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**Creating Successful Readers & Writers:
An Introduction to the Building Blocks Literacy Model**

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Teachers are often inundated with different reading curriculums that claim to be the best in teaching young children to read. One may often become confused, overwhelmed, or even sick when trying to decipher what each curriculum or program offers and claims. Where can kindergarten teachers look to find a program that is research-based, effective, and doesn't require the purchase of hundreds of dollars of materials? Check out The Building Blocks Literacy Model!

The Foundation of Building Blocks

Some elementary school teachers may be familiar with The Four-Blocks Literacy Model. This is a popular strategy used by many in the public school setting to teach reading and writing. But where do kindergarten-age children fit into The Four-Blocks Literacy Model and the teaching of reading and writing? Over a decade ago the creators of The Four-Block Literacy Model researched what could be done for children in kindergarten. The result was The Building Blocks Literacy Model, a developmentally appropriate kindergarten strategy based on what children need to learn and what is known about how young children learn in relation to reading and writing (Hall & Williams, 2000). The Building Blocks Literacy Model can be used with an already existing reading curriculum or as a stand-alone curriculum.

The Building Blocks Literacy Model focuses specifically on emergent literacy research findings. Teachers who utilize the Building Blocks framework provide their students with a variety of reading and writing experiences from which all children develop what Hall and Williams (2000) describe as "six critical understandings" and serve as "the building blocks of their success". The Building Blocks framework assists teachers by providing developmentally appropriate activities that foster literacy development in young children.

The "six critical understandings" developed by Hall and Williams (2000) include the following aspects, or strategies, used by teachers in the Building Blocks Literacy Model:

Desire to Learn to Read and Write

Teachers create an environment where a variety of developmentally appropriate activities help children see themselves as both independent readers and writers.

Language Concepts

Through the use of journaling, environmental print, predictable charts, and morning messages, teachers foster the children's ability to read and write.

Print Concepts

Through the use of shared reading and writing experiences, teachers model print knowledge and concepts with the children.

Phonemic Awareness

Before phonics instruction can begin, children need to have a working knowledge of phonemic awareness. Allor and McCathren (2003) found the process of developing phonological awareness begins when children come to recognize that speech is comprised of words. Such an understanding is then extended until children are able to recognize that words are comprised of sounds, or phonemes, and they are then able to manipulate those phonemes to accomplish various tasks. In the Building Blocks Model teachers develop phonemic awareness in children through the use of rhyme, poetry, tongue twisters, and playing with language.

Interesting Words

Many teachers know about environmental print. The Building Blocks Literacy Model extends the list of real-life words that children find interesting and relevant in their own environment.

Letters & Sounds

Through activities such as alphabet books, shared writing opportunities, beginning and ending word sounds teachers encourage letter and sound recognition.

Conclusion

Many of these strategies may sound familiar, and they should; they are common practices in early childhood education. These strategies are based on research and found to be effective. The Building Blocks Literacy Model brings all of these strategies together to form a developmentally appropriate curriculum for kindergarten-age children (some 1st and 2nd grade teachers also use aspects of Building Blocks) with activities that increase success in beginning reading and writing.

References

- Allor, J.H., & McCathren, R.B. (2003) Developing emergent literacy skills through storybook reading. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 39*(2), 72-79.
- Hall, D., & Williams, E. (2000). *The Teacher's guide to building blocks: A developmentally appropriate, multilevel framework for kindergarten*. Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa Publishing Company, Inc.

Print Resources Specifically Related to The Building Blocks Literacy Model

- Hall, D., & Cunningham, P. (1997). *Month-by-month reading and writing for kindergarten: Systematic, multilevel instruction*. Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa Publishing Company, Inc.
- Hall, D., & Williams, E. (2000). *The Teacher's guide to building blocks: A developmentally appropriate, multilevel framework for kindergarten*. Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa Publishing Company, Inc.
- Hall, D., & Williams, E. (2001). *Predictable charts: Shared writing for kindergarten and first grade*. Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa Publishing Company, Inc.

Internet Resources

The Four-Blocks Literacy Model Website: <http://www.four-blocks.com/kindergarten.htm>

Teachers.net Building Blocks Info: <http://www.teachers.net/4blocks/article16.html>