according to your classroom layout so that they make sense to the students.

A – Slant down, slant down, give it a belt.

a – Make a little c and a line, that's an a that's really fine.

B – Ceiling to floor, big chest, big tummy to the door. →

b – Ceiling to floor, little tummy to the door. →

C – Hook to the ceiling, and curve to the floor.

c – Hook to the midline, and curve to the floor.

D – Ceiling to floor, big chest to the door. →

d – Little c makes little d.

E – Ceiling to floor, give it a hat, give it a belt, give it a boot.

e – Straight to the door, → curve to the midline, and curve to the floor.

F – Ceiling to floor, give it a hat, give it a belt.

f – Hook to the ceiling, straight to the floor, give it a belt once more.

G – (goat letter) Make a capital C and a tray for his hay.

g – Make a little a, and a tray for his hay.

H – Ceiling to floor, ceiling to floor, give it a belt once more.

h – Ceiling to floor and a hump.

I – Ceiling to floor, give it a hat, give it some boots.

i – Midline to floor and dot it once more.

J – Ceiling to floor, and curve up once more.

j – Midline, hang way down, give it a crown (dot.)

K – Ceiling to floor, slant down and down once more.

k – Ceiling to floor, slant from midline and again once more.

L – ceiling to floor, give it a boot to the door. →

l – Ceiling to floor.

M – Ceiling to floor, slant down, and up, and down once more.
m – Midline to floor, hump, hump.

N – Ceiling to floor, slant down and up once more.
n – Midline to floor, and hump once more.

O – Around we go, ceiling to floor.
o – Around we go, midline to floor.

P – (pig letter) Ceiling to floor, give it a pack for its back.
p – Midline down way below, give it a little pack to go.

Q – (queen letter) Around we go, ceiling to floor, give the queen a walking stick.
q – Make a little a, and a train (for her gown.)

R – Ceiling to floor, big chest to the door, slant to the door. ◇
r – Midline to floor, hook to the door.

S – Curve to the ceiling and curve to the floor.
s – Curve to the midline and curve to the floor.

T – Ceiling to floor, give it a hat once more.
t – Above the midline and to the floor, and across once more.

U – Curve ceiling to floor and up once more.
u – Midline, curve to the floor, up to the midline and down once more.

V – Slant ceiling to floor, and up to the ceiling once more.
v – Slant midline to floor, and up to the midline once more.

W – Slant ceiling to floor, up and down and up once more.
w – Slant midline to floor, up and down and up once more.

X – Slant ceiling to floor and across once more.
x – Slant midline to floor and across once more.

Y – Slant a little and once more, then straight to the floor.
y – Slant a little from the midline and once more way down.

Z – Across the ceiling, slant to the floor, straight to the door. ◇

READATHON LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parents and Families,

As this school year draws quickly to an end, I am so proud of my students' reading success. In order to emphasize and further that success, I would like to invite you to a Readathon where the children will read selections they have chosen. The Readathon will be held on _____

_____.

I truly believe this will encourage them to continue reading over the summer. It will also give them such confidence and improve their attitudes toward continuing to read over the summer months.

After the children have completed their reading selections, I will give suggestions for parents to use at home as you continue my work in making your child a lifelong reader. I will also distribute flyers with specific activities to use with your child.

I look forward to you attending this special celebration. If you cannot, I will see that the flyers are sent home to you. As always, I am extremely grateful for your support and care this year.

Very sincerely,

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